INTEGRATING STRANGERS

ANAÏS MÉNARD

SHERBRO IDENTITY AND THE POLITICS OF RECIPROCITY ALONG THE SIERRA LEONEAN COAST

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INTEGRATION AND CONFLICT STUDIES
Published in Association with the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, Halle/Saale

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Anaïs Ménard

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To my father
For the lost words and the unachieved travels

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Acknowledgements

This book is the outcome of combined efforts to make ethnographic field research and anthropological writing possible. At a time when the social sciences are suffering greatly from a lack of institutional and financial support, and when long-term fundamental research is neither considered 'useful' nor 'productive' in our modern economies, I count myself lucky to have had the opportunity to conduct this project fully and wholeheartedly. I have many debts to acknowledge, only a few of which I am able to mention here.

The research was funded by the Max Planck Institute for Social Anthropology, where I became part of the Integration and Conflict along the Upper Guinea Coast (UGC) research group headed by my Ph.D. supervisor, Professor Jacqueline Knörr. My gratitude goes to her first for trusting my abilities to become 'anthropologized' and for making her own academic circle a humane and compassionate environment. The UGC group became a true family in the few years that I spent at the Institute, and I address my deepest thanks to my second supervisor, Wilson Trajano Filho, as well as to Jonas Klee, Christoph Kohl, Agathe Menetrier, William P. Murphy, David O'Kane, Markus Rudolf and Anita Schroven for their continuous support and many efforts in commenting and reviewing my earlier work. Nathaniel King, in particular, played an important role, as he became my Sierra Leonean mentor and directed my attention to the Peninsula. My greatest debt goes to Maarten Bedert, my 'doctoral brother', who shared with me the ups and downs of doing a Ph.D., and who has remained a great friend and colleague ever since. The last of the UGC members, Christian K. Højbjerg, left us prematurely and with a durable sense of loss in April 2014. His work remains a great source of inspiration to me, and I hope that my chapters on initiation societies do justice to his ideas and earlier comments.

I owe an immense debt and gratitude to the many people who welcomed me in Sierra Leone and who appear, in one way or another, in this book. At Fourah Bay College, Professor Joe D. Alie and Dr Sylvanus Spencer offered me

institutional grounding and support. In Freetown, the members of the Bonthe Family helped me during the earliest stages of my fieldwork and encouraged my research on Sherbro identity. In this respect, I want to express my gratitude to Jacob A. Tucker, Horatio Max Gorvie, Solomon Caulker, Floyd Alex Davies and Evangelist Solomon Max Gorvie. Special thanks go to David K. Tucker, my Krio and Sherbro language teacher, who followed my first research endeavours on the Peninsula, and to the many people who made my stay at YMCA Freetown a memorable one.

On the Peninsula, my thoughts go to Jonathan K. Charma, my research partner, for the great work accomplished during my stay, and for all the big and small adventures that we experienced on the way. Jonathan died in November 2020, but he remains very much alive in this book. I assume that he would have been proud to see the final result of our quest and that he would have cooked fresh crab to celebrate – a plan that we had formed back in 2019, but that never materialized. On the Peninsula, my research was facilitated by the local authorities of settlements and by the families and friends who hosted me and shared their daily life with me, including: Iyamide Claye and her daughter Augusta, John P.K. Leigh and Ramatu Leigh, Deborah Dowu Salaam, Daniela Dove, William B. Small, Hannah Koroma, her daughter Tenneh Koroma, George P.C. Nicol, his sons Margai and Oseh Nicol, Francis D. Shyllon, Kolleh and Irene Smaila, Mr Yanka, who gave me the Sherbro name Yemah, Edward B. Benga, David Douglas, Pa 'White' Johnson and his family, Jonathan Cole, Alhadji Slowe, Pa Tua and Pa Yamba, Gibrila Kargbo, Elisabeth Jabu Leigh, Fatmata and Esther Charma, Theophilus Walker, Bai Bangura, Ebu N. Turner, Samuel Small, Magnifique, Francis Kappia, Daniel Macauley, Paul 'Shinose' Bangura, Joseph S. Jalloh, Chernor Jalloh, Hassan Kanu and many others who accepted me in their midst. Special thanks are due to Greg van der Horst, Mohamed Gbondo and David Yarjah for their friendship.

Over the years, I have benefited from many insights, comments and discussions as I presented sections of this book to academic audiences. I am indebted to the many scholars who provided me with ideas and inputs. At the University of Louvain-la-Neuve, where I completed the final revisions, particular thanks go to Professor Pierre-Joseph Laurent and Dr Marie Deridder for our rich discussions on West African perspectives. During the last stages, the manuscript also benefited from close readings and comments from Brian Donahoe, John Eidson, Thomas H. Eriksen, Adam Jones, Peter Mark, Steven Reyna and Joseph Opala. I also wish to thank my two reviewers for Berghahn Books, who provided careful reading and insightful suggestions. As a book deserves to be beautiful too, I want to express my gratitude to Jutta Turner for designing the maps and Astrid Baudine for reworking the photographs. Finally, the book could not have been completed without the help of Jennifer Cash, whose careful work on the narrative considerably improved the manuscript.

Friendship is a great privilege and many people have contributed to enlivening academic life in Germany and beyond, among them Faduma Abukar Mursal, Laura Balzer, Maarten Bedert, Sophie Besancenot, Marie Deridder, Soledad Jiménez Tovar, Lourdes Madigasekera-Elliott, Manuela Pusch and Roberta Zavoretti. In France, I was lucky to become part of an amazing circle of Sierra Leonean women, thanks to whom I could keep a taste of Sierra Leone in Europe. I want to thank them for encouraging my ethnographic work and valuing it as an important mission. In this regard, Myriam Kamara became a wonderful knowledge broker and an amazing friend. I also want to address my deepest gratitude to Bintou Minte, who was (and is) ever-present and encouraged me at the most difficult times, and Isabelle Bognini-Garcia, who made me (and still makes me) realize and actualize my strengths as a human being. These relationships were more than I could ask for.

This work is also the result of a peculiar family story that started in Sierra Leone in 1984. I am the second generation to grow fond of this country, after my parents, Jean-Claude Ménard and Grażyna Kręcka. I am amazed at their respective trajectories and am proud to uphold their heritage. They passed on their curiosity for life and their love of discovery.

Finally, I would not have seen this project through without the love, patience, daily support and sense of humour of my partner, Thomas Cacchioli. Two wonderful girls were born during the course of this project, and the writing acquired a whole new meaning, with Alicia talking about the book that mum (endlessly) writes and Maïa sitting on my lap.

Parts of this research have been published previously, and I am obliged to Brill and Springer Nature for giving me permission to reuse my work in this new form. Sections of Chapters 4 and 5 were published under the title 'Dynamics of Inclusion and Exclusion Related to a Creole Language: "Krio" as an Ambivalent Semiotic Register in Present-Day Sierra Leone' in the coedited volume by Jacqueline Knörr and Wilson Trajano Filho, *Creolization and Pidginization in Contexts of Postcolonial Diversity. Language, Culture, Identity,* published in 2018 by Brill. Parts of Chapter 7 were published in a book chapter entitled 'Poro Society, Migration and Political Incorporation on the Freetown Peninsula, Sierra Leone' in the coedited volume by Christian K. Højbjerg, Jacqueline Knörr and William P. Murphy, *Politics and Policies in Upper Guinea Coast Societies, Change and Continuity*, published in 2017 by Palgrave Macmillan.

Introduction

This book is about ethnic identity and reciprocity as mutually constitutive agents of social reality. It is a study about the articulation between ethnic identity, as a social construction, and reciprocity, as a regime of value that frames social interactions. With the case study of Sherbro identity in Sierra Leone, I invite the reader to look at ethnic identity through the lens of reciprocal norms and practices that are at the centre of West African social life. I consider how the production and performance of identity is bound to reciprocity as a stable mode of expected relations between groups.

People who define themselves as Sherbro form a relatively small group in Sierra Leone. Nationally, they constitute no more than about 2% of the population. The Sherbros coexist with larger groups, such as the Mende and Temne-speaking populations that each account for a third of Sierra Leone's population, and with other minority groups, such as the Krio. People who self-identify as Sherbro may also hold an ethnic identity from one or more of these other groups. They make those identity claims legitimate and socially valid by pointing to various lines of descent and, in the case of Krio identity, adopting a lifestyle that indexes them as 'Krio'. Whether at the group or the individual level, Sherbro ethnic identity bears out the strongest claims that theoretical discussions of ethnicity have made for the co-constitution of ethnic identities through the selective manipulation of traits and boundaries. However, their possibilities for cross-ethnic identification also reveal people's general ability to adopt various identities in different contexts and situations. Most strikingly, Sherbro maintain a strong sense of 'being Sherbro' despite *and* through multiple ethnic affiliations.

In Sierra Leone, but not only there, to hold multiple ethnic identities does not necessarily produce conflict – either for individuals or for groups. To belong to many kinds of people at once is normal. Sherbro populations, perhaps, are even less conflicted than others about this situation. Through their lives, I have

tried to tell part of the story of how it is possible for them to belong to many groups at once, and in so doing to define themselves as particularly Sherbro.

Since Barth (1969), anthropologists have moved away from the essentialist paradigm that attributes specific 'traits' to a named group. Instead, authors have studied how identities are constructed through historical processes and social practice. The Barthian model, by emphasizing the construction of boundaries, has highlighted the strategic uses of identity and the logics by which groups associate with or dissociate from each other. For most later scholars, Barth's model has been understood to imply that people, under specific circumstances, may claim divergent ethnic identities and may even change ethnic membership (Eriksen 2019: 136). Yet, it is still expected that an individual displays only one ethnic identity at a time, as either an insider or outsider of any particular reference group, and that the boundaries between groups are relatively fixed. Subsequent constructivist approaches have increasingly emphasized the fluidity and fragmentation of identities in a globalized world. Yet, despite the growing influence of concepts that attempt to define 'mixed' identities and cultural practices, such as creolization, hybridity, métissage or syncretism (e.g. Hannerz 1987, 1996; Shaw and Stewart 1994; Stewart 2007), the study of contemporary identities in Africa has continuously evaded a close interrogation of practices of cross-ethnic identification.

In the African context, it seems, anthropologists have not been able to develop the study of ethnic identity much beyond the Barthian paradigm. Historical approaches have shifted the perspective by showing that ethnicity (and ethnic groups) is neither stable in time nor independent from wider social and cultural constraints. They evidence the way(s) in which ethnic identities were naturalized and reified by colonial regimes, thereby setting new group boundaries in societies that were almost certainly ethnically mixed in the precolonial past.[1]

Amselle (1999), for instance, uses the concept of 'chains of societies' to describe the flexible configuration of precolonial spaces through networks of relations organized around exchange, politics, language, culture or religion. Similarly, Lonsdale (1994) describes the existence of precolonial 'permeable ethnicities' constituted through the making of communities bound by exchange, recognition, trust and shared moral values. Nevertheless, the ensuing emphasis on the 'fixing' of identities across the colonial and postcolonial periods (or, as Amselle puts it, the 'ethnic fetishism' of the colonizers that replaced and fixed pre-existing fluid social categories) tends to obscure the fact that people continued, under colonial regimes and afterwards, to travel, to cross territories, to settle and marry in different communities, and certainly to self-identify according to their own needs. In other words, 'permeable ethnicities' are not (only) something located in a distant African past (Werbner 2002: 734).

Furthermore, the emergence of local conflicts across the continent since the 1990s has encouraged scholars to focus on the essentialization and politicization

of group identities in the struggle for political power and economic assets within nation-states.[2] As Werbner (2002: 752) points out, this has resulted in an 'excessive focus on differentiation or opposition, conflict and competition', which largely dominates the literature on ethnicity. Research on new forms of essentialization, although necessary, did not dispute anthropology's general assumption about 'the existence and integrity of collective boundaries' (Cohen 1994: 124).

Such overconcentration on a Barthian-inspired model of ethnicity in which identity is interactional – but only between distinctly bounded groups – leaves little room for theorizing identity with respect to groups that appear 'betwixt and between' (Eriksen 2002: 213–14) and whose members may transcend usual categories of ascription. For such groups and their members, identity is rarely just a matter of negotiating either/or between two or more 'bounded' identities; rather, it is a matter of negotiating either/and. Arguing for the use of 'frontier' or 'border' instead of boundaries, Anthony Cohen invites us to have a closer look at 'the lines which mark the extent of contiguous societies, or to meeting points between supposedly discrete social groups' (1994: 125). In this book, I suggest that some identities can be constituted precisely on border lines and in those regions of ambiguity that resist classic definitions of ethnicity. But to understand these identities for what they are requires us to do at least two things: to analyse the historical processes that resulted in the constitution of such identity; and to combine this with a cross-analysis of the contemporary dynamics by which people, individually and collectively, experience, reformulate and maintain their 'betwixt and between' status.

In this book, I try to accomplish this dual task with respect to the Sherbros. I adopt a historical perspective that highlights the complexity of ethnogenesis as a multifactorial process (see Fardon 1988; Nugent 2008; Peel 1983), while showing how the production of ethnic boundaries in the past has contributed to setting the conditions for practices of cross-ethnic identifications in the present. I show how the Sherbros have included over time various (ethnic) categories as part of their group identity. My use of 'category' refers to the various performances related to a distinct ethnic identity and the ability of actors to use its set of sociocultural attributes (language, dress, habits/behaviours etc.). The category that actors perform is not necessarily the one by which they identify themselves primarily.

The ability of Sherbro communities to form cooperative practices with members of other groups has been crucial to identity formation itself. My focus on reciprocity and its role in the construction of ethnicity shifts this study further along the axis of the subjective dimensions of identity, to probe how people think about these relations of exchange, and how this influences performances of ethnicity in the present. In the following chapters, I argue that the relations of reciprocity that Sherbros established with other groups, by allowing people of multiple origins to integrate into local communities, resulted in a hybrid type of ethnic identity, which valorizes heterogeneity *and* purity at the same time. I

depart from postmodern conceptualizations of hybridity, developed in relation to diaspora and migration studies, which emphasize the ability of cultural hybrids to dissolve boundaries.[3] Sherbro individuals do not see themselves as 'creole' or 'mixed'. The plural nature of Sherbro identity does not break down ethnic categories and differences, but rather allows individuals to engage with them in a socially productive way – which may involve cross-ethnic ties or relatedness *and* strategies of othering (including the rhetorics of autochthony). In other words, the hybrid subject can claim plurality along with purity. We shall see that this ambivalence is related to the inherent paradox of reciprocal exchange itself: the establishment of socioethnic boundaries through exchange also allows crossovers and switches. Here, I extend Marotta's observation that 'the hybrid subject, and the cultural space that it creates, does not make boundaries obsolete, rather they are essential to its very constitution' (2008: 301).

The hybridization of Sherbro identity is the product of historical processes of exchange with populations whom Sherbro groups viewed as strangers. How to make strangers part of the social body – to what extent and in what terms – is a critical question that most societies grapple with. Discourses about 'the stranger' illustrate the tension that exists between the acceptance of sociocultural difference within the social body, which is grounded in the commonality of the human experience, and perceived fears that new power relations may endanger the (imagined) inner core of society. Strangers thus often face restrictions regarding their status and activities, and may be maintained in a state of political, economic and/or legal dependency that reminds them of their social debt. A specific type of 'reciprocal tension', Simmel (1950: 408) states, characterizes the relationship to the stranger, whose presence and activities are often much needed.

Throughout the following chapters, it should become clear that reciprocity is the form of exchange that Sherbro themselves think about most often in relation to identity. This relational view of self is relevant for many African societies, despite attempts by colonial and postcolonial states to insert fixed boundaries and reduce the complexity of frontier areas characterized by multi-ethnic co-existence and mixing. Precolonial and colonial African societies, depending on their size, political organization and hierarchical structure, accommodated alien individuals in multiple ways, through marriage, adoption, clientship, slavery, friendship, initiation etc. (see Cohen and Middleton 1970). As Shack notes (1979b: 14), these subnational processes, following independence, became subsumed under broader logics of state and nation-building. Yet communities have maintained them as mechanisms of local relevance too, and they have done so *in spite of* national policies that foster conflict between groups. In this book, I analyse those arrangements in the perspective of social debt and examine how the perception of this debt may change, create points of friction and have implication for identity-making. For now, let us approach reciprocity from the vantage point of anthropological theory.

Reciprocity may be defined as a type of cooperative practice that lies at the heart of producing a social fabric. Foundational analyses present gift-giving as a process of exchange that represents the driving force for the establishment of alliances. Practices of gift-exchange produce a normative system that binds different groups of people with social obligations and helps them build a set of common values (Lévi-Strauss 1949; Malinowski 1922; Mauss 1990 [1923–24]). Mauss emphasized the importance of reciprocity by presenting gift-exchange as a foundational principle that reinforces social cohesion and solidarity. In identifying the three obligations 'to give, to receive and to return', he showed that social ties are sustained by the continual return of gifts and counter-gifts over a long period, and that the unreturned gift wreaks havoc on its recipient and his social relations. For his part, Simmel (1950) emphasized the centrality of faithfulness (commitment) and gratitude in making human relationships more stable and cohesive – that is, the experience and expression of sentiments in addition to the exchange of calculable and material substances. In those early approaches, reciprocity appears as 'the moral cement of culture and society' (Komter 1996: 301) – namely, a social arrangement framed by moral commitment.

In this shared sociological and anthropological tradition, I adopt an anti-utilitarian perspective on reciprocity to emphasize the social value of gift-exchange. In other words, the primary objective of reciprocity is not to acquire goods, but to establish social relations based on cooperation and, more specifically, to create a moral commitment by which people will want to sustain those relations through the exchange of items (goods, services) or people (women, children, slaves), which acquire symbolic value. At the same time, the alliance thus established is always revocable, which marks a shift from peace to war, from trust to mistrust (Caillé 2007: 9–10).

In this book, I am concerned with the lived experiences of reciprocity between people belonging to different ethnic groups – that is, how reciprocal relations and values of moral commitment are imagined, talked about, used and manipulated. Reciprocity is a cultural model of interaction shaped by local representations: representations about the arrangement itself (what should be exchanged, with whom and how), past interactions (how reciprocity was established and practised in the past), relations of trust (who can be trusted and who cannot, based on past interactions and reputation) and anticipated returns (how interactions between groups will change in the future) (see Ostrom 2003). To observe reciprocity under this light is to focus on *expectations* of reciprocity formed by various groups in relation to each other. Expectations do not always materialize, so I also draw a distinction between the general consensus about reciprocity in society – or 'a shared understanding about how people should interact: an ethic that governs the exchange' (Walsh-Dilley 2017: 520) – and underlying logics of power relations, hierarchies and conflict. Power relations can subvert established rules

built on (expected) mutual loyalty, and thus make social relations unstable and unpredictable. From this perspective, reciprocity, as expressed by local discourses, appears as the fulcrum around which social change and reproduction are constantly renegotiated.

In order to illustrate this ambivalence, I focus on an institution central to political culture in Sierra Leone and West Africa. This is the landlord/stranger arrangement, which establishes relations of reciprocity between proclaimed 'owners of the land' and people who settled after them, or 'strangers'. The creation of bonds of reciprocity proceeds from the mutual recognition of social identities as landlords and strangers, which may be linked to specific ethnic identities. Although entailing a degree of social hierarchy, such bonds imply 'the recognition of the other person as a potential ally' (Komter 2007: 102). This alliance as it is found across Africa exemplifies the inherent ambivalence of exchange, since it rests simultaneously on the willingness to associate with neighbouring groups and on the need to prevent conflict. In this respect, this type of association is both 'free' and obligatory, based on altruism and on interest (see Caillé 2007: 51–54; Komter 2007: 103). At the same time, by opening up the possibility of long-term relationships and/or assimilation, it affects the production and performance of identity. In the chapters in this volume, I analyse how this institution frames the rhetorics of contemporary Sherbro identity and substantiates practices of cross-ethnic identification.

In taking the Sherbro group as a case study, I limit my argument to the West African context. In societies of the Upper Guinea Coast, reciprocity assumes a distinct set of social forms and meanings, which have been well documented through the ethnographic literature. However, it should be expected that the contours of ethnic identity in other social and geographical contexts is mutually constituted through relations of reciprocity, and that reciprocity is a dominant element in intergroup relations that shapes the expression of ethnic relations in other regions of Africa as well. Patterned relations between patrons and dependants were widespread across precolonial and colonial Africa. These involved forms of feudalism, slavery and wealth-in-people (see e.g. Goody 1971; Guyer 1993; Miers and Kopytoff 1977). Shack and Skinner (1979) also show that host/stranger relations continued to inform strategies of nation-building across Africa in the post-independence period. The continuous relevance of this model for the organization of social life in Africa demonstrates the importance of looking at regional processes as expressions of wider phenomena.

Landlords, Strangers and Sherbro Ethnogenesis

Landlord/stranger relations are a common cultural idiom in Africa for expressing local ideas of identity, belonging and social hierarchies. The local politics of land rights usually delineate social identities and mediate access to political

membership in specific communities (Berry 1993; Lentz 2006a). Kopytoff's analysis (1987) of the precolonial internal frontier shows that this model has a long history on the African continent. Groups of 'frontiersmen' would decide to leave their political community and establish firstcomers' rights on a new land, thereby becoming 'owners' of the land and claiming authority over later migrants. However, Kopytoff's model characterized a context in which large amounts of land were available to claim, which is rarely the case in Africa today.

The landlord/stranger arrangements, which organize the social differences between 'owners of the land' (or firstcomers) and groups of latecomers, are typical of the local institutions in precolonial Africa in that they order patron–client relationships (see Berman 1998). This type of alliance emerged in the West African context of long-distance trade as a means to secure commercial routes and ensure 'peaceful intergroup exchanges' between communities (Brooks 1993: 38). The moral obligation of hospitality by the landlord guaranteed the stranger's safety in a context of slavery and slave-raiding, but also ensured that he was kept 'under control' by local families. By placing themselves under the authority of a local landlord, strangers also secured land use and protection for their properties. They reciprocated by paying taxes, and usually refrained from becoming involved in local politics in order to remain loyal to their landlord (Fortes 1975; Mouser 1975; Shack 1979a). By such arrangements, local powerful men expanded their networks of social dependants, thereby solidifying a political economy based on wealth-in-people – that is, the control of dependents to achieve status and power (Bledsoe 1980; Guyer 1993) – and could use these networks of dependants to administer subterritories and expand local economic activities.

The landlord/stranger relationship was a dynamic system that allowed for the emergence of localities marked by plural cultural and linguistic influences. It did not create fixed boundaries, but instead made it possible for people of various origins to renegotiate social identities and ethnic affiliations according to shifting power relations between groups (Bellagamba 2000: 39–40; Lentz 2006a: 14; Trajano Filho 2010: 161–62). As in other parts of precolonial Africa, ethnic identities in Sierre Leone tended to be fluid, contextual and dependent on flexible social attachment and group membership, networks and mobility.

Thus, based on the premise of reciprocity, landlord/stranger relations allowed people of various origins and backgrounds to form a community of shared values. This corresponds to a type of 'moral ethnicity', which Lonsdale defines (1994: 132) as 'the common human instinct to create out of the daily habits of social intercourse and material labour a system of moral meaning and ethical reputation within a more or less imagined community'.[4] The landlord/stranger alliance defined a common basis for the renegotiation of social positions and land rights within a specific locality. In turn, conforming to the rules of reciprocity produced local belonging and delineated the boundaries of the political community. It set a consensus among the resident groups about how to be a person of virtue and

become eligible for local rights. The distinction between firstcomers and late-comers embedded in structures of patronage, their respective economic occupations and rights, as well as their mutual recognition as significant actors of local communities, were more relevant to social identity than ethnic identity as such. Differences in culture or language had little meaning without the larger moral framework of ethnicity that took patronage systems as its principle.

As such, in analysing the elements available on Sherbro ethnogenesis, I follow Spear's argument that ethnicity was not entirely constructed by colonial forces. Ethnicity, as it appeared in the twentieth century in West Africa, is better understood as a product of the impact of colonial policies on precolonial 'traditions and forms of ethnic consciousness' (Spear 2003: 25; see also Mark 1999; Nugent 2008; Peel 2000). In the early twenty-first century, ethnicity continues to refer back to the precolonial forms and modes of relatedness, even as it is reshaped by colonial and postcolonial policies. Of these precolonial forms, the landlord/stranger arrangement continues to stand out as the most significant. It has allowed Sherbro-speaking communities to integrate various types of strangers in their midst and has contributed to Sherbro ethnogenesis.

Sherbro ethnogenesis is tied to the political and economic history of the Sierra Leonean coast. Historically, Sherbro speakers were predominantly fishermen along the country's southern coast, although they combined fishing with small-scale agriculture. Sea, estuaries, rivers and lagoons were dominant elements in their lives as resources for livelihood, transportation, communication and trade (Davidson 1969; Krabacher 1990: 30).

'Sherbro' designates both a language and an ethnicity. Sherbro belongs to the Mel languages, a subgroup of the Atlantic languages. The Mel cluster is further divided into the Temne branch and the Bullom-Kissi branch (Bullom So/Mmani, Sherbro or Mampa Bullom, Bom and Kissi).[5] Speakers of Bullom So were established along the Sierra Leone River estuary as early as the fifteenth century, while Sherbro was identified as a distinct language on the southern coast sometime after European contact. However, both groups are presumed to be among the earliest inhabitants of contemporary Sierra Leone.

At the beginning of the sixteenth century, Portuguese texts mention Temne and Bullom-speaking populations as the inhabitants of Sierra Leone (Hair 1967a: 253, 1967b: 50). Some texts mention the name 'Sapi' as early as 1506 to refer to coastal people of the Mel language group 'around and on the Peninsula' (Hair 1968: 48).[6] Yet, 'Bullom' and 'Temne' also figure as separate groups in accounts by Pacheco Pereira (1507) and Valentim Fernandes (1508) (Hair 1967b: 50). Comparing the various accounts, Paul Hair (1967a: 254) concludes that Bullom speakers occupied the coastal line 'from near the Scarcies River, past the Sierra Leone peninsula, to Sherbro Island and the Kittam River'.

Hair's evaluation of linguistic continuity in the region shows that the presence of Bullom-speaking populations on the coast was fairly stable over time.

The main historical event reported in the Portuguese sources in the mid-sixteenth century are the so-called Mane invasions, by warriors who were likely Vai speakers and who advanced north along the coast from a region situated around Cape Mount (Hair 1968). Some scholars, such as Person (1961) and Rodney (1967), have argued that the Mane invasions caused a radical sociopolitical rupture among 'Sapi' populations. However, linguistic analysis suggests that the Mane invaders were likely assimilated to local communities (Hair 1967a: 256, 1968).

Landlord/stranger relations played an important role in connecting coastal peoples to transnational networks from at least the time of European contact. As early as the mid-fifteenth century, local societies applied their norms of
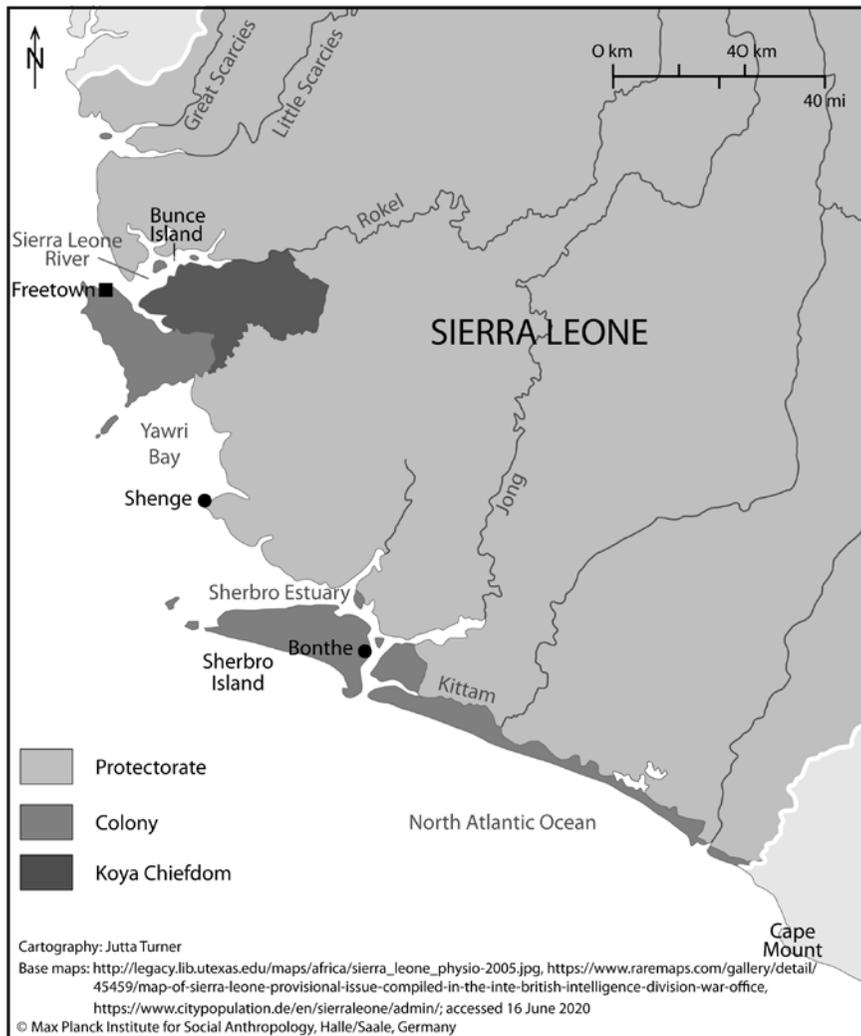
Map 0.1. Sierra Leone at the end of the nineteenth century. © Jutta Turner

hospitality to European merchants. They allowed the Portuguese *lançados*, for example, to settle and to marry women of their patron's kin group. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, Sherbro communities to the south of Yawri Bay established matrimonial alliances with British traders. The Royal African Company, chartered by the British Crown, developed its trade activities throughout the seventeenth century and built forts along the coast to secure an economic monopoly over the region against other nations. Some of the British merchants married influential Sherbro women and founded powerful Afro-British lineages.[7] The descendants of those traders, some of whom were educated in England, not only acted as middlemen between the British and African groups, but also played a leading role in the slave trade of the eighteenth century.

It seems likely that the name 'Sherbro' emerged from transnational contacts with Europeans sometime after the establishment of trading posts on the coast by the British in the seventeenth century. The name itself is presumed to be a corruption of 'sea bar', referring to the bar at the Sherbro estuary (Koelle 1854: 2). Traders used the name to refer to the coast south of the Peninsula, from Yawri Bay to the estuary of the Sherbro River. 'Sherbro' thus became the English name for coastal Bullom-speaking populations to the south of Sierra Leone. Another recent analysis by Corcoran (2014: 4–5) is consistent with earlier research (Hall 1938; Pichl 1967) that report 'Sherbro' to be derived from a Bullom political title *Shebora* or *Sherbora*, which was already in use at the time the Portuguese described the coast of Sierra Leone. In any case, though it appears to be a neutral geographical and linguistic designation, 'Sherbro' came into existence as a distinct group based on the specific relations they had with European traders.

The astonishing way that Afro-British families gained positions of power in the region is due, notably, to the way in which landlord/stranger relations were deployed as part of Sherbro political culture. Two factors influenced local patterns of integration. On the one hand, the acephalous structure of the political system enabled strangers to approach directly local rulers for protection. By contrast with large and centralized polities, in which each group could live separately, the dispersion of power in scattered settlements encouraged hosts and strangers to cooperate and create alliances on multiple levels (see Cohen and Middleton 1970: 16). Similar principles are known to have been active widely, if not uniformly, across Africa. For instance, Colson (1970: 40), in her study of Tonga society in Zambia, notes that 'when they settled, [strangers] sought to entrench their position by an appeal to the common values of kinship and neighbourhood'. On the other hand, local patterns of kinship facilitated integration. The cognatic descent system of Sherbro society allowed the children of strangers to derive social rights from their mother, by which they became fully assimilated into local communities. Marriage to a woman of the local group guaranteed strangers' access to equal rights over one or two generations, particularly when this alliance involved a woman of high status

(MacCormack 1979: 198, 1997: 278). This contrasted with patrilineal systems, which produced strict hierarchies in which the children of strangers and local women could not acquire full political rights based on kinship and in which their descendants remained subordinate to dominant patrilineages (Brooks 2003: 51–52). As in Colson's study of Tonga patterns of assimilation, people in Sherbro settlements preferred dealing with strangers 'as potential members of their own society' (Colson 1970: 45).

In the eighteenth century, Bullom-speaking populations became increasingly fragmented under the pressure of larger groups. According to Hair (1967a: 255), they occupied the same stretch of coast, 'but only in pockets, their line being broken by Temne and Mende intrusions, apparently made since 1800'. Along the Sherbro coast, speakers of Mende (from the larger Mande language group) expanded westwards to the shore, which marked the beginning of the coexistence of Mende and Sherbro populations in the southern region. On the Peninsula, Bullom and Temne populations came into closer proximity. In early Portuguese sources, Temne are described as inland people, who occupied territories to the north and southeast of the Peninsula (Hair 1968: 51). They may have started migrating towards coastal territories between the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Hair (1967a: 255) contends that, in the eighteenth century, Temne populations at the Scarcies River had extended 'some miles to the south at the expense of the Bullom'. Winterbottom (1803: 3–4) observed that 'the Timmanees … forced themselves down the river Sierra Leone, among the Bulloms, who formerly possessed the whole region from the river Kissee to the Sherbro'. The Temne and Bullom kingdoms on both sides of the Sierra Leone River became rivals. Earlier peaceful coexistence may have turned into enmity due to the new foreign presence in an expanding trading area. Chiefs who signed treaties with the British at the end of the eighteenth century were identified by the colonists as Temne rulers from the Koya chiefdom, which lay close to the Peninsula. Therefore, Sherbro claims of autochthony are sometimes still contested by Temne populations on the ground that the Peninsula was part of Koya, particularly in towns that are close to the present chiefdom, like Tombo (see Chapter 2).

The Peninsula Frontier Zone

The geographical focus of this study is the Freetown Peninsula region. This choice allows for a closer examination of historical and present relations of Sherbro communities with the black settlers of the Colony later known as 'Krio'. Communities situated in other regions, particularly along the southern coast, would differ in the details, though the general pattern of Sherbro identity and interethnic relations being constructed and negotiated around a common moral core based on landlord/stranger relations would still be visible.

The political geography of today's Sierra Leone still bears the imprint of colonial developments. In 1808, Freetown and its Peninsula became part of a British Crown Colony. The Colony's territory was differentiated from the British Protectorate, which was established over the hinterland in 1896 (see Map 0.1). Freetown was conceived as distinct from the Peninsula on which it is located, but the Peninsula was also distinguished from the 'hinterland' that comprises the majority of the country today. Under British rule in the nineteenth century, the Peninsula became a frontier region. Diverse populations met and developed different types of social, cultural and material exchanges through ambivalent processes of integration and friction (see Rodseth and Parker 2005: 12). As a frontier, the Peninsula remained a remote 'wild' space: it was cut off from the colonial administration in Freetown and yet accommodated new populations. In this role, it became a site for the emergence and transformation of ethnic identities in direct relation to colonial developments.

Coastal settlements of the Peninsula, from the nineteenth century onwards, came to form one of West Africa's 'coastal micro-regions where migrant fishermen of different origins' met and lived together (Chauveau 1991: 15). Canoe migration along the coastline, whether permanent or seasonal, intensified with the modernization of fishery technologies and the constitution of urban markets for fish. At the turn of the nineteenth century, Sherbro-speaking fishermen living along the southern coast migrated northwards, as conflicts between chiefdoms created an unsafe environment along the Sherbro coast (Fyfe 1962). Temne fisherfolk migrated to the north of the Yawri Bay at the beginning of the twentieth century and settled with them (Hendrix 1984).[8]

Processes related to migration, colonization and the growth of inland markets certainly gave more importance to mechanisms of assimilation of migrant fishermen. Like strangers before them, these men took wives in the communities to which they migrated. It is difficult to assess, historically, the distinct ethnic make-up of Peninsula communities. Fishermen may have migrated to 'old' pre-existing Bullom or Mampa Bullom (Sherbro) communities or may have established new ones (see Chapter 2). At the same time, migrations occurring from south to north certainly raised the number and size of Sherbro settlements along the Peninsula coast. They may explain why current Sherbro populations trace family ties to places such as Bonthe, Shenge and other places along the Yawri Bay. In this way, they also acknowledge their social and cultural connections to the south and to the Mende.

In any case, during the nineteenth century, Bullom populations were recognized as firstcomers in coastal areas of the Peninsula, regardless of the uncertainties over their earlier provenance and identity (see Fyfe 1962). Fishermen coming from other areas were assimilating into Bullom communities as early as the nineteenth century, but this process on a smaller scale probably pre-dated this period of large fishing migration. The 'moral ethnicity' binding landlords

and strangers involved not only land allocation and marriage, but also the values of fishing and their ritual ethos. Fishing migration produced multi-ethnic communities of fisherfolk united by their livelihood in small communities of belonging.

As migration accelerated in the twentieth century with the development of Freetown, processes of differentiation appeared gradually, which I will detail in Chapter 1. Yet, until the early twentieth century, rural settlements of the Peninsula remained relatively isolated from Freetown. Connections to Freetown were usually made by sea rather than by the bush paths that connected individual settlements (Melville 1849). Nevertheless, colonial dynamics also impacted ethnicity formation. Even in its rural areas, the Colony was a space forged by direct colonial rule, intense economic activities, and successive waves of migration and urbanization. Sherbro-speaking populations interacted not only with members of other local groups, but also with the black settlers of the Colony. Those interactions started at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the slaves captured by the British on slave ships along the coast were 'freed' in Sierra Leone. Members of this new group, called the Liberated Africans, were then encouraged by the colonial authorities to settle along the Peninsula.

As local populations coexisted with many alien groups, it is safe to assume that social arrangements based on reciprocity in this nineteenth-century frontier zone played an important role in shaping the nature of those interactions and, ultimately, in building contemporary Sherbro identity as a bridging category. They resulted in cultural integration: Sherbro populations on the Peninsula characterize themselves partly through their selective adoption of the sociocultural attributes of other ethnic identities. These adoptions are not seen as leading to assimilation, but as allowing for the emergence of a shared system of practices and meanings. In their social practice, actors self-identified as Sherbro easily cross ethnic boundaries. They can relate to multiple ethnic origins and use them strategically. This type of identity performance is the product of a 'frontier zone' shaped by mobility and a high degree of social interactions.

West Africa counts numerous instances of 'frontier zones' characterized by several centuries of intensifying mobility and high sociocultural diversity. Scholars working in the region have documented practices of cross-ethnic identification both on the coast and in inland areas (Berliner 2010; McGovern 2013; Sarró 2009, 2010). In Mali, for example, Amselle (1998: 52–54) has shown the existence of a 'system of transformations' that accommodates for switches in ethnic identity between Fulani, Bambara and Malinke societies. Ethnic conversions result from power relations, as individuals acquire 'a position of dominant or dominated' (ibid.: 52) related to the movements and implantation of groups in the region. Conversions from Fulani to Bambara identity, for instance, imply a statutory change, as families are incorporated into dominant lineages and often combine with religious conversion, as the Muslim faith is abandoned in the

profit of fetishist beliefs (ibid.: 53–54). Those changes, although reversible, are expected to hold for relatively long periods of time.

Following these authors, one purpose of this book is to use the case of the Sherbros to demonstrate the central role of local politics, particularly of reciprocity, in substantiating such practices. That identity should be conceived, in Amselle's words, 'a political phenomenon or as ratified by the powers that be' (1998: 54) has been demonstrated time and again by scholars working on ethnicity. Yet in the rush to understand repeated 'ethnic' conflicts, the substance of ethnic fluidity – namely, its human realization and related social practice in contemporary societies – has been given less attention than it merits. Taken together, the integrative processes described below, and across West Africa, may be relevant for other regions in Africa where frontier processes have been commonly accompanied by strategies in building wealth-in-people and attracting strangers into productive areas.

Reciprocity and Social Integration from a West African Perspective

Social arrangements between firstcomers and latecomers continue to be very much alive across Africa. They are particularly important for organizing access to resources, such as land and political rights (Berry 1993; Chauveau, Jacob and Le Meur 2004; Lentz 2006a, 2013). The nature of the mutual obligations that bind hosts and strangers usually depends on the economic organization of the local society and its interaction with the productive skills of strangers.[9] The relations between hosts and strangers usually follows what Sahlins (1972) termed 'balanced reciprocity' because they are based on the exchange of differentiated assets (strangers provide goods and labour, hosts provide women and land). Moreover, the relation has symbolic and ritual dimensions, since landlords enact authority over land by establishing ties with local spirits (Kuba 2004; Lentz 2006a, 2006b). The landlord/stranger reciprocity could best be described as an 'arrangement' in Schatzki's terms (2002) – namely, a set of institutions and meanings that structure relations between groups and embrace various dimensions of social life. The concept of 'arrangement' points to the stability of this model through time, despite contextual changes that may relate to mobility, resources, or political switches. Thus, following Bellagamba (2004: 385), I take a 'historicizing' approach to an institution that has persisted since precolonial times and the meaning and significance of which has transformed with the variations of the sociopolitical context.

The implications of this arrangement on social life become clearer when considering the significance of hospitality in gift-exchange theory. Hospitality is a type of nonmaterial gift, which originates in the possibility of future exchange with strangers (Komter 2007: 95), but also creates an initial debt towards hosts that patterns subsequent interactions. The original act of hospitality binds the

stranger with the implicit commitment to display lasting gratitude towards hosts (Simmel 1950). In Sierra Leone, strangers are expected to show 'respect' (in the local idiom) to hosts, which includes symbolic payments and political loyalty. Thus, the landlord/stranger reciprocity is a moral agreement that reduces the insecurity that results from establishing social relationships with latecomers (Lévi-Strauss 1949; Malinowski 1922; Sahlins 1972; Simmel 1950) and helps both groups establish stable and sustained relationships (Mauss 1990 [1923–24]). At the same time, it is an inherently unstable combination, as it rests on the political, ritual and moral ascendency of hosts over strangers.

As such, the landlord/stranger arrangement weaves political and economic interest with a set of morally binding values of gratitude and repayment. Murphy (2010: 40) defines it as a 'moral economy of dependency: namely – a set of expectations and obligations in reciprocity and exchange between dependents and patrons'. This statement emphasizes the production of differentiated identities and statuses, thereby turning gift-giving into a mode of social control of 'patrons' over dependants (see Schwartz 1967). The bond of reciprocity is also a way to install a form of domination and to create debts that can never be cancelled (Godelier 1996).

The process by which strangers display moral values over time (showing respect and gratitude in various ways) can mitigate hierarchies and produce social integration. Strangers differ from outsiders: they are permanent or seasonal residents, related to local populations via marriage and/or economic exchanges. Over generations, they can obtain land, political and economic entitlements, and thus gain relative social status. Overall, relations of reciprocity that occur as part of the landlord/stranger institution work to include new strangers into host societies, thereby achieving social integration.[10] The implication of this is that reciprocity, by building trust and social capital within a locality, also structures identity claims. Identities may be fluid and crossovers frequent, yet they follow certain rules. In other words, it is not sufficient to choose one's identity; one must have a rightful claim to it. And Sherbro identity on the Peninsula, due to its history, opens up many avenues for individual claims.

Sherbros have integrated and continue to integrate members of other ethnic groups on the basis of reciprocal relations. Two mechanisms lie at the heart of my ethnographic description. On the one hand, Sherbro communities assimilate members of local ethnic groups, who can acquire Sherbro identity. This process manifests in the local use of narratives of ethnic 'transformation': people explain the mechanisms by which their ancestors or they 'became' Sherbro over time. In Sherbro society, the establishment of a kin alliance and the adoption of local ritual practices are central to this integrative process. Other anthropologists working in societies of the Upper Guinea Coast point to the processual nature of identity and the existence of 'idioms of transformation' (Berliner 2010; McGovern 2013; Sarró 2009, 2010): it is possible to 'become'

a member of an ethnic group by adopting a specific set of social and ritual practices. Those processes allowed for the emergence of fluid ethnic identities across the region (Trajano Filho 2010: 162). In Sherbro society, it explains how people can invoke and navigate other ethnic categories as constitutive of Sherbro identity, including the Temne and Mende categories that oppose each other on the national political scene.

On the other hand, historically, Sherbro communities built social and family networks with the black settlers of the Colony. In this instance, the strangers belonged to a colonial world to which local populations aspired. Sherbro populations employed strategies, such as marriage and child-fostering, to secure entry into the settlers' group. They acquired Krio identity over time, as part of their self-definition, and yet remained *kɔntri* – a Krio word derived from the English 'country' that translates as 'rural' or 'indigenous'. They could combine both identifications, despite the fact that the two identities were presented as mutually exclusive under the British colonial regime. Sherbros continue to position themselves as both Krio and *kɔntri*, thereby assuming an inbetween social status.

The dynamics of ethnic transformation and the inclusion of a Krio component into Sherbro identity – as processes that drew socioethnic boundaries while exposing Sherbro communities to outside influences – resulted in what I define as ethnic hybridity. Through this focus on hybridity, ethnicity appears ever more clearly as a 'set of relations' produced by historical forces (Comaroff and Comaroff 1992). Sherbro ethnicity – in its definition and practice – has incorporated the structures of inequality that brought 'dissimilar groupings into a single political economy' ordered by colonial social classifications (ibid.: 54). Yet, in the Sherbro case, it did not lead to fixed distinctions, but to a possibility of crossing boundaries.

Ethnic hybridity is the result of reciprocity as a mode of interaction that achieves social and cultural integration. Processes of integration produced the distinct sociocultural contours of Sherbro identity, while constructing it as a fluid and unbounded practice. Sherbro identity became plural and able to accommodate various categories of identification. As a result, it assumes a mediating position between social and ethnic categories that continue to be viewed as antagonistic in the Sierra Leonean context (Mende/Temne, Krio/*kɔntri*). At the same time, Sherbro identity is experienced as fundamentally 'indigenous' to Sierra Leone, and the perpetuation of this identity on the Peninsula is closely related to the fishing livelihood and proximity to the sea, as Sherbros understand the seashore to be 'their' land. Yet, this fundamental relation between identity, land and livelihood has been questioned in recent years, as has been evident in a recent upsurge in autochthonous discourses.

Autochthony and the Politics of Recognition in the Postwar Context

The Peninsula, in the wake of Sierra Leone's Civil War (1991–2002), has undergone significant political and demographic changes. The receptivity of hosts towards strangers has changed, which makes it a productive case to observe shifting power relations between groups and subsequent adjustments in reciprocity discourses and practices. The scale of internal migration has played a role in triggering the rhetoric of autochthony: local populations, fearing that groups of newcomers may become politically empowered, reassert their firstcomer status by stigmatizing and excluding them.

The Peninsula case combines the various factors that have otherwise led to conflicts based on autochthonous rights in other African contexts:[11] a demographic shift, a context of democratization, a relative economic differential between hosts and strangers, and scarce resources (in particular, land). Starting with the demographic shift, the population of the Western Area – i.e. Freetown (the Western Area Urban District) and the Peninsula (the Western Area Rural District) – has grown rapidly during the two decades following the Civil War.

Censuses since 1963 show that the region has always attracted rural migrants. Population growth in the Western Area Rural District marked its sharpest acceleration between 2004 and 2015 when its population increased by 154.9% from 174,249 to 444,270 people (Statistics Sierra Leone 2017: 99). It is the administrative district that gained the most population in Sierra Leone in this period of time. Freetown, of course, continued to be a hub of migration, as was expected, but to a lesser extent than the Western Area Rural District. The report on the 2015 census (Weekes and Bah 2017: 7), commenting on the growth in the Western Area Rural District concludes that 'population growth … is probably due to large scale migration from the other regions during and after the eleven-year war' and that its negative impact is 'currently evidenced by large scale destruction of forests for settlement purposes'.

Sierra Leone's post-independence censuses did not record the ethnic identity or languages of its citizens on the Peninsula until 2015. Nevertheless, it is safe to assume that Sherbro populations already constituted a minority group on the Peninsula in the 1980s. Yet, until the Civil War, land was available and local communities could maintain territorial separation between their own settlements and more recently established ones. Tokeh, for example, remained a Sherbro-majority settlement of a few hundred inhabitants, even as larger villages like Tombo were mixed. Since the 2000s, it has been much harder to maintain ethnospatial boundaries. The availability of land has decreased sharply. Land shortage drives an intensification of discourses of ownership that encompass both the claims of autochthony of specific families based on oral history and the supposed autochthony of the Sherbro group at large. Landowning families

strongly resist newcomers' claims to land, as well as their claims to political sovereignty that would tear off sections of existing settlements (see Chapter 8).

Conflicts over land, as in other regions of Africa, have been key to the modification of landlord/stranger relations and the solidification of ethnic boundaries. Often, those conflicts result from state interventions in the allocation of land ownership. Changes in policies, when granting economic advantage to groups perceived as later settlers, can durably modify the relationships between them and their host communities. In Guinea, McGovern (2013) describes how the policy of 'mise en valeur' adopted by Sekou Touré's regime in the 1960s attempted to eradicate the customary system of land-use rights in Loma society and encouraged individual ownership of land. State laws gave Manya speakers the possibility to obtain land rights without negotiating a customary arrangement with the Loma 'original' landowners, whereas those rights were previously tied to the cultural and social assimilation of Manya speakers into Loma society. Manya speakers felt less obliged towards their hosts to 'become' Loma (we find here the 'idiom of transformation' described above), which, in turn, participated in the construction of 'fixed' ethnic distinctions (ibid.: 103).

On the Peninsula, postwar governments have played a central role in transforming relationships between landlords and strangers towards conflicts based on autochthony. Speculative practices and the commodification of state land in the region have caused an exponential rise in land value. Thus, land has become a main economic asset for autochthonous families in a context of economic insecurity. Although long-term tenants can rightfully claim land ownership under customary law, those families are less inclined to grant this right altogether. As a result, groups of strangers have turned towards the state as an alternative patron that can mediate access to local rights. In some places, they have secured the right to claim political independence from their host communities and elect their own headman, which also gives them relative control over land (including the right to sell land).

The political strategy adopted by newly settled populations has been facilitated by the return to multiparty politics in the postwar period. The strategy for democratization has exacerbated the need for political leaders to secure a voting base, particularly in the Western Area that is more ethnically and culturally diverse than other regions (see Chapter 1). During the last two decades, newly settled populations have both acquired demographic weight and reinforced their economic advantage in commercial fishing (see Chapter 3). Along the Peninsula, their local representatives have made clever use of those assets to establish relations of patronage with political leaders and members of state bodies in Freetown.

In this light, autochthony is a response to local economic vulnerability in the postwar moment. In a shattered Sierra Leonean economy that leaves most of the population in conditions of extreme poverty, Sherbro narratives of

dispossession have become a trope against the backdrop of recent migration. Local populations have seen their influence eroded by demographic growth, political changes and conflicts over productive resources. As a result, they have tied their social status as firstcomers to a more bounded and exclusive version of ethnicity (Geschiere and Jackson 2006; Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 2000).

However, in this book, I emphasize how claims of autochthony arise as a manifestation of unstable relations of reciprocity. Previous analyses of autochthony have productively theorized the impacts of political liberalization and the market economy on the production of local identities. At the same time, they tend to overlook local interpretations of conflicts that do not necessarily emphasize causal relations beyond the local or national level, but point out breakdowns in the local context itself. Reciprocity, in the West African region and beyond, often constitutes the local prism by which global factors become filtered: discourses about reciprocal relations reflect long-term social interactions, produce power relations and legitimate shifting uses of ethnic identity, including autochthony. Local understandings of ethnicity, as Chun (2009: 343) argues, only have 'meaning in these local contexts of experience and power, even as they work out tensions, conflicts and contradictions that may be rooted ultimately at the global level'. Reciprocity institutions, embedded in local political cultures, are central in mediating external forces (Walsh-Dilley 2017) – they help people to make sense of their integration into global systems by accommodating or contesting change. On the Peninsula, local discourses reveal that developments at the national and global levels are considered meaningful inasmuch as they indicate a continuation or a breakdown in moral values related to reciprocity, thereby determining the balance between social reproduction and social change.

Thus, populations on the Peninsula do not interpret their contemporary conflicts as being primarily over resources. They see conflict as the result of a breakdown in relations of reciprocity, and in a lack of mutual recognition of status, obligation and responsibility. This interpretation is consistent across the ethnic and social groups with whom I conducted fieldwork. Specifically, people saw conflict arising from the breakdown of landlord/stranger relations. The landlord/stranger arrangement normally guarantees political and legal recognition at the local level. Recognition involves both respect (giving the other rights) and social esteem (recognizing the other's cultural difference and abilities) (Honneth 1995). By entering into this type of alliance, groups of strangers are acknowledged as contributing to the construction of the political community (for instance, by providing ritual leaders, by leading economic activities or by ensuring political mediation). In many ways, it is an alliance by which groups seek social existence by *doing* something for the common good. As Hilgers (2011: 42) notes, there are degrees of autochthony that correspond 'to the position that each group occupies in the common space' and those positions reflect 'at least implicitly, the contribution of each one to the success of the collectivity'.

Reciprocal relations give social substance to various groups and mark their belonging to the collectivity.

In this light, landlord/stranger conflicts are, in Honneth's words (1995: 135–39), struggles to achieve patterns of mutual recognition. They are responses to subjective experiences of disrespect, as people who engage in conflicts feel that they are denied rights or moral relations. Although the local perspective emphasizes the expectation that these relations contribute to stabilizing the common good, further analysis demonstrates that the landlord/stranger arrangement is also a model of cultural action that legitimates political and social changes 'resulting from dependents having strategically gained positions of domination' (Murphy 2010: 42). The disruptive character of power differentials opens up the possibility to contest the relationship and emancipate from the original alliance (see Gouldner 1960: 174). Dependants can renegotiate their status by accusing patrons of failing their obligations, for instance, by refusing to grant land ownership or by levying taxes that land users perceive as undue. Such conflicts often result in political schism and the founding of a new political community. Chapter 8 presents several such cases along the Peninsula. The fact that groups of strangers may want to sever their ties with their patrons appears as a common scenario in Sherbro oral traditions. In this respect, conflicts based on autochthony can be viewed as attempts to redraw the boundaries of the original 'moral' community that set common values for different social groups.

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Having described the general theoretical arch of this study, let us now turn to some details and examples. Here I sketch out how Sherbro populations are integrated with other ethnic groups (via the transformative idiom and kriolization) and draw the distinction of a Sherbro identity from these patterns of integration, as a product of the 'frontier zone' described earlier.

During my fieldwork, I spent a good amount of time sitting with Mr Nicol on the porch of the community centre of Kissi Town. I had met him towards the beginning of my research. Mr Nicol, who was in his late fifties by then, was severely disabled and did not move from his wheelchair. When not staying in Kissi Town for research, I used to visit him regularly. We chatted about the latest news or just sat quietly, watching cars that drove by and greeting people who passed. People came to see him for various matters, as Mr Nicol had been the headman from 1981 to 2004. In 2010, a 'stranger' had become headman, challenging the ruling primacy of landowning families. Many inhabitants complained that 'the Temne' had taken over and that they dominated fishing in Kissi Town. Through it all, Mr Nicol remained available on the porch of the community centre, where people met with him. The headman himself came to discuss cases and receive his advice, particularly concerning land disputes.

During my stay in Kissi Town, Mr Nicol and his sister Mrs Koroma took me with them to Mokemba, their mother's village, about 50 kilometres down the coast. The first wife of Mr Nicol came from the same area. In Mokemba we were welcomed by Mr Nicol's family. I noticed that people conversed both in Sherbro and Temne. Mrs Koroma pointed out to me that Mr Nicol was addressed by his Temne nickname *Chemideif*. As she told people about my work, I was asked to record the founding myth of Mokemba told in Sherbro by an elderly woman. The myth foregrounded the long-term coexistence of Sherbro and Temne populations in Mokemba, but when I enquired more about it, people evaded my questions.

Later, I asked Mr Nicol how he had acquired the Temne name of *Chemideif*. He told me that he had been initiated into Poro, the male initiation society that marks local belonging and transition to adulthood, in Mama Beach, a neighbouring community on the Peninsula. During the initiation, he was given his society name, Pieh. Later in life, he took part in Poro festivities in Mokemba and sang the following song in Temne: 'Don't ask me, don't ask me [*chemideif*]. Then, whom should you ask? … the head of the society, the one who takes the money from Bondo, the one who eats the money.' The song tells about the authority of the heads of the Poro society and mocks their propensity to appropriate the money paid by the heads of Bondo, the female society.[12] Ever since those festivities, the name of *Chemideif* had stuck.

Mr Nicol's names revealed the complexity of his social identity. His great-grandfather on the paternal side was a Mende migrant from Panguma, who had been 'adopted' (fostered) by a Krio. In the process, the family had acquired the British surname Nicol. Mr Nicol could not speak Mende, but his father had given him a Mende name, Kagbindi. People knew about Mr Nicol's Mende ancestry. A community of Mende migrants on the Peninsula had approached him to represent them as their next Mende tribal head.[13] He also had two Christian first names: Charles and George. He had acquired the first through baptism and the second through sponsorship, when a British resident of Freetown had paid for his schooling and given him a new name. Finally, he had acquired the society name of Pieh through the initiation in Mama Beach, although in Mokemba, he was known as *Chemideif*.

Mr Nicol always defined himself as Sherbro, at times as Mende and often as Krio. He traced his Sherbro origin on both sides of the family tree. His father's mother was part of the Leigh family from Freetown and owned the entire land of Kissi Town (see Chapter 8 for a detailed explanation of land disputes in Kissi Town). She was an 'educated Sherbro' and therefore could also be called a Krio. On his maternal side, his grandparents had migrated from Mokemba to Tasso Island. They had converted to Islam and changed their name to Kargbo, a last name usually associated with populations of Temne or Limba origin.

Yet, Mr Nicol was careful to avoid making any family connection to the Temnes. He explained to me that before his mother's father changed his name

to Kargbo, he was called Samuel Johnson, a name that was obviously Sherbro, and he argued that Temne populations had entered the Mokemba area only after his family had migrated.

At the time of Mr Nicol's grandfather's emigration, matters may have been different and a Temne connection may not have been as problematic as in the present moment. In any case, though Mr Nicol could also sing (if not speak) in Temne and carried a nickname because of it, he distanced himself from a 'Temne' ascription in terms of identity and ancestry.

The 'Transformative Idiom'

Mr Nicol is not unusual among the Sherbros in having multiple known ethnic identifications. Indeed, Sherbro ethnic identity is itself built up around the history of such individuals. Nevertheless, Mr Nicol is an especially fascinating example of how individuals who define themselves as Sherbro can employ several ethnic affiliations and maintain connections to various ethnic groups, in this case Mende, Temne and Krio. Those affiliations reveal two social processes: one is ethnic 'transformation', that is, the process through which somebody can 'become' Sherbro; and another is kriolization, that is, the way by which an individual can acquire the attributes of Krio identity. Both are important aspects of individual identities among Sherbro populations. Those two social dynamics have deep
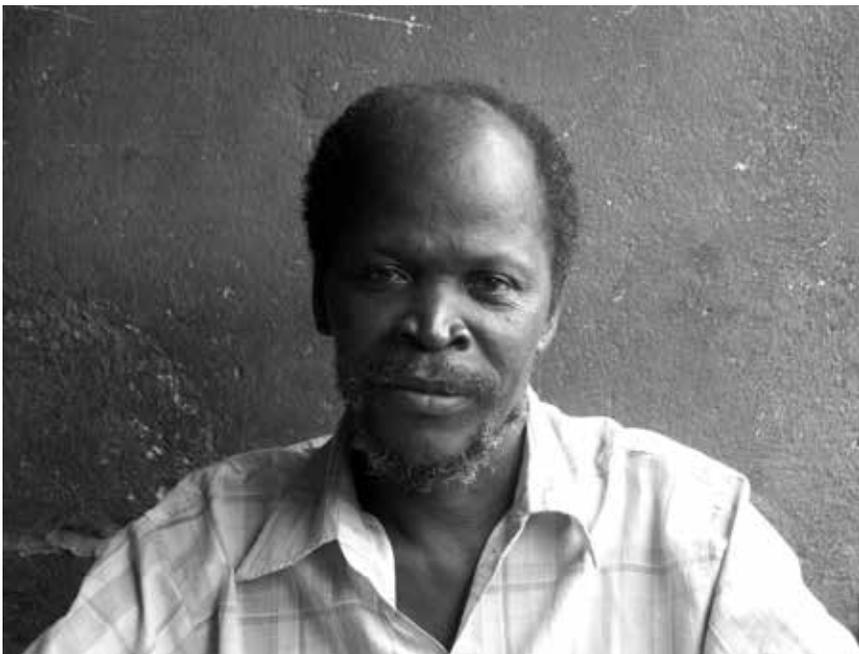

Figure 0.1. George Pieh Charles Nicol (1956–2020), 2011. © Anaïs Ménard

historical roots that relate to population movements and political changes in the region. While kriolization is the result of power relations that emerged with the imposition of the colonial rule, the 'transformative idiom' (Sarró 2010: 237) is the outcome of a specific mode of dealing with strangers in societies of the Upper Guinea Coast that have been shaped by intraregional and transnational mobility.

As sketched out above in the historical background, the existence of multiple migration routes, and maritime routes used by fishermen in particular, can explain that people who define themselves as Sherbro can trace links to both Temne and Mende-speaking groups. The family story of Mr Nicol reveals the way in which members of other groups assimilate into Sherbro communities and acquire rights rapidly. Mr Nicol's paternal grandfather, whom he defined as Mende, married a Sherbro woman, Mrs Leigh, and Mr Nicol's father was born in her village, Kissi Town. His father married a Sherbro woman from Mokemba and Mr Nicol was born in Kissi Town. His father sent him to be initiated in Mama Beach, a neighbouring Sherbro village, which sealed the matrimonial alliance of his grandfather and marked Mr Nicol's belonging to his grandmother's lineage. Mr Nicol stressed the importance of matrifiliation in defining his Sherbro identity: he claimed it on his mother's side (in Mokemba) and on his paternal grandmother's side, the branch that had allowed him to inherit land in Kissi Town.

Mr Nicol's story expresses an identity 'thought and formulated through idioms of transformation' as described in other societies of the Upper Guinea Coast (Sarró 2010: 237). Strangers can become part of the host group through a specific sociocultural process, which may involve the acquisition of language, customs, livelihood or participation to ritual practices (Shack 1979a: 9). Ethnic identity is mutable and can be achieved over time. Thus, some strangers 'became' Sherbro in the sense that they abandoned previous ethnic affiliations in favour of Sherbro identity. Nevertheless, this does not always imply that 'all traces of strangeness' are lost eventually (ibid.). In Bulongic society in Guinea, Berliner (2010: 264) shows that local discourses describe the process by which people of diverse ethnic origins came to form Bulongic society and invent a new identity. Similarly, in Sherbro society, people acknowledge (and use) their multiple origins and discuss how their ancestors 'became' Sherbro. The cognatic descent system and dominance of matrifiliation, which is at odds with the patrilineal norms of other groups such as the Mende and the Temne, allow people to claim more than one ethnic identity. This specific feature also explains the many nuances by which one can claim Sherbro identity depending on one's biography and origins. In the case of Mr Nicol, his paternal Mende origins, along with his long political career as headman in Kissi Town, even gave him enough credibility for Mende-speaking groups to consider him as a potential Mende tribal head.

Marriage and initiation continue to be the main avenues for ethnic 'transformation' in Sherbro communities. This is congruent with Shack's argument

(1979a: 9) that 'the cultural rather than the political process, including the adoption of language, customs, dress, mode of livelihood, fictive kinship, and religious practices, has been the most common and widespread method by which strangers have been completely incorporated into host societies'. Other anthropologists working in the region point to the relevance of the initiation process in changing one's ethnic affiliation. Sarró (2010: 239) shows that belonging to the Baga Sitem society in Guinea involved 'transformation, performance, and assimilation'. Becoming Baga involved a lengthy ritual process that included initiation (see Sarró 2009: 41–48). In the Guinean hinterland, McGovern (2013) demonstrates that the cultural and social assimilation of Manya speakers into Loma society involved learning the Lomagi language and initiating into local societies. Yet, as those two identities have become less flexible over time, those shifts in identity became less frequent throughout the twentieth century. My own observations in Sierra Leone show that those processes continue to be very much alive in the Peninsula region.

In Sherbro society, the ritual process by which strangers can change ethnic and social status continues to be at work. Shack (1979b), following Victor Turner (1969), argues that 'the ritual process' allows strangers to move from a liminal position to be part of *communitas* and become members of the host society. This process marks the stranger's belonging to the local community and opens up the possibility of acquiring local citizenship, which grants access to land and political rights. Mr Nicol's Poro initiation marks his belonging to his paternal grandmother's lineage and the rights that he derives from it, as the descendant of a Mende man who was affiliated to a Sherbro lineage. At the same time, he could take part in Poro rituals in his mother's village – a place in which Sherbro and Temne cultural and linguistic practices were mixed. By defining himself as 'Sherbro', he could bridge the gap between Mende and Temne ethnic categories easily, although he denied Temne connections. The political context that stirred issues of autochthony clearly made the acknowledgement of Temne-Sherbro mixed origins a sensitive issue. I will examine in Chapter 1 the political reasons that underlie Mr Nicol's (and others') public rejection of his Temne origins and the emphasis on his Mende roots. For now, suffice it to say that Mr Nicol could call on a plural cultural and linguistic heritage, based on different kinds of kin connections, all of which supported the intergenerational process of his acquisition of Sherbro identity.

Creolization Processes and Hybridity

Mr Nicol's narrative also foregrounds the Krio dimension of Sherbro identity. He evoked two distinct processes: (1) the kriolization of members of local groups (in this instance, Mende), who acquired the attributes of Krio identity through fosterage in a Krio family; and (2) the equivalence that people

commonly establish between Krio and 'educated Sherbro' – a process that does not imply the assimilation of Sherbro individuals to the Krio group. Sherbros are not 'fully' Krio, but are Krio nonetheless. Both identities can coexist to define an individual. As an explanation to the proximity between the two groups, I was often told matter-of-factly that 'the Krio are Sherbro' and 'the Sherbro are Krio'.

Krio identity emerged gradually from processes of creolization among local populations and various groups of settlers. Creolization refers to a process of social mixing, by which uprooted people – originally people born in the colonial plantations – fashion out original social and cultural forms out of heterogeneous influences. This process generates a new common identity that is 'referred to in terms of common historical experience and roots and a (new) common home' (Knörr 2010b: 733). The black settlers and their descendants who populated the Sierra Leone Colony from the end of the eighteenth century onwards were first referred to as 'creoles'. However, by the mid-twentieth century, the name 'Krio' became used to designate a distinct (ethnic) group of mixed ancestry resulting from the settlement of various populations in the Colony.[14]

Sierra Leone received various groups of settlers between the late 1700s and the mid-1800s. In 1787, a group of British abolitionists led by Granville Sharp founded the Province of Freedom on the territory of present-day Freetown to resettle some of the 'Black Poor' who had been freed from slavery. The settlers secured the land of Freetown by signing treaties with local rulers of the Koya Temne region, King Tom and King Naimbana (Fyfe 1962: 19–21). However, their early settlement was burnt down by another local ruler, King Jimmy, in 1789. In 1790, English benefactors revived the project of the colony and King Naimbana agreed to the arrival of new settlers with the signing of another commercial agreement.

In 1792, the Nova Scotians, who had gained their freedom by fighting on the British side during the American War of Independence, reached the colony. They rebuilt the settlement and named it Freetown. They were followed by the Maroons in 1800. Finally, when the slave trade was abolished in the British Empire in 1807, British patrols stopped slave ships on the West African coast and released slaves in Sierra Leone to start a 'free' life. The resettled slaves came to be known as Liberated Africans. They soon constituted the largest group of settlers in the Sierra Leone Colony. By 1848, Liberated Africans and their descendants numbered 40,243. Liberated Africans populated Freetown and settlements along the Peninsula, where they came in close contact with local Bullom populations.

Krio identity resulted from processes of sociocultural mixing among those populations with diverse origins. By the mid-nineteenth century, the settlers and their descendants formed a heterogeneous group with regard to their occupation, social background or religious affiliation.[15] Nevertheless, Krio identity,

in the historiography of Sierra Leone, is more closely associated with Freetown's social elite and its specific value in colonial society. Many members of this group were educated in Christian schools. Some of them had studied abroad and had intellectual professions. Similar to the Creoles in Guinea Bissau, Christian-educated settlers in Freetown formed a higher (urban) social class that cultivated cultural distinctiveness by adopting a European lifestyle and a set of values and habits judged as 'superior' or 'civilized' (Kohl 2018). Colonial authorities placed the black settlers and local populations at the two ends of the social ladder. Members of the Freetonian elite desired to mark their difference from upcountry people, whom they saw as 'primitive' (Cohen 1981). In this sense, this group forged a relatively exclusive identity.

Under colonial rule, the civilized/native[16] dichotomy was spatially situated. The settlers lived in the Sierra Leone Colony, that is, Freetown and its Peninsula. They had little contact with the population of the interior, except for traders who travelled inland. In 1896, British authorities established a Protectorate over the interior of the country, which created an official political distinction between citizens of the Colony and the mass of British-protected subjects, who were nonetheless considered autochthones when compared to the non-native 'Creoles' (Caulker 1976). This administrative division precipitated political divergence between the populations of the Colony and the Protectorate. Progressively, the British transferred political power to populations of the Protectorate. The process that led the path to independence, which implied the reunification of the two political entities in one country, effectively marginalized the Krio elite in national politics.

Krio identity, like other creole identities, was integrative and open to newcomers of various ethnic origins (Eriksen 2007; Knörr 2010b). Yet, individuals who were incorporated into the Krio 'elite culture' had to adopt distinct cultural attributes and social standards that set them apart from indigenous groups. Consequently, the literature has described social relations between Krios and local ethnic groups as one of unidirectional assimilation (see Cohen 1981; Porter 1963). In the Krio language, the process of 'becoming Krio' is commonly referred to as *krionayzeshɔn*: as in Mr Nicol's narrative, individuals bearing other ethnic identities can assimilate into Krio society through education and adoption. In doing so, they also bring in various sociocultural features in the definition of (their) Krio identity. Yet, the influence of local groups on contemporary Krio culture has remained unexplored. Following Wyse (1989), Dixon-Fyle and Cole (2006: 6–7) stress that scholars have had little consideration for the fact that the Krios did not form a homogeneous 'upper class entity' shaped solely by foreign influences. Krios themselves have tended to downplay local cultural influences and to emphasize their non-Sierra Leonean origins, particularly Yoruba (as many Liberated Africans had Yoruba origins). Yet, local groups' cultural and social features also contributed in the making of Krio society.

Nowadays on the Peninsula, the local relationship between Sherbro and Krio does not follow the described pattern. Moreover, the historical data on Sherbro/Krio relations presented in Chapters 2 and 3 suggest that they never did follow a pattern of unidirectional assimilation. Sherbro and Krio identities remained distinct, while both groups related to the other through kinship, friendship, sponsorship and ritual practices. Intermarriages have been common between the two groups, even at times when Krios disapproved of marriages with local groups (Knörr 2010b: 746). Nowadays, Sherbros can present themselves as Sherbro/Krio or Krio/Sherbro with regard to family names, kinship, education and Christian values. They easily navigate Krio culture. Krios, for their part, readily acknowledge that Sherbros and Krios 'are the same people'. They can easily emphasize their Sherbro origins when they want to appear as authentic Sierra Leoneans (Knörr 2010a: 215).

Sherbros combine an identity as *kɔntri* (indigenous) with one as Krio. In this sense, they stand at the margin of the creolization process by their ability to navigate both social worlds. The construction of Sherbro ethnicity corresponds to Bakhtin's linguistic concept of 'hybridity' that defines the ability of speakers to use 'two social languages, within the limits of a single utterance' (1981: 358). Its social practice brings it close to intentional hybridity, by which speakers set two discourses against each other as part of a social or a political strategy (ibid.: 360; Young 1995: 20–21). Applications of hybridity in the social sciences have emerged as a critique of essentialism and have described the ability of actors to transcend racial and ethnic boundaries, particularly in contexts of uprootedness and migration (see e.g. Bhabha 1994; Gilroy 1993). However, following Ahmad's critique (1995), I consider hybrid identities to be the product of specific material and historical conditions. Agencies, Ahmad (ibid.: 16) states, 'are constituted not in flux and displacement but in given historical locations' (see also Werbner 2015: 21). It is because they are the result of long-term historicity that they appear as both 'transgressive and normal' (Werbner 2015: 4).

Historically, the construction of Sherbro identity points to the incorporation of mixed influences, which transgressed categories that were presented as definitive in the early European encounters of contact, and as 'fixed' and 'pure' by later colonial authorities. Under colonial policies and structures, individuals came to think of themselves as belonging to specific groups, whose reproduction was tied to colonial social dynamics. Yet as Bhabha (1994: 111–14) argues, the colonial powers also created the conditions for the production of hybridity because they could not eliminate (and also produced) transcultural forms and ethnic mixing. These processes subverted the colonial myths of cultural and ethnic purity, and challenged the binary structures that opposed colonized/colonizers and native/civilized. The emergence of hybrid cultural and ethnic forms was disruptive in that the colonizer was never wholly in control of its own discourse, which was appropriated and modified. To invoke the hybridity of Sherbro identity is thus

to remind the reader that the colonial period (and subsequent structures of governance) shaped expectations and expressions of ethnic identity.

However, hybridity has played out differently in the dynamics of Sherbro and Krio identities. In the Sierra Leone Colony, it is Krio identity that became more clearly the product of cultural creolization induced by colonialism. The Sherbros, by contrast, became a category of 'cultural brokers who turn[ed] the classificatory ambiguities to their own advantage' (Eriksen 2002: 65). Sherbro identity illustrates the agency of the colonized, for whom being 'in between' became not only a strategy, but also a way of fully occupying the interstices of the colonial world. This specificity allows us to think more globally about the relationship between hybridity and purity in relation to ethnic identities.

Hybridity is principally invoked in relation to multiculturalism, as a modernist/cosmopolitan version of 'creole' or 'mixed'. Its use does not disrupt the general assumptions that 'normal' ethnic identities are 'purer' and that mixed identities, whether viewed positively or negatively, are unusual cases that defy the normal theoretical parameters for understanding ethnicity.[17] Like the concept of diaspora, hybridity evokes 'the subversion of naturalized forms of identity centred on the nation' (Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk 2021: 2).

However, when looking at the social practices of people who self-identify as Sherbro, hybridity does not mean 'mixed' (in the sense, for instance, that the Krios are), but rather a juxtaposition of identifications that neither blend nor collide. Performances of hybridity do not threaten existing sociocultural boundaries, but instead compose with them in a creative way. As a result, I approach the concept of hybridity in a broader perspective: it includes the dual nature of Sherbro identity in the postcolony (being Krio and *kɔntri* at the same time), as well as its ability to include a large spectrum of other ethnic categories through past and present processes of assimilation – categories that Sherbro individuals can mobilize in specific ways. In other words, I see hybridity as the fact of having a pivotal position between various types of identities that remain distinct and separated.[18] Hybridity itself has acquired high status and keeps on reproducing itself in discourse and practice. The Sherbros may not be a unique case of hybridity (practices of code-switching between *kɔntri* and Krio, for instance, may be widespread), but the concept comes to illustrate the diverse composition of ethnic identities themselves, whose social understanding and practice rarely match definitions made either on the basis of 'purity' or on the basis of 'mixing' (or blending).

Ethnic Registers and the Performativity of Language

Drawing on Bhabha's semiotic approach to hybridity, I look at its transposition in local performances of identity. Performances are part of the discursive field – they become texts that underscore the relation between language and identity.

Mr Nicol's narrative, by playing on many identities for different purposes and contexts, points to ethnic identity as a linguistic performance. The focus on performance has allowed anthropologists to analyse ethnic identity as the product of situated social practices (Brubaker 2004; Eriksen 2002; Hutchinson and Smith 1996; Jenkins 2008). Those approaches emphasize the role of agents in assuming various identities and using them according to situations, contexts and needs. In order to clarify the multiple uses of Sherbro identity, I combine this processual approach with a linguistic perspective on identity, which provides useful theoretical tools to account for the historical phenomena at the heart of the processes of identity production.

Contemporary performances of Sherbro identity continue to transgress the dominant inherited narrative of distinct, binary categories (native/Krio, Mende/Temne). However, its social practice is neither liminal nor ambiguous; rather, Sherbro identity has encoded various ethnic registers as its own. Following Agha (2006: 24), a register is 'a linguistic *repertoire* that is associated, culture-internally, with particular social practices and with persons who engage in such practices' (emphasis in original). It is attached to a system of speech style, which includes both linguistic and nonlinguistic signs (for instance, gestures, physical attitude and clothes). Language users routinely engage in metapragmatic evaluations by reading those signs as indexes of registers and by linking those registers to specific identities.

Ethnic registers are '*historical formations*' (Agha 2005: 25). They acquire social value through a dynamic sociohistorical process of 'enregisterment', by which 'diverse behavioral signs … are functionally reanalyzed as cultural models of action' (Agha 2007: 55). The social value of a register changes over time, as users change, adapt the register to the context, employ signs in innovative ways or compete over how these should be used. A register is made up of a collection of social values and meanings constituted at various times and locations. Sherbro identity 'enregistered' varying linguistic repertoires as part of its social practice, including the *kɔntri* and Krio registers, and the registers of other ethnic groups (i.e. language and customs), which resulted from close and multiple interactions at different periods in history. Enregistment is the channel that allows for contemporary practices of cross-ethnic identification. Depending on the social interactions at work in specific places and on the speakers' skills, these repertoires of signs may play a stronger or weaker role in identity performances (for instance, the Krio dimension may be less important in certain regions).

Sherbro identity has integrated a large set of semiotic markers that point to various registers. People who self-identify as Sherbro can draw on different sets of linguistic and behavioural signs to emphasize one identity or another, when those become situationally relevant. This type of performance also depends on a speaker's skills. For instance, not everybody is able to display signs indicating social prestige, as in the case of the Krio category. This ability, or lack thereof, is

the outcome of an individual's social position in contemporary society and can be evidence of social inequalities.

Thus, I view ethnic identity as the product of both external and internal discursive processes. The former refers to the use of specific registers for external audiences in an interactional process, while the latter concerns the internal (re) definition of the social significance of indexical signs with regard to the context (decisions over which signs should be used and why, and for which audiences). For instance, conflicts with Temne strangers may encourage individuals to abandon indexical signs that link them to this register: many people, like Mr Nicol, choose not to disclose their knowledge of the Temne language.

From this perspective, the uses that people make of registers also reproduce power relations between language users, thereby sustaining asymmetrical interactions between hosts and strangers. They point to the dialectical relationship between hybridity and the legacy of colonial violence, and to the enduring weight of hierarchies of power in shaping practices of identification (also see Brah and Coombes 2000; Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk 2021). The historical construction of registers is tied to the production of ethnic 'categories' by colonial institutions in regimes of social inequality (Lentz 1995: 320). In Sierra Leone, colonial powers positioned Krios and natives in opposition, which produced stereotypical effects that continue to mould social action (see Agha 2007: 55). By including the Krio repertoire, Sherbro identity also incorporated power relations that were at the heart of colonial dynamics. Hybridity encoded 'the profound inequalities engendered by colonialism itself' (Ahmad 1995: 17). In this respect, it could not be separated from processes of cultural differentiation. Sherbro populations both subverted colonial hierarchies and reasserted their importance by building social strategies, such as education, child-fostering and marriage, in order to mark their belonging to a higher social group. In the present context, people continue to use Krio identity as a way to indicate social distinctiveness. Krio, like in Mr Nicol's narrative, defines a person as socially superior *because of* (Western) education. Thus, the ability to *krionayz* – i.e. to display signs associated with the Krio register, such as speaking Krio with a rich vocabulary – legitimates the reproduction of social hierarchies vis-à-vis other groups of strangers.

It should be noted that the performances of Sherbro identity may vary with the social and historical patterns of each region. We may talk about *identities* to define those variations, which are related to distinct (regional) 'enregistrement' processes depending on the ethnic and linguistic groups with which Sherbro populations coexisted. Nevertheless, the ease with which Sherbro people use cross-ethnic identification and substantiate this practice by referring to the trope of 'decline' is in itself a common denominator to all.

In other provinces of Sierra Leone, Sherbro identity is more closely defined vis-à-vis Mende and Temne-speaking populations than the Krio.[19] According to the census of 2015, people who self-identify as Sherbro represent 1.9% of Sierra

Leone's total population. By contrast, the Mende and Temne-speaking groups make up for a third of the population each. Even in the southern region, where the overall proportion of Sherbro people is relatively higher (6.2%), they coexist with a majority of Mende speakers (Weekes and Bah 2017: 25–26). In most regions, the tendency seems to be towards a Sherbro assimilation to the other groups and certainly a diminution in the active use of the Sherbro language (Childs 2010; Childs and Bendu 2018).

Yet, not all people who define themselves as Sherbro speak Sherbro. Corcoran (2014: 9) mentions that 65,736 Sherbro speakers were listed in the 2004 population census (1.3% of the population), while 111,652 identified as Sherbro (2.3% of the population). Similarly, language is not a necessary attribute of Sherbro identity on the Peninsula (see Chapter 5). Sherbro speakers are rare and the Sherbro language is mostly used for rituals.[20] Despite the fact that Sherbro had clearly 'died out' in the region, 3.2% of the population of the Western Area Rural District identified as Sherbro in 2015 (Weekes and Bah 2017: 26). As Corcoran points out (2014: 8), Sherbro people are well known for mastering neighbouring languages 'with native competence'. I illustrate their ability to move between ethnic groups in Chapters 4 and 5.

The trope of 'decline' of the Sherbro language and customs has become an inherent part of the performance and definition of identity itself. As a result of various strategies of assimilation, this trope allows people who define themselves as Sherbro to substantiate their multicultural background and claim other identities ('I am Sherbro, but I speak Mende/Temne/Krio' or 'I have been raised in a Mende/Temne region'), while processes of enregistrement, in Agha's sense, have rendered those 'other' identities socially acceptable in the eyes of other speakers. Being Sherbro represents an inherent possibility of being 'someone else' according to situational needs and somebody's performative skills. Sherbro (group) identity thus appears as the sum of individual discursive actions, a 'discursive formation' (Ammann and Kaufmann 2012) or 'discursive fiction' (Chun 2009), neither homogeneous nor stable in time, but rooted in distinct sociohistorical processes.

The Structure of This Book

Chapter 1 sets the ethnographic scene by presenting the specificity of the Peninsula as a 'rurban' space and by analysing the historical conditions – in particular, land tenure – that have contributed to building tensions between local populations and newly settled groups. Accordingly, I also discuss more recent phenomena, such as migration, the economic and ecologic challenges of the fishing industry, and the postwar processes of democratization. Postwar democratization is especially important because it has produced legal changes that contribute directly to the politicization of ethnic identities in the region and to urgency in the discourses of autochthony. Finally, I present my methodology

based on multisited fieldwork, as well as epistemological reflections on secrecy in an urbanizing environment.

Chapters 2 and 3 explore the role of oral traditions in framing Sherbro imagination about ethnic boundary-making. These traditions include narratives about colonial encounters with the black settlers of the Colony and about the assimilation of members of other local ethnic groups in Sherbro communities. In Chapter 2, I focus on the way in which Sherbros and Krios narrate their early interactions, while in Chapter 3, I show how the reciprocal arrangements that Sherbro communities established with the black settlers differed from those that they established with other groups. Oral traditions, coupled with historical sources, allow us to understand the historical processes by which Sherbro identity acquired its hybrid meaning, as people both reaffirmed their sociocultural distinction and adopted other ethnic categories as their own. Moreover, the use of kinship idioms (based on wife-exchange) in oral traditions produces a discourse about political alliances. These narratives allow Sherbro stakeholders to present a version of history that becomes, at the same time, a discourse about *expectations* of reciprocity, by telling the audience about which other groups can or cannot be trusted in the present. This pattern also appears in stories about initiation presented in Chapter 7. Telling history both reflects and substantiates contemporary intergroup relations, from cooperation to open conflict, and in this way constitutes a collective performance of identity because the narratives follow common patterns and their implications are collectively agreed.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I discuss local performances of ethnic hybridity. Chapter 4 provides an account of the way(s) in which Krio identity became part of Sherbro collective and individual performances of identity on the Peninsula. Sherbros define themselves as *civilayzd* (civilized), by which they mean that they are both *kɔntri* and Krio. I also detail the various aspects of being *civilayzd* in contemporary local discourses and practices. Chapter 5 explores more specifically the tactics of concealment and disclosure at the heart of identity practices. Ethnic hybridity contains the inherent possibility to mark social differentiations and bridge them at the same time.

In Chapters 6 and 7, I explore the use of ritual initiation as a factor of interethnic integration situated in wider logics of reciprocity between Sherbro and groups of strangers. I show that the initiation of strangers is a strategy by which Sherbro communities maintain relations of indebtedness, which include ambivalent feelings of friendship and authority. Membership in local societies appears as a powerful tool to create interpersonal trust and produce relatedness between people from various origins. At the same time, it allows Sherbro communities to mark their position as hosts to other groups. Chapter 6 focuses on practices of 'double membership' between Sherbros and Krios, meaning that people can be both members of Poro or Bondo (in Sherbro settlements) and of Hunting (in Krio settlements). These practices are an illustration of rather 'horizontal'

relationships between the two groups bound by mutual debt. In Chapter 7, by contrast, I show that initiation into Poro of strangers of other ethnic origins is part of a 'ritual process' that requires their full assimilation – namely, the type of ethnic transformation described above. Nevertheless, this system, by which Sherbro communities maintained political authority in the past, is now challenged by new populations, who reject both the monopoly of Poro members over leadership and initiation as a mode of integration. The gradual emancipation of strangers explain that Poro rituals have become sites of ethnic assertion and symbols of autochthony. In this way, the chapter opens up the analysis on current dimensions of conflict between hosts and strangers.

In Chapter 8, I explore in more detail the process of 'autochthonization' in Sherbro communities and the reinforcement of ethnic boundaries in a new political and economic context. I examine the role of recent changes, such as democratization and decentralization reforms, but also land speculation, in fuelling local feelings of injustice of firstcomers (who claim land ownership based on autochthony) against latecomers (who were allocated land). Yet, local negotiations about land and politics continue to be framed within the discourse of reciprocity. Taken together, Chapters 7 and 8 reveal the ambiguity of reciprocity, which works towards social integration, but also constitutes a fluctuant arrangement that serves to renegotiate power relations, sometimes through the exclusion and stigmatization of strangers.

Notes

1. See e.g. Amselle 1998, 1999; Lentz 1995; Lentz and Nugent 1999; Nugent 2008; Spear 2003; Vail 1989.
2. See e.g. Berman, Eyoh and Kymlicka 2004; Bøås and Dunn 2013; Chabal and Daloz 1999; Chauveau 2000; Dorman, Hammett and Nugent 2007; Geschiere 2009.
3. See e.g. Brah and Coombes 2000; Clifford 1997; Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk 2021; Papastergiadis 2000; Pieterse 2001; Werbner 2015.
4. Bellagamba (2004: 403–4) also refers to the practice of entrustment in the Gambia, by which strangers sought protection of local patrons, as a local model of 'moral ethnicity'.
5. The labels 'Temne' and 'Sherbro' are also used as contemporary ethnonyms, whereas 'Bullom' does not figure as an ethnic group in recent censuses, probably due to the gradual assimilation of speakers of Bullom So into Temne populations in the northern region of Sierra Leone. Speakers of Bullom So were estimated to be several hundred in 2003 (Childs 2008).
6. The term 'Sapi' appears in Valentim Fernandes' account *Description de la Côte Occidentale d'Afrique* (French translation), written between 1506 and 1510. Fernandes describes the ivory carvings of Sapi (or Sapes) populations of the 'Serra Leoa' region (Mark 2015).
7. Famous Afro-British lineages included the Corker, the Rogers and the Tucker families. For detailed accounts of those families, see Brooks (2003) and Jones (1983).
8. Historical narratives in coastal villages often mentioned the migration of experienced Temne-speaking fishermen from the northern coast. Often, people could not recall whether they were Bullom (i.e. speakers of Bullom So, the northern branch of Bullom) or

Temne, which is consistent with the long-term coexistence of both sets of fisherfolk along the northern coast.

9. In many instances, the host/stranger relationship takes place in agricultural societies that require additional labour during the farming season. Nevertheless, other cases may concern the relation between farmers and herders, or farmers and traders (see e.g. Bedert 2017). These movements often produce complex socioeconomic organization. In Mali, for instance, Deridder (2021) analyses the structuring of 'ethno-occupational' groups ('groupes ethnico-professionels') based on the control of differentiated resources in the Niger Delta (water, pasture and agricultural land), and the political imaginary that supports this arrangement.

10. I use reciprocity instead of dependency because it encompasses the variety of relations that unfold between members of social groups, from vertical relations of subordination and power to horizontal relations of friendship and economic interdependence. However, reciprocity is not necessarily a relation between equals and may involve relations of domination and exploitation, as the dominant group imposes the terms of the relationship.

11. See e.g. Ceuppens and Geschiere 2005; Chauveau 2000; Geschiere 2009; Geschiere and Nyamnjoh 2000; Socpa 2006.

12. Although the meaning of the song was not spelled out, it refers to the ritual interactions between Poro and Bondo members (see Chapters 6 and 7). During Bondo initiation, Poro members receive money to carry out certain tasks. For instance, during fieldwork in Baw-Baw, they helped to build the fence that served as a closed space for Bondo initiates.

13. On the Peninsula, 'tribal head' refers to a local representative who defends the ethnic group's interests in various political arenas and solves local disputes.

14. The linguistic origin of the ethnonym 'Krio' is debated. One suggestion is that it derives from the word 'creole' (English) or 'crioulo' (Portuguese) (see Hair 1992: 112). Yet, the Sierra Leonean scholar Akintola Wyse (1989), whose work largely contributed to giving historical legitimacy to the ethnonym 'Krio', privileged a non-European origin to the word. He argued that 'Krio' derived from the Yoruba word *akiriyo*, meaning 'those who go about paying visits after church service'. The sociolinguist Ian Hancock (2016) rejects this explanation, arguing that the analysis of Yoruba linguistic rules does not support it.

15. For instance, see Cole (2013) for an analysis of the Muslim Krio.

16. I use civilized and native without quotation marks when referring to the colonial hierarchy.

17. The debates about purity and mixing arise from the analyses of the biological roots of the concept of hybridity. In his compelling study *Colonial Desire* (1995), Young traced the concept's origin in nineteenth-century racial evolutionism and evidenced its use in structuring colonial theories of racial purity and 'miscegenation'. The concepts that indicated interracial mixing, such as métis(sage)/mulatto/mixed-race precisely resulted from a racial construction based on binary oppositions (Phoenix and Owen 2000: 74). In the 1990s, postcolonial thinkers such as Stuart Hall and Paul Gilroy appropriated the concept of (cultural) hybridity to describe processes of cultural mixing and the construction of identity through cultural contacts, such as diasporic (and/or deterritorialized) identities. Yet, they were also criticized for reproducing the very idea that they were trying to challenge – namely, the pre-existence of 'pure' essentialized entities (on this debate, see Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk (2021: 72–73)).

18. In this respect, not all Sherbro groups may claim a close link with the Krio or Krio-ness as part of their identity. The distinction between the control that each group has over the definition of its identity holds for the Peninsula region and to its intimate connection with the process of creolization. Still, Peninsula Sherbro are not exceptional in the historical imagination of the Sherbros themselves. On the one hand, when reflecting on Sherbro

identity, people often called upon past connections between the Colony and areas of the southern coast. Bonthe Island became part of the Colony in 1861 and was one of the most competitive bases for export trade throughout the nineteenth century. The island accommodated diverse populations, including a high proportion of British and Creole traders. White (1981; 1987: 45–46) shows that, from the late 1940s onwards, Creole women established intense trading networks between Freetown and Bonthe. On the other hand, the claim to Krio identity was not only legitimated by links with Freetown, but by wider historical relations with the British. People originating from Bonthe, Shenge or Rotifunk invoked family names, and prestigious (chiefly) ones in particular (Caulker, Tucker, Macauley etc.), to highlight the transnational connections that Sherbro people had established with the foreign merchants. The history of the coast substantiated the claim to *krionayzeshɔn* as a self-evident process. These claims may have indicated a class distinction, since people whom I interviewed in Freetown were more likely to 'become Krio' than people who had stayed in their region of origin.

19. Likewise, the proportion of Christians among Sherbro populations of the Peninsula is high, and Christianity is performed as an attribute of Sherbro identity. In other regions, Islam may be the relevant reference that informs individual and collective performances of identity.

20. The native language of most Sherbros living on the Freetown Peninsula is Krio. This is the reason why most emic terms used here are Krio and not Sherbro. The process by which Krio becomes a native language also concerns people of other ethnic groups who settle in Freetown and whose children progressively abandon the use of (but not necessarily the knowledge of) languages from 'home'. Yet, beyond individual choices, group identity often remains coterminous with the permanence of language, since languages such as Mende and Temne remain widely spoken, including in the Western Area. For Peninsula Sherbros, the continuity of group identity as Sherbro is not grounded in the maintenance of the Sherbro language, which is seldom spoken or heard. On the contrary, the adoption of Krio as a native language reinforces the claim to Krio identity as constitutive of Sherbro-ness.

Chapter 1

Anatomy of a Rurban Space

The territorial and administrative specificity of the Peninsula played a key role in framing the context in which the relations between hosts and strangers unfolded. In this chapter, I am concerned with colonial and postcolonial developments that have affected the production of the Peninsula as a specific 'rurban' area. The Peninsula is profoundly rural in many of its economic and sociopolitical structures. Yet because it is situated at the edge of the capital city, rural livelihoods coincide with the city's administration, services, employment opportunities and patronage networks of 'big men'. This blend of rural and urban characteristics has had lasting outcomes on identity dynamics, both regarding the construction of Sherbro identity in the region and the way in which local people have received postwar migrants since the 2000s. Moreover, fieldwork in this rurban space requires a specific methodology based on mobility, which I will detail in the second half of this chapter.

The Peninsula is a stretch of narrow hills south of Freetown that is about 50 kilometres long and 10 kilometres wide. Most of the land is part of the Western Area Peninsula Forest Reserve – a thick forest intended to be protected from land sales and encroachments. Down the hills, the Peninsula Road runs parallel to the Atlantic coast, along a collection of fishing villages and towns, forming a loop around the Western Area (see Map 1.1). Freetown and its Peninsula form the Western Area, one of the four administrative regions of the country. The Western Area is further divided into the Western Area Urban District (Freetown) and the Western Area Rural District (the Peninsula). This urban/rural distinction disappears when people outside of the Western Area talk about *tɔng* (town in Krio), which refers here to Freetown, to qualify the whole region. On the Peninsula, by contrast, *tɔng* only refers to the urbanized space of the capital.

The rurban space is the product of an intermediary position between Freetown and the Provinces established during colonial times. The region became part of the British Crown Colony in 1808. Nevertheless, throughout the nineteenth century, early processes of urbanization were limited to Freetown itself. Coastal populations of the Peninsula remained relatively isolated until the construction of the first Peninsula Road at the end of the 1930s. This created several ambiguities concerning the status of local populations living along the coast. They were part of the colonial system of direct administration and lived under a regime of state property, and yet maintained customary tenure and political structures that were not officially recognized. This 'inbetween' status not only shaped Sherbro identity making, but also had enduring impacts on negotiations between hosts and strangers regarding land, as the region that has attracted increasing migration flows from rural areas since the 1950s.

Communities in Flux

The Peninsula region has gone through major demographic changes since the second half of the twentieth century. The development of the fishing economy caused several waves of migration to the coast between the 1920s and 1960s. In the late 1950s, Temne-speaking fisherfolk developed a capital-oriented model of fishing that reinforced their position in the local economy. Between the two censuses of 1963 and 1985, the population of the Western Area increased by 184.2%, rural and urban areas included (Statistics Sierra Leone 2017: 99). Diggins (2018: 47) reports that, along the Sherbro coast, the acceleration of Temne migration in the 1970s and the 1980s resulted in political and economic conflicts with local fishermen. On the Peninsula today, Sherbro fishermen identify the 1960s as the period during which relationships between hosts and strangers started to change due to a boom in the fishing economy, which resulted in a new influx of people to the coast (see Chapter 3).

Nevertheless, the 1970s and 1980s are also remembered as a period of relative abundance, hope in economic development and reasonably good relations between groups. People emphasized that despite the conflicts of the period, strangers were still accommodated. Family stories, like Mr Nicol's as given in the Introduction, reveal longlasting Sherbro/Temne relations during these decades, and many people mention how from Temne origins, they (or their parents) 'became Sherbro' and settled in existing communities.

Throughout the 1990s, the Civil War caused massive population displacements from the inland regions to the coast. Rural populations fled towards urban centres as rebel troops of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) advanced from the eastern border. In March 1991, the RUF led its first offensive in the east of Sierra Leone. The regime of President Momoh, destabilized by this armed incursion, was soon overthrown by a group of officers, who established

the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC), headed by Valentine Strasser, in April 1992. The NPRC promised to fight the RUF and bring peace to Sierra Leone. Troops of the regional armed force, the ECOMOG (Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group), were deployed in the interior. In March 1996, a civilian government headed by President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah was elected. Another military coup followed in May 1997, which put the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) into power. The AFRC allied with the RUF and entered negotiations with the President in exile. Nigerian-led troops of the ECOMOG intervened more extensively in the country and flushed the military junta out of Freetown in February 1998, following which they reinstalled the Kabbah government. By then, ECOMOG troops were 'in full control of the Freetown peninsula' (Dumbuya 2008: 96). The rebels posed a direct threat to Freetown and the peacekeeping soldiers' presence aimed at 'preventing rebel access to the Peninsula road' (Osakwe and Audu 2017: 113).

Peninsula settlements were said to be relatively safe until December 1998, when the AFRC/RUF fighters attempted to use the Peninsula Road to enter Freetown. In the Tombo area, many people fled to the Banana Islands, where they knew they would be safe. The rebels were pushed back at York by the ECOMOG, with the help of local defence groups, and entered Freetown from the opposite side, the East End, during the bloody attack of 6 January 1999. Militias burned homes and buildings, and killed over 6,000 civilians. They were forced out by ECOMOG soldiers within three weeks. The ECOMOG troops then retreated. The United Nations (UN) Mission for Sierra Leone was sent as a peacekeeping force in October 1999, and a British intervention under a UN mandate finally put an end to the war in January 2002.

Throughout the war, harbours of the Peninsula hosted thousands of displaced people. The population growth was particularly high in Tombo, Goderich and Tokeh – three towns that each now have over 20,000 inhabitants. The war severely destabilized the local economy: owners of tourism facilities left and many people went unemployed, fishing was forbidden in certain areas, and food supplies were difficult to obtain. In many places, people also evoked their fear of peacekeeping forces, which were known for their harsh treatment of local populations.

In the aftermath of the conflict, the Peninsula has accommodated an accelerating flow of new residents. The precariousness of livelihoods in rural areas has pushed a large number of people to the capital region. Economic migrants engage in fishing or fishing-related activities, such as charcoal-burning and wood-cutting, small-scale farming and construction-related activities, like quarrying or sand mining (the extraction of sand from beaches).

Moreover, living in Freetown has become increasingly difficult, due to population density and pricey city rents. Freetown and its periphery, which contain close to two million people, have few real options for housing the fast-growing

population. The building of informal housing in risk-prone areas results in regular flooding, mudslides and other disasters during rainy seasons. In this context, relocating on the Peninsula allows people to build dwellings in less crowded and pricey areas. Many of the new (poorer) residents also act as property caretakers for wealthy Sierra Leoneans who invest in real estate. In recent years, land speculation has radically changed the landscape of the region. By 2018–19, to the north of the Peninsula, large constructions had mushroomed everywhere along the Peninsula Road and deforestation was advancing rapidly. In this environment, local populations were increasingly restricted from accessing land that they considered 'community land'.

Land Rights and Indigeneity

Since the 1990s, land-related conflicts between Sherbro customary landowners and migrants have intensified due to demographic pressure. The major point of contention concerns the recognition of communal land tenure in the region. The specifics of the land tenure system in the Western Area result from the historical distinction between Colony and Protectorate. In the Sierra Leone Colony – i.e. today's Western Area, including Freetown and the Peninsula – the enforcement of British law meant that customary land rights were not officially recognized and were suppressed in favour of state and private tenure. However, in the Protectorate, customary tenure remained in the hands of local authorities.

The dualism of the land tenure system was in line with the geographical and social distinction that colonial authorities operated between native and non-native populations. In rural areas, native groups were defined by their practice of customary laws, while British laws were enforced in the Colony. However, the imperfect alignment of the categories native/rural and non-native/urban meant that native populations in the rural areas of the Peninsula had no defined rights. They were considered 'urban-based natives'; their native status kept them from being 'citizens' like urban dwellers (Mamdani 1996: 19), but because they lived in the Colony, they did not officially depend on customary law: 'Neither subject to custom nor exalted as rights-bearing citizens, they languished in a juridical limbo' (ibid.).

Sherbro identity, along with their legal status, was positioned at this juncture of rural (native) and urban (non-native) identities. The colonial distinction between natives and non-natives created a further distinction between them before the law (Mamdani 1996: 5). Natives were assigned a 'subject ethnicity' dependent on ethnic-based customs and culture. However, non-natives were assigned a 'subject race' and were denied an ethnic identity. The category of non-natives, in Sierra Leone, corresponded to the black settlers, the Liberated Africans and their descendants, who (supposedly) had no roots in the country. Because of their close affiliation with Krios, which will become apparent in

colonial censuses discussed in Chapter 2, Sherbro identity on the Peninsula became more recognized as that of a 'subject race' than that of a 'subject ethnicity'. Local populations of the Colony were rarely defined with respect to distinct native customs and culture. Furthermore, because the barrier separating citizens from subjects was also framed in civilizational terms, in which groups were arranged in a hierarchy according to Western standards that evaluated language, education, comportment and religious beliefs (see Chapter 4), Sherbro identity also sat in this juncture. However, it should be noted that the situation was different for Sherbro populations who lived on the southern coast of Sierra Leone, which – with the exception of Bonthe – was part of the Protectorate.

The 'non-native' status may not have affected the lives of Peninsula residents until the mid-twentieth century, as rural areas of the Colony were isolated, sparsely populated and loosely supervised by colonial authorities. Whether and how local authorities in the rural areas of the Peninsula may have continued to observe customary tenure, especially in the resolution of any land disputes, is little documented. However, in the current context of demographic pressure and land-related conflicts, this issue has gained a new salience. Long denied a status as 'natives' on the Peninsula, Sherbro populations now emphasize their autochthony and indigeneity in the region. They seek the right to be considered an indigenous group in relation to land entitlements acquired on the basis of customary tenure.

In ordinary usage, the terms 'indigeneity' and 'autochthony' are closely related. Both refer to the original occupancy of a given land, and become important when legal rights or status is supposed to derive from such occupancy. Within the anthropological literature, 'indigeneity' tends to be used to describe groups whose livelihood and culture are threatened due to 'a historic or present experience in subjugation, marginalization, dispossession' within nation-states (Pelican 2009: 56). 'Autochthony', by contrast, is used to describe and analyse situations in which the 'original occupants' seek exclusive control of local resources (Gausset, Kenrick and Gibb 2011: 139). In the West African context, 'firstcomers' are likely to advocate for the exclusion of 'strangers' through claims of autochthony (ibid.).

On the Peninsula, claims of autochthony and indigeneity coincide and are mutually supportive. Both aim at securing privileged access to local leadership and land. Claims to indigeneity are raised, in part, because autochthony is not recognized as a basis for legal claims in the Western Area. As in other African states, Sierra Leone's postcolonial governments have failed to address many of the institutional legacies of colonialism – among these, that indigeneity remains the sole legal basis for entitlement to customary land. This situation has increased the political use of specific ethnic identities (see Mamdani 2005). In articulating a collective identity as an indigenous group, Sherbro local authorities demand the right to have this identity recognized as the premise for land ownership, like groups living in the Provinces – i.e. the administrative territories

outside of the Western Area – including Sherbro groups living in chiefdoms of the south of Sierra Leone. The discourse of indigeneity therefore articulates feelings of injustice for groups that were not included in earlier phases of the postcolonial politics of entitlements.

The discourse of indigeneity is also grounded in a global movement for the protection of disappearing cultures and regimes of knowledge (Li 2000). Sherbros play on the positive connotations of indigeneity – such as their knowledge of coastal ecosystems and artisanal fishing – to rehabilitate their customs as authentically local and to develop ecotourism (see Chapter 8). Such an embrace of indigeneity opens a direct link to global institutions and actors, such as the UN, international NGOs and tourists. Despite the Ebola crisis in 2014–15, followed by COVID-19 a few years later, both of which halted foreign entries into the country, local populations continue to believe in tourism as the sector that could bring potentially the highest economic benefits, as the region undoubtedly qualifies as one of the most beautiful places of the country. The various crises, it seems, did not slow down investments, land speculation or construction along the beaches. Meanwhile, the promotion of indigenous Sherbro culture targeted at external actors supports autochthonous claims on the national political scene: for instance, it has helped local people in some areas to secure the economic exploitation of the beach in the face of competing claims. Thus, the performance of indigeneity offers a new avenue for social recognition and provides legitimacy to firstcomer claims in the context of competition over local rights.

State Politics and the Discourse of Autochthony

The construction of Sherbro autochthony on the Peninsula, as in other regions of Africa, is the outcome of both a process of democratization that restructured national politics more tightly along ethnic and regional lines, and of a reconfiguration of local political dynamics following demographic and economic changes. The success of Temne-speaking populations in fishing and fish trading since the 1960s has contributed to structuring contemporary autochthonous discourses around a supposed Sherbro/Temne opposition set in irreconcilable cultural differences, which also reflects ethnic polarization in national politics.

The mobilization of ethnicity by political parties for the purpose of capturing state resources has been studied widely since the 1990s. In many African countries, this mobilization of ethnicity has followed a progressive shift to multiparty politics, which forces political elites to compete for ethno-regional voting bases. The democratic process continues to be rooted in a neopatrimonial system, in which political parties act as patrons to the 'clients' of their electorate (see Berman, Eyoh and Kymlicka 2004; Chabal and Daloz 1999; van de Walle 2003). Because the parties fail to offer their electorate substantial programmes and ideologies, ethnicity remains the main line of differentiation between

political parties (Ottaway 1999: 311, cited by Randall 2007: 89). Thus, the process of democratization has been increasingly defined by patterns of ethnic voting (Young 2007: 258). Eifert, Miguel and Posner (2010), for instance, have evidenced the salience of ethnic identification prior to and during electoral processes, when political power is at stake. Incumbency generates a huge patronage capacity (Guiymah-Boadi 2007: 30): access to the state guarantees material gains both in the public and private spheres, although redistribution often remains limited to the political elite and rarely reaches the actual electoral base (van de Walle 2003).

In Sierra Leone, whether national politics have been dominated by one party or two, the fragility of institutions, since independence, has fuelled ethnic conflicts and polarization (Kandeh 1992). Following independence, Sir Milton Margai, leader of the Sierra Leone's People Party (SLPP) and first Prime Minister of Sierra Leone, was in charge between 1961 and 1964. After his death, dissenting members of the SLPP joined the opposition party the All People's Congress (APC), which gathered members from the Northern Province. Despite the APC's victory during the 1967 general elections, the SLPP maintained military power for a year. The APC gained control of the country in 1968. Siaka Stevens, who stayed in power between 1967 and 1985, installed a one-party system in 1978. Hayward and Kandeh (1987: 47– 48) note that the shift to a one-party system, by concentrating power and silencing any opposition to the ruling party, increased reliance on patronage networks and ethnic-based violence. This system contributed to the collapse of the state at the beginning of the 1990s.

The restoration of multiparty politics after the war consolidated a two-party political system that pitted the SLPP against the APC. The SLPP has its voting base in Mende-speaking areas of the south and east, while the APC is closely associated with northern Limba and Temne identities.

The electoral process for the 2002 general elections, which saw the victory of the former President-in-exile Ahmad Tejan Kabbah for the SLPP, was relatively fair and peaceful given the difficulties of the postwar context (Kandeh 2003). Nevertheless, the SLPP and the APC, which garnered most of the votes, 'continued to be separated not by ideology but by competing ethno-regional ties and loyalties' (ibid.: 196). The APC candidate, Ernest Bai Koroma, won more than 50% of the votes in the northern region, while Kabbah scored above 90% in the southern and eastern regions, which are more ethnically homogeneous.

The restructuring of parties along ethno-regional lines was even stronger in the presidential elections of 2007 and 2012, which brought Ernest Bai Koroma to power for two mandates. In both elections, Koroma scored above 80% in the northern region. In 2018, the SLPP candidate Julius Maada Bio won the presidential elections, supported by southern and eastern electors. Since 2002, thus, Mende (SLPP) and Temne (APC) identities have been increasingly opposed in the struggle for state power and resources.

From the local political arena to the national scene, political affiliations are conflated with ethnic identities, which allows for their political manipulation and the use of ethnic networks for competition over power. Politically, Sherbro populations have been more aligned with Mendes, particularly in the Southern Province. Historically, Freetown and the Peninsula region have been 'swing' constituencies. The population of the Western Area is particularly heterogeneous, which makes the creation of structures of patronage less obvious. Nonetheless, in 2007 and 2012, the APC gained about 70% of the votes in the region. This score decreased to 60% in 2018, but the party still enjoyed a solid voting base. By contrast, Sherbro populations who live in the area stress their political affiliation to the SLPP. In the southern region, the Sherbro/Mende alliance in politics has existed for a long time and strengthened in 2018 following the election of Julius Maada Bio, who claims both identity affiliations.

On the Peninsula, since the war ended, Sherbro populations have viewed national politics through the lens of recent migration. The Western Area Rural District was the district of Sierra Leone with the highest population growth between 2004 and 2015, particularly in the wards of York and Waterloo, which cover the main fishing areas and account for 77.3% of the total population of the district (Weekes and Bah 2017: 17). Temne speakers constitute the majority group of the Western Area Rural District with 40.3% of the population, followed by people of Mende origin (14.1%) (ibid.: 26). This demographic shift accounts more prominently for Sherbro votes along the lines of politicized (Mende) ethnicity. Sherbros have held the successive postwar APC governments responsible for encouraging migration (of Temne-speaking populations) to the region in order to secure a voting base. Migrants more often support the APC, as evidenced during the local and councillor elections of 2012.

Furthermore, the Local Government Act of 2004 changed the rules of village head elections in terms of allowing any person who has lived for five years in a settlement to stand as a candidate. In large fishing settlements, migrant groups are proportionally high and were able to win local headmanship elections in 2008, 2012 and 2018. Even with the victory of the SLPP presidential candidate in 2018, more APC candidates were elected at councillor positions in the district. The election of these officials – village heads and councillors – is a key step to accessing wider political networks because district councillors link local communities with high-ranked state officials in Freetown. As these links normally proceed along party lines, this meant that local Sherbro authorities would benefit less easily from relations of patronage with APC-elected village heads and councillors.[1]

In a context of increasing political tensions, Sherbros have tied their autochthonous rights to an essentialist definition of ethnicity that excludes Temne-speaking strangers from 'local citizenship' – that is, the political and land rights derived from one's belonging to a local community. Sherbros have

emphasized social and political connections with Mende-speaking groups, and have downplayed those with Temne-speaking populations. That a Mende group asked Mr Nicol to become their tribal head should be understood as a move towards Mende/Sherbro political unity in the face of the dominant APC in the region, even if it is described as the natural outcome of common cultural identities. Mr Nicol's political allegiance, like that of many Sherbro political leaders in the region, was clear; following his death in August 2020, his coffin was covered with an SLPP flag.

In the local political arena, the reification of the Mende/Sherbro political alliance trumps discourses of Sherbro/Temne integration. People often concealed or mitigated their Temne origins in order to dissociate themselves from migrants. They made a distinction between their relations with Temne-speaking populations who were in the region prior to the war – in other words, strangers who associated with Sherbro communities on the basis of reciprocal arrangements, which usually involved marriage and initiation – and political conflicts that characterized their current relations with newly settled populations.

From Postwar to Post-Ebola: Whither Identity?

This book departs from recent literature on Sierra Leone, which, during the past two decades, has been dominated by explanatory models of the Civil War and accounts of the 'postconflict' phase. During this time, concern for understanding the dynamics of identity making has been pushed into the background of the academic agenda for two reasons. One reason is empirical: Sierra Leone's conflict did not play out along ethnic lines. Patronage politics and the escalating politicization of ethnicity contributed to state collapse in the decades preceding the Civil War, but the war itself did not draw on '*pre-existing* ethnic loyalties' (Richards 2009: 9, emphasis in original). A second reason is more related to a consideration of academic ethics: authors evaded questions of identities because the spectre of 'primordialism' loomed over any attempt to debate whether and how ethnicity was an important factor in social life.

The two reasons are tied to the dominant concern for explaining the war more generally. Initially, most analytical models of the war discussed its rational logic in an attempt to counter the 'new barbarism' thesis that was articulated by Kaplan (1994), who argued that tribalism was a primary driver of conflict. These early analyses focused on state failure and on processes of social exclusion that could explain political 'grievances' at the origins of the insurgency (see e.g. Abdullah 1998; Peters and Richards 1998; Richards 1996). Other authors focused on the logic of 'greed' and on the economic rationality of fighters (Collier 2000; Collier and Hoeffler 1998). Their models provided an intelligibility for African conflicts that were otherwise presented as identitarian and unsolvable (Cramer 2002: 1848). However, this meant that discussions about identity could

no longer be separated from the cultural irrationality described by Kaplan. Ethnic identity, as a social phenomenon structuring the life of many Sierra Leoneans, was seen as a trivial aspect of social life, no more than an 'epiphenomenon' (Richards 2009), against economic greed and social tensions that generated conflict.

In the immediate postwar phase, concerns for identity remained absent from academic studies, as scholars tended to focus on the international agenda for reconstruction. Sierra Leone emerged from the war with a bankrupt economy, collapsing infrastructures and pressing social issues, such as the necessity to reintegrate former fighters into society. Postwar interventions posited that the country suffered from socioeconomic and administrative problems that could be fixed through democratization and liberalization. They defined Sierra Leone by a 'lack of' – i.e. proper administration system, economic transparency and democratic institutions – supposedly associated with insecurity (Wai 2012). Reconstruction appeared as an aggregate of technical solutions. For instance, 'youth empowerment' and decentralization were thought to be part of the remedy for the patrimonial state crisis. The literature of the postconflict moment reflected concerns about instability, (in)security and the restructuring of the state as authors focused mainly on civil society, reform and governance (Fanthorpe 2005; Jackson 2006; Richards 2005), but also on transitional justice (Shaw 2007), on the demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants and on the 'crisis of youth' that had been a trigger for violence (see e.g. Hoffman 2011; Menzel 2015; Peters 2011).

Indeed, almost two decades after the end of the Civil War, its consequences are still deeply felt. The war left a grim legacy of socioeconomic insecurity and ruined infrastructures that has not yet been overcome fully, despite international intervention. The long-term neglect of health infrastructure became starkly apparent during the Ebola crisis of 2014–15, which hit Sierra Leone to a terrifying degree, killing 14,000 people. The rapid spread of Ebola in Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia revealed regional histories of injustice and economic extraction, from the transatlantic slave trade to structural adjustments reforms, which resulted in 'political economies of neglect' and the withdrawal of states from social sectors (Leach 2015: 823). In the wake of the crisis, social and economic inequalities, fuelled by rampant inflation, became more pronounced. High rates of unemployment and precarious job opportunities not only constrain life choices, but also maintain many youths in a state of economic dependence (see Enria 2018).

Even as the postwar years pass, academic attention has followed the path of economic, health and social crises without asking much about identity. However, as people and resources move around, it seems inevitable that identity should come to the fore. In the postwar context, rural-urban migration has become a common strategy to mitigate precarious livelihoods. The continued neglect of rural areas has durably undermined local economies. Migration contributes to urban overcrowding and the saturation of existing facilities. The result of

population pressure in Freetown, as Shepler and Ibrahim (2011: viii) accurately describe, 'is a city of two million people bursting at the seams, with inadequate housing, incessant traffic jams, constant power outages, water shortages, and poor environmental sanitation'. As Freetown residents move to the Peninsula in search of labour, cheap housing and available land, similar effects are observed in large fishing towns. Moreover, on the coast, issues of environmental degradation have become a significant threat to maritime economies (Diggins 2018). Overfishing by local fleets and international trawlers depletes fishing grounds on a large scale. Between 2012 and 2018, local Sherbro fishermen mentioned a radical depletion of fish stocks, and artisanal fishing had become strenuous.

Life on the Peninsula is therefore undertaken in a context of 'insecure modernity' (Laurent 2013), in which state institutions create economic deregulation and vulnerability across the national territory. As people migrate from impoverished areas, increased competition for resources occurs in areas of in-migration. On the Peninsula, postwar governments neither led coherent policies of urban development nor regulated processes of land speculation and privatization. Many settlements lack health centres, school infrastructures, electricity and other basic services. The lack of nearby police stations is also mentioned as a key problem, as serious disputes (especially over land) are frequent. The building of facilities largely depends on a headman's connections with central authorities and his ability to bring in investors. As a result, 'development' remains precarious, as it relies either on foreign investment (which calls for more privatization) or on political patronage (which reverses with political switches).

Rural-urban movements have also built up Freetown and its Peninsula as a multiethnic and multicultural region. Each migratory movement – from rural workers of the Sierra Leone Colony to those who tried their luck on the coast in the 1960s – played a key role in constructing the Western Area as a culturally diverse environment. Those movements resulted in the production of distinct cultural forms, such as new masquerades (King 2011; Nunley 1987). Postwar migration has promoted further cultural contact, mixing and the reformulation of ethnic beliefs, customs and lifeways that are considered important for those who claim the relevant identities. As Shepler and Ibrahim (2011: viii) have illustrated, everyday life in urban areas offers insights on how identities, cultures and social ties are recomposed in creative ways. The Peninsula is a bustling area. Its human geography changes daily with its landscape as a result of land sales, building sites and population mobility. Questions of identity become salient here as populations are settled, dispersed and resettled. The politics of reciprocity, which mark the tension and oscillation between autochthony as a discourse on the one hand, and the necessity of integration on the other, were not abandoned altogether in the ravages of war or reconstruction and inform the new debates about identity.
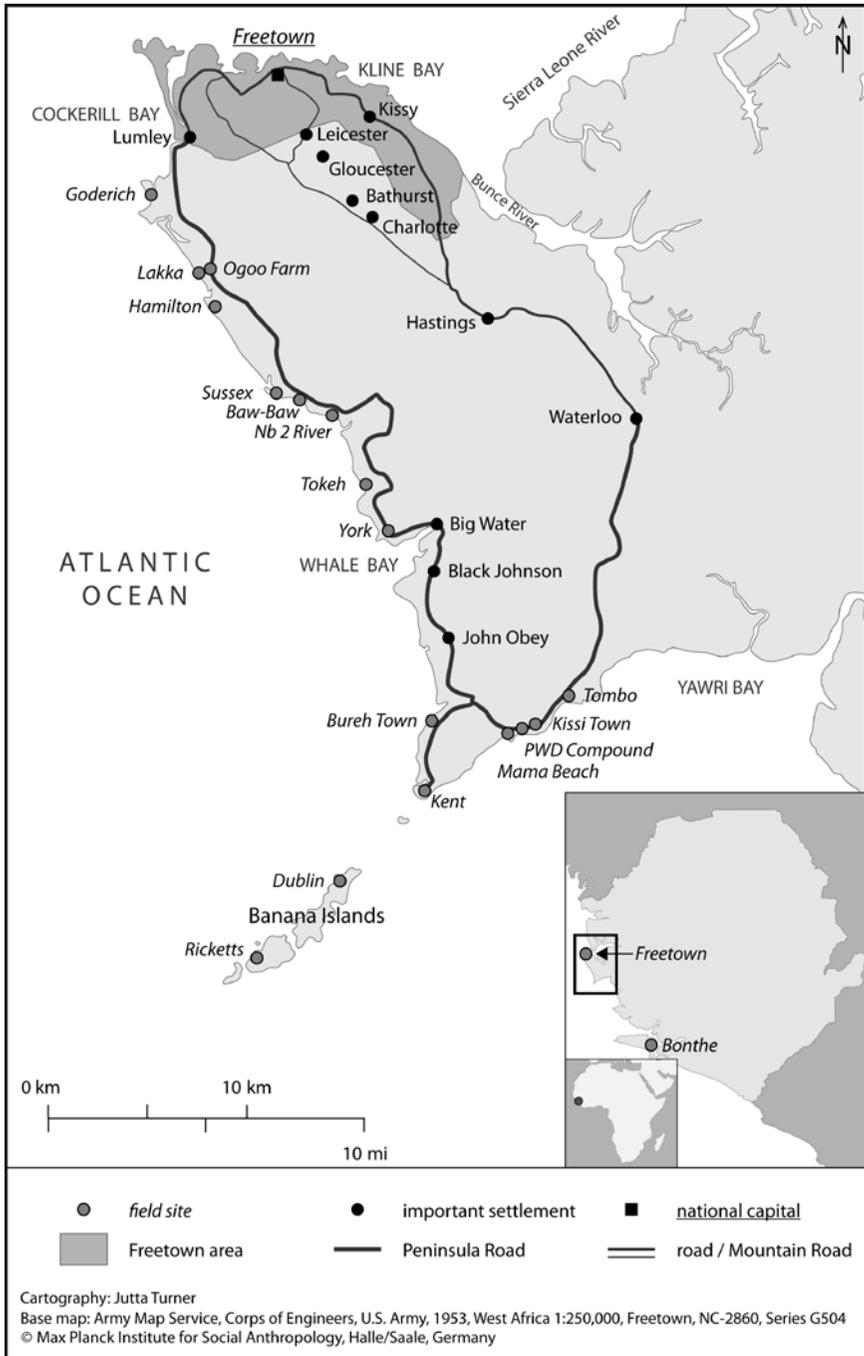
Map 1.1. The Western Area, with field sites. © Jutta Turner

Multiple Landscapes

During the last decade, the Peninsula area has experienced rapid urban expansion. From Goderich to Baw-Baw, the northern part has been absorbed into the urban fabric as the construction of the Lumley-Tokeh Road has progressed. In 2011–12, privately operated minibuses (*poda-poda*) would take passengers in Lumley to drive them south via Goderich, one of the biggest fishing harbours. Their final destination was Ogoo Farm Junction, where the tarred road stopped. By then, the construction boom had begun to hit the Peninsula. Between Goderich and Ogoo Farm, the landscape was a continuum of bare hillsides, large residences and *pan bodis*, the iron structures that mark land occupation and usually shelter a low-paid caretaker. This part was becoming a residential area, where wealthy Sierra Leoneans built residences away from the noise and heat of the overcrowded city. After Ogoo Farm, motorbike taxis (*okadas*) drove passengers south on the dust road. Given its decrepit condition, the road was often empty, except for the large trucks carrying sand, and it was often difficult and expensive for locals of those areas to get an *okada*.

In 2018, the tarred road had been completed from Lumley up to Baw-Baw (but the 7.7 kilometres between Baw-Baw and Tokeh were yet to be constructed) and the urbanized landscape had extended. The road construction had brought new houses and shops along the way, and fresh hills were being deforested at a high rate. Many local residents were complaining that the population growth was such that they could not identify many of the people who had settled along the new road. *Poda-podas* and *kekes* (motorized tricycles) regularly circulated up to Baw-Baw Junction for an affordable price, which had encouraged more people (from Freetown and elsewhere) to choose the Peninsula as their place of residence. Changes in the south were less dramatic between 2012 and 2018, but were already significant.

Already by 2011–12, the intensifying migration of the preceding decade during and just after the war was shifting power relations between 'old' historical towns and newer settlements. Settlements that had recently welcomed many new residents, such as Ogoo Farm and Mile 13, often counted more inhabitants than places populated by Sherbro and Krio landowners. Migration also accentuated a territorial distinction within settlements, like in Baw-Baw and Number Two River, between local populations who lived down near the sea, and later immigrants who lived up near the road and engaged in activities such as quarrying and land caretaking. On the beach sides (in Lakka, Baw-Baw, Sussex and Number Two River), Sherbro populations abandoned fishing and turned hopefully to the development of tourism as their main activity (see Chapter 8).

After Baw-Baw Junction, the old dust road continued to Number Two River and Tokeh. Between Number Two River and Tokeh, the road was in extremely poor condition. It demarcated a north/south boundary and cut the Peninsula
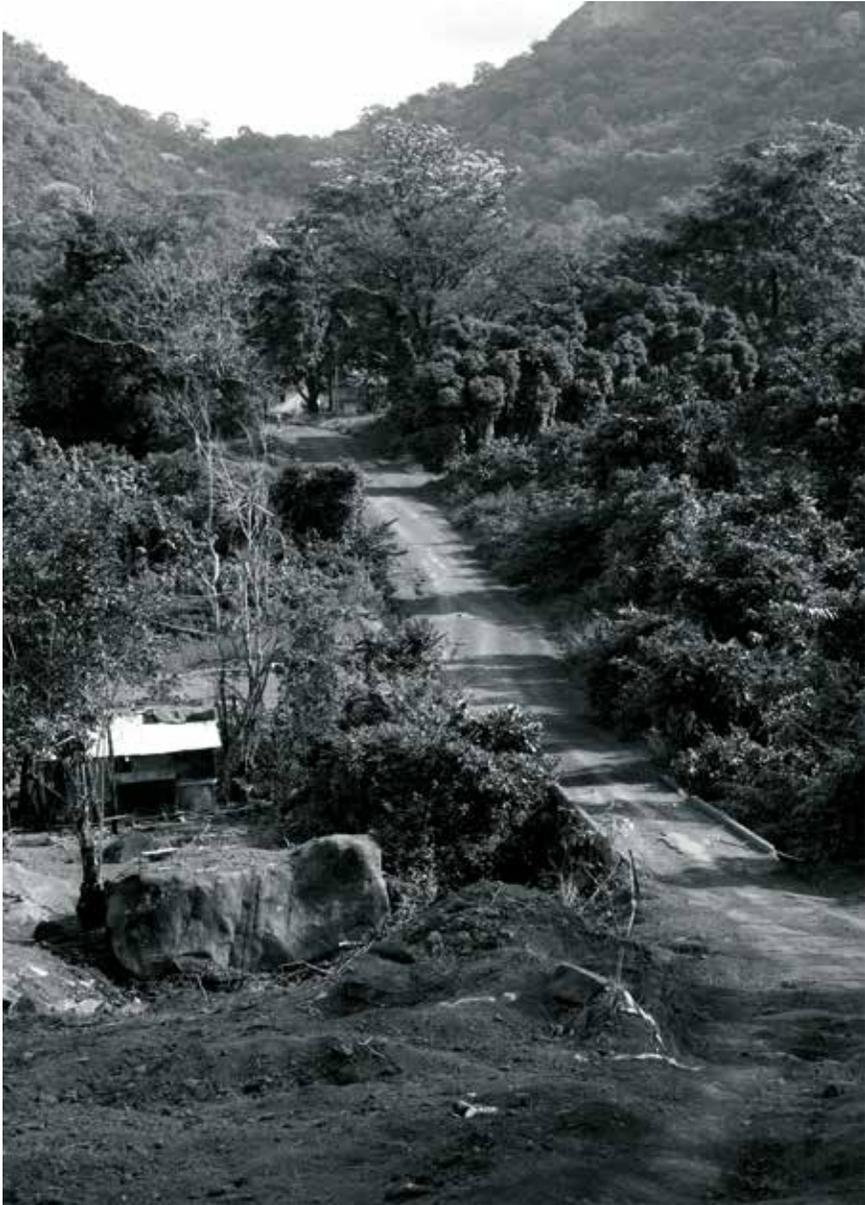
Figure 1.1. The Peninsula Road near Sussex, 2012. © Anaïs Ménard

into two (almost) separated halves. There were two options to reach Tokeh: by bike along the road or by crossing the estuary by boat at Number Two River and then walking about a mile on bush paths.

On the southern half of the Peninsula, the tarred road completed in 2005 connected Tokeh and other fishing towns to Waterloo and Freetown. This had propelled the development of a pronounced economic specialization in fishing, and many settlements, such as Kent, Kissi Town, Mama Beach and Tombo, had grown exponentially with the settlement of new populations. By 2011–12, Mama Beach had about 8,000 inhabitants according to local estimates. Kent and Kissi Town counted about 1,800 and 1,000 inhabitants, respectively. As for PWD Compound, its population size was difficult to estimate because it was a newly formed settlement that had grown very rapidly around fishing. It was probably home to a few thousand inhabitants in 2011–12. Many villages, like York, Bureh Town, John Obey and Black Johnson, counted only a few hundred inhabitants. Bureh Town in particular was appreciated by tourists for its stunning beach landscape.

Between Tokeh and Mama Beach, the forest landscape was still preserved and the large hills loomed impressively over the visitor. This part of the Peninsula is further from Freetown's centre and was perceived by many living in Freetown as less accessible, as it was necessary to drive around via the east road (via Waterloo and Tombo) to reach those settlements. Thus, urban encroachment was not yet visible, but in many places, pillars, fences and signboards signalled private

Figure 1.2. The Peninsula Road near York, 2012. © Anaïs Ménard

properties. It is certain that the completion of the Lumley-Tokeh Road in the near future will prompt the sudden erection of new houses and buildings. Finally, from Kissi Town to Tombo, people have specialized in the fishing industry. This brief description reveals the variety of rurban communities in which I conducted my fieldwork. Roughly speaking, the Peninsula may be divided into three different 'landscapes' with reference to the social and economic dynamics of its settlements. The south (Tombo, Kissi Town, PWD Compound, Mama Beach and Kent) is characterized by intense fishing activities; in the middle (Bureh Town, York, Tokeh, Number Two River, Baw-Baw and Sussex), fishing remains mostly smaller scale and artisanal (except for Tokeh), and populations expect tourism to replace fishing as the main economic activity; in the north (Hamilton, Lakka, Ogoo Farm and Goderich), the construction boom is at its height and economic activities are more diversified – agriculture, quarrying, building etc.

While fishing constitutes the common economic denominator linking all of these settlements, three towns in particular – Goderich, Tombo and Tokeh – were fishing hubs. Their social dynamics were clearly shaped by seasonal and permanent migration. Alongside fishing, other activities were increasingly visible across the landscape, such as quarrying (Number Two River and PWD Compound) and sand mining (Hamilton and John Obey). Sand mining, although illegal, had intensified in 2018–19. It was tolerated by the higher authorities for the financial benefits it brought, and those interests clashed with those of local populations, who aimed at taking advantage of the fabulous landscape to develop tourism (see Chapter 8).

Nevertheless, despite a visible economic boom, socioeconomic inequalities persisted alongside a sense of remoteness, in particular due to the lack of local infrastructures. Public transportation was scarce in remote places like Bureh Town and Kent. Daily commuting was common, especially for people who sold fish products in Freetown or Waterloo, or for schoolchildren enrolled in other communities, but it remained tiring, time-consuming and expensive, particularly in the context of economic inflation. For local people, 'development' was visible and coterminous with building: for instance, in 2018–19, Sussex was supplied with electricity. Yet the people living there barely saw any improvement regarding their own livelihood. With the exception of minimal service provision, there were few urban planning or employment policies aimed at absorbing the demographic increase.

Despite the Peninsula's progressive inclusion within urban networks, the distinction between 'urban' and 'rural' remained part of local representations. When I stated my wish to do fieldwork on the Peninsula, most of my Freetown acquaintances sought to discourage me: Peninsula settlements were 'too far away' and I would need a 4x4 because no taxi would be willing to take me there; the trip was too long and too tiring; the settlements had neither electricity nor water; and, apart from the beach, it would be extremely boring. Interestingly,

they did not have a similar reaction when other researchers planned to go 'up-line' – that is, into the Provinces – for their research. My friends living in Freetown understood the ethnographic impulse and thought it was fine to 'go native', but the Peninsula was definitely not the right place to do so. They said that I would not learn much of value about typical Sierra Leonean lifestyles and cultures, while at the same time experiencing all of the disadvantages of living in a rural place. For them, the Peninsula did not appear 'culturally authentic'. It was seen either as a place of real estate investment or as a place of recreation famous for its beach parties. Local inhabitants were rendered invisible, which tended to create the pervasive representation of a virgin land. This, in itself, was enough to drive the curiosity of an anthropologist who did not enjoy sea-swimming, but did not mind sitting on *okadas*.

Multisited Ethnography and Issues of Mobility

The material presented in this book is the product of three fieldwork phases. During the first phase, between March and July 2011, I spent time in Freetown learning Krio and Sherbro with the idea of exploring interethnic relations in Bonthe, on the southern coast of Sierra Leone. During that period, I attended meetings of an organization called the Bonthe Family, founded by Freetown residents of Sherbro origin. I forged a close relationship with them and it was expected that I would start my research in Bonthe when I finished my initial language training. However, during this time, a Sierra Leonean colleague directed my attention towards changing intergroup relations on the Peninsula. Thus, in July and August 2011, I paid several visits to settlements on the north of the Peninsula and conducted a few interviews with headmen and other local stakeholders. My language teacher accompanied me, providing introductions and mentioning that I would return for longer stays in the future. Repeated visits allowed me to forge my first contacts on the Peninsula. Meanwhile, I undertook some preliminary work among the *krionayzd* (kriolized) Sherbro in Freetown. I also organized a longer stay in Kissi Town to be able to visit the south of the Peninsula up to Tokeh.

Eventually, I decided to set off for the Peninsula in September 2011 for a second fieldwork phase that lasted until July 2012. I chose seven settlements (Sussex, York, Baw-Baw, Bureh Town, Kissi Town, Tokeh and Lakka) as bases from which I would conduct research. This choice reflected my interest in comparing diverging (and localized) social and cultural arrangements, and understanding how migration impacted (or not) local strategies of integration. I conducted fieldwork in Sherbro settlements and Krio settlements, as well as in places populated by recent migrants, especially in the south of the Peninsula, where conflicts with Sherbro populations over political and cultural matters were salient.

I came to realize during my stay that coastal settlements of the Peninsula formed a coherent social unit defined by common family networks and high intersettlement mobility. People can trace family links to many settlements. They invite each other for naming ceremonies, weddings, funerals and cultural events. These types of interaction cut across cultural differentiation between Krio and Sherbro settlements. Moreover, these are connected through participation in common ritual practices related to initiation societies.

Fieldwork, in this context, required mobility. Settlements where I chose to live were bases from which my research partner and I travelled to neighbouring towns. Furthermore, we travelled for the day, or sometimes a few days, when invited to family events, meetings or rituals in more distant settlements. This mobile type of fieldwork had two advantages: it connected me more intimately with local practices of mobility and allowed me to maintain contacts with people in the long run. Even after I was no longer living in a particular settlement, I was often able to stay informed of individual situations and ongoing issues.

Yet, mobility also presented a challenge in terms of ethnographic methods. Arriving in a new settlement was not an easy task. Each was different and had its own array of disputes and tensions. In this regard, I need to acknowledge the specific role that my research partner Jonathan Charma played in my various 'integrations'. I met Jonathan as I started my fieldwork in Sussex. He was born in Number Two and lived in nearby Baw-Baw as a fisherman, but due to his involvement in community-based development projects and his position as a Poro member, he was particularly well known amongst fisherfolk along the Peninsula. In smaller Sherbro settlements, he could give me an initial idea of the various families and their links to other communities. He also informed me about unresolved issues and potentially controversial topics. He also had a decisive mediating role in laying the groundwork for interviews, particularly when they concerned Poro or Bondo membership.

My first steps in a new settlement involved mapping – through which I gained an idea of the different neighbourhoods, the location of sacred groves and cemeteries, and the types of fishing practised – and collecting the official oral history from local elders. Both mapping and collecting oral history made me visible and facilitated later interviews. Furthermore, both exercises opened up debates about relations between firstcomer and latecomer populations. Disputes often focused on issues of identity with regard to symbolic places such as land, sacred groves and cemeteries, and these disputes quickly surfaced when the conversation turned to relations with strangers. As a result, these two exercises helped me to adapt my research very early on to the specific circumstances of each settlement. This led me, for instance, to explore issues related to land and initiation societies, which had not I planned for initially.

Informal discussions, semi-structured interviews and participant observation were all part of my fieldwork experience. Longer stays in some settlements
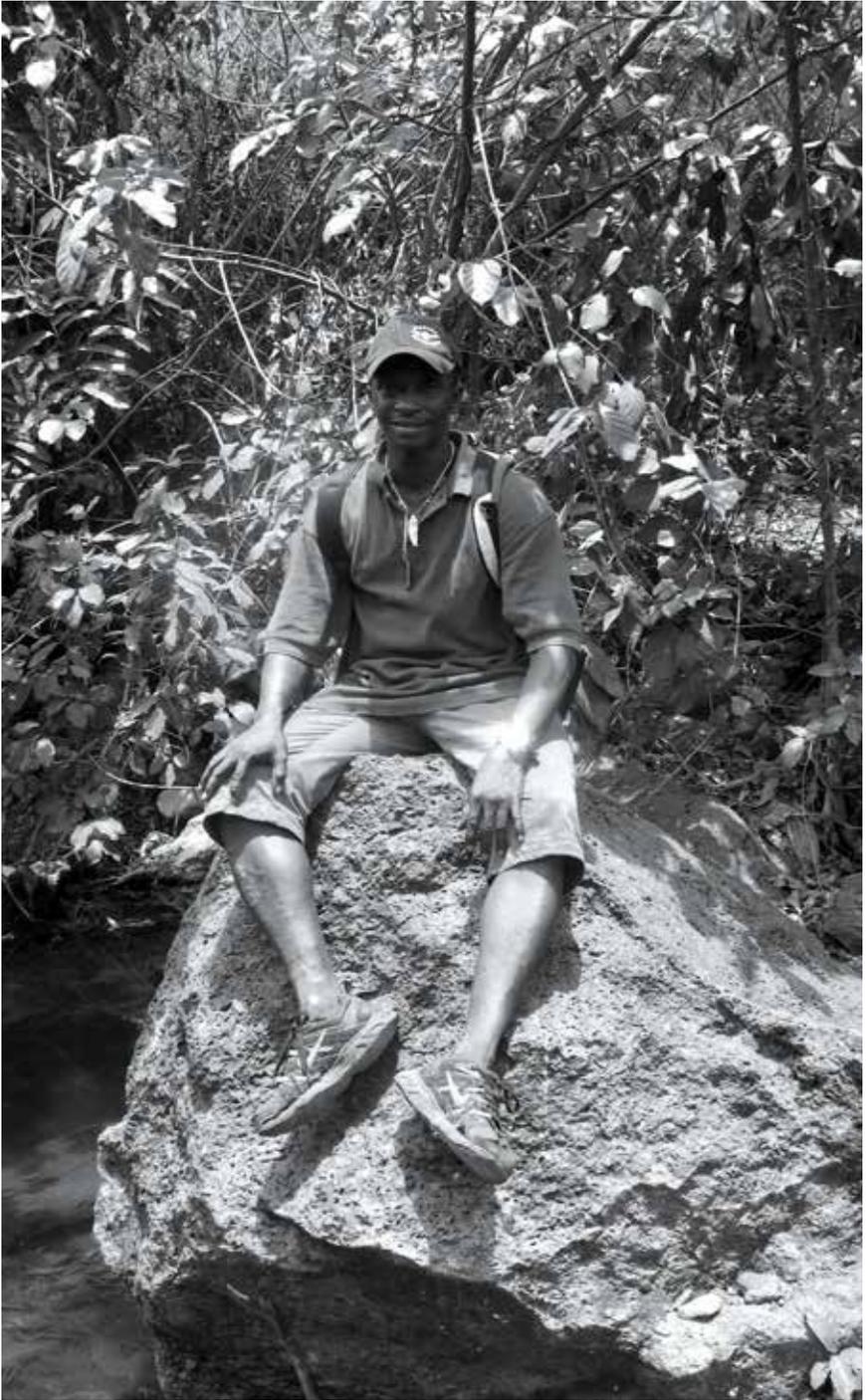
Figure 1.3. Jonathan Charma (1972–2020), 2012. © Anaïs Ménard

allowed me to conduct in-depth interviews and build solid relationships with some families. Within settlements, I was present during community meetings concerning land disputes or development projects. I followed land cases and accompanied people to the justice court in Freetown to attend hearings. I also participated in the weekly meetings of volunteers engaged in the ecotourism project led by the NGO Welt Hunger Hilfe. Finally, I attended many family celebrations, church services and ritual events. Since Jonathan was from Baw-Baw, I was invited by the heads of the Poro society to public ceremonies of the Poro initiation. Moreover, I witnessed public ceremonies of the Bondo initiation both in Baw-Baw and Lakka.[2]

The third phase of fieldwork was one of restitution. Life kept me away from Sierra Leone for quite a while, yet I did not want to engage in writing the final version of this book before I had a chance to present the content of the Ph.D. dissertation to people with whom I had worked. This happened in 2018–19 when I returned for a month of fieldwork that allowed me to see the changes the Peninsula was undergoing. This phase of fieldwork was particularly reflective. It was painful. I visited the graves of deceased friends and measured the sufferings that people were still experiencing year after year, crisis after crisis. In the name of 'development', the environment of the Peninsula had been continuously degraded. Livelihoods were threatened and fish was scarce. I collected and amended most of the material from Chapter 8 on land issues following this last fieldwork. It was a fruitful experience in other regards too. As I read out sections of analysed data, painstakingly cross-checking the details of each person's story I had included, I collected discreet smiles, nods and concrete amendments. Senior members of initiation societies agreed on the publication of the most sensitive data (see the next section on issues of secrecy). They were both puzzled by the details of my descriptions and satisfied by my findings. Many people told me that the book was 'history' inasmuch as their own lives and presence of the Peninsula would be documented and continue via the text.

About Secrecy

As a coda, I would like to raise a few methodological points on secrecy in the ethnographic enterprise, particularly concerning my engagement as a female anthropologist with initiation societies. In West African societies, secrecy is powerfully entrenched in the production of culture. Aesthetics of concealment and disclosure have constituted a common line of enquiry for anthropologists working in the region since the 1960s, and initiation societies have provided the focal point for this enquiry. Even in the context of a much wider disciplinary discussion of the ethics and politics of ethnography, Poro, the male institution widespread along the Upper Guinea Coast, continues to have a fascinating aura for many scholars –not least because it is strongly associated with politics. In

a feminist perspective, entering Poro – literally or symbolically – may qualify as the epitome of anthropology's 'masculine preoccupation with penetration, domination and objectification' (Moore 2010: 31).

However, the study of initiation societies was not part of my initial research agenda. If I broached the topic at all, I was discouraged by other anthropologists from asking questions about Poro once in the field, especially as a woman. Many scholars around me reproduced the unspoken rule of West African anthropological literature that assigns female researchers to the study of female societies like Bondo, while the Poro society continues to be the prerogative of male researchers. These opinions also replicated the local idea that Poro is 'dangerous' for women, notwithstanding the fact that male researchers are also (often) non-initiates and that asking unwelcomed questions may be risky for them too.

However, soon after I started my fieldwork, it became clear that the political issues around Poro would become central to my research. Conflicts with strangers around ritual symbols were relevant for local people to articulate and assert their identity as autochthones. The issue of initiation societies had become emotionally loaded, and provided a way for people to express their anger and frustration in the face of change. For instance, people would discuss open conflicts around sacred groves (see Chapter 7) to clarify identity disputes. At the same time, engaging with 'secrets' required building relations of trust.

Recently, anthropologists working in the region have pointed out that the ethos of concealment and disclosure is contingent upon the nature of social relationships built in a changing environment.[3] Initiates do not repeat immemorial traditions, but rather perform ritual practices 'critically and reflexively, giving them new meaning and pragmatic use' (de Jong 2007: 5). Likewise, initiates and non-initiates alike may adapt the ethics of disclosure to emerging preoccupations, such as a new context of social and cultural exposure (Sarró 2020). What should be kept secret, by whom, from whom, how and why is part of the social fabric, and changes with new power relations and challenges within local communities. Ritual performances linked to initiation societies now appear to be a mechanism that allows people to absorb external forces and negotiate 'modernity' – including rapid urbanization and its deregulatory effects on community life – in local terms (de Jong 2007; Ferme 1994).[4] In line with those authors, my research demonstrates the plasticity of initiation societies that, despite the local trope of decline, find social interstices in which to deploy their ritual force.

At the time of my research, the conditions for leading Poro initiation and rituals had transformed dramatically since the Civil War. The remoteness necessary for secrecy was disappearing: the encroachment of the urban landscape and the presence of many new populations, for whom Poro masquerades constituted a nuisance, had restricted not only members' ritual practice, but also their ability to control local politics. In such a context, some 'secrets' – such as the role of Poro in local politics (see Chapter 7) – were increasingly discussed, albeit cryptically,

among members in the public space. These discussions created a sense of mobilization and constituted a possibility to reassert a collective identity.

Poro members observed that the secretive nature of their society could be upheld only with difficulty. This situation contrasted with their recollections of the 1980s, when communities were distant and remote, separated by long swaths of inhabited forest. By then, Sherbro populations had built an image of themselves as possessing powerful esoteric knowledge related to the vitality of the Poro institution. Several cases (or rumours) of ritual murders had made a lasting impact on local minds. Yet in 2011–12, local communities were no longer places of seclusion. Expressions such as 'now the place has opened' defined the recent shift from a bushy area to domesticated land, increasingly connected to the capital and monitored by the state.[5] The ethos of power built on closure had vanished, which also reconfigured the boundaries between secrecy and publicity (see Sarró 2020: 468).

Yet the renewed interest for initiation and ritual practice that I witnessed in 2012 and 2018–19 demonstrated that the power of the Poro had not really disappeared. Perhaps Poro members no longer held control over local politics, but public rituals aimed at social cohesion were acquiring a new relevance. In 2012, nascent opportunities for tourism allowed Poro members to operate a process of commodification and reification of culture (cf. de Jong 2007: 170) that reinforced identity boundaries between autochthones and strangers. In this environment, the presence of a researcher certainly appeared as a resource with which senior members hoped to solidify local strategies of identity assertion. Sharing some of the Poro decisions with me was not only a matter of trust, but also a strategy to advertise the importance of local cultural practices to the outside world.

It was a strategy of cultural outreach that was well managed by senior Poro members. I was not meant to help them, like an anthropologist of yore, by recording their 'disappearing tradition'.[6] Instead, I was meant to learn about the importance of the Poro, from a variety of angles, but not to be empowered to transmit any of their secrets kept from non-initiates and especially from females. My access to information was mediated by the possibility of entering relations of trust with senior members. My research partner played a key role in introducing me to Poro members in several places; the trust they had in him as well as the potential benefits of his networks and activities were extended to me. In this context, I was careful to display my interest for individual experiences of membership (through individual interviews), but not to focus on cultural performances as such. I very rarely recorded or took photographs of masquerades, although I was often invited to do so as a 'privileged' observer.

Still, there were limits to what I could record, what I would be told and what I would be allowed to see. Senior members controlled the kind of information I gathered through their own practices of disclosure and in making their

expectations of my own behaviour clear. During her doctoral research, Shelby Carpenter, who became a member of Hunting, a gender-mixed society, emphasizes the role of networks of patronage in directing her research. She writes (2011: 32): 'I quickly learned that the more knowledgeable informants did not fear meeting with me because they were confident that they could control their sharing of knowledge.' Similarly, senior members of Poro played a critical role in providing information to me. It was the younger initiates who were more careful when discussing any topic related to initiation societies with me by fear of 'making a mistake' – that is, disclosing something that they should not have disclosed in my presence.

Furthermore, my engagement as a female anthropologist with Poro was considered quite positively among senior members. While some joked that I would become a *mabole* – i.e. the only female ritual figure of Poro – they also knew that I would not actually initiate.[7] In this respect, as a female, I was perceived as much less threatening than a man: I could neither enter the local society nor any other Poro (which would have been very risky, as I could have leaked information to other groups). Therefore, I could not *make use* of the 'content' of secrets – namely, esoteric and symbolic knowledge held by senior members – against initiates in a ritual space. As the preservation of 'secrets' is very much viewed in terms of a power struggle between various forms of Poro and ritual leadership (see Chapter 7), my gender identity explains that relations of trust were somewhat easier to establish.

The mutual dynamics of selective management by Poro members and the researcher's complicity in achieving secret knowledge without its attendant powers has been recognized for a long time. Senior members' disclosure of 'secrets' largely depended on the context of enunciation (Bellman 1984). Secrecy, as de Jong observes (2007: 186–87), is a 'cultural mode of performance' that involves initiates and non-initiates, including the researcher herself. Many secrets are, in reality, 'public secrets'[8] known to non-initiates, who perform secrecy as part of their social role (Højbjerg 2007: 41). The utterance of secrets arises in the interstices of the social interaction, making the boundary between knowledge and secrecy highly porous. In general, this creates a paradoxical situation for the researcher, who does not know but knows nonetheless – and this knowledge is performed as part of the complicity created between initiates and her. In my case, it was expected that as a non-initiate, I would run away and hide indoors when the Poro mask performed. But on other occasions, I shared the laughter of senior members when they described how the Poro *dɛbul* (masked spirit, or 'devil') had captured one of the initiates. They did not mind if I heard such stories, even though I gleaned allusions on the process (and therefore on the performance of the Poro spirit) from them. The sharing of such moments with Poro members set me apart from other women, with whom it was expected that I would not discuss what I had heard.

Nevertheless, my complicity was not wholly voluntary. I did limit my data collection to not contain any knowledge that might be considered as the property of initiates – for instance, the content of initiation, secret formulas and herbal remedies, forms of secret language such as the Poro spirit's language etc. But my position as a non-initiate would have prevented me from going beyond those boundaries had it been my purpose to do so. I was reminded of this once by Jonathan, who noticed that after I had recorded some translations of songs during a funeral ceremony, I had left my recorder on. Unintentionally, I had also recorded the part of the ceremony that involved the Poro speaker, who translated the spirit's language to the community. Jonathan asked me to delete it immediately, which I did. I was surprised at his strong reaction, but it confirmed that the boundaries with which I had voluntarily complied had been set for me by the Poro members too. The only time when Poro members did accept to tell me stories and songs that were considered Poro tradition was when they narrated the accounts of people who had 'betrayed' the society. For this reason, I have switched to using letters for person and village names in the section entitled 'The "Ritual Process" Revisited' in Chapter 7.

The changes within Poro, as well as the management of its secrets vis-à-vis various outsiders, were deeply connected to changes in the rurban context of the Peninsula at the time of my fieldwork. Poro members in the rurban space maintained the aesthetics of concealment, while using their cultural resources for appropriating urbanization in their own way. The Poro society was progressively incorporated into a narrative of modernity that stressed the importance of economic development, tourism, cultural protection and cosmopolitanism. My ethnography reflected this apparent paradox: people talked about both recent changes and deeply grounded beliefs and practices that, to them, were key components of their identity.

However, this paradox lies at the very core of the performance of secrecy. Managing the tension between closure and revelation is part of the society's ethos and a well-known exercise for senior members. Strategies of disclosure are anything but new: in the region, they appear as a historical trope that marks periods of interaction and geographical openness. Initiation into Poro has been extended to strangers, and white strangers in particular, since colonial times in order to strengthen economic and politics networks (see the Introduction). In the 1980s on the Peninsula, there were examples of foreign hotel owners who underwent initiation when they aimed at buying part of the Poro grove. Changes in the postwar period may be perceived as more brutal, more rapid, and yet as nothing that may appear unsolvable in the eyes of Poro members. In this respect, my ethnographic endeavour became a small element of a wider strategy to inscribe Poro, and ritual practice more generally, within new developments of the rurban environment.

Notes

1. The policy of decentralization implemented during the postwar period has strengthened the importance of intermediary political positions between the local level and the national level (MPs and ministers) as a critical link with wider structures of patronage.

2. The name given to the female initiation societies varies, but I use the Sherbro term *Bondo* (Hoffer 1975: 155), which is consistent with local use.

3. See, for instance, Berliner (2008) on intergenerational relations among the Bulongic.

4. Certainly, the context of the Peninsula differs from the one encountered by scholars working in forest societies, and in which data may be more difficult to collect, like in the case of Poro in Loma society (Højbjerg 2007) or Bondo in Mende society (Boone 1986). However, comparing the postwar manifestations of Poro in coastal Sierra Leone and Poro in forest societies seems hazardous since the conditions of its deployment, including its social and symbolic value in a precarious urbanizing environment, are diametrically different. In doing so, I would run the risk of further mystifying this institution in regions where it may appear, at first glance, more 'authentic' or less 'impacted' by modernity.

5. One of the most striking examples of penetration of state law in ritual life was the necessity, for members, to ask for clearance from the Ministry of Tourism and Culture (under former President Ernest Bai Koroma) in order to organize Poro initiation legally.

6. I was never asked to write down ritual sequences to fix a disappearing tradition. On the contrary, these issues were open to contestation: members had lengthy discussions about how (or whether) to revive rituals that had not been practised during the Civil War and competed between themselves about the 'proper' ritual sequences and 'the right way' to do things. In one place, I observed a member who decided to write down the ritual sequence of a Poro public ritual so that younger generations would not forget how to perform it.

7. The *mabole* is part of both Bondo and Poro and her position blends male and female attributes. The position is usually occupied by a ritual leader of Bondo. In Mende society, she holds a ritual role as a mediator, as she oversees Poro initiation, cares for the initiates and allows their symbolic transition into adulthood (Bosire 2012: 70; Ferme 2001: 178). In the context of the joke, mention of the *mabole* referred to my transgressive position, at the juncture of the women's and men's realms.

8. I am referring here not to esoteric knowledge, but, for instance, to the past and present role of Poro members in politics, or to the ranks and hierarchies within the Poro society. For instance, titles, ranks and hierarchies are public secrets to the extent that Poro names on the Peninsula are used in public and the final procession by which initiates are led out of the sacred grove follows a strict order by society rank, which non-initiates are able to recognize.

Chapter 2

Narratives of Colonial Encounters

This chapter aims at mapping a historical landscape of Sherbro/Krio relatedness on the Peninsula. It invokes written sources concerning the Sierra Leone Colony and the analysis of oral traditions that I collected. The combination of these two types of sources gives some picture of Sherbro presence on the Peninsula since the nineteenth century and on the early conditions of their encounter with the black settlers. But this chapter should not be taken as an exercise in ethnohistory. Its aim is to provide some insight into the way that Sherbro and Krio today imagine their common history. In this respect, my 'reconstruction' follows local patterns and draws attention to discourses of autochthony and indigeneity. In this way, it also examines (as does Chapter 3) the collective dimension of identity performance.

As mentioned in the introduction, Sherbro ethnogenesis emerged from a series of interactions among various groups along the Sierra Leone coast. These interactions include the population movements from the interior and contacts with Europeans that followed the opening of international trade routes as early as the sixteenth century. In the nineteenth century, parts of the territory of Sherbro-speaking populations were incorporated into the British Crown Colony: the Freetown Peninsula in 1808 and Bonthe Island in 1861. As local populations came into close contact with the settlers, the definition of the Sherbros as a distinct ethnic group became clearer in colonial censuses. Nevertheless, today, the identification as Sherbro also depends on people's relations with neighbouring groups. Depending on where they live in Sierra Leone, Sherbro populations may be seen as assimilated into the larger Temne or Mende-speaking groups. On

the Peninsula, Sherbro populations are closely associated with the Krio group. Across Sierra Leone, they are perceived and perceive themselves as people who can rapidly *krionayz*, or become Krio.

Though Sherbro identity depends on interaction with others, such interaction is sometimes perceived as diminishing 'Sherbro' distinctiveness. When I started my fieldwork on the Peninsula, the trope of cultural decline structured identity discourses. I was told many times that the 'original' Sherbro culture was disappearing in the area. I was told that Sherbros had *krionayzd* and that it would be better for me to do research on Bonthe Island and, particularly, the Turtle Islands – small remote islands to the south of the country – because only there would I be able to grasp what remained of the 'true' Sherbro culture. I did not take this advice, choosing to investigate precisely the problem of relations with others. How do these mixes, bridges and junctures of culture and social relations constitute the heart of Sherbro identity on the Peninsula?

Demographics in the Sierra Leone Colony

Assessing precisely the early relations between local populations of the Peninsula, the colonial state and its representatives remains difficult. Despite the inclusion of the Peninsula within the Colony in 1808, colonial archives do not give much visibility to indigenous groups of the region. One of the first colonial acts of violence towards local populations of the Colony, it seems, was silencing them and rendering them invisible in colonial texts. Moreover, the historiography of Sierra Leone has not yet addressed the interactions between populations of the Peninsula and the colonial state, and historical sources are elusive on those between Liberated Africans and local groups (see Cole 2006; Scanlan 2017).

However, oral histories in the Sherbro and Krio communities offer rich narratives of colonial encounters with the British settlers, the Liberated Africans, and other people who fled slavery and/or resettled in local communities throughout the nineteenth century. This discrepancy between written and oral history informs us on the singular position that indigenous populations of the Peninsula assumed in relation to the process of state formation in Sierra Leone. Local communities remained isolated and to a large extent invisible to colonial authorities (see Chapter 1). Nonetheless, local populations were part of a new political and administrative set-up, in which the settlers, particularly those living in nearby settlements, acted as a connecting factor. They encountered the colonial system directly, through the presence of Liberated Africans and colonial administrative processes, such as censuses. This positioned the Peninsula as a space between rurality and urbanity, but also as a space 'unknown' and opaque for colonial officers in Freetown.

Thus, present-day narratives of colonial encounters focus on interactions from below: how local populations met with new settlers, and especially with

the Liberated Africans, in the nineteenth century. This focus helps the Sherbro local authorities, who convey such narratives, in establishing historical precedence and substantiating claims of autochthony on the Peninsula. At the same time, those narratives give some insight into the historical depth of the relations between Sherbro and Krio populations in the region. But before we engage in this analysis, it is important to provide an overview of what we know of Sherbro historicity on the Peninsula.

Until the 1820s, the colonial authorities could not make any serious claim to control, or know much about, territories beyond Freetown itself. Written sources about local groups that inhabited the region when the Province of Freedom was established in 1787 do not mention Sherbro populations. They mainly concern Temne chiefs with whom the British settlers signed territorial treaties to secure their presence in the region (see the Introduction).

The first population censuses, from 1811, were confined to Freetown and recorded only a few names for local and settler populations. The 1811 census totalled 1,917 inhabitants in Freetown, mostly Nova Scotians and Maroons. References to 'natives' in the colonial archives covered workers, labourers and traders who came to the Colony to work and were identified by the British as Temne, Mandingo or Kru (Kuczynski 1948: 75, 80).[1] Despite their jurisdiction, British officials continued to view rural areas beyond Freetown and their populations as belonging to the Temne chiefs from whom the first settlement had been purchased. As Scanlan stresses (2017: 18), they were more concerned with 'affairs within the colony … than [with] the Africans who shared the Peninsula with colonial settlers'. The 'small hamlets dispersed throughout the peninsula' were believed to be Temne settlements (Kuczynski 1948: 75), and it was not until the 1820 census that the identity of populations residing in villages spread out along the Peninsula was considered (ibid.: 84).

As a result, descriptions of ethnic distribution along the coastline during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries reflected the general lack of knowledge and concern for local interethnic relations by the British colonizers. Dominant accounts distinguished between speakers of Mampa Bullom (Sherbro) along the southern coast and speakers of Bullom to the north, both groups being separated by the Peninsula. Koelle (1854: 2) notes that the Bullom living north of the Sierra Leone River are separated from the Mampa Bullom 'by the Timne territory'. In the twentieth century, McCulloch (1964: 75) states that 'the Bullom … tribe is divided geographically into two sections, which are separated by Temne chiefdoms and by the Colony'. This contrasts with Hair's analysis (1967a) of language distribution prior to 1787, which presents Bullom territory as continuous from south to north. Such accounts did not integrate data on local populations living on the Peninsula.

Against this background of reduced knowledge about indigenous populations, demographic data referring to Peninsula populations should be treated

with some scepticism. According to the 1827 *Report of the Commissioner of Enquiry*, 'natives' residing in villages spread out along the Peninsula were not considered before the 1820 census (Kuczynski 1948: 84). Between 1820 and 1822, the *Missionary Register* records an increase from 1,046 to 3,526 'native' inhabitants. Kuczynski (ibid.: 85–86) explains this increase by three factors: all indigenous people were not included in the 1820 census; some were originally included in the number of Liberated Africans; and from 1820 to 1822, more indigenous people immigrated to the Colony. The first mentions of Sherbro populations appear in the censuses of 1847 and 1848. For the year 1848, the census indicated a population of 'Sherbros' of 1,527, which made them the second largest group after the 40,243 Liberated Africans and their descendants born in the Colony.[2] The report also mentioned 'a few hundred of Sherbros' living in the rural districts of the Colony.[3]

Two main factors can explain why Sherbro-speaking populations begin to appear in censuses from the mid-nineteenth century. One is that with the gradual resettlement of former slaves along the Peninsula, which marked one of the first contacts between the Colony and local populations, colonial accounts began to recognize and distinguish Sherbro and other local groups that were present. A second factor is that Sherbro were indeed moving to the Peninsula. Some of these movements were for political reasons, as wars broke out to the south of the Yawri Bay.[4] Fishing migration from the southern coast of Sierra Leone also accelerated throughout the nineteenth century, as the Colony gradually turned into a safe haven and a dynamic economic place. By the mid-nineteenth century, fishing had become a key economic activity supporting the development of the Colony (see Chapter 3). Those two processes also triggered seasonal and permanent migration, and contributed to moulding a Sherbro identity on the Peninsula that made the group's presence 'visible'.

Mentions of Sherbro populations in censuses followed three decades of intensified resettlement. In the early nineteenth century, new villages were founded by groups of Liberated Africans, like Leicester, Regent and Gloucester, in the mountains behind Freetown. In 1818 and 1819, some of those groups moved south: among others, they founded Charlotte and Bathurst in the Peninsula hills, Kent on the Atlantic coast, and Hastings and Waterloo on the east (Luke 1939: 54). York was not a 'new' settlement per se: in 1819, about 200 disbanded soldiers of the Royal African Corps settled in a pre-existing Bullom settlement. They were soon joined by Liberated Africans. Scanlan (2017: 169) notes that 'by 1822, nearly 8,000 people lived in the villages, compared with 5,600 in the capital'. In the 1830s, Bullom villages were chosen as resettlement sites. Labourers from Fernando Po who had been captured by slave ships were resettled with other farmers 'at the Bulom village Funkia, named "Goderich" after the Secretary of the State' (Fyfe 1962: 188). Other recaptured slaves settled in the villages

of Sussex and Tombo (ibid.: 209; Hendrix 1985: 69). Fittingly, oral traditions in these three settlements recall the coming of the recaptured slaves.[5]

Knowledge of Peninsula populations prior to the foundation of those settlements was scarce. As Liberated Africans settled on the coast, colonial authorities became aware of the presence of local populations. Looked at critically, it appears that the Sherbros came into being in British colonial records because of the role played by their villages in hosting former slaves. They became part of a scheme of supervision that had its roots in the parish system. Under Governor Charles MacCarthy, who administered Sierra Leone from 1814 to 1824, the Peninsula was divided into parishes, and the Liberated African villages were supervised by clerics of the Church Missionary Society. With the village system, MacCarthy hoped to develop commercial agriculture and make the Colony economically productive. Missionaries were expected to oversee agricultural work and educate Liberated Africans in order to prevent them from running away from the Colony (Scanlan 2017: 177). The village system also allowed MacCarthy to extend political control over the Peninsula's territory (ibid.: 184). Therefore, it is not surprising that the first censuses covering the whole Colony appear in 1818, 1820 and 1822, after the foundation of Liberated African villages to the south.

Nevertheless, the scope and nature of Sherbro relations with the British colonial administration is not recorded in historical sources. One reason that we may advance for the continued neglect of attention to local populations lies in their economic specialization. They were integrated into the Colony's economic networks through the fishing trade. This trade was important for supplying Freetown markets, but it was not part of the export production that the colonial administration aimed to develop throughout the nineteenth century. Thus, little attention was directed to managing or administering the population that engaged with it.

Furthermore, it is still unsure whether British administrators had a clear view of the ethnic and linguistic make-up of Peninsula villages. They continued to rely mainly on information from settlers and missionaries in places where those people had interactions with local populations, like Sussex, Tombo or York. In other places, information about 'natives' was even more unreliable. The result is that despite the increasing detail in censuses, the demographics of the Peninsula continued to remain hazily known. A map of the 'Sierra Leone Colony, 1853' reproduced in Peterson's book (1969: 192), for example, shows a rather domesticated landscape to the north, but only an approximate representation of villages to the south, with only two bearing the label 'native village' (with the exception of York and Kent, which were populated by the new settlers). Some of those villages along the Peninsula may have been 'old' pre-existing Bullom, Mampa Bullom or mixed population.

Krio 'Strangers' and Sherbro 'Hosts'

Although we do not know much about the groups that populated the Peninsula in the early nineteenth century, contemporary Sherbro accounts assume that the Sherbros were present. However, it is important to ground those accounts in the general perception of the Sherbros as an indigenous group that has no history of migration from the hinterland. Sherbros liked to point out that they had 'always been by the sea' and had been in contact with Europeans early on. They were, according to all groups' oral and historical accounts, 'firstcomers' among indigenous groups. As far as we know, there were Bullom-speaking peoples on the Peninsula before the sixteenth century and certainly by the onset of British colonialism. Certainly, more Sherbro populations moved to the coast in the early years of the Colony. As Corcoran (2014: 7) observes, 'while Sherbro are regarded in some ways as the most autochthonous of the autochthonous, their 500-year connection with the West and position within the Colony as opposed to the Protectorate also associates them with the Colony, the British, and the Krios'.

It is precisely this connection that Sherbro oral accounts address when they detail the arrival of Liberated Africans near or in their communities. In this way, they assert autochthony with little need for historical data. Narrators in Sherbro settlements usually framed the coming of the Liberated Africans as a positive interaction and silenced possible conflicts with locals, as well as between locals and colonial authorities who would have been in charge of resettlement schemes. Colonial officers or missionaries remain absent from those stories. This narrative technique of omission presents a general message of peaceful interactions between the Liberated Africans (and their Krio descendants) and Sherbro groups.

This chapter and the next present group accounts. Vansina (1985: 19) defines such accounts as 'the oral memories … [that] embody something which expresses the identity of the group in which they are told or substantiates rights over land, resources, women, office and herds'. Group accounts are institutionalized versions of the group's history. They present an official narrative that can help in terms of legitimating relations of power and justifying identity claims and rights over resources. Oral tradition constitutes a social device, by which groups who consider themselves as firstcomers can establish the primacy of their political and land rights over groups of latecomers (see Lentz 2006b). In this light, group accounts constitute a central narrative performance to legitimate Sherbro claims of being autochthonous.

Nowadays, for example, people trace family connections in places such as Bonthe, Shenge and other places along the Yawri Bay. As family histories, these narrations may point to relatively recent migration from the southern coast, and these narrations do appear alongside other oral traditions that incorporate migration stories. For example, the foundation of many villages is explained by the early migration of a fisherman coming by canoe from the Sherbro coast.

However, the cliché of migration most often indicates an imagined cultural link to Sherbro and Mende people living to the south of Sierra Leone (see Miller 1980: 32). Even when they are assumed to reflect actual movement, these stories about migration do not contradict Sherbro populations' claim to autochthony, as they continue narratologically to position Sherbros as hosts to other groups, including the descendants of the settlers, the Krios.

Following Miller (1980: 6), I approach oral traditions as historical narratives that include three components: clichés (or stereotypes); episodes (the narrative story that gives a human quality to stereotypes); and personal reminiscences (what narrators remember of their own experience). The performance of oral traditions is also significant in understanding how they contribute to ethnic identity and relations, but this theme will be taken up in Chapter 3. Here, I focus on the dimensions of structure and content. From this direction, the narrative process depends on the selection and emphasis of certain events that are significant in the present context (Murphy and Bledsoe 1987; Tonkin 1986; Vansina 1985). As Choo and O'Connell (1999: 2) point out, the historical narrative 'imposes a discursive form on the events … and gives meaning to [them] by presenting the events, agents and agencies as elements of identifiable story types'. Oral traditions in Sherbro settlements present us with 'story types' that pertain to the past relationships of Sherbros with strangers. While historically grounded, they provide social norms for the construction of identities and group relations in the present (Knörr and Trajano Filho 2010: 16).

Collecting group accounts, along with mapping settlements, allowed me to get a sense of the social structure of communities and of the way in which ethnic groups positioned themselves towards one another. Along the Upper Guinea Coast, oral traditions provide a social code by which hierarchies between firstcomers and latecomers are established. By selecting events of local political significance – or 'pivotal events' – such as an early migration or a matrimonial alliance, people can position themselves as firstcomers and lay claim to land and leadership (Murphy and Bledsoe 1987). Along similar lines, Sherbro narrators selected 'pivotal events' to construe 'Sherbro' as a group of firstcomers in relation to strangers.

Historical settlements of the Peninsula are said to have either a Sherbro or Krio origin. Of the settlements in which research was conducted, seven of them – Baw-Baw, Bureh Town, Lakka, Mama Beach, Number Two River, Tokeh and Kissi Town – were described as Sherbro villages (*Sherbro vilej dɛm*) because they were said to have been founded by Sherbros. Five of them – Dublin and Rickett on the Banana Islands, Hamilton, Kent and York – were described as Krio villages (*Krio vilej dɛm*) as they were founded by settlers in the nineteenth century. Finally, three of them – Goderich, Sussex and Tombo – are known for having a Sherbro part of town (*Sherbro Tɔng*) and a Krio part of town (*Krio Tɔng*). As will become clear, several of the other settlements also contain ethnically named

'towns', and those names usually refer to the ethnic background of families who settled there first (often as 'strangers').

The terms 'Krio' and 'Sherbro' are employed in all settlements to mark social and historical patterns of settlement. Nevertheless, reporting these designations may convey a false impression of clear-cut social and cultural distinctions. Families are related and individuals may be able to use the two identities interchangeably based on the context. At the same time, this differentiation has historical roots and appears in oral traditions both to present Krios as 'strangers' to Sherbro hosts and to describe a long-term social alliance that now unites Krios and Sherbros against populations who migrated to the Peninsula more recently. By reaffirming each other's social positions as hosts and strangers, both groups position themselves as 'the original' inhabitants of the Peninsula, dating back to the nineteenth century, in opposition to the recent political and land claims of other groups. Therefore, I am including in this chapter oral traditions collected both in Sherbro and Krio settlements, since they present narrative commonalities.

Oral traditions are embedded in spatial configurations that associate groups with places. Sherbro 'towns' are situated by the beach. The origins of Sherbro settlements are typically traced back to the arrival of a first settler, who came by sea in search of new fishing grounds and founded what is now called *Sherbro Tɔng* (Sherbro Town) or *ol tɔ*ng (old town). In many settlements, the landscape is divided between Sherbro Town, which is nearest the seashore (down) and

Figure 2.1. Old town, Baw-Baw, 2011. © Anaïs Ménard

populated by fisherfolk, and other parts of the settlements that extend inland near the Peninsula Road (up). These upper parts are said to have been inhabited later. The up/down separation applies in Bureh Town, Lakka, Mama Beach, Sussex, Number Two River and Baw-Baw, where a steep slope and a stream separate the Sherbro settlement from the rest of the village. This geographical arrangement makes Sherbro 'towns' seem rather secluded. In Tokeh, the old town has been replaced by tourist bungalows, but there remains a physical boundary between the new and old parts of town marked by the end of the tarred road and the start of a sandy path leading to the seashore.

Despite the diversity of populations in the region, the historical presence of Sherbro-speaking populations on the Peninsula is rarely disputed. In my attempt to collect oral traditions, I discovered that even in places where recent populations had accessed leadership and where conflicts with Sherbro landowning families existed, headmen directed me willingly towards Sherbro elders. For instance, in larger settlements, such as Goderich and Tombo, new 'towns' have emerged more recently, with names given by later immigrants, such as Allen Town, New Town or Englandville. Headmen usually advised me to get the history of each town, while acknowledging the Sherbro origin of the 'old' settlement.[6] Although recent immigrants challenged the claims of Sherbro families with regard to landownership and political authority, they did not contest Sherbro autochthony per se.

Figure 2.2. Fishing beach, Baw-Baw, 2011. © Anaïs Ménard

In Krio and Sherbro settlements, oral traditions tended to be concordant in presenting Sherbros as autochthonous populations. Sherbro elders (some of whom also resided in Krio 'towns') had the authority to provide me with 'accurate' historical information.[7] In some places, the distinction between Krio and Sherbro elders was not clear-cut. In Tombo, I was directed towards one of the previous Sherbro headmen, only to find out that he claimed his family to be Krio. In several meetings, such as in Hamilton, York and Sussex, Krios and Sherbros spoke with one voice. Personal interviews did not reveal significant discrepancies between the oral traditions narrated in meetings I held with several individuals and their particular versions collected later.[8] Sherbros and Krios generally agreed on a representation of earlier history corresponding to a particular code of arrival that set up a hierarchy between Sherbro 'hosts' and Krio 'strangers'. When they did disagree, Sherbros often had the last word on the ground that they had been present prior to the arrival of the former slaves.

Sussex is a striking example of a geographical division between two 'towns' based on a precise code of arrival. It separates Sherbro Town from King Town (also informally called Krio Town). The landscapes of the two settlements provide a sharp contrast. King Town has large streets and spaced wooden houses, also referred to in Krio as *bodos*, arranged in a square pattern. It has a Methodist church that was built by the Wesleyan Mission in the mid-nineteenth century. Sherbro Town is situated at the end of King Town, on a small peninsula, with only one access road and one footpath connecting it to King Town. It is much smaller and densely populated. It has narrow paths, basic mud-and-thatch dwellings, but also a few cement houses, and a recently built Catholic church.

Regarding the background of this particular landscape, oral tradition asserts that the arrival of the slaves was a fundamental moment in the creation and expansion of the area. I was told that the precolonial name for Sherbro Town was Bompethok, which indicates the position of the settlement as 'the land that stretches out into the sea'. Oral tradition describes the coming of a British captain, who had been based in Kent since 1789. He arrived with slaves[9] and walked along the Peninsula to find land for them. The first time they reached Bompethok in 1824, Sherbros sent them away, fearing to allow any strangers to settle near them. Undeterred, they returned three more times, until Sherbros, after telling the slaves that Bompethok would not welcome strangers, finally conceded that they could settle outside of their village, in a bushy area above Bompethok. This is claimed as the historical explanation for the Sherbro word used to designate Krios, *abeka*, which means 'let us put them there'. The settlers called their new place King Town, and both entities were later incorporated into the village of Sussex. Yet, the differentiation in names (Sherbro Town/Krio Town) remains. In fact, some Sherbro elders reminded me that the original and appropriate name for Sherbro Town is Bompethok and that the name Sherbro Town was later applied by Krios.

This oral tradition in Sussex establishes Sherbros as firstcomers. Liberated Africans did not come to an empty land, but were strangers who had to fight for social acceptance. Oral traditions in Tombo and Tokeh also mention the name *abeka* for Krios, which confers social superiority to the Sherbros who allocated the land where the newcomers lived and named the people in commemoration of this allocation. The historical hierarchy thus created between hosts and strangers gives the sense of a timeless presence of Sherbros in the region.

Competing Narratives

The strict hierarchy implied by oral tradition has little foundation in actual social reality. Krios and Sherbros along the Peninsula coast are part of the same families. In Sussex, mention of the name *abeka* caused laughter among people living in Sherbro Town, as the term is rather obsolete and almost everybody had family connections to both parts of the settlements. This type of laughter was also an indication that the assumed 'purity' of Sherbro populations conveyed by historical narratives was also a fictional feature of their present identity. Nevertheless, the oral tradition is presumed to present a historical truth that can structure, explain and legitimate social relations – even against other empirical data.

The moment of encounter between Sherbro populations and Liberated Africans creates a 'pivotal event' that proves the historical precedence of both groups in the area vis-à-vis very recent migrants. Krio elders, by endorsing the status of their ancestors as strangers, validated a local version of history that established the existence of Sherbro precolonial settlements. In doing so, they also reaffirmed their right to present themselves as hosts to populations who had arrived more recently, even if this was sometimes contested by Sherbro actors. Thus, Sherbro and Krio claims of autochthony appeared mutually reinforcing. Oral traditions offered Sherbros and Krios a common historical ground upon which to build a discourse of unity in opposition to the political and social claims of other populations. On the Peninsula, Sherbros and Krios claim to be *wanwɔd* (a Krio word derived from the English 'one word'), which stands mainly for political alignment. Being *wanwɔd* is usually brought up in order to substantiate both groups' historical presence on the territory of the Peninsula. In this context, the collective aspects of identity performance become clearer, as groups share an interest in narrating a version of history that consolidates their social and political position.

Proving historical continuity was important with respect to ongoing debates with Temne-speaking populations. The question at stake was which group 'owned' the Peninsula originally. History, literature and school textbooks used in Sierra Leone report that the British acquired the Peninsula from Temne chiefs of the Koya chiefdom, which shared a boundary with the Sierra Leone Colony to the northwest (see the Introduction). But, as a Krio man from Kent explained, the destiny of the Peninsula then diverged from that of the Temne lands:

> We [Krio and Temne] had this discussion [about the boundaries of the
> Koya chiefdom] for a long time. If you look at history, even Waterloo
> was inside Koya. The whole Peninsula was Koya but the Peninsula be-
> came the land of the slaves. It was differentiated. It became a Krio land.
> It changed into a Krio land and one cannot claim it to be Koya anymore.
> If Temnes claim this land on historical ground, it would bring disputes.

Once transferred to the British, the land became 'Krio land'. Unlike Temne chief-
doms, the Peninsula became a land where many populations coexisted. In such
a place, he meant, any particular ethnic claim – but especially a Temne one –
would likely stir up conflict.[10]

The elders in Sherbro settlements contested the written version of history. They
were quick to stress that King Naimbana and King Tom were actually Sherbros.
Further, they said that these kings were the only legitimate landowners; there-
fore, the land was Sherbro. As evidence, I was often told that when the British
arrived, they asked King Gbana, a Sherbro king, 'What is your name?' and the
King responded 'name Gbana', which was distorted as Naimbana by the set-
tlers and misinterpreted as a Temne name. I was meant to understand that the
general pattern of misassigning Temne identity to Sherbro kings had occurred
to King Naimbana and King Tom as well. Sherbro elders, instead of relying on
'official' history, crafted a locally grounded historical narrative based on their
own first encounter with the settlers as strangers. This narrative stressed colo-
nial interactions from 'below', as opposed to the 'above' transactional relations
between Temne chiefs and the British described in history books, and served to
justify Sherbro historical primacy at a local level.

The issue was politically sensitive. For instance, in the early 2000s, as the
first Temne headman was elected in Tombo, one Temne resident revived the
controversy by proclaiming around the settlement that the town belonged to the
Koya chiefdom. The town authorities called the Temne tribal head to bring the
argument to an end (in the Western Area, each ethnic group is represented by a
tribal head). A Sherbro man recalled: 'In front of [the Temne tribal chief] and
the headman, [this man] had to recognize that we were the ones hosting them.'
The political care with which the matter was handled indicates the sensitivity
of the issue and the fact that the conflict could have escalated. Nevertheless,
interviews with Temne-speaking populations revealed that their representations
of the Peninsula as a part of Koya continued to provide them with a justification
for their presence and their land claims.

Ambiguous Identities

The subtleties of oral tradition, conveyed through shifts of emphasis even within
established narratives, are possible because of the ambiguity of ethnic identity

on the Peninsula. Historical narratives that concerned Sherbro/Krio relations maintained an interesting paradox: while they reasserted the host/stranger relationship, they also tended to present Sherbros and Krios as indistinct peoples with common historical roots.

Despite the stipulated distinctions between Sherbro hosts and Krio strangers, people also used oral traditions to maintain a form of ambiguity about their respective identities. Both groups highlighted their 'alliance', albeit for different purposes. Krios used oral traditions to claim indigeneity. In colonial society, the settlers and their descendants were perceived, and perceived themselves, as non-natives. Even if they were black and of African descent, they had a higher social status and different legal rights than 'natives' (see Chapter 4). The native/non-native dichotomy implicitly referred to the specificity of the settlers as a non-African group (Goerg 1995: 177). The settlers were 'non-natives' in the sense that they were no longer tied to their 'tribal' roots.[11] Categories that represented them in colonial censuses shifted progressively from 'Liberated Africans and their descendants' to 'Creoles'.[12] Those categories separated the settler-descendants from 'natives', despite the fact that they had also mixed with local populations (ibid.: 119). Nowadays, people of Krio origin continue to be considered as 'non-natives'. Thus, it has also become important for Krios on the Peninsula to emphasize their historical ties with Sherbro populations to prove their Sierra Leonean origins.

In many Krio places, people described their slave forefathers as Sherbro 'returnees'. In Hamilton, I collected the following oral tradition from Mr Davies. Mr Davies' father was Sherbro, born and raised in Sussex, and his mother was Krio. The early settlers of Hamilton, he said, were Sherbros who were captured and taken into slavery. He included among these Sengbe Pieh, the hero of the Amistad revolt.[13] When they escaped slavery, these Sherbros came 'home' and gradually populated the various settlements of the Peninsula. Those who settled in Hamilton planted corn, said Mr Davies, which explained the original name of the settlement *Kangbeh*, the Sherbro word for maize. Under colonial administration, the village was renamed Hamilton. In contrast to other Sherbros of the Peninsula, these early inhabitants preferred agriculture to fishing. When other groups arrived at the coast, among whom were other 'returnees' (who later became Krios), the resettled Sherbros married them. This is how the village became a Krio place. Mr Davies' story contrasted with Sherbro accounts: in his version, Sherbros are not quite firstcomers; they were an early group of returnees, who later mixed with other returnees and became Krios. In this version, there is a subtle repositioning of the Sherbros as an indigenous group of Sierra Leone, but not an autochthonous group of the Peninsula. Nevertheless, they still precede all other ethnic groups and Krios.

Mr Davies' presentation was not unique. Oral traditions in Krio settlements often described black settlers as returnees, implying that these settlers

were people who had been taken away from the Sierra Leonean coast. Narrators usually mentioned two processes of settlement: people from the coast, who were captured in the early days of the slave trade, but escaped, and the later resettlement of Liberated Africans. In Mr Davies' account, those epochs are separated, with Sherbros returning in the first wave and 'Krios' in the second wave. However, his mention of Sengbe Pieh is an example of 'descending anachronism' (Miller 1980: 16) by which the narrator transferred Pieh's return to Sierra Leone in 1841 to an earlier time. Indeed, the return of Sengbe Pieh is a symbolic event, also used by narrators to emphasize their group's links with the transatlantic world. In both Hamilton and Tokeh, for instance, I was told about the recent coming of Americans who claimed to have Sherbro roots and tried to learn the basics of Sherbro customs and language.[14] For some people, this project constituted an additional proof that 'returnees' had been Sherbro.

Knowing the ethnic origins of the slaves who embarked on the Middle Passage is a complex historical endeavour. Nevertheless, the general distinction of two phases of returnees that is conveyed by local identity discourses is borne out by historical research. Between 1800 and 1815, the origins of Liberated Africans reflected the relatively limited scope of the patrolling capacities of the British, which means that 'many slave ships brought to Freetown were captured within close proximity of the colony' (Anderson 2013: 107). In other words, many of the earliest Liberated Africans did originate from the Sierra Leonean coastline and interior.[15] Later on, although there is evidence of the presence of Bulloms and Sherbros among the Liberated Africans of the Colony, they constituted a small proportion of a much wider group of people of both Sierra Leonean and non-Sierra Leonean origin. Colonial censuses also show that a few Liberated Africans were of Sherbro origin.[16]

However, colonial censuses give a poor picture of the resettlement patterns of returnees. The censuses underrepresented the former captives who escaped the Colony to return to their home societies (Curtin and Vansina 1964: 187; Jones 1990: 52) and those who settled further away in 'native' villages of the Peninsula.[17] For Sherbros captured along the coast, resettling in nearby villages of the Colony, where people practised fishing and may have spoken Mampa Bullom, may have been relatively easy. As we shall see, some Sherbro narrators referred to people who 'escaped' as founders of local places, like Tokeh.

Other Krio oral traditions privileged representations of the past that presented the black settlers as Sierra Leonean 'returnees' who were unable to remember their roots. A Krio from the Banana Islands living in Bureh Town explained that when 'the slaves' were taken away, they forgot their language and came back unable to trace their family. As a consequence, they started to speak Krio and to live as Krios. These representations provided Krios with an easy explanation for their subsequent social mixing with Sherbros. Although their ancestors had forgotten it, they were Sherbro who had been taken in slavery and

had returned home after a long and painful absence. The moment of 'return' is described as the reunion with one's kin after the experience of slavery, thereby grounding Krio identity in Sierra Leonean history. A further implication of this story is that the 'forgotten' Sherbro identity was nevertheless preserved as a certain affinity for associating with Sherbro people.

In Sherbro settlements, people also interpreted the return of the slaves in terms of a broken family continuity. A first version of the foundation of Tokeh, which is presented in Chapter 3, mentions the migration of a fisherman from Shenge to the Peninsula. Yet, one of the men who had been chosen to tell me that story later told me that the founding families of Tokeh, who all have English surnames, were people who had escaped slavery:

> The slaves founded this village. When the white men came, they followed the coast to capture slaves. All people on the coast were Sherbro. Some of these people managed to escape and did not go back to the Provinces. They remained on the coast. The British people took their relatives. All that they knew is that they had been taken from the coast. They did not know the hinterland. From Tokeh to Goderich, when they escaped, they stayed on the coast. The young ones managed to escape and created settlements. It is the same in Bonthe: anywhere they could settle near a beach, they did so.

There is no mention here of the cliché of the original migration, but only of individuals who escaped slave traders. The narrator seems to situate the 'return' of Sherbros in the early days of slavery. Thereby, he juxtaposes those early 'returns' with the settlement of the Liberated Africans, which results in a shorter historical sequence (Miller 1980: 17).

Furthermore, these two moments were a juxtaposition to the other story of migration from Shenge, which was not meant to be contradictory. Taken together, the two stories illustrated the preoccupation of positioning Sherbro populations towards different groups and participated in the construction of hybridity via the historical imagination. The first story of migration established historical precedence and domination over later groups, Temne agriculturalists in particular (see Chapter 3). The second story grounded the origins of Krio-ness in the return of Sherbro slaves on the coast, thereby emphasizing the ambiguity of origins, as the Krios of the region could also be considered (historically) Sherbro.

In many cases, Sherbros used oral traditions to stress the Krio dimension of their identity. These narratives supported the construction of Sherbro ethnicity as 'hybrid' – being both 'native' and Krio (see Chapter 4). Through them, Sherbro elders addressed the processes of *krionayzeshɔn* by which Sherbros had become Krios. In Tombo, a representative of Sherbro landowning families (who defined

himself as Sherbro/Krio) told me that the community existed before 1812, which marks the first record of Tombo in official papers. The first inhabitants, he said, lived in the Peninsula hills as a way to hide from slave ships coming from the Plantain Islands, the Banana Islands and Kent. Each day, fishermen would leave their canoes in the harbour after fishing and retreat back into the hills. Eventually, some desired to move down from the hills.[18] Then, a man settled near the shore in a swampy place to do gardening. Women started coming to him to ask for vegetables.[19] Fishermen began to bring their canoes closer, in the part of Tombo called Kassi. In 1812, the first headman of the settlement was Tombom. Around that time, white missionaries came from Kent and walked along the coast to evangelize people. They met Sherbros in Tombo, educated some of their children and baptized them with English names. The person concluded:

> We do not have Krio people here. It is not a place founded by Krios. The people who call themselves Krio are adopted Sherbro people. You know that Sherbros call Krios *abeka* – let us put them over there. It is because they told the missionaries to build a church outside of the village. They gave them a place for the church and for the children whom they educated.

This narrative reinforced the Sherbro origins of the village and explained how people came to be Krio. The second half of this quote refers to a historical process by which black settlers fostered children from local groups and evangelized them. Historical records testify that the Liberated Africans were resettled in Tombo in the 1830s near Sherbro Town, on the road from Kent to Waterloo that opened in the 1820s. The village had no permanent missionary, but had a school and three Christian churches (Hendrix 1985: 69). The account is therefore a plausible description of Sherbro to Krio identity shift through adoption and conversion. Although the narrative does not mention the local negotiation of those two identities (becoming Krio while remaining Sherbro at the same time), it accounts for the early process by which Sherbro of the Peninsula acquired English surnames and converted to Christianity.

Alternatively, as a man in Bureh Town once told me: 'Only a few original Krio are left. If you look for Krios, unless you consider Krios of Sherbro origin, you will not find Krio people in Sierra Leone anymore.' His formulation is initially baffling, as one might expect more people self-identifying as Krio to have emerged out of decades of migration, intermarriage, urbanization and modernization. Here, though, he postulates an original group of Krios (probably returnees) who have disappeared, except those who have Sherbro ancestors who 'became' Krios.

Moreover, Sherbro settlements were made of successive waves of migration from the interior. In many places, people who define themselves as Sherbros

have other origins. For instance, in Baw-Baw, many people proved to be of Temne origin, whereas in Bureh Town, Mende and Lokko origins were more common. This testified to the progressive incorporation of strangers into Sherbro communities. Historical narratives incorporated those (certainly more recent) migrations, while weaving them with colonial history: in other words, the histories of families of various ethnic origins who migrated to the Peninsula were transposed to a preceding epoch.

The version of the foundation of Mama Beach, which I collected from the Sherbro headman, illustrates this process. Like many settlements, Mama Beach is divided between a lower (old) part and an upper part, where many new fisherfolk have settled. Population pressure in the upper part has led to important land conflicts with two neighbouring communities, PWD Compound and Bonga Wharf (on this issue, see Chapter 8). Mama Beach's lower part is subdivided into three 'towns' near the wharf (Lokko Town, Mende Town and Sherbro Town) and towns farther away from the sea, occupied mostly by latecomers.

According to the headman's story, the settlement was founded in 1832 by three friends: Pa Gbanka, Pa Smith and Pa Thompson. Each of them built in his own area, and people named each area after the ethnic origin of the founder: Pa Gbanka founded Sherbro Town, Pa Smith Lokko Town and Pa Thompson Mende Town. Pa Thompson was a very close friend of Pa Gbanka and he decided to move from Mende Town to live nearer to his Sherbro friend. Originally both Lokkos and Mendes were farmers, but then Mendes started to fish with Sherbros. The story concluded by stating that the history of Mama Beach allows people to welcome Mende, Sherbro or Lokko, whereas Temne 'are sent' to (that is, are asked to settle in) PWD Compound or Bonga Wharf.

When I asked the headman about the presence of early settlers in this area, the story was mixed with contradictory information about the slavery roots of the founding fathers:

> [These families] start from slavery times. When the white man came to the coast, he met the Sherbro people. They exchanged men for rum and tobacco. When they brought these people back, they founded Freetown. When Freetown started to be crowded, people moved: they opened places in Kent, Banana, York, Kissy, Wellington, etc.[20] From there, they discovered the place. There was a tussle between the Smith, the Thompson and the Benga [Gbanka] as to who discovered Mama Beach first. But they did not come from upcountry. These people had always been by the coast.

This statement attributes Liberated African origins to three families otherwise described as originating from the interior. But this contradiction can be explained. Claims of autochthony, which respond to the presence of migrants,

require Sherbros to prove their long-term presence on the Peninsula. Either as slave traders or victims of the trade, Sherbros are said to have always been on the coast. Nonetheless, autochthonous origins are also needed to support landownership under customary law and to confront migrants' land claims (see Chapter 8). Mendes and Lokkos are likely to have worked as farmers, and Mende roots were often used to support land claims. Furthermore, the 'return' of original families from slavery binds the three ethnic groups in a founding moment that occurred prior to later migration.

Mama Beach oral tradition merged two historical steps in one: the arrival of the Liberated Africans and the progressive incorporation of local families into the Krio group. Otherwise, interpretation of origins was left open: the three founders may have been returnees, although it is more likely that they were later immigrants who had been raised as wards of Krios – through a practice of child-fostering that I will further detail in Chapter 4. Individual stories of elder members of families in Mama Beach revealed both a history of migration from the interior to the coast and the adoption and upbringing of a parent in a Krio settlement, such as nearby Kent. The three founding families therefore appeared connected through a similar experience of *krionayzeshɔn* (taking up the attributes of Krio identity), which opposed them to populations who had arrived on the Peninsula more recently, with an emphasis on Temne-speaking groups. In this context, the ability to *krionayz* established both precedence and social superiority. The mention of colonial history pointed to the higher status conferred to the black settlers and the strategies by which local populations engaged with those unusual strangers.

Conclusion

This chapter has offered an overview of the role of oral traditions in providing an explanation for the social proximity of Krio and Sherbro populations on the Peninsula. Historical sources reveal that their relations are grounded in the colonial context of the movement and resettlement of former slaves in the Sierra Leone Colony. Oral traditions do not contradict such sources, but present an alternative view of the colonial encounter. They emphasize the role of hosts that the Sherbros assumed vis-à-vis the Liberated Africans. At the same time, both Sherbro and Krio narrators played on the ambiguity of origins (of returnees) to highlight that the sociocultural proximity between the two groups may have had an even longer history and preceded the moment of the colonial encounter.

The result is that oral traditions establish several kinds of moral actors in terms of ethnic identity, migration and settlement history, occupation and relations with others. In general, community-origin stories established autochthony (for Sherbros) and indigeneity (for Krios), and assigned positive values to processes of

krionayzeshɔn. So structured, they legitimated Sherbro claims to local land ownership and acknowledged an indigenous cultural identity for Krios. These narratives also played on the tension between purity (by establishing ethnic boundaries and Sherbro autochthony) and heterogeneity (by maintaining the ambiguity of Sherbro/Krio ties). Thus, they also served as an illustration of contemporary individual experiences of a hybrid identity. Historical narratives expressed a Sherbro/Krio alliance in the present based on common social, economic and ritual practices that will be detailed in the following chapters. Depictions of this alliance smoothed over historical junctures and tensions that may have otherwise existed between local populations and the settlers in order to make a continuous social landscape. In the next chapter, I will examine how those historical links produced a common social and geographical space that unites Sherbros and Krios.

Notes

1. The census taken in 1817, for instance, listed 1,009 African 'natives' who had come to work in Freetown (Kuczynski 1948: 84).

2. Colonial Office, Great Britain. 'Sierra Leone. No. 25', in *The Reports Made for the Year 1848* (1849: 304–05).

3. In the 1850 census, there is no specific mention of Sherbros, who, it seems, were included, like other local Africans, under the category 'native strangers', which totalled 3,516.

4. After the Caulker-Cleveland War, which opposed James Cleveland, a fierce slave-trader who ruled on the Banana Islands, and Stephen Caulker, Chief of Bumpe, the Banana Islands fell under the administration of the latter between 1797 and 1810. Stephen Caulker, who had Anglo-Sherbro ancestry, forged good relations with the Colony. As British squadrons patrolled coastal waters, the north of the Yawri Bay became safer, while slave-raiding intensified to the south. In the same period, the chiefdom of the Caulkers was politically divided and drawn into war, which disrupted security and trade along the southern coast throughout the nineteenth century. Referring to Tombo, south of the Peninsula, Hendrix (1984: 9; 1985: 68) assumes that Sherbro migrants founded the old settlement around 1800 in search of a more stable environment.

5. There is also evidence of the use of the Sherbro language in reports by Reverend G.R. Nyländer, who translated Christian hymns 'in the Sherbro dialect of Bullom' for chief George Caulker of the Banana Islands in 1820 (Hair 1963: 7).

6. The 'old' Sherbro names of various settlements are known, although their origin and meaning may be given different explanations. For instance, people commonly use the name *Funkya* for Goderich. One local interpretation is that *Funkya* is derived from the Sherbro word 'funk', which means cotton.

7. In two locations, the situation was different. In Goderich, the Sherbro and Krio versions of oral tradition differed. Both groups claimed to have founded Oba Funkya, the part of Goderich closer to the sea, which is distinct from Sherbro Town. The Krio version is predominant, as Sherbro populations are less numerous and identifiable. Moreover, the Banana Islands were considered a 'Krio place' only. People acknowledged that Sherbros had lived on the islands during colonial times, but said that they had left long ago for the Sherbro coast.

8. I am referring here only to oral traditions that concerned the establishment of settlements. However, other narratives could lead to tensions between both groups: for instance, stories about land-use rights and the collection of taxes from other groups of strangers. In other words, Krios also asserted their historical rights over land (and sometimes parts of the beach), which they considered that they had acquired over generations.

9. The word 'slaves' is often used in oral traditions to refer to Liberated Africans and their descendants who settled in or near Sherbro communities. Sometimes, narrators also employ 'Krio' retroactively as a name for early settlers who had yet to undergo processes of creolization that led to the emergence of Krio identity.

10. The competition between Freetown's social elite and Temne leaders for cultural and political monopoly in the Sierra Leone Colony became stronger at the end of the nineteenth century (see Bangura 2017). In the 1890s, migration of Temne-speaking populations to the Colony intensified and British colonial authorities introduced elements of tribal rule by recognizing the authority of the Temne Tribal Headman to administer Temne people, thereby creating competition with the Freetown Municipal Council. 'Temneness', via the development of cultural associations and Islamic education, came to represent 'a useful alternative to the Freetonian way of life' (Bangura 2017: 193). Temne and Freetonian identities became mutually exclusive.

11. In the first half of the nineteenth century, Christian education and conversion were designed as a means to sever the ethnic affiliations of the former slaves. In response to this policy, many Liberated Africans escaped and re-created 'ethnic enclaves' (Scanlan 2017: 178) outside of Freetown. Both within and outside Freetown, some of the groups of Liberated Africans preserved their ethnic identities for generations, such as the Aku descended from Yoruba recaptives.

12. On the history and uses of the names 'Creoles' and 'Krios', see Chapter 4.

13. Sengbe Pieh is usually presented as a Mende man born near the Gallinas coast (see Abraham 1978). He was captured by Spanish slave traders in 1839 and freed after the Amistad trial. He returned in 1842 to Sierra Leone to establish the Mendi Mission near his village. This mission marked the beginnings of the American Mission Association (AMA) in the United States. But as Sengbe Pieh's home had been destroyed and his family killed, he helped the missionaries to settle on Bonthe Island and became a trader (Osagie 1997: 73). The early presence of the AMA in Bonthe have raised competing claims over Sengbe Pieh's origins, since many Sherbros claim that he was born and buried on Bonthe Island.

14. People commonly referred to the project initiated by the American historian Joseph Opala that connects Gullah people in South Carolina and Georgia to Mende communities in Sierra Leone, from which they extrapolated the venue of other Afro-Americans to the Peninsula in the context of 'roots tourism' (which had no connection with the Gullah project). Joseph Opala lived in Hamilton in the 1990s, during which he helped to connect the community with the US embassy to fund the building of the secondary school. He suggested the name 'Sengbeh Pieh Memorial Secondary School' in order to attract US funding. However, there appears to be no historical link between Hamilton and Sengbe Pieh. Before this initiative, this historical figure was hardly known in Hamilton (Joseph Opala, personal communication). Thus, Mr Davies merged those contemporary elements in his narrative frame.

15. Anderson (2013: 126) shows that there were twenty-two people of Sherbro origin among the Liberated Africans who enlisted in the West Indian Regiments and the Royal African Corps. It is not known whether some of them chose to return to Sierra Leone when they were demobilized, but it is known that between 1817 and 1819, disbanded soldiers were

'the earliest inhabitants of several villages … including Wellington, Waterloo, Hastings and York, settlements that were later to see an influx of liberated Africans' (ibid.: 110).

16. Colonial Office, Great Britain. 'Sierra Leone. No. 25', in *The Reports Made for the Year 1848* (1849: 305).

17. This explains the difference between the number of Liberated Africans who were landed and the total population of Sierra Leone (Curtin and Vansina 1964: 187). On the mobility strategies of Liberated Africans, also see Domingues da Silva et al. (2014).

18. Hendrix (1985: 68) also reports that between 1812 and 1840, inhabitants moved gradually from an original site to the present location of Sherbro Town in Tombo.

19. Sherbro elders claimed that the name Tombo was derived from the Sherbro *A koni thombok ko* (I am going to ask for vegetables) because it was a gardening area.

20. Kissy and Wellington were Liberated African villages established in 1916 and 1919, respectively, on the eastern side of Freetown. They are now neighbourhoods of the capital city.

Chapter 3

Framing Reciprocity
From Settlers to Strangers

In this chapter, I examine how Sherbro communities of the Peninsula interpret their relations with other groups in relation to social arrangements characterized by reciprocity. Through the establishment of reciprocal exchange, settlers can acquire the status of strangers to the Sherbro host group. In the past, reciprocity was deployed differently, depending on whether it concerned members of local groups, who were considered subordinate, or the settlers of the Sierra Leone Colony, who were 'prestigious' strangers with whom Sherbros wished to be associated. I argue that those two modes of reciprocal relations resulted in two different types of integration informed by the specific kinship patterns of the Sherbro group.

I turn again to narratives in order to analyse people's perceptions of the norms of reciprocity by which they expect to frame their relations with other groups, as well as the discourses that they craft about those relations, which inform their definition of Sherbro identity in the present. What is striking is how the narratives interweave tales of kinship and fishing with ethnic relations – thus merging several material forms with the symbolic logic of reciprocity. As in Chapter 2, although many of these narratives appear highly personalized, they reveal much about the collective performance of ethnic identity as well; the scenarios, relevant actors and strategies are all commonly recognized and deployed.

Narratives about the establishment of host/stranger relations typically focus on wife-exchange, which becomes the symbol of a political alliance – that is, if wife-exchange does not necessarily entail active cooperation, at least it may prevent open conflict between affinal kin. Kinship idioms tell the audience

about the type of arrangement created with strangers (domination/subordination, cooperation etc.), what prerogatives they acquired and what obligations they 'owed' to their host. They respond to a question about political alliance – namely, with whom (or against whom) is it possible to ally and why? To whom is it possible to give and from whom should one receive? (Caillé 2007: 84).

However, kinship idioms are not the only way by which Sherbro oral traditions express relatedness. Fishing constitutes another 'substance' of reciprocity – it is a livelihood that entails a specific type of economic cooperation between groups. When cooperation in fishing appears impossible, it reveals dysfunctional relations and breaks in the 'cycle of return' expected between hosts and strangers. Accordingly, in oral traditions, fishing is a central material practice that unites economic actors (men and women of various origins), but also becomes a metaphor for group relations. Narrators often told about the establishment of kinship relations in conjunction with economic arrangements in the fishing economy.

Before turning to the narratives, two notes need to be made. The first concerns the presentation of the material in this chapter: substantive background information is mixed in with the analysis of the narratives. As in Chapter 2, I have used secondary sources based on substantial archival and historiographical work to better read the narratives against historical evidence. Nevertheless, these narratives are still 'stories'; they have the moral function of identifying precisely which situations, actors and motivations should be the relevant ones of social life. Their construction presents us with stereotyped accounts of intergroup relations and reveals the importance of collective performances in shaping Sherbro identity in relation to other groups. The second note is to acknowledge the Sherbro kinship system against those of other groups, and the role of kinship in strategies of integration.

Cognatic Descent and Matrifiliation

Anthropological evidence points to the fact that the Sherbros were initially a matrilineal society, but that matrilineality eroded as they came into contact with larger patrilineal ethnic groups and the English system of inheritance on the coast (Hall 1938; Hoffer 1971). MacCormack, who wrote the most compelling research on Sherbro society, observes that by the 1960s, Sherbros could be said to have a cognatic descent system (Hoffer 1971; MacCormack 1979). Membership to a descent group could be traced through either female or male kin, and inheritance depended on the social prestige of both the female and male lines. MacCormack, for example, observes that people can give preference to patrilineal descent, yet matrilineal claims are invoked in instances of the high social status of a female ancestor, mother or father's mother. She concludes that Sherbro 'descent groups consist of the resident nonunilineal descendants of an ancestor' (1979: 185). My own data support MacCormack's analysis. Some forty years

later, Sherbro communities of the Peninsula retain several matrilineal features. Group identity and social rights predominantly continue to be 'transmittable through women' (see Day 1983: 84). Matrifiliation is still relevant for claiming local belonging and accessing political leadership (see Chapter 7). However, inheritance, including land rights, can be claimed on both female and male lines.

The cognatic descent system, on the Peninsula, has retained what could be termed a matrilineal principle in relation to the assimilation of male strangers, meaning that matrilineal ties are considered more valid in establishing the identity of a child born of ethnically mixed parentage. Descent from a Sherbro woman, along with membership in the local male or female initiation society (Poro or Bondo) ensures belonging to the local Sherbro community. This principle coexists in practice with patrilineal ones (for instance, when deciding a child's family name or postmarital residence) and cognatic inheritance (individuals who are Sherbro on both sides of their family tree can choose which one to value when claiming rights). Overall, the Sherbro descent system is characterized by a high degree of fluidity in kinship affiliations.

Beyond the immediate context of the family and social reproduction, the cognatic system of Sherbro society enables processes of social integration that differ from those observed in patrilineal societies. In forest societies of the Upper Guinea Coast, for example, anthropologists observe that the patrilineal system establishes a relation of subordination 'between the descendants of politically superior patrilineage, defined as first-comers and as wife-givers, or mother's brother, and the descendants of subordinate patrilineages, defined as latecomers and as wife-takers, or sister's sons' (Højbjerg 2007: 237). The hierarchy between lineages of mother's brothers and sister's sons typically corresponds to a hierarchy between groups of hosts and groups of strangers. Lineages of strangers do not hold the same rights to access political functions within the chieftaincy system (see Murphy and Bledsoe 1987).

In Sherbro society, by contrast, the possibility of matrifiliation allows for a more flexible type of social stratification. Integration implies that strangers affiliate to a Sherbro matrilineage by way of marriage and initiation into local societies (the 'ritual process' described in Chapter 7). In this case, the postmarital residence rule, which is virilocal, does not apply. Matrifiliation entails that children of in-marrying men can upgrade their social status through the female line (MacCormack 1979: 198). They access the political and social rights conferred by belonging to the matrilineage (for instance, political leadership). However, this possibility requires the stranger's sociocultural assimilation ('becoming' Sherbro). This matrilineal pattern of integration competes with the kinship systems of other ethnic groups, such as the Mende and Temne, both of which are patrilineal. As a result, oral traditions usually describe Sherbro relations with strangers as highly unstable. Latecomers to a local community may seek to impose their own patrilineages as politically dominant.

The case of the black settlers of the Colony presents us with another type of host/stranger configuration that has carried over into contemporary Sherbro/Krio relations. In this case, the possibility of assimilation was balanced by both compatible kinship systems and prestige differentials. The settlers were strangers to the Sherbros, yet they held a more prestigious social status, linked to the relations they had established with the British and their exposure to Christianity. Murphy and Bledsoe (1987: 136) argue that in Liberia, indigenous populations responded to the arrival of America-Liberians by seeking their patronage and assistance, and by positioning themselves as subordinate 'clients'. Sherbro communities used marriage and child-fostering to associate themselves with the settlers. The settlers' villages may have remained politically distinct from Sherbro settlements, but both populations engaged in social and economic cooperation, and were, ultimately, linked by kinship.

Furthermore, the Liberated Africans, as they settled on the Peninsula, were a group of diverse people who had to invent a new mode of coexistence in newly established villages. It is safe to assume that their mode of tracing descent was quite flexible and accommodated for the various cultural influences and family configurations that characterized their new society.[1] Thus, kinship arrangements with Sherbros were likely to adjust to the local patterns of cognatic descent and virilocality (for instance, if a settler married a Sherbro woman).

Those historical processes of intermarriage and integration, fostering and patronage led to the emergence of a Sherbro/Krio social and territorial unit, which I define as a residential zone. The residential zone concept, coined by Kopytoff (1977), refers to a larger area, not limited to the actual place of residence, in which people can relate to their matrilineal kin despite patrilocal residence. If the Peninsula is viewed as a residential zone, then much about the coexistence of Krios and Sherbros, as two distinct groups not related via the processes of assimilation, becomes less confounding. Further, if a strict concern for matrilineality is shifted to a recognition of the importance of *matrifocality*, then we gain even more clarity. Tanner (1974: 131) defines matrifocality as an attribute of any kinship system in which '(a) the role of the mother is structurally, culturally, and affectively central and (b) this multidimensional centrality is legitimate'. In the matrifocal model, women have relative power within the kin group: they control economic resources and participate in decision-making processes concerning kin. Furthermore, the role of women is culturally valued. Finally, the emotional bond between mother and child is strong and important. Tanner emphasizes the role of kinswomen in an individual's life and 'a cultural patterning of affect and of interpersonal relations that promotes kin ties to and through women' (ibid.: 137).

Krios and Sherbros are integrated in a residential zone bound by the centrality of relationships established through women. Individuals maintain close relations with family members by nurturing maternal kin ties in scattered

settlements. Local discourses emphasize that the early adoption of the fishing livelihood in settlements established by the black settlers would have contributed to reproducing this social pattern. Although livelihoods in Krio and Sherbro settlements are now diversified, fishing remains part of the local ideology that presents Krios and Sherbros as residents of a common coastal territory.

Storytelling and Performance

Narratives about kinship as an alliance (or a political arrangement) imply a certain form of storytelling, which revolves around the discourses of representatives of the local political power, mainly Sherbro elderly men. This focus may mask discourses of subaltern groups (women and youth) about their own relations with strangers. In reporting those narratives, I am sensitive to the feminist critique that highlights a male bias in studies of reciprocity (see Weiner 1976). However, in this West African case, reciprocity structures local politics (the question of who has power over whom), which is informed by male logics of exchange, including the exchange of women. As a result, male voices remain dominant in the narration.

This focus on elderly male narrators is also justified because it emphasizes the construction of authority that is central to performances of Sherbro collective identity. In turn, such performances constitute a mode of production of social power vis-à-vis other groups. In the remainder of this chapter, I base my analysis on two stories of village foundation: the first collected in Bureh Town and the second in Tokeh.

In July 2011, as I started preliminary research on the Peninsula, I recorded historical narratives about the foundation of several settlements to the south. During those encounters with local political figures, I was not yet known as 'the anthropologist working with Sherbro populations'. On these two trips, I was accompanied by one of my contacts in Kissi Town, Mrs Koroma. I presented myself as a researcher, interested in local history, and stated my wish to conduct further fieldwork in the year to come. Later, those early interviews proved crucial, as the people who had narrated those stories became key interlocutors.

The two stories were told to me in Sherbro. This was the choice of the narrators, Mr Small in Bureh Town and Mr Johnson in Tokeh. They chose to speak in Sherbro and to translate their stories (or have it translated by one of the participants) into Krio, since my command of the Sherbro language did not allow me to understand them fully. This choice, in front of a person they did not know yet, participated in the linguistic performance of ethnic identity. Both narrators positioned themselves as legitimate interlocutors for a researcher who showed an interest in Sherbro populations. Furthermore, they reinforced their authority by displaying their linguistic abilities in a social environment in which the Sherbro language has disappeared from daily use. The language choice structured the

interaction between performers and audience. The audience, of course, 'plays a key role in assessing the significance of the talk' (Bauman and Briggs 1990: 70) and in this case lends credibility to the story by recording it and reporting it in a written form. The use of the Sherbro language aimed at making stories reliable and authoritative, in an environment that has seen Sherbro local political power increasingly eroded and fragilized.

In Bureh Town, a village of a few hundred inhabitants, the choice of Mr Small as my interlocutor did not raise any issues: he had been the longest ruling headman and appeared as the prominent elderly figure of Bureh Town. Mrs Koroma knew Mr Small and introduced me to him. In Tokeh, by contrast, a large settlement that shelters many new populations, the right to tell history was a contested issue and the narrator, Mr Johnson, used his position as a deputy headman to impose his own narrative. However, both narrators asserted their authority and competence to 'recontextualize' the oral text in response to circumstances of the local political environment. This recontextualization became part of a performance of power that framed intergroup relations (Bauman and Briggs 1990: 76). Their identity as Sherbro speakers (and, I would learn later, as powerful men within Poro) gave those stories a flavour of authenticity, while presenting autochthony as a collective property of the Sherbros.

An Origin Story: Unusual Strangers

Here is the version of the foundation of Bureh Town (Bakyama) narrated by Mr Small:

> A man came from Bonthe. His name was Bureh Kyama, and he was the first person to plant a tree in this town, which became Bakyama. He arrived here first in 1836. When this man arrived, this was not the place where he started the village. He first settled in Hungkpoh, on the beach. He came with his wife and two children. He was a fisherman. He did not do farming at all. By then, the town was young and there was happiness. They called the place *Maminko*, in Sherbro 'the place where people laugh'. Sherbros call this place happiness – *Mamin* – and Krios call it York. Sherbros call it happiness because things were difficult when they arrived there first, but then other people started coming until it started to grow and become prosperous. But there the sea was rough and the waves were pounding the shore, so they decided to move off from the beach. They came very close to Hunka ('we are here'). If you see those two trees that are standing over there [about a mile from the village along the beach], that is where they started to bury their people, where the indigenes are still buried. From there, they came to the place that we generally call Tribeng, which means 'old town' [in Sherbro]. When they

settled in the old town, the place began to open and the town expanded. Then in 1845, they settled where the village is presently. Now, how did it get the name Bureh Town? There were five Krio women who were trading fish at that time. Any time they came here [to buy fish], they said [in Krio] 'Leh wi go to Pa Bureh in tɔng' [Let us go to Pa Bureh's town]. From there came the name Bureh Town. When the village started to grow, other Sherbro were visiting from other villages and always said: 'Hin kon yako Gba Kyama' [Let us go to brother Kyama]. In Sherbro, *Gba Kyama* means 'brother Kyama'. From there, the name stayed in Sherbro as Bakyama. When Krios came to stay here, they put their own cemetery where these two other trees are standing. The place stands there until now. That is the only place that they used as a cemetery.

This historical narrative not only depicts the foundation of Bureh Town but also its later relations with York. York was founded in 1819 following a reduction in British military forces and the disbanding of the West India regiments stationed in Sierra Leone. Soldiers were given land and York began with about two hundred of these new colonists. The place was renamed after the Duke of York, yet Bullom called it Momini, which supposedly referred to a pre-existing Sherbro settlement (Fyfe 1962: 136). Momini is possibly a distortion of the Sherbro word *mam* – to laugh. The name used by Mr Small, Maminko, bears the additional location indicator *ko*, but probably refers to the same place. According to Fyfe (ibid.), York colonists married Bullom women, who came to live with them – and perhaps, as Blair (1968: 28) suggests, those women may have been 'amongst the original Sherbro inhabitants of the site'.

Although historical dates are inaccurate, oral tradition in Bureh Town recalls progressive migration from Maminko to the present settlement before the arrival of settlers. It establishes Sherbro historical precedence over the site, while not contradicting later history about the foundation of York by foreign settlers. Mr Small's story focused on the progressive and peaceful interactions with York residents in a geographically distinct village. He described how 'Bureh Town' got its name through an interactional process between the settlers and the Sherbro neighbouring populations. This contrasts with changes in names, such as Hamilton, Sussex, York and many others, that resulted from the imposition of British rule. Though he could have focused his story on the dynamics of external imposition and internal response, and on the dispossession of land that indigenous populations experienced with the establishment of the Colony (Galli and Rönnbäck 2021: 119), this is not the path he chose.

Local oral traditions across the Peninsula emphasized the geographical separation of Sherbro settlements and newly founded Liberated African villages, as indicated by the use of the name *abeka* for the settlers, as was discussed in Chapter 2. These local representations correspond to the present configuration

in which Sherbro and Krio settlements are embedded: they have separate ter-ritories and political authorities (village heads). In the Colony, the villages founded by the settlers were usually separate and independent. The political territories of Sherbro and Liberated African villages were clearly differentiated. This aligned with Sherbro political organization, in which authority is dispersed among small-scale scattered settlements. The localization of power among both groups may have facilitated direct – although not necessarily peaceful – relations between the settlers and local populations (Davidson 1969; Day 1983; MacCor-mack 1980). Each group kept its own distinct identity and interacted on the basis of this distinction.

Liberated Africans did not establish an overarching authority upon Sherbro villages, but created links based on social influence. They became 'prestigious' strangers, who had access to Christianity and literacy via the missionaries. Local populations secured entry into this new society, individually and collectively, through strategies such as marriage and child-fostering, by which the settlers also consolidated their dominating social position (see Chapter 4). On the Pen-insula, this type of alliance was established between groups that cohabitated in the same region and forged other types of connections, such as economic co-operation and common ritual practice, which tended to replace stiff hierarchies with more horizontal relations over time. Thus, Sherbros may have looked to their strangers as a possibility to access new assets, while aiming at maintaining their social position as hosts locally.

Mr Small emphasized the continuous and peaceful socioeconomic interac-tions between Sherbro populations and the settlers in York. The kinship idiom comes to reinforce this description. Interestingly, this idiom is at odds with historical data presented above, which rather stress on marriages between the settlers and Sherbro women. The reason may lie in the discourse about 'egalitar-ian' exchange that Mr Small wanted to convey.

The figure of the Krio fish trader illustrates the gradual integration of the two populations by way of marriage between Krio women and Sherbro men. Patrilineal logic would have it that the settlers, as wife-givers, were socially su-perior to the Sherbros and assimilated them within their own group by way of marriage. Yet, the story describes no such assimilation. The reason is to be found in the cognatic descent system of the Sherbros. Mr Small positioned Sherbros as wife-takers, and yet Sherbro communities still relied on their own women to ensure the continuity of their group (see MacCormack 1997: 291). The kinship idiom of Bureh Town emphasizes precisely the continuity of the Sherbro kin-ship system, despite the settlers' presence. The story implies that Sherbro/Krio relations were not based on sociocultural assimilation, but on the creation of horizontal links between communities via marriage and children. The story does not provide us with information on how children born from Sherbro men and Krio women were considered or to which group they belonged. They may have

been absorbed into their mother's group, but this did not constitute a threat for the sociopolitical continuity of Sherbro communities. Rather, this process only strengthened family links between communities.

When evoking kinship here, I am more concerned with local politics than with descent per se. In reality, marriage, place of residence and child belonging may have been rather flexible and dependent on practices situated at the microlocal level. The implication of this story is that Sherbros could maintain the conditions for the social reproduction of their group and thus political authority over their territory. The narrative associates Sherbro/Krio kinship with a specific territorial configuration that allowed both groups to remain (politically) separate, and yet to relate on the basis of the social and economic exchanges that depended on marriage and kin relations.

Also, the kinship idiom is interwoven with a description of economic collaboration that presents both groups as mutually interdependent. The narrative implies that, for Sherbro hosts, engaging with the settlers on a cooperative basis was more rewarding than treating them as a subordinate group. In the field, people often referred to the fact that the 'slaves' had taught Sherbros how to read the Bible, but Sherbros had taught them how to fish. These transactions were presented as an exchange of equivalent skills in a social arrangement characterized by reciprocity between 'higher-ranked' strangers and 'lower-ranked' hosts.

Fishing and Social Relatedness

The development of collaborative economic relations around fishing between populations of York and Bureh Town constitutes the pivotal event that accounts for subsequent social mixing. In the nineteenth century, fishing became the primary economic activity on the Peninsula. Although on the southern coast, Sherbro-speaking populations usually combined it with farming, due to the proximity of urban markets, fisherfolk of the Colony specialized in fishing early on. Hendrix (1984: 4) observes that by the mid-nineteenth century, the fishing industry 'was a key area of employment and production', including both open-sea and coastal fishing. In Krio and Sherbro fishing towns, farming is considered to be the livelihood of other groups who migrated from the interior. In most settlements, oral traditions mentioned that farming started with the arrival of Mende or Temne migrants, who cultivated crops on lands allocated to them by Sherbro or Krio people. Gardening and hunting were remembered as past activities. Krios in particular were known to have vegetable gardens for their own consumption and to practise agriculture for local trade, such as cassava in York.

Fishing is associated with a particular type of one-man paddle-boat called a Kru canoe (but locally called *kunu-kunu*) that is designed for hook-and-line fishing. Seemingly, the Kru canoe was not part of the traditional fishery of the Sherbro coast.[2] The name instead indicates a Liberian origin, from the Kroomen

who were skilled seamen recruited to work on British ships in the nineteenth century (Hornell 1928: 11; Krabacher 1990: 162).[3] My conversations with Sherbro fishermen confirmed that they believed Kroomen to have introduced this technique on the Peninsula coast (they linked the name *Kru* with the Kroomen). Sherbro fishermen, as I observed their daily fishing routines, used other types of boats and practised net fishing as well. Nevertheless, they usually preferred the hook-and-line technique, with which they caught larger and more valuable species such as barracuda, snapper and ladyfish. In their views, the *kunu-kunu* was a marker of Sherbro identity, as opposed to the motorboat fishing practised by other groups – an issue that will be discussed later on in this chapter.

The fishing economy rests on the economic relationship that unites fishermen with fish traders who process the raw fish and put it on the market. Fishermen have at least one, but possibly several trading partners, to whom they habitually sell their catch. Since fish cannot be stored for long, fish traders smoke it according to a process that can require several days in smokehouses called *banda*. After two or three days, the fish becomes dark brown and 'will last between two and three weeks without a significant loss in quality' (Krabacher 1990: 286). This period can be extended to several months with additional smoking stages. The processed fish is sold in nearby markets and Freetown, yet sellers also travel inland.

Gendered transactions are at the centre of the artisanal fishing economy. Processing fish is a female-dominated enterprise. While men go to sea, it is women who smoke the fish and sell it at the market. The female fish traders can provide parts of the fishing equipment, such as hooks, lines or baits, or food and fresh water before the fishermen goes out to sea. They sometimes also financially contribute to boat repair. Further down the Sherbro coast, Diggins (2018) shows that female fish traders need to elaborate strategies to secure regular business relationships with fishermen in a context of sharp decline of maritime resources. These gendered transactions involve money and various types of help, such as food and loans, but also seduction tactics. Partners who are romantically involved also often team up for business.

Mr Small referred to those gendered exchanges and added an ethnic component to them by describing 'historical' economic transactions between Sherbro fishermen and 'Krio' female traders (in the story understood as women settlers). Thus, the foundation of Bureh Town stands as a metaphor for a Sherbro/Krio sociopolitical alliance based on a common livelihood.

This representation of the local past also has some historical basis. Fisheries on the Peninsula developed with the presence of the Liberated Africans, who considerably increased the demand for fish, but also directly participated in this economy. The settlers resisted colonial attempts to develop commercial agriculture (Scanlan 2017) and some of them adopted the fishing livelihood soon after their arrival.[4] From the 1830s, they developed the construction of large sailing

boats, called 'benefit boats', which accommodated large crews specialized in snapper fishing (Hendrix 1985).[5] Benefit boats carried food and water for a few days. The fishermen used deep-sea lines and processed the fish at sea by drying them over a small fire (ibid.: 70). In 1850, the British authorities reported between 110 and 140 boats and canoes on the Peninsula, particularly sailing boats built by local populations.[6] Melville (1849: 113) counted up to thirty sailing boats at the Freetown harbour. By the mid-nineteenth century, fishermen from York, Kent and Tombo, including many Creoles, supplied large quantities of dry fish for the Freetown markets.[7] Liberated African women in those locations also traded fresh produce and fish (White 1981: 629; 1987: 34). They sold the fish in Waterloo and Freetown, which they reached by boat or by land, but also far into the interior.

This dynamic economic environment surely pushed local fishermen and fish traders in Krio and Sherbro settlements towards more cooperation. They may have shared their techniques and worked together to a certain extent. Although this would be difficult to trace in historical sources, contemporary accounts provide an insight into those early exchanges.

The Kru canoe technique has come to represent a symbol of unity between Sherbros and Krios. Wharfs of Krio settlements have many *kunu-kunus* (Kru canoes). During fieldwork in York, for instance, I counted three motorboats and thirty paddle boats, among which were twenty Kru canoes. Both Sherbro and Krio fishermen stressed that the *kunu-kunu* technique is originally Sherbro and highlighted knowledge transmission from Sherbros to Krios regarding paddle-fishing and boat-carving skills. Additionally, Krio fishermen often mentioned that in the past, fishing on benefit boats drew on Sherbro hook-and-line techniques. Many people said that processes of transmission were facilitated by seasonal fishing migrations. Krio fishermen on the Banana Islands and in York remembered Sherbros coming from Bureh Town to carve *kunu-kunus* and to teach their skills:

> We have carvers here, but they learned from Sherbros in Bureh Town. They came here to teach them. People from Bureh Town used to carve a lot here. In the 1980s, some stayed up to six months here. Now the fish has reduced [and they don't come as often]. But even if we know how to carve Kru canoes, they will still do it better than us.

Conversely, fishermen in Bureh Town also recalled the names of famous Sherbro carvers who used to practise their skills along the Peninsula and passed on their knowledge.

Sherbro knowledge is not only technical knowledge. *Kunu-kunu* hard-earned fishing skills are enshrouded in the secrecy of the Poro initiation society. Poro initiation and fishing are both linked to a process by which young men

have to prove their masculinity by acquiring a strong and independent nature and by showing no fear of danger. Going to sea can be compared to entering the Poro sacred grove, in which the initiation takes place: both present aspects of peril, knowledge, mystery and magic that only initiates can understand and master. Both are places of male socialization and individual accomplishment. In the past, fishing regulations were dictated by the Poro society. By planting the Poro wooden stick in the littoral zone, Poro members could prevent overfishing in certain areas (Hall 1938: 5). Although this is no longer the case on the Peninsula, most *kunu-kunu* fishermen are also Poro members.

Indeed, initiation remains necessary to become a recognized fisherman, as it gives access to ritual knowledge by which fishermen protect themselves at sea and increase their catches. During fieldwork, some young men who had dropped out of school and wanted to do fishing were instead encouraged to become members for this reason. Similarly, Poro membership provides extended networks of sociability. Poro groves are situated along the beach and members often hold their meetings on the beach. For Poro members, the Peninsula is not experienced as a succession of settlements, but as a continuous stretch of beach along which they move and meet. Non-initiated fishermen not only feel excluded from these gatherings, but also fear them and are scared of enforced initiation (see Chapter 7). As seasonal fishing migrations between settlements remain frequent, even Krios often take the decision to become members in order to circulate freely between fishing locations.

Similarly, *kunu-kunu* carving requires not only specific technical abilities, but also the support of other Poro members. When a fisherman needs a new canoe, he calls on other fishermen for help: choosing the tree, cutting it down and bringing it to the village. In Sussex in 2011, Poro members continued to organize community work for the making of a new *kunu-kunu*. Fishermen living in neighbouring settlements were asked to join in, and the group headed into the forest for a day, led by master carvers, who learn their skills through apprenticeship. Everyone took a turn at the less skilled work, after which the carvers hollowed out the trunk with specially designed axes. By the end of the day, the canoe was dragged down to Sherbro Town. There, the master carvers continued work on the canoe for two or three weeks before it was finished. In general, fishermen preferred to order their canoes in towns where carvers were considered competent and had a solid reputation.

Kunu-kunu fishing, as a technique common to Sherbro and Krio fishermen, is central to the material culture of the Peninsula and includes social, economic and ritual dimensions. Both populations highlighted its practice as a strong element of their identity. Fishing, in contemporary accounts, appeared as an expression of Sherbro/Krio social relatedness, thereby erasing the conflicts that existed between them or may have existed in the past between local populations and the settlers. Krios were positioned as strangers in that they depended on

Figure 3.1. Master carver at work in the Peninsula forest, 2011. © Anaïs Ménard

Sherbro knowledge for the adoption of the fishing livelihood. Yet, the semantics of fishing expressed not only long-term interactional processes and social relatedness, but also the existence of a common coastal zone of residence that was forged through mobility practices.

Residential Dynamics and Matrifocality

Sherbro and Krio populations on the Peninsula are part of a residential zone that is characterized by two dynamics: the geographical and sociopolitical separation of Sherbro and Krio settlements, and high intersettlement mobility due to fishing. People usually identify social mixing and fluidity in the Sherbro/Krio residential zone as an outcome of the preoccupation with fishing and related practices of mobility. In the following section, I consider how mobility and matrifocality combine in people's accounts of social relations between groups.

Sherbro/Krio common family networks are said to have emerged from fishing mobility. When fish become scarce in an area, fishermen go *alεn*, which means that they migrate seasonally to places with higher fish concentrations (see also Diggins 2018; Krabacher 1990). Mobility is further necessitated by the fact that there is no alternative activity to alleviate economic strain when the fishing is poor. During the rainy season, women can support the household by engaging more intensively in trade. Yet, dependence on a single subsistence

Figure 3.2. Dragging the canoe down Sherbro Town, Sussex, 2011. © Anaïs Ménard

activity demands that fishermen migrate more often and for longer periods. They regularly go fishing in other settlements, sometimes for several months, before returning. For *kunu-kunu* fishermen, the scope of movement is limited: they go to settlements of the Peninsula that they already know and to which they can return regularly. The decision to move is based on fishermen's knowledge of fishing seasons, but also on information provided by kin and friends in other places.

Most fishermen initiate relationships with women in settlements where they migrate seasonally and those women can also become their business partners. Thus, it is common to meet Sherbro fishermen with multiple relationships in several settlements on the Peninsula. Many of them also have an 'official' woman in their village of origin. This multiple-household pattern was given by some fishermen as the reason why they would not marry their woman back home, as a married woman would likely ask for financial compensation if she learned about 'girlfriends' in other places. Such multiple relationships are usually tolerated, even if they can cause conflict in couples: most women know that their husbands have lovers along their fishing route. They endure those situations, as long as they receive enough money to run the household and the husband does not bring back a lover to live with him as a second wife or establish her as the official wife. Fishermen who do so are publicly shamed, as I observed during my fieldwork.

Many people could identify family members in other settlements as a result of the *alɛn* practice. As one Sherbro fisherman in Tokeh told me, referring to his family in York:

> Krios and Sherbros are mixed up. Sherbro people can go *alɛn* to York and keep a woman there. My mother is a Decker [family name] and her big brother used to go *alɛn* to York and got children. The children are all Decker. This family owns half of York … All the Krios in York have Sherbro fathers but they have all become Krio.

Another fisherman in Tokeh mentioned that the similarities in the family names in Tokeh and York – Decker, Slowe and Pratt – result from fishermen of Tokeh seasonally living in York and vice versa, and he concluded: 'Fishermen at sea, depending on the wind, will land at York, Bureh Town or Mama Beach … They go where the sea pushes them.'

These patterns of mobility are also cited as the reason why men do not engage as husbands or fathers to a significant degree. Fishermen are regularly absent and seldom take part in daily decision making concerning the household. Their financial contribution to the upbringing of children is not guaranteed, particularly for those born from 'side' relationships. A fisherman may sometimes decide to give a 'side' relationship some level of official recognition. He offers the

woman's relatives some money for them to acknowledge the union, by which he ensures that the children will carry his name (like in the example above of the Decker family in York). Yet, these arrangements are also unstable. Some women choose not to use the father's last name in case the latter fails to provide financial support (money for food, school fees or other payments for children) or to demonstrate a romantic commitment.

Thus, at the local level, people may mix matrilineal and patrilineal principles: in the case of the Deckers in York, children bore their father's surname, but were considered 'Krio' based on matrilineal principles. This situation is typical of the matrifocal pattern of kin relations on the Peninsula. An individual's ethnic identity is usually defined by his or her place of birth and residence, which is therefore determined by whether his or her mother stays in her own village. Although residence (in Sherbro and Krio settlements) is usually virilocal, people born as a result of *alɛn* relationships typically stay in their mother's village and will claim rights on their mother's side, despite bearing their father's surname. In Krio settlements, people can inherit documented properties on their mother's side and rarely claim any in their father's village. This pattern differs in the event that a Krio woman marries a Sherbro man, and thus comes to live with him. In this case, she and her children may adopt the man's name and the children usually self-identify as Sherbro. However, she will also be able to claim rights on the mother's side. These women usually maintain strong relations with kinswomen in their place of origin. Conversely, the inability to visit maternal kin, often due to financial constraints that may prevent travelling, even for a day, may be experienced as a real suffering.

Thus, self-definition as Krio or Sherbro often depends on the place of residence in someone's infancy and childhood (a Krio or Sherbro settlement). The place of birth and residence also determines in which society a child is initiated first: the Hunting society in Krio settlements, and the Poro or Bondo in Sherbro settlements. Despite the possibility to become a member of both, early membership in one or the other society is a further marker of ethnic identity (see Chapter 6). As we have seen, the child's place of residence is not necessarily the mother's place of origin. Nevertheless, people usually remain emotionally attached to their mother's village and relate easily to their maternal kin throughout the Peninsula. They meet their relatives for occasions like weddings, funerals, rituals or ceremonies of ancestors' worship, which are further detailed in Chapter 5.

For women too, mobility and seasonal residence are not uncommon. Women engage in different types of trade, like fish, cookery, beverages and other small items. In recent years, the population increase on the Peninsula has made these activities more profitable. Women can engage in trading activities in other places – often places where they have female kin – for several weeks before returning to their husbands' settlement. They take the children with them or leave them with kinswomen. Additionally, some of them may move for ritual reasons: those who

have an important ritual role in the Bondo initiation society may be called upon to help organize the initiation period in another settlement.

Socialization tends to revolve around the relations between mother and child and among the mother's kin. The emotional bond between mother and child is considered important (Hoffer 1971: 114). Divorce and separation are frequent and the end of a relationship often coincides with the woman's decision to return with the children (regardless of their age) to her hometown – often her own mother's – either for a while or permanently.

On the Peninsula, the mother's village has special emotional and social significance. By 'mother's village', I mean the settlement in which somebody (a man or woman) can rely on maternal kin for support (for instance, child-rearing or need for an accommodation). If the mother lives with her husband in another settlement, the person may choose to go to the mother's place of origin instead where their maternal kin live. The family story of Mr Kargbo (his father's name), who lived in Tokeh, is interesting in this regard. Mr Kargbo and his nine siblings were born in Baw-Baw from a Temne father who had come *alɛn* and settled there. The mother's mother of Mr Kargbo was from Tokeh and had married in Baw-Baw. His mother had been born there. However, when he was a teenager, she came back with the children to her mother's place in Tokeh because of marital problems. The grandmother herself had come back to Tokeh after her marriage had ended. Thus, Tokeh was the place where both his grandmother and mother took refuge, as they could rely on the help of their maternal kin. Mr Kargbo had lived in Tokeh since then and considered it his hometown, which shows how the mother's place can become the main place of emotional attachment.

The mother's place of origin is often also the settlement where an individual is entitled to claim political and customary land rights. In Sherbro communities, the mother, the mother's mother and the father's mother are the most important kin when negotiating one's customary rights in a given settlement. Many people claim customary property on the maternal side. Access to leadership also depends on Sherbro female ancestorship, either on the mother's or the father's side, as evidenced in Chapters 7 and 8. One of my interlocutors, Cho, had lived for more than twenty years in Baw-Baw, yet he still thought about moving back to Number Two River, where he had been raised by his maternal grandmother. He owned land there inherited from his grandmother and contemplated standing as a candidate for headmanship in the future. Cho referred to Number Two River as the place of his 'ancestors': it indicated a strong emotional but also spiritual link to the place, as ancestors are believed to help in personal endeavours. Thus, Cho could both experience an emotional attachment to his mother's place and use matrilineal rights in land and leadership.

The matrifocal pattern that unites Krio and Sherbro settlements is often associated in local discourses with mobility (of both women and men). The

specifics of Sherbro relations with the early settlers – based on coexistence and yet also separation – is held to have generated a type of integration in which each group preserves its specific identity, while stressing close kinship ties with the other. These kinship ties, as we have seen, are often expressed through the central role of women and maternal kin in both societies.

The Intricacies of Assimilation

By contrast, members of other local groups were and continue to be integrated into Sherbro society according to a different pattern of reciprocity. This type of integration, which requires the assimilation of strangers, mainly concerns men who settle and marry within Sherbro settlements, and for whom Sherbros act as wife-givers. Following matrilineal principles, the children of strangers born of Sherbro women are considered to belong to their mother's group. Strangers and their children are expected to assimilate to their Sherbro matrilineage and acquire Sherbro identity over time. In this case, oral traditions describe an unstable combination between wife-giving and the patrilineal ideology of the societies from which the strangers originate. Integrating local strangers presents an inherent risk that the latter may want to impose the authority of their own patrilineage over Sherbro lineages in order to access power. In the present context of the Peninsula, narratives concerning local strangers focus on the integration of Temne-speaking populations, which reflects recent conflicts between them and Sherbros over land ownership and local political leadership, which I will detail in Chapter 8.

The kinship idiom that appears in oral traditions to qualify Sherbro/Temne relations underlines its competitive aspects. As an illustration, I present one version of the foundation of Tokeh. In Tokeh, I was welcomed by the village committee: the headman, his deputy (Mr Johnson) and his secretary. The headman assumed that I was asking for a story told in Sherbro and, since he did not speak it very well, he asked his deputy to narrate his version of local history. Mr Johnson started his story by saying that he had gotten it from his maternal grandmother's little sister, thereby grounding it in a transmission based on matrifiliation:

> The older people were fishermen, who had come from Shenge. When they travelled along this road to go to Freetown, normally they rested at the mouth of the river between York and Tokeh. They stopped, lit a fire and slept. But some of them … decided to settle. The first village was up the hill. *Tokeh ko* – in Sherbro this means 'up there' and *tok* means to rest … The old village is the place where the town started. We have the Douglas, the Slowe, the Decker, the Johnson and the Martin [families] … There were no other people here, except for the Sherbros … The first

man who came from the provinces and joined them was Pa Santigi and he was Temne. He was the first Temne man to come to this town. He was a farmer and he worked here during the farming season. Then, he would return home when the rains started and the Sherbros would dry fish for him. After some time, Pa Santigi took his brother along to do farming for the Sherbros. The Sherbros welcomed him too and dried fish for him when he returned home … After another rainy season, Pa Santigi's brother returned accompanied with another brother. The Sherbros told him: 'You have started bringing your Temne brothers here, but we do not want plenty of them.' Pa Santigi reassured them and told them that his youngest brother, who had just come, would not cause them any problem. But when he started to work on his farm, the brother met with one of our grandmothers. She was still breastfeeding her son. They kept their love secret … When Pa Santigi decided that it was time to return home, his youngest brother said that he would not go, because he had found a woman. Pa Santigi said: 'What! I have been here longer than you and I have no wife. This is what the Sherbros said, that they did not want any problem here. Well, I will have to meet them and tell them that my youngest brother will not leave?' … He called all the Sherbro elders and said: 'I want to tell you something. This is my brother. I brought him here. But he said he is not going with me because he is in love with your daughter.' The elders asked him who the woman was and he responded 'Mamfuei'. They called Mamfuei, who said: 'This is true. This man said that he wants me to be his wife.' The Sherbros dried fish for Pa Santigi, who returned home. His brother stayed and Mamfuei had a son, Kontham. Pa Santigi's brother brought the Muslim religion here … When he settled, he met the people praying [at church]. So, he too prepared a small place to pray. He built a small mosque … [Those who were not Christians] started to pray with him. He is the first Temne to have settled in this town.

This version of the foundation of Tokeh reveals an ambivalent relationship between Sherbro populations and Temne-speaking settlers. It merges two distinct dynamics of Temne migration. On the one hand, it presents the arrival of Temne-speaking populations as the pivotal event for the expansion of the village. Pa Santigi's brother, in this specific account, was identified as the grandfather (father's father) of the former headman and as having arrived in Tokeh in the first half of the twentieth century. Yet, as Miller (1980: 19) notes, references to genealogies are also (and often) used to refer to sets of relationships, in which 'individual figures … turn out to be personifications of social groups'. In this narrative, whether or not he existed as such a factual person, Pa Santigi's brother personifies a Temne stranger's line of descent and Mamfuei represents

the Sherbro matrilineage. On the other hand, the kinship idiom implies an underlying fear of losing one's host status and authority with the arrival of Temne settlers, which refers to the migration of Temne fisherfolk since the 1960s and to subsequent disputes that occurred between the two groups.

Mr Johnson has the Temne strangers describe a perceived reluctance by Sherbros to establish any lasting relations based on a matrimonial alliance with them. He also describes the two groups as distinct with regard to their economic occupations, and this distinction is described as the reason for their mutual tolerance prior to the establishment of kinship ties. He explains that Sherbros and Temnes practised a type of barter system based on farming/fishing exchange. Temnes were allowed to stay in the community for the farming season, but the giving of fish also signifies the existence of amicable relationships.

Mr Johnson's story follows a logic found in oral traditions from Kissi Town, Mama Beach and Tombo. These narratives also mention that, at first, Temne fishermen did not stay on a permanent basis. And they also remained silent on Temne's later involvement in fishing. This allowed narrators to contrast an early idealized relationship of mutual reciprocity with the current situation of competition over land and fishing. In these stories, early interactions illustrate positive exchange and friendship as long as this did not imply affinal kinship. Strangers are left in a liminal position without the possibility of upgrading their social status. Yet, ultimately, one of them initiates a relationship with a local woman and settles.

Because of the settlers' farming activity, it is implicit that settlements were separated. Until the 1980s, Tokeh's old town consisted of a line of houses on the beach side and Temne farmers had their houses farther up, where the new town is situated today. This geographical separation illustrates the liminal status of Temne settlers, who were set apart. Sherbros also stressed that those early migrants were afraid of Poro and chose to settle outside of existing settlements to avoid enforced initiation. The discourse about Muslim strangers (Temne and Fulah) being scared of Poro is a recurring one on the Peninsula, yet most Temne strangers are often members of Poro in their area of origin (see Chapter 7).

Such narratives contrasted with those concerning members of other groups, such as Mende settlers, whose presence was accepted *within* Sherbro settlements. In Tokeh, a Sherbro man with Mende paternal origins told me:

> [Mendes] used to come here and tell people that they had come as strangers. Our people used to give them a place in their houses and ask them what they could do. [Mendes] would say that they were farmers and could be employed to plant cassava. They planted, developed land, set traps for animals … Sometimes, the Mende man would look around and see a woman to marry. But Sherbros did not give anybody to marry to Temnes.

In this statement, the old town is retrospectively perceived as a place where Sherbro and Mende-speaking populations lived together. Mendes were farmers but started fishing, which illustrates an integration process based on marriage and livelihood. The person compared those relations with the refusal of Sherbros to accept Temne speakers as strangers through wife-giving.

Many people explained that Sherbros encouraged Mendes to settle because they were disciplined and complied with local rules. This distinguished them from Temnes:

> Sherbros encouraged Mendes [to settle] more than any other nation [tribe]. And we Sherbros, our own background comes from Mende [land]. [We encouraged them] because they obey and [Sherbros] were not afraid of them. But [Sherbros] don't like Temnes, because they are quick to fight … We [Sherbros] welcomed Temnes, but we all came from Mende [land], we like [Mendes] very much. Even in York, you have a lot of [Mendes]. They are Decker, Shyllon, Martin … they all come from Shenge or Bonthe.

Sherbro populations on the Peninsula liked to trace their origins from the Sherbro coast and stress their cultural affinity with Mendes. These relations were presented as based on historical continuity and on a similar ability to 'become Krio' quickly, like in this statement about Mende descendants living in York. Yet, stories of Mende migration also often described a gradual acceptance of the stranger's presence – just like the gradual acceptance of Pa Santigi and his brothers – as a way to validate the autochthonous status of Sherbros.

Conversely, stereotypes about Temne populations presented them as quarrelsome and aggressive, with 'bad' attitudes that Sherbros did not want to associate with – deceit, competition, dissimulation etc. These depictions had much to do with the ethnic clichés that concerned Muslim trading peoples under colonial rule (Bolten 2008: 36, 178–80). Temnes, who favoured Islamic education, were stigmatized as having 'little or no Western education, then viewed as a hallmark of civilization, high status, and prestige' (Bangura 2017: 130). Temne cultural values collided with colonial discourses about Western cultural hegemony upheld by Freetown's Christian-educated elite. As a result, Temnes were easily presented as unable to emulate the social behaviour and 'way of life' of the Krios. In his narrative, Mr Johnson played on this subtext about Temne behaviour. The implication is that Sherbros mistrusted Temnes and tried to keep them at bay. Thus, intermarriages between Sherbro and Temne populations, as evidenced by the common occurrence of Temne origins among self-defined Sherbros, were downplayed in origin narratives.

Mr Johnson's narrative shows how Temne populations can be rendered negatively in the Sherbro imagination. Mr Johnson's narrative operates on a contrast

between the first settler, Pa Santigi, and the brother. Pa Santigi is careful to maintain temporary relations based on exchange and trust. The fact that Sherbros give him fish materializes those friendly relations. Those relations did not involve wife-exchange and the Temne strangers did not become full members of the Sherbro community – they remained physically outside it, respectful, afraid.

From this perspective, the establishment of kinship ties disrupts the initial relation. The seed of a negative interpretation of the Temne in this story comes from noting that Pa Santigi's brother's relationship with Mamfuei is not part of any official exchange between the groups. It is an incident that remains hidden – not only from the elders of the host group, but also from the elder Temne brothers.[8] Pa Santigi himself is afraid that despite his own good conduct, all Temne migrants will become suspect and lose the hosts' trust because of his brother's conduct. In this story, the Temne appear as an untrustworthy group of strangers: the youngest brother betrays authority figures of his own group, who had negotiated the terms of their presence in the Sherbro community. The Sherbro authority figures forgive, but, by affording beneficence, they create a debt by which they mark their position as power holders.

The kinship idiom that emerged from various oral sources described Sherbro/Temne relations as fundamentally nonassociative. As Fortes (1975: 248) states, the incorporation of strangers into host communities in these stories depends 'on some kind of kinship fiction'. Until there is a marriage (and/or children), the Temne strangers are described as living very much apart from the Sherbro hosts. Sherbro authorities refuse to position themselves as permanent hosts to Temne agriculturalists; they do not give them wives. Ultimately, the authority of the elders is circumvented with the acceptance of the first settler. In this story, like in others, women subvert male authority by imposing a love relationship that they initiated.

These stories frame a kinship idiom that becomes clearer when set against analyses of matrilineality in the anthropological literature. The assimilation of in-marrying men constitutes a disruptive element for matrilineages (Schneider 1961: 18). Wife-giving must be combined with the recognition of descent through females to avoid the creation of competing male lineages, through which strangers may try to exert power (Richards 1958: 246). In Sherbro oral traditions, the integration of settlers is defined as dangerous, since in-marrying men may refuse to comply with the rules of integration (in particular, to be initiated and/or to initiate their male children into Poro, as I will detail in Chapter 7), by which they become associated with the Sherbro matrilineage and subordinate to Sherbro political authority. Instead, they may want to impose the leadership of their own patrilineage over host communities. The tension between matrilineality and patrilineality implies that children of male migrants may privilege social bonds with the paternal line. The child may choose his father as his main reference and engage in political and economic cooperation

with him, which may have severe consequences for the reproduction of the matrilineal group (Schneider 1961: 23). Again, the issue is not about descent in itself, but the ability of host communities to maintain political authority over groups of strangers.

Sherbro oral traditions do not present wife-giving from a matrilineal to a patrilineal group as a problem per se. Some of the other groups that Sherbro populations marry, like the Mende, are also patrilineal. Yet, it is the Temne who are described as refusing their subordinate status following marriage. Oral traditions reflected the way in which Sherbros looked retrospectively at the development of Sherbro/Temne relations since the 1960s, when Temne fisherfolk started to compete with them in fishing. This period marks the gradual emancipation of strangers from their hosts and the erosion of uncontested Sherbro political authority at a local level.

Performing Identity

We can now attempt to draw a comparison between the two oral narratives presented above – Bureh Town and Tokeh – in terms of identity politics. In moral terms, discourses about kinship and fishing frame reciprocity as an ideal type of relationship (which appears successful in the first case and conflict-prone in the second case). In this way, oral accounts draw boundaries between clearly separated socioethnic groups, while suggesting, simultaneously, the subsequent malleability and plurality of Sherbro identity. In these stories, the claim to autochthony merges with issues of sociocultural mixing. Reciprocity becomes a paradoxical process that produces ethnic boundaries, while making them more porous.

Hybridity is encoded in oral texts at different levels. In both cases, hybridity proceeds from perceptions of past and current reciprocal exchanges. The account collected in Bureh Town results from a contemporary view of longlasting and deep social and family connections between populations of Bureh Town and York. These links are accepted and established through historical narration, because they confer a certain prestige to Sherbro families. Like the oral accounts analysed in Chapter 2, they create ambiguity and form the narrative substrate on which Sherbros can claim Krio identity (see Chapter 4).

The account collected in Tokeh tells us of kinship and social links established through mistrust. Yet, as Caillé (2007: 103) observes, the necessity to establish reciprocal exchange is always stronger with suspicious strangers and foes. This ambivalence means that forming an alliance and creating debt is a risky process on both sides – a process that can ultimately turn into betrayal and conflict. At the same time, these stories clearly establish the Temne origin of some Sherbro families, as Temne speakers assimilated into Sherbro society over generations. Thus, despite the fact that Sherbros tend to conceal Temne

origins, as illustrated in Mr Nicol's introductory vignette, these origins cannot be utterly rejected. This requires narrators to find a way to reconcile purity and heterogeneity in the narration itself. In this respect, the performance of Mr Johnson and the metanarrative around his story offered a nuanced approach to identity.

The story offers a historical frame to the consequences of more recent migration, since those identified as 'strangers' are those who now tend to resist local demands for integration and instead seek political autonomy. These conflicts in Tombo and Tokeh are further described in Chapter 7. In this respect, Mr Johnson crafted a coherent critique of the political situation in Tokeh. He presented himself, and not the headman, as the authority figure in possession of Sherbro oral texts. He grounded his legitimacy in his knowledge of language, but also in matrilineal transmission, and the fact that he had always lived in Tokeh, contrary to the headman and his secretary, who had gone to school intermittently in other areas and (in their own view) did not speak Sherbro that well. Mr Johnson embodied the various qualities that create the authority of the performer (Bauman and Briggs 1990: 77): access to oral texts, legitimacy, competence (he recontextualized the story in a credible way) and values (he was able to foreground the importance of the story for Sherbro collective identity). These qualities were recognized by the audience, including Mrs Koroma, who did not know the participants beforehand and nevertheless qualified Mr Johnson as 'the original man of Tokeh'. In brief, he had sufficient background to legitimate Sherbro autochthony.

Mr Johnson could be said to have offered us a story that was a veiled critique of the headman's leadership. Later, I learned that the headman was perceived as having built his power on a Temne electorate and having abandoned his 'Sherbro' identity. For instance, he refused to participate to Poro rituals (because, he told me later, he was a dedicated Muslim convert who had made the Hajj), whereas Mr Johnson was one of the most prominent and active senior members in Tokeh. Mr Johnson's depiction of a crisp religious difference between Temne and Sherbro populations at the end of the story indirectly spoke to this tense local political context. In the discussion that ensued, he mentioned that Pa Santigi's grandson had ruled for seventeen years and implied that the Sherbros had considered him a better headman than the current leadership. Implicitly, he referred to tensions among Sherbros themselves regarding the weight that they should give to Temne strangers in contemporary politics. In this regard, the headman embodied a strategy of acceptance and adaptation, whereas Mr Johnson used the scene to craft a discourse of resistance. In doing so, Mr Johnson shifted the boundaries of ethnic difference by rehabilitating the former headman with Temne origins – which valued the logics of assimilation – and dismissing the authority of the headman with Sherbro roots. In this way, he also underscored the importance to consider Sherbro identity as a plural one.

Fishing Migrations and Fishing Techniques

Let us now turn to fishing as the fulcrum of conflict. As much as fishing is a symbol of Sherbro/Krio social relatedness, it has come to express problematic relations with Temne-speaking populations, who are the most active and numerous fisherfolk on the Peninsula.

Temne-speaking fishermen migrated from the Sherbro coast to the Peninsula very early on. Migrations are mostly documented in Tombo, since it lies at the crossroads of several trading routes. It is the closest port to the Koya chiefdom and it is also an ideal trading point with the Sherbro coast up to Bonthe. Kotnik (1981) suggests that the first large Temne migration to Tombo occurred at the end of the nineteenth century. According to Hendrix (1984: 12; 1985: 71), the main population change instead occurred in the 1920s and 1930s, when Temne fishermen and their families started to settle permanently in Tombo. Similarly, in Tissana, on the south of the Yawri Bay, Diggins (2018: 43) reports that the arrival of Temne-speaking populations is traced to the interwar period and coincided with the introduction of the *banda* smoking technique, which allowed for the expansion of the commercial fishing economy. These developments, along the Sherbro coast and on the Peninsula alike, coincided with a specialization in fishing for bonga, which could be easily marketed in the interior due to its low price (Hornell 1929). The construction of the Peninsula Road at the end of the 1930s, by connecting fishing towns to Waterloo and Freetown markets, also facilitated trade.

Nevertheless, Sherbro people recall the 1960s as the turning point in their relations with Temne strangers. The fishing economy changed radically at the end the 1950s with the arrival of Ghanaian fisherfolk on the Sierra Leonean coast. Fanti speakers, who are well known for their fishing skills, introduced larger motorized canoes for crews of up to fifteen men, and nylon ring nets designed for deep-sea fishing and the harvesting of herring. This technique is now prevalent on the Peninsula. Fishermen deploy the net in a loop around the shoal and paddle the boat to the centre. They start the boat's engine and circle at high speed so that fish are caught in the net's mesh. In 2012, a big wharf like Tombo had ninety-three 'Ghanaian boats' (as they are called locally) in use and fifty in repair. As this technique requires large crews, many fishermen travel for the fishing season. Thus, on the Peninsula, fishing crews also include many Sherbros who come seasonally from the southern coast.

The introduction of this new technique in the 1960s brought important changes to the socioeconomic life of fishing towns. Fishing intensified, along with seasonal migration, as the new boats required large crews at the peak of the fishing season. In Tombo, Hendrix (1984: 19) states that 'the period from about 1955 to 1965 can be characterized as a period of radical social and economic development'. With large catches, the fishing economy became market-oriented

Figure 3.3. Ghanaian boats at Tombo harbour, 2011. © Anaïs Ménard

and women specialized in processing and marketing fish on a full-time basis. Meanwhile, the number of fishermen and fish traders settling in Tombo continued to grow. While Hendrix (ibid.: 12, 19) mentions 438 inhabitants in 1891 and 2,500 in 1967, Kotnik (1981) estimates the population at 7,000 inhabitants in 1981.

However, Ghanaian fishermen were expelled by the Sierra Leonean government in 1967. In Sierra Leone, as in many African countries, the post-independence period was marked by the expulsion of outsiders, as new governments tried to define the social and cultural boundaries of their nations (Skinner 1963). By then, the relations between Fanti speakers and local fishermen had become uneasy. Even before independence, local fishermen had complained of unfair competition and Ghanaians had been prohibited by colonial authorities from fishing in certain areas of the Peninsula. When they left, Temne-speaking fishermen took over the Ghanaian boat technique almost exclusively (Krabacher 1990: 203). By adopting this technique, they came to occupy a major economic niche, by which they reinforced their position as key actors of the local fishing economy. In 2012, Temne-speaking fishermen continued to hold a dominant position in fishing across the Peninsula and to reside in large fishing towns, such as Tombo, Mama Beach and Goderich.

Many Sherbro fishermen mentioned that the Temne-speaking population had trained with the Ghanaians and had acquired their skills. They emphasized the Temnes' massive involvement in fishing after the departure of the Ghanaians as a turning point in host/stranger relations. From the 1960s onwards, Temne fisherfolk settled on the Peninsula in a context of nation building and fast economic change, which may have coincided with a hardening of local group identities. These newcomers were identified collectively by their Sherbro hosts who felt progressively deprived of the monopoly in fishing. Thus, the contemporary use of the ethnic labels 'Temne' and 'Sherbro' reflects historical power relations. In the current political context, it allows people to draw a line between strangers and autochthones, regardless of the patterns of intermarriage that have existed between them.

The relative success of Temne-speaking populations in fishing made their relations with their hosts difficult. The increased commercialization of fishing in some places such as Tombo, Mama Beach, Tokeh and Goderich had several outcomes. Temne families became wealthier and expanded their activity, which created tensions with local fishermen. As Shack (1979a: 16) notes, the fact that migrants pursue economic opportunities 'inevitably gives rise to the belief that their economic success is being achieved at the expense of members of the host society'. Furthermore, more people migrated to the Peninsula during the 1970s and 1980s, and land pressure became a new problem (see Chapter 8). Finally, the sociodemographic ratio between hosts and strangers was progressively

reversed, which made Sherbro firstcomers lose their privileged access to political leadership.

In the present context, the conflict between hosts and strangers has become articulated around fishing technologies and ideologies. *Kunu-kunu* fishing is presented as 'proof' of Sherbro autochthony set against the capital-intensive model dominated by Temne latecomers. Although well-off Sherbro fishermen can also acquire Ghanaian boats and hire seasonal crews, they are quick to stress their rejection of this technology as an identity marker. In their view, a good fisherman has to learn the most difficult techniques first and prove his ability to face danger alone at sea. *Kunu-kunu* fishing illustrates men's courage and skills, and comes first in the learning process of a Sherbro fisherman. When asked about their preference for *kunu-kunu* fishing, Sherbro fishermen usually responded by stressing their independence. 'Sherbro fishermen like fishing alone', they would often say, and they would contrast it with the aggressive and dominating attitude of people fishing in crews, which also corresponded to the behavioural traits underlying the stereotypes about Temne populations. Moreover, being skilled fishermen remains perhaps the main symbol by which Peninsula Sherbros sustain their group identity, in the absence of Sherbro language use and formal customary rights to land.

While the *kunu-kunu* technique was presented as part of a 'Sherbro way of life', ethnicity does not determine individual economic choices, which are rather fluid and depend on many factors, including existing social networks, seasonal routes and capital. Some Temne migrants who had settled in the 1950s and 1960s had also adopted this technique as their own. Their practice of *kunu-kunu* fishing was subject to jokes and underwrote the joking relationship between Temne and Sherbro fishermen, who were on good terms. In Tokeh, for instance, a favourite anecdote among fishermen of both Sherbro and Temne origins was that when a Temne fisherman came to shore with his *kunu-kunu*, Sherbros would not help him to drag it past the waves, but would watch him from afar struggling to reach the coast by himself. The anecdote underscores both groups' acceptance of Sherbro dominance in traditional fishing techniques.

The decline of fish stocks and the increasing competition in the fishing sector have contributed to the 'fixing' of specific technologies as attributes of groups. Sherbros were quick to blame the use of unsustainable fishing methods by Ghanaian boat crews, which, they said, contributed to emptying deep-sea grounds. Fishermen often used nets with smaller meshes that catch younger fish, which endangers reproductive processes. *Kunu-kunu* fishermen also stigmatized Temne fishermen for their lack of knowledge (for instance, it was common to hear sentences like 'Temnes fish but do not know how to swim' or 'Temnes know about trading but not about fishing'). They also often mentioned that they disliked the species that Ghanaian boats' crews caught – sardines and mackerel – which they considered too small and tasteless. A Sherbro fisherman told

me that by fishing with the wrong nets, Temnes catch 'even fishes that are not edible; at least Sherbros don't eat them'. Hendrix (1984: 16) notes that before the 1950s, Yawri Bay fishermen used sardines only as bait. Refusing to share the same food also indicates social differentiation. This statement stressed not only bad fishing techniques and food tastes, but also the perception that Sherbros and Temnes would never belong to the same category of fishermen or to the same social category more generally.

Nonetheless, all local fishermen are threatened primarily by foreign-owned trawlers that catch fish offshore, often illegally, and deplete sea resources at a rapid pace. In April 2019, the Sierra Leonean government banned industrial fishing in the country's waters for a month in order to give fish stocks a chance to regenerate. Yet the results of this initiative were short-lived. Industrial fishing continues to destroy marine ecosystems and exacerbate the vulnerability of local livelihoods.[9] In 2018, many Sherbro fishermen believed that *kunu-kunu* fishing could not be maintained for long. The use of paddle canoes limits catches to near-shore sea grounds, while the rarity of fish stocks obliges other fishermen to go very far (and dangerously) out to sea. Thus, *kunu-kunu* fishermen have suffered much more from the fish stock depletion that had become so blatant the past years, and this technique is gradually becoming the symbol of a lost livelihood.

In recent years, Ghanaian boat and *kunu-kunu* fishermen have competed for the same sea grounds. Ghanaian boat crews can sometimes fish in areas closer to shore, although fishing regulations prevent them from doing so. Near the shore, they meet *kunu-kunu* fishermen, who practise stationary fishing (anchoring at a depth of a few metres and using a line to catch bottom fish). Although motorboats are not allowed to throw nets in another boat's fishing space, they sometimes encircle the canoes and when they draw the net, they detach the canoe's anchor and the smaller boat capsizes. If the fisherman on *kunu-kunu* gets caught in the net and cannot cut across it, he will drown.

Many such incidents were reported in big wharfs like Tombo. During my stay in Bureh Town, a *kunu-kunu* fisherman was encircled by two motorboats. A fight broke out between the two crews and another canoe fisherman who had come to rescue his friend. The crews pushed the two fishermen in the water and left them for dead, but they managed to reach the shore. When this incident happened, fishermen in Bureh Town were shocked and scared. They discussed extensively the fact that the sea had become a 'wild space' and that local authorities could no longer set regulations. Such ruthlessness, when other men could be left to drown, they said was because fishing was being practised on such a large scale that the fishermen on the water no longer knew each other. And the problem was growing worse: every day, they said, there were new people on the water, many of whom were unfamiliar with fishing. At the same time, government regulations concerning fishing spaces, methods and preservation strategies were hardly respected, if not completely overlooked.

Conclusion

It is possible to identify two strategies by which Sherbro communities in the past established relations of reciprocity with stranger groups. Sherbros and Krios (originally the black settlers of the Colony) became part of a residential zone bound by the central role of maternal kin. The presence of the settlers resulted in specific exchanges: Sherbros accessed the settlers' society by way of evangelization, marriage and child-fostering, while the settlers adopted aspects of the local culture, including the fishing livelihood. This historical process explains some of the ways in which Sherbro identity has acquired a Krio dimension and some of the ways in which Krios have included local elements within their cultural practices. Both aspects are discussed in Chapters 4 and 5 respectively. By contrast, Sherbro communities integrated members of other ethnic groups via marriage and livelihood by a process that required their (and their children's) assimilation into the Sherbro matrilineage. Thus, populations who claim Sherbro identity today are often descendants of assimilated strangers of various origins.

In both cases, oral narratives underline the ambiguity of reciprocal arrangements, which imply social obligation (to welcome strangers) and political interest (for Sherbros to have them on their side), but also gift-giving and amicability (Caillé 2007: 87). Hosts and strangers remain potential foes related by a series of mutual exchanges and debts materialized by various acts of giving (women, children, land, fish, knowledge etc.), of which oral traditions constitute the reminder. As we will see in Chapters 6 and 7, Sherbro communities further secure relationships of indebtedness by specific strategies of ritual initiation.

Oral traditions produce homogeneous representations of ethnic groups. They 'fix' identities by giving historical justification to the categorization of groups as allies or enemies and provide a narrative against which contemporary relations between groups are measured. This reveals the relevance of collective performances for Sherbro identity making in relation to other groups. Oral traditions result from a process of 'selecting' (Miller 1980: 17), by which Sherbro populations emphasize specific aspects of their past relationships with groups of strangers. The description of the Sherbro/Krio alliance veils tensions that may have otherwise existed between local Sherbro populations and the settlers. Similarly, the idiom of nonassociation between Sherbro and Temne populations conceals dynamics of integration that have taken place and continue to exist between both groups. Nevertheless, both types of narrative also show Sherbros' plural identity and ability to code-switch according to socially constructed hierarchies between groups – an aspect that I will explore in the next chapter.

Notes

1. Nowadays in Krio settlements, inheritance rights are based on English law principles of bilateral filiation. This specificity originates in their early integration in the Colony, where English law prevailed (see Chapter 8). Children can inherit properties (house or land), which are usually legally documented, on the mother's or on the father's side.

2. Hornell (1928: 14) reported that Kru canoes 'are especially numerous in the coastal fishery of the Peninsula', but only a few were to be found in Yawri Bay and Shenge. Conversely, more recently, Krabacher (1990: 163) counted only two Kru canoes among hundreds of 'Bullom canoes' (larger canoes that can accommodate net fishing) on the Sherbro coast.

3. The Kroomen began arriving in the Province of Freedom from Liberia in 1793. They were hired as boat crews and soon constituted a labour force to be hired for various kinds of activities developed in the Colony (Kuczynski 1948: 80; Tonkin 2010: 112). In 1822, there were about a thousand Kroomen in Freetown. Some also lived by fishing on the Peninsula coast (Kuczynski 1948: 81, Fyfe 1962: 125, 135).

4. Recent historical work by Galli and Rönnbäck (2021) also shows that soil fertility in the Peninsula area was uneven, and many places were unsuitable for commercial agriculture.

5. This technique was reported along the Sherbro coast and on the Peninsula until the late 1940s (Hendrix 1984; Krabacher 1990: 304). On the Banana Islands, a former Krio captain of benefit boats recalled that he used to go fishing in Shenge under Mrs Bailor-Caulker, who was elected the paramount chief of Shenge District in 1962. The same story was recalled by several people, which would indicate that some benefit boats were still sailing in the 1960s.

6. Colonial Office, Great Britain. 'Sierra Leone. No. 26' in *The Reports Made for the Year 1850* (1851: 179–80).

7. Hendrix (1984: 4) mentions that by the end of the nineteenth century, four ethnic groups – the Temne, Mende, Sherbro and Krio – had produced an extended maritime vocabulary. Hornell (1929: 15) mentions that Kent was a centre for Kru canoe tarpon fishing and refers many times to 'Creole fishermen' in his accounts of the Sierra Leonean coast.

8. A story with a similar narrative frame was collected in Tombo (see Ménard 2017b).

9. For many years, Chinese-owned trawlers have operated in Sierra Leonean waters, practicing illegal, unregulated and unreported (IUU) fishing. In addition to employing highly unsustainable fishing techniques, most do not abide by national regulations and fish without a licence or in zones forbidden to trawling. In recent years, the impact on the artisanal fishery sector and local economies has been devastating. Local populations' food intake has declined sharply. The depletion of fish stocks and growing inability to make a living has also pushed fishermen working on Ghanaian boats to move to other neighbouring countries like Guinea. The dramatic consequences of trawling have been documented in big fishing towns like Tombo (see the 2022 documentary film *New Boats* by Lansana Mansaray). Yet smaller towns of the Peninsula have also suffered severely from the depletion of fish stocks, particularly in places where people fish with smaller artisanal boats ('mina boat' or *kunu-kunu*) near the coastline.

Chapter 4

Discourses of the 'Civilized Man'

Ethnic hybridity refers to the construction of a plural sense of identity, one that bridges ethnic categories, as a result of specific historical conditions. Sherbros often refer to themselves by the Krio word *civilayzd*. In Chapter 2, I explained how Sherbro populations, since early colonial times, acted as economic and cultural brokers between European traders and local populations on the coast. Prominent families integrated Europeans by way of marriage and embraced early Western influences, such as Christianity and literacy, by which they could achieve a better social position in their own social context. On the Peninsula, people often referred to early colonial history and the role of Sherbros as middlemen to claim a 'civilized' status in the present. They also referred to the history of the Colony more specifically, and to the early contacts that local populations established with the Liberated Africans, as discussed in Chapter 3. In these usages, 'civilized' meant educated and converted.

For many decades, on the Peninsula, local populations were not assimilated into the settlers' communities. The social arrangement between them and the settlers ensured multiple exchanges between the two groups, as well as the possibility of remaining distinct. Sherbros, in this process, acquired an identity that they now define as both Krio and *kɔntri*. In this regard, individuals experience their identity as being inherently dual. The use of *civilayzd* and *civilayzeshɔn*, as contemporary local terms, indicate the combination between Krio and *kɔntri* affiliations: they can be used to claim a high social status and an educated background despite indigenous ancestry or to indicate autochthony despite the ability to assume a Krio identity.[1] Originally, the Krio/native

dichotomy was more of a social distinction. However, as Krios gradually be-
came recognized as an ethnic group in Sierra Leone, it can be said that Sherbro
identity has acquired a Krio ethnic component. In this chapter, I explore fur-
ther the discourses by which Sherbro assert Krio identity.

Krio Identity and the Colonial Project

The emergence of a new patriotism in Britain after the defeat in the American
War of Independence in 1775 gave prominence to the imperial project (Colley
2012: 147). The anti-slavery campaign became an emblem of the country's glory
and moral superiority over other Western nations. The abolition of the slave
trade in 1807 and later of slavery in 1833 became important in the discourse of
British supremacy in the Victorian era. Colley (ibid.: 367) notes that 'it supplied
the British with a powerful legitimation for their claims to be the arbiters of the
civilized and the uncivilized world'. Thus, the early settlers of the Province of
Freedom were endowed with the mission of spreading Christianity and civiliz-
ing their fellow Africans. They were symbols for indigenous populations who
had been exposed to civilization. The Liberated Africans, soon after their arrival
in the Colony, also acquired the socioeconomic skills that allowed them to move
up the social ladder of the colonial society.

   For the settlers, education and Christianity became privileged avenues for
upward mobility in a context where social success was tied to the achievement
of Western standards of civilization. Porter (1963: 88) argues that 'religion and
education are almost inseparable, for the school developed, not as an institu-
tion in itself, but as a function of the church'. In 1816, Governor MacCarthy
asked the Church Missionary Society (CMS), which was linked to the Anglican
Church, to act both as a civilizing agent and as an administrative force in rural
settlements newly founded by Liberated Africans. The system of parish admin-
istration ensured a longlasting Christian influence on Liberated African popula-
tions (Peterson 1969). By the mid-nineteenth century, mission churches opened
schools that were accessible to children of both settlers and Liberated Africans,
thereby unifying these two groups around common values and norms (Porter
1963: 92). Between 1830 and 1870, Liberated Africans gained social recognition
and respectability not only through formal education, but also 'by virtue of their
success in trade and business' (ibid: 7). In the Colony, social standards learned
through education were in line with Christian values. The social qualities pupils
acquired, such as discipline, honesty, modesty and moral strength, were perceived
to be the result of a strict adherence to Christian dogmas (Colbeck 1956: 119).

   From the 1870s onwards, the descendants of the Liberated Africans born
in the Colony became increasingly referred to as 'Creoles'. Over time, this term
came to apply 'generally to the settlers and their descendants' (Luke 1939: 53).
This mix of populations also included people from neighbouring ethnic groups,

particularly Temne and Bullom populations who had intermarried with the settlers. Until the late nineteenth century, settler society was flexible and open enough to allow for the incorporation of many people of indigenous origin (see Porter 1963; White 1987). Nevertheless, the emergence of the Creole – and later Krio – group as a distinct, self-identified and bounded group is a historically contested issue. It is unclear to which extent the 'Creole' identifier was in use among local populations of Freetown by the end of the nineteenth century.[2]

Yet historians, in their attempts at defining the specificity of *Creoledom* (Porter 1963) or *Kriodom* (Wyse 1989), largely contributed to the portrayal of a homogeneous Krio 'elite culture' that emerged in the course of the nineteenth century. Members of Freetown's intellectual and social elite entered prestigious professions and became civil servants, medical doctors and lawyers. Upward social mobility, along with the prestige of working for imperial glory, created a sense of being part of the elite in Victorian society. They were expected to be examples for autochthonous Africans, adopt Christian values, behave in a European manner and reject African traditions (Spitzer 1974: 39). This became increasingly important as the idea of 'civilization' also united Britons around a feeling of superiority over alien cultures and societies that 'they only imperfectly understood, but usually perceived as inferior in some way' (Colley 2012: 377).

Upper-class Krio culture also rested on the adoption of a specific 'European way of life' that proved belonging in the British social world (Cohen 1981; Porter 1963; Spitzer 1974). Members of this group stigmatized the 'uncivilized' and 'primitive' habits of populations of the interior, and they forged a rather exclusive identity, based on membership to various restricted social circles, such as Christian churches, school circles and Masonic lodges.

Yet the 'elite culture' reflected only a small part of the larger and more socially and culturally heterogeneous group of peoples who inhabited the Colony. The descendants of the settlers were segmented along religious affiliations, occupations and social classes (Goerg 1995: 125–26). Many of them were Muslims, often of Yoruba origins, and this group was also known as the Aku (Cole 2013). Many inhabitants of the Colony lived in rural areas of the Peninsula, as their ancestors had been dispatched in villages of the parish administration system (see Chapter 2). Their professional occupations varied, as they engaged in trading, but also in fishing or gardening (Porter 1963: 111–12). As Dixon-Fyle and Cole (2006: 6) observe, 'the vast majority of people in the emergent society by the turn of the twentieth century belonged to the working class'.

Krio identity, although fluctuating and multi-dimensional, became more politically pronounced in the first half of the twentieth century, as the British created the conditions for populations of the Protectorate to participate in politics. The expansion of the British sphere of influence led to the declaration of the Protectorate in 1896. This resulted in the Hut Tax War in 1898, as Britain sought to impose taxation on inhabitants of the Protectorate. The populations of the Protectorate

held Krios responsible for the taxation and tensions escalated. More than ever, inhabitants of the Colony felt alien and were perceived as such. After 1898, Britain implemented 'a policy of separate and dual development' (Caulker 1976: 122), which deepened sociocultural and political divergences between Colony and Protectorate. The Krio elite was increasingly sidelined from national politics. In response, Krios claimed their distinctiveness from people of the Protectorate and emphasized their closeness to the British. In 1853, Liberated Africans had become British subjects and two years later, they had been granted British citizenship. Many Krios, in the period leading up to independence, understood Sierra Leonean identity as restricted to the territory of the Colony and as concomitant with a 'Creole nation' whose members would continue to hold British citizenship (Caulker 1976: 22).[3] Yet they progressively realized that although they had been the executive force of Britain's 'civilizing mission', they had never been considered as part of the *commandment* (Mbembe 2001: 31). The political dominion of Krio leaders in the Colony eroded significantly, as the 1947 Constitution gave people of the Protectorate a majority in the Legislative Council. Following independence in 1961, Krios became a minority group in the new nation.

Across the postcolonial decades, Krios have remained socially and culturally separate from the rest of the country. They have therefore attracted social antagonism. After independence, urbanization encouraged rural-urban migration, and this facilitated social mixing, but without sufficient upward mobility. The 1970s and 1980s were marked by massive unemployment and social discontent, which provided some of the fodder for the Civil War that started in 1991. Because Krios 'continued to figure prominently among the educated elite', they were among those that the rebels wanted to destroy (Knörr 2010b: 744).

In postwar urban Sierra Leone, 'Krio' has again become a more open category. It is no longer perceived only as a class-based ethnic group, but also as a form of transethnic identification marked by an urban and modern lifestyle (Knörr 2010a, 2010b). As Cole (2013: 128) notes, 'there has been an inexorable *Kriolization* of language and culture in contemporary Sierra Leone' (emphasis in original). Those who claim a Krio identity (without a Krio family background) also associate 'village life' with a lack of opportunities and the violence of the war. Krio identity is also expressed through the widespread use of the Krio language in a highly diverse urban environment.

The sheer exponential population growth in the Western Area makes the use of some common language necessary, and Krio has resumed its historical status in this respect. The figures in the 2004 census on ethnicity and language show that in the Western Area, Krio is now also widely employed as the *lingua franca* by recent migrants.[4] Young migrants, or people from the first generation born on the Peninsula, feel that they progressively forget their home language, which they tend not to use in their daily activities. Jokes were common among youths in the streets of Freetown, as they teased each other, often in a friendly way, to

be 'Krio'. Conversely, signs of 'upcountry' accents – when Krio is not 'clear' grammatically, not fluent and mixed with words of local languages – were easily mocked in a dismissive way, including on social media.

However, my friends in Freetown did not consider themselves Krio. When asked about their own identity, they stated their ethnic background. Nevertheless, they usually admitted that, as they spoke better Krio than their home language and as they lived as young urbanites with no intention to 'go back to the village', they could be seen as Krio. They did not mind the ascription of a Krio identity. 'Krio' has become a category of performance, which does not necessarily mean that individuals embrace it as an identity. Performing Krio-ness symbolizes a transition between two lifestyles, yet it is a transition that does not require abandoning one's own ethnic identity (Knörr 2010b).

Civilayzd and *Civilayzeshɔn*

The terms *civilayzd* and *civilayzeshɔn* implicitly refer to the ambivalence of Krio identity, which blended African and European sociocultural features. They indicated the emergence of hybrid cultural forms and creative identity-making processes at the margins of the colonial power. By the end of the nineteenth century, Krio mimesis of Western habits had become an object of mockery and criticism from colonial authorities. Bhabha (1984: 129) states that mimicry 'in disclosing the ambivalence of colonial discourse also disrupts its authority'. As Britain progressed in its efforts to control the interior, Krio mimicry became a 'menace' to the colonial regime because of its disruptive character, but also because Krios had key administrative positions and were able to act politically (Caulker 1976: 140–46). Hence, 'authentic' African identities became valorized and Krios were dismissed as imperfect copies of Europeans.

The 'civilized' under colonial regimes transgressed the lines separating Africanness from European civilization. In Liberia, Tonkin (2010: 123) writes that 'the civilised faced both ways and their actual relationships meant that simple binary oppositions between aboriginal and settler cannot be made, any more than the variable, frequently shifting boundary between civilised … and tribal'. She notes that the English word *country* is used pejoratively and in opposition to *Kwii meni* (civilized matters). Yet, when *Kwii meni* is contrasted with *Zo meni* (ritual matters), the terms are not mutually exclusive, but represent 'different domains of knowledge, power and expertise' (Tonkin 1981: 322). Thus, people at the margins engaged with two distinct social worlds, crafting their own understanding of what 'civilized' meant to them – a combination of cultural assets and social skills that allowed them to navigate the colonial world, while remaining members of their own societies of origins.

The ambiguous meaning of *civilayzd* and *civilayzeshɔn* persists, as these terms contain an ambivalent discourse: they can be used either to praise

educational achievement or to disparage a person who tries to hide his or her ethnic origins by taking up a Krio lifestyle. On the one hand, being *civilayzd* is increasingly associated with modernization[5] and with a Krio lifestyle, by which one asserts one's rights to modernity and membership in a globalized world (Ferguson 2002). The word *krionayzd* is also used as a synonym, both as an adjective (somebody who has become Krio) and as a verb (the process of becoming Krio). On the other hand, *civilayzd/krionayzd* means being Krio but not quite, as one remains an indigenous Sierra Leonean – a *kɔntriman.* As in Liberia, the words Krio and *kɔntri* cover experiences that 'can be shared by the same person' (Tonkin 2010: 322). For Sherbros, this ambivalence is taken for granted due to their historical interactions with Krios: Sherbro identity 'is' *civilayzd.* It possesses an ascribed indigenous (*kɔntri*) component, as well as a Krio component that is achieved through education and socialization.

As a result, Sherbros have turned the contemporary terms *civilayzd* and *civilayzeshɔn* into claim-making concepts for both Krio and autochthonous social statuses, particularly in the context of recent migration: these terms simultaneously express social and cultural distinctiveness, and substantiate an indigenous identity. On the Peninsula, both of these identity claims are important, as Sherbros may want to distinguish themselves from migrants, but also to support their claim to be considered autochthonous. In this sense, most oppositional terms can be alternatively derogatory (towards others) or valorizing (towards oneself): being a *kɔntriman,* belonging to a *trayb* (tribe), having a *tradishɔn* (tradition) or, by contrast, being Krio. By playing on the contrast between Krio and *kɔntri*, people also reappropriate the ideological legacy of British colonialism in current processes of identity making, and re-enact relations of domination/subordination between Freetown/the Peninsula and the Provinces. These concepts continue to frame social reality and discourses: socially and morally loaded dichotomies are reinterpreted on the basis of contemporary political concerns.

This chapter and the next one focus on performances of Sherbro identity as *civilayzd* – that is, as both Krio and *kɔntri*. Sherbro identity includes the Krio and *kɔntri* registers, namely two repertoires of linguistic and nonlinguistic signs that individuals are able to employ according to social situations and contexts (Agha 2007). People move between the Krio and *kɔntri* registers by using linguistic and behavioural signs, such as speech, gestures, demeanour, clothes and social habits. The identity displayed is based on the ability of the audience (the researcher, members of other groups, institutions etc.) to read those signs.

Adopting signs of the Krio register is certainly not the prerogative of Sherbros only. People of other ethnic origins can also choose to 'appear' Krio in certain situations. As in the case of other creole identities, self-identifying as Krio depends on one's ability to embrace a 'way of life' and adopt the local creole language as one's own (see Eriksen 2007, 2019). However, people of Sherbro origin claim being ethnically Sherbro and socially Krio at the same time, without

necessarily switching. Thus, I am concerned here with the way in which Sherbro identity is constituted by having a claim to being Krio.

Family names are taken to constitute the most obvious evidence of historical links between Sherbro and Krio populations. Most Sherbros have English names, such as Douglas, Johnson, Pratt, Williams or Thompson, among many others. Mission churches in neighbouring Liberated African villages surely played a crucial role in the baptism of local populations.[6] Moreover, the ward system, by which the settlers brought up children coming from poor local households, was an important aspect of those relations. Children converted to Christianity often 'achieved a high degree of education … and adopted the name of the fostering family' (Cohen 1981: 64). In Sherbro settlements, not many people know the origin of their family name with certainty, but the majority assume that one of their parents had been 'adopted' and had taken the name of a foster parent or a missionary. In other words, these family names do not supersede other local family names that are to remain hidden in order to conceal non-Krio origins, as is usual in fosterage. In this respect, people can claim that they are part of the same local Krio/Sherbro extended families, and they used historical account to substantiate those claims, as presented in Chapter 2.

Previously, Krio identity has been described as relatively bounded and based on endogamy. Some of the gatekeepers of Krio identity, such as the Krio urban upper class, may still maintain this perception. Yet, the discourses by which Krios and Sherbros on the Peninsula call on real and fictive kinship questions this assumption.[7] In their shared residential zone, Sherbros and Krios understand themselves as related based on the model of the Krio 'grand cousinhood' – an extended family network in which relations between members are maintained 'by frequent, extensive and expensive family "ceremonials"' (Cohen 1981: 62). In Chapter 5, I will explain how these ceremonials, like marriages, funerals and ceremonies for the dead, strengthen Sherbro/Krio networks of kin on the Peninsula. For now, suffice it to say that family names allow people to trace family relatives in several, if not all, settlements, and a similar English name creates fictive kinship between strangers meeting for the first time.

Below, I explore the discourses and practices by which Sherbros on the Peninsula claim Krio identity. In turn, the association of the Krio and *kɔntri* dimensions within a single identity allows individuals of various origins to use those registers not as opposing classificatory categories, but as two sets of emblems that complement each other.

Education and Child-Fostering

How does a person learn to display the relevant signs of a register? Although there are many avenues, including the street relations mentioned above, education is a powerful site for such learning. Certainly, education was central to

personal narratives about how Sherbro became Krio. People commonly stated that 'an educated Sherbro is a Krio' and suggested that, should I study the ethnic background of civil servants in Freetown, I would certainly find most of them to be Sherbro. Such individuals had *krionayzd*, they said, achieving a higher social status through educational and professional achievement. In addition to formal education, fosterage by a Krio family and early socialization according to Krio principles is an important avenue of status change (Cohen 1981: 36).[8] Such socialization, according to Sherbros, makes them belong to the Krio sociocultural world on a different ground than does a mere 'performance' of Krio-ness (language, habits) by people who have migrated to the Peninsula.

To be *krionayzd*, for a Sherbro, is not a sign of assimilation to the Krio group, but a way to have a complete Sherbro identity – one that is part Krio and enables easy individual mobility between Sherbro and Krio communities. Indeed, Sherbros claim that because they adopted the Krio system 'early on' (in history), Sherbro communities can reproduce Krio norms and Christian-infused educational and socialization practices without the actual presence of Krios. They can reproduce, on their own, both Sherbro and Krio social systems. In other words, Sherbros on the Peninsula consider their identity as inherently dual. They often claim that they have integrated the 'Krio system' as part of their own identity.

Many *kɔntri* people raised in Krio homes may navigate Krio and *kɔntri* registers easily, employing a wider range and variety of even subtle signs to mark this identity. The distinction of the Sherbros comes in two ways: first, in the explicit claims they make that Krio identity is constituent of Sherbro identity; and, second, in a history of particular relations related to fosterage and education. Child-fostering, by which poorer families send a child to be educated in a Krio household, has played (and continues to play) an important role in reproducing Krio society. These children, who are not necessarily Sherbro, are referred to by Krio as *men pikin* (a child to mind/raise). Historically, the association of the Sherbro group with the Colony, as well as their geographical proximity with the black settlers on the Peninsula, made its participation in fosterage more frequent and intense than that of other groups.

Practices of child-fostering between Sherbro and Krio therefore differ from the usual pattern. Specifically, fostered Sherbro children continue to circulate between Sherbro and Krio communities, even as they acquire Krio identity. Also important is the fact that the long tradition of fosterage means that even Sherbro on the Peninsula who were never fostered, or only briefly, still consider their own socialization and education, including their mastery of Krio as a native language, sufficient to make them 'Krio'. As we shall see in the last section of this chapter, this inbetween status tends to be recognized by members of other ethnic groups, who readily use their kin ties with Sherbro families in order to claim Krio-ness. The Krio living in neighbouring settlements also accept the close association of local Sherbros with themselves. Although they could distinguish

between individuals who had been fostered in Krio families and those who had not, they usually chose to acknowledge other individual connections and memories for such individuals instead, while maintaining that 'Sherbros are Krio' anyway (and mentioning their common origins – see Chapter 2).

Despite their claims that it is no longer necessary, fostering is still practised by many Sherbro. A Sherbro child will be sent to well-to-do Krio relatives, who will pay for their schooling. In the past, such fostering was justified on the rationale that schools were located in Krio settlements. Nowadays, many Sherbro settlements also have primary schools, but the quality of the teaching is still reported to be lower. The schools in Krio settlements enjoy a higher prestige and parents prefer to send their children to York, Sussex, Hamilton or Freetown. These places also offer secondary education, which is not the case in many Sherbro settlements. By placing children with Krio relatives, parents also expect a good Krio 'training' and nourish the hope that the guardians will provide access to the benefits of the 'civilized' world and to opportunities that they cannot offer (see Bledsoe 1990: 76).

However, actual experiences with child-fostering are described with ambivalence. At a collective level, fosterage has worked as an important mechanism of creolization, both in Sierra Leone (Cohen 1981) and Guinea Bissau (Trajano Filho 1998), and in both cases, it has been used as a way to create alliances and cement patronage relationships between social groups. Fosterage usually reinforces the subordination of the family that gives a child into fosterage and its dependence on the relative who takes responsibility for the child (ibid.: 453). Fosterage creates asymmetrical relations: Sherbro are dependent on Krio relatives, who have a higher educational capital, and often more money to pay for school fees and material. Sherbros often mention that foster children are chastised, deprived of food and exploited by being made to do household chores. Still, parents rarely act on their children's complaints because they do not want to demonstrate ingratitude (Bledsoe 1990). Similarly, parents look at harsh training as the price needed to 'earn' Krio education, to reinforce family and social networks with Krios, and to secure access to a social group that has higher status. In this regard, members of the child-giving group owe a social debt to the group that practises fosterage.

Nevertheless, on the Peninsula, due to the proximity of settlements, it appears that parents cannot really force their children to stay in situations in which they might suffer. Individual narratives of child-fostering do not emphasize structures of patronage, but rather flexible relationships in which children also remain in control of their own mobility and may turn back to their own village in the event of problems. The following examples describe the individual trajectories of two residents of Bureh Town, who did part of their schooling in York in the 1980s. At that time, there was no primary school in Bureh Town. These stories illustrate the flexibility in social and geographic mobility produced by fosterage.

Barki was born in Bureh Town. His father used to go fishing regularly in York and introduced his son to one of the fish dealers with whom he worked. She found a sponsor for Barki, who moved to York. The Krio lady who took charge of him baptized him in the Methodist church and changed his first name from Barki (the name of the fourth male child in Sherbro) to Abioseh (a Krio name of Yoruba origin). Yet, she kept his family name unchanged. He started going to school, but the lady never gave him lunch. He also mentioned regular beating, which made him want to run away. The Krio woman, he said, used to give him money to buy cakes, but she soon accused him of hiding the money for other purposes. He used to go back to Bureh Town on weekends and complained to his mother. By then, he was studying for the selective entrance exam of the senior secondary school and felt that he also needed coffee to be able to study more. Hence, every weekend, he used to take food and coffee with him for the whole week in York. Right after his exam, he fell ill and went back to Bureh Town in order to get treated with traditional medicine. As the relationship with his Krio sponsor had already soured, she refused to take him back and, when he was accepted to senior secondary school, he moved to Sherbro relatives in Tokeh while continuing his schooling in York. By then, school pupils living in Tokeh crossed the river every day to go to class in York. Later on, he worked in tourism in Tokeh and eventually settled in Bureh Town. He does not go to York very often, but he considers the son of his Krio foster (with whom he was raised and who still lives in York) to be within his network of close relatives.

The second example is a woman. Gloria was also born in Bureh Town, her father's village. She was raised there, but also knew her mother's place, Mama Beach. A Krio woman who was a teacher at the primary school in York decided to take her for schooling in York when she was seven. The woman used to buy fish in Bureh Town to do some business. She baptized Gloria at the Brown Methodist Church in York. She changed the girl's birth name to Gloria, but allowed her to keep her family name. After a few years, Gloria returned to Bureh Town to take care of her grandmother and did not complete secondary school. Meanwhile, she was sent at the age of fifteen to become initiated into the female initiation society in Mama Beach. Her Krio sponsor agreed to this because Gloria would receive a different type of training there that would be equally useful: looking after a house, taking care of a husband and so on. Later in life, she married a Krio man and settled with him in York for several years, then moved back to Bureh Town to stay with her new husband. The three children of her first marriage were raised both in Bureh Town and York. Yet, Gloria says that she still feels emotionally closest to her relatives in Mama Beach.

Social mobility characterizes all points of the fosterage cycle. Krio sponsors can be extended relatives, but they might also be friends, business partners or other interested parties (like a schoolteacher) who accept to 'train' the children of poorer families. Often – although it does not show up in these two narratives –

the fosterer benefits from the child's free labour. These stories clearly show how the fostering relationship does not usually lead to the child's permanent assimilation into the Krio group. Child-fostering in Krio families is a way by which Sherbro children learn the attributes of Krio identity and the practices of Krio socialization, while remaining *kɔntri*. Children move back and forth between locations, and can experience social and emotional attachment to both.[9] Later in life, they may continue to attend the church into which they were baptized, but they are also likely to continue 'traditional' initiations – even with the support of their sponsors (in this regard, it is not unusual to meet older Krio women who are also senior ritual leaders of Bondo, as will be seen in Chapter 6).

Mobility is central to Sherbro educational strategies: one has to seize the opportunity to get the best education possible, but remain attached to one's 'home' – often the mother's place, as Gloria's story illustrates. As one Sherbro man stated, children raised in Krio settlements do not forget their ethnic origins:

> [Krios] used to look down on us. The only thing that made them consider us was education. A Krio would adopt a child and put him in school. But the child would not turn Krio. He would know where he belongs and would be able to say: 'These are my people.'

Geographical proximity of their home settlement allows children to maintain a certain amount of autonomy and mobility. They have regular contacts with their family, can travel back to their home village on weekends, discuss things with their parents and complain about possible ill treatment they have received. Parental influence maintains the children's familiarity with the social and cultural sides of Sherbro settlements − for instance, in Barki's and Gloria's stories, the fishing livelihood, initiation societies, and/or traditional healing.

Individuals often looked at their experience as foster children in terms of agency, stating that they decided to go back to their home or to move when they did not feel satisfied with their situation. Child agency may be retrospectively overstated, yet these narratives interestingly reflect the adult experiences of mobility between settlements described in Chapter 3. The following story was narrated by a Sherbro man, whose parents were from Tokeh:

> I used to live with my grandmother [father's mother] in Tokeh. She sent me at an early age to town. But I was very stubborn so she decided to send me *na dems*[10] to the Banana Islands. We walked and passed by Bureh Town. There, we met my grandmother's sister. She said: 'Leave him to me before you send him *na dems*.' So I stayed in Bureh Town for two years. By then, my father had come *alɛn* to Bureh Town and had taken another woman there. Since I was not going to school, he sent me to one

lady in York. She put me in school but treated me badly. She employed me to sweep, to do a lot of housework, and she did not give me enough food. At that time, our house in Tokeh was empty. Because of this Krio mammie, I did not feel well in York, so I decided to go back to Tokeh. My father told me that if I would leave York, he would not pay for my school fees anymore. I had done four classes ... I told [my friend from Tokeh], who studied in York with me, that I wanted to go back to my village and live on my own. So, one day, I ran away. I went to my friend's grandmother and told her that I had come to live with her ... So, the three of us started living together in Tokeh. The Krio mammie told my father that I had ran away, so my father stopped paying for my fees.

The movements described are typical of Sherbro strategies of education. At first, the grandmother had planned to hand her grandson over to a Krio friend in the Banana Islands, a place associated with punishment and discipline. Then, his father decided to place him in York. Residence with a Krio family is a token of proper socialization and may involve strict discipline. Nevertheless, children's knowledge of the area and of their relatives in many other settlements allows them to easily challenge their parents' decisions, thereby contesting the dominant narrative of patronage. Geographical proximity implies that sponsors have less authority and control over children. Once enrolled in school, and provided that they find somebody to pay for schooling, children know that they can continue studying regardless of their residence and therefore avoid 'socialization by hard-ship' (Bledsoe 1990). In Barki's case, the child succeeded: although the Krio lady broke her sponsorship, he went to live in Tokeh and continued his schooling in York, until his parents ran out of money to fund his secondary school. However, in the story told by the man from Tokeh, the father stopped paying his school fees because the child had broken the family's loyalty towards the Krio sponsor.

These stories and others show further nuance in the relations between Sherbro *men pikin* and their Krio fosters. In these cases, residence with a Krio foster parent does not necessarily imply economic support because foster parents do not always pay school fees. In such cases, the contracted 'debt' is not economic, but moral. In the past, placing a child in a family living in a Krio settlement was instead a question of location and access to better schooling. This may explain why individual narratives do not focus on relations of dependency and debt, but rather on flexible 'arrangements' between families. Moreover, the 'real' Krio identity of those relatives is often questioned and reframed within the logics of *krionayzeshɔn* between the two groups. For instance, the 'Krio lady' who had sponsored Barki's education was a Sherbro woman born in Tokeh, who had married a man living in York and had lived most of her life there. Similarly, one woman living in Tokeh explained that she had sent her elder daughter for schooling in York to a Sherbro relative on the mother's side. She concluded 'You

see, she's not even a Krio' in order to downplay the social and status differences that this type of relation might have implied. To her, as to many others, fostering resulted from a family arrangement with *krionayzd* Sherbro relatives.

Many parents also send their children to Krio settlements or to Freetown in order to prevent them from becoming attracted to fishing and tourism, which are considered less socially prestigious occupations. Nowadays, as tourism develops on the Peninsula and offers quick financial returns, parents often express the concern that it may cause a higher number of dropouts. As early as the 1980s, many people had decided to leave school to seek employment in the tourism sector. At the same time, tourism allows people to diversify their livelihood choices later in life. Many youths are unable to complete secondary school due to financial constraints. They often come back to their hometown and start fishing. Stories of incomplete schooling were common and often aimed at demonstrating that pursuing a livelihood by fishing was a matter of survival even for many who had received an education.

The cases of Barki and Gloria also point to the specificity in the use of names by Krio sponsors. Sherbros on the Peninsula have English surnames in large part because of historical relations of fosterage. Nowadays, Krio sponsors tend to leave the child's family name unchanged, and to change only his or her first name as a sign of a new religious and social affiliation. This practice supports the possibility for Sherbro children to keep their first identification alongside the Krio one, and to selectively expand and develop kin networks on both sides later in life. A once-fostered child is not obligated to use his or her baptismal (Krio) name. Although she moved back to Bureh Town, Gloria liked to use the name she acquired in York. In contrast, Barki took back his Sherbro birth name and was addressed by most people by his initiation name or by the foreign name he used with tourists. Baptismal names do not erase previous identifications, but add a new point of reference in a larger identification spectrum. A baptismal name, which is usually an English and/or biblical name, combined with an English surname classifies a person as Krio and marks a higher social status. By contrast, the use of a birth name or initiation name follows the more common practice in Sherbro settlements. Thus, Gloria might appear to perform a Krio identity slightly more than Barki, but both have maintained close emotional relations (and some social ones) with their Krio foster relatives.

Different names also may be used for different audiences. At first, my presence encouraged people to present themselves with the polished combination of a baptismal name and English surname. People gave vague explanations about the origins of their family names, such as 'I'm English' (and even once 'I'm Scottish' as the person had the surname Walker), either referring to distant white or settler ancestors, or assuming that one of their forefathers had been 'adopted' a long time ago. Only when they knew more about my research did they mention their Sherbro birth name and/or initiation name. Initiation names in particular

were used as emblems of a *kɔntri* identity. When used in everyday life, initiation names tie an individual to a locality. In the 1980s, so I was told, Sherbro authorities even tried to systematize the use of society names as official middle names on administrative documents. Although their initiative was not conclusive, it demonstrates a wish to register *kɔntri* names alongside their Krio baptismal names and surnames.

Practices of Socialization

While having benefited from 'Krio training' in a Krio family is a source of pride, Sherbros insist that they have adopted those practices of child socialization as their own. Individuals emphasize the intergenerational transmission of the 'Krio system' within Sherbro settlements. In the above-mentioned examples, Barki spent just over a year in York, but still insisted to me that he was trained as a Krio. He referred both to his own time in York and to the fact that his own mother had been raised by a Krio family. Both Gloria and Barki found their education relevant in explaining their behavioural and moral traits, and said that they had raised their children the same way. Being Krio means knowing how to behave properly, as a Krio. The early adoption of Krio behaviours based on discipline and obedience is contrasted with habits seen as *kɔntri*. Those narratives re-enact the Krio/*kɔntri* dichotomy in the context of migration and position Sherbros as *civilayzd* in contrast to *kɔntri* populations.

The role of early socialization is particularly important in achieving Krioness. Both Krios and Sherbros describe an ideal child-rearing that establishes strict parental authority and rigorous child obedience (Steady 2001: 128). Children must learn the values that have become features of the Krio elite status; they must be hardworking, obedient, humble and expect little praise. Satisfaction is opposed to envy and greed, which are traits attributed to uneducated populations. Barki described it as follows:

> You should content yourself with whatever [your parents] give you. They teach you humbleness. You should be satisfied with the food that they give you. They will only give you little food. It is important to get something to eat, but the quantity will always be small. I am used to that system. You know, many children are envious, they steal food, but I did not do that.

In Barki's statement, food deprivation, common in child-fostering practices (Bledsoe 1990), is associated with a moral training and is used as a way to force values of discipline and honesty upon children. Undergoing hardship is perceived as building character and moral resistance.

Obedience includes understanding nonverbal communication from parents, eye communication in particular. As Steady notes (2001: 129), a 'well-trained child is supposed to *fɔ no yai* (read eye signals from his or her parents)'. Parents use nonverbal signs in the presence of strangers to signal to their children that they need to leave, or to decline food or a gift politely. As one Krio man stated: 'Eye-communication is very important for parents because it is the way by which they can avoid embarrassing situations towards strangers.' It implies that parents are in a position of sufficient authority to control their children's behaviours.

Rigorous education is associated with a social focus on the individual and the family that contrasts with community values. Krios are described and describe themselves as 'conservative', in that they prefer remaining apart from other families; they 'mind their own business', as people commonly said, meaning that Krios neither interfere in the lives of others nor become involved in issues that do not concern them. Discourses about 'Krio training' stress the role of the household in socializing children, as correct behaviours are learned at home, not in the community. This separates children from the public arena: meals are taken at home, and playing outside or going out into the neighbourhood is considered a distraction that keeps children from their studies. This type of home training centred on family values is perceived to lead to success in education, whereas its lack is usually associated with educational failure.

Nevertheless, Sherbros were quick to distance themselves from what they saw as the negative outcomes of Krio training – mainly that it produces individuals who are less tied to community obligations. Sherbros often commented on Krio individualism. They criticized their tendency to remain within the limits of their own compound and to refuse free lodging to anyone. They also disapproved of the attitude of their Krio relatives who refused to discuss personal matters or enter into mutually beneficial relationships. In other words, they considered that Krios were not always eager to assume the relations of mutuality that would have otherwise characterized customary social practice in Sherbro settlements.

As a result, the word *civilayzd* points to a hyphenated position that presupposes the ability of Sherbros to meet social expectations on both sides: getting educated the 'Krio way', while maintaining *kɔntri* values that revolve around the notion of sharing. Metaphors about the sharing of food illustrate this ambivalence. The description of Krio eating habits aligns with a Western conception of individualism and social etiquette. The following statement emerged from a discussion I had with three elderly men in York about the Krio lifestyle:

> [We differ in] the way we educate our children, the way we live, the way we prepare our food, the way we organize our homes … We – the

Krio – do not gather with other people. [*Kɔntri* people] like to bunch with other people. In one room, they put sixteen of them, whereas Krios would put only one or two people, the wife and the husband. The children have their own room. The living room is free. You have your dining room, for your pots and pans. You do not put these in the living room as [*kɔntri* people] do. The children should go to school … They should know how to behave when they see strangers. They know how to greet and when to keep quiet. They stay away from their parents unless the parents call on them. They know how to talk and when to eat. We do not eat like [*kɔntri* people] who go to the street and buy [street food]. You have times to eat. You eat separately, not together. Everyone has one's own plate. We do not place the food in the same bowl for everybody to take. [*Kɔntri* people] eat together … At home, you know your plate. You will take your own, not anyone else's plate. If you take another one, they will beat you.

While the three men agreed on this statement, one of them (a man born in Bureh Town, who had married a woman from York and had lived there for forty years) concluded that the Sherbro people behaved the same way as the Krio people did and that they were 'one people'.

This description stresses the similarity between Krio and Western lifestyles with regard to food practices and the organization of family houses. Order appears as a core value, which is supposed to reflect individual qualities such as moral rectitude and rigour. This includes knowing how to eat properly, and at regular times, and knowing how to delimit spaces within houses (bedrooms, a living room, a separate kitchen), furnished with precise objects, as opposed to *kɔntri* houses (see also Porter (1963: 95–98) on Krio house styles and furnishing). As discussed by Kohl (2018) in the case of Guinea-Bissau, those practices become emblematic of the separation between creole upper classes and other ethnic groups.

In the case of Liberia, Moran (1990: 64) observes that the discourse on civilization emphasizes cleanliness and housekeeping standards. Similarly, statements about food practices in relation to hygiene and the prevention of disease can be used as tokens of proper civilized behaviour.[11] In Bureh Town, a Sherbro elder presented the use of the spoon in an evolutionary tale from primitiveness to civilization. He said that, at first, Sherbros were purely 'natives'. Intermarriages made them embrace the Krio system. He explained that before, when Sherbros prepared food, they used to put everything in a bowl and call other people in their surroundings to eat together. They all came, sat down and put their hands in that bowl. But when Krios (i.e. the settlers) brought civilization, they thought that sharing food with another person from the same bowl was unsanitary if not

potentially dangerous; everybody should have his or her own individual share. They shared the food proportionally and everyone was given a spoon. Sherbros realized that using a common plate was unhygienic because not everybody washes their hands properly; hence, they adopted the habit of dividing food into individual portions.[12] He concluded that this is the reason why most Sherbros are Krios: they copied the Krios and *krionayzd*.

Sherbros commonly equate the arrival of Krios with the coming of 'civilization'. Although contacts with Europeans occurred earlier, Krios are considered the socially relevant group, whose presence influenced local practices and from whom the system of socialization was adopted. The story implies that Sherbros appropriated Krio habits as their own because they understood the reasons that justified them – like hygiene in the case of the spoon. The spoon stands as a material improvement, but also an educational and moral improvement. Finally, it contrasts Krio socialization with *kɔntri* habits that are considered improper.

In other cases, statements about sharing food supported a conception of personhood based on relatedness, in which the nurturing of affective and kin ties requires commensality. During my stay in Bureh Town, it happened once that I refused food served on a common plate. As I watched others eating, my host jokingly told me that I was a Krio and that Krios did not share with others. He implied that by not eating, I refused social association with him. Commensality

Figure 4.1. Krio house (*bodos*) with kitchen utensils drying outside, York, 2011. © Anaïs Ménard

produces shared substance and kinship, for by consuming food, one associates oneself with the people who prepared it. Offering food is a sign of nurture and care: it shows one's generosity and wish to incorporate the other person in one's social network. Accepting food is a sign of trust and it allows somebody to acquire social substance. In a social context where people are fearful of intentionally being poisoned – strangers in a Sherbro settlement, for instance, would not consume food anywhere, and if offered it, would accept it and leave it untouched – sharing food signifies one's incorporation into a specific network of relatives.

Hence, descriptions of Krio eating habits became particularly relevant when people criticized the unwillingness of Krios to relate to Sherbro kin. One man from Tokeh, who had close relatives in York, said:

> [Krios] come [to Tokeh] the same way they would come to York. They see us as brothers. They call us brother, uncle, and we have the same family names. But they will not give you food. You will not see them eating. If you get access to food, then you will get access to something in the family … If I visit a Krio and he is inside his room eating, he will continue eating and talk to me politely from afar. Then, when he finishes eating, he will put his bowl aside, come and start the real discussion. He will only apologize by saying that he was putting some bowls in order. That's what they are like.

This statement mostly referred to Krios' unwillingness to grant land rights to their Sherbro relatives, but also presented a Krio model in which kin and social ties are consciously overlooked in favour of personal interests. The sharing of food materializes generosity and openness; by extension, it implies sharing one's belongings and helping others who may face material or financial problems. In Sherbro discourses, the perceived selfishness of Krios is contrasted with a *kɔntri* lifestyle, upheld by Sherbros and built on values of togetherness and mutual aid. These examples show that practices of socialization such as those related to eating and sharing food can be used to express Sherbro social identity either as Krio or *kɔntri*.

Narratives of Social Transformation

The position of Sherbros as *civilayzd* and their ability to bridge between Krio and *kɔntri* identities is also acknowledged by members of other ethnic groups. Individuals with other ethnic origins consider 'Sherbro' to be *kɔntri*, yet such identity can also be asserted through the adoption of Krio attributes. 'Sherbro' appears as an identity to which various groups can relate and through which people can employ the signs of Krio identity.

Historically, Krios were seen as forming an exclusive group, since they refused to marry local African populations. Although this has changed, it is often stated by other groups as a reason for the persistence of Krio social exclusivity. For instance, it was common for people in Sherbro and Krio settlements to highlight the difficulties that migrants might encounter when marrying Krios on the Peninsula, as adapting to their lifestyle might be challenging. In contrast, Sherbros consider themselves, and are considered by others, as a population that can rapidly absorb Krio habits and standards as their own. Marriage to a Sherbro is considered to lead to the same kind of social transformation as marriage to a Krio, though it allows for the preservation of *kɔntri* traditions and values. The fact that Sherbros have a historical social capital to access, invoke and use the Krio register allows for further processes of integration with other groups. Sherbros continue to cohabit and marry with members of other ethnic groups, who can identify as Sherbros rather flexibly, integrate into Sherbro community and learn how to use Krio emblems as part of Sherbro identity.

Many Sherbros have varied ethnic origins resulting from migrations. These origins are concealed easily by mentioning Sherbro matrifiliation (see Chapter 7 on the logics of assimilation). Nevertheless, people can easily discuss the way in which their ancestors 'became' Sherbro, which usually includes the adoption of the fishing livelihood and Poro membership. Personal narratives reflect a double identity change: an ethnic transformation (as one has become Sherbro) and a social transformation (as one has acquired the capacity to use the Krio register as part of Sherbro identity). It is possible to claim Sherbro identity not only through 'traditional' mechanisms, such as matrifiliation and Poro membership, but also by the acquisition of the attributes of Krio-ness, often involving education and socialization along the lines of Sherbro/Krio connectedness. The example of Mr Smith illustrates the general pattern of personal narratives: he mentions a parent who migrated and integrated into a Sherbro community, and describes how he himself later *krionayzd* through education:

> My great-grandfather was a Lokko and he married my great-grandmother who was a Sherbro. They gave birth to my grandfather in Mama Beach and my father after him became pure Sherbro … I can be proud [of being Lokko]. I usually say that my grandfather was a Lokko and even a part of the village is called 'Lokko *tɔng*' for our sake.[13]

He then explained that his grandfather's brother worked in Waterloo and had placed him with a Krio family when he was a child. He had stayed fifteen years in town with them:

> That's why if you look at me, if you have never seen me before, you will say that I am a Krio. And if I tell you my surname Smith, you will believe

that I am a Krio. … You are the one choosing what I am and you will probably think that I am a Krio. I can say that I am a Lokko because of my roots. I can say that I am a Sherbro because I speak it. But if I don't want to talk, if I don't want you to know me, I will say that I am a Krio because I behave the correct Krio way.

This narrative distinguishes three identities that attach Mr Smith to different ethnic and social registers. Lokko is presented as an avowed identity defined by blood. It also positions him as a member of a founding family of Mama Beach. Sherbro appears as an inbetween identity: it is both an ascribed and an achieved status that bridges between his Lokko ethnic origins and his Krio identity. Krio identity is the result of training and education.

Mr Smith plays on his Sherbro identity as both an ascribed and an achieved status. Signs of identity ascription are related to the *kɔntri* register, such as place of birth (Mama Beach), ancestry, Poro membership and the Sherbro language. Nonetheless, Mr Smith considers that attributes that others in the community may perceive as ascribed are actually the outcome of the social achievement of previous generations on his father's side, whose members gradually acquired Sherbro identity. His own representation of the family's history is one of ethnic transformation. He describes this process by defining his great-grandfather as Lokko, his grandfather as Lokko/Sherbro as he was born in Mama Beach, and then his father as 'pure' Sherbro because – as he explained to me – he was a fisherman and a Poro member. It is a process that involves only men, which separates this branch of the family from his Sherbro relatives on his mother's side – the side on which his Sherbro identity is traced through female ancestorship, and therefore considered as ascribed by blood (see Chapter 3).

This narrative, like some others presented in Chapter 7, presents heterogeneity as a main component of the 'pure' Sherbro identity – purity becomes constituted through the incorporation of male strangers in the social body and their shift to a new ethnic status. These discourses build 'Sherbro' as a fundamentally open category able to contain difference.

Mr Smith also states his ability to use the Krio register. His ability to use Krio emblems, such as the Krio language and social behaviour, are part of his Sherbro achieved identity. It is a social identity that he achieved during his lifetime, for his skills were acquired through education in a Krio family. This process, as we have seen earlier, is also facilitated by family connections between Sherbros and Krios. Mr Smith is able to play on the confusion induced by similar family names. He defines his strategic use of the Krio register as a social 'front' displayed to outsiders when he wants to appear as a well-learned and accomplished individual. Thereby, he states that he is able to conceal is *kɔntri* identity on purpose in certain social contexts: social navigability – the ability of being Krio and *kɔntri* – thus becomes a symbol of the inherent duality of Sherbro identity.

Narratives of social transformation emphasize 'Sherbro' as a pivotal identity between Krios and other populations. The use of the Sherbro category, because it is also recognized by other groups as including both registers, enables people's passing across Krio and *kɔntri* identifications. Thereby, individuals also preserve their other *kɔntri* identity (Lokko, Mende, Temne, etc.), which they can mobilize in certain situations. This process builds both on the possibility to draw on different ancestry and on the essentialization of Krio and *kɔntri* identities as substantiated by specific attributes (names, behaviours, education). In this regard, discourses and practices related to Krio and *kɔntri* produce stereotypical effects. However, within this framework, Sherbro identity offers a category of identification that integrates various influences and to which many other groups can relate, which foregrounds the fluidity of social practices. These types of discourses also reinforce the idea that Sherbro identity can be claimed through Krio-ness.

Conclusion

The Krio component of Sherbro identity results historically from the social arrangement between local populations and the settlers of the Colony, who maintained separate settlements and identities, but interacted on the basis of social and economic relations. In this process, what might have been only a Sherbro *kɔntri* identity acquired a Krio dimension.

With a close observation of local discourses and practices regarding the Krio dimension of Sherbro identity, it is possible to draw two patterns concerning the relation of Sherbro identity with regard to social stratification in Sierra Leone. On the one hand, in Sherbro discourses, Krio behaviours and lifestyle continue to be considered superior to the practices of other ethnic groups (or *kɔntri* habits). In line with practices of fostering, Sherbros give particular importance to education and early socialization. This lifestyle becomes a normative criterion that attaches individuals to a social register of *civilayzeshɔn* and that becomes relevant in specific situations, as I will detail in Chapter 5.

On the other hand, because of its ambivalence, Sherbro identity constitutes a bridging category in the Krio/*kɔntri* dichotomy that continues to frame social positioning. Personal narratives show that acquiring Sherbro identity is considered to have an effect of social transformation similar to acquiring a Krio identity through adoption or fostering. As part of Sherbro identity, the Krio category appears less disconnected from the social reality of other ethnic groups; in other words, it makes Krio identity more familiar, reachable and practicable in a rural and diverse Peninsula environment. 'Sherbro' appears as a hybrid identity in the sense that it combines socioethnic registers that are relevant in producing social practice and understanding. From this perspective, it bridges the differences between various groups and allows the performance of integration.

Notes

Sections of this chapter were published under the title 'Dynamics of Inclusion and Exclusion Related to a Creole Language: "Krio" as an Ambivalent Semiotic Register in Present-Day Sierra Leone' in the coedited volume by Jacqueline Knörr and Wilson Trajano Filho (2018) *Creolization and Pidginization in Contexts of Postcolonial Diversity. Language, Culture, Identity,* published by Brill.

1. *Civilayzd* and *civilayzeshɔn* are derived from the English 'civilized' and 'civilization', but I use the Krio variants because their meanings differ slightly from those in English usage.

2. Skinner and Harrell-Bond (1977) refuted the idea that the 'Krio' constituted a group before the 1940s and 1950s, but they have been criticized by historians, such as Wyse (1989) and Fyfe (1980). Building on Skinner and Harrell-Bond's findings, Bangura (2017) also refutes the existence of an encompassing, shared and bounded Creole/Krio identity in the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century in Sierra Leone. See Goerg (1995) for a critical analysis of this debate based on the use of 'Creoles' and 'Krio' in colonial archives.

3. See Torrent (2009) on the political strategies of the Krio elite before independence.

4. In Freetown, 7% of people identify themselves as Krio, but 42% claim Krio to be their first language, and 51% their second language. In the Western Area Rural District, Krio and Temne rank similarly as first languages and Krio dominates as a second language.

5. Murphy (1981: 674) makes the same observation by noting that for people in rural Liberia, civilized matters are 'matters associated with modernisation'.

6. Under the parish administration system, new Christian converts were baptized as a symbol of their individual path to civilization. The Liberated Africans took up the Christian names of education sponsors or personalities they liked (Porter 1963: 81). See Peterson (1969) for more details on the policy of baptism during the MacCarthy governorship.

7. This specificity again raises the question of whether the 'Krio' constitute a uniform group. The expression of Krio identity on the Peninsula, due to people's rural (fishing) livelihood and family connections across coastal villages, surely differs from that of 'urban' Krios who have a different history of interrelations with indigenous groups. Both the content and the boundary-maintenance principles of the two groups surely differ, even though both are distinguishable as higher status. In this regard, Krios living on the coast may also differ from those installed in the Peninsula hills, in which the missionaries were more present and agriculture was more developed, and where the settlers established relations with other groups, not necessarily Sherbros. Indeed, on the Peninsula, different groups of Krios are recognized (depending on the networks of which they are part), although not so far as to disrupt the apparent cohesiveness of the group identity. As will be detailed in Chapter 6, Sherbros make a difference between those local Krios who join Poro out of friendship and kin connections (in other words, those who are part of the 'cousinhood' referred to above) and those from Freetown who may join in order to achieve a status as political 'patrons', but with no emotional connection to people in the village where they undergo initiation.

8. For a similar argument, see Moran (1990) on Liberia and Kohl (2018) on Guinea-Bissau.

9. In this respect, it seemed that family and friendship relations were more intense between specific (and geographically nearer) locations, such as York and Tokeh, York and Bureh Town, Kent and Mama Beach, or Sussex and Baw-Baw. This also explains certain patterns of membership to initiation societies across ethnic boundaries, as will be explained in Chapter 6.

10. 'Na dems' (lit. to place in an enclosure) means to restrict a person's movements. In this context, he meant that he would spend a period of isolation on the Banana Islands (with a Krio relative) as a form of punishment for his disobedience. Across the Peninsula, the Banana Islands are also perceived as the place where the 'deep' Krio language and culture (and surely, in this story, the Krio training) are best preserved.

11. In Liberia, Moran notes (1990: 64–65): 'Civilized people also say that they keep their pots and dishes covered to keep the flies off their food. The implication is that civilized people, by virtue of their greater education and sophistication, understand the relationship between flies and disease, although flies are present at all stages of food preparation and cooking.'

12. In reality, daily eating practices may vary. However, during ritual events, the differences between Krios and Sherbros are marked and displayed. At funerals, families in Krio settlements distribute individual portions, while in Sherbro settlements, sharing food from a common plate is more common. During public ceremonies of the Poro society in Sherbro communities, food is often cooked together and is always consumed from common plates. Food sharing thus becomes part of the display of *kɔntri* identity (see Chapter 5).

13. Lokko Town is a section of Mama Beach. Oral traditions in Mama Beach, including the foundation of the settlement by Pa Gbanka, Pa Smith and Pa Thompson, are analysed in Chapter 2.

Chapter 5

The Tactics of Concealment and Disclosure

Sherbro identity performances build on the legacy of the colonial imagination that construes Krio and *kɔntri* categories as distinct and opposite. The ability to use different social fronts (Goffman 1990 [1959]), at separate times, by displaying the attributes of the Krio or *kɔntri* registers, is central to those performances. Performances of Krio-ness build on the social attributes – education and socialization – described in the previous chapter. As a result, strategies of concealment and disclosure constitute moments of intense dramatization of a person's ethnic identity. By concealing and disclosing fronts, performers enact hybridity: those performances cause surprise because they transgress usually accepted social boundaries – in this regard, they interrupt the assumptions upon which the social interaction takes place – and yet they also posit this transgression as a normal feature of their identity.

Performances depend on the social context, the audience and the ability of the speaker to command the Krio and *kɔntri* semiotic registers. Sherbros living on the Peninsula are accustomed to switching registers according to locations (their hometown/Freetown). They adjust their performances to one setting or the other. For *krionayzd*[1] Sherbros living in Freetown, whose families originate from places such as Bonthe and Shenge in southern Sierra Leone, occasions to demonstrate a *kɔntri* identity are much fewer. Some were born in Freetown with little or no recollection of their 'home'. Some were born upcountry and educated in prestigious schools. Later, they found employment in Freetown, with little chance to visit their home regularly. In Freetown, they usually maintained a Krio 'front' and many also incompletely mastered the *kɔntri* register.

For instance, some mentioned not being initiated, some said that they had never learned how to fish and almost none spoke Sherbro.

For both groups, the social prestige derived from the use of the Krio register relates to Goffman's (1990: 45) definition of idealized performances, as 'in … most stratified societies there is an idealization of the higher strata and some aspiration on the part of those in low places to move to higher ones.' Agha (2007: 167) notes that prestige registers may be recognized widely in society, and yet very few people may be able to use their emblems. For Sherbros, being Krio and being *kɔntri* at the same time is a source of pride and leads to tactics of dramatization as the most powerful way to produce an accurate image of the 'hybrid' self. These tactics aim at adapting the performance to an audience (i.e. to appear 'Krio' in Freetown), but they can also have a playful dimension, as they often consist in making others believe in a certain performance and suddenly reveal another part of identity.

In this chapter, I focus on ethnic hybridity as an interactional process that allows individuals and groups to position themselves in specific social situations. The first section illustrates those processes from different positionalities (*krionayzd* Sherbros living in Freetown and Sherbros living on the Peninsula) in order to highlight the diversity of strategies by which specific groups of people 'play on' the plural nature of Sherbro identity to craft an image of the self. The second section focuses on collective performances related to religion and rituals on the Peninsula. Following Bell (1992: 90, 123), I approach rituals in terms of practice, as a privileged mode of action that produces communities and boundaries. Through the display and concealment of specific cultural contents, Sherbros use rituals to either associate with or disassociate themselves from Krios.

Krionayzd Sherbros and the Performance of Neutrality

Krionayzd Sherbros living in Freetown can maintain a consistent Krio social 'front' that others rarely question, in settings where displaying a Krio lifestyle is socially valued. In this group, self-perceptions as *krionayzd* concerned mainly people from the middle/upper classes, who tended to work in intellectual environments and to hold highly skilled positions as lawyers, journalists, civil servants or engineers. Thus, the data include a 'class' effect, which makes it different from the analysis of social practices and discourses on the Peninsula. Nevertheless, they reveal the patterns of collective performances of hybridity.

While code-switching is not uncommon in Sierra Leone, the possibility for *krionayzd* Sherbros to navigate Krio identity rests on several interconnected semiotic abilities (that are not necessarily used simultaneously): adopting an unmistakable Krio accent; mixing Krio with British English; squeezing 'deep' Krio, like pithy proverbs, into greetings and conversations; disclosing a typical Krio name (i.e. 'English' personal and family names like Donald Georges, David

Nicol or Agnes Johnson); using formal attire; referring to Krio habits (like eating *fufu* on Saturdays), etc. Their performances are convincing because they are consistent and unambiguous.

From such performances, others can infer a set of individual qualities, such as formal education and a high social position, connected with a higher profession, and deduce that the person producing them is Krio. Certainly, the use of the Krio register represents a social and professional asset in Freetown. It is a prestige register, which is associated with positive psychological traits, such as being hardworking, serious, disciplined and reliable. *Krionayzd* Sherbros rarely refute being Krio. This identity places them in the upper social stratum, and also opens up opportunities and connections that they would otherwise be denied.

Krionayzd Sherbros stress that the use of the Krio register is easy due to the Sherbro/Krio cultural proximity. One man who lived in Freetown and originated from Bonthe summarized it as follows: 'Sherbros can easily adjust to Krios; they feel comfortable with them because of their common Western education.' Talking about the impact of education on *krionayzd* Sherbros, a fisherman on the Peninsula told me: 'If you trace [Krios'] background, they are Sherbro. [These people] will tell you that they are Sherbro but will still claim to be Krio. If a proper Krio person tells you "I am a Krio", just consider that person to be a proper Sherbro.' According to this line of argument, educated Sherbros only 'hide' under a Krio disguise, and Krios may not be what they appear to be.

While there is ample historical ground for this argument, for the reasons discussed in the preceding chapters, it is critical to point out that *krionayzd* Sherbros in Freetown also succeed in projecting the image that they have always been Krio and that there is no other *kɔntri* identity seeping in around the edges of their being. It is a performance that projects their identity and social trajectory far back into the past, erasing easily detectable traces of any recent migration or enduring social ties to rural communities. *Krionayzd* Sherbros project such an image while never explicitly denying any *kɔntri* connections. They accept an ascribed identity as Krio, while avowing – when necessary – a Sherbro identity.

Yet Sherbro roots do not have to remain forever secret as the price of success; they can be disclosed at times. People in Freetown often recollected anecdotes about the surprise registered by acquaintances or friends when they revealed their Sherbro identity. I witnessed such a moment myself one day when I was talking to a friend at the entrance to his workplace. One of his co-workers passed by and I was introduced, along with the purpose of my research. The person was extremely surprised and slightly embarrassed; for the past twenty years, he had believed that my friend was a Krio.

Over time, the concurrence and congruence of signs in a person's behaviour convince the audience of a person's identity. As in this case, when a direct question emerged relating to one's origins, a *krionayzd* Sherbro would usually choose to reveal Sherbro identity. It is also important to prove an autochthonous status

to avoid the teasing that a Krio can face for being 'non-native'. Such a disclosure does not reduce the status of the person because Sherbro identity is already considered high status. Again, this has to do with the 'common knowledge' that due to history, socialization and education, a Sherbro can also be a Krio.

Stories of disclosure can also become moral tales. One female university teacher from Bonthe shared with me an anecdote that she had been told by her father. First, she reminded me that Bonthe had served as a commercial base for the British. Therefore, people in Bonthe, fishermen and villagers alike, were generally well educated. Her father used to see people coming back from fishing, partially undressed, as they usually are on fishing boats. Every day after fishing, these people would go to a particular shop and discuss prices in Mende or Sherbro. One day, the white shopkeeper became annoyed with them and loudly criticized them with offensive words. One of the fishermen turned to him and said in English: 'To whom are you alluding?' The shopkeeper was taken aback. Her father, who was in the shop, was amazed by this response and realized that all the fishermen spoke English. The woman ended the story with the sentence: 'The least of them knows how to read and write English.'

Such stories were quite common in interviews with well-educated Sherbros. It allowed them to stress that Sherbros, early on, had subverted relations of power that classified 'natives' as non-educated, including in remote areas, where the advancement of 'civilization' was considered limited. They often referred to Bonthe, which is a key symbol in the historical imagination of the Sherbros (as a group) of their transnational links (see the Introduction). Bonthe Town, situated on Bonthe Island in the Southern Province, was administered as part of the Sierra Leone Colony. Its development around trade since the eighteenth century explains why the discourse on 'civilization' is equally relevant there.[2] On the Peninsula, Sherbro and non-Sherbro people alike also stressed that in the past, a Sherbro person would always be educated whatever his or her livelihood. The recurrent image is that of the educated fisherman; though he might be seen walking around half-naked in his fishing trousers, he could nevertheless outdo a white man in speaking polite and proper English.

In these stories, revealing one's identity is part of a dramatization process that emphasizes the positive ambivalence of Sherbro identity: one displays intelligence but humility; education but faithfulness to a *kɔntri* lifestyle. Conversely, *krionayzd* Sherbros wish to display these qualities when using emblems of a *kɔntri* identity. Outside of the Western Area in particular, the use of the *kɔntri* register appears to be safer than the use of the Krio register. *Krionayzd* Sherbros were the most likely to have encountered difficulties when travelling, as they are less familiar with the customary system. Many feared the presence of the Poro society and expressed some embarrassment at not being initiated.

In Freetown, as very few people speak Sherbro, fishing has become a critical *kɔntri* emblem. Fishing is not only a relevant cultural practice to Sherbro

ethnicity, as detailed in Chapter 3, but also shows one's willingness to indulge in manual work, which educated people usually avoid. References to fishing become a way of contesting stereotypes of exclusiveness and elitism often associated with Krios. Many *krionayzd* Sherbros mention with pride that they know how to fish and that they usually go fishing when at home on vacation. To borrow Astuti's words on the Vezo of Madagascar, Sherbro-ness is also a type of identity defined by a '*way of doing* which people perform' and not simply a state of being (Astuti 1995: 16, emphasis in original). Swimming, paddling (with a *kunu-kunu*) and fishing are activities that make a person Sherbro. In this regard, strangers who adopt this lifestyle in communities of the Peninsula may appear 'more Sherbro' than *krionayzd* Sherbros living in Freetown.

Indeed, *krionayzd* Sherbros may experience shame as a result of their lack of practical skills. When I was staying in Sussex, I met a man who was working as a civil servant in Freetown. He was six years old when he was sent by his mother to Freetown. She forbade him to come back to Sussex because she feared that he would start fishing and neglect his education. On several occasions, he stated that he regretted that his mother had not allowed him to learn fishing. While he acknowledged that discipline had helped him to make a career in government administration, he claimed not to be able to relate to his age mates who had stayed in Sussex. He was a Poro member, but his lack of fishing ability remained a significant difference between him and other members.[3] As a result, he stressed other aspects of indigeneity: he insisted on people using his Poro name and had given Sherbro names to his children.

Beyond its associations with a high *and* native social status, Sherbro ethnicity is considered neutral in relation to the context of politicization of ethnic affiliations, particularly those of Mende and Temne identities. The small size of the Sherbro group and the ability of its members to assimilate into neighbouring peoples have played a role in shaping this representation of Sherbro ethnicity, which often becomes an asset. I discussed this with one man, originally from Bonthe but who had lived in Bo throughout his life. Bo is the stronghold of the SLPP in the Southern Province, dominated by Mende populations. He told me:

> I worked in Makeni [capital of the Northern Province and stronghold of the Temne-dominated APC] for two years. There, as a Sherbro, I was a neutral person. When I first said that I was coming from Bo, I could feel that people looked at me differently. I could feel some tension. But when I said that I was Sherbro, people approached me more easily. They felt free to talk with me. The moment you say that you are Sherbro, you are different. You are not considered as a potential enemy any more.

This man had a similar experience when coming back to Freetown for work. He arrived to stay with extended relatives of his brother's wife in a Temne/Limba

compound, which also included three Mende households. At first, when he arrived, the Temne landlady thought that he was a Mende and did not speak to him much. When she learned that he was Sherbro, she suddenly became friendly. She even asked him to take her son to Bonthe to start a business. He concluded by saying that if he had been Mende, the contact would have been more difficult and she would not have befriended him to that extent. Conversely, he had no difficulties relating to Mendes in the same compound, since they knew that he was a Sherbro living in Bo and that he could speak Mende too. Hence, he reckoned that disclosing his *kɔntri* identity changed his relations to people and their attitude towards him.

Sherbro identity usually ensures safe social interactions with outsiders, as it is perceived both as ethnically neutral and socially respectable. This appears to be the outcome of people's ability to integrate into and connect with different ethnic groups. First, it refers to the fact that Sherbro share cultural and social features with both Mendes and Temnes. 'When a Sherbro man sings, he sings in Mende; when he speaks, he speaks in Temne' was the sentence I heard from a Sherbro man in Tokeh with the intent of summarizing both the Sherbro/Temne language proximity and the Sherbro/Mende common cultural practices.[4]

Second, the principle of matrifiliation (although it may appear old-fashioned in present-day Sierra Leone) gives individuals the possibility of strategizing ethnic belonging in social encounters. Sherbro paternal origins can serve as a marker of identity, as patrilineality is the dominant norm in Sierra Leone. At the same time, people can use Sherbro matrifiliation to hide or supplant Mende or Temne paternal origins, which may be difficult to negotiate in specific situations. They can appeal to the specificity of the Sherbro group in that matter.

Third, and embedded in a postwar context, neutrality refers to the Sherbro/Krio relatedness and their similarity in behaviour during the war. Knörr (2010b: 745) indicates that Krios are perceived as having been less involved in the war as perpetrators. The specificities of their identity are reinterpreted in a positive light in the aftermath of the war. Krios are seen as less attached to a particular indigenous identity and thus less likely to support tribalism in national politics. The perceived ethnic neutrality of Sherbros results partly from their Krio affiliation. Like Krios, Sherbros enter the civil service, but tend to maintain a neutral political stance. As I heard several times, 'they can hold key positions in the government but they will stay humble'. Modesty appears as a positive asset that prevents political ambition.

A second local explanation of political neutrality notes that Krios and Sherbros are minorities who do not have a large 'tribal' voting base on which they can build political positions and win elections. In actual politics, some have tried to use Sherbro identity as an advantage. For example, Maada Bio, who won the presidential elections for the SLPP in 2018, is originally from Bonthe, currently a Mende-dominated area. When he ran in 2012, he tried to bring his Sherbro

identity to the fore; however, nationally, he was still considered a Mende, along the usual lines of ethnic partition in politics (see Chapter 1).

On the Peninsula, stereotypes about Sherbros similarly converge: they were presented, and presented themselves, as a peaceful group, who were not involved in war atrocities. As in the Krio case, this perception may be due to their geographical position on the coast, far from the areas where the war started (Knörr 2010b: 745). However, it is unknown to what extent Sherbros in the south of the country may have been active in local (Mende) militias. Yet the image of neutrality remains for all Sherbros. This is perhaps the case because Sherbros who are demonstrably not neutral can always be something else: Mende, Temne or Krio. Stories of concealment and disclosure represent not only a strategic use of ethnic registers, but also the intrinsic possibility of not being categorized (and therefore of not being pointed at).

Both local and migrant populations used stereotypes about Sherbros that emphasized their peacefulness. Some sentences typically returned in conversations: 'Sherbros do not like fighting'; 'They want to avoid problems'; 'When they see problems, they jump in their Kru canoe and paddle far until they think it is safe to come back'. Yet, peacefulness can also serve as a synonym for weakness. Sherbros emphasize that in order to avoid violence, they tend to surrender to force and accept invaders. This was invoked as a justification of their difficulties in dealing with new migrants.

British Sherbros and Krio Decorum

On the Peninsula, performing Krio identity in interactions with migrants, who often come from rural places of the interior, has become a strategy to mark social differentiation. I would like to illustrate this point by reporting a conversation I had with my research partner. One day, when crossing the river between Number Two River and Tokeh, Jonathan and I sat on the boat with a girl who looked about fifteen years old. Jonathan (who did not know her, but had noticed the way she talked and dressed) talked to her in a provocative way, calling her *kɔntri*. The girl escaped quickly when the boat landed, but when we encountered her later, Jonathan started joking again and the girl responded bravely, 'Mi nɔtɔ kɔntri' (I am not a country girl). Then I took up the task of making Jonathan (JC) explain himself to me (AM):

> AM: Why do you call her *kɔntri*?
> JC: Because when she first came here, she did not speak a word of Krio. She is from upcountry. She spoke only Temne. Now she has picked up Krio. You heard that she told me, 'Mi nɔtɔ kɔntri'.
> AM: So if you are not a *kɔntriman*, who are you?
> JC: Me? [Pause] I'm English.

> AM: How come you're English?
>
> JC: Because I speak good English and I speak good Krio.
>
> [At that moment, two boys passed in front of us conversing in Temne.]
>
> JC: Temne is a *kɔntri* language.
>
> AM: Sherbro is not?
>
> JC: Well, no, we are *civilayzd*. We are able to dress with style. We are able to wear these fine Krio clothes. When we go to church, we don't go with a shirt. We go with print.[5] Like yesterday, I saw late at night the wife of the headman coming from town. She was dressed like a real Krio woman. She had a beautiful Krio dress and I teased her for that.
>
> AM: So you said that Sherbro is not a *kɔntri* language?
>
> JC: Well … yes. But the Peninsula [Sherbro] almost entirely adopted the Krio system. We are almost Krio-dominated. If you go to Shenge, every family speaks Sherbro at home. Here they will tell you: my father is Sherbro, my mother is Sherbro, I am a Sherbro but I don't speak it. We are not natives [*netiv*], we are Europeans. If you are a native, you must practise your own system. We are the British Sherbro.

This conversation took place at the beginning of my stay in Sierra Leone, as Jonathan and I had just started working together. My presence clearly influenced the interaction he had with the girl and his subsequent self-representation. At first, he qualified the girl as *kɔntri* and she recognized it as an insult. As we discussed the matter, he justified his position by making an evaluation of linguistic and behavioural signs with reference to the *kɔntri/civilayzd* dichotomy. He opposed these two identities to mark the difference between the social status of the migrant and his own. He defined Sherbro as *civilayzd* with regard to language (the knowledge of English and Krio) and clothing (the print dress). Through metapragmatic evaluation, otherwise disparate signs are turned into normative criteria of group membership 'that convert facts of social difference into measures of rank or hierarchy' (Agha 2007: 75). In this regard, the performance of Sherbro identity is locally specific, as it plays on the historical dichotomy between the rural 'interior' and urban Freetown.

The Krio language is often qualified as a *lingua franca*, as it allows people of diverse ethnic origins to communicate. Moreover, it is the language of government administration and education. On the Peninsula, Krio is the native language of most Sherbros. The expression 'British Sherbro', which I heard many times during fieldwork, designates people's inability to speak Sherbro as an indigenous language, but also claims English as an indigenous language for the Sherbros.

Language loss is sometimes deplored, yet it is seldom stated as a significant barrier to claiming Sherbro identity. For Sherbros, the Krio language can equally serve as an ethnic marker. This is the case despite the perception of Krio as a *lingua franca* that generally has 'little or no indigenous cultural significance'

(Bangura 2006: 158). As in the exchange above, a *kɔntri* accent in speaking Krio underscored a migrant status in a social environment dominated by the Krio language, while Jonathan demonstrated education related to Krio-ness.

In a Sherbro context, the two languages are linked to different social situations. Krio is valued as the language of education, but also of intimacy, as it is used at home and between relatives. The progressive shift to Krio as a native language is commonly attributed to social achievement: people who are educated and work in Freetown are not willing to maintain knowledge of the language. Most parents also do not try to teach Sherbro as a first language to their children. At the same time, Sherbro is maintained as the language of rituals and its use connects to an important social and emotional part of an indigenous identity. The young generation rarely practise Sherbro, but often learn the basics from their parents and songs in Sherbro during initiation. Thus, both Krio and Sherbro have cultural significance and are co-constitutive symbols of ethnic attachment.

In *Acts of Identity* (1985), Le Page and Tabouret-Keller show that linguistic behaviours indicate individual choices of identifying with, or distinguishing oneself from, a certain group. The choice of language is closely related to specific social situations, since individuals project identities through speech acts. In a context of migration, Krio has become the language of social differentiation. Although most people speak Krio, the way in which Krio is spoken remains a major social indicator. Most people consider that Sherbros speak a purer, clearer Krio than migrants who learned it as a second language. It is not rare for local people on the Peninsula to mock the 'rural' accent of people who recently migrated, as Jonathan did. Hence, the type of Krio accent and vocabulary as well as the selected use of English in certain contexts continue to be emblems of social prestige. Krio identity is projected into speech acts as a way to mark belonging to a higher 'urbane' educated class.

In many social interactions, Krio is opposed to Temne, as both languages compete for the status of *lingua franca* on the Peninsula.[6] Particularly in the south of the Peninsula, where migration has been important, the Temne language is central to the fishing economy. A female fish trader said:

> All Sherbro speak Temne now … How did Temnes dominate us? Because when you go fishing, when you want to buy fish on the beach, you have to do it in Temne. The whole business is in Temne now. Temnes are more involved in fishing today than we are. They dominate the fishing [business]. So, if I want to enter that business, I have to learn Temne, I have no choice.

As Temne emerges as the language of business, Krio remains the language of education and public meetings, a situation that imbues these two languages with values related to distinct social spheres. The social opposition created through

the use of language between business and education is meaningful, since Temne-speaking populations have long suffered from negative stereotyping in Sierra Leonean society and have been described as 'uneducated' with reference to Christian missionary education in colonial society (see Bangura 2017; Bolten 2008).[7] Local Sherbro populations often stigmatized 'the Temne' for their lack of education and 'rudeness', which they understood as a lack of proper behaviour. Rudeness, in this sense, was opposed to 'civilized'. These statements reproduced and reinforced the historical colonial hierarchy that represented Krios and Temnes at the two opposite ends of the civilizational ladder.

Addressing migrants in Krio becomes a way of contesting the prevailing local use of Temne. Krio was employed as the language of resistance against migrants, while also being presented as the language of neutrality. Sherbros argued that Krio is a language devoid of tribal and political implications. Nonetheless, this call for neutrality masked a social strategy, since Krio continued to be used as an emblem of social superiority, as the following examples show.

In Mama Beach, I witnessed a dispute that involved two fishing crews. One worked on a boat owned by a Krio from York and the other worked on a boat owned by a Temne resident of Mama Beach. When the harbour master asked the crews to explain the facts, the Temne crew started speaking Temne. Someone from the other crew protested that this was a general meeting, and thus they should use a language that everyone understands. The Temne captain was invited to speak in Krio. He started mimicking Krios by using many English words. The Krio boat owner noticed and told him to 'speak locally' and 'use the broad Krio' because people were not familiar with 'English'. He meant to humiliate the captain of the Temne boat and create an unbalanced social interaction. For his part, by using English words, the Temne captain contested this strategy by mocking the social superiority associated with Krio identity and the Krio language. This, of course, the Krio captain firmly stopped.

Thus, Krio can also be used as the 'autochthonous' language – the language of firstcomers, who master it properly – in order to demarcate social positions. My host in Kissi Town, for instance, could speak Temne very well, yet she did not respond to greetings in Temne from female traders passing in front of her house: 'It is not my language; if they said "Mwe, Saka" [Sherbro greetings] I would reply.' She added that when people spoke Temne to her, she pretended that she did not understand, although she used Temne willingly in joking relationships with Temne friends. She considered Krio to be the most neutral language to be used with strangers (and she expected strangers to do the same), but also pointed out that migrants should adapt to specific cultural conditions by greeting either in Sherbro or Krio. Yet, she knew that no one would greet her in Sherbro. She used Krio as an emblem of autochthony and a way to maintain (relative) social superiority, knowing that in the Kissi Town area, Temne had supplanted Krio as the common language.

In these examples, as well as in the dialogue transcribed above, the use of Krio marks social and symbolic capital, and is interpreted as such by other groups. Thus, the Krio language, despite its urban 'cosmopolitan' connotations, continues to be opposed to *kɔntri* in a way that positions *kɔntri* as socially subordinate to Krio, which re-enacts power relations that were at the heart of colonial classification. As a result, mastery of Krio and English (or lack thereof) are strong indicators of contemporary social and educational inequalities, which explains that the Krio register remains 'a sought after commodity – even one that can be purchased for a price, through schooling, elocution lessons and the like … [which] maintains the value of the register for a time' (Agha 2007: 167).

Jonathan mentioned not only language but also clothes as an emblem of Krio decorum to be opposed to the habits of migrants. Blommaert (2005: 203) stresses that 'every act of semiosis is an act of identity' in which we disclose information about ourselves. Dress is a critical example of a nonverbal semiotic sign through which information about identity is being revealed. In colonial Sierra Leone, dress became a sign of social differentiation. The settlers and Liberated Africans used Western dress codes. Later, in line with Victorian values, Krios openly complained about the 'indecent' nakedness of local populations (Porter 1963: 102; Spitzer 1974: 86). Western dress codes pointed to distinct social and moral values that positioned individuals within a socially dominant circle, whereas discourses about the indecency of local Africans maintained them at the other end of the 'civilizational process'.

In contemporary practice, clothes remain a strong element of social performance. The dress code depends on the nature of the occasion and its location. People tend to wear different clothes inside and outside of Sherbro settlements. Krio emblems are usually displayed with relation to formal work, institutions and services in Freetown. For instance, during my stay in Bureh Town, I accompanied my host to a meeting with the Public Relations Officer at the District Council in Waterloo. She put on a print dress for the occasion. She said that I would see her wearing her *lapa* in Bureh Town, that is, the piece of cloth tied around the waist that women wear 'in the privacy of their homes' (Spitzer 1974: 16). However, for such a meeting, she had to dress and look like a Krio; jokingly, she added that she had to make a good impression on the Public Relations Officer and show that she was an educated woman. By this, she acknowledged a direct relation between Krio clothing, education and social respectability. In general, women wear print dresses when going to Freetown or church services, or during travel. Yet, knowing the right way to tie *lapa* and the occasions on which one should use it are necessary conditions to qualify as *kɔntri*. For example, as proof of her Krio identity, one Krio woman explained to me that she had never known how to tie a *lapa* properly because 'Krio women only wear skirts and print dresses'.[8]

The *lapa* is a sign of indigenous identity as it is used during initiation society performances. Clothes can indicate belonging or nonbelonging to initiation

societies. Men wear the *lapa* during Poro dances. During Bondo initiation, girls learn how and when to wear the *lapa*. In Lakka, when the Bondo society was initiating a dozen girls, Bondo performances of members included songs against a woman who had refused initiation. She was born in Tokeh from Sherbro parents, but had moved to York and then to Freetown at a very early age. She had married in Freetown, but later moved in with her brother in Lakka. When I asked about her refusal of initiation, she explained that her decision not to become a Bondo member was a result of her Krio training:

> I would not agree to that. My mother and my father are part of their own [society]. All my sisters and brothers went to Bondo and Poro. It is my big brothers who sent the smaller ones to be initiated in Baw-Baw ...
> I told [my parents] that I would not go because I am not used to that ...
> [Bondo women] cause me problems. They hint that [I am not a real Sherbro]. But I am not afraid. I avoid them. I do not go when they have their ceremonies. But when they meet me, they sing against me. I wear long skirts. They will sing 'You, long skirts, you, long skirts' all the time.

Her statement shows that clothes are semiotic signs, which become 'identified with certain social beings and their activities' (Agha 1998: 178). Trajano Filho (2002) shows that the mention of clothes can suggest religious or ethnic differentiation without clearly spelling it out. In this example, Krio and *kɔntri* identities are essentialized through the attributes of the skirt and the *lapa*, which link to normative criteria of womanhood. The song constitutes a discourse over a nonverbal sign: it is a critique of wearing skirts, which indicates the absence of Bondo training. During initiation, girls are said to be taught social rules that prepare them to become adult women – for instance, rules on pregnancy and childbirth, the performance of household duties, and how to conduct their relations with in-laws and Poro members (Bledsoe 1984: 457). The *lapa* is the *kɔntri* dress that infers female skills related to initiation. Similarly, women can be accused of being 'too Krio' when they argue against men: well-trained *kɔntri* women should rather display humility and submissiveness; in these contexts, education and the use of English can be regarded as symbols of arrogance.

Since the end of the Civil War, membership in initiation societies – Poro and Bondo – has revived as a main marker of autochthony (see Chapter 7). It has become important in establishing one's *kɔntri* identity and validating the relationship of Sherbros to the land. The following story, about a woman called Boi, shows how people separate contexts, locations and audiences when using ethnic registers with regard to initiation societies.

I had the opportunity to talk to Boi about her religious involvement when she was in front of her house in Baw-Baw preparing a few kilos of smoked fish in a basket to send to market in Freetown. Her story followed a more or less

familiar pattern for Sherbros. She had an English surname and was born in Tokeh, her mother's town. Her father's family was from Baw-Baw. She could also trace cousins in Number Two River, Bureh Town and Sussex. She attended school in York, after which she married a man from Baw-Baw, whom she had met in Freetown. She lived for over twenty years in the capital and worked as a fish trader at Kroo Town Road Market. For many years, she was elected the chairlady of female traders. She was responsible for guaranteeing traders' rights, representing them at city council meetings and ensuring that new traders registered with the administration.

When she was in town, women at the market thought that she was a Krio. Women from the Bondo society used to tease her, saying that she could not understand *kɔntri* practices. She would reply with a smile. They did not invite her to Bondo performances, which she did not want to attend anyway, although she gave money when the Bondo mask danced for her. The other women stressed her difference and her Krio attitude. She did not comment one way or the other on this. Since her values and her upbringing led others to believe that she was a Krio, she did not see any point in denying it, unless someone asked her about her own background. Moreover, masquerades were often performed on Sundays, which she found annoying because she attended church at Kroo Town Road in central Freetown, and the women dancing and singing outside disrupted the service. It was only in 1984, when her son joined the male initiation society, that she invited the market women to the ceremony. When they came, they were flabbergasted to learn not only that Boi was a Bondo member, but that she was also a *sowei*, a senior ritual leader, in charge of organizing initiations.

In this story, Boi described her life (to me, the anthropologist) according to the normative criteria of Krio identity. Her position as chairlady of female traders implied access to formal education. She also placed an emphasis on a good Christian life guided by moral principles: other ritual practices are not rejected, but do not supersede church obligations, such as going to Sunday services. Both practices are compatible, but should not be mixed. For her, Christianity remained the only possible religious reference in Freetown's social context. As Fashole-Luke (1967: 10) argues, Krio Christianity and African traditional beliefs are equally maintained, but 'kept in watertight compartments and are seldom, if ever, allowed to come together or interact upon each other'. Along the Peninsula, people continued to separate ritual duties as indexes of Krio or *kɔntri* identities, despite the fact that Christian practices may at times incorporate 'traditional' elements, as will be shown more clearly in the last section of this chapter.

Boi intended to distinguish herself from the other women, whom she pictured as lacking respect towards individual choices and religious beliefs, but also lacking the curiosity to enquire about her identity. By stating her ability to conceal her *kɔntri* identity, she wanted to make a statement about her mastery of Krio social codes – and her ability to 'appear' Krio when she wanted. The

story drew a distinction between Sherbros and members of other ethnic groups in their ability to perform Krio-ness. Using Krio codes allowed Boi to present a consistent Krio 'front' to the other women, thereby maintaining her position of authority and social prestige. By describing the attitude of the other women, who took her identity for granted, she expressed a sense of intellectual and social superiority over them. By carefully knowing how and when to conceal or disclose her dual identity, she succeeded in achieving the social prestige of being both an educated Krio and a *kɔntri* woman of high rank.

Boi's narrative reveals how individuals navigate between Krio and *kɔntri* registers in different geographical and social locations. Her uses of her two social identities are related to her capacity to separate religious practices, their contexts and audiences.[9]

At the time of my research, her social habits revealed the same strategy. She went to Freetown for Sunday services and was an active member of several church female organizations. When she was there, she maintained a Krio social 'front'. Krio women can be part of Bondo, but they tend to conceal it (see Chapter 6). Boi did not display Bondo membership in town so as to earn respect as a Krio woman. Yet, she had launched a Bondo initiation period in Baw-Baw. She organized one or two initiations every year in various Peninsula settlements. She stated that demands for initiations had accelerated in recent years and she had more requests than she could meet. In Baw-Baw, where she was often teased for being Krio, she became a defender of initiation societies and embraced the revival of Bondo with much fervour, as an emblem of Sherbro *kɔntri* identity.

Christian Standards in Marriage Practices

In the remainder of this chapter, I am concerned with the way in which Sherbros intentionally stress particular religious aspects in rituals – either a Christian heritage or African spiritual beliefs – in order to represent themselves as Krio or *kɔntri*. Ritual practices, as collective performances, constitute a significant space for displaying the cultural content of identity. They bind communities together in a process of boundary making vis-à-vis other groups (Bell 1992: 123). People in Sherbro settlements separate two types of performances: those attached to Christianity and those attached to the persisting 'traditional' religion. References to Christianity may be used to display the inclusion of Sherbros within 'the Krio system', while *kɔlchɔ* – the Krio term for 'culture' – stresses their attachment to ritual practices and beliefs related to the Poro and Bondo initiation societies. As Sherbros display one aspect of their identity, they tend to conceal the other one, although both may integrate mixed influences.

References to Christianity speak to a Sherbro/Krio community and provide a historical explanation for subsequent population mixes. Krios in Kent and York, for instance, attributed Sherbro/Krio relatedness to the Sherbros'

early adoption of Christianity, which influenced education and child training. In turn, people in Sherbro communities presented the adoption of the 'Krio system' as a positive outcome of mutual knowledge transmission. While Krios learned fishing, Sherbros accessed Christianity and formal education, as Jonathan once commented:

> Most Sherbros are Krio and most of those Krios are Sherbro. Krios came as evangelists to tell us about salvation. After fishing, we used to wash our nets and maintain them. We did not have time to open a book. Krios were more educated. Most church activities were organized by them. Krios civilized us and taught us to go to church every Sunday.

In Sherbro settlements, community bylaws are said to derive from a Christian heritage. Fishing and market activities are forbidden on Sundays. In Muslim-dominated communities, such as Tombo and Kissi Town, Sherbros complain of the lack of respect shown towards the Sunday rule, although they cannot require Muslim fishermen to take a day off from their economic activity. In Mama Beach, in order to preserve the tranquillity on Sundays, the headman allowed boats to depart but not to land. Fishermen sold the fish in neighbouring settlements.

Life-cycle rituals, such as weddings and funerals, are strongly influenced by Krio social and ritual standards. A church marriage – also called a 'pimpom' wedding with reference to the car's klaxons at the end of the ceremony –is still regarded as 'an index of civilization' (Tonkin 2010: 124). Such marriages are considered more prestigious – and more stable – than customary ones. The bride and groom are usually engaged (*put stop*), albeit often only the day before the church wedding, with a calabash and an engagement ring. A customary wedding is simpler and less costly, as it involves only a ceremony at home.

Most people cannot afford a church wedding, but it is valued more than a customary marriage. Both women and men emphasized that customary marriages fail easily, due to patterns of multiple relationships (see Chapter 3). I often heard comments that women did not respect their husbands when they were not married at church. Church weddings also have significant financial implications and demonstrate the man's willingness to marry. They are therefore also considered a sign of the woman's social value. Not being married at church is an argument that women bring up in disputes when they want to contest their husband's authority. There is an expectation that a customary marriage should eventually be sanctified by a church wedding in order to be taken seriously on both sides. As this rarely happens, church weddings as a social standard become a counterargument supporting the fluidity of relationships and individual freedom.

When customary marriage is not possible, either because the man cannot afford it or is already married in his home village, it is usual to witness the practice

of *put smɔl tin*, whereby the man presents the woman's family with some money and gifts so that they will acknowledge the union. This usually involves giving envelopes with money to the woman's relatives (parents and siblings) as well as to key figures of the community (mainly the headman, the elders, the pastor and the imam). For Sherbros, this practice differs from a proper engagement before a church wedding, which may be at odds with practices of other ethnic groups.

The following example illustrates the point. In Sussex, a man of Temne origin living in King Town came to engage a woman in Sherbro Town. We gathered in the parlour of the woman's family house and envelopes were distributed to the woman's relatives. A female elder of the woman's family led the ceremony and conducted the talk with the man's uncle. After the distribution, the uncle offered a small wrapped parcel:

> The female elder: What is this parcel for?
> The uncle: To engage [her name]. Now, no man should come between him and her.
> The female elder: You came to engage her or to lock the door [*lɔk di dɔmɔt*]?
> The uncle: We only engage.
> The female elder: We know the difference. You did not come to engage her. I am your daughter-in-law. You came to lock the door, to lock the back door. We shall close the door and have a watchman. This is the gate he should watch.

The female elder then called the woman close to her and told her:

> They came to know how we are doing in this town. They brought one Krio [the parcel]. It is too heavy for me. Please interpret it for me. He said they came to lock the door, to keep the fence up. At night, you should have come back here. We decided to lock the door. Now you agree and you're happy to have the door locked and to be inside. Find the security now.

The young woman handed the parcel to her elder brother, but because he lived overseas, it was clear that he would not be able to watch over her. Everybody laughed at her decision.

The man's family chose to display his commitment by merging both Krio and *kɔntri* elements in their demand, with the expectation that the woman's family would appreciate it: they brought not only envelopes, as is usually practised in Sierra Leone, but also a parcel, which is a reference to Krio engagement ceremonies. During the ceremony, which usually takes place the day before the church wedding, the man's family presents a box that contains a Bible, a ring

and a calabash covered with white cloth and containing small items, such as a needle, thread and kola nuts (see also Fyle and Heroe 1977: 12; Spitzer 1974: 30; Wyse 1989: 11). The fact that the female elder publicly mentioned that it was Krio showed social appreciation of the gesture, as it referred to the adoption of Krio practices by Sherbros.

Nevertheless, the female elder also used the ritual as an opportunity to stress the cultural and social distinctiveness of Sherbros from other ethnic groups. She implied that the man's family had made a mistake in calling the demand an 'engagement'. She reminded the man's uncle that the engagement procedure was a different ritual and said that this should be referred to as *lɔk di dɔmɔt*, meaning that the family accepts the responsibility of controlling the woman's behaviour until the man marries her. The *lɔk di dɔmɔt* does not represent a binding decision in the way that engagement does, since the woman continues to wait for a proposal, during which time her family assesses the seriousness of the man according to his readiness to marry. Hence, *lɔk di dɔmɔt* does not necessarily imply an established relationship. The decision of the young woman to hand over the parcel to somebody who cannot control her (the elder brother who lives overseas) illustrates the point. The woman's family considered the man's demand, but downplayed its implications. Although Sherbros most often marry the traditional *kɔntri* way, and rarely at church, the intention was to demarcate social positions and hierarchies between hosts and strangers by including Sherbros within Krio Christian culture.

It is now possible to contrast this case with the description of a 'pimpom' wedding I attended in York. During this event, references to Christianity were used to validate existing networks of sociality between Sherbro and Krio settlements. As I recorded in my notes:

> At the invitation of a York [Krio] family, I attended the wedding of one of their daughters to a fisherman originally from Bureh Town [a Sherbro settlement], but who had been raised in York [a Krio settlement]. The day after the engagement, the wedding was to take place at the Anglican Church. The groom was soon to become a pastor of the Methodist church and had asked a reverend from his own religious denomination to perform the ceremony. The groom and bride were dressed according to Christian standards respectively in suit and white dress. The reverend began by welcoming people from York and the neighbouring villages. He announced that people from the Banana Islands, Bureh Town, John Obey and other surrounding villages were invited to a special service of the Methodist church on the second following Sunday. The ceremony commenced. The reverend told the couple about the benefits and duties of marriage life and used extensive references to the relationship between Sherbros and Krios. Hence, he told the groom: 'You are a fisherman, so

fishes are your friend. You are not the friend of the fishes because you catch them but fishes are your friends because they bring you money. And you know these fishes have bones and this lady here is your sweetest bone. When you suck it, a tender juice comes out of it, doesn't it? It is this bone that will remain in your throat, in your heart.' He followed up the maritime metaphor with a statement on the need to confront adversity together: 'They will paddle their own canoe now. You will let them paddle their own canoe. Sometimes, it will not be easy, the sea will be rough and sometimes there will not be any fish in the sea. But it is a challenge for them now.' Once married, the bride and the groom faced the crowd, each with a wicker basket to take offerings. The reverend once again joked with the congregation, telling people to put money in the first basket and fill the other with fish. Everyone laughed. The amount of offerings was important. Following this light-hearted moment, the newly married couple came out of the church. Relatives congratulated them. The *Jolly* mask [the *Jolly* is a masquerade society that performs at various social occasions] had been invited and danced in front of the church. Finally, the couple entered the car that would lead them to their respective families in Bureh Town and York to receive the blessings of their parents.

Occasions such as weddings offer opportunities to reaffirm the social and familial links between Sherbro and Krio settlements. In this example, these links are of two kinds. First, before the ceremony, the reverend called on people from both Krio and Sherbro settlements to attend a common service at the Methodist church. Church attendance still plays an important role in attaching people to various places. For instance, it is not unusual for individuals who were raised in York and who returned to Bureh Town or Tokeh later in life to continue attending Sunday services in York. Second, the reverend used jokes in his sermon to refer to the social and economic significance of fishing in Sherbro/Krio relationships. The Sherbro ethnic background of the groom is both an object of mockery – as the Krio bride is called his 'sweetest bone' – and admiration. The offering baskets resemble those used by fish dealers to hold the smoked fish. By saying that one should fill the man's basket with fish, the reverend praised fishermen for making the York community prosperous: fishing is the backbone of the local economy and many women in the church are also fish dealers, so everyone should be grateful and give him money on that day.

These references indicate the interaction and interdependence of Sherbros and Krios in the fishing economy. Later, I asked the father of the bride whether her husband would insist on her joining the Bondo society. He replied that two of his daughters, who lived with men of other ethnic origins, had decided to join. In the case of this marriage, he said that his son-in-law was not part

of 'the Sherbro culture', meaning that he was not part of Poro. As a result, it seemed unlikely that the young man would encourage his wife to join Bondo. Their marriage was to be almost entirely Krio. The bride's father explained that his son-in-law was raised by a Krio and the newly married couple planned to settle in York, where there is neither a Poro nor a Bondo bush. Finally, he said: '[My son-in-law] has the Krio system, so they could marry like that, without complications. The only culture [*kɔlchɔ*] that he has is fishing.' Thus, his fishing skills were considered to be the main indicator of his Sherbro training and *kɔntri* identity – a practical competence that thus *made* him Sherbro despite his otherwise Krio lifestyle. At the same time, the father of the bride asserted 'the Krio system' as a proof of the cultural closeness of Sherbros, which allowed a union based on Krio Christian terms.

Religious Variations in Rituals

As discussed above, language, education and dress are all drawn upon in performances of individual and collective identity. This final section concentrates on the use of religious rituals to differentiate between Krio and Sherbro settlements. In Sherbro places, rituals are framed within African spiritual beliefs, whereas in Krio places, they refer to Christianity. Yet, both groups mutually influence each other's cultural practices, as we shall see now.

Sherbro/Krio networks of relatives rely on mutual attendance at rituals. These social events are of two kinds: family ceremonials, such as weddings and funerals, and community rituals, like rituals for the dead and rituals such as the *Kuk fɔ tɔng* (Cooking for the town) and *Kuk fɔ warf* (Cooking for the wharf), by which spirits are asked to protect the town and fishermen at sea. Both are important social occasions through which relatives meet and maintain their networks (Cohen 1981: 74). For some family events such as weddings, it is common to issue personal invitations, whereas funerals draw people from all settlements. Besides, the practice of wake-keeping the night before the funeral, which is important to both Sherbros and Krios (Fyle and Heroe 1977), is a significant social event. Friends and extended relatives attend wake-keeping in greater numbers than the funerals themselves. Not only the financial contribution but also the time, money and effort needed to come from another settlement are seen as sufficient signs of sympathy by the family of the deceased.

Rituals for the dead are of particular significance to Krios. Many of these customs are of Yoruba origin.[10] On Christian holidays, both Krio and Sherbro families go to gravesides to pour libations for dead relatives, ask them for protection or consult them regarding future prospects. Individuals attend these ceremonies at the place where they feel the strongest connection, yet they can go to various gravesides when settlements are not too far from each other. The fact that Krios and Sherbros participate together in these rituals is of particular

significance, since it allows people to emphasize common ancestry, acknowledge the geographical space that unites them and display a common historical heritage.

While families in Krio settlements usually prefer going to the cemetery on Christmas Day, families in Sherbro settlements pour libations on New Year's Day. Thus, both can visit various cemeteries. A woman from York, whose mother was a Krio from Banana Island and whose father was a Sherbro from Bureh Town, often visited the three sites every year: she went to Banana Island at Christmas, returned to York to pour libations for her dead child on New Year's Day and eventually went to Bureh Town on the second Sunday of January to visit her father's grave. Most Muslim Sherbros maintain the tradition as well, for people in Sherbro settlements see it as a ceremony separate from Christian influence. A Muslim Sherbro told me, for instance, that 'it is neither Muslim nor Christian; it is a Sherbro tradition'. Some Muslims, instead of visiting the grave, place the *sara* inside their house, which is an offering that consists of rice-flour balls mixed with sugar, also called rice bread, and kola nuts, with water and soft drinks. Thereby, they can perform an alternative ritual on a day associated with a Sherbro tradition. Some Christian Sherbros also carry on the *sara* tradition for deceased Muslim parents.

Such occasions can assume a community-oriented dimension. For instance, on New Year's Day, the headman also pours libations for the community and asks for the renewed confidence of the dead in his own leadership. In Bureh Town, oddly, the New Year's Day ceremony takes place on the second Sunday of January. As a result, it is an event that attracts people from the entire Peninsula, sometimes very loosely connected to Bureh Town. Most people arrive on Saturday night to enjoy music, drinking and dancing – including the usual football match between Bureh Town and another Peninsula team – which is followed on Sunday morning by family rituals at the cemetery. The cemetery is a mile from the village, and the long walk on the beach is fuelled by heavy drinking. The occasion allows people who have not met for a long time to catch up and feel part of a larger Peninsula community.

Nevertheless, the ceremonies for the dead are also an occasion for Sherbros and Krios to perform differences of *kɔlchɔ*. In the next two paragraphs, I present New Year's Day ceremonies that I attended on 1 January 2012 in Baw-Baw (a Sherbro settlement) and in Sussex/King Town (a Krio settlement).

In the early morning of 1 January, I was invited in Baw-Baw by the representative of the Martin family on the mother's side to witness the pouring of libations for the ancestors. We formed a group of about ten people and stopped at several sites. All rituals were carried out in the lower part of Baw-Baw, near the beach. We stopped first between the line of houses and the Poro sacred bush. I was told that until a few decades ago, women were buried behind their houses, not far from the graves of men inside the Poro bush. Family members poured

gin in one glass, water in another, and opened a bottle of soft drink. Everybody kneeled, hands on the ground with upturned palms. Gin and water were poured on the ground, and the male elder asked for blessings in Sherbro. Then, each participant took some of the moist earth, put some on his or her forehead and chest, and drank from the two glasses. The men then entered the Poro bush to carry out a similar ritual for deceased Poro members. We, the women, waited for them. After visiting another woman's grave, we went to the cemetery to honour a recently deceased uncle. Finally, libations were poured on the beach and at the family house, after which everyone went their separate ways. The ritual on the beach was carried out for an uncle who had drowned at sea. Family members formed a line facing the sea and the male elder called the uncle several times with long cries, while others were clapping their hands in a regular rhythm. The group shouted in unison a last call before they poured the libation in the sand.

Later during the day, I witnessed the New Year's Day community ritual in Sussex/King Town. In Sussex, Sherbro Town and King Town have separate cemeteries. The two headmen pour libations separately for their own community. The headman of King Town asked two elders, the oldest woman of King Town and one local political representative, to help him in carrying out the community ritual. They gathered people around the main tree of the beach, some metres away from the cemetery. The headman knelt down and asked for the blessings of the dead. The older woman then poured water on the ground and named protective ancestors. Three glasses were put at the foot of the tree, with gin, water and soft drink. She soaked four kola nuts in the water. She asked each ancestor to bless the town and the headman, and, after each libation, added: 'We are people who do not believe in *mɛrɛsin* [medicine] but worship God.'[11] The group sang several gospels in Krio. The other man poured libations. The headman asked people to choose two representatives from the youth and from the women to talk to the ancestors on their behalf. The older woman then broke two kola nuts and asked for the ancestors' blessings. She threw the four parts, which fell back symmetrically, two halves up and two halves down, meaning that the blessings over the headman's leadership had been granted.

The purpose of this type of ritual – to receive the blessings of the ancestors – is common to both Sherbros and Krios. Both groups perform family rituals (like the one in Baw-Baw) and community rituals (like the one in Sussex). For community rituals, the cast of kola nuts is performed by an elder, who is believed to have more experience in putting requests to the dead. Nevertheless, the religious beliefs that Krios and Sherbros invoke are different, which also points to different practices in the ceremonies for the dead.

Places of burial differ for Sherbros and Krios. Although most Sherbro men are now buried in public cemeteries, until recently sacred groves served as cemeteries for Poro senior members. As a result, members pour libations in the Poro bush. Moreover, upon the death of a member, Poro members perform a secret

ritual over the body, after which it is passed on to the church for public religious funerals. The failure to perform this ritual causes problems: the deceased will not be at peace and instead will appear in dreams and disturb the living. Wake-keeping also involves Poro dances and songs (*sɔkɔ*). In Krio settlements, the Hunting society can also perform a ceremony over the body of a deceased member before handing the corpse over to the church. In that case, society-related dances are sometimes forbidden by the pastor in charge of the funerals, as I observed in two cases. All people are buried in the same public cemetery. Thus, the pouring of libations does not involve any secret part to the ritual, whereas in Sherbro settlements, the sacred grove is a privileged place for talking to the dead.

The call to the uncle lost at sea involves cultural references to Poro ceremonies. A funeral ceremony observed in Baw-Baw will serve as an example here. The death of the Poro member had not been announced before the following public ceremony. After Poro rituals had been passed over the body of the deceased, the speaker of the society called the women to stand in front of the house of the dead, on the other side of the street, and clap. The door was open, but the threshold had been blocked by a bamboo mat since the first day of the Poro ceremony, which lasts according to the title and rank of the deceased within the initiation society. Poro members, their backs to the door, faced the women, and responded regularly with long cries to the voice of the Poro spirit inside, who spoke the secret language. The spokesperson of the society walked back

Figure 5.1. Headman pouring libations in Sussex/King Town, 2012. © Anaïs Ménard

and forth between men and women, and reminded people in Sherbro about the deceased: that he was sick and that the society had been praying for him during this time. After finishing these reminders, he announced the death to the village. Suddenly, a signal was given by the spirit inside, and the men entered the house with one shout. With the death so disclosed, the women started crying and walked towards the door to see the body. In some other Poro rituals observed during the initiation period, women's clapping marked the liminal space in which Poro members could perform public ceremonies. The women's attendance and participation is necessary for Poro members to perform and for the Poro spirit to talk publicly. Women link the secret and the public parts of the Poro. Their clapping is also a call to the underworld, so that dead spirits can communicate with the living and a spirit of a man lost at sea can return.

The ceremony in Sussex, on the contrary, involves Christian references, gospel songs and prayers. The reference to *mɛrɛsin* constitutes a meta-discourse that defines Krio identity as opposed to *kɔntri* beliefs related to initiation societies. Here, *mɛrɛsin* refers to harmful forces based on occult powers. In Krio settlements, the use of Christian references serves as a justification for practising rituals originally unrelated to Christianity. Some Krio participants felt obliged to justify their presence to me by saying that as Christians, they did not believe that dead people could have any impact on their lives. Yet, they stated that they still felt the need to perpetuate the tradition because 'culture and religion are two different things'. Therefore, references to Christianity are used to conciliate *kɔntri* practices and religious belonging. Members of born-again churches in particular are discouraged from taking part in these rituals. For Sherbros, the preaching against initiation societies has contributed to the disaffection of New Year's Day celebrations. Krios, by emphasizing Christian faith on the one hand and 'tradition' on the other, can present *kɔntri* practices as compatible with religion.

The Christian/*kɔntri* dichotomy is re-enacted in community events that derive directly from local ritual practice, such as the *Kuk fɔ tɔng* and *Kuk fɔ warf*. The *Kuk fɔ warf* is common to fisherfolk along the Peninsula. The ritual keeps the sea spirits satisfied, by which fishermen hope for better catches and fewer accidents at sea. The *Kuk fɔ tɔng* is similar, but places more emphasis on the protection of the community as a whole. These rituals can be performed annually, although this rarely happens. In many Sherbro places, they had not been performed for a long time. In Krio settlements, such as Kent, but also on the Banana Islands, they had been more common in recent years. In 2012, I observed them in Number Two River. The set-up of the rituals differs in Krio and Sherbro settlements, since in the latter, they are organized by Poro members. In performing them, people in Krio and Sherbro settlements maintain a distinction based on religious beliefs. At the same time, it shows that Krios have made rituals of indigenous origin compatible with Christian traditions.

As in the case of the New Year's ceremony, Krios and Sherbros perform this ritual by following similar rules. Fishermen usually put in a request to the headman when fish become scarce, before the rainy season, which is also the most dangerous period for open-sea fishing. On the day of the ceremony, everyone can take part. Food and pots are carried to the wharf or to a sacred location close to it: the cooking takes place there until mid-afternoon. In Sherbro settlements, a small bamboo table is placed at the sacred site where people pour libations, usually at the foot of a silk cotton tree. The table placed under the tree is covered with white cloth and the cooked food is placed under it. In Krio settlements, the food is placed under a small wooden hut, with a piece of white cloth tight on top. Only a few people, mostly elders of the community, are able to perform the ceremony, pour libations and cast the four halves of the kola nuts to seek the blessings of the spirit world. Cooked food is also carried to the main stones or islands in the open sea to please the sea spirits. No one is allowed to eat the food prepared for sacred sites and it is left as such. After the pouring of libations, people eat and any food that is not finished is either left where it is or thrown into the sea.

In this example, it becomes apparent that Krio communities adopted local rituals and beliefs as their own. Their rituals use symbols that establish a link with the spirit world – the silk cotton tree and the sea stones for water spirits. Krios living in Dublin on the Banana Islands also stressed the *kɔntri* practices performed during those rituals. They mentioned that people eat food together out of a common plate. This contradicts the ordinary Krio practice of preparing and offering individual portions, even during other rituals like funerals. By stressing commensality in this case, Krios insisted on the values of togetherness and sharing like proper *kɔntri* people. At the same time, the ceremony is dissociated from initiation societies. People in charge of pouring libations are often members of Hunting, but their role is more closely linked to their prominent social status. On the Banana Islands, the ritual was in the charge of the fishermen's benefit society, which is a form of association introduced by the Liberated Africans (Peterson 1969: 259–64) and by which fishermen provide mutual assistance – for instance, in the event that a fisherman is lost or dies at sea. Members of different benefit societies also invite each other to the *Kuk fɔ warf*.

In Sherbro settlements, Poro members play a key role in organizing the *Kuk fɔ warf*. As people would express it, they 'have the event in their hands' or 'own it' (*na dɛn get am*). On the eve of the ritual, Poro members perform secret ceremonies in various sacred places of the town. Then, in the evening, they organize the *sɔkɔ*, which is public. Senior members send invitations to members in other settlements through Poro channels. On the next day, both men and women cook at the main sacred site. Members of the Poro cook apart. They cover their hair with white cloth. The food that they prepare goes to several sacred sites: the main cotton tree, the sea stones and the island, and a site inside

the Poro sacred grove. In Number Two's *Kuk fɔ tɔng* in 2012, a few elements varied. The cooking did not separate members from non-members, but women and men cooked apart. Each group of three to four people was supervised by an elder, whose head was covered in white. The sacred bush no longer existed, but Poro members maintained a specific site where they poured libations.[12] They had organized the *sɔkɔ* the night before and, on the day of the ritual, they proceeded with the same symbols as during other Poro ceremonies – for instance, the small table covered with white cloth for libations, and white scarves to cover their hair.

People in Sherbro settlements often stressed that 'all of this is *kɔlchɔ*'. In this usage, *kɔlchɔ* becomes the socially acceptable way to refer to local beliefs and practices related to initiation societies. *Kɔlchɔ* is distinct from 'religion'. De Jong (2007: 63, 119) makes a similar observation in Jola society, in which people refer to local initiation rituals as 'tradition' or 'culture' to differentiate their ancestral religion from Islam. The Krio *Kuk fɔ warf* includes prayers, but praying is considered inappropriate in Sherbro settlements. The rituals are a time to gather people around cultural practices branded as 'authentic' and not to display religious affiliations that may sometimes be in conflict with participation in cultural events. For this reason, elders privilege the Sherbro language in performing rituals, such as when pouring libations for the dead (on New Year's Day) or during the opening ceremony of the Poro initiation. Although many people may not fully master Sherbro, a few words in Sherbro are important to express the cultural content of a *kɔntri* identity.

Conclusion

The tactics of concealment and disclosure, which pertain to how individuals perform their Sherbro identity in specific social circumstances, reveal collective patterns of social positioning. Ethnic hybridity is established through social performance, and the decision to emphasize one category or the other depends on the objective(s) of the performer, and how the performance serves in delimiting the social and cultural frontiers of the group vis-à-vis others. The performance of Krio-ness, for instance, can be used as a process of exclusion and humiliation of populations who migrated recently from the interior of the country and do not fully master the Krio language and Krio cultural codes. In this sense, the Krio/ *kɔntri* dichotomy, originated from colonial history and grounded in geographical separation, reproduces power relations in the present context.

It has become apparent that performers, in using concealment and disclosure, expect the 'hybrid' self to be disruptive and interrupt the assumptions upon which some social interactions are based. However, these strategies also reveal that Krio/*kɔntri* performances are everyday normal practices. Being Krio is considered an essential part of Sherbro identity, as Sherbros have built a social

capital that allows them to be (and appear) Krio. Moreover, Sherbro identity assumes a mediating position between other (politicized) ethnic identities.

The case concerning ritual performances also forces us to reconsider, explicitly, the claim that Krios have formed, since colonial times, a culturally homogeneous group (Cole 2006; Peterson 1968). In this chapter, as in the preceding ones, I have provided ethnographic evidence of the longlasting interactions between Sherbros and Krios, and I have shown how Krios integrated indigenous influences into their own society. Despite the fact that Krios themselves have sometimes emphasized non-Sierra Leonean roots, such as the Yoruba culture, and have downplayed their relations with local ethnic groups (Dixon-Fyle and Cole 2006: 7), a focus on their relations with the Sherbro communities of the Peninsula shows that they have had varied and ongoing relations of social and cultural exchange. In order to develop this point, in Chapter 6, I examine the dynamics of Sherbro/Krio social relatedness linked to common membership in local initiation societies.

Notes

An earlier version of the 'British Sherbros and Krio Decorum' section of this chapter was published under the title 'Dynamics of Inclusion and Exclusion Related to a Creole Language: "Krio" as an Ambivalent Semiotic Register in Present-Day Sierra Leone' in the coedited volume by Jacqueline Knörr and Wilson Trajano Filho (2018) *Creolization and Pidginization in Contexts of Postcolonial Diversity. Language, Culture, Identity,* published by Brill.

1. I use the expression '*krionayzd* Sherbro' according to the local understanding of the terms: Sherbros living in Freetown, whose *kɔntri* identity remains hidden. They appear as Krio to others and do not mind being mistaken for Krio. This includes people born in the Provinces or in Freetown, but also people born on the Peninsula. I met some who had lived for a few decades in Freetown before returning to the Peninsula for retirement. The data presented here also include their experiences during their years of professional activity.

2. Among *krionayzd* Sherbros, the historical imagination was important in drawing the contours of Sherbro identity. This became even more obvious during my work with members of the Bonthe Family – a Freetown-based organization founded by people of Sherbro origin, most of whom have loose links with Bonthe Island. As they took up the task of organizing the celebrations of the fiftieth anniversary of independence in Bonthe Town in 2011, I travelled with members of the organization – about thirty in total, all quite high-profile people who could afford to travel. The three-day programme involved a lot of sightseeing and people expressed their nostalgia for the past glory of Bonthe. Those who had been raised in Bonthe especially talked about 'prosperous times' when the town had been economically well off and developed. They referred to colonial times as well as to the post-independence period until the 1970s, when Bonthe had electricity and an airport, and was called Christmas Island, as many people in Freetown liked to spend the Christmas holidays in Bonthe Town. For instance, a female member of the Bonthe Family told me: 'Life started here. Civilization started here. Everything started here. We were the first ones to be developed, much before Freetown. Here should be Freetown today.' This

statement emphasized the nostalgia of prosperous times, but also the past status of Bonthe as a 'civilized' place.

3. On the relationship between fishing and the Poro society, see Chapter 3.

4. See Chapter 7 for a discussion of Mende/Sherbro cultural commonalities.

5. The print dress or *kabba slot* is part of Krio traditional attire. It is a dress made of cotton printed fabric and adorned with distinctive embroidery.

6. In the 2004 census (Western Area Rural District), Krio and Temne ranked similarly as first languages, with 36% and 37% of the population, respectively (45% of the population identified as Temne, compared to 5% as Krio). Krio dominated as the second language, with 54% of respondents mentioning Krio compared to 8% for Temne. These figures do not convey locational differences: in the south of the Peninsula, and Tombo in particular, the Temne language was already dominant in the 1980s (Hendrix 1985).

7. In his history of the Temne in Freetown, Bangura (2017) shows that Western education and the European 'way of life' were not the only avenues for gaining prestige in the colony. Temne identity, via the development of cultural associations, became attractive to members of other ethnic groups, who learned Temne and adopted 'Temne values'. Temne elites also championed the development of Islamic education in Freetown 'as an alternative path to social status in an urban environment dominated by Western culture and mores' (2017: 133).

8. In the Liberian context, Moran (1990: 68–69) explains that 'the association between clothing style and status is so strong that "lappa woman" is used interchangeably with "native" or "country woman".' Civilized women, who are forced to work on the market and start to 'tie lappa' lose their social status and are considered to be no longer civilized.

9. It is important to note that these strategies may vary in other settlements. I would like to report here a conversation with the historian Joseph Opala, who resided in Hamilton in the 1990s. When he settled in Hamilton, a couple of elders came to greet him, among whom was Mammie Johnson, who usually wore the *kabba slot* and prepared 'Saturday fufu' (a Krio dish) for him. One night, he heard the society drums beating and learned that Mammie Johnson, who had just died, was a 'big woman' of the Bondo. He was extremely surprised. He qualified these tactics of concealment and disclosure for me as 'Krio by day, Sherbro by night'. This may have been particularly relevant in Hamilton, which is a 'Krio' place. By contrast, in Sussex, where there are two separated Krio and Sherbro settlements between which families are related, people told him that a person's choice of livelihood made somebody 'Krio' or 'Sherbro'. If somebody decided to become a fisherman, he would be considered Sherbro. Finally, in Lakka, he was told that populations were 'fully Sherbro' – they did not engage in any activity other than fishing. This speaks to the importance of both historical and social conditions in influencing strategies of identity making, which may differ from settlement to settlement, even in a very localized geography, and to the construction of identity through performance, or identity by *doing*.

10. See Cohen 1981; Fyle and Heroe 1977; Porter 1963; Spitzer 1974; and Wyse 1989.

11. *Mɛrɛsin* refers to various substances (herbal medicines or 'leaves' in particular) used by the members of initiation societies for their esoteric powers.

12. The sacred bush was sold in the 1970s to a local Lebanese entrepreneur. While the details of this transaction were not disclosed to me, it was the first instance of a sacred place being sold for economic purposes on the Peninsula (see the discussion in Chapter 7).

Chapter 6

The Social Dynamics of Double Membership

On the Upper Guinea Coast, initiation into local cults is often part of the 'ritual process' (Turner 1969) by which strangers become incorporated into local communities. The reciprocal arrangement between hosts and strangers implies that the latter will join local initiation societies, as a sign of their submission to hosts' ritual and political authority. Initiation plays a role in changing a person's ethnic affiliation, and ritual practice in turn can become a criterion for ethnic membership (see Berliner 2010; McGovern 2013; Sarró 2010). In this chapter, I analyse the local modalities by which initiation plays an integrative role that is substantiated by wider logics of reciprocity between hosts and strangers.

Initiation societies, otherwise termed 'secret societies' in the anthropological literature, refer to institutions that structure gender relations and also produce hierarchical relations along rank, age and lineage (Bledsoe 1980, 1984; Murphy 1980; Murphy and Bledsoe 1987). In Sierra Leone, 'traditional' societies (i.e. those with indigenous roots in Sierra Leone) include, among others, Poro for men and Bondo (or Sande) for women, both of which are widespread along the Upper Guinea Coast. These institutions are in charge of organizing the gendered processes of initiation that will mark boys' and girls' transition into adulthood. Initiation takes place in a sacred grove, where initiates learn ritual 'secrets' and performances, such as singing and dancing. Many authors note that initiation periods, which could last up to several months in the past, are now shortened to a few weeks and sometimes a few days.

Poro and Bondo practices are embedded in deep religious beliefs materialized by masquerades, namely masked performances that are the visible manifestations

of spirits. The Bondo mask can perform publicly, whereas the Poro mask is hidden to non-initiates (i.e. seeing the mask by mistake implies enforced initiation).

Precolonial accounts lend a great historical depth to both Poro and Bondo. A first mention of Poro appears in Manuel Alvarez's account of the coast of Sierra Leone circa 1615 (Lamp 2016). Alvarez attributes Poro to the Mane in the southern region, from where it was transmitted to the southern Bullom and the Temne. He situates the Poro 'university', where pupils are trained, beyond Cape Mount, in Vai-speaking territory, and stresses the role of the institution in keeping order and preserving peace. Early analyses of the Poro society have evidenced its role in maintaining political stability in the midst of precolonial conflicts and in managing local political affairs (d'Azevedo 1962a, 1962b; Fulton 1972, Little 1965, 1966). The origins of female societies are similarly ancient. Early descriptions appear in Valentim Fernandes' *Description de la Côte Occidentale d'Afrique* (1506–10) and André Alvarez de Almada's *Tratado breve dos Rios de Guiné* (1594) (see Rodney 1980: 65), but Dapper makes the first use of the name 'Sande' in his *Description of Africa* (1668). According to Lamp (1985: 28), the Temne and Bullom both 'testify to a Mende origin for the mask', which also suggests early processes of transmission.[1]

In contemporary Sierra Leone, Poro is associated with the rural context, while Bondo practices are described as resilient in the city, including Freetown (cf. Knörr 2000).[2] On the Peninsula, Sherbro settlements have both Poro and Bondo sacred groves. Each Sherbro settlement has, or had in the past, an independent Poro chapter, which refers to a local unit of members who are in charge of the sacred grove and can lead initiations there. Krio settlements, by contrast, have the Hunting society. Hunting is derived from Yoruba traditions and was introduced in Sierra Leone by the Liberated Africans by the mid-nineteenth century. It is gender-mixed and grounded in urban settings (King 2011: 3).

The anthropological literature highlights the role of initiation societies both in social stratification and in the production of solidarity between members.[3] As Bledsoe (1984: 462) points out in the case of Bondo, 'female solidarity and stratification are different yet equally valid aspects of the same organization'. Literature on the war follows similar lines, as authors such as Richards (1996) and Peters and Richards (1998) have identified the role of Poro in maintaining a customary system that favoured elders over youth and generated conflicts that escalated into war violence. Nevertheless, in the postwar context, initiation societies seem to have a facilitating role in processes of reconciliation, for they have strong ritual significance and can play a cohesive role at the local level (Coulter 2005; Richards, Bah and Vincent 2004).

Nevertheless, the local modalities by which initiation societies create or undo relations of reciprocity between groups are rarely explored. I concur with Ferme's analysis (1994: 31) that 'both solidarity and stratification models of the organization of the Sande and Poro lacked analyses of their particular manifestations

in local chapters embedded in wider communities, of their rituals, and of the historical forces with which they articulated'. The creation of a male or female fellowship through initiation often appears as the main argument supporting the 'integrative' nature of initiation societies, as it can crosscut ethnic affiliations in diverse societies.[4] Other approaches address the role of secrecy and processes of cultural transmission that bind initiates together (Bellman 1984; Højbjerg 2007). Using a cognitive approach to processes of transmission, Højbjerg gives evidence of the persistence of Poro beliefs in a context of state iconoclasm, which reveals the cultural significance of Poro as a body of religious knowledge independent from politics.

These approaches provide some insights into the way in which initiation may constitute a binding practice between hosts and strangers. Being part of common initiation societies creates trust. Trust emerges from the ability of members to use the language of secrecy adequately (Bellman 1984). Simmel (1950: 348) notes that 'there is in the secret society … the internal quality of reciprocal confidence among its members – the very specific trust that they are capable of keeping silent'. Moreover, social relationships are built upon reciprocal knowledge (ibid.: 309): a stranger has to reveal things about himself in order to fend off suspicions and acquire trust. As the dialectics of trust and betrayal are inherent to initiation societies' practice, membership becomes a critical mechanism to achieve such knowledge. Moreover, membership provides common spiritual beliefs to different groups, who revere the same local spirits and ancestors. Thus, common initiation inscribes hosts and strangers within the same ritual space defined by local ancestorship.

In this chapter and the next one, I show that membership in initiation societies, via its ethos of secrecy, operates as a means through which reciprocal interactions between groups are negotiated. This chapter details the modalities by which Sherbros and Krios combine memberships as a process for strengthening their social and kin ties. Krios are usually members of Hunting, and Sherbros are members of Poro or Bondo. Nevertheless, on the Peninsula, people have a long practice of double membership. Individuals can join the society of the other group, in addition to their membership in their settlement of origin, and without changing their ethnic affiliation. By contrast, initiation into Poro for strangers from other ethnic groups is part of a process of ethnic transformation detailed in Chapter 7. Initiation marks their assimilation to the Sherbro group. Becoming a member of Poro is an expected return from a stranger who settles and benefits from the hospitality of Sherbro communities.

A Methodological Note

This chapter and the next one focus on discourses about membership that inform the way in which collective bonds are imagined, and the way in which

individuals validate or reject membership in societies as an ethnic marker or as offering the possibility to cross ethnic boundaries. The data were collected in two ways: personal interviews with members and participant observation (for instance, during the initiation period in Baw-Baw). With regard to individual interviews, questions never focused on the content of secrets, but only on the social and emotional significance of membership. People, who were at first hesitant to talk about Poro or Bondo membership, felt reassured by the fact that we would only talk about their individual experiences as members, and many of them talked rather openly about their membership. Additionally, my research partner, Jonathan Charma, as a member of the Poro chapter of Baw-Baw, could access Poro meetings in other settlements. The information then reported was one of an outsider to a specific chapter.[5] His legitimacy as a member to provide me with the specifics of the political decisions taken in these meetings was much more limited than in Baw-Baw. Therefore, here I only have included information that was corroborated in discussions with senior members of specific Poro chapters or, to put it another way, information that these members voluntarily 'leaked'. In 2018–19, I could update these data directly with the same members, without Jonathan's mediation, which showed that I had gained legitimacy, in their view, first by the act of writing and second by coming back to ask for permission to publish. Their confident reaction at reading (or listening to) my findings confirmed that I had not divulged secrets, but that I had contextualized them 'in text' (de Jong 2007: 193) and translated the social logics that gave them substance in the Peninsula environment. For evident reasons, I have preserved the anonymity of speakers by using pseudonyms or by naming settlements with a random letter when necessary.

The chapter includes interviews with both Poro and Bondo members with various society ranks. Nevertheless, my work with a Poro member undoubtedly generated a gendered 'bias' that gave more prominence to data concerning the male society. Moreover, the political conflict that opposed Sherbros and strangers made Poro members particularly vocal about the role of their society in local politics and about local membership as an expression of autochthonous belonging (see Chapter 7). In comparison, the role of Bondo as a vector of ethnic differentiation was less important: Bondo members stressed sisterhood, despite the existence of ritual differences that usually marked the ethnic origin of members.

Finally, at the time of my research, there had been a twenty-year break in Poro initiation, as initiations had been put on hold during the time of the Civil War. The reasons for this are detailed in Chapter 7. My stay coincided with the first initiation period after the war, organized in the sacred grove of Baw-Baw. In the years that followed, the Poro chapter in Sussex organized an initiation period in 2013 and the chapter in Mama Beach in 2013 and 2016. As a result, many interviews, unless otherwise mentioned, refer to initiations that took place

before the war. From there, we can infer that the social and emotional meaning given to one's membership may have changed over time, and may have altered painful memories of initiation or exaggerated feelings of nostalgia towards either initiation or ritual practices. Nevertheless, my aim here is to give an overview of how people imagine their membership today, with reference to which social networks, and how this may impact their social life.

Ritual Territories and Power

Initiation societies act as identity markers and delineate Krio and Sherbro territories. Sherbro settlements have Poro and Bondo sacred groves, referred to as Poro or Bondo *bush*,[6] where initiation takes place. Krio settlements host Hunting societies. Membership in Poro and Bondo is considered to be part of Sherbro cultural practice, and membership in Hunting is considered a Krio tradition. People commonly use the Krio words for culture (*kɔlchɔ*) and tradition (*tradishɔn*) to express this ethnic, ritual and territorial differentiation.

Ritual territories indicate both a religious and a political differentiation. The Poro society determines the geographical contours of power: the local political territory is the one over which Poro members have authority. Poro members act on behalf of the community to protect the territory (Murphy 1980: 195), solve land disputes (Bellman 1984: 26–28) or negotiate peace with other groups. These prerogatives derive from the specific relationship that landowning lineages have 'not only with the earth but also with the ancestors dwelling under the earth and all blessings and power they might give' (Hoffer 1971: 99). Initiates learn how to respect both previous and present 'owners' of the land, ancestors and landowning families (ibid.: 185, 313). When asked about the reasons for the divide between Krio and Sherbro territories with regard to initiation societies, people frequently answered (regarding Hunting) 'wi nɔ bon mit am' ('we did not meet [this sacred bush] here when we were born'). Poro and Bondo, as initiation societies of local origins, are viewed as the societies of Sherbro hosts and therefore distinct from the Hunting society introduced later by the Liberated Africans.

In Sherbro settlements, the Poro sacred grove but also specific sites along the beach are places for meeting and decision making. Poro members can apply ritual laws within the community's territory, especially during initiation. These laws can also concern the social and economic life of the community: Poro wooden signs can be used to protect land, fruit trees or water wells. During initiation times, the violation of Poro laws is a common accusation that dramatizes the entrance of ritual initiates into the sacred grove. In Sherbro settlements, 'committing against the society' – so the Krio expression goes – is a reason that justifies initiation into Poro and Bondo. These accusations include, for instance, *kɔs* (insults) against members, or picking fruits from a tree marked with a Poro sign, an offence that challenges the authority of landowners.[7] Violations of Poro

laws are amended by the initiation process. Upon their entry in the Poro bush, initiates confess their past mistakes and bad behaviours, and 'by undergoing metaphorical death, [they] eliminate evils from the community' (Bellman 1984: 112). During initiation, they also learn how to respect social hierarchies and those who are 'owners of the land' (cf. Hoffer 1971: 313).

People living in Krio settlements, for their part, tend to position Hunting and Poro in a Christian/pagan dichotomy and consider Hunting to be Christian-oriented. Members mentioned that Hunting societies organize annual thanksgiving services in church. The Hunting mask performs, but does not enter the church, which marks the delimitation between a Christian holy space and a mundane space, not related to beliefs but to enjoyment. Krios are careful in distancing themselves from what they consider devil's worship in Poro and Bondo ritual practice, as someone told me in York: '[Hunting men] don't even pray to the shrine. We don't pray to the shrine or the devil. We always pray with Christian prayers before we start our meetings, so that God will protect us and everything will happen well.' The religious distinction also refers to differences in burial practices, because at least some Poro members continue to be buried inside the sacred grove instead of the public cemetery (see Chapter 5), whereas Hunting members are always buried in Christian cemeteries.

Due to the role of Poro in legitimating the status of landowners, it cannot coexist with the Hunting society in the same political territory. As compared to Poro, Hunting also plays a lesser role in proving connection to the land. Krio residents had sometimes tried to introduce Hunting in Sherbro villages, but Sherbros did not take it as a serious possibility. A Poro member in Bureh Town told me:

> Having a Hunting bush here would make a mockery of Poro stakeholders. Other [Sherbro] villages would find it funny; they would call them Krio. It is also risky because the Hunting [society] can overlook the Poro [society] if it comes to have more members. Although Hunting has entered our system now, most elders would not agree. Everybody has one's own culture. We Sherbro have ours [*wiyon*]; Krio people have theirs [*dɛnyon*].

This *mockery* refers to two things: first, members of other Poro chapters would call Poro senior members 'Krio', which shows the relevance of society membership in marking ethnic identity; and, second, the situation involves the risk of being supplanted by members of the Hunting society in terms of numbers, power and leadership. Because Sherbros consider themselves as hosts to Krios, a reversal of social hierarchies would be humiliating, and Sherbros would lose their status as 'owners of the land'. Finally, the statement concludes that each group knows its social position. Although Poro and Hunting memberships can be combined, territories (for social and political reasons) have to remain differentiated.

Moreover, Poro often takes ritual precedence over Hunting. Poro members told me that they had performed in Krio settlements a few times for the death of senior members, who had resided there. Instead of meeting in the Poro bush, they gathered at a small site on the wharf to perform sacred rituals. Women and non-members stayed indoors during the ritual process, as happens in Sherbro settlements. This practice, referred to as *fɔ lɔk di ples* (to lock the place), will be further detailed in Chapter 7. Suffice it to say here that there are no examples in the literature where this practice has been described in areas that have no Poro sacred grove. For deceased members who are both Poro and Hunting men, each society performs on different days. The fact that Krios allow such performance indicates not only that Krios can become Poro senior members, but also that Poro rituals are considered legitimate due to relations of reciprocity established with Sherbro localities. As a consequence, Poro members can, on some occasions, apply Poro ritual laws in places that have another ritual tradition.

Initiation societies usually welcome people of multiple ethnic origins. However, in the political context of the Peninsula, they are an avenue for groups of strangers to contest political territories and they have become loaded with ethnic meaning. Temne-speaking populations, who are mainly Muslims, have become associated with the Ojeh society, also called Egungun.[8] Krios and Sherbros can also be Ojeh members, but they present it as an exclusively 'Temne society' that is not compatible with Christian principles. Ojeh is usually described as a society in which members employ *juju* and harmful medicines. In large fishing towns of the Peninsula, such as Goderich and Tombo, Ojeh was introduced by Temne fishermen in the 1970s. Diggins (2018: 48) observes that in Kagboro chiefdom, the introduction of Ojeh also followed Temne migrations to the coast and landowning families saw it 'as an aggressive move to usurp the once-incontrovertible authority of Shenge's own Poro society'. In Tombo, before the Poro bush was desecrated, the rivalry between the two masquerades structured local politics. I was told that both would perform the same day, in different parts of town, to demonstrate their 'power' and attract the maximum number of followers, who would come to violent confrontations. The Ojeh society thus played a role in the contestation of Sherbro local authority, which ended in the clearing of the Poro bush (see Chapter 7). In 2012, in Kissi Town, near Tombo, I could see several Ojeh signs on trees. In Mama Beach, the headman had rejected a proposition to establish an Ojeh sacred bush, knowing that members could perform regularly inside the town.

In Krio settlements, recent migrants tended to use Bondo and Poro to establish their presence and push their political claims. In Kent, Temne women had advocated for the creation of a Bondo bush, but landowning families had so far refused to grant them land. Bondo women performed from time to time, and Krios complained about this. The recognition of a Bondo chapter may lead eventually to the establishment of a Poro sacred grove, as one of the women who

had asked for the land told me: '[The Poro men] are waiting for us. Once we have our bush, we will be able to ask for theirs … If they give us a place, we will divide it, we will get ours, they will get theirs.' Bondo and Poro societies form a complete ritual system underpinned with complex symbolic interdependency (Lamp 1985). They mediate the relations between the sexes and complement each other for the training of future adults of the community.[9] At the same time, senior members of Poro and Bondo form an alliance, often structured around elite lineages, based on the control of dependants, poorer families and their (re) productive resources (Bledsoe 1980, 1984). Viewed from this perspective, the demand for a Bondo sacred grove was perceived as a manoeuvre to reverse host/ stranger relations and gain political voice. Many Krios feared that the presence of a Bondo sacred grove would lead to the creation of a Poro grove and to modifications of the bylaws and the Christian lifestyle of their settlement.

Krios in Bondo and Poro

On the Peninsula, Krios and Sherbros share ritual practices based on the principles of reciprocity. Initiation in one's settlement of origin is required, as Poro and Bondo are markers of Sherbro identity and Hunting of Krio identity. Yet, this primary affiliation can be combined with a secondary affiliation. Hence, Sherbros can join Hunting, and Krios can join Poro or Bondo societies. Double membership seals existing social and family ties and materializes the Sherbro/ Krio residential zone analysed in Chapter 3. Furthermore, ritual practice offers both groups a common spiritual basis and produces fictive kinship by referring to a community of ancestors that are part of the initiation society's spiritual ethos.

The plurality of affiliations in initiation societies is frequent in Sierra Leone. Wyse (1989: 120), for instance, mentions that Krios can be both Freemasons and part of Ojeh or Poro. Yet, Krios do not discuss those dynamics easily and remain attached to a discourse that presents indigenous ritual practices, and female initiation in particular, as 'backward' (Knörr 2000). Christian Krios are usually opposed to practices of genital cutting that are part of female initiation.[10] Krio women can be part of Bondo, but tend to conceal it, as it is not considered compatible with Krio identity. Yet, Bondo played a critical role in the formation of Krio culture in the Liberated African villages of the nineteenth century.[11] In a similar way, Krio belonging in Poro has evident historical roots, despite their strong 'civilizational' discourse against it. On the Peninsula, Krios who become Poro or Bondo members are very discreet about it and would not, for instance, acknowledge their membership readily or use their initiation names in public, as is common in neighbouring Sherbro settlements.

For Krios, membership in Poro and Bondo also reflects their uneasy social position in Sierra Leone and their difficulty in making Krio identity 'autochthonous'. During the twentieth century, Krios progressively lost their dominant

political status. Wyse (1989: 124) notes that after the ratification of the 1947 Constitution, which gave a legislative majority to peoples from the Protectorate, the Masonic lodges became a social and 'psychological refuge' for Krios. Their memberships in other societies, such as Hunting, Ojeh and Poro, also increased. Wyse (ibid.: 54) presumes that belonging to those societies, by reconnecting Krios to African beliefs, may have given them the possibility to fill a spiritual and cultural 'void' in a colonial society that limited their spiritual fulfilment to Christianity. Following Wyse, I show that decisions to join Poro or Bondo for Krios who live on the Peninsula allow them to come to terms with their ambiguous social status in Sierra Leone. In recent times, many of them have experienced war violence. In the postwar context, the perception of the Krios as forming an urban 'upper class' has continued to stir up hostility against them.

By joining Poro and Bondo, Krios become part of 'the majority' of Sierra Leoneans and thus alleviate a longstanding feeling of exposure and vulnerability. Furthermore, by valorizing family connections with Sherbros, Krios anchor their identity in an 'indigenous' territory and reconnect with ancestors, whom they see as their own. Thus, Poro or Bondo membership, among Krios, rests on a balance between *advantej* (advantage) – the Krio word indicating the social, economic and political gains to be derived from membership – and emotional meaning derived from friendship and kinship ties.

Membership in Poro and Bondo offers possibilities for creating relations of patronage across the region. Socially disadvantaged members can attach themselves to powerful men and women, or patrons. Poro, in particular, appears in collective imagination as particularly powerful at the political level. In the literature, Poro involvement in wider politics is rarely supported by firsthand empirical evidence (Højbjerg 2007: 21). However, in local perceptions, it appears as the society of 'big men' that has relevance in linking an individual to important social networks. Somebody in York expressed it this way: 'I don't have access to talk to a minister; I cannot talk to the President either. I don't know him, he does not know me. But inside the society, you must share, you must talk.' This statement discloses the imagined pervasive role played by Poro in Sierra Leonean politics. The link between territory, Poro and power is extrapolated to national politics: Poro is an institution of and for people who were originally 'owners of the land' in Sierra Leone, and who, through initiation society networks, have access to decision making and can control national politics.

On the Peninsula, Poro members can initiate people of multiple ethnic origins and social backgrounds, including 'big men' from Freetown. For instance, the initiation period in Baw-Baw took place before the general elections and Poro senior members expected 'big men' to undergo initiation in order to ensure voting support. They hoped to coerce these men to act as financial sponsors for children of Baw-Baw and pay for the ritual festivities. This gives the image of a society that is particularly well connected to the centre of power and gives access

to many social networks. In reality, the establishment of relations of patronage depends more on individual connections and on how one makes use of them.

Hunting and Poro memberships are also considered mutually reinforcing since in combination they offer political and social advantages across the entire Peninsula. Men acquire prestige and expand their webs of dependants in a wider area. After a Hunting man has joined Poro, his own position within Hunting is reconsidered and upgraded. A Hunting member who had subsequently joined Poro said:

> Krios who join Poro will get a better position inside Hunting; it will give them an advantage over their own companions. People will respect them more inside Hunting.

Achieving a higher status within Hunting is often stated as the main purpose for Krios to join Poro. 'Big men' become visible in their community. A senior member of Hunting in York, after having become a Poro member, displayed his new social status by moving to a bigger house. The property became the symbol of newly acquired power, based on material wealth and 'wealth-in-people' (Bledsoe 1980). It indicated that a higher number of 'dependants' paid him visits to maintain their relation of patronage with him. Double membership allows men to consolidate power relations, both by expanding their networks of dependents and by being included in wider networks of more powerful people. Poro membership also grants Krios more respect in their own communities. Non-members fear them and some even think that members abuse their status by taking undue advantage in family or community disputes.

Among the individual reasons that push Krios to join, Poro membership also conveys, in both Sherbro and Krio discourses, a sense of feeling safe everywhere in Sierra Leone. Having freedom of movement, particularly in the Provinces, is a common reason given for joining Poro. In the case of women, Knörr (2000: 86) describes the necessity for female traders living in Freetown to be initiated into Bondo so that they are included in commercial networks and upcountry trade. Many Krios on the Peninsula stressed that membership was useful when travelling, which is also an explanation that distanced themselves from the beliefs in spirits attached to Poro and Bondo rituals.

In Sussex, one man in his eighties, who had worked as a civil servant in Freetown, shared with me a story that illustrates the sense of vulnerability experienced by non-initiated men when travelling upcountry. He was the son of a Sherbro man from Sherbro Town and a Krio woman from King Town, and was initiated into Poro in Sherbro Town. His father had told him that if he received work that involved travelling upcountry and he was not part of Poro, he would 'have to stay where the women are' and he would be harassed. Years after his initiation, the man drove to the Southern Province to visit his brother-in-law:

I stopped on the road and went to ease myself behind the back of a small shop, where they sell drinks and other stuff. It was almost time for them to pray. Two people came to me and told me that the place where I eased myself was not too far from a certain place [the Poro grove]. [*Switching to English*] I said: 'What is it about?' I was so surprised. [*Switching back to Krio*] They said that they had launched the Poro society, just near this place … I said that I could not ease myself in front of the house with people watching. I told them that I could talk more. I tried to test them [to see if they were Poro members] … More people came to see what was happening …. Somebody in the crowd recognized me and said: 'This is Pa S.' He was from Tokeh. He said to his fellow members: 'You have taken a wrong direction, he is a master [a senior member].' [*He laughed.*] I said, '*Ɔmpa*, you did not tell them about me?' They told me that I should come with them [in the Poro bush]. I went there … I told them: 'Is it me you are chasing like that? Don't you know me?' They asked me to forgive them and I left.

Mr S., in the eyes of local Poro members, looked like a non-initiated Krio. They tried to intimidate him and to make him 'pay' (quite literally) for easing himself near the Poro grove. The men addressed Mr S. in Krio, assuming that he could not be a 'fellow countryman' – probably because of his look, his car, and his use of Krio and English. Instead of proving them wrong (he could have self-identified or proven his belonging to Poro by using Poro greetings), he decided to conceal his identity, maintain his Krio 'front' by using English and embarrass his interlocutors. He waited until he was identified as a powerful member by one of his peers. When he entered the grove, he scolded the members for their attitude.

Mr S. used the story to retrospectively illustrate his father's argument: the presence of Poro can induce fear in non-members: fear of being shamed, fear of 'committing against the society' by mistake and fear of enforced initiation. At the same time, this story is about the use that Mr S. makes of his Krio 'front' and his disclosure of his *kɔntri* identity at a critical moment (see Chapter 5), which is the result of his Krio/Sherbro double ancestry. His *kɔntri* identity becomes a disruptive element of the interaction. He is revealed as a Sherbro and Poro member – two statuses that he never denied – and the other men are revealed as having mistakenly assumed him to be Krio. By using disclosure in a timely manner, he reversed the initial situation by which Poro members tried to humiliate him.

On the Peninsula, the decision to become a Poro or Bondo member often results from the necessity to move freely when residing in Sherbro settlements. Due to their seasonal stays in neighbouring areas (going *alɛn*), Krio fishermen who are not part of Poro are excluded from local meetings. Many said that in Sherbro settlements, non-members feel less comfortable about socializing.

They also feel vulnerable to enforced initiation, since during initiation periods they may encounter Poro gatherings by accident, particularly on the beach side. During the initiation period in Baw-Baw, I observed that non-initiated people generally kept away from the lower part of Baw-Baw, where initiates were taken into the sacred bush.

Joining Bondo is also a question of residence. Krio women who move to live with their Sherbro husbands often become Bondo members. Otherwise, they have to hide during the initiation period and avoid certain water sites.[12] Women become members to enjoy a certain freedom of movement. Men also have less social consideration for non-members. A Poro member expressed his own opinion on the matter in the following terms:

> In the [Bondo] society, they will train you. They will tell you that you have to respect your husband, that you have to obey him. If you are not inside the society, you may not listen to him. Then, he will *kɔs* [insult] you, he will not respect you. He will tell you that you behave this way because you are not properly trained. And when [the society will perform] in your village, [as a Bondo woman] you will feel free, you will not need to hide anymore.

Fittingly, Hoffer (1975: 157) notes that a man, knowing that his partner is a Bondo woman, 'can be confident that she is also trained in the moral and social responsibilities of a potential procreator'. It is difficult to assess whether Sherbro men press their Krio wives to initiation. Women look retrospectively at their decisions in terms of agency and stress their own non-Krio origins, such as Sherbro, Mende or Limba, as reasons for joining. Nevertheless, non-initiated women face pressures to join, from both men and women, in order to enter networks of 'patronage and protection' (Bledsoe 1984: 457). Although initiates must pay a fee at initiation, there are few barriers to membership, but much to be gained. Bondo senior members use the initiation society as a way to maintain relations of patronage (Bledsoe 1980), and refusing to acknowledge those hierarchies causes non-initiated women to be harassed and bullied.

In Krio discourses, membership in indigenous societies allows Krios to be protected against *mɛrɛsin*. These substances and herbal knowledge have an ambivalent place in the social imagination because they are used to heal and to poison, and are simultaneously a force of protection and destruction. Thus, Krios seek protection against *mɛrɛsin* that may harm them. One young man, who had decided to become a member to protect himself from Sherbro *mɛrɛsin* after a conflict with a fisherman from another settlement, explained: 'Some things happen and people use *mɛrɛsin* or *juju* against you … so I decided to join the society … Some fishermen can come [from other settlements to fish here]. We all live as one but sometimes you will catch more than they do and they will be jealous.'

Jealousy, in material terms or in love affairs was an overwhelming preoccupation of young people trying to improve their lot. Accusations of witchcraft, animosity and jealousy often express the feeling of being marginalized and constrained to an environment where chances to improve one's situation are scarce (Jackson 2011: 155). In Krio local imagination, Poro membership, with both the practice of medicines and the protection of co-members, makes self-defence against evildoers possible. By contrast, in Sherbro discourses, self-protection is not an end in itself, but instead is an outcome of the compulsory nature of initiation. Sherbros rather stressed the positive outcomes of accessing secret knowledge, such as increased fishing catches.

Nevertheless, Krios not only join Poro and Bondo for *advantej*, but also to emphasize their autochthonous origins. Most Krios living on the Peninsula refer to parents or forefathers who migrated from the Provinces. They can claim a *kɔntri* identity, but cannot link it to specific cultural or linguistic practices. As a result, Poro or Bondo membership serves as a proof of this claim. From this perspective, family bonds with Sherbros, direct or imagined, play a role in justifying membership. For some people, double membership results from family obligations in two different settlements. One man living in Tokeh explained that his father had sent him to Poro when he was small. Later, when he was in secondary school, his mother's family in York asked him to join Hunting. His maternal uncle was a *Baba* – the highest rank within Hunting – in one of the two Hunting societies of York. Again, he could hardly refuse, but, at the same time, he was happy to perpetuate what he called 'a Krio tradition'.

In other cases, initiation can indicate both an emotional need to maintain family relations and the necessity to move freely within communities where the person has family and friends. For instance, Mrs A., who lived in York, told me that when she was young, she had asked her brother's wife whether she could join Bondo. Her mother's mother was born in Tokeh and identified as Sherbro. She had married in York and Mrs A.'s mother was born there. Mrs A. wanted to become a Bondo woman because she knew that all her female relatives on her mother's side were initiated. She explained: 'I did not ask either my mother or my grandmother, because they were not part of the society. You know, people who come to live in York can forget about the culture.' Her parents had 'turned' Krio in this regard. Her brother's wife took her for initiation in Sherbro Town in Goderich. Her mother and grandmother were angry at her for not letting them know of her decision. She looked back on it as a way of feeling part of a community of kin. Thus, Krio women who decide to become Bondo members usually have Sherbro family connections and choose this strategy to reconnect to their kin (see Knörr 2000). Mrs A. had made the choice to become a Bondo woman, but not a Hunting woman. She could nevertheless claim Krio identity (with Sherbro roots) due to her upbringing in York.

Initiation may also form a sense of moral obligation towards previous generations. The meaning of initiation is presented in a wider family context. Many Krios reshape an autochthonous identity by viewing membership as an outcome of ancestry, as the example of Mr G. shows. Mr G.'s mother was born in York. His father had come from Kailahun and was not a Poro member, but he knew that his father's father was:

> I joined Hunting, like my father, because it is the Krio culture. When I decided to join Poro in Bureh Town, I did not tell my father or anybody. My grandfather was dead. I went to Bureh Town. When I came back to York, my father told me: 'That's your grandfather's society! Why did not you tell me?'

Mr G. said that he had neither friends nor family members in Bureh Town, but he felt a strong desire to enter the society. His decision was one of family continuity and, like in the case of Mrs. A., his decision not to inform his father indicated that he wished to distance himself from a *krionayzd* family model. Both were also scared of their parents' reaction. The process of becoming Krio, for people who migrate, often implies the rejection of *kɔntri* practices and beliefs that have negative connotations (see Chapter 5). The next generation, for their own part, feels freer to embrace their relatives' beliefs by joining Poro or Bondo in a settlement close to their own and more familiar than the places their parents have left behind. Initiation is thus perceived as resulting from a transgenerational transmission and becomes a way to reconnect with a forgotten or lost autochthonous identity.

Reconnecting to one's relatives may contribute to individual spiritual fulfilment. The story of Mrs C. expresses beautifully the lived contradictions of being Krio: the attachment to Christianity as a moral value, yet the feeling that respect for one's relatives may require breaches with the Krio religious ethos. When alluding to the conflict over the creation of a Bondo bush in Kent, she insisted on the religious specificity of Krio settlements. She placed monotheist religions and Hunting on the same spiritual level: 'Even if they find [a land], it will not be possible [to have Bondo here]. I will not accept that, Bondo, Poro or Ojeh. The only society we accept here is Hunting, with the Christians and the Muslims.' She thought that the presence of a society other than Hunting would endanger the social and political life of Kent, opening the way to new community rules and bylaws. As stated above, in Kent, Krio landowning families were worried about the land request for a Bondo bush (and later a Poro bush), since they thought that migrants would use it as leverage to push their political claims.

Still, Mrs C. had joined the society herself 'like many other Krio women in Kent', she said. She emphasized that most Krios had Sherbro roots and relatives in neighbouring villages. She was initiated into Bondo at Waterloo, since she

was a friend of the *sowei* there. Mrs C. had not been able to bear children and the *sowei* advised her to go through initiation.[13] Mrs C. explained to me that her decision was linked back to her family roots. Her father claimed to be a Krio and he was born in Russell. Her mother was a Krio, who had been born in Kent, but her mother's father was from Mama Beach and she knew his Sherbro name. She remembered that her mother was proud of her own Sherbro name too. Mrs C. had relatives in both Mama Beach and Bureh Town. She attributed her barrenness to the neglect of family traditions: '[Tradition] was part of me, because my great-grandfather was a Sherbro, who was part of [the tradition]. Then it should continue in the family. My mother was not part of it. So, it fell down on me and my children.' After being initiated, she had nine children.

Mrs C. expressed feelings of duty towards her Sherbro relatives, although socially she defined herself as a true Krio. She believed that the spirits of her relatives had affected her health and that it was her responsibility, through joining Bondo, to renew her relationships with them and ensure family continuity in spiritual and moral terms. Her boys were members of Hunting only, yet she said: 'As for me, I thought that if I would [join Bondo], everything would be right. Everything is about belief.' She implied that because she had accepted the belief that it was her family duty to become a Bondo member, her decision had had a positive impact on her life and health. Like Mrs C., Krio men and women, in order to distance themselves from 'pagan' practices, often adopted a pragmatic view of belief. But, in breaking away from non-Christian ritual practices, most Krios, like Mrs C., also feel cut off from their ancestry. Thus, in becoming members of Poro or Bondo, they experience relief from reconnecting to the spiritual requirements of one's deep origins and of repairing something that had been severed. Like Mrs. C., Krios are likely to articulate two ways of believing: the Christian faith and ritual practices that connect to an autochthonous identity.

'If We Join Hunting, It Is for the Sake of Love'

Double membership often results from social relations of reciprocity established between Sherbros and Krios. Membership between Krios and Sherbros can be 'exchanged': joining the other group's society is a favour that is returned when a man from that other group joins one's own society. This exchange binds the two groups in a long-term moral contract of payment and repayment, often expressed by the word *paopa*. The meaning of *paopa* is close to 'obligatory' or 'imperative' and its use marks the continuation of social relationships over a long period of time. During my fieldwork, I observed this mechanism of double membership mostly among men. This gender bias resulted certainly from working with Jonathan who gave me more access to Poro networks. Nevertheless, more research could expose the links that exist between female members of Hunting and Bondo members, as I expect that they would exist in one form or another.

Double membership follows friendship or family networks and opens up common political channels. For instance, people can partake in meetings in other settlements. Some towns have a practice of double membership enmeshed in larger economic and social alliances, such as the relations detailed in Chapter 3 between Bureh Town and York. A Poro member commented:

> [Joining Hunting] is a question of friendship, but not only. It is a matter of must [*paopa*]. Since many people from York have come inside Poro in Bureh Town, at some point we will have to go there. It creates a union. Now people in York push us to open our own society for the ones who did not have the opportunity to join. But then, we will have to eat [join] Hunting too.

Membership becomes an object of exchange that, beyond individual experiences, binds two communities together in a moral contract that emphasizes cooperation.

Membership reciprocation is understood to consolidate family and/or friendship ties and to create relations of trust. Initiates are bound by the knowledge and practice of the language of secrecy; they learn the procedures by which protected information can be communicated (Bellman 1984: 66, 88). Thus, double membership is a way to speak a common language and create unity. Such relations are not exclusive to Poro and Hunting, as relations of membership reciprocation also exist, for instance, between Mama Beach and Goderich concerning Poro and Ojeh. During the war, as fishing was prohibited in Goderich, many Temne fishermen migrated south of the Peninsula. They introduced performances of the Ojeh society in Mama Beach. Some became Poro members, and some Sherbro fishermen joined Ojeh in Goderich, creating a new reciprocal link between the two communities.

Exchanges of membership commonly seal affinal kinship in the Sherbro/Krio zone bound by matrifocal norms: brothers-in-law and sons-in-law are expected to be incorporated into the woman's community by way of initiation, although this does not entail assimilation and ethnic 'transformation' as in the case of other groups. Jonathan, my research partner, who was an active Poro member of the Baw-Baw chapter (initiated in Tokeh), tried to convince one of his friends in York to join Poro in Baw-Baw during the initiation period in 2012. His friend expressed doubts and told us that he preferred to join in Bureh Town, where he had spent long periods of time fishing and playing football, and where he had many friends. In Bureh Town, he had asked his friends to join Hunting, but they had replied that they would if he joined Poro. Joining Poro in Bureh Town was *paopa*, namely an obligation vis-à-vis his existing social networks. His father-in-law was also from Bureh Town, which 'obligated' him, as somebody who had taken a wife in this group, to consolidate kinship with initiation.

Joking relationships often structure interactions between affinal kin and can be stretched to create fictive kin. Jonathan's wife was from York, and when we were conducting research there, he was often provoked by his friends, who would shout jokingly in Krio as they passed us: 'Bralɔ [brother-in-law], when will you eat that mɛrɛsin?' or 'Eat this mɛrɛsin now [come and join now], eat this mɛrɛsin'. The joke referred to Jonathan's decision to postpone his initiation into the Hunting society, although he was already related to people in York. Relations of reciprocity assume their meaning over time. Joking relationships imply that membership reciprocation, but also its delay and its reminder, is an important process for strengthening family and friendship relations created through marriage.

The semantics around the idea of eating convey a similar meaning. 'Eating the mɛrɛsin' refers to the initiation process. Eating involves trust as one ingests something foreign and potentially dangerous during initiation. But 'eating the mɛrɛsin' in that case also means that initiation allows a person to become fully incorporated into his or her existing social networks. Jonathan himself had told me: 'If we join Hunting, it is for the sake of love.' 'Love' in this context refers to marriage patterns, such as those uniting families in Sherbro and Krio settlements, and to strong friendships created through fishing migrations, football games and ritual occasions such as weddings, funerals or masquerades.

Moral commitment towards family and friends does not always result in actual membership. Delaying one's initiation is very common. The difficulty to lead initiation during the war explained why in 2011–12, a whole new generation was awaiting Poro initiation (see Chapter 7). However, notwithstanding this extreme political context, the main reason for postponing one's initiation is that it requires significant payment (to be initiated) and, later, financial commitment (to meet the financial duties that membership confers). As in other West African cases, monetary payments and food-giving are among the transactions that initiates and their family engage in with spirits and their representatives so that the child will be reborn as an adult. Families accept these payments as a way to enter into relations of patronage with people from higher lineages, even if they may complain about exaggerated demands (Ferme 1994: 35). As a result, on the Peninsula, people often joked that initiation is a money-making business for Poro and Bondo senior members.

Financial commitment is also expected from adults, who choose to join the initiation society of another group. Before initiation, the future initiate is placed in the position of a child who has to obey and learn. During preparations for initiation, he is required to provide money and goods, such as initiatory clothes, rice and rum, to the member who organizes his initiation. The initiate has to show submission, whatever the usual social relations between him and this member may be. Ritual ranks may reverse usual hierarchies relating to age and social status. One top-ranking Hunting man told me: 'You see, inside Poro,

[name] is a bigger man than me. I am his junior. But inside Hunting … he is my baby. He has to bow in front of me.' Yet, by conceding money and power, the new initiate builds social prestige. The more money he spends on initiation, the higher the position he can expect to reach within the society. Moreover, with a higher rank, the person will be in a position to convince (or oblige through patronage) other members to join his own initiation society.

Financial commitment translates into social status, which may explain why people delay their own initiation. If they have reasonable chances of increasing the price at which they 'buy in', they can come in at a higher status. This does not necessarily involve direct payment, but a financial ability to support the organization of the initiation period (with food, drinks, etc.) – in other words, to prove that one can act as a 'patron' (now and later) of the society. Other financial issues come into play, such as financial contributions when the society performs. Some Hunting members told me that they were worried not only about the cost of Poro initiation itself, but also about the additional monetary burdens such membership implies. Double membership also means that families need to pay for both Poro and Hunting masquerades during the funerals of a member, which represent significant costs.

Relations of reciprocity assume their meaning over time, as gifts, honours and services are reciprocated by members of each society (Mauss 1990 [1923–24]: 46). In this regard, joking relationships remind people of their reciprocal obligations, particularly when people postpone initiation. Joking relationships emphasize the ethnic and social separateness between Krios and Sherbros, while providing 'the social conjunction of friendliness and mutual aid' (Radcliffe-Brown 1940: 200). People do not talk about initiation openly, and members instead often try to convince non-members to join their own society by hinting at it. A Hunting member in Dublin (Banana Islands) said: 'Many people told me to join [Poro], but I did not want to. I have a lot of friends in other villages. They can invite you, call you to say that they would like to see you, that you should come for a visit in their own village, like Bureh Town, Mama Beach … but I resisted.' He understood the manoeuvres by which his friends tried to coax him into Poro. Conversely, his friends felt free to communicate their intentions and were confident that he would understand what they were hinting at.

Once the initiation period had started in Baw-Baw, Jonathan used to tease non-initiated men. While walking in Lakka, he saw a teenager who had relatives in Baw-Baw:

> JONATHAN: Come with me, we will walk to Baw-Baw.
> YOUNG MAN: No, I won't go there, until that business is finished.
> JONATHAN (*laughing*): Your Auntie in Baw-Baw has died!
> YOUNG MAN (*half-joking, half-serious*): Let her die! I won't go there.
> JONATHAN (*laughing more and more*): But what is there in Baw-Baw?
> YOUNG MAN: I don't know!

The young man ran ahead to escape Jonathan's taunts. Most men in his situation were annoyed by the provocation and answered that they would not set foot in Baw-Baw until the end of the 'business' – the usual word that describes Poro initiation, used by members and non-members alike when talking in public. Non-members are on their guard about enforced initiation: the teenager understood Jonathan's joke and stated that even in a case of dire necessity, he would not visit his relatives in Baw-Baw. In the dialogue, both parties played out the mechanism of secrecy based on the member/non-member distinction (Bellman 1984; Simmel 1950). This distinction needs to be acted out and voiced in order to merit social validity.

Initiation society masquerades, which involve dancing, singing and drinking together, are fundamental aspects of enjoying friendship relations. Often, when I asked people why they had decided to join another society, they responded 'I just liked it', 'I like the performances' and 'I just decided that I wanted it'. People often witness masquerades in other settlements and dance along with the procession. For instance, people in Sussex/King Town – the Krio part of town – told me that they regretted that members in Sherbro Town did not perpetuate Poro-related practices at Christmas, which was a time to settle disagreements:

> When Christmas was coming or any festive season, [Sherbro Town] had a band. Everybody was happy, and that was the time to make peace between people. If you and I have a disagreement, during that dance, peace would settle without judgement. During the dance, you would make peace. Then people cooked and would share food. I go to your house, you come to my house, you force me to eat at yours, on Christmas Eve.

On New Year's Eve, people in Sherbro Town used to invite people from both communities to pour libations under the main cotton tree. One Krio woman remembered that her mother, then headwoman of Sussex, bought rum and clothes for this occasion and took part in the festivities. Members and non-members alike, women and men, were welcome to attend a community celebration that drew upon both Christian and initiation society traditions. The decline of these practices is attributed to the preaching of Evangelical churches against 'devil worshipping', but there are also important disputes between both parts of town relating to land and political leadership. For many people of King Town, the end of common cultural practices is a symbol of social division. To express this shift, they often said that 'these [Sherbro Town] people are to themselves now', which means that they have walled themselves off from the wider community life. This shows the extent to which ritual occasions allow families and friends in different settlements to maintain good relationships, as well as the relevance of the language of performance in framing these bonds.

Reflections like these on relations of reciprocity suggest that Sherbros distinguish between (local) Krios who have initiated into Poro and Bondo on the basis of kinship and friendship, and (Freetown) Krios who have joined for *advantej* and to gain acceptance in political circles. The membership of the former is believed to be more genuine, as Krios from neighbouring settlements show their commitment to ritual practices. The social obligations created by double membership differ from the relations with 'big men' based on patronage, as the latter rarely attend performances, but are expected to provide financial support.

For instance, during the concluding ceremony of the Poro initiation, the oldest *Yamba* – i.e. a rank name indicating a leadership position within Poro – initiated in the same sacred grove during the last initiation period is expected to lead the procession of initiates who come out of the sacred bush with the *Yamba* title. In 2012 in Baw-Baw, the task fell to a Krio man from Sussex/King Town, a former headman in his eighties. He was one of the senior members who went to the council to obtain the governmental licence for conducting the initiation. At the council, the man who delivered the paper was surprised to see him and asked if he was a real Krio. He confirmed it, saying that the Poro was his Lodge (referring to the Masonic Lodge of which urban Krios are usually part). In this way, he made it clear that he considered Poro membership a marker of his local identity. He would not fail to attend initiation society performances in Baw-Baw, although age made it difficult for him to walk. Despite the time lapse between initiations, age and infirmity, the Krio man proudly took up his responsibilities as *Yamba* when the initiations were resumed.

Conclusion

This chapter has identified the strategy of double membership by which Sherbro and Krio communities reinforce their relations. Although people can hold multiple memberships (for instance, a member of Hunting and Poro may also join new urban societies in Freetown), the mutuality created through 'pairing' and exchange reflects deeper aspects of social organization. Dynamics of double membership reflect a specific Sherbro/Krio sociality that reflects the organization of the residential zone analysed in Chapter 3. The 'exchange' of membership among Sherbros and Krios strengthens friendship and family ties between connected settlements, and makes reciprocal relations rather horizontal, despite the fact that more (ritual and political) 'power' is attributed to the societies of the Sherbro autochthones (Poro and Bondo). Following Wyse (1989), these data suggest that dynamics of double membership have nourished Krio culture with local customs and beliefs, thereby allowing Krios to anchor their identity in an 'indigenous territory' and a cultural locale to which they relate as their own.

In the next chapter, I will explore how the reciprocity expected from members of other ethnic groups is of a different kind: initiation is part of the 'ritual

process' through which strangers become part of the local community. The requirement to 'assimilate' to Sherbro communities through initiation (or initiation of one's children) is a way for local people to maintain and sanction relations of indebtedness that are part of the host/stranger relationship.

Notes

1. Bondo is the name given to the female society among the Temne and Sherbro, among other groups. Among the Mende, the society is referred to as Sande. I use the Sherbro term *Bondo*.

2. King (2011: 4) mentions that in urban contexts, 'the role of the Poro secret societies is not overt', while Peterson (1968, 1969) and Nunley (1987) describe the successful implantation of the Bondo society in Freetown. Fanthorpe (2007: 15) notes that in the Western Area, 'the power and influence of the men's societies in particular are much attenuated in comparison to rural areas', contrary to Bondo initiations that take place regularly.

3. For the solidarity model, see Bellman (1984), Hoffer (1975) and Højbjerg (1999, 2007).

4. See d'Azevedo (1962b), Hoffer (1975), Siegmann (1980) and Welmers (1949).

5. Poro meetings bring together initiated men of a locality to discuss issues facing the community, but they are also spaces of sociality during which members drink, smoke and joke together. Jonathan, as a Poro member, could attend various Poro meetings on the Peninsula, including those outside his home settlement, where he would also meet people who had been initiated in the same cohort (he had been initiated in Tokeh, but as a resident of Baw-Baw, he was attached to the Baw-Baw chapter). There, it seems that he could voice his opinion, but could not play any decisive part in the internal decision-making process.

6. *Bush* in Krio can assume different meanings, among which is the idea of the 'sacred grove'. Contrary to the term's use by agricultural forest societies, there is no distinction in the language between bush as farmland and as the wild forest.

7. In practice, members put up signs to protect their own private properties and ensure that nobody will pick the fruits before they are ripe. These signs can be found in communities that have no Poro bush, but where Poro members reside, such as in Krio settlements. Offences are then reported to a neighbouring Poro chapter. It appears that members who violate Poro laws (because they possess Poro secret knowledge and understand hidden symbolic meanings) are considered to commit a more severe offence than strangers doing the same unknowingly.

8. Hunting and Egungun are both Yoruba traditional masquerades that were introduced in Freetown in the nineteenth century by the Liberated Africans coming from Nigeria (Nunley 1987). Both gathered people of different religious faiths. Yet Egungun tended to gather Muslims who stressed their African indigenous roots, while members of Hunting emphasized their Christian basis. King (2011: 16) indicates that 'each society contended with the other over which of the two was more representative of the Krio'. Later, Muslim populations such as the Fulah, Mandingo and Temne began to join Egungun. Ojeh is a branch of Egungun.

9. Both societies are interdependent for the performance of rituals. Poro members often stressed that they needed the support of women to lead their own initiation period. Certain public rituals are not considered successful if Bondo members do not take part.

10. Fanthorpe (2007: 16) notes that female genital cutting (FGC) is practised across all ethnolinguistic groups in Sierra Leone, including Muslim Krios (Aku), with the exception of Christian Krios in the Western Area. The data reported here contradict this statement, yet it shows that, at least publicly, Christian Krios have positioned themselves against FGC.

11. See Cole (2006) and Peterson (1968). See also Peterson (1969: 267) on the introduction of the Bondo society.

12. Sherbro men and women may experience social pressures in Krio settlements and choose to become Hunting members for similar reasons. One man from Baw-Baw living in Kent joined Hunting in 2008 because his compound was near the Hunting sacred bush. People used to bully him, saying that he had no right to pass near that place. Yet, his membership in Hunting mainly had relevance in the local setting and not over a wider area.

13. On the link between excision and fertility, see Bledsoe (1984: 457) and Hoffer (1975: 157).

Chapter 7

Initiation as Ethnic Transformation

For members of ethnic groups other than Krio, the social logics of integration through initiation may be qualified as a process of 'ethnic transformation'. Initiation into Poro is among the social obligations held by strangers towards their hosts, which – when undertaken – lead to the strangers' cultural and ethnic assimilation. Ethnic transformation offers a resolution to the stranger's indebtedness (after initiation, people can fully claim Sherbro identity) and a way for Sherbros to secure men's long-term political allegiance.

In this chapter, I want to focus on the role of initiation in constructing Sherbro identity through plurality and heterogeneity. While scholars working along the Upper Guinea Coast have pointed out that initiation enabled identity switches in the history of the region (McGovern 2013; Sarró 2010), the process by which local communities are built through the ritual transformation of individuals of various ethnic descent has not been well documented.

My argument follows MacCormack (1979), who identifies Poro in Sherbro society as an institution that facilitates the integration of in-marrying men. Initiation is a 'ritual of incorporation' that produces structure and norms by allowing strangers to move from a liminal status to become full members of the social body (see Shack 1979b). Ritual integration is a process by which strangers assimilate into Sherbro communities and switch their ethnic identity. That this is so is underscored by the point that Sherbro discourses about ritual integration focus on strangers who resist it – in the present context, Temne-speaking populations. Poro stories about the betrayal of Temne strangers, who tried to use the initiation society to take power, provide a metadiscourse that separates

the 'good' stranger, eager to assimilate, from the ungrateful stranger, who fails to respect his social obligations. Nevertheless, in practice, Sherbros continue to integrate strangers of various origins, including many people who define themselves as Temne.

The emphasis on matrifiliation has implications for social hierarchies that are expressed in and through society initiation. In patrilineal societies, Bondo and Poro support hierarchies created through matrilateral kinship: lineages of sister's sons are subordinate to lineages of mother's brothers, who retain political leadership.[1] Within Poro, 'matrilaterality is again employed as a metaphor for rank' (Murphy and Bledsoe 1987: 129). By contrast, Sherbro society emphasizes matrilineal ties, which leads to a rapid 'full' assimilation of male strangers and their children. Children born to a Sherbro woman are considered to belong to their mother's group and their initiation into Poro validates kinship in her line. Initiated strangers (and their children) can access political duties, and being a descendant of a stranger is not correlated with a higher or lower rank in Poro hierarchy. The rank achieved by sons of male strangers is more closely linked to that of their maternal uncles – when these are in charge of the boys' initiation – and they can attain the highest ranks of Poro.

Before we address the significance of those processes for integration, we first need to analyse how Poro and Bondo can be markers of (local) ethnicity and play a role in delineating the boundaries of coexisting ethnic groups in contemporary ritual practice.

Poro(s) and Bondo(s)

The Sherbros are not the only group to have Poro and Bondo societies; the Mende and Temne also have both societies. Many times, I was told that there were ethnospecific traditions of Poro and Bondo. Such information emerged as a discourse that substantiated views of social compatibility or incompatibility among the groups; Sherbros on the Peninsula claim to be culturally closer to (and compatible with) the Mende. Most such stories should be read through the lens of existing tensions between Sherbro autochthones and Temne-speaking populations. We might expect that statements people make about irreducible ritual differences will be strengthened or weakened in relation to the role that initiation societies are assigned as ethnic markers due to conflict (Knörr 2000: 83).

At the time of my fieldwork on the Peninsula, it was the distinction between Sherbro and Temne Poro societies that was said to be significant. A similar distinction between Mende and Temne Poro societies was made by Dorjahn (1961: 37), who, with regard to the Temne Poro society, noted that its members, 'while maintaining that they would not fear to enter any Temne lodge session, insisted that they would never take part in Mende sessions'. During my research, members of the Sherbro Poro situated their ritual practice as closer to Mende

tradition. Nevertheless, there appear to be striking similarities between Sherbro and Temne Poro, such as rank names *Yamba*, *Raka*, *Gbanabom* and *Famancha* (*Mancha* in Temne) and certain aspects of initiation, which I will comment upon later (see also Dorjahn 1961, 1982).

Oral traditions in Temne-speaking chiefdoms indicate that Poro was introduced by Sherbro migrants, who travelled up the Jong River (Dorjahn 1961: 37). Sherbro sacred groves remained distinct from Temne Poro groves (Dorjahn 1982: 37). In Shenge, a coastal region where these two groups have coexisted over a long period of time, Hoffer (1971: 175–76) reports a story of transmission from Sherbros to Temnes at Yoni on Bonthe Island, which concurs with Temne oral tradition reported by Lamp (2016).[2] Because it was borrowed from Sherbros, Sherbros in Shenge consider the Temne Poro not to be 'as strong' as their own (Hoffer 1971: 314). On the Peninsula, members stress that Temnes 'do not proceed correctly' in their ritual practices and members of the Temne Poro direct the same criticism at Sherbros.

The existence of ethnospecific differences in ritual procedures, both in Poro and Bondo, places limits on the participation of members in performances taking place in sacred groves from another tradition. First of all, the use of herbal medicines is said to be different. Men stress that they do not use the same leaves to fabricate their medicines. Bondo members make the same distinction: members of the Sherbro Bondo stated that, upon entering the sacred bush of the Temne Bondo, they would bring their own food and drinks due to a difference in cooking procedures. The restriction against ingesting each other's food reminds members of the limits of social association. Bondo secret knowledge is closely associated with the art of poisoning (Bledsoe 1980: 68) and women can easily use poisons in cooking. It is unclear whether going against this rule would result in illness caused by the ingestion of incompatible medicines, or punishment in one's own society for the transgression of a Bondo law, or both. In any case, references to poisoning emphasize the power of Bondo members and sustain feelings of fear and suspicion. Differences in food and medicine preparation are not merely descriptive statements, but also metaphors for social distinctiveness.

Members also mention differences in the codification of the relations between Poro and Bondo members. The complementary role of the two societies is central to ritual organization. Poro and Bondo initiations socialize young men and women in their adult responsibilities. They create 'categorically pure women and men' who are prepared to control their sexuality and to enter 'safe' relations with the opposite sex (Bledsoe 1984: 465). The ritual contacts between Poro and Bondo members also proceed from the sexual symbolism that structures the local cosmology. In Sherbro practice, Poro men are not allowed to enter the Bondo bush, unless Poro senior members, such as the *Raka* and *Yamba*, are invited for specific ritual occasions or to settle a dispute between the two societies.

In Temne practice, women and men can invite each other at specific times in their respective sacred groves in order to perform rituals jointly. This difference was confirmed several times by members of both traditions, particularly women. Members of the Sherbro Poro disapprove of the way in which women are allowed to enter the Temne Poro bush on some ritual occasions. It was also described to me how, in one instance, members of the Sherbro Poro fled the Temne grove (where they had been invited) when they knew that women were coming. They were scared of breaking their own ritual laws. Hence, the limits on participation are grounded in symbolic differences that are codified as mutually exclusive.

Members, both men and women, can comply with the rules of another tradition when invited to specific ritual occasions. Yet, the knowledge of difference maintains the fear of entering a sacred bush in a foreign place, the rituals of which are unknown. For instance, some large towns such as Goderich host both Sherbro and Temne Bondo sacred bushes, but women said that they rarely enter, if at all, a sacred bush of the other tradition.

Furthermore, due to the close relation between Poro and local power, Poro members cannot easily take part in meetings in sacred groves when the tradition is unfamiliar to them. The Poro bush is said to be a place for important discussions and decision making:

> We do not allow [members of the Temne Poro to enter the Poro bush] because when they enter, they will try to prove that they do everything better than us. They will want to make us drink their own *mɛrɛsin* [accept their own ritual rules] so that we will listen to them. They will try to overthrow us. But the Mende, we accept them. They will acknowledge that it is our bush and they will share their ideas with us so that we will discuss and decide together.

In this statement, members of the Temne Poro are not associated with local leadership out of fear that they could take over. Differences in ritual practices imply diverging views on hierarchies and a potential for political conflict. By contrast, it presents members of the Mende Poro as allies, who respect the political legitimacy of their hosts.

Members often mentioned that Mende and Sherbro Poro traditions were close. Nevertheless, it remained unclear to what extent a member initiated in another Poro tradition could take part in local Poro meetings. Additionally, each locality has a specific hierarchy and members initiated in the same Poro can be restricted from attending too. Some headmen on the Peninsula stated that in order to discuss community matters, only Poro members who are part of the local chapter are invited. When other members are present, their participation

may be restricted. For instance, Jonathan could attend certain meetings in settlements other than Baw-Baw, yet he said that he had no decision-making power.

Mendes and Sherbros both perform what are called in Krio *af-af* (half) societies – that is, they perform masks as public entertainment. On the Peninsula, Baw-Baw and Mama Beach keep masks like the Goboi and the Nyafale. The Goboi is controlled by Poro members and appears during important ritual festivities. For instance, the Goboi from Mama Beach performed in New Year's Day celebrations in Bureh Town in 2019. Performers came from different settlements of the Peninsula. The Nyafale is a mask that, among Mendes and Sherbros, announces the venue of the Goboi, but it has rather secular and entertainment functions (Siegmann and Perani 1980: 29). For Poro members, their role as *af-af* societies attests to the cultural commonality of Mende and Sherbro Poros, and to their shared opposition to Temne customs. As one Poro member in Tokeh told me: 'If a Temne says that he will play the Goboi, it will look funny, as if he wanted to steal the tradition [*I go tan lɛk se na tif I wan tif am*]. He would not know how to sing or dance properly.'

Sherbro/Mende Bondo was also presented as a unity of ritual practices, in opposition to the Temne Bondo. During my stay, the *sowei* of Baw-Baw received a new Bondo mask and several instruments that she had requested from an international nongovernmental organization (NGO). On the day of the official handover, she told me that the NGO representatives had made a mistake. They

Figure 7.1. Reception of a new Bondo mask in Baw-Baw, 2012. © Anaïs Ménard

had brought a Bondo mask on top of which were attached two head ties, one white and one red. She removed the red head tie, explaining that it was part of the Temne custom. She showed me the mask with the white cloth attached to the head and said: 'This is Sherbro. It is Mende Sherbro.' Among the Mende, Bondo masks that are tied with white cloth are considered of divine origin and their use is restricted to the *sowei*s[3] (Boone 1986: 163, 194). But red cloth would not be tied to a Mende mask because it signifies 'danger and trouble' (ibid.: 236).

Colour symbolism is particularly significant with regard to the values embodied by society members. White is the colour of purity, cleanliness and justice: it is 'the colour of the spirit world of God and the ancestors' (Boone 1986: 23). MacCormack, in her study of the Thoma society among Sherbros, notes that 'water itself is whiteness': the 'underwater' is the world of spirits and ancestors (1980: 113). Dialogue between the living and the dead is mediated by pouring libations with *kol wata* – an offering made with a beverage (water, rum, gin or soft drinks) to appease the spirits (see Chapter 5). White represents adulthood and social responsibility; a *sowei* wears a white head scarf to display her high rank. White is opposed to black, the colour of selfishness and social disruption. For Sherbro, red is ambiguous. It connotes 'activity, power and vitality', hunting and warfare, and can also symbolize destructive forces (MacCormack 1980: 113).

The Specifics of Bondo

Bondo may appear to be a society with fewer political connotations than Poro and therefore as less likely to become a site in which ethnosocial struggles are played out. All the major ethnic groups in Sierra Leone have Bondo societies, and Bondo itself has been described as a single society into which women from the various groups enter. Boone (1986: 15), for example, underlines that the society is multiethnic in that 'almost every woman of the Mende, Susu, Vai, Temne, Sherbro, Gola, Bassa, and Kpelle peoples has passed through its initiations'. Bondo membership unites women around common ideals of femininity, female knowledge, morality and responsibilities. It creates a female independent sphere of power, in which women can control their own activities and acquire 'a bargaining position in social relations involving men' (Bosire 2012: 98). In this regard, women may stress more easily the cross-ethnic sisterhood that is formed through Bondo. Certainly, this aspect of female unity is reflected in the syncretic nature of Bondo performances on the Peninsula.

Ritual differences do exist between Sherbro and Temne traditions of Bondo. However, there is much truth in the vision of a panethnic society. In most places, what matters most is to be a Bondo woman, notwithstanding the tradition in which the woman has been initiated. This is particularly visible in Krio settlements, where women have various strategies to get initiated. Usually, they rely on connections with initiated friends or relatives who will introduce them

to their own society chapter (see Chapter 6). Bondo initiations happen quite often and do bring together girls from different origins. Sherbro *sowei*s move between settlements to organize initiation periods[4] and are active in crossing ethnic boundaries: some mentioned that occasionally, if there is no girl to replace a specific *sowei* position, they can invite a Mende *sowei* to fill the position during initiation times. Also, second- and third-generation migrants rarely send their girl children back to their hometowns to get initiated.[5] This is partly motivated by financial constraints, but migrants who are considered to be 'on good terms' with the community are also expected to give their girls to local *sowei*s.

The Bondo initiation period in Baw-Baw in 2012 gathered girls of different ethnic origins from Tokeh, Sussex and Baw-Baw. Apart from Krio and Sherbro, which both of the *sowei*s spoke, one also spoke Mende and the other spoke Temne; both could sing in various languages as well. As one member said:

> We do not sing without putting some Mende inside. Mende is [in our tradition]. Temne no, unless somebody comes and sings, the others will follow, because you know that if the society is [initiating], anyone who is a member must come and sing.

Both Poro and Bondo members are very adept at picking up song lines in other languages during ritual performances, although they only partially understand them, if at all. Temne songs, for instance, are said to be much more idiomatic: they employ a different metaphorical language, but some people who understand Temne can translate their meaning.

Initiations are social in nature. Women from different settlements can participate in each other's Bondo celebrations. In Mende regions, Boone (1986: 27) notes that 'several lodges in a town or in a chieftaincy will come together to initiate the girls in a group'. During the closing ceremony of the Bondo initiation period in Lakka, most of the women who had come to support the initiates were from Ogoo Farm and belonged to the Temne Bondo. They could organize their own initiation periods in Ogoo Farm, but they came because this time, a market woman from Ogoo Farm, whose husband lived in Lakka, had placed her daughter in the Sherbro Bondo. Around twenty market women, all dressed in *ashɔbi* – ceremonial clothes made of the same fabric – joined in a procession down Lakka clapping and singing. They carried a banner that read 'Ogoo Farm Market Women Association, together as one'. Their presence and 'play' (Bondo singing and dancing) was welcomed by women in Lakka and contributed to the success of the ceremony. It is important to note that initiation aims at forming 'a fellowship among neighbouring girls and women' (ibid.: 41). Thus, a large number of initiates and families supporting them makes for a successful initiation.

At the same time, members of the Sherbro and Temne Bondo also articulated a form of rivalry that was not devoid of political implications. Through

links to the Poro society, Bondo *sowei*s also establish relative political power for themselves. This is because, in leading initiations, they create and maintain a sphere of influence that also grounds them in relations of patronage with Poro senior members. Bondo *sowei*s work in close alliance with chiefs or headmen – who are almost always important Poro members – not least because chiefs derive financial benefits from the presence of Bondo, as they collect levies from Bondo initiation (license fees) and 'fines for breach in Bondo laws' (Bosire 2012: 72). Thus inserted in wider networks of male patronage, *sowei*s from one group may achieve relative power over those from another.

In Tokeh, Bondo members recalled that before the Civil War, members of the Temne Bondo had tried to organize their own initiation period and had invited their own *sowei*. But members of the Sherbro Bondo had objected and stopped them. One Sherbro woman explained:

> The Temne, if they want to do it, they have to do it under our control. We have the children, we have the village. They will not [lead initiation] by themselves. We should be *wanwɔd* [united] and every family should put its own children … We did not agree, we told them that they had no right to do that unless they gave us notice beforehand.

This statement marked hierarchies in structures of patronage. On the one hand, Sherbro women protected their own privileged access to political structures and their influence over local leaders. On the other hand, their articulated their right to 'control' what other women did and, presumably, to levy fees of their own. Bondo membership marked socioethnic differentiation, as Temne women were reminded of their subordinated status as strangers.[6]

Bondo also enables legal power for *sowei*s. Bondo initiations in the Western Area are more closely monitored by the state than in the Provinces, and 'scandals' about enforced initiations, underage initiations or child abuse quickly end up in the newspapers. Initiations require a licence, and obtaining a licence depends on a *sowei*'s good relations with powerful men. Either the headman must put in a request for the licence in Freetown, or she must do so directly – either way, connections with government officials are invoked. Accordingly, *sowei*s liked to underline the legality of their own practice and to cast doubt on the practices of other ritual leaders; sometimes, they accused the leaders of other traditions of not proceeding in the correct way. Members of the Sherbro Bondo claimed that they adhered to the rules of the governmental licence and did not initiate 'underage' children.[7] For their part, members of the Temne Bondo said that they did not practise enforced initiation. When acknowledging some instances of abuse in Sierra Leone, they attributed these to *sowei*s of the other tradition.

In spite of these divisions, Bondo still represented an opportunity for creating cross-ethnic sisterhood. Yet, probably due to its lesser role in maintaining

autochthonous control over local politics, the female society did not 'transform' women's ethnic membership quite as dramatically as Poro did for men.

The 'Ritual Process' Revisited

Membership in Poro is part of the ritual process by which strangers get incorporated into local Sherbro communities. Initiation legitimates kinship ties, but also ensures that Sherbros maintain authority over in-marrying men and their children (see Chapter 3). The initiation of the in-marrying man integrates him directly into lines of male hierarchy and authority within Poro. The initiation of the children ensures the recognition of their descent through the female line; initiation brings them formally under the authority of the maternal uncle and enables them to access the rights related to their uncle's social status. The major risk of wife-giving – the creation of competing descent lines by strangers and their descendants – is mitigated by initiation. Therefore, it is expected that a stranger is willing to initiate and/or to 'give' his male children for initiation to the local Sherbro Poro.

Hassan, a Temne fisherman born in Goderich, who had settled in Mama Beach during the Civil War, explained how initiation into a Sherbro Poro had affected his local relations:

> I have become Sherbro now [*A dɔn tɔn Sherbro*]. I am used to their system. I have spent fifteen years in a Sherbro community, I joined the [Poro] society, I got a Sherbro woman and I had children who are born Sherbro. Before I came here, I did not think I would join one day, because I was already part of the Ojeh in Goderich. When you come [to Mama Beach], people will tell you that you can join [Poro] if you like. But I saw my friends who were members telling me not to walk here or there, not to pass here or there. Now, since I have become Sherbro, when they have a meeting, I can go. They won't accept you unless you have become [*yu dɔn tɔn*] Sherbro.

Hassan represented himself as the 'good stranger' who respected his reciprocal obligations in exchange for Sherbro hospitality. His reference to his Sherbro wife and their children 'born Sherbro' follows the lines of a gradual integration as described in the preceding chapters.

Here, we turn to describing how it is that Poro membership works to integrate newcomers in the structural logic of kinship. As discussed above, the invitation and acceptance of initiation signals and creates relations of trust, status and respect; membership informs and aligns one with a group's cultural traditions and political relations. Poro membership binds newcomers into local kinship structures. And, as it does so, it contributes to building 'Sherbro' as a

category that allows cross-identification. It is not only Hassan who becomes Sherbro without losing his Temne identity; his children and their children will soon make the same claims as so many others already discussed: Temne by the father, Sherbro by the mother; or, perhaps, Sherbro by the father, who was a Temne, and also by the mother.

As Hassan explains, he could live in the Sherbro community as a Temne. He observed that his non-initiation into Poro kept him from full and free association with his friends. He recounts that he assumed that his Ojeh membership made Poro membership unnecessary or undesirable, but changed his mind over time. His friends encouraged him to become initiated and withheld him from full community participation until he undertook it. This dynamic can work the other way too: facing the same social pressures, noncooperative strangers will not undertake initiation and will be further excluded from community life.

Hassan's initiation acquired meaning with reference to a process of ethnic transformation that involved two generations. The combination of marriage and membership marked his new (achieved) identity (he had 'become' Sherbro) and the (ascribed) identity of his children. He also made a direct link between initiation, his newly assigned Sherbro identity and his ability to fully take part in men's activities in Mama Beach.

However, the stories that reveal the intricacies of the ritual process of integration are of another type: they are stories of betrayal and refer to Temne strangers who tried to disregard the obligations of initiation. These strangers try to take over power in the given community. And, importantly, they do so by pretending to adhere to the rules of the Sherbro Poro. The 'betrayer' is either a trusted Poro member who attempted to leak secrets or a non-member who tried to get hold of information that would allow him to take over Sherbro leadership. By violating the language of secrecy, the man 'exposes' the society – the local term to express the consequences of divulging secrets – and threatens local political stability. Initiation, either of the betrayer or of his offspring, restores the *communitas*. Here is one such story:

> A Temne man referred to as Pa L. arrived to settle in A. in 1975. At that time, the Poro society was initiating and he pretended to be a society man although he was not. He did not go into the bush but once took part in a secret ceremony for the death of a member. The house where the ceremony took place was right at the back of the society bush and he could see all the secret instruments of the Poro society. Yet, community men did not trust him. Once, when all *sɔkɔ* men [members] gathered for dancing, they were not satisfied with his performance and started doubting him seriously. Hence, Poro senior members decided to call a meeting for all society men at the wharf, near a big stone. They saw Pa L. coming but he passed the stone and avoided them. They called him

and asked him why he was not joining in; he responded that his heart told him not to come among them. Therefore, Poro senior members called for another meeting the next day, this time inside the Poro bush. At night, Pa L. escaped from the house without telling anybody. By then, he was staying with his woman, the headman's sister, with whom he had one child, F. Poro members gathered to decide what to do about Pa L., who had seen the secrets of the society. Although they agreed that the man should be punished, they could not find him and decided that his child should become a member. The 'devil [Poro spirit] ate F.', who was reborn with a Sherbro society name that means 'somebody who does not have an owner', because members of the society had been responsible for his initiation. When the boy came out of the bush, Poro members sang five songs for him: three in Sherbro, one in Temne and one in Mende. Two Sherbro songs sang about how 'my parents are liars' and 'the man does not hide, the man does not hide'; according to the Mende song, 'today, the truth has prevailed'; and according to the Temne song, 'I was pregnant; I had a child; now the child has watched the society bush'. After some time, F. began to like the Poro society more than Sherbros themselves did. His mother went to find Pa L. and asked him to come back to the village because now the child was a member of the Sherbro society. She told him: 'Your son is fishing; he's doing everything like a Sherbro now.' But Pa L. refused and never came back.

The description of Pa L. validates a common stereotype about the Temne as inclined to seek power. It also shows the dynamics of integration through Poro membership through the prism of punishment. In this case, Pa L.'s son is initiated to repair the trust broken by his father. In another version of the same story, I was told that Pa L. was caught by Poro members in a neighbouring Sherbro community and initiated by force. Either way, initiation restores and reinforces Poro (and Sherbro) boundaries. In both versions, the future of F. as a Sherbro and Poro member is also ensured, regardless of what happens with his father.

Stories of the betrayal of Poro tell a local audience which strangers can and cannot be trusted based on historical precedents. Often, the stranger is described as someone who enjoys special trust in the community due to his relationship with a prominent woman of the community. In Pa L.'s case, he was living with the headman's sister. The seriousness of the betrayal is underscored with reference to this initial position of trust.

A story in another locality told about the disgrace of a Temne resident who used to live with a *sowei* who was also the sister of the head of the Poro society. Like Pa L., this man pretended to be a Poro member, but other members had suspicions and called a meeting inside the sacred bush. When the man committed mistakes in Poro greetings, his deception was confirmed. He was then forcibly

initiated, along with his boys. Poro members invented a song that included the lyrics 'Pa M. [the head of the Poro society]'s elder sister almost died', which referred to the shame that had befallen the *sowei* because she herself did not know that her man was not a Poro member. In another version of this story, I was told that the same man had to meet senior members in the sacred bush because his son had committed an offence against the society. As in the story about Pa L., the betrayal plays out and the initiation of both father and/or son restores relations.

In both stories, trust is called into question by a man's inability to perform (sing, dance or greet) as expected in the local Poro. As he is revealed as a non-initiate, the man is taken to constitute a direct threat to political leadership. Members suspect him to 'spy' secrets in order to impose the authority of his own lineage – hence the logic of the son's initiation as a solution to the father's betrayal. Through initiation, male children are shifted from the authority of their patrilineal line to that of a maternal uncle by symbolic rebirth through the initiation society. The child is made to accept a new allegiance: 'the old life … is the life lived in the bosom of the family and the lineage; whilst the new life is a life in which the prime allegiance is to the community as a whole' (Horton 1971: 103, quoted by Siegmann 1980: 94). For those who were born of strangers, the rupture from lineage is more complete.

Other elements of the story reinforce the understanding that initiation validates matrifiliation and produces the initiate's belonging to the community. In the first story, F. becomes 'somebody who does not have an owner' because he cannot claim to be a follower of his father, whose disloyalty put the community at risk. His Poro name also reminds him of his obligations, respect and obedience towards the men who initiated him. Two songs refer to the process of revealing the truth: 'my parents are liars' tells us that the betrayal has negative social consequences for both the wife and the child that need to be rectified. 'The man does not hide' speaks about the ritual process that the child undergoes to make amends for his father: unlike his father, he is reborn as a new man and no longer needs to hide. The last song in Temne and the mother's sentence ('your son is fishing; he's doing everything like a Sherbro now') express the newly created bond between the child and members of his mother's group that has been enacted ritually through initiation. The mother's sentence confirms the process of ethnic transformation that their son has undergone.

Strangers who have 'betrayed' the community are expected to give one or several children to the Poro society, a mechanism that ensures the attachment of males from a foreign patrilineage to their mother's community. It implies obedience to the rules set by landowning lineages and a strong moral commitment; in sum, it constitutes a statement of belonging. This final story illustrates the link between the initiation of children and moral obligation.

One man had settled in C. He was not a member, but went to Poro meetings in the sacred bush. One day, members discovered the truth and the man escaped.

He joined Poro in the Provinces, but because he had betrayed his host community, he was scared to return alone and instead did so with other members of his own chapter. A Poro meeting was called to decide what should be done with him. Since he had learned local secrets, it was decided that he had to 'give' his two sons for initiation in C. Nonetheless, the man decided to stay away from the people in C. He settled on land a bit further from C., claiming it as his. His third son joined Poro in the same area as he had, and when he returned after initiation, he helped his father in managing the community. The two men applied at the Ministry of Lands to obtain political independence on their territory, which was granted, and the third son later became headman.

This story discusses a man who clearly wanted to be part of C. on his own terms. He attended Poro meetings without being initiated; got initiated elsewhere as a partial restoration of his relationship (because he did not return alone); and, although he seemed to agree to the restoration implied by 'giving' two of his sons for local Poro initiation, he himself moved away from the community and his third son undertook initiation outside of the community.

In C., this story of an initial 'betrayal' of the Poro continues to be told because the man and his third son remain involved in political and land disputes between two settlements (C. and the one to which the two men relocated). It is recalled in order to indicate that the father and his third son had no allegiance to people in C. – worse, they had on several occasions pretended to have such allegiance and had betrayed their hosts. Aside from the initial betrayal, the father had also not respected the moral obligation implied in giving two sons for initiation. The initiation of his sons should have placed the man in a subordinate position from which he would not challenge his hosts on critical issues of belonging such as land and power, but he had disregarded this subordination.

It should be noted that stories like these caused lots of laughter among Poro members. They liked to shame the betrayer. Importantly, these stories also reversed the power relations between Sherbro and Temne populations that are currently at work on the Peninsula. Although the Temne seem to be gaining the upper hand in many arenas of local politics, these stories render those gains illegitimate. Against a few strangers who betray, Sherbro communities maintain power over the majority who seek the community's trust and validation.

Stories of betrayal illustrate Jackson's (2004: 160) view of initiation as a 'drama of restoration': the initiation of children following a 'betrayal' presents us with a norm for social integration. In these stories, we see clearly how ethnic transformation co-occurs *with* the expansion of kinship relations and *through* Poro membership. They show how a stranger becomes assimilated – how a Temne becomes Sherbro through the ritual process.

But these stories also hint at the mutability of ethnic identity from another direction. They reveal the child's own agency and the possibility for reversals. The most telling line in the first story is that F. does everything 'like' a Sherbro; he is

not completely and irreversibly Sherbro, despite Poro initiation and kinship. In the last story, the third son follows his father and not his brothers. Neither kinship nor initiation produces lasting ethnic identities; one must still prove attachment to the community. As in other descriptions of the 'transformative' idiom in West Africa (McGovern 2013), Sherbro identities in these stories remain fluid and dependent on individuals' strategies of alliance and self-definition.

In other words, initiation opens up the possibility of 'becoming' Sherbro by performing. This may involve fishing and participation in ritual performances (as we learn that 'F. began to like the Poro society more than Sherbros themselves did'). Those stories established a pattern for the desired social assimilation of strangers that marked eventually a switch in ethnic identity. They pointed to the fluidity of Sherbro ethnic affiliation.

Conversely, just as many people with other ethnic origins succeed in claiming and performing Sherbro identity, the possibility of losing that status is always present. Many times, people concealed their Temne roots by referring to their ancestors as Sherbro or by stating that 'yes, he was a Temne, but he did everything *like* a Sherbro'. Then, my interlocutors would explain their ancestor's involvement in fishing and Poro membership. This relates to Astuti's conceptualization of ethnicity as a '*way of doing* which people perform' (1995: 16, emphasis in original). Acting Sherbro by learning how to paddle and fish performs identity in the present. To do 'like' a Sherbro is to acknowledge one's origins, while showing one's continuous commitment and loyalty to Sherbro structures of power.

Ethnic Belonging, Transformation and Social Hierarchies

The matrilineal ideology and process of ethnic transformation allow highly fluid personal affiliation to landowning families, which opens up possibilities for children of migrants to claim their right to leadership. MacCormack (1979: 185) notes that individuals may stress their belonging to the paternal or the maternal side according to the political prestige attached to each. On the Peninsula, contestants for political leadership tend to stress Sherbro female descent, which explains how descendants of strangers can access power more easily. In patrilineal societies, by contrast, lineages of sister's sons are politically subordinate to lineages of mother's brothers and, in theory, are more constrained to access political power.[8]

In previous generations, matrifiliation among the Sherbros on the Peninsula may have produced sociocultural integration between local populations and newcomers, as detailed in Chapter 3. Oral history suggests such a vision, except that it also tells of the economic and environmental stresses linked to the expansion of fishing that began in the 1960s. However, in the years since the end of the Civil War, and certainly in the decade over which my fieldwork stretched, the political stakes surrounding ethnic affiliation have been high.

Moreover, the political system in the Western Area differs from the customary chieftaincy system of the Provinces, where leadership is maintained among ruling lineages. Yet, in rural towns of the Peninsula, local headmen are elected every three years in a system that was introduced after the Civil War. It must be said that the following data are the product of recent political changes and that the absence of ethnographic study prior to the war makes comparisons difficult. Nevertheless, it appears that local struggles over power are intensifying and leadership has become accessible to migrants (see Chapter 8).

Although headmen who are not Poro members can be elected, Poro membership continues to have relevance in terms of one's ability to contest and access political power. The following examples of local elections in Tokeh and Baw-Baw illustrate the shifting nature of power and the plurality of combinations among lineage affiliation, Poro membership and local political conditions in order to 'make' a Sherbro leader (see also Ménard 2017b).

In Tokeh, the headman who ruled throughout the war was descended from early Temne settlers, dating back two generations (see the analysis of Tokeh's oral tradition in Chapter 3). When they commented on his rule, Poro senior members in Tokeh stressed that the headman's grandfather had displayed moral commitment and friendship with the Sherbros. He had not wished to become a Poro member himself, but he had 'given' all of his children to be initiated in the local Poro – this, as one senior member told me, was 'because of the agreement he made with the Sherbro people. He agreed to dance to their tune'. This expression indicated the respect of community laws and social hierarchies. Another senior member stressed the role of marriage and initiation taken together. He said that the headman's father was Temne, but had been born in Tokeh and had married a Sherbro woman. As such, he was considered a local citizen. Moreover, his father had a society name and thus had 'become' Sherbro.

The former headman drew directly upon his father's mother to support his Sherbro identity. During his rule, in the context of the war years, Poro ritual practices had been difficult to maintain. Some members pointed to his Temne origins when deploring the 'loss of culture' – thus interpreting his assumed lack of commitment as a sign of 'strangerhood'. Still, most Sherbros preferred him to the headman who ruled after him and had won the successive elections of 2010, 2013 and 2017 (see the discussion in Chapter 3). The incumbent headman of Tokeh was part of Sherbro landowning lineages on both sides of his family tree. However, he had turned to Islam and made the Hajj. His voting base included mainly Temne-speaking populations and he had rejected Poro practices as incompatible with Islam. His detractors told me that he had 'become' Temne or 'he's Sherbro but his attitude is Temne'.

In the local context, the former headman, the descendant of a stranger, appeared as a defender of Sherbro interests: he acknowledged his Temne origins, but presented himself as a Sherbro 'citizen'. Collective memory, through the

statements of Poro senior members, positioned his grandfather as a non-initiated stranger, who had nevertheless abided by the local rules of ethnic assimilation for his own children. This, in turn, allowed the headman to claim Sherbro identity based on matrifiliation and on the notion of local citizenship. Local citizenship appeared as an identity to be achieved by showing one's commitment to Sherbro 'culture' and by preserving local interests and values – namely the 'moral ethnicity' tying people to a locality. Like in F.'s story analysed above, ethnic assimilation opened up the possibility for strangers and their descendants to perform Sherbro identity, and this performance was regularly reassessed by people who considered themselves 'autochthonous' – or, at least, 'more' autochthonous. The contrast was strikingly made against the new headman, who had a full Sherbro ancestry, but had withdrawn from his fundamental Poro responsibilities and was supported by populations who had arrived recently.

A second case reveals more complex dynamics of ethnic positioning. In Baw-Baw, the village head election in 2010 was contested by two candidates. The first had paternal Temne ancestry, but strong connections to Sherbro families. He was a young senior member of Poro. He was supported by the two heads of the local Poro chapter, the *Gbanabom* (his father) and the *Yamba* (his father-in-law). Both of the older men lived in the lower part of Baw-Baw, near the seashore, where the sacred grove lies and where most founding families reside. The *Gbanabom*, who died in 2015, was Sherbro by his mother and Temne by his father. He identified as Sherbro and people considered him Sherbro. The second candidate was one generation behind in the assimilation process: he was the son of a Temne settler and a Sherbro woman, and he had a comparatively low hierarchical position within Poro.

The second contestant's background was weaker in social terms, and the Poro position of the first candidate's father granted him more respect from Sherbros living in the lower part of Baw-Baw. By contrast, they were concerned by the 'attitude' of the second candidate and considered him to have 'Temne ways'. They feared that he would prohibit Poro members from performing and that he would encourage more foreigners to settle. He was regularly accused of accommodating his own Ghanaian boat crews in Baw-Baw during the height of the fishing season. Yet, the majority rule applied and he was elected.

During his mandate, the elected headman's position was ambivalent. He obtained a governmental licence to organize the Poro initiation in 2012, by which he consolidated his leadership. His early commitment in favour of the 'Sherbro culture' was appreciated. At the same time, Sherbros suspected him of engaging in relations of patronage with 'his' people only – understood as Temne relatives – and of disregarding social hierarchies that placed him in a subordinate position towards senior Poro members. The same two contestants stood for the 2013 headmanship elections, with the same outcome, leading to post-election dissension. The conflict was solved through the project of leading another Poro

initiation. Members could not contest election results, but wanted to force the headman's support and respect by organizing another initiation. However, the initiation never materialized.

In 2017, the same two candidates ran again for headmanship. This time members of the local Poro campaigned against the incumbent headman. Poro members said that he had neglected his obligations towards autochthonous lineages, favouring what was perceived as 'his' group, the Temne; for them, his loyalty lay elsewhere. In the end, the headman was voted out. The competition was so fierce that in 2018, many people on both sides no longer talked to each other. When I discussed the issue with a Poro leader, he compared the situation with local politics in Tokeh: 'it was the same ways that [the headman] wanted to bring here. We gave him leadership, he brought Temnes here, he left us, he did not want to know whether there was still a Sherbro living here. He wanted to sell us'.

These two examples show that political power rests on a subtle combination between ancestry, Poro membership and 'attitude'. Matrifiliation facilitates competition for power and provides legitimacy. Nevertheless, Poro membership and commitment to Sherbro 'culture' are the main factors that make 'good' leadership according to Sherbro standards. In a context where Poro members cannot directly control local politics, Poro membership ensures that the headman will encourage ritual practice, and the higher his position, the more he will feel compelled and responsible to give Poro members a voice in political matters. Yet, Poro membership is not sufficient. Headmen, regardless of origin, must demonstrate their commitment to Sherbro identity and give pre-eminence to local networks of patronage.

In recent local politics, firm commitment to Sherbro identity has been considered as more important than Sherbro identity by ascription. In Tokeh, the descendant of Temne settlers appeared more autochthonous than the headman, who was considered to have betrayed his group. In Baw-Baw, the previous headman was tolerated so long as he promoted Poro rituals and respected networks of patronage. 'Strangerhood' is thus defined less on the basis of ancestry than on the basis of one's loyalty towards Sherbro lineages, whose authority is maintained through Poro.

While the principle of matrifiliation facilitates strangers' access to leadership, it also exerts an equalizing effect within Poro. The Poro society functions according to a ranked system that attributes specific ritual roles to each position. Local Poro chapters need these various positions to be filled to perpetuate initiation, and each initiation period distributes positions accordingly. On the Peninsula, I also observed that members can be 'promoted' to new positions. Little is known about the way in which positions are actually distributed, but many authors suggest that hereditary rights and wealth (payment of initiation fees) are the main criteria for accessing higher ranks (Fulton 1972: 1223; Little 1965: 358–59).

Dorjahn (1961: 37) observes that Poro titles in Temne society are transmittable from father to son. However, in Sherbro society, evidence suggests that descendants of strangers also have access to high ranks within Poro by following the status of their maternal uncles. If the maternal uncle is a powerful and wealthy man, there is every chance for the initiate to achieve a higher status within Poro.

One example will help illustrate this process. Early in my research, I was in M. sitting at the wharf with a political figure of the town. People usually refer to him by his initiation name. We will call him O. As I was enquiring about the relations of M. with an adjacent community populated by migrants, O. told me that people rarely give land within the town to somebody of Temne origin – that is why the Temne had settled outside. Foday, one of O.'s family protégés, came to greet us and we stopped our conversation. Foday introduced himself to me, and I enquired about the origin of his surname. He replied that it was a Temne name and was about to give some explanations about his family background when O. cut him off: 'You can find that name in two languages: Lokko and Limba. Perhaps you will find [a man who has that name] whose great-grandfather had migrated to a Temne village, that's possible. But Lokko and Limba are the ones who own that name.' Tension was building and Foday replied: 'Well, you can find [this name] in Nigeria, so which tribe is that?' O. ignored the question. I commented that M. welcomed people of Temne origin, after all. O. said: 'Well, I cannot really say we have [Temnes] here. He considers himself Temne.' When O. left later, Foday commented that in Sierra Leone, people usually identify themselves by their patrilineal line. His father is Temne and lives in Tombo. Most of his relatives, brothers and sisters live in Tombo. His mother was from a nearby Sherbro locality and O. is her brother. At the age of seven, Foday enrolled in primary school in M. and started living with his maternal uncle. When I met him, he had a regular job not far from M. and still lived in O.'s house.

In front of O., Foday took pride in mentioning his name and his father's ethnic identity. O. presented an opposing interpretation for the name's origin. The main argument lay in the fact that Foday considered himself Temne, while O. did not and tried to discourage him from doing so. He left the matter by saying 'he considers himself Temne', drawing a parallel between Foday's last name and family background: Foday believed that his name was Temne, although it was not; similarly, he considered himself Temne, but belonged to his mother's group. The tension of the exchange had also been heightened by my presence, since Foday's arrival had undermined O.'s statement about the presence of Temnes in the settlement. Foday presented himself as a stranger, while O. wanted to prove the contrary.

At that time, Foday was not a Poro member, but he was fascinated by the society. Yet, he was not ready to join at the next initiation in Baw-Baw in 2012: he said that his studies left him with no time and that he could not get by without his money-earning activities on the side. He was much more enthusiastic

about joining in a place near Tombo, where all his brothers had joined and that sounded more familiar to him. Yet, unexpectedly, the devil 'ate' him in Baw-Baw, and Foday came out of the sacred grove with the title *Yamba*. I could not talk to O. about this issue, but it is reasonable to think that in his view, Foday's initiation was necessary, because he had been raised in his mother's family and lived with O. himself. Moreover, he could challenge the authority of his uncle, as he had done in front of me. Had Foday been initiated in his father's place, he would have become a member in a Poro chapter that would reinforce links with his patrilineal kin – he would have drawn closer to Temne.

Foday's initiation did not place him at the bottom of the Poro hierarchy. He became a *Yamba*, which meant that he could lead initiations in M. Foday became attached to his mother's group ritually and thereby became a part of M.'s future key senior members. It is reasonable to think that both the social status and ritual position of his maternal uncle, as well as his financial power, played a role in assigning the *Yamba* title to Foday.

Moreover, there is a social logic to giving higher positions to strangers. Members of higher ranks have an obligation to bring and support a greater number of initiates during subsequent initiation periods. This means that more people of the member's social networks, either kin or friends, will join as well. Membership becomes exponential: members with a higher title become more involved financially but also more committed emotionally.[9] Thus, giving high ranks to descendants of strangers within Poro is consistent with the logic of wealth-in-people. The local Poro chapter benefits from the commitment of men who can link various settlements together and expand the society's numerical and social influence. Moreover, the social prestige gained by reaching an important rank should not be underestimated and has an impact on one's commitment to the society. Initiation binds strangers to local communities by sealing the relations of indebtedness that are part of the reciprocity model.

Poro and Politics in a Postwar Context

However, during the last few decades, population growth has played out in the reconfiguration of host/stranger relationships. During the Civil War, the Peninsula became a refuge for populations who fled the fighting. More recently, economic opportunities in fishing have attracted new populations (see Chapter 1). As those residents have acquired demographic weight, they have mustered political legitimacy and have contested for leadership.

The political conflict between Sherbros and those residents has been displaced on the ethnoreligious field. Groups of strangers have rejected Poro practice as a means for integration, thereby contesting the grip of members over local politics. Assimilation, for them, is neither useful nor desirable, for they wish to establish politically independent communities, as I will further detail

in Chapter 8. In Sherbro discourses, the breach in host/stranger relations is articulated as a loss of trust when compared to the relations established with previous generations of strangers, who 'used to get initiated' and did not challenge Sherbro political authority. This corroborates Shack's argument (1979a: 10) that 'the smallness of scale, rather than ethnicity or race, would appear to be a more decisive factor in defining the attitudes of receptivity by African hosts towards strangers'. In this context, members of local chapters brandish the Poro institution as a symbol of their autochthony.

During the Civil War, Poro initiation stopped for multiple reasons. Security and livelihood concerns prevailed. Fishermen moved by boat discreetly, mostly at night. In Tokeh and Goderich, fishing was prohibited by ECOMOG troops, and fishermen moved to smaller settlements such as Baw-Baw and Mama Beach (see Chapter 1). Furthermore, Poro members stressed that a successful initiation needs time and 'power' – that is, the social and financial support of a significant number of members. Initiation is, above all, a festive occasion that brings people together from the whole Peninsula. In the disrupted social context of the war, people did not have the financial means to initiate and they could not take the risk of travelling for such a purpose. Gatherings were also considered suspicious and dangerous.

Moreover, men were expected to mobilize at all times in village self-defence groups. Poro members stressed that Poro was not used as a channel for the organization of those groups. The Western Area fell under the protection of the Organized Body of Hunting Societies (OBHS), founded in November 1997 as part of the Civil Defence Forces (CDF) organized to fight the RUF. The OBHS commandment recruited, trained and deployed young men in the Peninsula villages. It divided the Western Area in different zones, each one under the control of one or two commanders (Carpenter 2011: 88–94). In York, members of the Hunting society reported to me that they had taken part to the OBHS defence groups.

The fact that the Western Area was preserved from the fighting until 1998–99 may also explain that men's mobilization through Poro was not effective. The maintenance of Poro initiation in other regions had much to do with the mobilization of ritual resources for fighting. Recruitment in the *kamajors*, the most widely known of the CDF groups, rested on the acquisition of esoteric powers and protective 'medicines' through initiation. The militias operated according to codes similar to initiation societies such as Poro (Ferme and Hoffman 2002). Richards (1996) describes that the RUF also used Poro-like rituals as a model of recruitment. In the Western Area, the OBHS operated on a different basis, closer to a national military group with tough training, but no esoteric type of initiation (Carpenter 2011: 93–94).

Finally, from the outset of the Civil War, the 'bush' tended to be associated with warfare and the RUF rebellion, including in regions that had not yet been

heavily affected by the fighting. The rebels were known for their ability to move and hide in the forest, which instilled terror in civilian populations and military forces. In the east and south of the country, people cleared forest patches around their communities, including sacred groves in close proximity of settlements, as a security measure against insurgents (Lebbie and Guries 2008: 56). Forest closures, including ritual ones, became a threat, as they could be used to launch attacks against civilians. On the Peninsula, civilians may not have feared the rebels at first, but the access to sacred groves was perceived as dangerous none-theless. In areas of the Peninsula where ECOMOG troops patrolled, people mentioned that moving in, or near, sacred groves was particularly unsafe, as they could easily become targets for ECOMOG soldiers.

In the changing political context of the postwar years, the Poro sacred grove became an emblem of autochthony, as the example of Tombo shows. Tombo, before the Civil War, hosted Muslim populations of Temne and Susu origins, and many Sherbros had also converted to Islam. It is the hometown of Alhadji Towa Smith, the former Sherbro tribal head and the first influential Sherbro of the Peninsula, who had been to Hajj in the 1980s, after which he had built a mosque and had started advocating for the abolition of the Poro society on reli-gious grounds. By the end of the war, and at the request of a group of influential Muslim Sherbros, Poro senior members performed a cleansing ritual to disinvest the Poro bush of its sacred powers. The argument went that the location of the bush at the centre of Tombo prevented market activities. After the cleansing ritual, that area of the bush was left undeveloped.

Until then, headmanship had remained in the hands of Sherbro and Krio landowning families. When the first Temne headman was elected in Tombo a few years later, some Poro senior members gathered to re-activate the sacred power of the Poro bush, in a desperate attempt to revive mechanisms of control over the population of latecomers:

> When [power] transferred to the Temne, they began to boast that the Sherbros would not have any voice here anymore. So the first thing that the Sherbros did was to take a licence from the government to revive the society. [Poro senior members] told us that we needed to get control of the village back, that we needed to show [strangers] whom the village belonged to. It is true: some Temne are here for a long time but they are still afraid of the society. But some of us were not in favour of that and the ceremony had already been passed: the place had no power anymore.

The attempt was unsuccessful. Although Poro members put on ritual clothes and gathered in the sacred grove, they were forced to move out and the place was cleared by order of the headman. He justified his decision by arguing that this place was 'just a cemetery' (as Poro members are buried inside) and that

everybody should be allowed to enter. Thereby, he refused to acknowledge the connection between the site and its ritual powers, as well as the sacred status of deceased members buried in the (former) Poro grove.

When the headman decided to clear the bush, rumours spread that the *kamajors* were still hiding inside. The rumours that presented the bush in Tombo as their hiding place used powerful memories of the war and exacerbated local fears that the war may resume. This constituted an additional argument for the new headman to put an end to the existence of the bush. The rumours, although being part of a political strategy, revealed how the bush, as a place that encapsulates violent memories, continued to generate anxiety for a long time.

The conflict in Tombo had a deep impact on the minds of Poro members across the Peninsula. Clearing the bush constituted a critical political act, as it suppressed the emblem of local political authority. It convinced members that they would no longer be able to contest power with ritual symbols. In this context, Poro members of other chapters hesitated long before organizing any initiation period. They were careful, in an unstable postwar context, to avoid being singled out by the government or migrant groups as intending to ignite conflict. The protection of sacred sites and associated ritual practices now required discretion.

Since the Civil War, Poro performances have been increasingly restricted due to the fact that sacred groves, which are used for initiation, are situated within settlements. By contrast, in Upper Guinea forest societies, Poro groves are rather remote and separated from inhabited areas. When initiation takes place, non-members are separated from members coercively – a practice that has been described in other West African Poro rituals (see Bellman 1984; Højbjerg 2007). In Krio, Poro members refer to this practice as *fɔ lok di ples*, meaning that while members perform Poro rituals in key sacred sites of the settlement, non-members and women have to stay indoors and wait until the signal is given by the Poro speaker to come outdoors again. Strict regulations apply with regard to personal mobility. Non-members are not supposed to know the identity of the initiates. Any time a new initiate is taken through the village to enter the sacred bush, the Poro speaker orders non-members to stay inside, which can occur several times a day at the start of the initiation period.[10] In order to avoid unexpected encounters with the Poro spirit, non-members have to signal their presence when walking outside, particularly at night, either for women by clapping or for men by blowing in a bottle. Some sites too close to the sacred grove are also forbidden.

During the opening ceremony of Poro initiation that I witnessed in Baw-Baw, rituals asking for the ancestors' protection were performed in different sites around the village and at the main entrances, thereby drawing the boundaries within which society law applies. This ritual thus indicates the sacred space, marked by Poro wooden signs, protected from witches and evildoers. Within

these boundaries, non-members are required to respect Poro laws and orders given by members. In Baw-Baw, these boundaries were restricted to the lower part of the settlement. A steep slope and a stream separate the lower dwellings from the upper part of Baw-Baw along the Peninsula Road. It leaves the lower part, where the sacred grove lies, quite isolated. After the ceremony, as we heard the Poro speaker announcing the venue of the Poro mask, most of us (non-initiates) ran past the bridge and up the slope to find a safe space. Similarly, in Mama Beach, the sacred space was circumscribed to the lower part of the town.

The necessity to walk freely is regularly stated by strangers as a main reason for joining the society. During both initiation times and Poro rituals, non-members have to run away when they hear that the Poro spirit will come out. They also often leave their properties behind (shop items, fish, nets, food, etc.). Thus, cases of theft have been reported, as Poro members sometimes use this opportunity to steal business stocks and supplies. In Baw-Baw and Number Two in 2012, some women and non-members decided to close their businesses and move to another location during the time of the initiation period. Others avoided selling in the lower parts of the settlements. Furthermore, the risk of enforced initiation for non-members who watch the spirit by mistake is real.

However, in the postwar years, with newcomers outnumbering local populations, such rituals are more difficult to perform. Many people, non-members and members alike, voiced the concern that it disrupted business and tourism.
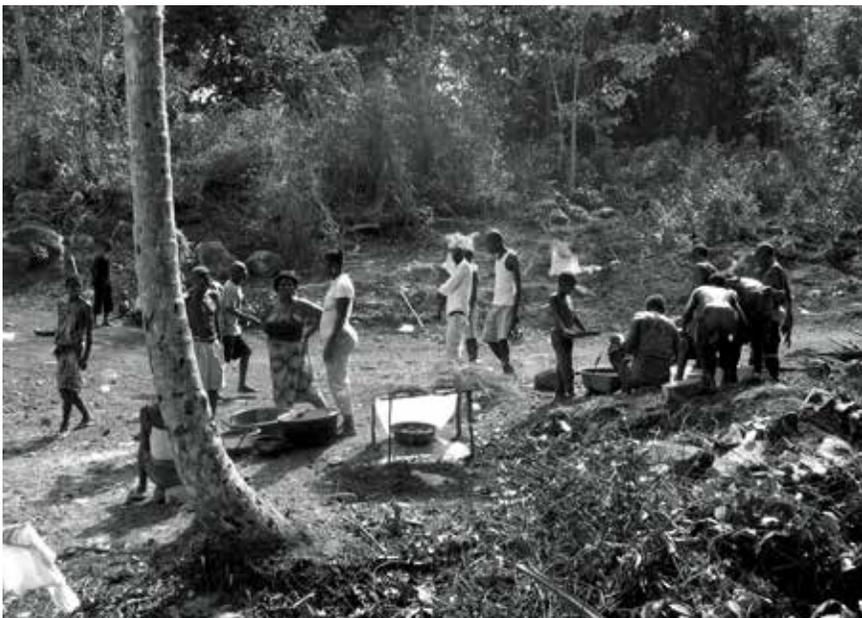
Figure 7.2. Food offerings for the opening ceremony of Poro initiation, Baw-Baw, 2012. © Anaïs Ménard

Initiation is not the only event that has become problematic; ceremonies involving Poro rituals also create tense situations, particularly in populated settlements like Tokeh, which had a population of about 20,000 people at the time of my fieldwork. In May 2010, Poro senior members in Tokeh decided to organize a community ritual called *Kuk fɔ tɔng* (see Chapter 5), by which the water spirit is asked to provide fish and protect fishermen at sea. This ritual includes Poro performances, during which members pour libations in sacred sites within the town. In Tokeh, the sacred grove is situated in the old town, which mostly comprises beach bars and tourist facilities and delimits Tokeh to the south. In the other direction, the sandy road leads to the centre of town and the car park, the economic heart of Tokeh, where most shops are located. The new town begins a few metres before the paved road starts. It is now the most populated part of Tokeh and extends far inland. There are four Poro sacred sites in Tokeh: the sacred grove, the island and two other sites at the other end of town, which means that Poro members have to cross the new town during their performance.

However, in May 2010, the headman of Tokeh attempted to stop the Poro procession at the boundary between the old and new towns on the ground that the new town is mostly populated with strangers who are non-members and who would either see the spirit by mistake or be forced to run away and leave their properties without supervision. Poro members were shocked that the headman, one of their initiation peers, conscious of the danger to which his action exposed him, tried to stop the performance. Senior members were arrested by the police, yet they were soon released and police officers allowed them to resume the ceremony.[11] The headman later apologized. Nonetheless, the case remained controversial, as many members from other settlements had been invited for the occasion and resented the headman's action.

Among Poro detractors, two discourses supported the view that Poro members should ultimately put an end to their performances on the Peninsula. First, the continuation of ritual practices posed the question of their compatibility with the widespread presence of outsiders and the intrusion of government law into areas that are also regulated by Poro law. The 'modernity' discourse stressed the incompatibility of ritual practices with urban life: the ability of creating a 'locked' sacred space was said to conflict with open urban spaces. Migrants used the term 'modernity' – and sometimes 'development' – to demand the right not to be impeded in the conduct of their public activities by Poro practices described as 'traditional' and better suited to rural areas because secrecy is a necessary condition for them. This line of argument was also employed by Poro senior members, who considered that 'open places' – by which they meant a growing population, rapid urbanization due to the road construction, and the presence of state services such as the police – are not conducive to ritual activities that must remain secret. Poro, in the 'modernity' discourse, was presented as the anachronistic remnant of a rural past that conflicted with government law.

The headman of Tokeh explained that although he did not partake in rituals, he would be held responsible for cases of damages, theft or enforced initiation that took place during a Poro performance.

Second, the religious discourse opposed Islam to 'pagan' practices. Muslim leaders tended to condemn participation in Poro rituals. The manner of socializing within the society – based on drinking, smoking, beating drums and dancing – was heavily criticized. Religious arguments are in no way new. Dorjahn (1982: 57–58) has already described the enduring tensions between Muslims and Poro members in Temne chiefdoms. Hendrix (1985: 75) notes that in Tombo in 1980, 95% of the population was already Muslim. Although many people who claim Sherbro identity are also Muslims, and many Temne speakers are also Poro members initiated in the Provinces, the religious discourse polarized ethnic identities within a religious framework. For Sherbros, the local understanding of *trenja* (stranger) often indicated an urban Muslim lifestyle that 'precludes society membership' (Fanthorpe 2007: 13).

Yet, the conflict that had been built around religious issues was undoubtedly a political one. Both in Tokeh and in Tombo, Sherbros blamed their own leaders for the process that led to the rejection of Poro. These leaders were accused of having converted to Islam in order to gain political support. For people who supported them, it appeared necessary to suppress the remaining sacred institution of the autochthonous leadership. Somebody in Tokeh told me: 'Now we beat [ritual] drums to ourselves. We don't do it openly like before. The difference with Baw-Baw [where members organize rituals] is that the population there is not much.' In settlements where large population of migrants had settled in, members were unable to perform ritual integration as they had done in the past, and newcomers were no longer 'dancing to the Sherbros' tune'.

Sherbros had mixed feelings about the presence of migrants, which stimulated the economy, but also inevitably implied a loss of power to them. At times, Poro members stated the possibility of using Poro as a means to re-establish political authority:

> I would like that we would initiate one last time; then we will forget about it. It would be a way for other people to understand once and for all that they are not home. Because of the Poro tradition, people would be scared; they would respect the natives again. It would be a caution for them for some time. But after that, I believe it will die.

Poro initiation, by instigating fear among non-members, is often used as a coercive force in intercommunity conflicts. Since the end of the Civil War, Poro members in several regions of Sierra Leone have used enforced initiation against groups of Muslim traders 'in attempts to re-establish the political primacy of "indigenes" over "stranger" Muslims' (Fanthorpe 2007: 13). On the Peninsula,

due to changing demographic and political configurations, members know that the Poro society can hardly force newcomers' compliance with autochthonous authority. Rather, members are concerned with the necessity to ensure the continuation of ritual practices needed in a community. At the same time, Sherbros have increasingly branded Poro *kɔlchɔ* (culture, tradition) as a symbol of their autochthony on the local scene.

The Re-evaluation of 'Culture'

The possibility to preserve Poro depends on members' ability to navigate its ambivalent status as an emblem of autochthony and as an institution that can adapt to 'modernity' (see de Jong 2007) and help members to appropriate a changing political context. These interlaced meanings emerge as members discuss different strategies related to tourism.

The continuation of initiation is an issue that sets emotional and political arguments against economic ones. As sacred sites become less secretive, Poro members often agree that the practice of initiation may become impossible. In many instances, Poro senior members admitted that the site of the Poro sacred grove could be used for other economic developments, particularly for touristic purposes. Their discussions about what should be done with such a territorial symbol, it seemed, gave them a sense of control over changing sociopolitical parameters on the Peninsula. From a political asset, they could decide to turn it into an economic one. Poro bushes, which are all located close to the beach, have a high potential for tourism activities and are targeted by investors. In Lakka for instance, the sacred bush was leased in the 2000s for the construction of a five-star hotel.

In 2012, each community of the Peninsula was discussing the future of its own sacred site. Members and non-members alike often mentioned 'the last initiation'. In ritual terms, the process of ritual cleansing requires one last initiation, after which the necessary ceremonies are performed to disinvest the site of its sacred powers. The 'last initiation' could become the subject of disputes between generations. Senior members of the older generation have the responsibility to protect the sacred grove. They are organically related to it and going against the ritual oath by desecrating the Poro site exposes them to the risk of sudden death. Many warned that cleansing the bush would affect the spiritual wellbeing of communities. Some may also have worried about the loss of a source of authority and income, as Poro initiation and rituals generate important revenues. On the other hand, young members tended to lobby in favour of transforming sacred groves into an income-generating place. In Sussex, the two younger generations – the group who had been initiated the last time, now in their forties and fifties, and the ones who wished to get initiated – expressed a strong attachment to the transmission of ritual knowledge: most considered

initiation to be an identity marker that showed their respect for their 'tradition' and by which they would perpetuate the Sherbro *kɔlchɔ*. Yet, as we discussed the matter before the initiation period started in 2013, they still hoped to use the place for community purposes after the initiation had ended.

Transferring the sacred grove to another place is possible in theory, but land pressure on the Peninsula makes it almost impossible to find a new appropriate site. When Poro members decide to sell or lease their bush, they keep a small sacred site – often a nonsecret place used to pour libations – for the performance of rituals. In 2012, Poro members in Mama Beach were discussing the lease of the sacred grove. With a large presence of new fisherfolk in town, they told me that they would keep a site referring to the ritual power of the society. It would help maintain Sherbro rights to leadership and control over populations of strangers:

> The only thing that [Temne people] are afraid of is the society. The bush should be left as a reference. Temne do not have enough courage to enter our own bush; otherwise they would have taken over the village already. With the bush, they know that the society is still there and that at any time we can perform. The bush should not be in the middle of the community, but then, we need to transfer it.

In this case, the eventuality of retaining a minor sacred site was seen as a way to maintain authority and to stress the continuing link between territory, ritual power and political right. And, indeed, in communities that had elected headmen who relied on the votes of people considered as newcomers by Sherbros, landowning families sometimes used the occasion of community rituals at minor sacred sites to contest what they regarded as 'bad' leadership.

Nevertheless, minor sacred sites were also created for the transmission of ritual knowledge. Community rituals such as the *Kuk fɔ tong*, as well as funeral rites for Poro members, are considered to be essential for the wellbeing of the social body. Funeral rites, for instance, seal the relationship between inhabitants, the land and its spirits by making peace with ancestors. By ensuring the resumption of these rituals, Poro members shifted the discourse about reciprocity from the obligations between hosts and strangers to the necessary exchange with spirits and ancestors. As Mauss (1990 [1923–24]: 20) notes, 'the spirits of both the dead and of the gods … are the true owners of the things and possessions of this world. With them it was most necessary to exchange and with them it was most dangerous not to exchange. Yet, conversely, it was with them it was easiest and safest to exchange'. This move was also part of a strategy to encourage new memberships in Poro and to maintain the auto-referential frame of religious practices (see Højbjerg 2007). Indeed, the perpetuation of community rituals requires families to continue the initiation of the new generation.

Each initiation period revived a strong emotional attachment to ritual practices that seemed to postpone decisions about the fate of sacred groves. In Baw-Baw, the initiation of 2012 was supposed to be the 'last initiation'. Baw-Baw local leadership, with the help of an investor, had offered to clear the bush, transfer dwellings to the cleared site and leave the beach for tourism-related infrastructures and activities. Yet, after the initiation period had ended, this plan was postponed. The decision of senior members to organize the first initiation after the Civil War, and to revive *kɔlchɔ* in an atmosphere of political tensions, was respected and admired by members across the Peninsula. It propelled the community to the forefront of ritual conservation that kept the various local Poro chapters connected.[12] The fact that young adults expressed a renewed interest in initiation testified to its emotional intensity and its relevance in creating a sense of local belonging.

At the same time, political concerns remained central to the revival of *kɔlchɔ*. In Mama Beach, two initiation periods took place in 2013 and 2016. The Sherbro headman, who took the responsibility for organizing those events, and with whom I met again in 2018, linked initiation to issues of power, as he said: 'Even if you want to be a leader here [you need to be initiated] … otherwise they will take leadership from your hands.' He referred to the large presence of latecomers in Mama Beach. Yet, he also said that it was time to organize initiation for the next generation. Many young men were waiting for it. As I asked if the plan to lease the bush was still being discussed, as it had been in 2012, he responded that the potential investor had not accepted a lease agreement. Members did not want to sell the bush. He added that everyone had enjoyed the initiation period. He described how more than eighty fires had been lit in front of houses of Mama Beach in one day. A fire indicates that the initiate is safe. The headman said that all initiates were doing well 'in the devil's womb' (initiates are said to be 'eaten' by the Poro spirit and reborn as adults). He was pleased that young men of his community were now initiates and that the society had 'taken over people's minds now'. As I enquired how the large number of 'strangers' had coped with it, he said that Poro laws applied down the village only, near the beach, and that people had complied with this arrangement. He reported two incidents with Temne men, who had watched the Poro spirit by mistake and had been initiated. Those were exceptions, but it was a clear sign that the ritual power of the Sherbro Poro could still be deployed against disobedient strangers.

The fact that priorities in Baw-Baw and Mama Beach had changed revealed the continuous relevance of Poro in politics. Initiations in Mama Beach prepared the ground for local leaders in Sherbro settlements to vie for headmanship and councillor elections in 2017. For senior members, initiation periods allowed them to gain prestige and consolidate their relations with high-ranking 'patrons' who play a critical role in providing political and financial support during election times. In the recent political conjuncture of the Peninsula, Sherbro local

leaders, who for most of them belonged to the Sierra Leone People's Party, have lost ground in local elections (see Chapter 1). By organizing initiations, they reaffirmed their political presence and influence, while cementing relations of patronage with government and party officials.[13]

The choices that members operated with regard to sacred groves indicated that Poro continued to be a relevant identity marker and channel for patronage in ethnopolitics. Members did not abandon the idea of leasing sacred groves in order to turn them into touristic facilities and yet, they weighed up different opportunities, each of them having equal validity and justifications, be they economic, political or emotional. Meanwhile, they continued to play on the symbolic value of Poro as a marker of Sherbro presence on the Peninsula.

A similarly ambiguous turn was the progressive inclusion of Poro in a discourse of cultural commodification. Seizing the development of a touristic niche in the postwar context, members have also branded their ritual practice with a new 'folklore' flavour, thereby delineating the boundaries of an 'authentic' Sherbro identity to be reaffirmed at various levels of governance. Through commodification, members shaped the features of a 'reified culture' to be displayed to local and national audiences. In line with de Jong's analysis of the Kumpo masquerade in Jola society (2007: 167–71), Sherbro public masquerades have become an expression of cultural authenticity, which substantiated claims to indigeneity.

Figure 7.3. Performance of the Baw-Baw Cultural Group (Goboi) at the Sussex festival, 2012. © Anaïs Ménard

The growth of tourism coincided with two preoccupations. The first was the creation of economic opportunities, as it became necessary to develop activities outside the fishing business, in which competition is high and resources are lower than before. The second was the possibility to frame ritual practices within the discourse of 'indigeneity' that put forward the necessity to preserve local knowledge and endangered 'traditions' (Pelican 2009). This demarcated Poro from religion by placing it within the discourse of culture protection.

This move towards the 'indigenous' discourse was made possible by the presence of an international NGO, Welt Hunger Hilfe (WHH), which encouraged the development of local initiatives regarding ecotourism in beach settlements. Sherbro communities were the first ones to take part in the project and seized the opportunity to craft a narrative by which they presented themselves as 'environment protectors' against migrants who exploited the forest. The involvement of Sherbro villages in the project is further analysed in Chapter 8.

As each settlement developed its own tourism plan in coordination with WHH, Poro members in Baw-Baw decided to promote ritual performances and combine this with a discourse on 'cultural preservation'. They claimed (by then) that it was the only place on the Peninsula that had been able to maintain its *kɔlchɔ* and keep its ritual practices alive. They started advertising masquerades and performances as authentically 'indigenous', targeting both a foreign and domestic audience, who come from Freetown to the beach on weekends. As an incentive, WHH provided new masks, instruments and clothes to Poro and Bondo ritual leaders (see figure 7.1), and funded an 'environment beach festival' that took place in Sussex in May 2012. The festival included a Kru canoe race, as well as several public masquerades – Bondo, Nyafale, Goboi and Gongoli – performed by the newly created Baw-Baw Cultural Group. The festival, although not branded as a 'Sherbro' cultural festival, exhibited the symbols of an 'authentic' local culture grounded in the knowledge and control of a beach environment that Sherbro autochthones continue to claim as theirs (see Chapter 8).

The discourse on *kɔlchɔ* counteracted some of the criticisms against Poro. It purposefully separated Poro from local politics by associating it with folklore. The presentation of cultural practices as income-generating activities also demonstrated the compatibility of Poro with both business and urbanization. Yet, despite its appeal to a wider audience, this type of cultural performances remained associated with the expression of local Sherbro identity, which linked cultural authenticity to claims of autochthony.

Conclusion

Sherbro narratives present integration through assimilation as the dominant model until at least the middle of the twentieth century. This process entails the cultural assimilation of strangers, who 'become' Sherbro by associating with

local matrilineages. The analysis gave prominence to a discussion of the integration of men, as initiation into Poro interlaces issues of identity, political power and territory. The ritual integration of men materializes social arrangements of reciprocity based on the stranger's indebtedness towards host communities.

The descriptions of 'ritual transformation' also evidence the shifting boundaries of individual ethnic identities and the process by which Sherbro identity incorporates the plurality of origins in its own definition. The local understanding of being 'Sherbro' also develops in relation to collective assessments of individual actions (or what being a 'committed' Sherbro person means in the present context), thus placing emphasis on the reproduction of the 'moral ethnicity' (Lonsdale 1994) that binds local communities in spite of (or perhaps by virtue of) the heterogeneity of individual origins.

However, current dynamics on the Peninsula also show that it is a model that recent strangers increasingly oppose. Certainly, the combination of migration and legal changes means that new migrants, particularly Temne, have gained sufficient demographic weight to elect their own local representatives. The role of Poro in making and unmaking local leadership has declined and members claim it as a symbol of a (threatened) Sherbro autochthony. Despite these changes, the institution keeps its political relevance in linking communities to centres of power. Renewed Poro initiations since the end of the Civil War also show one way in which Sherbro communities continue to integrate newcomers, gaining strength from incorporating, obligating and rewarding those who might otherwise be strong opponents. Yet, these rituals are also used to enter patronage networks with 'big men' and 'scare' political opponents. Lastly, recent developments in tourism have encouraged Sherbros to create a narrative of indigeneity that further delineates the cultural contours of Sherbro identity, in response to political attempts of suppressing Poro in the region.

In this respect, Poro remains an important marker of a territorially anchored Sherbro identity, as ongoing conflicts with migrant groups over land politics have been aggravated in the postwar context. These conflicts, which have structured host/stranger relations in more recent years, are analysed in Chapter 8.

Notes

Sections of this chapter were published in a book chapter entitled 'Poro Society, Migration and Political Incorporation on the Freetown Peninsula, Sierra Leone' from the coedited volume by Christian K. Højbjerg, Jacqueline Knörr and William P. Murphy (2017), *Politics and Policies in Upper Guinea Coast Societies, Change and Continuity* published by Palgrave Macmillan.

1. See e.g. Bledsoe 1980; Little 1965, 1966; Murphy 1980; Murphy and Bledsoe 1987; Siegmann 1980.
2. According to Lamp (2016: 13), Manuel Alvarez's account of circa 1615 suggests that the Mane, whom he located around Cape Mount on the southern coast, may have introduced

the Poro institution among the Temne, 'which preceded the separate introduction of a Poro tradition from the Bullom … in the Yoni chiefdom shortly thereafter. The second Temne adoption of Poro from their relatives and allies, the Bullom, may have been an attempt to achieve parity with their new overlords, the Mane, on their own terms'.

3. The plural form of *sowei* in Mende is *soweisia*. However, I have followed here an English plural form, which is more consistent with local uses on the Peninsula.

4. It seems that getting a licence from the government for an initiation period is a complex procedure. Bondo ritual leaders who know their way around political and administrative circles and can obtain a licence are asked to lead initiations in various settlements. The Sherbro *sowei*s seem particularly successful in navigating this terrain. The role of licensing and institutions in the legitimation of ritual practices requires further research.

5. Fanthorpe (2007: 15) mentions that in Freetown, only the most prosperous people send their girls back to their villages for initiation.

6. Against this statement, a member of the Temne Bondo mentioned the past existence of a sacred grove in Tokeh and remembered the last initiation at the end of the 1980s: 'It brought jealousy. [Sherbro women] said that our [society] is more frightening than the one of the Mende/Sherbro, that we have some ceremonies that they don't do, that they look like the ones of the *sɔkɔ* men. But we initiated a few Sherbro women … But the conflicts can be resolved when we perform together.'

7. The local meaning that people attribute to 'underage' may vary. Sierra Leone's laws prohibit the initiation of girls under eighteen. Yet, in this case, Bondo women wanted to say that they initiated pubescent girls, but not small children.

8. In Sierra Leone's patrilineal societies, like the Kpelle, matrilateral ties structure Poro hierarchies. Ritual obligations tend to be kept within the hands of lineages of sister's sons (or strangers), who represent spiritual authority, while lineages of mother's brothers (or landowners) control local politics (see Murphy and Bledsoe 1987: 129; Højbjerg 1999: 538).

9. The financial advantage of allowing strangers to attain a position of power is salient in the case of 'big men' from Freetown or foreign investors.

10. The ritual procedure by which the spirit 'catches' new initiates is very similar to the Temne *amporo dif* (Poro kills) that Dorjahn (1982: 39) describes as a declining practice.

11. It appears that police officers who solved the case also did it in their capacity as Poro members and not with reference to government law. A few authors have also stressed that 'devils' are beyond the realm of legality: they cannot be arrested or charged in court (de Jong 2000: 163; King 2011; Nunley 1987: 57).

12. The organization of initiation periods on the Peninsula seems to follow the pattern described by Højbjerg (2007: 243) by which Poro is 'transmitted from one settlement to the next'. The first village to organize Poro holds a specific ritual place.

13. In his study of the initiation of politicians in Jola society, de Jong (2002) notes that initiation is a way to 'appropriate' national politicians, hold them accountable to local communities and access the public sphere.

Chapter 8

Lands, Livelihoods and Politics

Land is central to the reciprocal arrangement established between hosts and strangers. While groups of firstcomers control access to land through political and ritual prerogatives, strangers can acquire property rights over the course of generations. However, throughout West Africa, governmental policies and land pressure, by modifying power relations between social groups, have affected those relations and polarized ethnic identities along the lines of autochthony.[1] The modification of the relations between firstcomers (groups who claim ownership by virtue of autochthony) and latecomers (groups of strangers who initially occupied land allocated by firstcomers) results from the combination of political changes and economic precarity. The scarcity of resources leads to the intensification of local struggles for local power and the capture of land as the main avenues for mitigating uncertainty.

Discourses of autochthony emerge when the presence of strangers is experienced as a form of injustice and dispossession – of land rights, political and ritual prerogatives, etc. The reception of strangers by host communities depends on several factors, among which are the scale of migratory processes, the 'power structure' between the two groups who compete for the same political and economic assets, and the institutional framework in which those relations unfold (Shack 1979a; Skinner 1963). The context of the Peninsula gathers these various factors. Locals experience the success of latecomers in the fishing economy as economic deprivation. Moreover, demographic pressure increasingly constrains access to land as an economic asset. Finally, postwar governments, by changing the rules of access to land and leadership, have modified the structural position of strangers, who can claim these rights as granted directly by the state. Among local Sherbro populations, these processes have led to the strong categorization of 'Temne' as the ethnic 'other'.

Competition over land and political leadership have intertwined, as places populated by latecomers have acquired gradually political independence – namely, the right to elect their own village head – and thus have broken free from their host communities by engaging with the state. Boone (2013) emphasizes that the institutional authority in position to allocate land rights plays a critical role in shaping the outcome of conflicts between 'indigenes' and migrants. In regions where land allocation is under the control of customary authorities, strangers are likely to be excluded from land ownership. By contrast, she notes:

> Where in-migration has been sponsored by the central government, in-migrants' land claims are based on national citizenship. The government that granted the land rights to the settlers is expected to defend these rights. Under this land tenure regime, the land-rights losers are those who claim land rights on the basis of indigeneity. (Boone 2013: 194)

On the Peninsula, the APC government that was in power between 2007 and 2018 did not encourage migration, but courted the recent settlers for political support. The patron−client relations thus established fostered the conditions for competition between autochthones and migrants; migrants validated the legitimacy of the state that granted them land rights. Land competition has activated ethnic identities, which mainly play out in the political scene (Boone 2013: 191).

Moreover, government law and policies increasingly shape land claims. In recent years, the value of land has skyrocketed in the region. The Peninsula, due to

Figure 8.1. Deforested hills in Lakka, 2012. © Anaïs Ménard

its proximity to Freetown, has become an attractive investment area for wealthy Sierra Leoneans living in the capital and abroad. As in other periurban zones of Africa, the customary politics of land redistribution, associated with established modes of social negotiation, recede as land becomes part of strategies of accumulation by the political and economic elites (see Zangré-Konseiga 2020). Unequal transactions between elites and local owners mark the epitome of the capitalist market economy 'disembedded' from social relations (Polanyi 1944).

Land has become a critical economic asset that has pushed people to enter into fierce conflicts, both at the interpersonal and collective levels. Communities across the Peninsula have engaged in strategies to enter clientelistic relationships with high-ranked politicians or civil servants in order to validate their ownership claims. Securing networks of state officials is a necessary strategy for people in order to navigate a periurban context of 'insecure modernity' characterized by: rupture – the acceleration of modernization and economic deregulation; doubt – the changes of customary mechanisms pertaining to land tenure and politics; and mistrust – the rearrangement of patron–client relationships as based on precarity and extreme economic dependency (Laurent 2013). This context modifies host/stranger relations in profound ways and creates the basis for autochthonous discourses to occur.

Nevertheless, this context does not question the local rationale of reciprocity. Groups of firstcomers and latecomers continue to invoke reciprocal arrangements to substantiate their actions. The logic of patronage permeates local discourses on both sides. People in Sherbro localities legitimate their autochthonous claims by stating that strangers, who are in a position of social dependence to access political and land rights, have bypassed customary channels of reciprocation. Similarly, latecomers emancipate themselves from those channels by arguing that firstcomers have denied them the rights that they have earned under the customary system.

The Local Experience of Statehood

Sherbro autochthony is articulated with reference to the context of legal dualism that divides the national territory into two parts, each ruled by different laws with regard to customary tenure and local politics. The process of state formation in Sierra Leone can be analysed using the concept of the colonial 'bifurcated state', which enforced a geographical and legal separation of the urban citizenry from the mass of rural subjects (Mamdani 1996).

In Sierra Leone, the colonial distinction between Colony and Protectorate produced a situation of legal dualism (see Renner-Thomas 2010). In the Protectorate's territory, colonial authorities maintained and institutionalized the chieftaincy system as the guarantor of customary rights. This appeared to be the most efficient modality of indirect rule. In the Colony, they ignored the existence of

the local customary system and applied English law. Envisioning the Western Area as a land of pioneers, they considered the settlers to be 'non-native' (see Chapter 1). This status had legal implications: 'non-native' populations could not own land outside the Western Area. To this day, the Provinces Land Act of 1960 prohibits 'non-natives' from purchasing land outside of the Western Area in territories under customary law and, in a tautological way, defines 'non-native' as 'any person not entitled under customary law to rights in land in a Province'.[2] By contrast, there are no restrictions on land acquisition in the Western Area imposed on other ethnic groups, which constitutes a problematic discrepancy in the legal landscape (Renner-Thomas 2010: 9). Recently, Krios have been quite active on social media to denounce this legal difference as unfair.

Sherbro populations identify the institutional legacy of the colonial state as highly problematic. The state continues to assume the Peninsula to be a land 'without natives'. The legal framework makes provisions for state and private properties, but not for customary land rights. In 2008, the Deputy Minister of Lands, Country Planning and the Environment officially stated that 'there is no community land in the Western Area' – a sentence that my Sherbro inter-locutors repeated to highlight the unfair treatment they have received from the government in comparison to the Provinces, where chiefs are 'custodians of the land'. By this, Sherbros understood land as 'a customary communal holding' linked to a specific indigenous identity (see Mamdani 1996: 22). The right to claim customary tenure, both individually and collectively, depends on the right to be considered a 'native' (indigenous) group by central institutions. People referred to the differences between Colony and Protectorate to express their feeling of being deprived of their collective rights to land.

Sherbro relations with the state may be defined as a situation of ambiguous proximity. People reinterpret the historical experience of direct rule as both an opportunity and a burden. In the colonial system, Sherbro populations were 'neither citizen nor subject' – they lived in a space of direct rule, but likely pre-served their customary political and tenure regimes (see Chapters 1 and 2). In contemporary practice, people mobilized the history of the Colony to represent themselves strategically as *either* citizen *or* subject according to situational needs.

The 'Colony' was often referred to in the present tense, in statements such as 'We are part of the Colony' or 'Here is the Colony'. People viewed historical belonging to the Colony as granting a privileged social status opposed to the 'native' identities of people living in (or coming from) the interior. In this sense, proximity to the state resulted in a local distinction between the uncivilized and the civilized, the old and the modern – dichotomies that were re-enacted in contemporary discourses. For instance, it was often argued that the proximity of the state made Sherbro populations more acquainted with modernity and its institutions, such as the judicial and administrative systems.

According to the vocabulary often employed by NGOs, the set of skills derived from institutional proximity was often referred to as 'awareness', which drew a distinction between *aware* citizens, who were exposed to a historical civilizing process, and *unaware* subjects, who were not. Such representations blurred the lines between present and past, and emphasized the supposed predispositions of inhabitants of the Western Area to act as citizens in modern terms, while contrasting them with the habits of populations in the Provinces. Commenting on historical differences, an elder of Kissi Town said:

> The people from the Colony get more of the Western life. And those from the Protectorate, there are our cultural people. They have chiefs, all their cases go through chiefs and their laws are different. But in the Colony now, you have to go according to the rule of the police, the modern law. If you are in the Colony, you are more attached to the modern law. But if you are in the Protectorate, that does not happen. If you commit an offence, they will say that they should tie you and they will tie you and put you under the sun.

Narratives about the Provinces accentuated the cruelty and absurdity of customary laws and of punishment practices. They also stressed the local despotism exerted by chiefs. In contrast, local headmen often presented themselves as respectful of state law and individual freedoms.

Nonetheless, the proximity of the central government was also presented in a narrative of subjugation and predation. In Krio and Sherbro settlements, local discourses presented Sherbros in the past as fearful of a colonial state that they poorly understood. By contrast, 'Krios' (understood here as the Liberated Africans) had engaged directly with colonial institutions. People claimed that, at first, Sherbros were not educated and relied on Krios for their interactions with colonial institutions. Representations of Krios as mediators aimed at supporting the representations of Sherbros as past colonial subjects, who lacked the necessary social and cultural skills to enjoy their rights and opportunities as citizens of the Colony.

Sherbros also presented themselves as extremely afraid of the police and direct state interventions in the recent past, which revealed a persistent mistrust of state institutions and agents. Some police cases had made a longlasting impact on local minds. One of the most violent and intriguing cases happened in 1972 in one Sherbro locality, as residents were accused of a ritual murder that had taken place inside the Poro sacred grove. The predatory nature of the state emerged in recollections of the event, as people said: 'They captured all men in the village' or 'They came with trucks, and took everyone away'. Fishermen who escaped the state authorities hid for months in faraway settlements. People who were children at that time remembered 'an empty village' only populated

by grandmothers, who cared for their grandchildren. From those men who were caught, many died in prison, while others came back with serious physical and psychological traumas. In their recollections, inhabitants emphasized that local people, at that time, did not know about their rights. Interestingly, they described contemporary land cases that involved the state by using a similar narrative frame. Many people emphasized both the arbitrary power of the state (to take land) and their own powerlessness, as they saw 'trucks, police men and soldiers' coming to grab land.

The imaginary of the Colony and the language of institutional duality, in Mamdani's terms (1996: 18), continue to frame the relations with state power. Contemporary representations as *either* citizen *or* subject reflect the ambiguity of the relations between indigenous populations and the colonial state in a social and legal environment shaped by direct rule. In contemporary terms, the proximity of the state is ambiguous: it may offer social and economic benefits – and 'development' in general – and yet state penetration down to the local level may become a threat. Referring to the Colony allows people to express a heightened feeling of insecurity related to state intrusion in the local arena in the postwar years, particularly regarding the regulation of political and land rights.

Institutional Reforms and Their Malcontents

In the postwar phase, the international agenda for reconstruction involved institutional reforms driven by transparency guidelines. As in other parts of Africa, democratization and decentralization reforms, by reshuffling power relations in local and regional political arenas, triggered the emergence of autochthonous discourses (Geschiere 2009). The application of a new electoral system modified the structural position of strangers within communities.

The Local Government Act of 2004, as part of the decentralization reform, introduced the election of village heads every three years. It also stipulated easy conditions for eligibility to the post: literacy and five years of residence within a community. Before then, it seems the organization of headmanship elections had been left largely to the local level.[3]

This reform contributed to reversing power relations between firstcomers and latecomers. Many latecomer groups have resided for generations on the Peninsula, but have seized the opportunity of legal and demographic changes to redefine their social status and advance their political claims. The National Electoral Commission (NEC) conducted village headmen elections, but only partially, it seems, in 2006 and 2009. The results were either unavailable or did not give a full picture of the changes at work in the Western Area Rural District. By contrast, the village head elections of 2013 and 2017 (in 96 and 121 villages respectively)[4] revealed the shift in voting power between groups. The examples of Mile 13 and Number Two River will shed light on these processes.

Mile 13 is situated on the territory of Sussex and depends politically on the headman of Sussex/King Town. In 2012, it was mostly populated by families who had settled long before the war. Most of the territory of Mile 13 is legally owned by an inhabitant of Sussex/Sherbro Town, who inherited it from his father. He gained recognition of ownership in court against the inhabitants of Mile 13 and tried to drive them away by having their houses demolished. Nevertheless, inhabitants came back and rebuilt their houses. They also established their own cemetery, which is an act that marks the foundation of a politically independent place, and thus asserted collective ownership on the ground by land occupation.

In 2016, the candidate of Mile 13 won the village head elections. By that time, due to the construction of the Peninsula Road and the migration that pushes people outside Freetown, Mile 13 had become much more populated than Sussex. With a Mile 13 resident as village head of Sussex, Krio and Sherbro landowners found themselves subsumed under the authority of a person, and population, whom they considered 'strangers'. For their part, people in Mile 13 considered that they had been 'slaves' to inhabitants of Sussex, as they had to pay taxes for land use and farming. The possibility to have their own candidate elected marked a form of social and political emancipation from landowning families.

In Number Two River, the headman elected in 2017, like the Mile 13 winner, gained the vote from new residents in the community. Landowning families considered him, too, to be a 'stranger'. His parents did not originate from the region. His father had come in the 1960s as a forest guard and had settled in an area called Forestry Compound, further away from the original Sherbro settlement. The headman had been born on the Peninsula and he had married a woman from a landowning family. But his biography was not sufficient to ensure the respect of firstcomers, who profoundly disliked him. He was also not a Poro member, which is often a requirement for accessing power under customary rules (see Chapter 7). He had been fiercely challenged by other contestants who were Poro members, but still he had won.

The newly elected headman told me that he had stood 'to liberate the people'. He meant the majority of the inhabitants of Number Two River who were considered 'strangers' and who were excluded from political participation by 'sons of the soil'.[5] Still, he could not expect an easy tenure. The polls only gave him a slight majority and landowning families employed various intimidation tactics to discredit his leadership: accusations of land misappropriation (cases that often involved the police), witchcraft, Poro-related rituals, etc. As a Poro member told me, the new headman would not 'enjoy power' as somebody 'from the soil'. Because he had no legitimacy in the eyes of landowners, they continued to contest his authority during his ruling years.

These political developments encouraged a stronger territorial and political division between the upper part of settlements, near the Peninsula Road,

where new populations resided, and the lower part of settlements populated by firstcomers who tried to retain their control over the beach side. Economic specialization reinforced the up/down distinction, as new residents worked mainly in the construction field, like building, caretaking of land, or stone breaking at quarries. Furthermore, landowning families were concerned with preserving their collective rights to the beach. In Number Two River, the economic stakes were high, as the beach is managed by a communal association and tourism represents the main income of most people 'down' the settlement. Thus, the beach side stood as the symbol of ritual authority and autochthony in a context of land pressure and political competition.

In 2012, the new registration process, which aimed at issuing biometric voter cards, also created tensions at the local level. The registration process binds electors to the location where they registered for participation in a wide range of polls: village head, local council, parliamentary and presidential elections. Below I present the case of the registration process in Bureh Town, which I observed on 27 January 2012;

> In January 2012, at the start of the registration process for the general elections, I lived in Bureh Town with my host, Mrs Dowu. One morning, she and I were sitting in her backyard when we heard shouts coming from the primary school, where one of the classrooms had been converted into a registration office for the forthcoming elections. I followed Mrs Dowu, who ran towards the school. There, about twenty to twenty-five people, non-residents of Bureh Town, were standing in line in

Figure 8.2. Quarry in Number Two River, 2018. © Anaïs Ménard

front of the classroom to register. About a dozen inhabitants of Bureh Town, who remained at a distance, were shouting at them. We were soon surrounded by many more people from Bureh Town, who heatedly expressed their discontent: 'It is not their Ward!' 'We don't know you!' 'We are from here!' ['*Na wi de de*' expresses the notion of being born from the soil] 'You are not from here!' ['*Yu/una nɔ de de*' expresses the position of outsiders]. The people who had come to register remained in line, strangely silent. Someone from the crowd said that according to government law, one had to live or work in the area in order to register. A respected Krio man who lived in Bureh Town wanted to call the police in Tombo: 'Let them come, they will put them in a cell.' Debates erupted over what should be done. Eventually, after exchanging a few words among themselves, the people who had come to register walked away.

Nonetheless, Bureh Town residents did not calm down. The discussion remained heated. 'No stranger has the right to come here!' 'They will bury us here!' 'They will kill us and bury us!' Such verbal images of violence were unusual, although residents in Sherbro communities openly expressed resentment towards newcomers. The people who had come to register were likely economic migrants and rural workers living in neighbouring communities. Inhabitants of Bureh Town suspected that the headman had offered them money to register in Bureh Town, whereas they believed these people should have gone to a registration centre nearer to their residences. The headman was a rather young man who had lost the trust of Bureh Town residents because of various conflicts. It was likely that he had tried to ensure voting support for himself in the next elections by sending the people to register in Bureh Town.

That same day, the headman returned with three policemen from Tombo, and the same group of people who had come in the morning stood waiting in line again, now protected by men in uniforms. Inhabitants of Bureh Town gathered in front of the school and objected. The headman argued that not only did these people work here and had the right to register, but anyone could register anywhere. The following exchange occurred between a Bureh Town resident and the headman:

> THE MAN: No, not anywhere they want. I am not a resident of Lumley so I will not register in Lumley.
> THE HEADMAN: Why not? You could. You are a Sierra Leonean.
> THE MAN: No, I am a descendant of Bureh Town. You should not be allowed to spoil this village.

Meanwhile, the police wanted to take Mrs Dowu to the police station because she had insulted the headman – but she said that she would

not get in the car. The man who had protested to the headman argued in her favour. He justified the reaction of the residents by explaining that nobody in this village knew these people. The policemen seemed embarrassed, caught between their duty and their sympathy for the inhabitants, as they understood the injustice of the situation. In the end, nobody was arrested for obstructing the registration process.

Mr Small, the main elderly political figure of Bureh Town and its former headman, arrived on the scene. His presence brought the dispute to a halt, as he explained to the registration staff that inhabitants of Bureh Town did not understand why non-residents were being allowed to register. The headman argued that any Sierra Leonean could register anywhere in Sierra Leone, the only condition being that one must be 18 years or older. One member of the registration staff said that he had called an official from the NEC, who was on his way to settle the matter. The NEC official arrived in a jeep, inquired as to the reason for the dispute, and, unimpressed, declared that the only official rule was that everyone had to register once. As a Sierra Leonean, anyone could register anywhere. However, he added, because the same voter card was to be used for presidential, parliamentary, local council and headmanship elections, someone who had not registered in his/her place of origin would not be able to elect his/her headman. The official did not comment on the converse situation: that people who had registered elsewhere than their place of origin or residence would vote for a local representative who would not represent *them*, given that although local residency did not matter for national or council elections, it mattered for village head elections. Such a situation implied that Bureh Town would have 'virtual' inhabitants showing up only to influence local elections. The NEC official's declarations were met with a stunned silence. Then the argument resumed but with less intensity. Elders decided to boycott the community meeting organized by the headman for that afternoon. Somebody said: 'Let [the headman] call people whom he considers "community people" in Bureh Town because we are no "community people" … If these [people who have come to register] are community people, then they should take part in the meetings.' The above event represented the end of any chance for constructive dialogue between the headman and the residents of Bureh Town, whose relationship had deteriorated over the past months.

This vignette illustrates claims of autochthony in the local context of Bureh Town, as influenced by electoral reforms and demographic changes in the region. Bureh Town, a rather small community, was rather secluded, less economically

attractive and did not welcome many strangers, as compared to other settlements such as Mama Beach, Kissi Town and Tombo. Nevertheless, residents were very aware of the risk of being outvoted by latecomers and reacted accordingly, with a discourse of exclusion of 'allochtones' in order to remind them of their (relative) subordinate social position as strangers.

This event marked the penetration of the logics of the state in the local political arena. The government's official discourse, backed by the use of modern technologies, created a sense of frustration among residents, who felt caught in a web of democratic rules that ignored the specificities of the local. Before the NEC official arrived to settle the dispute, most residents of Bureh Town believed that the case would be decided in their favour. They believed that, at the town level, such problems continued to be solved according to customary law. They also believed that state representatives like the police would validate their autochthonous rights. However, on this day, most of the inhabitants came to realize that the town was subsumed by a new national legal framework.

The incident set two political spheres in opposition: the state, which guarantees the equality of citizens before the law, and the community, whose members advocated for the negotiation of relations between social groups in accordance with customary laws. Residents opposed national citizenship to local citizenship, understood as a set of rights granted by firstcomers. In this regard, the laconic explanation of the NEC official created a heightened sense of injustice, as it meant that firstcomers had lost their status of political 'patrons', sovereign in their locality, to the state. Nevertheless, inhabitants of Bureh Town targeted their critics less at strangers than at local politicians, who, in their view, engaged in electoral malpractice to secure personal interests. In many places, local candidates were aware of the voting power of latecomer populations and tried to mobilize their votes. In this context, Sherbros identified the state as the main culprit for their changing relations with strangers, as state law gradually superseded local prerogatives in the allocation of political and land rights.

For their part, headmen elected among migrant populations often upheld the new law against local arguments of autochthony. In Tombo, a member of the town committee commented on Sherbro claims to a monopoly over leadership in these terms:

> The indigenous rights bring a lot of problems in our community. Sherbros claim to be indigenous. But Tombo is under the Colony. It is for each and every Sierra Leonean. Whoever wants to contest for headmanship should stay at least five years in the community. The law does not say that you should be born here. The five years is for you to prove that you pay taxes. The right [to headmanship] is based on residential stay.

In this statement, the legal heritage of the Colony was presented as more democratic than the one in the Provinces, a point to which I will return below. The five-year residential rule was interpreted as linked to one's duties towards the state. By comparison, Sherbro local authorities understood the five-year rule as a partisan decision linked to the political strategy of the successive APC governments to enrol the vote of migrants on the Peninsula. Comments such as 'We don't blame migrants, we blame the party [APC]' were common. Those comments underscore the point, reported in earlier chapters, that the relations with latecomers had, until the postwar period, been managed at a relatively local level, and that the law concerning headmen changed both the nature of political relations and the management of land disputes.

Citizenship(s) and Land Affairs

In a context of economic uncertainty, land has become the central asset to secure, both for individuals and communities. In the Western Area, the coexistence of legal regimes plays a role in pitting ethnic identities against one another in the process of ownership legitimation.

At the local level, Sherbro communities have maintained rules that qualify as customary with respect to land tenure, although this type of ownership does not benefit from legal recognition. As a result, Sherbros tend to present their identity as affixed to customary tenure, while other groups invoke state law to prove ownership. Ownership legitimation points to different conceptualizations of citizenship, by which I understand a set of rights and duties tied to belonging to a specific political community, whether local or national (Lund 2011).

Ownership in Krio settlements originates in the legitimation of property by the colonial state. Krios presented themselves as 'early' citizens of the Colony, whose land rights derived from titles they had acquired from colonial authorities. In the Colony, freehold tenure was not granted at first: the settlers became tenants of the British Crown. The Colony's administration later recognized land titles and turned them into a form of freehold (Renner-Thomas 2010: 19–20). On the Peninsula, although the settlers appropriated vast amounts of land, most had no deeds; rather, land simply passed from one generation to the next. Hence, the Unoccupied Lands Ordinance of 1911 guaranteed that land without title belonged to the Crown. This persuaded many Krios to obtain official ownership by way of declaration, thereby claiming vast amounts of land, which led to later speculation (Asiama 2006: 223–24).

As a result, in Krio settlements, land is mostly private. The prevalence of private property is also expressed through the perception that Krios 'trust documents' more than other groups do. Krio property holders are known for refusing customary relations through which strangers access land ownership after some time. In Sherbro settlements, people often criticized the way in which Krios

would retrieve land from tenants even after many years of renting. They often contrasted this practice with that in Sherbro settlements, in which land ownership was granted as soon as a stranger had built on a parcel of land. If he had not prevented the building, the former owner had no right to take back the land. In those statements, Sherbros positioned themselves as customary landlords to other groups, while criticizing the 'Krio system' of ownership based on documents. Similarly, Sherbros complained that their Krio relatives did not take their customary claims to land (in Krio settlements) seriously.

In a context of land pressure, Sherbro landowners strongly disapproved of the idea that the legitimation of ownership based on title deeds should take precedence over customary ownership based on local history and land occupation. People often emphasized that their parents did not think about obtaining documents, as previously land was available and customary ownership went unchallenged at the local level. Customary tenure results from developing one's land by clearing, planting trees, building a house or a *pan bodi* (basic iron structure for a caretaker). Local people were particularly resentful that outsiders to local communities, who had acquired land years ago for a cheap price and had abandoned it, returned to claim their property now that the Peninsula had become attractive and valuable. Renewing the image of the first colonial encounter, they explained that their ancestors who sold land did not understand, at that time, the implications of signing a document. They contended that document holders should pay the difference, as land was much more valuable today. In their view, the customary argument of developing one's land came first in these disputes.

When a young man living abroad came back to Sussex/King Town to claim a parcel bought by his parents in the 1960s, for which they held documents, the reaction of inhabitants was one of shock and incredulity. Somebody stated as we were discussing the case:

> Forty years! Can you imagine! These Krios bought it, then they went abroad and they forgot about the land for forty years! They do not build anything on it, they do not put anyone as caretaker, they don't even clear it. And see, when one of their children has a project, they suddenly remember that they have land.

In this case, the family had neither *displayed* ownership nor showed interest in the community. They had been out of the country for years and suddenly their son came back to secure land. The man's claim was valid under statutory law, but was not legitimate in the eyes of Sussex inhabitants, who drew on local standards of customary tenure.

A family from Sherbro Town, whose status as property holders was established locally, opposed the man's claim. The headman advised both parties to check the validity of their respective documents at the Ministry of Lands. He

stated that although he was in favour of the local family, 'documents are bigger than he is' – in other words, he had no right to legitimate customary ownership. The representative of the family from Sherbro Town claimed to have documents, but did not want to display them. It is likely that they did not exist. As a result, he forced the claimant to fight with customary symbols: the other family cleared the land hurriedly, following which he stored the materials for a house construction directly on the parcel. Neither of the two parties wanted a court case, due to the complications this would bring in terms of time and money. For the claimant, who would have surely won the case in court, a legal decision would not have necessarily marked victory on the ground. Therefore, each continued to use customary markers, hoping to wear the other down and reach a compromise. Thus, at the local level, customary markers also remained relevant in disputes that involved document holders. Land occupation, often combined with numerous and inconclusive court cases, became the basis on which specific land disputes were ultimately arbitrated.

Nonetheless, the legitimacy of customary claims dropped as the state penetrated and superseded the local in land affairs. In the context of land pressure, the ability to produce documents is an asset: it allows the recognition of property rights and opens up the possibility of asking for compensation in the case of a land dispute. The construction of the Peninsula Road between Tokeh and York in the 2000s, for instance, encroached on private lands. In Tokeh, the Sierra Leone Road Authority took land from Sherbro families who, as customary owners, were unlikely to prove legal ownership. These families had no right to compensation. In neighbouring York, the Krio families who were in the same situation held property deeds and thus were entitled to financial compensation. They received a large amount of money as a result.

Such land cases, whether they involved the state, investors or private document holders, were common across the Peninsula since the end of the Civil War and forced residents in Sherbro settlements to reconsider the validity of their customary claim beyond the local level. The fact that a significant number of land disputes ended up in court encouraged many people relying on customary ownership to survey their properties and secure title deeds. Yet, land survey and registration remained a difficult and costly process. In order to alleviate this cost, it was common for people to pay land surveyors in kind – with acres of land.

As government representatives tended to abuse their right to claim 'state land' for their own individual purposes, the image of the predatory state reemerged in many narratives. There was a pervasive fear that 'the state' might challenge local customary ownership and take land without compensation, as in the case detailed above. As an inhabitant of Mama Beach explained:

> I have a land but I don't have documents for it. Before, people did not understand that land had a value. A few years ago, I planted mango trees

on that parcel, because I had not enough money to build a house and it looked bushy. Now it looks like it has value. It shows that it belongs to somebody. In the village, everybody knows the boundary of our family land. They know it belongs to us. The only thing I am afraid of is the government. They can just come and take somebody's land.

In legal texts, the Public Land Ordinance of 1898 authorizes the compulsory acquisition of land by the state, provided that the owner is informed and compensated (Renner-Thomas 2010: 116). Yet, no compensation is necessary if the land has remained unoccupied for a period of at least twelve years. Renner-Thomas observes that 'a person who is unable to prove beneficial user of his land for the prescribed period may well find himself being expropriated without receiving any compensation' (ibid.: 117). Furthermore, the clear definition of 'land occupation' is problematic and left to the discretion of the state.

People in Sherbro localities often criticized the legal system as it was inherited from the Colony. They referred to the changes brought about by colonialism, which involved the concentration of power in the hands of colonial administrators. Land-grabbing by state officials was, in such a way, reinterpreted as a historical and political legacy of direct rule. Their attitude became linked to the appropriative nature of the colonial regime, as the following statement by a Sherbro elder in Kissi Town indicates: 'The whole Colony had been bought by the colonial masters. It was theirs. The government thinks it is its own personal land.' Direct rule is equated with the strong personalization of the modern state and the omnipotence of state officials in power. These discourses reformulated in contemporary terms the consequences of the bifurcated state that resulted in an advantage to the state and a disadvantage to the people.

Among these differences, the lack of power of village heads on the Peninsula compared to that of chiefs in the Provinces was a major subject of complaint. In the Provinces, the title to communal land is vested in the paramount chief and involves 'the right to control the disposition of land to strangers' (Renner-Thomas 2010: 162). Members of Sherbro landowning families contended that people in the Provinces did not need documents, as chiefs have the right to legitimate land-use rights. By contrast, their own village heads could not defend customary claims against private owners or abuses from state representatives. This discourse allowed them to criticize, in the Western Area, the absence of a legally empowered intermediary level between them and the state. Village heads, at the time of my research, were overloaded with demands from private people to acquire land on the Peninsula or to locate a parcel that their relatives had bought in the past. Some of the headmen expressed their discouragement that they could not protect any land for community development.

By contrast, groups of latecomers used the legal distinction between the Western Area and the Provinces to reaffirm the role of the state in granting land

ownership (see O'Kane and Ménard 2015). They grounded their claims in the historical specificities of the Western Area as a 'free land', a land of pioneers, where no specific ethnic group could claim autochthony and where the state gives equal rights and opportunities to all. This included, in their view, the ability to obtain land directly from the Ministry of Lands. The headman of PWD Compound, a newly politically independent settlement populated by latecomers (both fishermen and rural workers), explained:

> If you want to buy land here, only documentation works because there is only government-owned land here … As headmen, we are only here for a period of three years. In the Provinces, the paramount chief is the custodian of the land; he is there for life. There is nothing that goes on without the knowledge of the paramount chief. This is why land issues are not devolved to Local Councils. But here you will work directly with the Ministry of Lands when you want to buy land … Do you know why there are no paramount chiefs in the Western Area? The Creoles had a tradition different from the rest of the country. This is not a province. This is the Western Area urban and rural; the different tribes all meet here, but we still use their [the British] system … For instance, Kent: is it a local name? Waterloo, Hastings, Newton, York … These are not local names. These are foreign [British] names. In case of land disputes, it is the government that will put a notice that it is state land.

Like the headman of PWD Compound, many groups of latecomers stressed the role of the state in legitimating ownership in order to evade customary hierarchies that maintained them in a subordinate position with regard to land and political rights. They aimed at acquiring control over land without the mediation of Sherbro authorities and reinterpreted the Colony's legacy as a 'modern' citizenship characterized by a direct link between citizens and the state.

Sherbro firstcomers, by contrast, advocated for differentiated rights. They understood citizenship as primarily local and conferred by one's belonging to a Sherbro community. National citizenship, for Sherbros, appeared as the outcome of the equal recognition of autochthonous rights and local citizenships throughout the national territory, which involved, for them, the end of the legal 'exceptionalism' of the Western Area.

Political Schisms and Frontier Processes

Demographic changes, land pressure and the increase in land value have encouraged populations of latecomers – whether they arrived recently in the Western Area or not – to seek political independence from settlements to which they were territorially and politically attached. This move towards political emancipation

is also an attempt at securing land control. For instance, groups of latecomers often complained that landowning families build facilities only in their own areas, leaving later parts of the settlements 'undeveloped'. These groups could easily achieve political independence by asking the relevant central authorities to grant the right to elect one's village head, a decision based on population numbers.

Nevertheless, becoming a firstcomer is not a status granted by the state. It is achieved when settlements that provided land in the first place accept claims to political independence and land ownership as legitimate. Processes of legitimation in that case follow customary patterns pertaining to the host/stranger relationship. My argument follows Kopytoff's observation (1987) that the frontier process, through which groups create new polities, is characterized by cultural conservatism. Although latecomers may draw on state legitimacy to access political independence, local negotiations based on customary obligations between hosts and strangers are necessary to legitimate land ownership. Hosts like to remind strangers of their 'debt of gratitude' (Colson 1970: 41), while strangers can easily invoke the obligations of their hosts to grant political and land rights. When conflict arises, the territorial extension operated by hosts when granting land can easily turn into political scission.

Thus, land disputes (and scissions) between communities continued to be fought on customary grounds and we can advance two reasons for this. First, neither customary landowners nor claimants could engage in a costly process to acquire title deeds. Second, most settlements that demanded political independence also existed before the Civil War; their inhabitants had created relations of reciprocation and mutual obligations with the host community to which they were attached long before the passage of the new law. Due to these relations, processes of legitimation still followed customary practices.

I present here as an illustration the case of PWD Compound, a settlement populated by latecomers who claim political independence from the two adjacent communities of Mama Beach and Kissi Town. PWD Compound lies between these two towns. In the 1930s, it served as a temporary base for workers employed by the Public Works Department for the construction of the Peninsula Road. In the 1960s, seasonal fishermen, mostly from the Bullom shore, started to settle permanently in the area. The first boundaries of the settlement resulted from customary negotiations, as local authorities of Mama Beach and Kissi Town allocated land to latecomers. Elders of PWD Compound who migrated during the 1960s remember having given the *kola*, usually money, rice and rum, to landowning families.

The demographic setup of the area changed with recent migrations. As it has become a large town, PWD Compound recently claimed its political independence and voted for its own village head for the first time in 2013. In the process of demarcating their new polity, the inhabitants changed the name of their town to 'Brigitte Village' and erected signboards on both sides of the

settlement, thereby drawing new boundaries with Kissi Town and Mama Beach. As the frontier process shows, the naming of a new political entity constitutes a critical event in establishing rights as firstcomers (Murphy and Bledsoe 1987).

The preference of firstcomers is that latecomers should use customary arguments to establish land ownership. They recognize that long-term land occupation is a legitimate reason to access property under customary law (Dorjahn and Fyfe 1962: 392). The possibility for second- and third-generation latecomers to access both political and land rights can hardly be contested by host communities. As a Sherbro landowner in Mama Beach stated about PWD Compound:

> When [migrants] have stayed long in that place, they can claim that it belongs to them. They tell us that they are born here, that nobody should come control them anymore, that they are citizens here. We cannot deny that. Since they have stood up to gain their independence, we cannot do anything about that. But we don't like the way they did it. If they had begged us, we would have given land with all our heart. But they just took it without asking.

The decision to grant local citizenship rights, including land ownership, would not be denied to someone with long-term residence, so long as customary reciprocal obligations that uphold relations between landowners and land users were followed. As this fisherman reminded me, land users need to acknowledge the social and political primacy of landowners and their social debt towards them. That is why they should *beg* for land. *Begging* indicates a form of respect and humility that strangers and their descendants need to display towards original landowners. Once they fulfil their obligations, land ownership can be granted.

Yet, to call upon these mechanisms hides the fact that the value of land has increased considerably in recent years. Firstcomers are less inclined to grant ownership, as land has become the main economic asset in the region. For many, selling land has become the only option to secure other investments, like paying school fees, building a house or buying a car. Latecomers, for their part, know that they would have to pay a heavy financial compensation for the land that they occupy. The capitalist economy thus informs the nature of local negotiations, as should become clear in the case of PWD Compound.

Landowning families in Mama Beach and Kissi Town liked to tell of a shift in host/stranger relations dating back to the early 2000s. They stated that, in contrast to earlier migrations that brought fishermen from the Bullom coast, most Temne-speaking fishermen in Tombo were from the countryside and ignored everything about fishing when they arrived on the Peninsula. In reality, many of them still migrated from Bullom, and many seasonal fishermen came from the Sherbro coast. Nonetheless, Sherbros used this contrast to explain how the scale of migration and the influence of new migrants had changed the

attitude of latecomers in PWD Compound, who, they said, felt confident in asserting their rights.

Certainly, another difference was that earlier migrants were remembered as having received land and citizenship rights individually. With the election of a headman, inhabitants of PWD Compound had obtained leadership, but the question of political independence, at the local level, appeared to be a complex issue. The state legitimated the new headman, but inhabitants needed their status as landowners to be recognized by the other two communities.

The construction of communal facilities was the first step towards this goal. In the absence of 'community land' on the Peninsula, the securing of communal services has become the main customary symbol of a group's political sovereignty. A district councillor of the Western Area summed it up once for me: 'When a village has no land for development, people feel deprived because they have to rely on the facilities of their neighbours and they could be denied of that right at any time if the other village decides so.' Having no facilities in a settlement creates dependency. It feeds a feeling of social inferiority for inhabitants who have to use the infrastructures of another town and questions the rights of that group to access communal properties based on autochthony.

In PWD Compound, the development of facilities began before the election. The mosque, the church and the school were built during the last decade. The new name of the community, Brigitte Village, honoured the German woman who had founded the health centre. This name therefore had political

Figure 8.3. 'Brigitte Village' signboard at PWD Compound, 2012. © Anaïs Ménard

significance, as PWD Compound was the only place that had a health centre except for Tombo and Kent, and the name itself indicated that Mama Beach and Kissi Town might also come to depend on PWD Compound's infrastructure. Furthermore, by evoking direct connections to the Western world, the signboards situated PWD Compound within the networks of global patronage, which, in itself, substiantiated the inhabitants' claim in constituting a standalone community.

The new name has not gained either popular or official recognition. In the lists of the 2013 and 2017 village heads elections, the settlement is called PWD Compound. Inhabitants of Mama Beach and Kissi Town refused to use the name Brigitte Village because in their view, 'compound' indicates that the area remains a subpart of a wider settlement and not an independent community. To change the name from 'compound' to 'village' was understood as a clear provocation, which was criticized in these terms by Mr Nicol, the representative of the main landowning family of Kissi Town:

> Compound is not theirs, like Forest Compound, Tokeh Compound [the compound between Tokeh and Number Two River] – it belongs to another settlement. At least if they want to become independent, they should not have called it Brigitte. They should have taken the name of one of the stakeholders of the community, like Pa [name], and give it to the community. Then it would have looked good.

To Mr Nicol, if PWD Compound claimed independence, at least the new name should have reflected local history and showed respect towards families who had historically allocated land. The name he mentioned was one of the early migrants to PWD Compound, who was related to him and recognized his authority in land disputes.

Thus, customary readings of local practices provided the basis upon which relations between settlements unfolded. Local authorities of PWD Compound changed the name of the settlement, but also placed signboards to mark new boundaries with Kissi Town and Mama Beach. The signboards were uprooted, but were soon replaced. These new markers of ownership created land disputes on both sides. On the Mama Beach side, although the boundary was disputed, people tended to privilege customary markers of ownership, such as clearing and building, and accepted that inhabitants of PWD Compound had acquired land rights based on long-term occupation. On the Kissi Town side, the land dispute remained unresolved and the boundary contested, sparking episodes of violence between the two settlements.

The reason for the difference in boundary disputes on each side lies in the normative orders at play. In Mama Beach, the new community's claims were accepted, in part, because most of the landowning families in Mama Beach did

not have documents for their land. Therefore, disputes could be arbitrated only on the basis of customary markers. However, the boundary dispute between Kissi Town and PWD Compound was likely to last for some time because land ownership in Kissi Town could not be negotiated on the basis of customary tenure.

Already before the war, Mr Nicol had surveyed more than 100 acres that covered the whole territory of Kissi Town between Tombo and Mama Beach. His documents were difficult to challenge in court and inhabitants of PWD Compound legally owed rent to Mr Nicol. In order to access property, they would have needed to buy his land from him. Among families who had arrived in the 1960s, some had paid the difference in price and obtained title deeds. Yet, for others, the existence of Mr Nicol's documents blocked the renegotiation of customary land rights; the relations between landowners and strangers were fixed by statutory law and could only be reassessed through the purchase of land.

Thus blocked, inhabitants of PWD Compound modified their strategies to achieve ownership at the local level. They disregarded Mr Nicol's documents. Some purchased land directly from customary landowners; Mr Nicol insisted that because a land sale required a conveyance signed by him, these purchases were illegal. Yet, his claim of illegal land sales is telling, in that it shows that despite the primacy of statutory law, latecomers can still effectively obtain land ownership through occupation – even if indirectly. As in the example of Mile 13, title deeds are of no avail in large settlements, where people have built and lived for an extended period and thereby gained customary tenure. Taking action in the statutory legal system may not bring any change when large populations claim rights under customary tenure. Ultimately, land users may get their individual claims recognized by surveying their plot without buying it.

As a counterpoint to this argument about the centrality of customary practices, it is necessary to mention that groups of latecomers, more than access to property itself, aim at acquiring 'the right to allocate use rights' to other groups (Lentz 2006b: 54). They renegotiate the borders of their polities to position themselves as firstcomers and have the ultimate control over land allocation. In the context of the Peninsula characterized by land speculation, this corresponded to the right of selling land. Thus, becoming firstcomers was a way of appropriating a lucrative rent under statutory law. As village heads preside over private land sales, obtaining one's own village head is the guarantee that he or she will approve and facilitate land sales within the territory of the new community. Conversely, this explains why landowning families may resist the redefinition of political boundaries.

Symbolic resources are also important in claiming customary tenure. Having a separate cemetery is a critical step for a community that seeks to establish firstcomer rights, although it is not a legal obligation to obtain independence under state law. The 'frontier' process implies that a group of firstcomers concludes a special relationship with the spirits of the land. Political and ritual

authority are intertwined in a single founding moment. Establishing a cemetery is a pivotal event that symbolizes the birth of a new polity: it marks the sacrality of the land in which one settles and confers authority to the settlers. In practice, funerals are a sign of local belonging. They are performed where a person 'belongs'. A cemetery thus indicates that inhabitants believe that they reside in a land of their own – that they are 'at home'. And, as 'home' is also where a migrant should vote (Geschiere 2009: 55), the right to have a cemetery proves the right to have an independent leadership.

In 2012, residents in PWD Compound were still buried in either Kissi Town or Mama Beach depending on family connections, and others were sent back to be buried 'at home'. The absence of a cemetery marked the subordinate position of inhabitants of PWD Compound, who depended on customary links with families of firstcomers to bury their dead. Local authorities of PWD Compound had negotiated for land for a cemetery with the local authorities of Mama Beach, but it was not yet opened. In 2018, the new cemetery was in use.

The need to establish a separate cemetery in PWD Compound became critical in 2012, as the village head of Kissi Town decided to block access by neighbours to the Kissi Town cemetery, due to episodes of violence between the settlements that had been sparked by disputes over land rights. The headman of Kissi Town was not a 'son of the soil'. However, his relations with landowning families of Kissi Town were good. He explained that his decision to forbid access to the Kissi Town cemetery was due to the decision by PWD Compound to become independent: 'These people say that they stand by themselves now, so they should get a pot, they should get a pan.' In his view, if residents wanted their political independence, they needed to obtain the necessary elements to establish their community. Moreover, he said that the Kissi Town cemetery was too small for the populations of both settlements, both of which had increased in recent years. He was in favour of granting full political independence to PWD Compound as soon as possible in order to prevent further conflict.

Among members of landowning families, however, contradictory feelings coexisted. They admitted that if people in PWD compound wanted their independence, they had to establish their own cemetery to support their claim. Nevertheless, it would mean that customary relations between families of landowners and families of latecomers would end. Landowning families of Kissi Town and early groups of latecomers bridged the two settlements by way of family relations. Sharing a single cemetery materialized such relations, involving both the social and spiritual ascendancy of people 'born of the soil' and the sharing of a common ancestral ground with families of latecomers. Mr Nicol was in favour of allowing access to the cemetery because there were people in PWD Compound to whom families in Kissi Town were related, and who would probably like to be buried in the same place as their kin. At the same time, he protected his right to claim PWD Compound as his. By contrast, the headman

of Kissi Town, who did not have customary relations with PWD Compound inhabitants, was in favour of severing the remaining links with them.

In the end, local authorities of PWD Compound secured land for a cemetery from a landowning family in Mama Beach. Land rights were transferred after customary negotiations that involved the representatives of the landowning family and the local authorities of both settlements. The new cemetery confirmed the customary process of boundary making – a process that proved impossible on the Kissi Town side due to the existence of documents.

However, local authorities of Mama Beach had to deal with another cemetery issue. The boundaries of the settlement were contested on the other side by Bonga Wharf, a village that had recently gained official political recognition. The two settlements disputed ownership of land situated at their boundary, where a luxurious hotel had been built that had brought about substantial economic benefits. As in many other cases, the process of obtaining political independence was related to the appropriation of economic rents. People in Bonga Wharf claimed this land as part of their own territory. In Mama Beach, local authorities refused to acknowledge political boundaries with Bonga Wharf. For the headman, inhabitants of Bonga Wharf, despite the fact that they had elected their own village head, were under his authority.

In 2012, inhabitants of Bonga Wharf were using the Muslim cemetery of Mama Beach. Mama Beach originally separated the cemetery for local populations, who were mainly Christian, from the Muslim cemetery for strangers. As a result of the boundary dispute, the headman of Mama Beach decided to join the two cemeteries, 'for people of Bonga Wharf not to believe that they were independent'. He said that he did not want Bonga Wharf to claim the cemetery reserved for Muslims as its own. When I raised the concern that Bonga Wharf had an independent village head, he responded:

> They don't have a permanent cemetery because people bury [their dead] wherever they want now. If they want to be independent, they should have their own cemetery. The one they used previously, they can no longer access it freely since it has somewhat joined with the other one and belongs to Mama Beach … It all depends on what they mean by independence. If an entity wants to be independent, then they should have all that they are supposed to have before starting to think about it. But the land they want to use belongs to Mama Beach community, and we are not ready to cede it. Even the place they live in is not theirs. It was a land entrusted to them by Mama Beach community, and part of it is part of the forest that is owned by the government.

The headman stressed that the decision to join the two cemeteries was a local decision and yet it was a sign that undermined the political legitimacy granted

by the state to inhabitants of Bonga Wharf. It indicated that local authorities in Mama Beach were not ready to accept the separation of Bonga Wharf and Mama Beach as two differentiated political entities.

Cemetery issues illustrate strikingly customary processes of recognition. Despite a legal environment shaped by state law, there is an interest for both latecomers and local groups to maintain the permanent (re)negotiability of land ownership based on customary symbols and social relations. Latecomers had the support of the state, and new settlements had their own village heads, but they were aware that they needed to gain legitimacy at the local level through customary negotiations. The 'inconclusiveness' of negotiation (Berry 2002: 654) opposed the conclusiveness of documents. At the same time, documents also proved to be inconclusive, as they did not solve the problem of land occupation. In the long term, occupation, combined with a 'new' customary marker – that is, securing state land to build communal facilities – remained the surest way to assert collective rights over land.

Securing Patrons and State Sponsorship

'There is no community land in the Western Area' is the official line of the Sierra Leonean government. Local authorities need to apply to the Ministry of Lands, Country Planning and the Environment to obtain state land for communal purposes – community centres, schools, cemeteries, garbage dump sites, etc. This is the case even though at the local level, some land has always been considered 'community land'.

The gap between the national government's assertion that communities in the Western Area have no community land and local practices of demarcating land as such is a new site for conflict. The successive postwar governments have aimed to encourage further land privatization in the Western Area. They have also aimed to circumvent local attempts to declaring as 'community land' parcels that might be of interest to potential investors from whom the state would profit by selling the land directly (state representatives themselves often take a personal interest in acquiring certain parcels). In a context of land-grabbing, with numerous cases of falsified deeds, double or triple sales, and an incredible rise in land disputes, the Ministry of Lands in 2008 also placed a ban on the sale of state land – i.e. all land not formally deeded to individual owners. The ban was still in place in 2018.

Sherbro local authorities reacted strongly against the government's position. Village heads, for instance, argued that within settlements, every family who had land could allocate a parcel to the community. Residents considered communal facilities, such as schools or sacred groves, as 'community land'. At the local level, 'community land' represented the sum of the efforts of families to promote the social and economic development of a territory held in common.

By contrast, land speculation was perceived as a fundamentally antisocial behaviour that impaired development, despite the fact that everyone engaged in it.

People in local communities resented the speculative attitude of state representatives and used customary arguments to position the state as a 'stranger', who merely *borrowed* what belonged to the community. As such, the state appeared as 'one actor among many others in society' (Juul and Lund 2002: 3). Residents reversed the rule of statutory law according to which unoccupied and nondocumented land belongs to the state: they considered that the landowner *by default* was the community, and that the state and its representatives had customary obligations towards them. People openly disapproved of cases in which a 'state land' signboard appeared on a land that was ultimately left undeveloped:

> [Government representatives] come and just put a signboard 'state property' without asking if it belongs to somebody. People get really annoyed, they root out signboards. If it is state property, then they should put a state building, develop the land. But they don't do that.

Land seized by government officials or sold to foreigners often resulted either in an absence of major community improvement or in projects unsuitable or unprofitable for local inhabitants. These plots were rarely considered 'community land'.

Local authorities in each settlement used multiple strategies to secure state land for community purposes. Engaging with the state became necessary to ensure this right. Protecting community land from land-grabbing rested on the political ability of village heads to connect to the centre of power and to position themselves and their community as 'clients' to the state and its representatives. This strategy included finding high-ranked politicians or foreign investors ready to support a specific project, such as a school, a water-well or a garbage area. As I could observe, village heads had to be very mobile and regularly visit ministries, decentralized institutions and other centres of power both to negotiate the 'customary rights' of their communities and to connect with potential private investors. As transportation to Freetown remained long and difficult, many headmen bought cars, and transport became a symbol of their political competence (O'Kane and Ménard 2015).

One example may shed light on the way in which people could negotiate customary rights with decentralized institutions. In 2012, the headman of Bureh Town sold undocumented land that was considered 'community land' under customary tenure. A group of forty residents took the matter collectively to the Western Area Rural District Council and the Chief Administrator invited them to discuss the case. Mr Small, the previous headman who had ruled for more than a decade, spoke on behalf of the group. He raised arguments that were related not only to land, but also to leadership. He explained that the new

headman was disrespectful of the elders and did not know how to maintain social peace. He said that the headman had sold the land without consulting the Committee of Elders. His management was opaque and residents did not know any details regarding the sale. When the Chief Administrator responded, he reasserted the duties of village heads, who should 'help the council to maintain the peace in the village and help the council to get resources from developments'. He dwelled on the fact that the headman was a 'small boy' who did not know how to take up his responsibilities, and that he should listen to elder people, who had more experience than him.

The Chief Administrator did not offer a solution to secure the return of the land. Cancelling a sale was not within his power. However, his position showed that the concept of 'community land' could be accepted and negotiated at an institutional level. He accepted Mr Small's claim as legitimate and scolded the headman (who briefly appeared during the meeting) in front of the group. The Ministry of Lands, he told me after the meeting, was the 'custodian of state land' and government representatives were concerned with anything that was being done with state land. Moreover, he argued that the District Council encouraged local development on state land. He stressed the responsibilities of the headmen who, according to state law, had to cooperate with the District Council to survey, register or lease land,[6] thereby introducing aspects of 'customary' negotiation into a strict legal framework.

The status of 'state land' also helped local authorities to protect land reserved for community purposes from private sales and encroachments. In Tokeh, the headman used the status of 'state land' to contest private claims over an area with high touristic potential. Beach areas in particular attract private investors, hotels, and business enterprises such as fisheries. Their financial offers and promises of economic profit are appealing to local communities. In 2010, the government declared Tokeh a major tourism area and invited foreign companies to invest in the Peninsula. During the same period, an international promoter leased land on Tokeh beach in order to build a luxury hotel. By 2018, its construction had been achieved.

Before the lease was agreed by the headman of Tokeh, the land had been contested over a long period. A well-known Freetown lawyer had claimed the property since 1977. At that time, the community had disputed the legitimacy of his documents, which, according to the headman, had not been signed by the rightful local authorities of Tokeh. In 2006, the lawyer returned to claim the land a second time. The headman contested his claim and drove away the land surveyors. The case ended up in court. In 2007, the man tried again to have the land surveyed, this time surreptitiously, but the headman was alerted and took the surveyors to the police. The headman won the case in court, but the dispute continued until the international company came on to the scene in 2009–10. The headman concluded:

> If we had not allowed the government to intervene in that dispute, we
> would not have been able to fight that man. But because we said that it
> was government property, nobody could claim it anymore. It does not
> matter that Tokeh had it [that it was community land]. We gave it to
> the government so that the government could protect us. Now, we will
> get benefits from it. [That man] had that land for long, since 1977, and
> he did not do anything with it. If he had developed it, if he had given
> people work … like [the company], who hired 75 per cent of the work-
> ers [at the building site] from the community … They take some social
> responsibility, they build a secondary school, then they will build the
> dam, and they will also build the community centre.

The lease had permitted inhabitants to negotiate the construction of communal
facilities with the foreign company. In 2018, the company had achieved the
construction of a secondary school. As the headman mentioned above, such
developments would not have been possible if the area had been privatized.
Precisely because the land had not been developed previously, he had been able
to justify its status as 'state land' and dismiss private claims.

In this conflict, the clause of the Unoccupied Lands Ordinance of 1911,
according to which land that has been unoccupied for twelve years can be de-
clared 'state land', worked in favour of the village head. Also included in state
land are 'shores, beaches, lagoons, creeks, rivers, estuaries and other places and
waters whatsoever belonging to, acquired by, or which may be lawfully disposed
of by or on behalf of the Crown'.[7] Local people knew of this law and commonly
mentioned that any land within 150 feet of the high-water level belonged to the
state. They relied on this argument to contest private claims related to the beach.

The state acted in this case as a patron: by agreeing to hand over the land to
the state, the community of Tokeh put itself in a position of a client seeking the
protection of the state. Nevertheless, for Tokeh inhabitants, the lease indicated
that the land had been considered community land – understood as 'for the de-
velopment of the community' – at the state level, although officially it is a lease
contracted between an international company and the state.

The promotion of tourism had another consequence: the prospect of reset-
tling part of Tokeh up the Peninsula Road. The town had become too populated
and lacked basic facilities. The government's impulse to transform Tokeh into
a tourism centre was the major driving force behind the project of relocation,
but it provided the headman with an opportunity to promise newcomers land
and thereby to consolidate his voting base. The lease to the foreign company
accelerated the process of securing land up the Peninsula Road. The Ministry of
Lands surveyed 300 acres and issued a master plan. In 2018, residents of Tokeh,
including the headman himself, had started to build on the new land and they
expected the Ministry to issue deeds for each family. The headman considered

this land to 'belong to Tokeh community', whereas, in fact, it was state land that would be turned into private plots.

In this case too, the strategy pursued by the headman showed a constant interplay between the statuses of state land and community land. Once leased by the state to a foreign investor, inhabitants of Tokeh took the lease to indicate that the state recognized the land as community land. They pushed for the company to provide community facilities as part of the bargain – presumably with a state agent standing by the headman in his negotiations. Furthermore, the project, and future tourism prospects, enabled the headman to request land from the Ministry for the relocation of the community. At the local level, the building of new facilities on the land showed its progressive transformation from state to community land.

Regarding the government's position on community land, the headman stated:

> Well, actually it is not correct. But if the government does not do it this way, there will not be any land for community development anymore … Now, people in Sierra Leone believe they can just take and sell everything. I support the government in its decision to regulate that. Otherwise, everybody will take what he wants. Now, the government has said that Tokeh is a touristic area. Development has come. We will not build near the sea now and if the government had not protected the land, we would not have been able to get that land [up the Peninsula Road]. They gave us 300 acres where to relocate the village. The government spread the message that communities have no land because people want to misuse the land. If people misuse the land, future generations will suffer. They have to control us. [The company] has given me money to build the school. Where shall I build the school if there is no land?

Furthermore, this statement shows that the headman was aware of his capacity to negotiate the concepts of community and state land at various levels. He used the government's statement about community land as a political strategy to avoid land-grabbing in the face of accelerating land scarcity. In other words, he presented 'state land' as a necessary official legal status that protected community land from private claims. This headman was very successful: in recent years, he had secured many infrastructures – a police station, a health centre and schools – that had transformed Tokeh into an attractive economic centre. It proved his skills in connecting his community to wider political networks and positioning it as a 'client' to the state.

Most headmen pursued a similar strategy and regarded the central government as the only institution that could protect 'community land' against

private owners and encroachers. Clearly, securing community land depended on the ability of local authorities to negotiate directly with the state. Community land existed, but securing it required a nuanced approach to negotiation. In a situation of land pressure and expanding communities, other headmen had successfully secured parcels up the Peninsula Road to relocate part of their communities. In 2018, it appeared more clearly that village heads had to act very fast to secure state land, as private sales had accelerated at an incredible speed.

Environmental Protection and Its Shortcomings

Participation in the forest protection programme also allowed Sherbros to claim beach areas as communal land by developing community-based ecotourism (ecolodges, ecotours, etc.) and promoting their local knowledge of the environment. The beach had become the symbol of locally driven development and communal ownership, not only because its control secures future economic prospects, but also because the privatization of beach areas restricted fishermen's access to the seashore and threatened their livelihood. Moreover, as the NGO in charge, Welt Hunger Hilfe (WHH) had a close relationship with the government. People interpreted its position as the state's recognition of Sherbro autochthony.

In 2008, the programme for the protection of the Western Area Peninsula Forest Reserve (WAPFoR) was launched through the financial and executive assistance of WHH. The forest protection programme aimed at redrawing the boundaries of the WAPFoR first demarcated in 1916 and mitigating the causes of recent deforestation. The new delimitation included a 150-metre 'buffer zone' that was initially thought of as an area where inhabitants could implement communal projects such as tree planting and beekeeping.

Since the end of the Civil War, deforestation has been fuelled primarily by land acquisition and unregulated building. The construction boom is visible through the intensification of new activities, such as stone-breaking at large quarries and sand mining on certain beaches, such as Hamilton and John Obey. Successive postwar governments have denounced the erection of 'illegal' structures (those without legal documents of ownership), while keeping silent about the impacts of the legal permits allocated by the Ministry of Lands. 'Blaming the poor' for environmental degradation has become a strategy by which central authorities can turn a blind eye on the disruptive entry of speculative capital in the region (Munro 2009). Due to the reliance on fuel wood for smoking fish, the fishing industry is regularly blamed for the decline of forest and mangrove covers. However, the impact of charcoal-burning and wood-cutting on the forest cover has been incidental compared to the clearance of land for sale.[8] Across the entire Peninsula, the allocation of private plots (with signs of ownership, such as pillars and fences) threatens both the buffer zone and the forest.

The forest protection programme led by WHH left aside the sensitive issue of land speculation and emphasized the role of the fishing economy in endangering the forest. The project started with the idea of providing either alternative types of livelihood for people living from forest activity, or ecofriendly livelihood tools, such as solar-powered ovens for smoking fish. Thus, the fight for forest protection implicitly embraced the discourse that presented the rural poor as 'ignorant degraders, in need of sensitization and enlightenment from elite officials in Freetown' (Munro 2009: 114). Locally, Sherbro participants to the project shifted this argument about the poor to one about migrants, who exploit forest resources for their livelihoods and have to be 'sensitized' about forest protection. Environmental protection was also associated with the promotion of community-based tourism, which was presented as a decent alternative livelihood to forest activities. Before the Ebola crisis hit the country in 2014, tourism was developing at a fast pace: expatriates were visiting the beach on weekends, communities were building beach huts and hotel investors were acquiring land. However, the ecotourism line of the WHH project mainly favoured local economic actors, often Sherbro autochthones, with control over the beach.

The project for forest protection rested on the converging interests of the actors at play, namely the state (who commissioned WHH to implement the programme) and local populations, who saw a benefit both in blaming migrants for environmental degradation and in taking an opportunity for developing local tourism. Sherbro communities were the first ones to be included in the project. Local staff and volunteers appropriated the discourse of forest protection as an emblem for identity claims. The beach area was presented as a communal space uniting Sherbros against private interests – namely, investors who wanted to privatize portions of the beach[9] – and newcomers, whose economic activities were denounced as having a negative impact on the ecosystem of the Peninsula. Volunteers often used the Sherbro word for unity/togetherness (*lomthibul*) as a way of displaying a common identity in the face of current migration. Participation in the programme also allowed them to renegotiate the autochthonous status of Sherbro communities with the state. Through the appropriation of the forest protection discourse, they declared the beach as a place to be controlled by firstcomers and to be used for the benefit of local communities. From this perspective, it is not surprising that the leading figures of the programme on the ground were coming from Number Two River, as it is the only settlement where the management of the entire beach is held by a communal association.

The discourse on tourism has become an important argument for Sherbros to claim their status as firstcomers: it relates to a prewar period, as some Sherbro people have participated in the development of tourism in the 1980s. Tourism calls upon a common past and a discourse of nostalgia about the 'golden age' of the mid-1980s, when the country was famous for its beaches and luxury hotels. The period is commonly referred as 'the Africana days', taken from the name of

the hotel based in Tokeh, which attracted an exclusive clientele and employed many people. Tourism stands in for the lost glory of the area as well as its future economic perspectives. It relates to peaceful times. In 2012, the gradual return of foreigners was viewed positively, as a tangible sign that the war had truly ended and that the country was becoming attractive again. In 2018, local communities considered tourism as a good strategy to rebuild a positive image of the country abroad, which had been severely undermined by the Ebola crisis.

Based on past tourism ventures on the Peninsula, local inhabitants in Sherbro communities liked to stress their business abilities and their knowledge of how to deal with tourists. They claimed to know what food tourists liked, how they liked to be treated and what excursions they enjoyed. Some people who had worked in tourism told me, for instance, that they had developed tourism at a time when local people had only limited contact with foreigners. Such discourses refashioned in a contemporary way the historical claim of coastal populations having been the first Africans in contact with Europeans in the precolonial days. They re-enacted hierarchies between 'civilized' populations of the coast and populations of the interior, while reaffirming the indigenous status of Sherbros in the region. Community-based tourism played the authenticity card by promoting indigenous 'traditions' to present to tourists, such as artisanal fishing or cultural performances (see Chapter 7).

The involvement of Sherbro populations in the project was based on a paradox from the outset, since most Sherbros are small-scale fishermen whose activities do not particularly affect the forest. In settlements where people lived at least partly on forest activities, residents could hardly see the benefits of the project, as someone from Mile 13 complained to me: '[Sherbros] do not invite us for meetings. But it is not Sherbros who are spoiling the forest.' Project volunteers from various settlements soon organized in an informal network and met every week on a different beach. This Sherbro-dominated social circle allowed volunteers to complain openly about the detrimental impact of migrants' activities on the Peninsula ecosystem. The rhetoric of forest protection, backed up by NGO and state authority, suddenly gave official legitimacy to these complaints. As more settlements became involved in the project, non-Sherbros were included in the discussion. People from John Obey and Tombo, for instance, were invited to discuss their own community projects in relation to environment protection. Yet, during weekly meetings, talks centred on how these members could convince their own community to stop illegal activities such as sand mining (in John Obey in particular), which in the long run might destroy the entire beach area.

Meetings generally started with a carefully crafted development discourse articulated by the local staff, stressing the benefits to be gained from alternative sources of income and livelihoods in order to preserve nature. It was usually suggested that 'Sherbros do not exploit the forest but have always been

on the seaside', and thereby asserted three things: the autochthonous status of Sherbros compared to those exploiting the forest; the firstcomers' right to land, which was sometimes explicitly mentioned; and the legitimacy of autochthonous populations in controlling economic and touristic activities on the Peninsula. Such discourses accentuated simplistic dichotomies of host/stranger, modern/backward, and civilized/primitive. The image of 'the bush' emphasized these oppositions – 'Lɛ wi kɔmɔt na bush' (Let's come out of the bush) served as a slogan for meetings and public awareness events. While conveying a message against forest exploitation, the term 'bush' played on representations of backwardness and primitiveness, thereby presenting migrants as populations to 'educate' and 'sensitize' about forest protection. In contrast, Sherbros presented themselves as having a specialized knowledge of forestry in relation to the coastal ecosystem. In their discourses, the bush turned into an object of autochthonous knowledge that valorized Sherbro 'tradition'.

The ecotourism initiative granted legitimacy to Sherbro autochthonous claims, through a process of negotiation with different levels of authority. From local perspectives, WHH was usually associated with the government, which supported the perception that 'the beach' was now being recognized at the state level as community property. Nevertheless, at volunteers' meetings, the project was often talked about in terms of national development:

Figure 8.4. 'Sensitization day' ('Water and forest are life, don't destroy them'), 2011. © Anaïs Ménard

> Government declared the Peninsula as a tourism area. Tourism is able to develop a country fast; we can remember the Africana days. The country was strong. The revenues from tourism spread over all regions. We do not want to sit down and just complain about the government. We want to develop our area so that everyone will say 'We are citizens, we are Sierra Leoneans'.

This statement crossed ethnic lines, calling for national cohesion and hailing back to the 'old days' of tourism in the Western Area, which it claimed benefited the country as a whole. It expressed the need to rebuild a positive national image based on tourism activities, involving not only local populations but other Sierra Leoneans as well.[10]

Weekly meetings conveyed a strong belief that tourism on the Peninsula could help rebuild a positive international image of the country, which would also attract investors. National symbols were reinterpreted along those lines. The green, white and blue flag was often said to be representative of the landscape of the Western Area with its forest, pristine beaches and sea (in reality, green stands for agriculture and natural resources, white for justice and blue for the Freetown harbour). Discourses about tourism were also framed within a unifying vocabulary, expressing the ambiguous position of local populations, who wished their autochthonous status to be recognized while looking for ways by which the region could develop economically. In 2018, people were conscious of the terrible publicity Sierra Leone suffered in the international media, from the Civil War to the more recent Ebola outbreak. People often said that the country had 'nothing to sell' to the outside world except for its exceptional beaches. The Peninsula was considered a decisive asset that would help re-establish a positive image of the country and a sense of national pride.

Although the WHH-led programme was short-lived, local fishermen had started to formulate their own projects regarding tourism. In 2018, domestic and international tourism was on the rise. Two beaches, Bureh Town and Number Two River, were drawing enormous crowds of urbanites for beach 'outings' on weekends. In both communities, the interest for fishing had declined sharply. In Number Two River, the chairman of the beach bought fresh seafood for touristic supply in other communities. Other beaches, such as Sussex, Baw-Baw or Tokeh, instead relied on individual businesses and had their own smaller customer base.

However, the existence of competing economic strategies in the Peninsula area both threatened tourism and undermined any attempt at tackling environmental issues. In 2018, the acceleration of ecological changes in the area was obvious: the depletion of fish stocks, the rise of the sea level (mainly due to sand mining) and coastal erosion, deforestation up hills and in the mangroves, the smog coming from Freetown, etc. Sand mining was seriously endangering

beaches like Bureh Town. It was occurring at its border with the community of John Obey, with trucks loading sand continuously. John Obey's beach had become unsuitable for tourism and the investors who had built touristic infrastructure had left. The same men who had been involved in the WWH-led project had alerted the central authorities and had spoken on national television to expose the problem of sand mining. This action failed to produce results; certainly, there was no policy implemented to provide alternative livelihoods for miners. Presumably, the financial dividends that local authorities and decentralized institutions derived from this activity outweighed any ecological concerns.

To the south of the Peninsula, the recent implantation of Asian fish processing factories and the construction of the Lumley-Tokeh Road were expected to boost the fishing sector. As one of the ex-WHH volunteers told me, efforts to unlock the beach side's economic potential were condemned by the lack of a collective project for the region: 'We want to do tourism … but Tombo and Goderich, they have made their beaches for fishing, Hamilton and John Obey, they have made their beach for sand mining.' As each local community decided which economic activity it would push forward, small-scale environment-friendly projects were bound to remain limited to the same tourism-oriented communities and were under threat of larger economic projects in fishing.[11]

In 2018, WHH had put its activities on hold on the Peninsula, but local volunteers had re-activated their networks to participate in a smaller project funded by the United Nations Development Programme aimed at mitigating climate change and the pollution of coastal areas. This project constituted a new economic rent to tap, yet participants were less enthusiastic than before about their possibilities for leverage. Many expressed feelings of powerlessness. After having denounced the development of forest activities, they faced the limit of their strategy and realized that they could not include many partners in the discussion. The strategy towards an 'autochthonization' of the environmental question could not be sustained, as other actors had also seized opportunities to promote their own vision of economic development.

Conclusion

Autochthony is a multilayered discourse that appears to be the product of colonial state formation as well as recent political, economic and institutional processes. Sherbros refer to the legal heritage of the divide between Colony and Protectorate to denounce the nonrecognition of their customary rights in the Western Area. Autochthony becomes articulated with a claim to indigeneity – the right to be recognized as a 'native' group. In these discourses, the state appears as an ambivalent force, both dangerous and necessary, as it has become the patron to which local communities have to turn in order to validate their customary claims. The state is equated with the forces of urbanization,

modernization and the entry of local populations into an unregulated capitalistic world, in which economic inequalities have sharpened and survival increasingly depends on one's connections.

Land matters are only one symptom of a suffering national economy. As Jonathan told me once, 'the country has no job, nothing to do, but people have land', emphasizing the quick financial reward of land sales. Land on the Peninsula has become the rent that one needs to capture in order to feel secure, and this has required both individual and collective strategies.

Nevertheless, the social arrangement between landowners and strangers remains highly relevant in land matters. Land speculation, combined with demographic changes, has led to a 'densification' of the frontier process (Chauveau, Jacob and Le Meur 2004: 5) by which communities redefine their relationships. Land disputes continue to be arbitrated on the basis of customary practices that pertain to the rights and duties of firstcomers and latecomers. Failures to meet one's obligations – strangers should 'beg' for land and hosts should allocate them ownership after some time – lead to confrontations. These frontier processes are embedded in state logics, but operate at the margins of the state, in an unregulated environment that forces actors to find new solutions to the lack of available land and economic precarity. These changes transform the scale and the timeframe of customary arrangements by intensifying and accelerating them. In this process, ethnic identities assume a less flexible form and become more tightly aligned with social identities as firstcomer or latecomer.

In this accelerating context, tourism may appear as 'the new frontier' by which people can look forward to creating a new space for reaffirming identity and developing the local economy. For Sherbros, it implies the framing of indigeneity within the global, perhaps more neutral, vocabulary of tourism. Yet, the entry of capital has a deregulating effect that leads to fierce competition for control over resources and land, as the increasing privatization of the beach areas shows. One of the newly elected village heads liked to repeat that the Peninsula is 'the most lucrative constituency' in Sierra Leone. While it would have been complicated to assess the reality of this statement, I could not help wondering for whom and for how long.

Notes

1. See e.g. Bøås and Dunn 2013; Chauveau 2000; Lentz 2013; Socpa 2006.
2. Provinces Land Act, Cap. 122, quoted by Renner-Thomas (2010: 8).
3. For instance, some people remembered voting by standing in a queue for their candidate in the 1970s, which would be the equivalent of a show of hands.
4. These figures mean that between the two elections, twenty-five villages applied to the Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development for political recognition and obtained it. This is a stark illustration of the extent to which the Local Government Act of

2004 allowed new and older communities to gain political independence in the postwar context.

5. The other two contestants were not born in Number Two River, but both could claim community belonging on their mother's side and Poro membership (see Chapter 7).

6. This refers to Statutory Instrument No. 16 of 2005 (see Renner-Thomas 2010: 10).

7. Crown Land Ordinance No. 19 of 1969, cited by Asiama (2006: 226). This legislation is still valid and has passed to the Sierra Leonean state.

8. In 2012, most of the firewood supply in Goderich was harvested in the province as a by-product of the farming cycle (Munro and van der Horst 2012: 71−72). Around Tombo, fish sellers mostly use mangrove wood for smoking, which comes by boat from Port Lokko and Bonthe District (Greg van der Horst, personal communication). Similarly, whereas charcoal has become the main household fuel, the Freetown and Peninsula markets are largely supplied by upcountry producers (ibid.: 83).

9. It is interesting to note that Tokeh did not take part in the programme, because this discourse did not fit the economic and land strategy of privatization led by local authorities.

10. As I could experience both in Sierra Leone and among people of the diaspora in Europe, rehabilitating 'Mama Salone' abroad is a matter of national pride. People would often say 'I would like to say that I am proud to be a Sierra Leonean', implying that it is difficult to express such pride in the face of popular images of Sierra Leone on the international scene – civil war, blood diamonds and Ebola. The wish to defend national colours is intertwined with the ambition to craft an alternative discourse to narratives of conflict, poverty and failure.

11. In 2021, the Sierra Leonean government concluded with a state-owned Chinese company the sale of 252 acres of land at Black Johnson, a small and secluded village of the Peninsula, for the construction of an industrial fishing harbour. The decision-making process that informed the choice of Black Johnson for this project remained opaque and state authorities ignored the necessity for an official environmental and social impact assessment. In May 2021, local landowners, including owners of small-scale ecotourism facilities, wrote an open letter to the President to alert on the ecological disaster that this project would cause (destruction of the wetland and rainforest ecosystems, loss of species, pollution …) and on its human consequences, as people will lose their land and livelihood. Conservationists groups also raised the alarm about the environmental risk, as Black Johnson is situated on Whale Bay, a critical ecological spot that hosts endangered species. The construction will also likely affect tourism development in nearby locations. The controversy and lack of public dialogue around this project demonstrated the state's perception of 'development' as a one-sided enterprise based on megaprojects, with no consideration for the multiplicity of voices and needs on the ground. In this context, local owners emphasized the state's practices of intimidation and coercion. The lack of consideration for the ecological risk further illustrated the short-sightedness of state authorities regarding the need for a comprehensive and concerted public policy of economic development on the Peninsula.

Conclusion

In the preceding chapters, I have explored the ways in which relations of reciprocity between ethnic groups have, over time, led to the construction of Sherbro identity as a hybrid one – one that has integrated the sociocultural attributes of other ethnic identities into its own definition. Sherbro identity may coincide with other identities (Mende, Temne and, more strikingly, Krio), but Sherbro is not a 'creole' identity in any of the usual understandings of the term. Sherbro identity remains distinct, even when it is expressed through the attributes of other identities. Being Sherbro contains the inherent possibility of appearing as an ethnic 'other' (while remaining proudly Sherbro and disclosing it when necessary).

The hybridity of Sherbro identity is visible through processes by which individuals transcend cultural and ethnic boundaries in the course of social interaction. It also refers to a process by which Sherbros (as individuals and as a group) reproduce a pivotal social position in discourse and practice. Commenting on Bhabha's and Bakhtin's works, Papastergiadis (2000: 194) observes that what is at stake in semiotic approaches to hybridity is the way that 'performances and texts … hold difference together' or join 'separateness and unity in a single semantic field'. Performances of Sherbro identity productively deploy 'differential identities' (Bhabha 1994: 219), thereby continuously redrawing socioethnic boundaries, opening up spaces for the negotiation of difference and producing continuities.

For better analytical clarity, we can say that the hybridity of Sherbro ethnic identity is expressed in two patterns: ethnic transformation, which allows for the frequent and easy crossing of ethnic boundaries; and the integration of a Krio component – that is, the experience of Sherbro identity as both Krio and *kɔntri* (indigenous). This position allows Sherbros (as individuals or as a group) to either emphasize cross-ethnic ties and identifications or, on the contrary, produce

boundaries and establish hierarchical relations with other groups. Sherbro identity is not experienced as 'mixed', but as both intrinsically pure (indigenous/autochthonous) and heterogeneous.

Importantly, the hybridity of Sherbro identity is performed, both individually and collectively, in ways that continuously naturalize 'ethnic' identities and relations. Village origin stories *appear* to be only a form of oral history that traces encounters between distinct ethnic groups. Closer analysis shows how these narratives construct 'purity' out of more mixed historical circumstances. Nevertheless, Krios, Sherbros and others agree about *how* these stories ought to be enacted in the present – there are also recognized rules to establish lines between singular socioethnic identities. So too, practices like marriage, child-fostering, initiation and other community rituals are pursued (and performed) by individuals because they are agreed upon across ethnic lines as appropriate ways to express 'pure' ethnic identities, interethnic relations and also hybridity.

In contrast to these contours of Sherbro identity, many aspects of social, political and legal practice in Sierra Leone continue to refer to identities that were crafted as pure and bounded categories in the colonial system. The delineations of local ethnic groups on the Peninsula and their relations prior to British colonial rule cannot be reconstructed with certainty. British records become more detailed as non-indigenous African groups, mostly freed slaves, were settled on the coast. From that point on, groups became known from the colonizer's perspective through the opposition between 'urban' non-natives (inhabitants of the Colony) and custom-based natives. Colonial knowledge and its techniques (like the census) distilled the image of local peoples into recognizable ethnic groups, plus a mixed population of settlers and their descendants.

Hybridity, of course, played at the margins of the colonial state. Even as some identities were purified, new plural identities were produced. Taken together, hybridity worked in contradictory ways: it subverted the colonial gaze, but also reaffirmed the role of colonial categories in granting specific privileges (Bhabha 1994). In colonial Sierra Leone, the non-native (and later Krio) category gained social value. Sherbro hybridity on the Peninsula was built on the encoding of these power relations. The hybridity of Sherbro identity illustrates the impact of colonial language and the value hierarchies of the colonial imagination on processes of identity making and on social relations. These hierarchies and power relations continue to be re-activated in the contemporary social context in the form of identity performances.

Social Structures in the Making of Sherbro Identity

Ethnic identity is a social construction, and it is linked to social structures and relations. Reciprocity is a regime of value that frames the many social interactions that make identity perceptible. Specifically, the social experience of

reciprocity (in the context of power relations between groups) is key in explaining the emergence of hybridity. The present sociocultural contours of Sherbro identity, as well as its boundaries (towards more or less flexibility), are linked to a social arrangement based on reciprocity between hosts (or firstcomers) and groups of strangers (or latecomers). Across Africa, similar relations between hosts and strangers unfold around matrimonial alliances, ritual processes and land allocation. This type of social arrangement establishes social (and often ethnic) boundaries between groups, while making crossovers and cultural integration possible. In other words, it is a socially ambivalent model of interaction.

The heterogeneous nature of Sherbro identity on the Peninsula resulted from local communities constructing reciprocal interactions with two different types of newcomers: other local groups and non-indigenous settlers. While firstcomer Sherbro communities successfully assimilated strangers from other ethnic origins, they also built a kin and social alliance with the settlers of the Colony, which did not result in assimilation.

Integration in Sherbro society differs from classic examples of landlord/stranger relationships as analysed in neighbouring patrilineal societies. Where the logic of patrilineality is strong, children of stranger men who have married local women have difficulty gaining full membership in the local community. By contrast, since precolonial days, matrifiliation has positively correlated with the rapid assimilation of in-marrying men and their children into coastal Sherbro communities. On the Peninsula, male strangers were – and still are – expected to become a member of the Sherbro community by conforming to local rules of integration, which include marriage, initiation and/or adoption of a fishing livelihood. Matrifiliation implies that the children of Sherbro women and foreign men are considered to belong to their mother's descent group. The ritual process mitigates social hierarchies, as children of stranger men can achieve Sherbro identity and local belonging by initiating into the local Poro. Initiation places children under the aegis of their maternal uncles and integrates them as part of the social and political fabric. It achieves 'ethnic transformation' inasmuch as strangers and their children change ethnic affiliation and social allegiance.

Colonialism added a new pattern to existing interethnic relations on the Peninsula. In the nineteenth century, the relations between local populations and the settlers of the Colony circumvented the usual host/stranger relationship. It was the colonial administrators, and not local communities, who provided the settlers with land. The settlers did not control customary rights to land or local political matters in a direct way. However, they appeared to have more social and educational capital, which they could use to create patronage relationships with local populations. Sherbro communities were drawn to adopt a number of settler ways and to attract settler patronage.

In the new pattern, neither newcomer nor firstcomer could be said to have assimilated to the other. Sherbro communities and those of the settlers remained

separated, but the two groups did interact, with matrifocality remaining an important principle. In the process, the Krios incorporated many Sherbro social and cultural elements in the making of their own society and vice versa. Over time, too, there emerged the contemporary situation in which Sherbros and Krios are said to comprise the same families, which is manifested by similar surnames. Each ethnic group maintains its distinct identity, but marriages merge the two groups in actual families. Membership in initiation societies strengthens kin and friendship ties, and allows individuals to assert dual community loyalty. Taken together, it is clear that social relations prioritizing matrifocality and initiation support a Sherbro identity that does not involve a relation of subordination between the *kɔntri* and Krio elements or expressions of it.

The result of long-term interactions between Sherbro and the settlers who became Krio is that contemporary Sherbro ethnicity on the Peninsula now bears the sociocultural markers of identities (Krio and *kɔntri*) that were presented as antagonistic by the colonial regime. Its postcolonial deployment is marked by ambivalence, Sherbros having the possibility to present themselves both as *kɔntri* and as Krios. People in Sherbro localities express this specificity by using the terms *civilayzd*: this indicates a higher social status related to a Krio identity and lifestyle, and at the same time a Sierra Leonean indigenous status (*kɔntri*). They can alternatively employ the Krio register, with the aim of displaying social distinctiveness, and the *kɔntri* register, to mark an indigenous identity. 'Krio' and *kɔntri* have become claim-staking categories with reference to an audience and a context. This case also shows that the Krio identity may be incorporated and used as a social constituent of the ethnic identity of another group.

Although the high social value of Krio identity was forged in the colonial context, in the twenty-first century, 'appearing Krio' is an important step for people of all ethnic groups who aspire to a 'modern' urban life on the Peninsula. In this context, Sherbros present themselves not only as firstcomers in their own land, but also as a bridging group for other people to *krionayz*. In this sense, ethnic hybridity opens up ways for individuals of various ethnic backgrounds to claim a higher social status. 'Becoming' Sherbro allows them to access the attributes of Krio identity and use them along those of the *kɔntri* register. In this regard, it is important to pay attention to the 'transformative' nature of hybridity itself and its relation to inequality: beyond the figure of the 'bridging person' and the synthesis it operates, hybridity also builds on movement and logics of accumulation (Papastergiadis 2000: 15). The integrative potentialities of Sherbro identity significantly rely on power differentials between groups and the possibility it opens up for other people to access social capital.

Finally, the hybridity pattern presented by Sherbro identity may not be a marginal one in West Africa. The ascription of hybridity to the marginal subject, subordinated and racialized, is a common line of analysis, which is useful for underscoring the ways in which 'the hybrid interrupts dominant identifications

and reveal refusals and blockages of hegemonic nationalist order' (Kalra, Kaur and Hutnyk 2021: 95). The Sherbros themselves are small in number, yet they neither comprise a rarefied cosmopolitan group, nor are they 'marginalized' subjects, too subordinated and racialized to participate equally in the dominant national order. The processes of cross-ethnic identifications and transformation described in this book instead point to the regions of ambiguity that (still) exist between ethnic groups in the postcolony, and to the inventive individual uses of those areas of contiguity that connect singular identities – thereby enabling exchange, meeting, sharing and identifying across groups – to redefine the postcolonial self and the collective (see Cohen 1994).

Old Patterns, New Politics

The landlord/stranger reciprocity model remains relevant in African contexts where political and land rights depend on membership in the socioethnic group. I have addressed recent changes on the Peninsula that explain current tensions between local populations and groups of latecomers, as their respective discourses mobilize diverging concepts of 'rights': while Sherbro populations emphasize their status as autochthones, which would give them control over politics and land, strangers break free from the authority of local political authorities to negotiate their rights directly with the state. Two main factors contribute to this situation. The first is the absence of any legal provision in the Western Area that would allow Sherbros to claim customary property or communal land. In reaction, they emphasize their 'native' (indigenous) identity as the basis for entitlement. The second is the combination of acute land pressure and speculation, which raises land prices and produces severe economic precarity. The inability (or unwillingness) of the state to regulate access to resources creates the feeling that the economic success of migrant groups, who secure land and control the fishing business, is achieved at the expense of local populations.

This conflict strikingly illustrates the ambivalence of reciprocity as a model of cultural action, embedded in power relations between social groups (patrons and dependants) who have rights and obligations towards one another. Actors understand landlord/stranger reciprocity as part of a larger cultural frame in which they operate over a long period of time and through which they assess social change. The way in which groups continue to position themselves in relation to this arrangement is grounded in historical imagination – namely, representations about how similar relations have worked in the past, why they have succeeded or failed and how these processes may inform contemporary views on trust. For Sherbros, the contemporary performance and definition of their local hybrid identity is contingent upon the ways in which relations of power with other groups are remembered, experienced and anticipated.

The emergence of autochthony, in this respect, is that of a discourse about 'rupture' that conceals processes of social reproduction. Land disputes, by pointing to an erosion of practices of reciprocity at the heart of social life, confirm Murphy's argument that 'the moral economy of dependency is also … [one of] violence and punishment (or, rebellion)' (2010: 42). The patrimonial model, by framing group relations within a moral ethos of loyalty, operates as a double-edged sword producing precarious social stability. By referring to breaches in reciprocity, latecomers engage in frontier processes that are central to the political culture of the region. They create new polities, thereby replacing integration with political scission. Conversely, Sherbro hosts do not see much advantage to be gained from tolerating groups of strangers who refuse integration through marriage, ritual practice or friendship.

The scale of migration has had an impact on the way in which hosts receive strangers, but also on the way in which strangers themselves see their own place within the host society. In areas with a high proportion of latecomers, people see an advantage to building up their own resources and leadership. Conflicts about Poro rituals and sacred groves in these places appear as the ritual expression of disputes over power and land. In customary arrangements, initiation puts an end to the ambiguous status of strangers: it aligns kin alliance with legal and political rights so as to produce full citizens. Yet, local citizenship, limited to community assets and political rights, does not correspond to strangers' conceptualization of the 'modern' citizenship for which they yearn. 'Modern' citizenship, which latecomers associate with the deployment of the state, opens up ways to quick rewards: political patronage, economic rents and land ownership. By contrast, they may see little advantage in assimilation to local communities. Global forces, macroeconomic relations and national policies intersect with changes in local power differentials, modifying the perception of reciprocity (and its corollary, indebtedness) not as a value that produces community, but as a burden that needs to be alleviated in order to actualise one's social, political and economic potentialities. From this perspective, the gradual rejection of initiation is not a rejection of Sherbro political and ritual authority per se, but a rejection of a specific political culture that strangers do not see as compatible with their own understanding of 'development' and 'modernity'. It remains to be seen whether the mutual desire for recognition can yield new frameworks for reciprocity (and new narratives to naturalize those frameworks) on a par with the landlord/stranger relation, or whether this old framework will be replaced by new models for organizing ethnic relations in a still relatively weak state that insists on instrumentalizing ethnicity as a proxy for the rights of citizenship.

Discourses of autochthony, Sarró notes (2010: 232), occur in societies that have been described as highly incorporative. Indeed, the landlord/stranger model is flexible and has been compatible with changing political trends and population migrations for several hundred years. My ethnography demonstrates

that this shift can be explained if we analyse the emergence of autochthony as the outcome of the limits of integration mechanisms. In the current context, the channels of reciprocation that usually guide social relationships between local populations and strangers have weakened. The presence of the 'other' has become non-negotiated and experienced as a form of social violence. Using Shack's terminology (1979a), Sherbros have become 'involuntary hosts'. As they experience changing power relations locally (although these may be grounded in changes situated at the national and global levels), the landlord/stranger reciprocity as a mode of managing otherness turns into autochthony as a process of othering. At the same time, the landlord/stranger model already contains a potential for contention, as it stabilizes relations of domination that, ultimately, call for social change (Murphy 2010).

In this context, people in Sherbro settlements produce moral discourses that emphasize why strangers may become 'good' or 'bad' in reference to an ideal type of reciprocal relations. Moral values become expressed via kinship, fishing or initiation. These discourses redraw the boundaries of the moral community by excluding some people while including others. Sherbros stigmatize 'bad' strangers, who disrupt the social foundation of local communities, while maintaining mechanisms of integration for people who show an eagerness to be incorporated. Moreover, the possibilities for integration through kinship, fishing and initiation are widely known among strangers themselves. Local processes of integration are still at work, as evidenced by periods of Poro initiation in 2012, 2013 and 2016 that gathered initiates of various ethnic origins.

Thus, despite the ongoing (and intensifying) essentialization of ethnic identities on a political level, invocation of the landlord/stranger model is one of the many ways in which people may preserve fluid identifications and cultivate more peaceful relations in daily social encounters (see Ammann and Kaufmann 2012). Both ongoing social integration and conflict are visible in the contemporary lives of local communities on the Peninsula. Articulated in family and friendship circles, Sherbro narratives of identity may point to the highly diversified make-up of the region and to the permeable contours of Sherbro identity. However, in land and political matters, they can take an essentialist tone for people to express feelings of being dispossessed of their 'attributes of power' (Shack 1979a: 12) – namely, political and ritual authority, economic resources and access to land. At the same time, conflicts with Temne-speaking strangers testify to the long-term coexistence of the two groups in the region. Sherbros analyse this relationship as a 'negative' one, but a relationship nonetheless, which shows that conflict itself can become a mode of relation that takes on its full meaning from a historical perspective.

Trust, Recognition and the Future of Hybridity

The positive aspects of ethnic hybridity may be jeopardized by a pervasive situation of 'insecure modernity' (Laurent 2013), perpetuated by postcolonial governments, in which individual survival depends on one's ability to capture rents and access social and political connections. From the Civil War to Ebola, Sierra Leone is recovering from successive crises that have not only affected economic structures, but have also revealed a deep distrust in institutions (Leach 2015). On the Peninsula, people often stated that interpersonal violence – physical violence, but also the lack of trust and solidarity – was a critical problem resulting from an economically and socially insecure environment. Populations felt dispossessed in many ways and conflicts heightened the feeling of not being in control of one's life (see Jackson 2011). Local fishing livelihoods are threatened by the overexploitation of resources, and economic insecurity forces people to fight for the most valuable asset: land. New economic perspectives, like tourism, remain precarious and rest on the entry of foreign capital in the region. Living the 'precarious modernity' thus endangers processes of integration, while demonstrating their importance in mitigating the effects of rampant economic deregulation.

Thus, discourses of reciprocity also constitute a metadiscourse about social trust in a postwar environment marked by suspicion and a lack of interpersonal confidence. Rebuilding trust in public institutions and political leaders in the postconflict phase proved to be difficult (Mitton 2009). The absence of political trust often correlates with statements about the lack of 'trustworthy' people in society at large (Stovel 2006: 234–41). Carpenter (2011: xx) writes that two years after the war, 'the post-conflict zone was described by Sierra Leoneans as fragile, unstable, and uncertain – a place where safety was unknown and trust was hard to come by'. Like other anthropologists, during my fieldwork, I observed that trust was a scarce resource and that interpersonal relations, particularly close ones, continued to be apprehended in terms of suspicion, danger and potential violence (see Jackson 2004). Trusting was perceived as a sign of individual weakness and a form of naivety in an insecure environment that prompted people to engage in dishonesty, trickery and deceit. People's skills of survival were grounded in their ability to conceal – their strategy, opportunities, wealth, etc. – so as to avoid jealousy, witchcraft and other means by which others would take advantage of them.

However, trust is critical in building reciprocal relations, as it helps actors to frame their expectations about the results of the exchange (Ostrom 2003: 50–51). During my fieldwork, the local discourse on reciprocity related directly to the postwar context and to the possibility of recognizing others as allies. Landlord/stranger reciprocity was a mode of relating that was necessary for those who would live in a shared community space. It ensured local recognition, as a form

of social esteem for groups with differentiated professional abilities and economic assets (Honneth 1995: 113, 122). It also enabled the recognition of long-term family connections. In a context of generalized mistrust, entering relations of reciprocity indicated positive qualities of openness and honesty. It remained an important channel for building social capital within a locality, thus reproducing the idea of communities based on 'moral ethnicity' and shared values.

During the 2010s, in which this book came into being, reciprocity was presented as a value that fostered social cohesion, cultural mixing and peaceful coexistence. It became a metaphor for the national body politic and the possibility of rebuilding a nation based on cross-cultural relations (by opposition to ethnopolitics), genuine care and trustworthy relations. Landlord/stranger arrangements appeared as a safe and stable tool, a ready-made response to postwar insecurities, despite their uneasy interaction with state institutions, multiparty politics and the politicization of ethnicity. As a mechanism that reduced the anxiety created by social relations, the landlord/stranger arrangement remained a central piece of the local social imaginary that helped people make sense of destabilizing social phenomena.

At the same time, ensuring recognition via other patrimonial channels had become essential for survival, thereby undermining the very basis of local cohesion. This rendered the discourse on trust even more pressing and relevant, in an area that in recent years had turned into a brutal socioeconomic frontier. In this environment, hybridity, as a product of integration, continued to be valued positively, but the parameters within which groups could engage in such a model were tightening as other narratives took precedence.

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