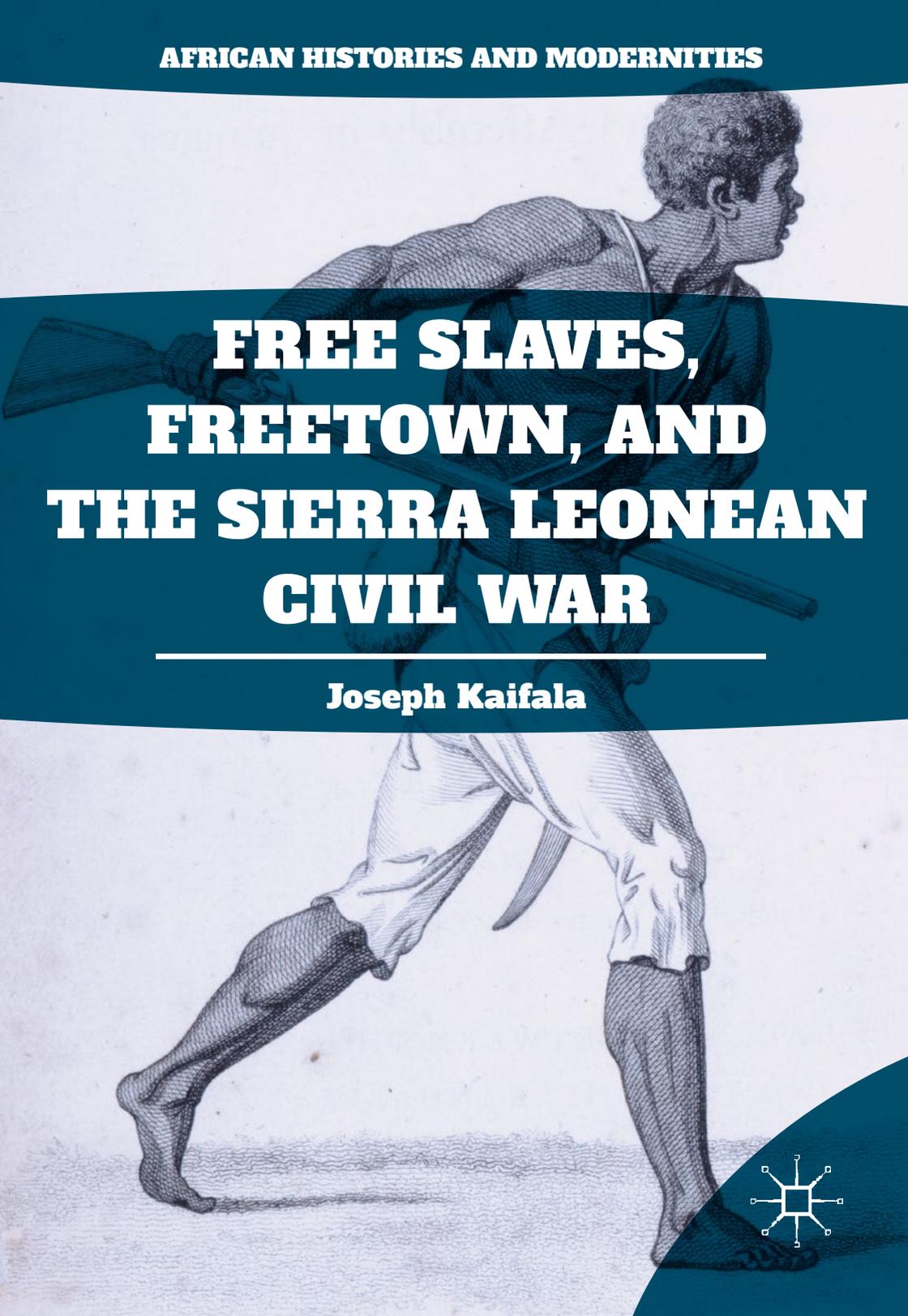


AFRICAN HISTORIES AND MODERNITIES



**FREE SLAVES,
FREETOWN, AND
THE SIERRA LEONEAN
CIVIL WAR**

Joseph Kaifala



African Histories and Modernities

Series Editors

Toyin Falola
The University of Texas at Austin
Austin, Texas, USA

Matthew M. Heaton
Virginia Tech
Blacksburg, USA

Aim of the Series

This book series serves as a scholarly forum on African contributions to and negotiations of diverse modernities over time and space, with a particular emphasis on historical developments. Specifically, it aims to refute the hegemonic conception of a singular modernity, Western in origin, spreading out to encompass the globe over the last several decades. Indeed, rather than reinforcing conceptual boundaries or parameters, the series instead looks to receive and respond to changing perspectives on an important but inherently nebulous idea, deliberately creating a space in which multiple modernities can interact, overlap, and conflict. While privileging works that emphasize historical change over time, the series will also feature scholarship that blurs the lines between the historical and the contemporary, recognizing the ways in which our changing understandings of modernity in the present have the capacity to affect the way we think about African and global histories. Editorial Board Aderonke Adesanya, Art History, James Madison University Kwabena Akurang-Parry, History, Shippensburg University Samuel O. Oloruntoba, History, University of North Carolina, Wilmington Tyler Fleming, History, University of Louisville Barbara Harlow, English and Comparative Literature, University of Texas at Austin Emmanuel Mbah, History, College of Staten Island Akin Ogundiran, Africana Studies, University of North Carolina, Charlotte

More information about this series at
<http://www.springer.com/series/14758>

Joseph Kaifala

Free Slaves, Freetown,
and the Sierra
Leonean Civil War

palgrave
macmillan

Joseph Kaifala
The Jeneba Project Inc.
New York, USA

African Histories and Modernities
ISBN 978-1-349-94853-6 ISBN 978-1-349-94854-3 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/978-1-349-94854-3

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016957295

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2017

This work is subject to copyright. All rights are solely and exclusively licensed by the Publisher, whether the whole or part of the material is concerned, specifically the rights of translation, reprinting, reuse of illustrations, recitation, broadcasting, reproduction on microfilms or in any other physical way, and transmission or information storage and retrieval, electronic adaptation, computer software, or by similar or dissimilar methodology now known or hereafter developed.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use. The publisher, the authors and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, express or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made.

Cover illustration: © Manuscripts, Archives and Rare Books Division, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, The New York Public Library, Astor, Lenox and Tilden Foundations

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Nature America Inc.
The registered company address is: 1 New York Plaza, New York, NY 10004, U.S.A.

For my mother, Mrs. Tewa Kaifala
And
In memory of my grandmother, Jeneba Kaifala

PREFACE

Sierra Leone is a remarkable country whose history has not been granted the comprehensive exploration it deserves. The country was home to slave ports that supplied plantations in the Americas and West Indies with the human cargo needed to maintain the Transatlantic Slave Trade. At the end of the slave trade, British abolitionists chose Sierra Leone as a place to resettle free slaves, which started with the arrival of the Black Poor from London in 1787. The Nova Scotians, free African-American slaves who fought alongside the British in the American Revolutionary wars, arrived five years later, in 1792. The Maroons, rebellious African slaves in Jamaica, were also repatriated to Sierra Leone through Nova Scotia in 1800. The last group of free slaves to settle in Sierra Leone was known as the *Recaptives*, those freed onboard illegal slave ships in enforcement of British slave trade abolition laws.

Another group of slaves who became the center of international attention at the time was the Sierra Leoneans who mutinied onboard the Spanish schooner, *La Amistad*, and navigated the ship to US shores. Competing claims for the Africans and the schooner landed the case in US federal courts. After months of litigation and diplomatic counterclaims between Spain and US, the US Supreme Court granted the Africans their freedom and ordered their safe return to Sierra Leone. American Quakers and influential abolitionists such as Lewis Tappan, Roger S. Baldwin, and former President John Quincy Adams took up the cause of the *Amistad* Africans. Sengbe Pieh or Joseph Cinque, the celebrated Mende leader of the mutineers, and his comrades were eventually freed and transported to Sierra Leone. These groups of free slaves named their settlement

Freetown, which is the capital of Sierra Leone. Amidst unforeseen difficulties, Freetown was transformed from a slave port to one of the most lively trade hubs on the Atlantic coast of West Africa under the administration of free slaves and representatives of the English Crown.

Sierra Leone remained a British colony until 1961 when it obtained independence. Unlike many other British African colonies, Sierra Leone flourished under British administration and Freetown was referred to as the “Athens of West Africa,” a place where black intellectuals and philosophers roamed the streets. The Church Missionary Society (CMS) established Fourah Bay College in 1827 to educate Africans. It also founded the Sierra Leone Grammar School in 1845, the first secondary school in West Africa, to provide education and religious training. Relation between Britain and Sierra Leone was so cordial that unlike other countries, Sierra Leone avoided a war of independence with its colonizer.

Sierra Leone prospered in the years immediately following independence until the death of its first Prime Minister, Sir Milton Margai, in 1964. The ensuing years were marred by coups and countercoups until the establishment of a one-party state in 1978 by its first president, Siaka Stevens. By the time President Stevens retired in 1985, he had orchestrated a series of constitutional amendments that allowed him to handpick a Sierra Leone military officer named Joseph Saidu Momoh to replace him. Momoh’s regime, which lasted from 1985 until his overthrow by a military junta in 1992, was a continuation of Stevens’ dictatorship and maladministration.

In March 1991, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) led by Corporal Foday Saybana Sankoh invaded Sierra Leone with the support of Charles Ganghay Taylor, leader of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL). The Sierra Leonean civil war was one of the most brutal wars of the twentieth century and it became notorious for the use of child soldiers and the vicious amputation of civilians with blunt machetes. When the 1996 Sierra Leone Electoral Commission produced a slogan that the future of the country was in the hands of the people, the rebels decided to chop off the hands of civilians. The civil war ended in 2002 and two transitional justice institutions were established—the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) and the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission (SLTRC). The SCSL was granted international criminal jurisdiction over those who bear the greatest responsibility for the conflict, and the SLTRC was established to create an impartial historical record of the conflict.

No book has provided a complete narrative of the history of Sierra Leone from its days as a slave harbor through its founding as a home for free slaves, to its political independence and civil war. The aim of this book is to provide a comprehensive understanding of the country in its times of war and peace and to offer the reader a clear account of the various stages of Sierra Leone's sociopolitical development in a global context. A major goal of the book is to provide a one-stop shop for Sierra Leone's history, from its founding to the end of the civil war. From the English slave case of *James Somerset* (1772), which established that a slave could not be forcibly removed from England to be re-sold, to the *Amistad* case in the US Supreme Court, which set free Africans destined for Cuban plantations, Sierra Leone has always been inextricably connected to the world.

This book also explores how a peace-loving country descended into a decade of violent conflict that left it completely devastated. It is the first book to offer a full historical narrative of Sierra Leone both in times of war and peace. Such a book is paramount as the country embarks on its remaking. The book is also a resource for world historians, international legal researchers, and ordinary people who are interested in the history and transformation of Sierra Leone. More importantly, it provides the next generation of Sierra Leoneans with an understanding of their history in order to further the aim of preventing a repetition of past errors that often lead to unspeakable violence. My hope is that as Sierra Leoneans continue to work toward forgiveness and reconciliation, they will walk with an understanding of their past, because what we are is influenced by where we have been.

Bowie, USA

Joseph Kaifala

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

I have always been interested in the study of history because of my belief that who we are is shaped by our past. This book is the first product of an extensive research into who we are as a nation.

I thank Francis Ben Kaifala, Esq. who is my beloved brother and intellectual source of support. I also thank my sisters, Hawa Kaifala-Samba, Amie Kaifala-Camara, Doris Jamiru, and Jeneba Kaifala, for the love and laughter. I am grateful to my brother, Sahr Kendema, for the journey we have been through together. Many thanks to Dr. Jowo Aberdeen, Miniratu Kamara, and Aunty Kadie Aberdeen. Thank you to my brother-in-law, Augustine Samba.

When my father died, my uncle, Sahr Joseph Tolno, welcomed my bother and me into his home and enrolled us at the Sierra Leone Grammar School. Sahr J., this book is a gift to you! Thank you to my aunt Jeneba and my cousins, Samuel, Ben, and Patrick. I am also grateful to my aunt, Mrs. Adeyemi Tolno and my cousin Valerie Tolno. To my lovely aunt, Angeline Tolno and her husband, Docteur Saa Dimio Sandouno. For the love of my cousins, Sia Tolno, Pascal Tolno, Mohamed Camara, Watta Sandouno, Mariata Sandouno, Borbor Sandouno, Sia Tolno of Concasseur, John and Edmond Kettor, Lucy Francoise Tongi, Christiana Satta Tongi, and Abraham Kabba. Aunty Fatu Kettor, Emilia, and Hawa Tongi, I say thank you.

I thank my brother, my comrade, Musa Adams, who has been my academic companion since the days when we walked miles on dusty roads to get to various refugee schools. Dandora Tongi, thank you for your love. I am grateful to Fatmata Tina Jalloh-Chamberlain for the family bond we have.

Without your kindness and support this work would not have been easily accomplished. Many thanks to Elijah Koroma, Imani Koroma, and Ms. Abdinnah Jalloh. Thanks to my *Landors*, Alhassan Jalloh and Adulrahman Jalloh. To Memuna Jalloh and her lovely children, Isatu and my darling Yeabeh. Thank you Mohamed Jalloh, Alyssa LaPane, Ms. Karimata Bah, and comrades Chernor and Aissatou Bah for your friendship. A very special thanks to Dr. Judith Goldstein and Humanity in Action.

No other person has shaped me more as a writer than Prof. Michael Marx. I am a better storyteller because of the work we did together. Thank you for welcoming me into the Golden-Marx family. I am grateful to Prof. Catherine Golden, Emmet, and Jesse Golden-Marx. I am also thankful to Prof. Kate Graney and her family, Sean, Mimi, and Ronan, for your love and support. Thank you Prof. Stephanie Fariior for shaping me into a human rights lawyer. I appreciate the love and support of the Shafiroff family: Martin, Jean, Jackie, and my lovely Elizabeth. When my computer gave up during the process of writing this book, the Shafiroffs mobilized and I was back to writing in no time. Thank you to the Krawczyk family: Hugo, Leonor, Noa, Nir, and Liat, the one soul mate who always challenges me to become the better of me. I remain grateful to Barbara Opitz, Carol Springs, Darren Drabek, and Mary-Beth O'Brien for my successes at Skidmore College.

My sincere gratitude to the Wells: Tamar, Rich, Rebecca and her husband Luis Salmaso, and my dearest Alicia and her husband, Jeremy Day. I thank you Alicia for your ability to survive my craziness. Thanks to the Bolmstand family, especially my brother Erik and his wife Frida Carlstedt, Ulla, and Magnus. For the love of Desiree Øvretveit, Inge Larsen, Anna Kamilla, Jakob, Johannes and Elias. To Aseem Shrivastava and Maria Teresa Julianello for believing in me at a time when I had doubts in my own abilities. I remain grateful to Barbara and Daniel Toa-Kwapong for parenting us in Flekke. Thank you to the indefatigable principal of the Sierra Leone Grammar School, A.J. Lasite, who first mentioned Abeokuta to me and ignited a historical curiosity in my young mind.

I am thankful for the love of Skidfam. There is no love greater than what we have. To my brother Peter S. Brock, I say thank you for always believing in me and for all those beer funds. To Billy Peard, for the late night discussions about the marginalized peoples of the world instead of reading our casebooks. I am grateful for Sweta Prabhakar and Shannon Clarke. To my friend Katie R. Thomas, I say go best friend! Thank you to my Italian intellectual, Federica D'Alessandria, for your friendship. I am

sincerely grateful to Chloe Viner Collins and her husband Shane Collins. The language in this book is better because of Chloe's editing. To all other family, friends, and supporters, thank you.

CONTENTS

1	Discovery of Sierra Leone	1
2	The Ethnic Makeover	9
3	Granville Sharp's Fight to Free the Slaves	33
4	Free Slaves in Freetown	59
5	War and Peace in Freetown	91
6	The Amistad Saga	127
7	The Hut Tax War	167
8	Postcolonial Political Fiasco	185
9	RUF Invasion and the First NPRC Coup	213
10	Second NPRC Military Coup and Elections Before Peace	241

11	The AFRC Military Coup	259
12	AFRC/RUF Invasion of Freetown and the Lomé Peace Accord	283
13	Flames of Peace	311
	Bibliography	323
	Index	331

Discovery of Sierra Leone

If Africa is the cradle of humanity then Sierra Leone, a small diamond-shaped country of approximately 28,000 square miles on the west coast of Africa, is the home of its abandoned children. A bona fide melting pot of cultures, were the country better than it has been, humanity east and west, north and south, would have come knocking at its door in search of their heritage or at least evidence of that macabre transatlantic commercial transactions in human beings. But Sierra Leoneans have not always been worthy guardians of their orphanage of humanity, so that for a while, they hunted one another in a decade of savage bloodbath during a vicious civil war that lasted from 1991 to 2002. The violent conflict effaced the triumphs of the country's prominent founding as a home for free slaves and wrote a lamentation to the post-independence political disintegration that flung it back to square one.

Modern Sierra Leone received its christening from Pedro de Sintra, a fifteenth-century Portuguese explorer who visited the area. Signor Pedro's expedition reached the west coast of Africa in 1462 and that was when legends regarding the discovery of Sierra Leone were hatched. Even though de Sintra was the one to name the country, his compatriot Álvaro Fernandez, another fifteenth-century explorer in the service of Henry the Navigator, had visited the region earlier in 1447 and perhaps stopped for drinking water or to observe the vegetation of the area for future colonization. It is also probable that de Sintra studied Signor Álvaro's voyage

and learned about the relevance of the Sierra Leone stop to early explorers traveling the west coast of Africa looking for possible hubs to obtain the human cargo that would be needed for the transatlantic slave trade or locations for spices on growing demand in Europe.

The available fact is that de Sintra stopped on the coast of Sierra Leone to refill his water barrels at the Rokel estuary on the coast of Freetown. The area near the estuary would later become known as the Watering Place because of its relevance to early European explorers as a stop for drinking water on their long journeys along the west coast of Africa. Whether de Sintra ever drew water from Sierra Leone remains part of the mystery surrounding the baptism of the country. Some say Signor Pedro was so impressed by the verdurous undulations of the Freetown peninsula mountains, prostrating in the shape of a crouching lion, the same that would later gladden the heart of Anna Maria Falconbridge, wife of Alexander Falconbridge, the first commercial agent of the Sierra Leone Company (SLC), that he pronounced the new locale *Serra Lyoa* or Lion Mountains. According to Anna Maria's Narrative, the "mountains appear to rise gradually from the sea to a stupendous height, richly wooded and beautifully ornamented by the hand of nature..."¹ The location of Freetown was described as "unquestionably the best that could be found in that vicinity, for the salubrity of its air, the goodness of the water, and the excellence of the harbour."² The coast of Freetown is one of the best natural harbors in the world. Conversely, there are those whose descriptions of events at the naming of the country exclude European fascination with Sierra Leone's beautiful natural harbor and portray, instead, the perilous nature of early European exploration of the impregnable and treacherous territories of Africa.

Another account of the legend has a more roaring effect. Those who subscribe to this account believe that there was a shortage of water on Signor Pedro's expedition and he remembered a refilling location on the west coast of Africa probably described by Álvaro or one of his crewmembers. Thus, de Sintra anchored at the Watering Place to refill his casks. Here, the legend bred a sensational drama that has become titillating to Sierra Leoneans. Arriving on the coast of Freetown, like the good captain he may have been, de Sintra must have gone up his ship to first inspect the land he was about to enter. Whether he ever set foot on Sierra Leonean soil or not is part of the legend. The story goes that there was heavy wind blowing through the thick forest of the Freetown peninsula that sounded like a pride of lions roaring through the jungle. Signor Pedro was certainly a brave captain to have set sail on an exploration of uncharted territories,

but not even he was man enough to make himself into a sacrificial prey to a pride. But was he in fact that brave? That is the question. Whether out of fear or valor, he remembered to pronounce the name, *Serra Lyoa*, be it as a place of beastly menace or a source of natural spring water, and that has remained an ineffaceable part of legends surrounding the discovery of Sierra Leone.

The Portuguese were the principal explorers of the west coast of Africa until the mid-seventeenth century when their expeditions and trading in Africa began to diminish. Other European powers such as Britain, Holland, and Denmark entered the business and exerted control of various trading ports in West Africa. The English slave trader, Sir John Hawkins, visited Sierra Leone in 1562 and took some 300 slaves from Tagrin, on the Sierra Leone River.³ Hawkins returned shortly afterwards, but his second visit was not as conducive as the first because of his gangster approach to doing business. His crew was attacked as soon as his ship anchored at Tagrin to refill his water barrels. Sir Hawkins, the hawkish English pirate later clad in official seaman uniform, continued to sail for a long time on the west coast of Africa, raiding other slave ships like an insatiable sibling nabbing food off the plates of others. Hawkins obtained a reputation among his peers as a dishonest adventurer and an opportunist who would later become a British Admiral to legitimize his piracy with royal crest. By Joe Alie's account, the dishonest conduct of traders like Hawkins, albeit in no other commerce than the wholesale transactions in humans as commodity, compelled Sierra Leonean coastal chiefs to demand hostages of some crewmembers as collateral against ungentlemanly and unfair conduct.⁴ Even though the chiefs were usually drunk to the dregs on European liquor received in exchange for slaves, they were not so deeply drowned in their bottles as to forget the source of their indulgence. Hawkins' hoodlum and piratical conduct of "help thyself to they neighbor's goods" was not condoned even by those he considered primitive.

Hawkins was later accompanied on his privateering by Sir Francis Drake, his cousin of similar character and repute. The two met their fateful end around the same time in 1595 and 1596 respectively, en route to the West Indies in the war of Queen Elizabeth I against Spain.⁵ Sir Drake died of bloody stool on the coast of Portobelo, Panama, and Hawkins died off the coast of Puerto Rico. The British monarchy continued to fund African expeditions and to collaborate with slave merchants. The lucrativeness of trade in humans and the gradual withdrawal of Portuguese traders from the west coast of Africa encouraged the British to impose control over the

transatlantic trade. In 1660, the British Monarchy granted a charter to a group of adventurers operating under the business name, Company of Royal Adventurers Trading to Africa.⁶ The company was mostly mismanaged in its first year of operation, but was successfully reformed in 1663 and granted monopoly over the slave trade to the irritation of other merchants who wanted their quid in the newly found profits in human beings. The Company of Adventurers eventually metamorphosed into the Royal African Company (RAC).

The RAC, successor to the Company of Adventurers, a business venture between the British Monarchy and private merchants, was founded in 1672 with a monopoly over the slave trade. Its charter, issued by King Charles II, guaranteed that “[o]ur will and pleasure is, and wee doe hereby declare the true intent and meaning of these presents to bee, that this our present grant and demise of ye regions countrys, dominions, territorys, continents, islands coasts, and places aforesaid. And all the benefit, commodity, profit, and advantage made, and to bee made and gotten out of ye same, or by reason of the terme aforesaid shall bee, and shall bee interpreted to bee, in trust, and for ye sole use, benefit, and behoofe of the Royal African Company of England.”⁷ Between 1680 and 1686, the RAC is recorded to have transported an estimated average of 5000 slaves a year and sponsored around 249 voyages to Africa.⁸ The Lion Mountains became one of the RAC’s ports of operation, and the name *Serra Lyoa* underwent a series of transmutations from Serra Lion and eventually arrived at the much refined English version that is Sierra Leone.

The British eagerly exercised their royal monopoly against other European traders on the west coast of Africa. In Sierra Leone, they built forts and prohibited other traders from entering their territories or conducting business with their local allies. Places such as Bunce Island, Sherbro Island, and Tasso on the coast of Sierra Leone became recognized British forts manned by the RAC for the exclusive use of British merchants. However, the British were naive to believe that other Europeans would simply submit to the authority of their royal monopoly on foreign territory far away from their homelands of Europe. In 1664, a conflict ensued between Dutch and British merchants at the RAC fort on Tasso Island. A Dutch officer, Admiral de Ruyter, responded by brutally attacking Fort Tasso, and as a symbol of his victorious military campaign, de Ruyter carved his name on a rock and buried it at the location of present day King Jimmy wharf on the coast of Freetown.⁹ Similar retaliatory attacks were waged against more RAC forts in other locations on the

coast of Sierra Leone. In 1728 Portuguese traders ransacked and captured Bunce Island, a profitable slave post about 20 miles from Freetown.

A series of geographical misfortunes and attacks from rival merchants forced the RAC to gradually pack its bundles and withdraw from Sierra Leone. The departure of RAC agents liberalized trade on the west coast of Africa and allowed other agents of European monarchs and privateers to work together, forming alliances with coastal chiefs for the advancement of trade in persons. The Dutch, Portuguese, and Danes returned, and by 1750 the RAC fort on Bunce Island was occupied by a London corporation, *Grant, Sargent and Oswald*.¹⁰ The Oswald Corporation transformed the fort into a lucrative commercial port for large slave ships that anchored to collect human cargo for the plantations of South Carolina and Georgia where business was booming both for plantation owners and slavers who supplied the needed human labor. Richard Oswald, the London proprietor of Bunce Island, who also owned shares in ships and plantations in Jamaica, South Carolina, and Florida, formed a cordial commercial relationship with Henry Laurens, a wealthy rice planter and slave dealer based in South Carolina who received slaves from Oswald's ships and sold them to planters in Charleston and Savannah. Laurens was "an owlish-looking, hard-working man, short and stocky, who prided himself on sleeping no more than four hours a night, and rose well before dawn to do his business correspondence by candlelight...owner of some three hundred slaves, he was at one point the biggest slave merchant in the thirteen colonies."¹¹ His partner, Oswald, was described as an astute entrepreneur who was admired as "a wise, thoughtful man who embodied the Scottish virtues of frugality, sobriety, and hard work..."¹² Though he never stepped into Africa, Oswald nonetheless reaped some of the greatest benefits from the slave trade.

In the 1750s and 1760s, Oswald and Laurens established one of the most successful commercial relationships for the supply of slaves and other goods, including camwood and ivory, from Africa. These goods came mainly from Bunce Island and other West African slave trading posts collectively known in South Carolina as the Rice Coast, because captives from the region were strong and most adept at tending rice fields. Demands for Rice Coast slaves produced an expansion of the trade, and fleets of ships sailed not only from South Carolina but also from Rhode Island, Connecticut, Massachusetts, New York, and the company's home ports of London, Liverpool, and Bristol. Each ship returned with between 250 and 300 slaves per voyage. At the height of its success, Bunce Island was a viable commercial fort with amenities such as a golf course, shipyard,

and European houses. According to Adam Hochschild, Bunce Island's "protected position and abundant fresh water supply made it one of West Africa's most active trading posts, selling slaves and supplies to European and American captains and performing repairs in its small shipyard."¹³ One of the prominent traders to frequent the island was John Newton, before he met his *Amazing Grace* and deliverance from wretched slaver to ordained minister. During one of his visits on March 27, 1753, "he traded his long-boat for four tons of rice from the Island's warehouse. Then he left his vessel, the *African*, at the shipyard to have sixty barrels of water stowed onboard and the mollusks scraped off its hull."¹⁴ *Amazing Grace*, the hymn Newton wrote about his transformation from slave ship captain to cleric, is a universal hymn of Human Rights defenders around the world.

In order to obtain a full inventory, most ships anchored for several weeks to receive slaves gathered from inland and delivered on smaller boats. Among the human cargoes taken from Bunce Island were men, women, and children, including ten-year-old Priscilla whose slender shoulders would have been violently snatched in 1756 by an impatient slaver and thrown aboard the *Hare* under Captain Caleb Godfrey as bonus cargo. Although she was not strong enough to lend much to the plantation life that awaited her, she was an investment that could yield long-term benefits. Like many others who passed through Bunce, she must have arrived on one of the smaller boats or local canoes and thrown into the confines of the fort through the gate for women and children, where her slender body would have rubbed against adults in congested spaces lubricated by sweat, blood, shit, puke, and piss, until larger vessels anchored to take them through the journey of the Middle Passage toward slavery in the Americas or West Indies. Missing home or hungry after her meager ration was digested, she would have cried and elicited additional slaps from angry mates who would rather not have heard her tiny Temne or Mende voice. When the auctions were done in South Carolina, the ships sometimes went through London where they delivered rice from the American South and other goods from Sierra Leone. Ships from the West Indies also arrived from their return journey with sugar, tobacco, or coffee. The same ships were then loaded with needed materials such as weapons, rum, more crewmembers, gifts for local middlemen, and other materials necessary for slave trading in West Africa.

As profits accumulated, so did the affluence and influence of Laurens and Oswald. Laurens was entitled to a moderate but cumulatively hefty 10 percent commission on all of Oswald's ships that docked in Charleston

under his care. Laurens acquired so much clout that during the American Revolution he was elected president of the Continental Congress. He was later appointed envoy to Holland but was taken prisoner in September 1780 by Captain George Keppel on HMS *Vestal* and imprisoned for approximately 15 months in the Tower of London, acquiring the infamous epithet of being the only American to bunker there until he was granted bail in anticipation of a prisoner exchange for Lord Cornwallis. In all likelihood, it was his loyal business partner Oswald who expedited his release and recommended his appointment as one of the Peace Commissioners to negotiate America's freedom from the British Empire under the Treaty of Paris. Oswald was chief negotiator on the British side, so it was only natural that he would have preferred at least one familiar face from the former colony in the person of Laurens. He arrived late during negotiations to join his comrades, Benjamin Franklin, John Jay, and John Adams, but he has been suspected for a curious addendum to Article VII of the treaty, which states that the British shall withdraw "without causing any destruction, or carrying away any negroes or other property of the American inhabitants..." The slave dealer cum diplomat was, much to the delight of Oswald, protecting whatever remained of their mutual interests in the human trade back in America. The American Revolutionary War cost Southern slavers many of their slaves who eagerly joined the British on a promise of freedom at the end of the war, and Laurens added the clause to prevent any further takings by the defeated former colonial master. However, without the demands of plantation owners for cheap slave labor, the Oswald conglomerate on Bunce Island was bound to go under.

Subsequently, the presence of European traders in Sierra Leone dwindled as demands for new slaves dissipated, but the overwhelming presence of Europeans on the coast of Sierra Leone could still be seen by the multitude of single mothers and young mulatto children they left behind. The Danes left the grave of a Danish captain who died on Bunce Island in 1783 to engrave their Viking presence. The Portuguese were the first visitors, and as a result a short form of their nationality *Porto* became a Temne word for Caucasian. The British departed to return at a later date on a mission bearing the insignia of liberty, Christianity, colonization, and commerce in nonhuman merchandize. The slave trade continued, and alliances between African and European privateers in the trade ignited wars and kidnappings in Sierra Leone. Coastal chiefs were rewarded with rum, guns, European clothing, and protection against rivals, in return for slaves. To live up to constant demands from their trading partners,

chiefs waged wars against each other and sold their captives to Europeans. In addition to human commodities, Europeans took precious metals and timber. Other goods such as cowhides, beeswax, and West African spices were also exchanged. By 1784, Bunce was under the management of John & Alexander Anderson, Oswald's nephews, who held the island until the abolition of the slave trade. The Danes were some of the most prevalent slave merchants in Sierra Leone at this time and approximately 2000 slaves a year were taken from Bunce.¹⁵

NOTES

1. Anna Maria Falconbridge, *Narrative of Two Voyages to the River Sierra Leone During the Years 1791-2-3* (London, 1794), 18–19.
2. Prince Hoare, *Memoirs of Granville Sharp, Esq. Composed from His Own Manuscripts and Other Authentic Documents in the Possession of His Family and of the African Institution* (London, 1820), 283.
3. Joe A.D. Alie, *A New History of Sierra Leone* (London: Macmillan, 1990), 33.
4. *Ibid.*, 35.
5. “Francis Drake Biography,” *Biography.com*, accessed February 17, 2015, <http://www.biography.com/people/francis-drake-9278809>.
6. “Royal African Company Established,” *Public Broadcasting Service*, accessed February 17, 2015, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1/1p269.html>.
7. “The King Grants the Right to Trade in Africa,” *The UK National Archives*, accessed February 17, 2015, http://www.nationalarchives.gov.uk/pathways/blackhistory/africa_caribbean/transcripts/charter_rac.htm.
8. “The Terrible Transformation: Royal African Company Established,” *Public Broadcasting Service*, accessed February 17, 2015, <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/aia/part1/1p269.html>.
9. Joe A.D. Alie, *A New History of Sierra Leone* (London: Macmillan, 1990), 34–35.
10. *Ibid.*, 36.
11. Adam Hochschild, *Bury the Chains: Prophets and Rebels in the Fight to Free an Empire's Slaves* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Co., 2005), 100.
12. *Ibid.*, 24.
13. *Ibid.*
14. *Ibid.*
15. Joseph A. Opala, *The Gullah: Rice, Slavery, and the Sierra Leone-American Connection* (Connecticut: Yale Gilder Lehrman Center, 2004), accessed October 11, 2016, <http://glc.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/bance%20Island%20in%20Sierra%20leone.pdf>.

The Ethnic Makeover

While John Hawkins and his European brethren were engaged in adventures around Tagrin, Bunce, and Sherbro Island, the interior of Sierra Leone was steeping with new ethnic groups and ethno-political organizations vying for superiority and territory. As many as 15 of Sierra Leone's 17 ethnic groups were busy shuffling themselves in the country. The 16th and 17th groups, Krio and Kru, did not arrive until later in the eighteenth century. These ethnic groups are classified into three linguistic categories: Mande, Mel, and other.¹ The Mende, Soso, Vai/Gallinas, Loko, Kono, Koranko, Mandingo, and Yalunka are part of the Mande ethno-linguistic group. The Mel cluster includes the Temne, Bullom/Sherbro, Gola, Kissi, and Krim. The Krio, Fula, Kru, and Limba belong to the remaining group, dubbed "other." The arrival of Mane warriors from the Mali Empire to the coast of Sierra Leone and slave raids organized by coastal chiefs against other territories to maintain the supply of slaves to their European partners dislodged some of these ethnic groups. The raids disrupted settlements and forced some ethnic groups to relocate or split into subgroups, especially those such as the Temne and Bullom, who were closer to the coast. These coastal ethnic groups, collectively known as *Sapes*, did not engage in war with each other before the Mane arrived.

The Mende, who are direct descendants of Mane warriors, arrived in Sierra Leone through neighboring Liberia in the middle of the sixteenth century. The origin of the Mane can be traced to the Mali Empire, but

unfortunately not much evidence is available to pinpoint their exact settlement before they arrived on the west coast of Africa. Their leader, the belligerent and no-nonsense Queen Masarico allegedly defied the emperor and was permanently expelled from the empire. Masarico mobilized a large group of loyal followers and began her trek away from the empire, advancing southwards. Her marauding warriors raided villages and took captives on their way south, increasing their number and improving their military strength. As Masarico's army grew, so did the need for food, hence the scorched earth pillaging of villages and towns along its way, taking resources it needed. For every village they marched through, the Mane left a trademark of blood, plunder, and conscription that indicated to whom-ever visited afterwards that Masarico was there, even long after she was gone. When the Mane detected that a town had formidable defense, they attempted to avert war by sending an emissary bearing an ultimatum in the form of a white cloth and a weapon, signifying a choice between peace and war. Those who preferred war did not only choose slaughter, they often became supper for the *sumba*, a spartan and cannibalistic squad among the Mane.

The Mane reached West Africa in the 1540s and changed the course of their trek westwards toward the Grand Cape Mount county area of Liberia on the southeastern border of Sierra Leone. They engaged in battles with the Bullom who were the original settlers of the regions the Mane occupied. The Mane were a marauding army who did as they pleased with those they encountered along their way, but like many tales involving persistent bullies, the underdog sometimes delivers a detrimental counter-punch. Queen Masarico's son, a valiant commander, was killed when he fell into a Bullom ambush—a severe and personal blow to a previously unflinching warrior queen. Masarico died shortly afterwards from old age and grief over losing her son. When the queen died, some of her leading warriors established their own small communities, and their presence had great influence on many coastal settlers and languages. For instance, the Mane viceroy Sherabola conquered the southern Bullom and his influence produced a reformed Bullom known as Sherbro.

The most significant influence of the Mane was the emergence of Mende as the largest ethnic group in Sierra Leone. The Mende are divided into three subgroups of *Kpaa*, a different or difficult version of Mende; *Ko*, which describes those who live in the upper part of Mende territory, and *Sewa* Mende or those who find themselves along the Sewa river in the south. The *Sewa* Mende considered themselves the purest of all other

dialects of Mende. However, the *Kpaa* Mende, who possessed a well-organized political system and a highly disciplined military, were indisputably the most illustrious of the Mende. The *Kpaa* Mende established an independent state in southern Sierra Leone and made Taiama its capital. The military strength of the *Kpaa* Mende allowed them to guarantee the security of surrounding towns in exchange for pledges of loyalty. The Mende were generally ruled by warrior chiefs whose leadership achievements depended both on their personality and the loyalty of their subjects.

Principal Mende states were identified by the name of their warrior chiefs. An example of a highly valorous Mende chief is Nyagua of Panguma, who was later deported to the Gold Coast (Ghana) with the Temne chief Bai Bureh and the Sherbro chief Kpana Lewis for their alleged roles in the 1898 Hut Tax war against the British, although Nyagua's district was actually exempted from collecting the tax. Nyagua signed an armistice with the British on May 25, 1889, which like other chiefs who entered into such alliances guaranteed him a stipend of £10 per annum. In 1893, he contributed a regiment to British forces fighting Samori Touré. His son Gbanyeh attended the Sierra Leone Grammar School in Freetown on British coffer. Nyagua also captured and surrendered a notorious and most wanted rebel named Makaya to the British. Despite these efforts, a District Commissioner accused Nyagua of organizing clandestine meetings with other chiefs and stocking ammunition in preparation for war.² The warrior chief died in Ghana in 1906 without ever seeing his beloved Panguma again. The Mende regarded their chief either as *primus inter pares*, a leader among equals, or as a member of their family. Some Mende people in Sierra Leone still refer to their chief as *Maada* (grandfather) even though the official title of a chief is *Mabin*.

According to Alie, a Mende chief was generally an individual who manifested the greatest leadership skills; thus, there were no hard and fast criteria for succession to the throne. However, leaders usually established their own settlements or were elected by an Electoral College comprising of sub-chiefs, elders, warriors, or other important personalities in the state. The chief relied on his *Lavai* (spokesman) as a link between him and his subjects. The *Lavai* received complaints and facts of disputes on behalf of the chief and transmitted the chief's messages to sub-chiefs and community members. Though little detail exists of Queen Masarico's conquest of parts of Sierra Leone or her origin, the Mende retained a tradition of matrilineal chieftaincy, which is another tangible proof of her influential leadership.

For sociopolitical administration and the education of their youths, the Mende, like other ethnic group, relied on two secret societies: the *poro* for boys and the *bondo* or *sande* for girls. These secret societies functioned as institutions of learning for pubescent children. Boys who joined the *poro* were expected to graduate with skills including proficiency in herbal medicine, local government, and warfare. As future breadwinners, young men were taught to provide for their families through farming and hunting. They acquired skills in medicine by learning the medicinal contents of various plants and animal parts. They were also trained in traditional etiquettes such as decorum at political meetings and respect for elders. Another aspect of the *poro* was military training. However, the most important ritual of the *poro* is the circumcision of boys as a rite of passage from boyhood to manhood. Those who complete the process among the Mende still receive traditional cicatrices on their backs to distinguish the uninitiated.

The *bondo* society involved similar training and rituals. Girls entered at puberty to receive courses in midwifery, childcare, sexual intercourse, and the role of women in polygamous households. The girls were also taught other arts and crafts such as cooking, laundry, singing, and dancing. Music and dance remain fundamental to a successful *bondo*. Some towns hire special music and dance instructors known in Mende as *sowe* (headwoman) to teach initiates. Mariatu Kamara, a victim of the Sierra Leonean civil war who was initiated at a young age, offers a contemporary sense of some *bondo* practices, albeit among the Temne: “the women from the village taught us homemaking, including cooking and sewing. We learned how to cook meals that would cure certain ailments, and how to use herbs to treat coughs and fevers. At the end of our time there, we returned to the village for a great feast, during which all of us danced.”³ But in spite of the wonderful education and training in domesticity and community life, the *bondo* society is incomplete without the much criticized circumcision. According to Kamara, “[t]here was only one part of the Bondo that I disliked, and it happened on our first night in the bush... I was told to lie down on the floor on a piece of cloth... My skirt was lifted high over my waist... I felt the *digba* [headwoman] cut my vagina”⁴ This aspect of *bondo*, known globally as Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), is one that has generated serious international outrage and condemnation.

Though the duration of these societies have been reduced considerably to suit contemporary societal demands, in their original time period, they could last for months or sometimes even a year. Enough time was considered necessary for the scars of circumcision to heal so that initiates

could reemerge in society without visible signs of vulnerability. For then, they had become legitimate heirs to the future of their community. No society wanted to see its future warriors and mothers limping from wounds of the very rite of passage that should have transformed them into unblemished candidates responsible for the preservation of the community. This is why those who succumbed to the complications of circumcision were declared to have answered the call of the gods. They were deemed unable to become warriors or mothers on earth so instead they entered the supernatural world to watch over the living. Sierra Leone's first prime minister, Sir Milton Margai, would later approve training for the headwomen of female secret societies in midwifery in order to compensate for the limited number of medical doctors and nurses in rural areas.

These secret societies "created a sense of comradeship and unity among members irrespective of family, clan or ethnic affiliation."⁵ Like most institutions engaged in the preparation of young people for adult life, boys and girls graduate as a group and forever identify themselves as members of the same initiation class, sometimes distinguished by the name of the presiding circumciser. In the *bondo*, the *sowe* remains the main identifier and she serves as godmother to the girls after graduation. When giving birth, *bondo* graduates trust their *sowe* more than any other midwife, and a *sowe* is sometimes called upon to intervene where a marital problem centers on the wife's inappropriate behavior, an infraction of her *bondo* rites. Graduation from a secret society gave initiates cultural rights to every fundamental aspect of community life. For instance, they were at the forefront of the crowning or burial of a royalty, while non-initiates were strictly forbidden from such rituals. Sometimes non-initiates were forced to remain behind closed doors until ceremonies such as the burial of a royalty or coronation was completed. When a war meeting was called, only the *binga* (men who graduated from the *poro*) were allowed to attend. The idea of *binga* or *kugbe* (warrior), which is culturally appurtenant to the *poro* society, was appropriated during the Sierra Leonean civil war for the creation of the *kamajor* (hunter) civil defense force—a militia whose purpose unfortunately was no longer the killing of wild beasts, but the slaughter of other human beings, in defense of villages and towns against rebels or renegade members of the national army.

Ultimately, the role of these societies was to ensure the moral, cultural, economic, and sociopolitical survival of society. The older generation had an obligation to make sure that the next generation was prepared in the ways of their people. Such harmonious transitions were necessary to guarantee that societies endured and entered the future without anarchy.

The behavior and modus operandi of the older generation were to guide the younger generation into the future. Like many societal organizations, membership to these societies was crucial and those who failed to join were often ostracized or kidnapped and initiated. Most adolescents were enlisted for initiation by their parents because the process required a large economic investment. Parents were required to feed initiates and provide tokens for elders who presided at the initiation of their children. Some families offered food accumulated from years of harvest. Those who could not afford the cost of initiation were forced to take loans from their neighbors after their child had been kidnapped by a society. These societies were unarguably highly organized sociopolitical entities for the advancement and enforcement of cultural rites.

Initiates also received instructions on cultural taboos and prohibitions from secret societies. There were many expectations and restrictions on the lives of members of society and failure to abide by them led to a hefty fine, death, or banishment. For example, polygamy was accepted among all the ethnic groups and therefore sleeping with another man's wife was a serious offense. The extent of a man's wealth was determinable by the number of wives he married because bride price, which was payable in cattle, property, or other goods, was never cheap. When a married man died, his male relatives inherited his wives, and women who (seldom) rejected this arrangement were required to return their bride prices to their husband's relatives before accepting other suitors. Incest, or what the Mende call *simongama*, including marriages within the same clan, was forbidden. Siblings of different sexes could not sit on one another's bed. It was both a moral and ethical violation to have sexual intercourse with a girl who had not reached puberty, a pregnant woman who was not one's wife, or a nursing mother. Sex in any forest was deemed inappropriate and a man was forbidden from shaking hands with the mother of a woman with whom he was sleeping—this certainly helped expose those who were engaged in secret hanky-panky. There were many more taboos, with slight variations among different groups, and the secret societies strictly enforced them. Some secret societies still act as significant cultural and political institutions among those who practice them, excluding FGM, which has become controversial and no longer deemed necessary.

The Loko, also descendants of Mane warriors, are closest to the Mende in terms of origin and culture. A few Mane viceroys defected from Masarico's force upon arrival on the west coast of Africa and pursued their own territorial agenda on mainland Sierra Leone. The Loko are descendants of a

breakaway group of expeditionary warriors dispatched against a Mane vice-roy who went AWOL. The expeditionary warriors never returned because they encountered the Temne who provoked them into a protracted war that deterred them from returning to their coastal base. They established a settlement north of Freetown around the territory of Port Loko district. The Loko are close cultural and linguistic siblings of the Mende and Gbandi of Liberia, but their settlement among the Temne transformed them significantly. The Loko and Mende are cognizant of their common heritage and refer to each other using the mutually flirtatious but egotistically objectionable term, *Njagbe* (nephew)⁶—who would want to be relegated to the status of mere offspring of a Mane affair with the other's parent. The Loko, like the Mende, were led by illustrious warriors and also engaged in secret societies similar to those of the Mende and Temne. Since the Loko, who continue to live among the Mende, prefer to speak the language of their host and those who live among the Temne mostly communicate in Temne, their population is declining at an accelerating rate, currently representing only about two percent of the national population.

The Temne are the second largest ethnic group following the Mende. They were also influenced by conquering Mane forces. The Temne are among the oldest inhabitants of Sierra Leone, arriving as traders from the Futa Jallon region of Guinea before the fifteenth century. They established a commercial center on the northwest coast where they conducted business between Sierra Leone and Futa Jallon. A coastal people at the time, the Temne were among the first group conquered by the Mane in the 1550s. The Temne are divided into two main categories without significant distinction in language or culture. These groupings include the *Sanda* and *Yoni* Temne—the former lived in the north while the latter lived south toward the center of the country. Temne sociopolitical organizations were patrilineal, and the people were divided into approximately 25 *ebona* (clan). Each clan identified with a warrior or a royal ancestor. Smaller subgroups of the Temne were *kholifa* and *Kunike* Temne. The social prestige of the clans emanated from the bonds they created among those belonging to them.⁷ Temne political organizations were similar to those of the Mende, with the *obai* as chief. The chief was assisted in his duties by his wife and various ministers known as *kapr*. For good leadership, Temne chiefs were required to undergo a sacred ceremony known as *kantha* to sanctify them against iniquities and protect them from temptations of bad governance. The chief could not abdicate, and it was forbidden to depose a chief who had already undergone *kantha* rites because of

his semi-divine status. The *kantha* consecrated the chief and transformed him into an embodiment of the community. He was viewed as a supernatural intermediary between his predecessors and successors, and it was believed that when he died the chief returned home to Futa to join his predecessors in watching over their itinerant children.

Temne chiefs maintained close connection to their subjects through their *kaprs* and other sub-chiefs. To ensure that chiefs did not abuse their positions they were “subjected to various restrictions and taboos, and [were] expected to conduct [themselves] in conformity with the injunctions and norms of the secret society in charge of [their] position.”⁸ Unlike Mende chiefs who were expected to demonstrate military gallantry, Temne chiefs were not permitted to engage in battle because it was essential for them to die naturally so that parts of their bodies could be preserved for the installation ritual of their successors. Since it was difficult to retrieve a body on a battlefield, the Temne did not risk sending their chief to war.

The *oboma* or *Kapr Mesim* was the chief’s deputy who acted on his behalf when he was on his deathbed until the official pronouncement of death. When the chief died, the *oboma* acted as *pa rok* (regent) and presided over the inauguration of a new chief (he was custodian of the royal regalia). The *Komrabai* or *pa suba* was the principal adviser to the chief and sometimes also served as spokesman. Interestingly, one of the later *Kaprs* of the Temne seems to have acquired his title from the profession of his Western derivative, *loya* (Lawyer). Since the Temne mostly inhabited the coastal areas of Sierra Leone, they were the first to come into contact with Europeans and consequently became one of the largest groups of Sierra Leoneans to be taken across the Atlantic as slaves.

It was also Temne chiefs who sold Freetown to British abolitionists for the resettlement of free slaves at the end of slavery in England. The initial transaction between the Temne and abolitionists was the beginning of a chain of misunderstandings that transformed the new country and the name of a ruling family. Chief Naimbana of Robana, who was one of the recipients of funds from the purchase of Freetown and a friendlier chief toward the settlers, possibly had a different name when the British first arrived. The original name of the chief may have been “Bana,” but when the British saluted him and asked what his name was, the chief probably answered, “name bana,” proudly exhibiting himself as fluent in the language of the visitors. The British of course misunderstood his reply, and the Temne ruling clan forever became known as Naimbana.