

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 Sherbro and Krios combine memberships as a process for strengthening their social and kin ties. Krios are usually members of Hunting, and Sherbro 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 Sherbro 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 [*denyon*].

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 *fo lok 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, ‘*Ompa*, 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 *alen*), 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 *meresin*. 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 *meresin* that may harm them. One young man, who had decided to become a member to protect himself from Sherbro *meresin* after a conflict with a fisherman from another settlement, explained: 'Some things happen and people use *meresin* 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 *kontri* 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 *kontri* 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 trans-generational 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: '*Bralo* [brother-in-law], when will you eat that *meresin*?' or 'Eat this *meresin* now [come and join now], eat this *meresin*'. 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 *meresin*' refers to the initiation process. Eating involves trust as one ingests something foreign and potentially dangerous during initiation. But 'eating the *meresin*' 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 (Ferre 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).