A Dissenting View of Creole Culture in Sierra Leone
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Résumé
J. S. Thayer — Une approche non-conventionnelle de la culture des Créoles de Sierra Leone.
La plupart des travaux sur les Créoles (Krios) de Sierra Leone mettent l'accent sur le caractère élitaire de ce groupe. Cet article, qui repose sur une recherche de terrain, traite des paysans et des ouvriers créoles vivant dans les villages surplombant Freetown. L’auteur s'attache à étudier plusieurs aspects de la vie villageoise créole, en particulier, l'évolution des conditions économiques, la mobilité ascensionnelle des paysans et des ouvriers créoles de la dernière génération, les relations avec les non-Créoles, l'institution du « tutorat » et la notion de « créolisation » des peuples indigènes. L’enquête révèle que ces différents domaines, qui englobent de larges secteurs de la vie créole, ont été négligés par la plupart des auteurs en raison de l'attention exclusive qu'ils accordent aux cadres et à la classe dominante créoles.

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The repatriated Africans who were settled in Sierra Leone are one of the most intensely studied and well documented people on the continent of Africa, certainly in sub-Saharan Africa. From the mid-eighteenth century different philanthropic and church organizations had called for a just resolution to the problem of slavery in the British Empire. The purchase of a small piece of land on the coast of West Africa and the settlement of returned slaves there in 1787 did not end Great Britain’s involvement with its former slaves. To the contrary, the early ideal of a self-supporting, self-sustaining entity was never realized, and in 1807 this tract of land, the Freetown peninsula, became a colony, Britain’s second-oldest in Africa.

From the very beginning the settlers were under constant scrutiny, first by the Sierra Leone Company, later by Church Missionary Society missionaries and colonial officials. Still later, travellers added their descriptions of Freetown and the surrounding area.\(^1\) By the mid-nineteenth century the settlers had come to be known as Creoles (or Krios) and developed a distinctive Creole culture. They also became self-reflective, as can be seen in their thriving press and in a number of autobiographies.\(^2\) By the middle of the twentieth century the Creoles had become the object of fairly intensive scholarly investigation. Except for large ethnic groups such as the Yoruba or the Ashante it is hard to find a single ethnic group on which so much scholarly effort, mostly of an historical nature, has been expended.

One reason for this attention, I believe, has to do with the fact that the Creoles are a ‘peculiar people’ who were believed, and believed themselves, to have a

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1. The settlement (later, Colony) of Sierra Leone was a source of great interest to many people, not only because it was a philanthropic enterprise, Britain’s second colony in Africa (after South Africa) and the exotic (and medically dangerous) tropical setting. Geographers, explorers, historians, missionaries, and colonial officials all wrote accounts of Sierra Leone, particularly of Freetown. See, for example, Alldridge (1910), Blyden (1889), Clarke (1843), Dallas (1803), Falconbridge (1794), Matthews (1788), Melville (1849), Poole (1850), Shreeve (1847).

   Government sources were also prolific. One of the earliest white papers on Sierra Leone (Report of the Commissioners of Inquiry into the State of the Colony of Sierra Leone, Parliamentary Papers, vol. VII) dates from 1827.

2. On newspapers and the press in Sierra Leone, see Fyfe (1957). There were dozens of periodicals which flourished, most very briefly, between 1870 and 1910.

special place in the history of Africa. More especially, they believed themselves
to have a special place in the meeting of Europe and Africa. Whether this
motivated the Creole missionary activities, the trading ventures, their service to
the British civil service as clerks in many colonial outposts in West Africa or
whatever, it was clear that the Creoles, although not Europeans, were in some
way not African, either.

In spite of the fascinating circumstances of Creole origins, development,
cultural history and social life, much of the scholarship concerning the Creoles
seems to peel away the complexity, differences or nuances and to discuss them
in a singularly flat, one-dimensional, and, with repetition, stereotypical
fashion. The end result is a distortion of Creole culture and history.

The scholarly view of the Creoles, which has become a virtual orthodoxy,
is to see them largely as European character, Christian in religion, bourgeois
(and elitist) in culture, and reactionary in politics. Crowder (1958: 187) repeats
Victorian stereotypes of the Creole as ‘Black Englishman’ when he refers to them
as ‘...an identifiable ethnic group with closer ties to England than Africa’.3
Christopher Fyfe (1962: 144) sees even the Creole houses as reflecting bourgeois
values,4 and Abner Cohen (1981) views Creoles almost exclusively in terms of
their elite status.5 Leo Spitzer concludes that the Creoles are politically
reactionary, both with regard to the annexation of the Protectorate in 1896 and
the coming of independence,6 although he does note that there was a spectrum
of Creole opinions on these events. Arthur Porter (1963) and others analyze
Creoles as an elite, Christian, conservative group,7 although Porter is nowhere as

3. This article is an interesting distillation of what I believe are all the common
stereotypes of Creoles— which are mostly wrong or at best misleading, viz., notions
of Creoles as ‘Black Englishmen’, Creole xenophobia, Creoles as a privileged
enlightened community threatened by upcountry savages, rare intermarriage
between Creoles and upcountry people, etc.

4. I have discussed Creole architecture and house form in an article entitled ‘Creole
House Form and Culture in Sierra Leone’  (to be published in 1992 in African Arts).

5. Cohen throughout his work calls them an elite. Although he concedes that not
all members of the elite were Creole (1981: XVIII), he never considers the fact
that there might be Creoles who are not middle-class, professional people. Rural
or poor Creoles are not so much denied as ignored in his work, as they are also
in the works of Porter (1963), Cartwright (1970), and Spitzer (1974).

Cohen also repeats various egregious stereotypes of Creoles. For example,
he states (1981: 21) that all professional, elite Creoles are Christians, and then
goes on to classify non-Christian Creoles as non-Creoles because they are not
professional, elite Creoles. The illogical nature of the argument aside, it provides
a thin and one-dimensional understanding of Creole history, society and culture.

6. Spitzer (1974: ch. 3), in which he discussed Creole ‘xenophobia’ towards the
aborigines, and also towards the Syrian/Lebanese people (ibid: ch. 5).

7. Throughout his work Porter (1963) like Cohen later, sees the Creoles as an
elite and their recent history as a threat to that elite status. Some withdraw
in horror from public life as the upcountry people take over, some accept Creole-
tribal equality, and some even throw off their Creole heritage and identity and
become tribal people (ibid.: 71-72); but nowhere does he discuss poor or rural
Creoles who, as this article attempts to show, participate with the countryman
(a member of one of the interior tribal groups) in his upward mobility in the
generations following World War II and Independence.

Wyst (1989) represents the most recent book on the Creoles. Although he
sees them as a synthesis of African and Western cultures, they are still presented
dogmatic or extreme in his analysis as some others, particularly Barbara Harrell-Bond, who regards the Creoles through the Marxist lens of elite oppressive class, at once the agents of the colonial oppressor and the oppressors of the indigenous Africans.

Although it may not be a standard scholarly tool, I would like to caricature this reigning orthodoxy of Sierra Leone studies. I do this with no disrespect intended, but merely to sum up this position and set it in bold relief so that my own point of view (shared by a few others) will in turn be clearer. It would go something like this:

The Creoles were a settler people repatriated to Africa from Great Britain and various parts of the New World, their ranks later swelled by the Liberated Africans (slaves from ships interdicted as they left West African coastal waters). The early repatriated settlers' association with their former masters' (British) culture impressed them deeply—the market economy, education, the Christian religion, and whatever else comprised the notion of 'civilization' for them. When they returned to Africa, almost all of them having been born in the New World, they regarded themselves as the vanguard of civilization on the dark continent. During the nineteenth century, with the encouragement of the colonial officials, the Creoles became the dominant ethnic group in Sierra Leone, in commerce as traders and shopkeepers in Freetown and the interior, and as government clerks and missionary clergy throughout Sierra Leone and, indeed, throughout all of West Africa. At the turn of the century the Creoles were preeminent in commerce, the professions (medicine, law, education, the clergy, and the civil service). It would not be until after World War II that Creoles occupied the very top of the professions or the civil service, for these posts were usually reserved for British colonial officials, but they were certainly far ahead of any other ethnic group at the turn of the century.

as a homogeneous group with uniform (and elitist) attitudes, opinions, and lifestyles, as can be seen in his remark about '... lawyers, medical doctors, academics and other similar social groups [sic] can be seen on festal occasions proudly and enthusiastically "clapping" or "singing" with their more plebeian brethren behind their "devils"' (ibid.: 124). Although he claims to see the Creoles in a more modern light (e.g., as an ethnic group), he still treats them as an economic elite group instead, and he compounds the errors of the past by dismissing non-elite Creoles as 'plebeian', thereby participating in the same haughty snobbishness that has over the years brought Creoles into such disrepute.

8. Harrell-Bond's views seem to have gotten more and more extreme. In a 1975 article she discusses problems of marriage in which conflicts reveal the strains of trying to conform to an ideal (monogamous/Christian) form of marriage. Like previous authors, though, she looks only at upper-class Creoles. For example, her contention that civil marriages are not real marriages to the Creole and that only church marriages are valid is one that is flatly contradicted by my data, in which many Creoles because of their poverty put off a church ceremony and accompanying receptions and dinners until much later, but everyone regards their marriage as 'valid', even though they may not even have had a civil ceremony.

In her 1981 article, however, she has adopted a Marxist point of view in which she sees morality (in this case anti-abortion laws) used to 'preserve or enhance the dominance and prestige of ... [Creole] lifestyle' (Harrell-Bond 1981: 3). I found the article illogical and dominated by ideology rather than fact. Besides large factual or logical lacunae in this article, it, too, had irritating minor untruths, viz., the howler that the common bond among Liberated Africans was Islam! (ibid.: 13).
However, around World War I all of this began to come unravelled for the Creoles. Their economic eminence was slowly taken over by Lebanese/Syrian immigrants, and more and more the 'native' peoples of the interior began to demand, and get, with the open assistance of the British colonial officials, opportunities that had once been exclusively reserved for Creoles. The Creoles stubbornly resisted this diminution of their power and status, but little by little 'native' peoples, too, became professionals and civil servants. Even before independence in 1961 the numerical status of Creoles (3% of Sierra Leone's population) rendered them politically impotent and irrelevant. All their privileges and most of their influence have been swept away, leaving them the option of integrating themselves into the new order or of emigrating.

I believe that this account summarizes, in broad outline, the orthodox understanding of Sierra Leone Creoles. In this paper I hope to correct what I regard as two fundamental errors of Creole studies: first, that it focuses only on elite Creoles and, second, in doing so not only ignores lower-class Creoles but also fails to examine Creoles as an ethnic group. This last point is the most important, for inasmuch as scholars focus on upper-class, elite Creoles, as do most of the modern writers, they imply that 'Creole' is a class designation. This paper focuses on lower-class, rural Creoles and emphasizes that Creole society has different classes. I hope the paper will help to correct the unbalanced and egregiously lopsided works that now make up the bulk of the literature on the Creoles.

My perspective in this paper is not altogether novel, for it has been taken up by a few researchers on Creoles and Sierra Leone. I hope to draw on them to bolster my claim that Creole history and culture must be seen and analyzed in a very different way. Perhaps the most significant work is John Peterson's _Province of Freedom_, a history of the Freetown peninsula. This is without doubt the best work on the early history of Freetown (1787-1870). Not only does Peterson present the historical data concisely, but he has a good eye for biographical detail in social context which makes the work useful to anthropologists and other social scientists. The complexity and diversity of early Freetown are pictured succinctly and elegantly. Other useful sources which support my point of view are mentioned in the notes.

This paper is based on library research I have done on the Creoles and also on the fieldwork I conducted among the mountain villages from June to December 1984. I had conducted fieldwork in Sierra Leone before, from 1979 to 1980 among the Susu people of Kambia District, so I was fluent in Krio, as the creole English is called, a language which is native to the Creoles and the _lingua franca_ for the rest of Sierra Leone. For my Creole fieldwork I lived in Gloucester village, one of the five 'mountain villages' in the hills above Freetown.

Creole villages, and the mountain villages in particular, were deliberately established in the first quarter of the nineteenth century for the expanding population of Freetown, particularly for the Liberated Africans. The bulk of

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9. **Richardson & Collins (1952)** is an excellent survey/census of the rural area of the Freetown peninsula, discussing not only culture and society, but even taking an inventory of farm animals! Other useful works, although somewhat minor in scale, include **Nicholls (1960)**, **Wyse & Eyle (1979)**, **Thomas (1971)**, **Luke (1939)**, **Peterson (1970)**, **Skinner & Harrell-Bond (1977)**.
he early inhabitants probably came from the Nigerian coastal area, as can be
gathered from early missionary accounts in which Yoruba was reportedly spoken
in the villages, and in Gloucester village to this day one part of the village is
known as Aku (Yoruba) town and another as Ibo town.

However, all Creole villages have had large numbers of more recent immigrants
from the hinterland of Sierra Leone. These tribal peoples, often called ‘country-
man’ by the Creole, are now the majority in most of the villages. In the mountain
villages the numerically dominant tribal group is the Loko.

This paper is based on several assertions, some of which are derived from
the works of Peterson, Skinner and Harrell-Bond, et al. and some of which are
based on my own research in Gloucester village. First, Creole culture is a hybrid
culture, derived from European and African sources, the latter being either from
Sierra Leone itself or from those who were settled among them (the Liberated
Africans). From the very beginning there was a high degree of contact between
Creoles and non-Creoles. The Creoles were not a unified group in any overtly
ideological sense until the mid-nineteenth century. It remained ethnically and
religiously diverse for the first two or three generations and, indeed, although
it is usual to think of Creoles as Christian, a significant minority is, and always
has been, Muslim. A second point to be made is that not only was this population
diverse ethnically and religiously, but it was also economically stratified.
Although the original settlers may have started on a more or less equal footing,
different social classes soon emerged among them. Third, within these social
classes were (and are right up to the present) Creole people who might be classified
as working-class or lower-class. These lower-class Creoles are frequently, though
by no means exclusively, rural. It should also be pointed out that rural Creoles
are not all poor, particularly in the modern period, and from the very beginning
of the mountain villages there were economic differences among the villagers.

Thus, this paper is a look at Creole culture from the bottom up—the
perspective of (relatively) poor, rural Creoles and how they cope in modern Sierra
Leone, how they interact with their (often non-Creole) neighbors, and how they
maintain their Creole-ness.

Let me anticipate one possible objection to this paper. It could be main-
tained—and I would not dispute the point—that some Creoles were (and perhaps
are) an elite. True enough. But the persistent depiction of Creoles as wealthy,
upper-class merchants, civil servants or professional people is misleading. There
were (and are) lower- or lower middle-class Creoles, and the study of these people
will bring us, I believe, to a fuller understanding of Sierra Leone Creoles.

Creole Village Life

Any study of Creole history would have to take into account a distinction between
the city life of Freetown and village life in the Freetown peninsula. As mentioned
above, most studies of Creoles focus almost exclusively on Freetown. However,
my own point of view is that Creole village life is worth studying because it is
different from Freetown life, but, paradoxically, is also an integral part of
Creole life and history.

The Creole village is not a mere collection of households, an amalgam of
individuals or families, but is a neighbourhood, a community, a socio-economic-
political unit. The village is united through a sense of historical identity, broad and deep kinship ties, church affiliation, self-help groups, and a general interdependence of its members. Villagers I knew and interviewed expressed a deep affection for their village, for its physical features, its buildings and fields as well as for the people of the village. Further, they differentiated themselves from city people and the hustle and bustle of city life, and believed themselves to be privileged to be delivered from such an environment. Another interesting feature of Creole villages is the part they play in general Creole ideology. Any Creole, no matter how citified, is proud to point to one of the rural villages as his ancestral home. Furthermore, he will invariably claim that true Creole culture and 'deep Krio' language can still be found only in the rural villages.

While the village is somewhat removed from urban life, it cannot be isolated from the broad stream of Creole history. The mountain villages, along with other villages close to Freetown, such as Kissy and Wellington or Lumley, have had a long and close relationship with the city. From the very beginning the villages have served as commuter communities for some who commuted either to school or a job. This is not a recent phenomenon. Because of a long and arduous commute, the temptation has always been, particularly for those in the mountain villages who had the economic resources, to decamp to Freetown permanently. In fact, the missionaries who founded these villages in the early nineteenth century had to use a certain amount of coercion to keep the original settlers in the mountain villages.

It cannot be assumed, then, that these villages are isolated from Creole-Freetown-Sierra Leone life. Nor can it be assumed that the inhabitants are, or were, uneducated or backward. Some of the most illustrious Creoles have come from the mountain villages. Africanus Horton, in the nineteenth century, and Davidson Nicol, the first Sierra Leonean Vice-Chancellor of the University of Sierra Leone, in the twentieth century, are examples of distinguished native-born residents of the mountain villages. Examples from my fieldnotes show that teachers, civil servants, businessmen, and clergymen are to be found throughout the mountain villages. Also, quite a few families, whose members were originally natives of the village, have moved back to the village after the breadwinner has retired.

The point I want to make about the Creole villages in relation to Creole history and culture is that they are different, but not isolated; set apart, but not alien; distinctive, but not anomalous.

Economic life

In taking life histories and genealogies in the mountain villages, I found much interesting material from the older generation. In 1984 I interviewed a number of people whose age was, on the average, slightly over seventy, which would place their births around World War I. Almost without exception their education was very limited, rarely going beyond primary school. The most common reasons given for this were lack of money and unavailability of secondary education. From a wider perspective this lack of schooling might have been encouraged by the onset of the Great Depression. A depressed economy might have forced children to forego the luxury of further education in order to help provide for
their families by some sort of menial employment. Informants resisted this explanation, saying that this limit of primary education had existed in their parents’ and grandparents’ time, and it was the rare individual who could afford to go on to secondary school or who had the superior intelligence and discipline to win a scholarship.

The jobs which these older people managed to work at were generally skilled jobs—carpenters, masons, blacksmiths or fitters (auto mechanics). Some were employed by the Department of Public works, others worked for small private businesses, and a few were even self-employed. Generally, they were ‘blue-collar’ workers, either skilled or semi-skilled. Many of them had been apprenticed as youths to skilled workers in Freetown. Around the age of fourteen or so a young boy would be taken by his father to a friend of the family or some other skilled craftsman who had agreed to take the boy as an apprentice. According to my informants, they spent from five to eight years as an apprentice before they were allowed to go out on their own. They were often not paid for their labor, but, as in most apprenticeship arrangements, the apprentices were given room and board in lieu of any salary. This arrangement is similar to the ward system, which I will discuss in a later part of the paper.

Among younger Creole people the trend in education and employment was quite different. For those born after World War II schooling through all or part of the secondary level became the norm for boys and girls. This trend has intensified since independence in 1961. For these younger people educational opportunities were increased not so much by greater prosperity which allowed their parents to pay for school fees, books, and uniforms, but by an increase in the number of high schools in the city. Simply put, more spaces became available for more applicants.

As a result of these expanded educational opportunities, young men and women have gone on to take ‘white-collar’ jobs as civil servants, teachers, or office workers. Almost all of the younger generation have salaried jobs.

There have been several long-term consequences of these developments for village life. First, women who used to center their lives around the household now commute, along with their menfolk, to Freetown for salaried jobs. In former times women who stayed home not only kept house, but they also ran the small farming operations (gardens, domestic animals, or orchards) of the household. Furthermore, they often sold vegetables or fruits at market stalls or from door to door in the city and suburbs. These cottage businesses have almost entirely disappeared among Creole women. They still survive among the Loko women of the mountain villages; in terms of class, Loko women are but one step and a generation or two behind the Creoles.

Now, it should be pointed out that in the past Creole women from these villages were well-known as traders in the markets of Freetown.10 Also, earlier in this century Creole women from the mountain villages took in washing from

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10. Elaine Frances White wrote a very interesting dissertation on Creole women traders (1978). This work supports much of the approach of this paper. In addition, she adds much to the literature that significantly enhances Creoles studies, particularly in the notion that ‘occupation became the important issue in determining ethnic identity’ (ibid.: viii). That is, when an upcountry woman came to Freetown and became a trader, she ipso facto became a Creole.
the city (perhaps this was due to an irregular water supply in the city itself). My point is that the jobs that women held in the past required no formal education and could be done at home (where they could watch over their children, gardens, and animals) or at least could be done on their own time. Now that women hold salaried jobs they have far less control over their time. The agricultural tasks they performed in the past are generally not done any more unless there is someone (a grown but unmarried daughter, an elderly parent) to take care of the gardens, orchards and animals. Most of the fields outside the compounds are rented to Loko men and women. As for animals, many Creole families keep none at all, or maybe only a few chickens.

A further consequence of this modern, higher status for women is that the family, with two salaried incomes, is now more affluent. Not only has the village become more and more of a commuting center, a bedroom community, for the Creoles, but because of the onerous nature of the daily commute and the lack of diversions in these quiet mountain villages, many Creole families have moved to Freetown permanently, renting out their houses. The orientation to Freetown is now almost complete. After all, if the advantages of village life (its isolation, the ability to raise vegetables and fruits or to keep farm animals) are spurned or are regarded as nuisances, then it will not be long until these two-salaried families move.

For many of them village life has indeed become onerous. Constant commuting up and down the hills—often on foot because of unreliable bus or taxi service—is a typical complaint. The remoteness of the village is seen now as a disadvantage, whereas in previous generations such isolation was seen as a respite from the hustle and bustle of the city. My landlady boasted that her father, a rather successful salaried man, walked every day to Freetown to work, but no matter how late he stayed, even if he attended a Masonic lodge meeting that lasted late into the night, he always came up the hill to sleep in the village. Although Creoles usually own their houses in the village (and thus pay no rent), with extra income they can now afford to rent in Freetown. There they are near the shops, cinemas, schools, etc. For modern, educated Creoles the villages of their ancestors have become less and less the focus and center of their lives.

The conclusion that I draw from these observations is that rural, relatively poor Creoles are now undergoing, and have been undergoing since World War II, a rapid rise in social and economic status. It has generally been assumed, and certainly emphasized, by writers on Sierra Leone that for decades upcountry people have flocked to Freetown to make their fortune, but it should be emphasized that rural Creoles are also modern-day beneficiaries of expanded educational and economic opportunities. The fact that they were Creoles or the fact that they lived in the environs of Freetown made little difference in times past. Only recently have they had the opportunity to advance, and at this late date it has been an advance made not in spite of, or in opposition to, the ‘countryman’, but together with him.

**Ethnic Relations**

This mention of the ‘countryman’ (the Krio term the Creole uses to refer to tribal peoples from the former Protectorate) is a theme that I want to address in this section and, to a lesser extent, in the final section of the paper.
It should be pointed out that from the beginning the mountain villages were always multi-ethnic in their make-up. Although they are known as 'Creole' villages, such a term was unknown to them in their early history, and the ethnic homogeneity implied in such a phrase was also foreign to them. Although many Liberated Africans came from the coast of Nigeria and Cameroon, some came from as far away as Angola in the south and Senegal in the north. They were liberated in Freetown and settled here and there. As I mentioned earlier, parts of Gloucester village were named after the concentration of different Nigerian groupings in the village. Both Skinner and Peterson have ably demonstrated\(^{11}\) that inter-ethnic relations were a fact of Creole life from the beginning, not only inter-ethnic mixing among the early settlers, but between the settlers and the native inhabitants of the peninsula and the interior.

My views, which are based on both library and field research, conflict with the standard scholarship on Creoles which sees \textit{inter alia} that the Creoles, as a homogeneous ethnic group, had, until recent times, a very low opinion of the 'countryman'. Towards the natives the Creoles were said to be reactionary and exclusive.\(^{12}\) I found the situation, on the ethnographic level, to be both more complex and more subtle.

As mentioned above, the Creole mountain villages are not, and have never been, ethnically homogeneous. The other ethnic group in the mountain villages is the Loko people. In Sierra Leone this group is rather small and, in historical times, insignificant. They now occupy one or two small chiefdoms between Temne and Limba country. According to the recollections of my older informants, Lokos started to come to the mountain villages around World War I. They came primarily as servants, farmhands, garden boys and general laborers in the employ of the Creoles. As is often the case, when the employer mentioned to an employee that he needed another servant or garden boy, the employee would volunteer a relative who would then join him in the village. After a while these Lokos were given, or even bought, parcels of land on which they built houses and thereby became permanent residents. Some parts of the villages are still known as Loko Town or New Site, indicating the newer settlement areas. Lokos also live in the older parts of town, but there they are renters rather than property owners. Lokos now constitute a majority in the mountain villages.

The stereotype of Creole relations with the 'countryman' is one in which the Creole holds himself aloof. What we see in the villages is that the countryman has become indispensable to the Creoles. As the rural Creoles have become more educated and have taken salaried, professional jobs, the Lokos have become the carpenters, farmers, masons, blacksmiths, tailors and laundry workers. Creole life in the villages would be almost insupportable without this infrastructure of skilled Loko labor. Let me give but one example. Farming among the Creoles has almost vanished. There are a few Creole farmers left, but by and large they have given up agriculture, even if they manage to keep a kitchen garden.

\(^{11}\) \textsc{Skinner & Harrell-Bond} (1977: 306-308, also 316-317) \textsc{Peterson} (1969: ch. 8).
\(^{12}\) \textsc{Spitzer} (1974: 76-77, 81). \textsc{Richardson & Collins} (1952: 194) also note a certain intolerance among Creoles. \textsc{Spitzer} (1974: 220) does note, though, that Creole attitudes towards the 'natives' have been various at different times, as does \textsc{Porter} (1963: 71-72).
a few chickens, and may be a pig or two. Because of their jobs in Freetown for both men and women, serious agriculture can no longer even be a possibility for them unless they hire Loko labor or, if they have no interest in agriculture, lease their fields to Loko farmers. Both of these options have been taken up by Creole landowners, and without Lokos to do the farming much of the land would have gone to waste and reverted to forest. In fact, enough land has reverted to forest over the past seventy-five years that woodcutting (and selling firewood in Freetown) has become a significant cottage industry for the Lokos.

The Lokos in the mountain villages are a generation or two behind the Creoles. They came to the mountain villages as unskilled servant labor, and they have slowly acquired rudimentary education and skills. When Lokos work at jobs outside the village (and many Gloucester Lokos work at Fourah Bay College), they tend to hold jobs as gardeners, messengers, janitors, watchmen—precisely the kinds of jobs that rural Creoles had up until a generation or two ago.

Will the Lokos and their children follow in the footsteps of the Creoles? There is every indication that Lokos fully realize and appreciate the importance of education, and their children are well represented among those going to high school and even to vocational college, teachers’ training college, and university. Like the other ‘upcountry’ ethnic groups, they seem intent on making their way upward in the social and economic life of modern Sierra Leone.

In the life of the village itself, however, the Creoles continue to run the town. In spite of the Loko majority in virtually all of the mountain villages, there is still a sense that the Creoles are the owners of the land. The mayor (or chairman) of the villages is invariably Creole, as is the parliamentarian representing the mountain district (which also includes Kortright and Fourah Bay College).

Each ethnic group conducts much of its affairs separately—the Lokos generally attend to their own internal affairs under the guidance of their headman—but as a town the Creoles provide leadership and cohesiveness. This is done in two ways. First, the Creoles hold the principal civil service jobs in the villages. In Gloucester the village chairman, the postman (who also serves as the official recorder of births and deaths), and virtually all the teachers and the principal of the primary school are Creoles. The main churches of the mountain villages are Anglican, and the clergymen are predominantly Creole, as are the lay readers. In Gloucester the Loko Christians formed their own church, where the service is in Loko and the ‘clergy’ are drawn from the congregation.

The second way in which the Creoles dominate the town is through voluntary societies. These committees have various names, and seem to change name and sometimes function from generation to generation, but some of the current ones were Village Committee, Committee of Gentlemen, and The Commoners’ Society. These organizations are essentially self-help groups which do work on behalf of the whole village. They undertake projects such as road repair, cutting brush from paths, cleaning the graveyard for New Year’s Day and Holy Week (times when people come to the graveyard to make offerings at the grave of their ancestors), arranging for graves to be dug, etc.

Now, it should be emphasized that these committees are open to all, and that Lokos frequently participate in them. But the leadership and the majority of the regular members are all Creole. More importantly, the motivation for
this communal self-help comes from the Creoles. There are a few key Creole figures who consistently figure out what needs to be done, collect the necessary tools, set the date for the project, publish the date around the village, and buttonhole individuals to participate.

The ethos of the village Creoles seems to be 'to whom much is given, much shall be expected'. Although they are at the top of the social hierarchy in the village (and everyone, Creole and Loko alike, seems to recognize this), Creoles realize that their responsibilities are also very great. Some Creoles in the mountain villages have established self-help organizations primarily for the benefit of the Loko people. To give one example, there is a preschool or nursery school in Leicester which is primarily for Loko children so that they will be better prepared for primary school. Also, classes are conducted for those (again, predominantly Loko) children who have started school at a late age. People who do such things sometimes rely on public money to set up these schools, or on charitable foundations (such as Save the Children, Rotary International, etc.), or even on private donations. My point is that it is the Creole villager who feels this impulse, perhaps noblesse oblige, to help his fellow man, to uplift the countryman, or to make life better for everyone in the village, rich or poor, Creole or Loko.13

My research shows that even the lower-class rural Creole shares with his upper-class cultural compatriot a sense of cultural superiority over the 'countryman'. However, because of his economic position and the fact of his dependence on Loko villagers, the Creole has practical day-to-day interaction with the 'countryman' that makes ethnic relations in the rural villages far more subtle and multidimensional than might be imagined from reading the standard studies of Creole culture or history.

Wards and Creolization

One of the most interesting aspects of the sociology of the family in Sierra Leone is that of wards. This custom has had a long history in Sierra Leone, among Creoles and indigenous peoples alike. Briefly put, a child may be placed with another family for a period of time. It is understood by both parties that there are certain duties and obligations on the part of the child and on the part of the host family. The host family typically agrees to pay for the ward's school fees, to give him room and board, and to oversee his moral and religious training. In return, the ward agrees to do any jobs around the house or in the gardens that he is asked to do and, in general, to be obedient, respectful and well-mannered. This relationship between the ward and the family may last a few months or many years.

Before I discuss the custom (or institution) or wardship as I found it in the mountain villages, I would like to make a few preliminary comments. First of all, wards are not servants, although they do a good many chores before and after school and on weekends. Rural Creoles use to have 'month boys' who came to work for them, so called because they were paid by the month. The first Lokos to come to the mountain villages came as month boys. Month boys were paid, housed and fed, but wards are raised and educated by the Creoles.

13. Porter (1963: 103-104) has an interesting comment about Creoles and non-Creoles.
Another point is that the institution of wardship is consistently either misrepresented or underemphasized in the literature. At best, comments about wards and guardians are harsh and one-sided. Dulcie R. Nicolls, in an undergraduate honors thesis (1960: 7), writes of wards that they ‘. . . . were rarely treated as members of the family. Most of them did hard and mean jobs, and sometimes waited on the children of their guardians’. Spitzer (1974: 81) dismisses the whole relationship as ‘paternalistic’.

What strikes me as odd about these representations is that the institution of wardship is not, and never has been, limited to the Creoles. My earlier research among the Susu shows that this institution has existed among upcountry people for many generations. Furthermore, wardship is ubiquitous among the Creoles, past and present; it is a very important part of the sociology of the Creole family. But if it is so oppressive for the wards, why does the institution persist? I hope to show in later discussion how a broad sociological understanding of this institution might help correct the standard misrepresentations.

Third, it should be pointed out that Creole wardship was somewhat different from the wardship among upcountry people. Creole wardship was unique in the sense that they took children as wards from among their own people and from upcountry people. Upcountry people usually took relatives as wards—a young child would be sent to live with his uncle or grandparents. The Creoles often accepted strangers as wards. They may have known the family of the ward, but they were not related by blood or marriage.

One reason I became interested in this aspect of their life was due to the fact that almost every family I interviewed had at that time, or had had, a ward. Some elderly couples had had four or five wards with them throughout their married lives. Sometimes they had only one at a time, or sometimes they might have been able to keep two or three simultaneously. Another reason for my interest was that I kept meeting Lokos in the mountain villages who had been wards, and I became interested by their accounts and perceptions of their life with Creole families.

One question I raised was why Creoles took and continue to take, wards. In answering this, Creoles tended to give two answers, often in combination. First, they say, labor is short and they need some help in their houses and gardens. Second, raising a ward is giving the child a chance to learn something of Western civilization and of the Christian gospel. In other words, the explanations are both selfish and altruistic.

In a broader sociological perspective, the requirement for labor is certainly a real one. In the mountain villages today there are few modern conveniences. Electricity is unreliable at best and quite expensive, and water is piped into compounds rather than into the house itself. There are exceptions to this; some of the newer houses of wealthier inhabitants have an indoor water supply, and some of the poorer inhabitants have to walk down the street to a common water tap. As a rule, however, laundry must be done by hand, water drawn in buckets, and housework done in a traditional, laborious fashion.

Creoles in the mountain villages have always considered themselves to be good Christian people, and the monogamous form of Christian marriage is strictly observed. This is not to say that many of the men do not have girlfriends and even parallel families in the city, but the legal form of monogamous marriage is observed. In Creole families, even large ones, labor for the household is almost
always in short supply. Upcountry people live in compounds with polygynous, extended families. Labor is always available in such compounds, but not so for the village Creole. Parenthetically, it might be interesting to test the hypothesis that labor-starved village Creoles take wards by comparing their situation with that of upper-class Creoles in Freetown. Many amenities and labor-saving conveniences are available to Freetown Creoles. If they continue to take wards, what is *their* motivation?

A related question might be raised about why country people give their children to Creoles as wards. Here the answers were usually very practical. Since the country people were often quite poor but ambitious for their children, they saw wardship as a chance to get an education for their children and as a way for them to ‘go bifo’ (i.e., get ahead or be successful). It must also not be forgotten that many country people still regard the Creole as civilized and his life as worthy of emulation, and wardship is a good way to inculcate these civilized values in their children.

From a historical and sociological perspective I would say that the institution of ward and guardian is, among other things, one way in which country people became Creoles. Even if they retain their name and their ethnic identity, Creole ethnic values and identity pervade their lives, often in ways they cannot even articulate. For others, the change in their social identity is complete.

For example, one resident of Gloucester related that he was a Susu from Lungi (a town across the bay from Freetown). However, he didn’t understand a word of Susu. His parents had brought him as a young child over to the village to be a ward and in the intervening forty years or so he had forgotten his mother tongue. Another example I might use is the example of an elegantly dressed young man who would, from time to time, drive up to Gloucester to go to church (at St Andrew’s Anglican Church). He brought his own grosgrain prayer book-hymnal and afterwards would sit on the verandah of the village shop and drink a beer or two, chatting with any of the villagers who would drop by or join him for a beer. When I asked who he was, I was told that he was Mr Maligi (notice here the upcountry name), who had been a ward of Mammy so-and-so (long deceased). In other words, in both cases the process of creolization seems to be complete and total.

There is a broad spectrum of this process of creolization. I have mentioned the more extreme cases, but I also found cases in which, because of the familiarity and affection that had grown up between the guardian and the ward, the ward had become a kind of surrogate child, even if he kept his own name and ethnic identity. One ward of Loko origin, now an adult with a family of his own (living in the Loko section of the village), frequently takes his family over to visit his ‘mother’ and ‘father’, sits with them in church, and continues to help them around the house. In another case, a Creole widow died and left her house to the ward who had lived with her for years and had taken care of her in her old age.

At the other end of this spectrum it is possible to find ex-wards who have somewhat bitter memories of their wardship, either because of the hard work, scanty food, or superior attitude of the Creoles. Even if they resent this experience deeply, they have all been influenced by it, whether it is reflected in their practice of monogamy, their religiosity, or their belief in the value of education. Regardless of their attitude, intimate proximity to Creoles has changed and even transformed their worldview.
I want to add a final note about creolization in the village context. If an upcountry child were to be placed in an upper-class, urban Creole family, the process of creolization would be more difficult. That is to say, the upcountry child placed among people who are college-educated, perhaps with advanced degrees, perhaps from universities overseas, would feel that the gulf between him and his guardians was too great. The guardians would keep him until he finished his secondary education, but it would be very unlikely for them to support him through a university education. Because of this insuperable gap, there would be little impetus for a ward to try to become a Creole like his guardians.

In the village, however, the general standard of living and educational achievements are much lower. There the Creole guardians might be housewives, skilled tradesmen, minor civil servants, or primary school teachers. These ranks are all obtainable in present-day Sierra Leone. Guardians in the village present a model for upcountry people to emulate, and it is perfectly reasonable for the ward to believe that he can become as educated, if not more so, than his guardian. The village environment is perhaps the most conducive environment in which this unconscious creolization might take place, because there the constraints of status, class, wealth and hierarchy are at a minimum.

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In this paper I have tried to examine three areas of Creole social life (Creole upward mobility, ethnic relations, and wardship) that are prominent features of Creole village life, but have been almost totally ignored in Creole studies. In general, Creole studies have ignored working-class or rural Creoles, focusing instead on professional, upper-class, urban Creoles. As I stated earlier, I think this unfortunate for several reasons, not only because it excludes a goodly portion of the Creole population, but also because it ignores Creole ethnic life in its diversity and unity. By focusing on the diversity and unity of Creole life, as seen through some of the life experiences of working-class or rural Creoles, we can begin to see Creole culture, history, and ethnic values in ways that are far more subtle and intricate than most of the scholarly literature on Creoles leads us to believe.

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