

“To Bo and Back”

A Diary by

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July-August 1981

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INTRODUCTION

Bo is a town of about 50,000 people in Sierra Leon which in turn has a population around 3, 5 million and which borders with Guinea and Liberia on the West Africa coast; from this region most of the slaves that were taken to England and America originated and to this region some of them returned 200 years ago. The repatriated slaves bore the English names that their masters had given them and even today most of the Krios who live in the coastal region around the capital, Freetown, have kept their English names; Bo, on the other hand, is the capital of the Southern Province of the country which is populated mostly the Mende tribe and which has maintained many of its ancient traditions and customs. The origins of the name Sierra Leon date back to the late fifteenth century when Portuguese sailors baptized the region Serra da Leon (The Lion Mountains) because the rumbling thunder in the impressive mountain range on the coast reminded them of roaring lions. Sierra Leon gained its independence in 1961 under Sir Milton Margai and on his death his brother Albert succeeded him until 1967 when he was defeated in the general election by the leader of the opposition Siaka Stevens; a brief period of military rule followed before Albert Margai surrendered power to his rival who was acclaimed as a national hero full of grandiose promises. In 1971 the country became a republic and in 1978 a one-party state under the eternal President, Siaka Stevens whose term of office is due to be renewed in 1985; elections for a new Parliament, or rather “ selections”, have already been postponed a few times but are promised for the end of this year.

I first became interested in Sierra Leon through my studies of Economics and Politics at Warwick University where I completed my degree course this year; subsequently I discovered that the nearby town of Leamington Spa wished to link with the town of Bo, and when it became clear that I could help the link and it could help me, my mind was made up to go. I had hoped that my University would assist me financially to carry out some studies in the region since each year it distributes a few grants for such purpose. Unfortunately at the final stage of selection I was told by a Professor of Biochemistry that in his opinion it would be far more sensible to send the money directly to the country rather than give it to me so in the end neither of those things was done. Such an attitude, namely that all problems can be bought off and solved with money, has done as much harm as good to Third World countries, and I hope this view which is still predominant among the majority of those who live in “ developed” countries will rapidly be made to change.

Having borrowed the money necessary for my trip, I went to extreme lengths to find the cheapest route between Milan, where I live, and Freetown, with the result that I flew from Milan to Lagos via Sofia at a student rate with Balkan Airlines and on from there to Freetown on a normal flight. I set off on July 17th and returned on September 15th 1981, and during the whole of that period I kept a diary which on my return I typed out with virtually no modifications. The only addresses I had in my pocket when I left were those of 2 people in Bo (to whom I had written to ask their help in finding me somewhere to live during my stay), and of the various missions of the Xaverian Fathers in Sierra Leone: these names and addresses were to prove extremely valuable, and I would like to express my deep gratitude to all those whom I met and who helped me during my 7 weeks in the country.

Finally I would like to thank Jane Knight, Secretary of the One World Link in Leamington Spa, and Ian Campbell and Peter Burnell, 2 Lecturers of Politics at Warwick University, who between them introduced me to Sierra Leone and gave me moral support in getting “to Bo and Back” on my own.

The following is a brief outline of the One World Link which is a venture I’m sure is destined to succeed.

Background.

Throughout the 1970’s there was an increasing awareness of the increasing gap between the rich western world and the poor “Third World” now popularly known as the North and South. This awareness grew at the same time as people in Britain were being told that they were getting poorer.

There are many books and documents which describe the desperation of millions in the developing world. However, it was found by the small number of groups in Britain who were trying to awaken the public to this desperation that they were up against a barrier of ignorance. The whole of our education system tends to ignore the rest of the world, and because the need for change strikes at our life styles and at the foundations of our economic system, most people in our society prefer to remain ignorant of the situation.

Various organizations have long existed which take an interest in the Third World; however, experience has shown that the best way of understanding the culture and life styles of people in other parts of the world is by getting to know them personally and visiting their homes.

The foundation of the One World Link

In October 1979, Frank Judd, a former Minister of State in the Foreign office, addressed a One World meeting in Leamington Spa, and his urgent plea was to take notice of the need for change in order to promote justice in the world. This led to the suggestion that a town or district link with an equivalently sized community in the Third World should be established and volunteers were asked to form a committee to investigate the possibilities. Throughout 1980 various activities took place and research into existing Third World links was made. In fact only 2 others in the country have survived (neither large scale) and only 2 out of 900 recorded twinning are known to have been with Third World countries.

The criteria used for choosing an area were that it should:

- a) be within reasonable distance of the U.K
- b) have English as a main language
- c) match approximately in size and population
- d) have a low Gross Domestic Product per capital
- e) have some current contacts living there.

The Bo Region of Sierra Leone was finally chosen on the recommendation of Michael Harris, the Overseas Director of OXFAM.

The next task was to seek approval from the local community and on October 24th 1980 the One World Link between Warwick District and the Bo Region was launched in the presence of the High Commissioner of Sierra Leone and local dignitaries as well as doctors, teachers and other members of the community.

Aims

The aim of the OWL is to give a better mutual understanding of the hopes, fears and problems of the two vastly different communities. The understanding will be promoted by exchanging visits,

correspondence, and by talks and exhibitions in the two countries. The main emphasis will be on contact of ordinary people with each other in the home and in the work place. It is proposed to further these contacts through schools and hospitals as well as churches and businesses and the foundations have been laid for a fruitful and lasting link. A crucial task will be to break down myths and misinformation on both sides and to establish an area of common interest that with time can be widened; to achieve this goal certain realism will be necessary so that from modest, unambitious and unspecified beginnings the great potential for mutual communication will be exploited to the full. Although contact between the 2 communities will be the priority it is also hoped that medicines and school books will be sent to Bo and perhaps local produce such as Gara cloth could be sent to Leamington; as long as a direct link between the two towns can be maintained the usual risks involved in sending aid and contributions to Ministry in Freetown will not be run”.

Emphasis throughout has been placed on the word “link” rather than “Twinning” because the fundamental aim is for a new line of communication to be established and because.

“The Art of Awareness is identifying yourself with the hopes, dreams, fears and longings of others. It is learning to interpret their thoughts, feelings and moods. It is keeping mentally alert to all that goes on around you: it is being curious, observant, and imaginative, that you may build an ever increasing fund of knowledge of the universe. It is striving to stretch the range of eye and ear; it is taking time to look and listen and comprehend.” (Wilfred A. Peterson)

Colin McAllister, 24th October 1981

MAPS

18.7 Arrived yesterday Sofia: airport extremely small just one building but people extremely helpful- arranged transport to luxury hotel all paid for by the airline (I have to wait 30 hours for connection to Lagos) During the first meal we even had wine which we were supposed to pay for but none would take our money. I met up with two Nigerians who might help me on my way back through Lagos: initial difficulties understanding each other, partly because they switch in and out of their own language so you stop listening then you suddenly notice they're asking you something in English, I'll get used to it no doubt. Sofia seems very far from oppressed, everyone looks happy, well dressed (including jeans which, we are told, are worth their weight in gold in eastern bloc countries), English music including pink Floyd's "Brick in the wall" whose main message in that " we don't need no education". Also a lot of dancing and flowers: on the tram a little old lady had bunch of branches full of red berries and she distributed them to all the children on the tram. There was no limitation on our movements about the town or on who we could talk to. Sofia is spacious, green, well planned, full of parks and wide empty roads; every other car is a Lada 124, quite literally; the people are so welcoming, polite, generous, can it all be put on for us or do we come full of the wrong ideas? I would like to return and spend more time there. The tram is extremely slow but it only costs 6/100 Leva, a few pence; they're mad on foreign exchange (you can't change Leva if you take them out of the country so you have to spend what you have got), and dollars are the thing, we were offered 4 times the official exchange by people in the street; also if you stay more than two nights in some of the hotels they will change your money for you at 50% more than the normal exchange rate. I met a Romanian student also visiting Sofia and spent the afternoon with him: we spoke of revolutions, economic difficulties, and the lack of possibility for him to travel outside the eastern bloc largely for financial reasons; he knew all about Mrs. Thatcher and the present

Unrest in the UK (in Romania no one is unemployed because it's illegal to be so, so everyone works even if that means 3 men doing one man's job, and everyone has a house- there's no great wealth and no great poverty). This student spoke English well having taught himself the language, and many people seem to get by in English. Sofia was celebrating the 1300th

anniversary of the foundation of the state of Bulgaria and they were proud of it; they certainly have a great cultural heritage.

19.7: Arrived in Lagos and have 6 hours to wait for my connection; the plane stopped at Tripoli for 1.30 hours at 2 am and we all had to get off. Both airport are extremely modern, both built on oil wealth; Tripoli was full of Arabs squatting and looking like nomads out of place in the modern surroundings; all over the place there were pictures of Gheddafi and signs: "Partners not wage workers" and "In need freedom is latent". In Lagos the airport, built by the Germans, was opened a year ago and seems, on the surface at least to be as well equipped as any European airport. I seem to be doing a tour of alphabets, Roman, Slavic, Arabic- what next? I'm in an ethnic minority for the first time in my life and I feel I stand out like a sore thumb. At Lagos an official volunteered his help and kept dropping hints about my giving him a present which I manage to get out off; another Italian was about to be sent back home because he had had his yellow fever vaccination within the last ten days, but 20 dollars sorted that problem out.

5 o'clock arrived at Freetown and was whisked through customs etc by the first official I met who took my passport out of my hand and only returned it when I gave him 4 Leones (2 pound), having refused the first offer of 2 Leones. There was a huge argument on the bus that took us across the bay to the town: we missed the ferry because a Lebanese in his Mercedes nipped in and took the last place, so we had to wait an hour. During that time everyone got excited and like the Neapolitans they all seem to shout and swear with great energy, particularly the women, without getting much done. A girl on the bus prophesied that 5 years from now, when a new generation takes power, things will change dramatically waiting for the ferry there's a row of large cars- Mercedes, Fiat, Renault- with windows shut tight to keep the poverty and misery out. It's frightening not to know where you are going, not understanding, not knowing what will happen next.

All along I ask myself what am I doing sitting here in Sofia, Tripoli, Freetown? And I can't find a simple answer or reason except that it's what I have chosen to do and that's all. I hasn't often happened to me to be surrounded by a language I don't know the first thing about: krio, the language spoken in this part of the country is a mixture of English, French, Portuguese, and African languages, so that even knowing English I find it hard at the moment to understand a thing. Did it take courage to under take this long trip into the almost unknown? No, the courage

lies in keeping going with no one to help you and keeping your wits about you while feeling threatened by the whole environment. I had decided to spend the first night with some Italian Xaverian fathers if they would take me, so I asked on the bus how much the taxi to Kissi dockyards should cost and I was told not more than 1 Leone: when I finally got a taxi it took us 20 minutes to find the place, partly because the driver couldn't read and I kept pointing to an address which meant nothing to him, and all along he had been complaining and saying I would have to pay him well. In the end he asked for 6 Leones and in the dark and pouring rain gave in and paid him- the first and last time I'm going to be cheated here. The fathers took pity on me and gave me food and a bed for the night; my first encounter with a mosquito net supported by a most impressive structure, and with tap water you can't drink.

20.7: The fathers drove me to the bus station and directed me to the right queue; on the way we turned up a side street which was blocked by oil drums, some children surrounded the car asking for money to repair the road but they let us pass after a few threatening words. I'm now standing all alone waiting for the bus to arrive from Bo after which they'll know how many seats are not taken and tickets will go on sale (normally the ticket is bought before the day of travel); it's not comfortable waiting here and being offered all sorts of wares, amid the continuous noise and bustle; colours and sounds are larger than life, every square inch of ground is covered by people selling everything under the sun all laid out on the ground including food. To attract attention they hiss like snakes and the queue does not move. My visa is not in order yet as was supposed to get a residence visa within 4 hours of arriving in the country but the fathers said it was better to go to Bo first and be given a letter explaining exactly what work I'm going to be doing. The queue still does not move.

On the bus, the scenery is very green, wild, few houses, and on the bus everyone is cheerful and chatting or singing. The comfortable Mercedes Benz bus has written on it " Guinness is good for you"- Guinness stout and star lager are the two beers available, both brewed under license in Freetown.

Reached Bo after almost 80 hours travelling at 7.30, too late to see anything of the town, and took a taxi to the house of Neil Trainer, the Methodist Minister who put me up for the night. We talked about the existence even today of religious rivalry between missionaries of various churches- Muslim, catholic, Methodist etc. - who have different approaches and different sizes of resources

at their disposal: on church can take 12 years for one set of missionaries to build and 2 months for another set to get completed depending on their finances. I still can't believe I'm here, what I see with my own eyes is overwhelming; it's like a film at which up to now I've been a spectator and in which I now hope to play an acting part. Also photographs of people and places which I had seen before coming here take on new dimension now. Another guest of the Trainers on a short visit to the country said he had witnessed primitive living here such as he thought could not possibly coexist with the way of life in Europe. I wonder what conclusions I'll come up with! One thing that has struck me is that the climate determines so much: in developed countries you can die of cold if you can't afford a house or the heating of it, so that means you have to work to earn a living and you have to save to be able to buy what you need; in underdeveloped countries you can live from day to day with the same clothes, you can sleep in the open, you don't need to put money by. Also in these countries it is often so hot you haven't the energy to work or alternatively in the rainy season it's so wet you don't feel like going out to work. The climate is what divides the North from the south in every conceivable way, and that can never change. Electricity was off 7.30- 9.30 pm this evening; apparently it goes off 7.30-9.30 or 9.30- 11.30 on alternate nights because there isn't enough fuel to supply all the houses at once- before Sierra Leone's chairmanship of the organization of Africa Unity (OAU) last year there was electricity all the time but they spent so much money hosting all the African leaders that they now can't afford to buy all the oil they need.

21.7: First day in Bo, writing by oil-lamp as the electricity is off. I was taken to my house this morning: it is normally occupied by a VSO on holiday at the moment in England so it suits everybody that is should stay here and as far as I'm concerned that means it won't cost me too much to stay here. At first it seemed primitive but even after only one day I now realize it is luxurious by local standards: I have a couple of rooms, a bathroom, a kitchen and a hall, all full of spiders and wasp nests which I've had to sweep out; the lavatory stinks but at least I have one. I went with Neil to the Cheshire Home, a home for children who have had Polio, and then we set off to look for some of the members of the committee that takes an interest in the home: the matron, Mrs. Jusu is away at a conference in England, but we were able to find Mama Rogers, a nurse at the hospital, Mr. Kallon, a man high up in the Ministry of agriculture, and Mama Foray, an elderly but extremely dedicated lady. It was agreed that I should draw up a program of activities for the 8 children still at the home (normally there are 25 in all but during the school holidays their parents are encouraged to take them home; unfortunately 8 of them have not been

collected so they are left to amuse themselves for two months without anything to do, not even crayons and paper); on Friday 24th we shall meet again to discuss the ideas I may have had by them. I have not a clue what to do and even language seems a problem since they mostly speak Mende, their own language, between themselves. I met Albert Lamin, a history teacher who is very keen on the link between Leamington spa and Bo; he promised in a letter I received from him before coming out that he would be my “constant companion” which was very reassuring. He promised to show me around the town tomorrow and we chatted about history, politics and economics, all very much as I anticipated: things can not go as they are, problems are getting worse every day, and there seems to be no magic solution. I’m now going to go to bed under my mosquito net supported by string from the ceiling, and with all the doors locked including that of my bedroom; I have been warned that theft is a major problem and you can not to be too careful, Mr Lamin has suggested putting a row of empty bottles behind the door so that anyone forcing their way in would wake me up. I am not going to bother. He also said he would let me have a machete to defend myself with and to frighten off thieves-that too I have refused. However, I do have to keep all the windows locked when I go to sleep even though they are barred, so the heat is killing: it is like being in prison except that the bars are not to keep you in but to keep you others out. Some facts: I) Teachers Whisky is flown in from Moscow on a flight that comes to Freetown on the first Tuesday of each month, and under the label in English there is a second label in Russian; II) I eat, I will eat, I have eaten, and I have not eaten in krio one says I chop, I go chop, I don chop, and I no chop- which can be confusing because you tend to interpret I don chop as I have not eaten; III) Government Minister are given an allowance when they go abroad of 250 Leones (125 pounds) per day.

22.7: I had a long talk with Mr Lamin about Nkrumah and Gheddafi and Nyerere, all of whom he admires and supports, as well as corruption, intellectuals, elect-oral politics, the Lebanese, universities, and foreign aid- we must have covered just about everything that affects this country: I notice most cars and taxis are Japanese, and that the wealthy all have Mercedes: it is obviously a status symbol and at 40000 Leones a piece they are certainly not cheap, but quite honestly I have never seen so many Mercedes in my life, there must be fifty in this small town. I was surprised by the number of car in general but the amount of huge luxury cars which seem so incongruous here is just unbelievable. It seems that here you are either extremely wealthy or else you are poor and everything is in the open as is corruption; no doubt in Europe extremes of wealth also exist and certainly corrupt practices are common but it is all more secretive and

discreet, which makes it less visible, more difficult to trade. As far as “corruption” goes what is called a Christmas present to a business associate in England is called a bribe in Africa; taking someone out for a meal because your son wants a job which that someone can give him is just called generosity or a sign of goodwill in England while here handing over in cash the equivalent of what a meal would cost to secure the same goal is “corruption”. One thing that can be said is that at least African society is more open and less hypocritical than British society, although one must make it clear that the scale of corruption and the extent to which it permeates right from top to bottom is impressive here. It is built into the institutional structure and it is the means by which things are made to work; if one wanted one could claim that corruption, far from being something innate to the African people is a direct result of colonial rule both because when they left rather rapidly in the early 1960’s the native administrators did not have the capacity to administer according to a code of respect for seniors or of moral and ethnical behaviour, corruption filled the gap and at least established some sort of order even if it was based on money rather than ability or achievement or worth. One thing I find surprising is that an English person can come to Sierra Leone and be surprised by the extent of corruption here and be indignant about it, anyone who as the slightest interest in Africa will be able to tell you that it’s the way the continent operates and one has no right to observe it from an ethnocentric (and hypocritical) point of view.

On the way to the market the smells are very strong and pungent but I am not sure if it is not some of the food on sale that has the strong smell, like ancient goat’s cheese; many of the houses are mud hovels with thatched roofs and the road along which I walk is just a mud track. This is the rainy season and that means the road a lot of the time is a mushy mess but it’s also how quickly it all dries up when the sun comes out; the people are well dressed and cheerful, it seems that however hard things may be they are prepared to laugh about it all. In the supermarkets (2) you can find almost anything at a price, and some prices are a real education, for example an 8 ounce jar of Nescafe costs about 6 pounds. I went to Mrs. French’s tea House, a grand name for a slightly less grand place: it consists of a single room full of armchairs and crumbling plaster with a kitchen at the back but, apart from being a meeting place for all the volunteers in the area VSO, Peace Corps, CUSO, it is the most welcoming and pleasant place one could imagine. Mrs. French is like a godmother to all the volunteers and when I first went she refused to accept money from me for a cup of coffee; her son David has just taken his A Levels and hopes to go to

Fourah Bay College in Freetown to study Economics though to go he would need a scholarship and they are certainly not handed out on merit but rather depending on who you know, so he might have to work for a year or so until he can save enough money to pay for his studies. Ironically there is a great shortage of scholarship and yet several are handed out each year to students from other West African countries for purely prestigious reasons, Sierra Leone isn't really a country that can afford to be generous although if the economy were properly managed this is a potentially very wealthy country and everyone could be much better off than they are now. David impressed me with his knowledge and enthusiasm for economics and it would be a great pity if he were to find it impossible to pursue his studies. This evening when it began to rain I went to collect rainwater in a bucket which I then filter, boil, and put in the fridge; I doubt I'll keep that up for all the time I'm here!

I think my timetable is going to switch or adapt to getting up at 7 am and going to bed at 10.30, a far cry from my university timetable. Tomorrow my first outing to the Cheshire Home, about 2 or 3 miles walk; I must get used to this electricity going on and off, yesterday I was woken up at 11.30pm by the lights coming on again having gone off at 9.30, so when the power is cut off I must remember all the lights that were on and switch them off; I've just seen a spider in the spare room 3 inches in diameter, I hope it doesn't move; I have occasional pangs like daggers going through my stomach but they don't last long and so far I've had none of the expected digestive problems.

23.7: it has been pouring down this morning: so far as I can see it rains for an hour then the sun comes out for an hour then it rains again so that an umbrella is an even greater constant necessity than in England and when it rains here it's no drizzle but rather an angry waterfall. I went to the market to buy some food and it took some getting used to: the stalls are made of wood and corrugated iron, placed very close together so that it's dark and you can't see the sky; the narrow tracks between the stalls are rivulets of mud through which everyone patiently picks their way and not one square inch isn't occupied either by a person or by some good on sale. Most things are sold in piles onions, groundnuts, wood, beans, peppers and all vegetables and some of the mathematics are rather erratic: for example, Maggi cubes, to my surprise, are very popular and you can

buy 2 for 5 cents or 3 for 10 cents, and no one seems to think it strange, perhaps because they only ever buy them 2 at a time. Rice is sold by the cup, where a cup is an old margarine tin, and palm oil is sold by the pint, where a pint is an old bottle of Guinness (which incidentally contains less than a pint, I think); often people will call a 10 cents piece a shilling or one bob. I also went to Coker's bar, the second haunt of young volunteers where Star and Guinness are drunk liberally; it is one of the landmarks of Bo and no one has a bad word to say about it.

I don't feel threatened any more, I walk everywhere and many people salute me, particularly the young children who have a word for "white man", "pumwe" which you hear all day long, and who call after you until you return their wave, I think I know what it must be like to be a member of the Royal Family always having to wave to people, because I end up having to do it at least 50 times a day. In fact although pumwe does mean white man I know of a case of a black girl, a Peace Corps volunteer, who was disappointed to be called pumwe all the time, so it is clearly used as a term meaning stranger now although of course the very first strangers were white men. Everywhere smiling is useful, you have to keep smiling, but anyway it's not forced I really am in a good mood. I was wary about buying meat in the market having seen the way carcasses are carried around on people's backs and outside the butchers' enclosure cow's heads thrown in a pile in a pool of caked blood and mud; but I'm assured that it's fresh and if cooked for a long time it's perfectly good and certainly it's very cheap (steak costs 2.20 Leones per lb). what humans don't consume, and that's very little indeed, vultures clean up clinically, which reminds me that when I went to the hospital to find Mama Rogers she pointed out to me 4 vultures perched on the roof of one of the wards waiting (for what?) and everyone seemed to accept them there.

24.7: today I bought some palm oil at 45c/pint with a fly floating in it; I reasoned that even if I bought it without a fly it was very likely that a fly had been in it before anyway. The oil is viscous and a dark red colour which is said to stain almost indelibly and it is supposed to have an immediate and lasting effect on the bowels of those not used to it: so far I've had no problems, we shall see with time. I went to Bo Government Hospital and

met Jenny Gibson who has been a doctor there for many years and also a young medical student called Clare out here for some experience which I'm sure she will get very soon! I will be going back to visit the hospital and in the meantime I've been asked to look at some blood pressure gauges to see if I can get them to work, I don't know where to start but I'll do my best. I came back for lunch and a Mr. Sherif appeared at the door; I invited him in thinking he might be connected with the One World Link; it turned out that he had been a teacher for 13 years but had lost his job the month before for having signed a petition against the principal of his school concerning his involvement in "Vouchergate", a scandal that recently broke out where vouchers were being encashed without the work they were supposedly paying for ever being done (if it even existed in the first place), the principal kept his place and the 8 signatories of the petition were sacked. This particular man was relatively lucky in that he had been able to find another job with the Ministry of Agriculture, but the job doesn't start for another month and meanwhile he has no money to live. I gave him half the food I had prepared and half the money I had on me, 4 Leones, for his pregnant wife. He seemed genuine but perhaps he'll be coming round every other day now, we'll just have to see. In the afternoon I went to the Cheshire Home where I was to meet Mr Kallon and Mama Rogers but neither turned up (my first taste of appointments rarely kept?); anyway I had brought some crayons and paper so I stayed the afternoon and the children did 24 drawing for me. They are great children, so bright and sincere, I don't think I'll have any problems here, their bright eyes and their smiles welcomed me more than any words could have done; and as far as the language goes, the older ones speak good English since all their schooling is done in English. They taught me how to count from 1 to 20 and how to say hello and goodbye in Mende, maybe by the end of my stay something will have stuck. Everywhere I go the children are so lively and when I stopped to photograph a group of ten of them they were delighted though no doubt I'll be hounded by them in the next few days to show them the developed picture. When I walk through the untarmacked side streets as I do every day it sometimes strikes me that I'm the only white person in sight and yet I feel at home. I must stay it's a mystery to me where the other whites get to, perhaps they're all too busy to walk around or else they only travel by car or motorbike. What it means for me is that when I stop and go into someone's house they're pleased and treat as some rare gift. Everything is

working out to perfection, at first things aren't easy because everything is new and different and different but initial hardships are worth it for what you get out of it in the end: I have me several Sierra Leoneans and hardly any pumwes and that suits me fine.

Siaka Stevens was supposed to be in town today to open the new police barracks but I never saw anything, he may not have come. I went to the bank to change 10 pounds and it took over an hour, one has to be patient, with countless pieces of paper and addresses and details of my passport going backwards and forwards being signed and countersigned. I must find out what to do with my rubbish.

Evening: I've just had another visit from a boy who said he needed money to get back home to Freetown tomorrow where he works as an assistant mechanic; he had been to the mission hospital in Serabu. 35 miles from here, to attend the funeral of his 36 year old father whom he says died of asthma. I gave him 2 Leones. Do I have to be careful here, am I going to have many visits? Clearly this house is known as it is always occupied by volunteers but they probably have more money to spare than me.

25.7: when I woke up this morning I was told that last night thieves broke into the other half of the bungalow in which I live and which is normally occupied by a Peace Corps volunteer but is vacant at the moment. They took out some bricks from the wall at the back then knocked down the back door as well as the front door from the inside, and they took out everything: cooker, fridge, mattresses and other furniture. Neither myself nor a boy who sleeps at the back of the house heard a single thing and yet we were both sleeping no more than 10 yards away; it really is remarkable how such a thing can be done and I only hope they knew my half was occupied and that's why they avoided paying me a visit. Following this incident the owner of the house learnt for the first time that I was staying in the other half and he was understandably annoyed somewhere along the line someone forgot to let him know of the arrangement whereby I am to spend the summer in his house. However when I learnt this I went round to see him this evening and he was very nice about it and was even grateful that I should be occupying the house and keeping an eye on it. Today at the Cheshire Home we put the drawings up on the wall with sellotape, a total of 35, if they continue at this rate it's going to cost me a fair

sum in crayons and paper. Tonight I'm going to Jenny Gibson's for dinner, my first taste of "expat" society!

26.7: This time I woke up to an invasion of ants which I tried to control with mosquito spray fairly successfully; how do so many appear overnight? And last night I found a beetle in the basin but he obligingly climbed down the plughole and disappeared into the nether regions of Bo's sewage system, if there is such a thing. I found myself locked out of the kitchen which in my prudence I had locked last night yet after 10 minutes struggling I managed to get it open and I've poured palm oil on the lock to try and make it more cooperative in future. So , last night at dinner I met a few people some more impressive than others. Jenny Gibson works something like 9.30 am-4pm, then 5.30 pm-10pm, and finally 11pm-3am almost everyday, no wonder she was recently awarded the OBE. The other person who rose above the rest was Moussa Conteh, a Sierra Leonean married to an ex-VSO who works at the Tikonko Agricultural Centre; he was quiet, discreet and spoke softly and I didn't get a chance to speak to him but he gave the impression of being very dedicated and sensible. When conversation got round to cannibalism, of which there has recently been a case in the country, I made a double gaffe: firstly I asked for some unknown reason if it was illegal, which seems very stupid to me now, and secondly I mentioned that I had read that the last President, Albert Margai, was linked with cannibalism at the time of his fall, there was embarrassed laughter and they all looked at Moussa and said present company was on the wrong side of the fence for such talk. They then spoke for a while about the Royal Wedding and the invitation to attend which Siaka Stevens was likely to decline because of the risks involved in leaving the country at the moment; the last time he left there were student riots and even last weekend a coup was rumoured i.e. one truck load of armed men intercepted coming down from the north. Of course in retrospect he was right since as soon as Sir Dawda Jawara of the Gambia went to London a coup was attempted in his own country. Even so attempts to oust "Shaki", as he is known, seem quite a regular occurrence and taken fairly lightly though any day one might succeed. Of course Bo has never liked Stevens having been the stronghold of the Margai brothers' Sierra Leone people's party, but it really seems that even though he is an astute and able politician, 13

years of him are enough and during that time his personal integrity and his priorities have left much to be desired. When he came to power he was a national hero because he offered an alternative to Margai's corruptions and cheating of the people and yet he has ended up in exactly the same position. I wouldn't be too quick to say he is a rotten selfish man, I think it would be fairer to say that he may have started off with good intentions and he may have been genuine in his desire to eradicate corruption but that he had to work within a system that could work in no other way and so at a certain point he had to give up and "if you can't beat them join them". On the other hand one could argue that a man of a true integrity would not have given up the fight so easily and would have staked his life for what is right, that's what happened recently in Nigeria before power was handed back to civilians: a military coup brought Murtala Muhammad to power and he set out to sack all those in the administration guilty of corruption and to imprison them, much to the delight of 99% of the population, but the other 1% made sure he was assassinated as soon as possible and so very little was changed in the long run. In conclusion, whatever one wants to think about Siaka Stevens I think it is fair to say that the time honoured dictum "power corrupts, absolute power corrupts absolutely" applies to perfection: he's an old man, he's a millionaire, and he's had the satisfaction of being Chairman of the OAU so why can't he retire gracefully as Senghor was able to do 6 months ago? (of course the answer is that in Senegal there was relative stability and there were 3 or 4 parties while in Sierra Leone there is only one party which does nothing but bow and scrape to the president anyway, if he retired tomorrow there would be anarchy but then that's no one's fault but his own.)

I heard my first criticism of the workings of the Peace Corps from a girl present at the meal: she said there are about 200 in Sierra Leone alone and, unlike VSO almost anyone who applies is accepted, in some states they even have to advertise; the name itself comes from the Kennedy era when the American youth was instructed to go out and communicate America's goodwill towards the non-communist world; when they get over here they're given a 3 months course to help them acclimatize (VSO get 2 weeks), and up to half the annual intake doesn't last the full 2 years; of those that stick it few, in this girl's opinion, do much good but the American state is very pleased with itself for the efforts it makes and it spares no money to advertise its achievements to the mass of the

American people. One of the other guests when asked what he most missed about England replied the food, I pity him if his idea of gastronomic bliss is bangers and mash and baked beans and spam! Finally I must say I didn't think much of the medical student in that she seemed a little too prim and proper and full of herself to throw herself into working in Africa but I may be wrong. I don't mean to be cruel but from what I've seen so far in general there are some wrong people as well as some right people out here, in my opinion.

I've just noticed a cut on my foot and I've jealously disinfected it, you never know: I'll probably laugh at my caution when I'm back home. Last night I came back to find I hadn't turned the gas off properly on the cooker, it would be ironic to come out here and blow yourself up with a gas leak when you could stay at home to do that!

I have one mug for tea, coffee, water, lime juice, so now they all taste the same whatever you put into the mug because somehow it is difficult to wash it out properly every time; maybe I'll be bold and buy another mug before I leave.

I went to Mr. French's and had an omelette (a treat) and coffee listening to 3 Peace Corps chatting for about an hour: they were complaining of conditions of life and poverty back in America, and they promised to root out these people in need when they got back, not having come across them before. At least if coming to Africa has moved something in them it's a good thing though I don't know how you could fail to see the down and outs in New York. Of course that's all part of the great myth which I hope will gradually be broken down that in the developed world everything is fine, everyone is happy, and there is no misery or hardship; I would guess that to be poor in America is at least as desperate as being hard up in Sierra Leone. And as far as numbers go there are far more people below the poverty line in developed countries than is generally admitted by anyone. One of the Peace Corps said at one point: "I'd be a socialist if I knew anything about socialism", I hope he is not going to remain in the same position for the rest of his life. It emerged that they are paid 220 dollars per month here plus 135 dollars per month back home during their stay, with accommodation provided free, which seems adequate for a single person.

Walking home I thought of a few things I've been told during the past 2 or 3 days:

I) this month is Ramadan which means no food during the daylight hours for the many Muslims here , even swallowing your own saliva is not strictly allowed, which is a convenient justification for them spitting all the time; secondly, apparently no one in Sierra Leone should, on his honest earnings alone, be able to buy and run a Mercedes and yet there must be 50 in Bo alone: like the number of wives being taken as a symbol of wealth among the average African so the number of Mercedes owned and flaunted by the Lebanese and the Ministers defines clearly the owner's self-appointed status; finally, a motto in a bar I sometimes go to: "when all's said and done, more gets said than gets done" so true. On my way back from town I stopped at the house of Lawrence, a friend of Albert Lamin, he graduated this year in Economics here in Sierra Leone and is now preparing to teach in a school for the next academic year. I stayed for 3 hours outside his house chatting having intended just to say hello: our views on many matters were very similar and he had as great an interest in hearing about my home country as I had in hearing about his. Of course we concluded that there are so many myths that it's impossible to have a clear picture without visiting different part of the world, and certainly the idea that the British society is perfect, that everyone is happy there, that all lessons for the rest of the world must come from there, I find irritating and I do my best to dispel it. I think the current British crisis can be explained very powerfully by the argument that the British as a race had it all relatively easy during the time of the empire so that an ethic of working hard for survival didn't develop as strongly as elsewhere; of course even in those times there was the British working class struggling to make ends meet, but somehow it was bought off over the years with wealth acquired overseas and expectations began to rise very rapidly. The result is that today in general people want too much and are not prepared to pay enough for it in terms of physical effort and sacrifice; the Common Market provides a convenient and deceptive excuse for Britain's decline, or alternatively the present myth, that things can be improved by putting the clock back and making people taste the bitter medicine of unemployment, bankruptcy, survival of the fittest, is churned out like sour bitter. Instead of harping back to a (glorious?) past, instead of closing a whole nation up in a shell of delusion, cutting back all expenditure except that devoted to defence, looking desperately for escape goats to blame the British disease on, why can't the truth be faced?: capitalism as we know it today has failed to make the

world a better place, it has just been treading water filling in cracks, creating new ones, and then trying to fill them in, in a blind frenzy to get there (where?) first. In Africa, people complain of how politicians have failed them, but are Mrs. Thatcher and Mr. Reagan not failing their people and others as well? Perhaps when our today has become history for our descendants, they will conclude that the rapid expansion of communication and the power of the media was a hidden curse as used by us: of course it has done untold good, but it has also meant that the mass of people may have been offered the chance to think but at the same time they lost the power to think. An item of news on television is taken as Gospel truth, and a myth of a communist threat has become so pervasive that people don't even stop to think what logic there may be to a desire for Russia to rule the world. When I was in America last summer I saw people in the streets wearing badges saying: "Nuke the Ayatollah" and when I asked them about this they replied quite candidly that the only way to regain that famous American pride which was ebbing away over the issue of the hostages was to blast the culprits out of existence, and these people were not unrepresentative extremists, they were the product of historical media presentation of the issue. Similarly the Americans and most other races believe that the problem of Third World poverty, starvation, deprivation, can be bought off with money, not surprising within a capitalist framework where money defines and solves everything; yet money sent to a Minister in Sierra Leone, or even free rice and so on, not only does it do no good but it also serves to perpetuate that very corruption which is so self-righteously condemned: handing material goods to a Minister only tempts him to divert them into his own pocket. I experienced the same mentality when applying to my university for a grant to carry out some studies in Sierra Leone, I was told at the interview that in the opinion of the committee it would be more useful to send 250 pounds to Sierra Leone (where to in S.L?) rather than giving the sum to me. Apart from the futility of doing as they suggested, which anyway they didn't do, I have found that all the people I have met here have been appreciative of my physical presence: for me to have come all this distance at my own cost just to sit talking to them in their houses, they find that a reassuring confirmation that all hope is not lost, that all white men don't just exist to take advantage of black men, that perhaps one day they will be able to earn a decent living in a world where free trade gives them a fair chance, this may all sound

airy-fairy and overoptimistic, and for all I know it may be so, but as far as I'm concerned it is a starting point as good as any other. Am I being carried away with naïve enthusiasm?

27.7: today I went looking for the Paramount Chief to see if he could tell me something about Bo, no luck, he was out at the airfield seeing the President off (so he was here after all though the town certainly didn't go out of its way to have celebrations welcoming him here, maybe they're past doing that now). I bought 21lbs of waste cuts from the Bunambu Press for I Leone, and I shall take them a little at a time to the Cheshire Home. I've also been busy getting a letter from the committee that I can take down to Freetown when I go to ask for my residence permit, Mr. Kallon said he'll have something ready for me by tomorrow and he'll ask Mrs. Foray as Chairperson to sign it. I went to see her at her house and stayed about an hour talking about her son, Pios, who at the age of 25 is editor of the one and only opposition newspaper in Sierra Leone, The Tablet; it is the most widely read paper in the country and Pios Foray himself is a national hero, he has been summoned before Parliament several times for speaking the truth that hurt and each time he has been acquitted and taken about the streets triumphantly by his supporters; the President doesn't know how to deal with him because of his popularity, but he has been mysteriously beaten up in the street and an attempt was even made to blow up his press. He is very brave, as is his mother who as a fervent Catholic is confident that a man who does good has special protection from God.

When I went to the Cheshire Home this afternoon they put a devil dance for me and we all had a great time; the children are wonderfully self-sufficient, as they have to be since there is no one to look after them, and there is an admirable spirit of friendship between them, apart from the occasional squabbles they help each other out and cheer each other up. I have worked out that there are two girls aged 12, Amie and Hawa, who are not handicapped and live with the others in return for doing all the cooking and looking after them in general. The others, Wuyah, Massa, Mamie, Alahji, Goonu, Esther, Lahai and Siaka, are those left behind during the summer holidays either because they have no home to go to or, more often, because their parents don't want to take them back and pay the 20 Leones (10 pounds) fee they are asked to pay per year, with which they are to be

clothed, fed, their school books bought etc., all of which costs at least ten times that amount. It's a mystery how the home manager with no help from the State and relying on donations which are not forthcoming; I know that each month they haven't enough money to pay even for the food, that they have no water but rely on water brought in basins and stored in a tank, and that they can't afford to pay the electricity bills. And then on top of all that a group of women in Freetown gave them a present of a television last year amid much self-congratulatory pomp and photographs: programs start at 7.30, and they go to bed soon after that, and besides they can't afford to use up electricity like that so it's hardly ever turned on. The 1500 Leones that the television cost could have fed the children for months but of course the generous ladies wouldn't have had the photographs to show off if they had just handed over the money. The children tried again to plat my hair the way they plat their own so skilfully but of course my hair wouldn't stay put and all their efforts to stick it down proved to no avail. Towards the end of the afternoon they began to cook on a standard 3 stone fire: 3 stones are placed to form a triangle and pieces of wood are made to meet at the centre do that when they are consumed the three branches only need to be pushed in towards the centre till they meet again. They were preparing Gari which is a speciality of the Bo region and consists of grated and roasted cassava eaten on its own or as a cereal with milk or soaked like porridge; I tried some this evening with milk and banana and it was delicious (the only thing I was worried about was the powdered milk packed in Czechoslovakia 3 year ago). This evening I cooked potato leaves: you boil them add small peppers liberally and then plenty of palm oil, delicious, not far removed from spinach. I'm gradually building up a range of recipes though they tend to be variations on a limited theme: rice, beans, fish or meat, potato leaves or cassava leaves, peppers, palm oil.

28.7: the house gets extremely hot and stuffy because when I'm out all the doors and all the windows must be locked tight, and even when I'm in and I go to bed I can't leave anything open. Last night the element in my Aladdin lamp was charred by a flame that leapt up further than it should have, I think because the lamp needs to be cleaned, so today I had to spend 4 Leones on a new element. Mama Foray summoned me to her house on my way back from the Cheshire Home to offer me some aubergines, or garden eggs as they call them here, and that meant another lengthy chat. I've had an idea to try

and write a play for the children and get them to perform it before I leave, I already know roughly what the story line will be, so let's hope it works. Finally I discovered a small neat hole half way up my little pot, it looks like someone has driven a nail through it, how did it get there? I've patched it up with sellotape for the moment.

29.7: I went to the bank to change 20 pound; for the customers who can't write and therefore can't sign the bank has a card with the imprint of all five fingers of the right hand, so that instead of signing they are asked to print their five fingers prints to be checked against their personal card when they want to withdraw money; a very messy business which inevitably results in my coming out of the bank covered in ink because I keep learning on the boards smeared with ink. At Mrs. French's I met a Peace Corps and a VSO from Sumbuya who are going down to Freetown tomorrow so I offered them a bed in my house and we agreed to take the bus together tomorrow; they declined my offer at first but this evening they turned up having changed their minds. Mr. Lamin called round and I explained to him a problem I had with the oil lamp; I had taken it apart and I couldn't get the wick back in again, the solution was to turn it upside down and I never thought of that: at the Cheshire Home I discovered that the play I had written for them was too difficult since they were too young to do any spoken parts; I suggested to Mohamed, the young cleaner there that he find three children from outside to do the speaking parts but he seemed pessimistic about the chances of that working. They enjoyed seeing a selection of photographs of me and wanted to keep one; at one point they had my passport, ring, traveller's cheques, scissors, glasses, driving licence, keys and watch in their possession, I hope I get them all back.

30.7: Went down to Freetown with the two volunteers, was given my residence permit valid one month from when I entered the country, and stayed the night at the Peace Corps rest house semi-illegally. On the bus I was talking to the VSO girl about the scandal of medicines banned in the west being unloaded by the pharmaceutical companies on Africa, and a doctor sitting close to us joined in; he was very outspoken and critical though he also said that 5 years ago if he had said the same things to us he would have found himself arrested as soon as the bus reached the capital. Despite that I turned round

just before we reached the terminus and saw that he had sneaked off the bus at some previous stop without even saying goodbye. What he was most bitter about was cases of pregnant women dying as a result of taking some drug which was banned years ago in developed countries, and he said he took this issue right up to the Minister of Health only to see his own job threatened by that same Minister; as a result he wasn't sure whether he would be staying in Sierra Leone much longer if his chances of advancement were nil. I suppose one could say that it is one's duty to serve one's country despite all the difficulties and not to abandon a sinking ship, but at the same time that doctor was only being human in giving up fighting a losing battle. There are many exiles who have found it impossible to operate within the Sierra Leone of today and are waiting in exile for things to change before coming back-are they doing the right thing?, I don't think I can judge. This doctor said what this country needs is not one revolution but 2 or 3; unfortunately I think he's right and also that it's only a matter of time before it all happens. I heard on the radio just now that the Gambia seems to have a coup; a few months ago Liberia had one and both countries are virtually neighbours of Sierra Leone. I'm only paying 4 Leones at this rest house for bed and breakfast, and it's a great opportunity to hear more about how the Peace Corps operates here: there is general agreement that it has been given a bad name by volunteers who come out to have a good time womanizing and drinking (a Sierra Leonean girl came to the house while I was there asking if anyone recognized the boy in the photograph she had; he was an ex-Peace Corps who had promised to come back for her and the son she had had from him). Even that rest house has been used in the past by Peace Corps accompanied by prostitutes. And during the time of the Vietnam War when some conscientious objectors were allowed to come out to Sierra Leone some just took the opportunity to smoke dope and have a lazy time. It's such a pity that a few people can do an organization so much harm, through it is up to the organization to do something about it if it wants to. On the other hand VSOs who are more serious and dedicated tend to be too hard up financially and secondly they tend to be more reserved: the Peace Corps are specifically instructed to spend time getting to know people, visiting them in their house and so on. While the VSOs are more detached in general- Lawrence in Bo told me you can differentiate clearly between the openness of the two sets of volunteers, with the result that the British reputation/ of

reservedness is perpetuated. I have no idea how accurate these generalizations are but all I can say is that I'm only reporting what I've been told.

This evening I went into town with Mark, the Peace Corps I came down with, and I fell down an open drain much to the amusement of onlookers who obviously know all the danger spots of the town: the gutter in some roads between the pavement and the street is 1ft. Wide and 2ft. deep and in the dark it's death trap. Fortunately I only got a wet foot though some volunteers have been known to break their ankles in the process of falling into a gutter.

31.7: there was no room on the bus up from Freetown so I took a truck- an unforgettable experience: the journey took 6 hours instead of the normal 3 and half, with 23 adults and 9 children crammed into a space 3mx1.5m. For part of the journey I had a little boy on my knees and there wasn't even room to put my arms down, I had to hold on to the roof the whole time. One thing I must say is that all the time I had been in Freetown it had poured and so I was drenched when I got into the truck but the journey, far from giving me pneumonia, allowed me to get off the truck bone dry thanks to the body heat in abundance. A final touch was a poor little girl being sick for part of the way without her mother being at all sympathetic, and the girl never said a word between her bouts of retching.

When I go home I received the visit of the APC youth Movement Secretary, a frightening person: the all People's Congress of Siaka Stevens has a youth movement of thugs who do as they're told and make sure that others do the same, and this fellow claimed to have 800 of the thugs at his beck and call. He had come to ask me for a donation for the Ramadan celebrations this Sunday and in the end I gave him 2 Leones so as not to get on the wrong side of him; in return he promised to call again, which I managed to dissuade him to do, and to procure a boy for me as well as female companion, both of which I declined (maybe it was a mistake!); he also offered to accompany me on the day of the celebrations telling me which devils I could and which I couldn't photograph and I was vague in taking up the offer. I took such a dislike to the fellow because he really seemed mentally imbalanced to me : when we got round to talk about politics he told me he wouldn't be standing for the next elections due in October, but that he would be elected

next time round. When I asked him how he could be sure he replied that the youth was faithful to him and would beat up anyone who stood against him as well as his supporters; he didn't find any fault in such methods because in his opinion he was the best man for the job so it was only right that he should be elected. Furthermore he told me that he corresponded personally with the President and when his Honour came to town one of the first people he would visit was himself. He was about 28, clearly very unintelligent and easily manipulated, and even if all of his stories might have been 90% invented, there was no doubt that he was indeed who he said he was and that the methods described by him are used regularly; also there is no doubt that he was representative of Shaki's hardline supporters and that people like him currently sit in the House of Parliament in Freetown.

I.8: this morning I bought fish for a change at the market, 8 fish about 20cm in length for 1 Leone, cheap; however I've just spent hours cleaning them and getting all the bones out so they aren't really a step forward from the meat. At the Cheshire Home I met an army of ants all neatly following a zig-zag path; I looked at them for a while then one climbed up my trouser leg and bit me. The children were all given a "Christmas" bag donated by Sabbach, the Lebanese owner of one of the two supermarkets in Bo, because tomorrow is the Muslim Ramadan. I'm glad Sabbach does some good because his prices are extortionate.

2.8: I have a pet spider who has been her since I arrived. At first he was in the store room but when I returned from Freetown I found him in the bathroom and I can't see how he got there; he is huge and even if I wanted to get rid of him I wouldn't know how to; he eats beetles the size of himself and there's a plentiful supply coming up the plughole of the sink. Maybe that's why he moved to the bathroom, I only hope he stays there and doesn't decide to come into the bathroom.

I notice that mothers and sons refer to each other when talking to me as Mrs. Jusu or Mr. Pios Foray, and not as my mother or my son, once an adult, in name at least, you become an equal to your parents and they respect you as any other person. Somehow all this here reminds me of Italy: simplicity, austerity as well as colour, a happy-go-lucky attitude,

inventiveness, individualism and good humour all the time; one could add corruption, things that don't work such as hospitals, a trying climate perhaps that's why I am perfectly at ease here and I've had no great surprises. This is a society where all the wrong people are "the right" people and all the right people are the "wrong" people, you will only get anywhere if you're Lebanese or a distant relative of a politician and similarly you'll only get something done if you're prepared to play their game, in this sense Africa is remarkable but maybe not as different from Europe and the U.S as we like to believe.

On the way to the Cheshire Home I stopped to watch the celebrations and the Devils out for Ramadan, interesting but nothing very special; there I met a student of Agriculture at Njala University who showed me the way to his house and asked me to call in on him soon: his name is Benson Amara.

3.8: my spider has gone into hiding; I'd really prefer to see him than not to see him. On my way home I stopped on the Tikonko Road for a drink and I met a 49 year old man who had spent many years in England and had been a Trade Union leader in Sierra Leone sometime in the past. He is an ardent opponent of the present regime and has spent 3 of the last 10 years in detention but is totally undaunted and will air his views openly. Since returning to Sierra Leone he has dropped all Trade Union activities and now works for CARE, the American relief agency that concentrates on building feeder roads to the remote villages. He likened this country to the Eastern bloc, which he has visited, where the leader of the official Trade Union sits in Parliament next to the Chief of Police, the head of the army and the Lord Chief Justice; he says the idea of one-party democracy came from China and Russia. I hope I'll see him again in coming days and hear some more of his views.

4.8: Benson came round this morning and returned this evening with a friend, Barba Daboh who is half Sierra Leonean and half Malian and who works on the Bo-Pujehun project. The two towns are 60 miles apart and a combined West German/ Sierra Leonian project intends to develop the large area covered by Bo and Pujehun; SO FAR ALL ONE CAN SEE is an abundance of German and French cars whizzing around but we are assured that a detailed study is being made of the area before anything concrete is

undertaken, so maybe in time it will prove to be a successful project for a change. Barba himself though working on the project thought that it was doomed to fail for the same reason that most development projects have failed: the function of the German experts who are here setting the thing up is to work themselves out of a job, and it's only right that they should come for a few years, set the thing up and train Sierra Leoneans who take over from them; however what usually happens is that those same Sierra Leoneans who take over start misusing the funds provided to them once the Germans go home, so the problem seems insoluble, whatever you do you lose out-I hope that is an over-pessimistic view though there is a lot of truth in it. Other ideas of Barba's: there will never be a coup in Sierra Leone because the people are more easygoing and unmotivated than in other West African states; Sekou Toure in neighbouring Guinea controls a socialist oriented but strongly independent state from which a lot can be learnt- many Guineans come to work in Sierra Leone but they all return home eventually when they have made enough money and then they agree to be socialists as long as they are allowed to enjoy their relative wealth; the Mano River Union originally formed by Sierra Leone and Liberia and recently joined by Guinea could, in Barba's opinion lead the way to a political union. I found this view particularly interesting because I knew of the River Mano Union as a purely economic agreement whereby internal tariffs would be removed between the three states and there would be free movement within the area for citizens of those states; to me it's a totally new idea that there may be eventually a merger between the three states and frankly I think it would be virtually impossible to achieve particularly between three states attached to America, England and France by their separate histories and led by ambitious men who would not be prepared to give up or share power. However the concept of the old colonial boundaries being redrawn to create more economically viable and more ethnically united groups of states has an appeal and quite possibly the future of Africa lies in this direction. Another point is that the issue of South Africa is at the moment serving the vital purpose of keeping African states united, and once South Africa is ruled by the majority of the population or some other satisfactory solution is found (and I don't think that is more than 5 years away), then there is the danger that African states will start turning on each other in a struggle for supremacy in the continent. If that happens then new boundaries will be drawn up by force so why not draw them up by

negotiation first? Today also had the visit of two friends who work in the Ministry of Agriculture and who wanted to know more about the link between Bo and Leamington Spa; and while walking in town I met a friend of David French who like him is hoping to be awarded a scholarship of 900 Leones per year to allow him to go to University. I noticed in the paper that one can apply to be sponsored by a foreign state, I think Germany is one, but a scandal is just breaking out concerning grants from abroad not being handed over to the students but being kept by the Registrar instead- all the news I gather about current events in this country if not from talking to people it all comes from the Tablet which I read assiduously: it is published twice a week like all other papers and has hardly any foreign news but on domestic news it is remarkably outspoken and subtle at the same time.

5.8: Snakes and Ladders- it seems that here all the snakes have burnt all the ladders after them, but it will all end soon. My spider made a brief reappearance today and then vanished again, he must have a secret hiding place; also in the evening when the lights go out the place becomes alive with crickets making their distinctive noises which seem to come from all directions- including the fridge- but I can never see them at work, they are invisible. One thing that does stand out, and remarkably clearly, is the firefly which really does illuminate the area around it with a green light: if we could work out its secret there may be no energy crisis any longer.

One adapts so quickly to new conditions and new environment, or at least I have: what was a shock a week ago is hardly noticeable now and even reading back at some of my first impressions it's as if someone else wrote them- maybe I was someone else a week ago.

Are the simplest things the simplest things to do or are they the hardest? Maybe the answer is that they are the hardest things to do before and the easiest things to have done after you have done them. So far for me to go to Cheshire Home is the easiest and simplest thing to do now once I realized that it takes so little to give so much. I've come to the conclusion that there are so many uneducated people in the world- I don't mean people who haven't been to school or are not literate, I mean people who don't want to approach other people, other cultures, other situations from those in which they find

themselves. Surely education is knowing how others live today and not knowing how some historical figure lived yesterday; it is seeing yourself as part of a whole and not as the centre of your own whole; it is wanting to and trying to learn and understand, not knowing it all already; it is listening and observing, not preaching and imposing; it is opening up, not shutting out; it is curiosity, modesty, awareness, involvement- it is all that far too many of us have by passed in our formal education.

The role of women and children in this society is well defined, there is no apparent conflict: women cook, have children, work in the fields and sell their produce at the market. At most they take a few weeks off to bear children unless they are of the very few who have full-time salaried jobs in which case they have a few months off; I was told of a woman whom a priest visited in the morning to wish her well in her pregnancy and when he returned at lunch time he found her cooking with the baby in a blanket nearby because the husband was due home soon. Soon after the baby is born the mother returns to her normal chores carrying it on her back till it is old enough to stand; she then leaves it at home with relatives and when the child reaches the age of about 5, or earlier, it starts being useful- carrying water, cleaning, cooking, selling ground nuts, going to the market. The man has absolute and total power over his wife (or wives) and children, they are there to serve him and please him: just as there is no such thing as romance or love as we know it between man and wife, so there is little fatherly love or attention for his children, and although all this may seem harsh and unjust it is a system that works, each has a definite place or role however arbitrarily assigned so that one has no right to be uncompromisingly critical of the system. Certainly I feel the role of the woman is humiliating and subservient, and I would like to see it change but, as with everything else, it is something that must come spontaneously from within the society and not something introduced from without. In the villages in particular a woman is seen as an item of property just like any other and the wealthier members of the community will have 6 or 7 wives who either take it in turns to cook for the man or else there is a head wife who cooks for the man and the others look after themselves and their own children. In case of Albert Lamin, for example, although he is on holiday at the moment and his wife still goes to work every day as a secretary, it is nevertheless expected on all sides that she should get up earlier in the morning so as to be able to prepare something for her

husband to eat during the day, and any different arrangement would be considered shameful. While women in themselves may be worthless, children are different case: though their function is also to serve and to work, they at least have some status, they are looked after and respected since the future well-being of the parents depends on their children surviving to earn enough to support them. Only in old age do women become Mamas once they have done their bit, and then they can wield a lot of power even over their husbands: the Mamas are waited upon, they become the wise persons who dip into their past to provide advice, and their word is followed to the letter; the old men appear to take on a more secondary role. All that I have said so far is what I've been able to observe and it's quite possible that many of my conclusions are incorrect if applied to the whole of Sierra Leonean society, I don't know.

Another characteristic is that people seem to require little sleep, they all get up at 5 or 6 and often don't go to bed till 2 or 3- at least, the men keep such a timetable, I don't know what the women do.

The volunteers here have a term "Tropical Mint Rot (TMR)" to define what Africa does to your capacity to think, and there's no doubt that such a thing exists though let's hope it is only temporary: even now after such a short time and in the least hot time of the year I find that everything has slowed down, if only because the pace of life here is that much more leisurely. It takes me longer to make mental calculations or to react to anything- perhaps that's why everything which seemed extraordinary a week ago seems normal now: a haze descends on your senses, you are less alert and you don't pick out noises, smells and sights as sharply as when you first arrive and also the contrast with what you are used to fades rapidly every day to the point where you feel at home anyway.

6.8: Two men came to the door last night at about 10.30 looking for a "white man" who used to live in this house, waiting to sell some diamonds to him; seeing that he was no longer here they asked me if I wanted to buy some diamonds the size of cherry-stones which they were just carrying around in their pockets. They looked very ordinary stones to me and for all I know they were false as was the story of the "white man", but on the other hand if someone wanted to sell diamonds illegally I suppose one would carry them round loose in one's pocket, and as far as looking like diamonds is concerned I'm sure

uncut diamonds do look like any other vaguely transparent pebble. I asked how much they wanted for them and they mumbled something like 70 Leones which would probably have gone down to 50, but apart from the fact that I didn't have the money to spare I don't think I would ever have risked buying them, an experience nevertheless. I've learnt to count up to 20 though that's sufficient to count to several hundred, but like all other Mende words the children at the Home don't know how to spell any of them so I've just taken down phonetic spelling- it's a strange situation where everyone speaks Mende among themselves, even teachers of English, but the only written language they are taught is English; if you want to study another language you do French, it's not possible for you to study Mende at any level. My own opinion is that there is something wrong there, at least a primary level they could do schooling in Mende and certainly at a higher level it should be at least offered as is the case with several of Nigeria's languages which you can study at University if you want to. Anyway, here goes 1-20 in my Mende: 1= Inta; 2= Fele ; 3= Sawa; 4= Nani; 5=Rolu; 6= Weta; 7=Wafla; 8=Wayapa; 9= Talu; 10=Pu; 11=Pumahunya; 12= Pumahunfele; 13= Pumahunsawa; 14= Pumahunnani; 15= Pumahunrolu; 16= Pumahunweta; 17= Pumahunwafla; 18= Pumahunwayapa; 19= Pumahuntalu; 20= Numugbongor; 21=Numugbongorhunya etc.... 40=Nufelegbongor etc. Up to 20 it's clear enough and then a new word appears made up of Numu= Man and Gbongor= to finish: this is explained by the fact that traditionally one counted all one's fingers then all one's toes and after 20 a man was literally finished; so at 40 two men are finished and so on, but what I don't know is what happens after the 19th man is polished off, that is I suppose 399= Nupumahuntalugbongorhunpumahuntalu, and then what? The latter part of how to say 20 was explained to me by a school teacher and the spelling is for one correct so the pronunciation is numuboyongor (a "g" before word seems to be silent, so one of the girls at the Home is called Gbonu pronounced bonu). However laborious it may seem I think it's a colourful way of counting and probably the local people never possessed or specified a large number like 400 so they had no problems. This morning I prepared a elaborate dish from a recipe given to me: pounded cassava leaves, (which look and taste just like the cud chewed by cows), okra (which are slimy vegetables looking rather like Cape-gooseberries), snapper-fish (all bones), garden eggs, palm oil and peppers- despite everything the end result was delicious and well worth the

effort; the only bit of cheating I did was to put in far less than the one pint of oil recommended, I think that amount would sink a battleship! I bought a small mahogany elephant from a handsome street seller for 2 Leones and a Gara cloth salesman came to the house but I didn't have enough money at the time so I asked him to come back next week: Gara cloth is typical of Bo and consists of hand-dyed cloth using mostly locally made dyes, very beautiful.

This morning I plucked up courage to take photographs of the market but it's no easy task: there are so many people that you can't get a clear view for a start and to stand around waiting for a gap immediately attracts attention so that even if you decide the moment has come you can't do it without someone seeing you; what then happens is that either they try it on and ask you for money (4 Leones) or else they freeze and pose for you, partially spoiling the purpose of your taking the photograph, Given these difficulties it's no wonder that photographs and documentaries seen in Europe don't go half way in covering the particular atmosphere of Africa. For example there is no way of showing what it's like to be one of 25 people in a poda-poda (local name for the trucks).

7.8: I bought "things fall apart" by Chinua Achebe for 4.50 Leones, expensive but worth every penny, it's a wonderful book and seems to say it all- which must be why Achebe, who is Nigerian, is called the African Shakespeare. What is interesting to me is that the book is set at the beginning of the influx of white missionaries into Africa and describes how the traditional culture is eroded by this phenomenon, and yet it describes to perfection customs that have survived to this day: the food, the climate, the sexual roles, the methods of cooking, even the immediate environment (if you look in the right direction) haven't changed one bit since time immemorial. Two Peace Corps, friends of the one I accompanied to Freetown, called in to see me on his recommendation: they both work in agriculture and they told me their opinion of the Chinese presence here. They said that the Chinese have developed technology for growing rice in conditions where land is scarce and labour is abundant while, in their opinion, Sierra Leone finds itself at the moment in the opposite position, so that all the technology being introduced at the moment is inappropriate. While I know nothing on the subject, and they presumably do, I find it difficult to accept their generalizations: is land abundant and labour scarce in this

country, and is Chinese technology only useful if the opposite conditions hold, and would the Chinese go ahead and introduce totally inappropriate methods of rice cultivation? I doubt it. They also told me that the Chinese run a hospital at Rotifunk, just as the Americans, the English and no doubt the Germans do elsewhere, but in this case the doctors only speak Chinese so that an interpreter from Chinese into English and another from English into the local African tongue are always required. It seems a crazy system but I think that is indeed the set up.

The Lamins came round this evening and confirmed all that I had worked out about sexual and social roles. They added that a bride is “bought” for 20, 30,100 or more Leones depending on the case, but even 1 cent is acceptable, and that this money is returned if the woman leaves the man or fails him in any way. In many cases the woman has to find the money for the children’s school fees, medicines, the children’s and the husband’s food and so on, so she has to work hard all day selling the goods she can grow or make to pay for everything; the husband’s duty only extends as far as providing shelter and clothing as well as all other extra expenses; and if the wife can’t manage to do all she has to do all she has to do then she is failing her husband and he has a right to complain.

8.8: a few points: a leather football in a shop cost 75 Leones, that’s what I heard quoted; the only difference between a sleeping dog and a dead dog is that the eyes of the latter are open and of the former closed; the fashion for some girls and women seems to be to wear tight trousers, straighten their hair and generally look as western as possible- and it doesn’t suit them; it is almost impossible to guess the age of some women, particularly those who have been slaving all their lives, so you will find a person who looks 60 carrying a 6 month old baby on her back and probably being only 40 years of age; there are some clever salesmen who claim to have herbs and nuts to cure and relieve almost anything under the sun-malaria, lice, hookworm, skin rash, impotence, river blindness, everything- and they are certainly entertaining to watch at work, particularly since to me the myriad of potions they had all seemed variations on 3 or 4 basic ingredients. However, I think it would be a mistake to be too cynical because I’m sure they have a respectable success rate somehow or other. Today I walked through a quarter I had not visited before, all dust tracks and huts plus hundreds of children: like the pied piper I

gathered quite a following singing something like poto poto senia after me, which I gather means white man in a pleasant sort of way, and I had to promise I would come back to see them. Children here are really so extraordinarily cheerful and welcoming and carefree, they're a tonic to us all.

9.8: Jenny Gibson came to see me, then Moussa, and in the evening I went to a Christian fellowship meeting at the Trainers' house; all interesting in different ways. Jenny told me she has been here 7 years having been in India before that; the greatest "culture shock" she had was not when she went to India but when she came back to England, and I can believe that. We spoke of politics in Sierra Leone: in 1977 many people were killed indiscriminately in Bo during troubles that centred on a general election and the APC's determination to win it overwhelmingly at any cost; the people were intimidated to the point where they fled into the bush to avoid getting into trouble, but when the day of the election came, much to Shaki's surprise and frustration, they all flocked back to vote for the opposition candidate. Shaki's reaction was to suspend the voting in Bo indefinitely, and he waited till the original nominations expired before announcing a new deadline for new nominations; he offered the opposition candidates a police escort to the nomination ceremony and they all accepted, but once they were all in a police van they were driven to Freetown and released there so that by the time they got back to Bo the deadline had expired and an APC candidate was later "democratically" elected. Following that election the President called a referendum asking the people if they wanted a one party democracy and 97% (!!) of the population agreed; after that all effective opposition was skillfully either absorbed or wiped out. Elections have been due this year but they keep being postponed because the climate doesn't suit the APC- whatever happens the elections won't be a quit affair, if they are ever called anyway. Jenny herself, to my surprise, is a passive Maoist.

When Moussa came, accompanied by Albert Lamin, he began by being very silent and it was like getting blood out of a stone talking to him, but he stayed 2 hours and by the end he had opened up completely and we had a great time demolishing myths about the "developed" and the "underdeveloped" nations of the world; he even promised to take me

out for a drink some evening, so I look forward to that because what he has to say is very perceptive and well thought out, unlike some other more emotional characters I have met.

10.8: Last night I participated in the “bring and show” evening of the Christian fellowship group: 2 Swedes, 2 Americans, 2 Sierra Leoneans, and 4 Britishers, an interesting collection of people each with fervent stories to tell, but I didn’t really feel it was my scene so I don’t think I’ll be a regular. The Americans were a Methodist minister and his wife who had sold their house to pay for a trip for one month to Sierra Leone summoned here by a force that was beyond their control- “the ways of God are mysterious...” the Swedes were also a minister plus newly married wife, called Christian and Christine preaching about Christ, rather a coincidence!

At the Cheshire Home I took a few of them to a bar nearby which they were delighted with though I had to make them sit under cover outside the bar because they were too shy to come in and preferred to sit on a concrete step in the pouring rain. I suppose they haven’t often taken to a bar and they felt out of place but when we returned to the Home they were very proud of their outing. I’ll have to be careful because only 4 of them are capable of walking to the bar plus one on my back (in fact at one point I had to carry two of them at a time because the path was too narrow to use crutches), so it’s not fair on the others who stay behind. There seem to be varying degrees of handicap: some of the smaller ones only crawl on the ground while others get around either with crutches or with no help at all, I think it all depends on their age and whether they have undergone the operations which a team of Dutch doctors come out twice a year to do at Serabu hospital free of charge. Polio in general has been eradicated after the discovery of the salk vaccine but I’m sure there are many more children with polio in Sierra Leone than the 50 or so in the two Cheshire Homes in Bo and Freetown, and until the Dutch doctors started coming out voluntarily nothing was done to help these children even if they were lucky enough to be in one of the Homes. Anyway, at the bar as we were leaving a young man who said he worked on the Bo-Pujehun project offered to buy drinks for everyone the next time we came, and he gave Wuyah 4 Leones to buy drinks when he wasn’t around; he also thanked me profusely for what I was doing and that encouragement and gratitude coming from someone I had never seen before gave me more pleasure than almost

anything that has happened to me so far in Sierra Leone. I hope we will meet again and have a talk. Tomorrow I hope to go to Gerihun, a village about 15 miles away where Brian Starken lives and works: he is an Irish missionary who has almost single-handed set up a secondary school with a particular slant towards agriculture and animal husbandry with money scrounged here and there.

As usual I had to wait 45 minutes at the bank but since it was raining it made little difference for once. Before that I had gone with Mr. Lamin to the school where he teaches, Christ the King College, also built by the Irish in 1955, and I was impressed with the spaciousness and relative grandeur of the place. At the back there were many graves, one of a woman who died in May 1981 aged 101; where no gravestone is placed a bush is planted so that some areas are a forest of bushes of different sizes and shapes, each bush having its roots in one person – I think I would much prefer to leave a beautiful bush behind rather than a pretentious and expensive gravestone as is custom at home, I must remember to specify that in my will. In a small cage near the school a crocodile 3 meters long seemed cramped and bored with small green eyes sleepily peering out: he was in a tank about half a meter high with wire netting placed on top, I'm sure he could have got out if he wanted to and I wouldn't blame him if he did decide to go home one day since no one seemed to pay any attention to him where he was. I also saw the exam results of this year and the selection seemed to me ridiculously severe; for example in form 3 which Mr. Lamin teaches only 17 out of 42 passed outright and were admitted to form 4, 5 have to repeat the year, and 20 have to transfer to another school. I suppose they know what they're doing but the system seems brutal to me; certainly not all schools are like that or else there would be no students left.

11.8: I went to Gerihun this morning, only 70c in poda-poda, and I found Brian Starken in his office, looking very far from a traditional priest with a T-shirt and profuse red beard; he is a great person and showed me all round his school explaining how money had come in trickles and fortuitously from Ireland, Germany and Holland. We then had lunch- a scrawny chicken and real potatoes, luxury for both of us- and we arranged to meet later in the bar of the village after he had sorted out some business he had to attend to. So I set off for the village and as usual gathered a band of young followers who

showed me everything there was to see: their reward was to have 5 photographs taken of them in various poses which they were delighted with. They took me down to the river bank where the crocodiles sleep at the night since they have to sleep on land apparently; then they showed me the school, playing fields, church, the old railway station (the tracks were taken up in 1971 since the railways were losing money impressively) reputedly full of snakes though I didn't see any. When Brian arrived at the bar we stayed for a long time drinking Star which he insisted on paying for, and I asked him about the possibility of a link between a village near Leamington, Birdingbury, and a village near Bo: he was very optimistic about a particular village, Yakaji, which he said was enterprising and progressive. He supplies several of the outlying villages with rice, tools and seeds and encourages the people to sow and harvest more: in theory they should keep 1/3 of their rice crop in storage for their own consumption, sell 1/3 to buy new tools and seeds, and sell 1/3 to pay for projects of local development like building a road or a school or digging a well. The theory rarely works because all sorts of conflicting interests enter the equation, particularly when the Chief only cares about his own wellbeing, but in this particular village of Yakaji they were enterprising and proud of their achievements. I hope to go to this village with Brian once the road to it becomes motorable again. He also told me about the Barclays's Bank Development Fund which at this end has promised a grant for agricultural extension in 12 villages but which at the other end in London they are more keen to make into a loan rather than a grant, which as far as Brian is concerned is useless. However they are likely to make it a grant in the end for political reasons: their well known involvement in South Africa means that they have to treat softly in the rest of Africa, though in fact I don't think any African nation would ever dream of pushing Barclays's Bank out of their territory. Apparently they allocate 1% of all their international profits to the development of the Third World and it's just a question of succeeding in getting a share of that 1%. At the bathe Lebanese proprietor, whom I had seen by coincidence in the bank yesterday (where he was laboriously counting out thousands of Leones in 10 Leones notes. The largest denomination available, to deposit into his account), was complaining bitterly of the Russian interference with the diamond market: traditionally diamonds were cut and put on sale in Antwerp, and though the cutting is now done even in Sierra Leone, Antwerp maintained a monopoly on the

marketing and selling of the diamonds until the Russians started undercutting them. You can now buy exactly the same diamond in Russia for a third of the price asked in Antwerp so that all those who were making indecent profits through the Belgian monopoly of the market are now being hit. I couldn't get myself to feel for this man though he evidently regarded this development as one of the most catastrophic in his life: I think people like that are in some way sick myself. He also told us the different gradings of diamonds which go something like extra collection blue, white, silver roughcut, silver, and more rarely pink and black. If 70% of the diamonds weren't smuggled out of the country the difference to the economy would be vast given that 70% of Sierra Leone's total export earnings are accounted for by the few diamonds legally exported. Brian says infant mortality before the age of 5 is about 50% and before the age of 1 it is 30% (by comparison the average in Europe is 12 deaths per thousand before the age of 1, about 25 times lower); unmarried mothers bear no stigma but on the contrary the new child is welcomed into the family as a potential future asset; in her lifetime a woman on average will bear 10 children but given that many of the more educated members of the community have at most 3 children, it means that there are many having far more than 10.

Normally theft goes unpunished even when everyone knows who is the culprit, the crime lies in getting caught and then the culprit is brutally beaten and kicked by all while the long list of his offences is proclaimed; in fact theft is not a 'sin' in traditional Mende belief, nor is adultery. Brian was an infinite source of information; I hope I see him again soon to learn more from him.

Back home this evening, a few more thoughts: chimpanzees are common in certain parts of the country though I haven't seen one yet, and where they are in plentiful supply they are eaten as a very delicate meat, just like anything else that moves and can be stopped is eaten here- cats, dogs, snakes, bush rats, deer- if necessary. Secondly I've noticed several people referring to their motherland and their fatherland, usually with reference to attending a funeral in one place or the other which involves a 40 days vigil, that is you should be present soon after the death and then again after 40 days when the departed gets his last farewell; anyway, the concept of the two lands to which you belong and to which you own some allegiance remains, and two are seen as very different since your

position vis a vis your maternal and your paternal relatives is not at all the same. Thirdly, I've just remembered something Moussa said which stuck me at the time: 'if the British hadn't colonized us, and if we had been in the position to do so, we would have colonized Britain' human nature.

The lock on my front door has been mounted, either on purpose or by mistake, upside down: you pull the handle up to open the door and you unlock it by turning the key clockwise. I'm getting so used to this that I'll probably be unable to open a door when I get home.

The heat is killing at the moment.

12.8: Last night I looked at the broken blood-pressure gauges which Jenny asked me to try to repair but I only got as far as spending I hour collecting all the split mercury that came shooting out of one of the cases when I opened it; it is almost impossible, as everyone knows who has done o'level chemistry, to get mercury to do what you want it to do rather than what it wants. As a result I haven't made any headway in repairing anything.

On my way to see Jenny Gibson at the hospital today, and to report my failure so far with the gauges, I was intercepted by a young man who professed that I was his friend and that he loved me, which took me by surprise I must admit. I followed him to the photographic studio where he works and he insisted on buying me a beer, introducing himself as Alpha from Guinea; in fact my French though rusty proved better than his English so we chatted for about ½ hour in French, and fortunately his French was identical to that spoken in France, unlike the English here which differs considerably from the Queen's English. I drew a map for him of how to get to my house and he said he would come around soon, we'll see. Also before I left the house this morning I had a brief conversation with a retired miner (coal in Wales then diamonds in Sierra Leone) called David Thomas, a charming old man who also promised to call sometime.

I think maybe habits and practices should be taken in context: to refer to one's husband or wife as 'this man' or 'this woman' is in fact almost an affectionate term and not a dismissing one as may seem at first; and to tell someone this first time you talk to them that you are their friend and love them seems to be a sincere request or statement of fact

and nothing else. One more point: it is evident that I am closely observed, the eye of Bo is on me, and everything I do, everywhere I go, is recorded so that after a few weeks I find people come up to me in the street and already know all about me- if that adds up to a sign of approval I'm very pleased.

One little girl, Kadiatu, and her brother Abdu come to see me every evening now and they don't mind whether we talk or not, they just like watching me read or write; I gave them sweets and drawing paper the first time and they replied by saying ' may God bless you', extraordinarily polite, without doubt European children could learn a lot from their African counterparts, to be grateful, humble, unspoilt, undemanding as well as contributing in some way to the family by helping out where possible- here they may have no choice but at least they do what they are asked to do by their elders in good grace. In addition children here are left to wander, they are in no way watched over or fussed over, so they learn things for themselves no doubt with mistakes on the way which could have been avoided; and yet they emerge with impeccable manners and characters- till they get old enough to have to struggle to survive and get into all sorts of trouble.

I went round the hospital once I got away from Alpha and I couldn't have failed to have been struck by the place: basic essentials were lacking, the hospital hasn't a generator of its own and people literally die on the operating table if a power cut occurs at the wrong moment; it doesn't even have an adequate water supply or any standards of hygiene, with hens walking about the wards and gods roaming through the grounds. There were about 50 jars of medicine in the store and that was all; there was an X-ray machine which has been waiting for 3 years for the necessary wiring and reflooring to be done to be able to put it into use and meanwhile a small 1947 x-ray machine was all they had; in the laundry 3 out of the 4 machines were out of order; the autoclave(to sterilize equipment) had seized up and anyway it only worked when the electricity was on; the EEC had donated a batch of oxygen tubes and machines which don't fit a single system in the country and are worse than useless. Almost certainly if you entered Bo Government Hospital bursting with health you would end up being carried out feet first, I don't know how Jenny can be so patient. I read that Shaki prides himself of having reduced the number of people per doctor in the country from 1: 18,000 to 1: 12,000, but then the average for the whole of Africa is around 1: 5,500, and secondly an average of 1,000/ hospital bed is also

dramatic. One thing Jenny told me of a more cheerful nature is that twins are far more common here than in Europe and almost every woman will have at least one set of twins in her lifetime; traditionally they are always given the same two Mende names irrespective of their sex. Some more phonetic Mende I learnt today:

Bebyeh: what is your name? bocaunwe: how are you feeling?; kaegome: alright ('thaks God'); bi ma mindo: where are you going? ; bi vui: how old are you? ; na vui: I amyear of age.

My radical 49 year old friend of the bar told me the pamphlet which Benson lent me and from which I am copying the chapter on Mende traditional worship has been banned because it destroys the aura of secrecy surrounding various activities of the Secret Societies in Sierra Leone- how exciting to be handling illegal literature!

13.8: The workmen came into the house today and I was relegated to the kitchen: the two halves of the bungalow are being redecorated during these summer holidays, and having finished the other half they've now come to facelift my half which will take them at least a week, but since I'm not really supposed to even be here I can't complain. I stayed at home waiting for Benson who had promised to take me to the Chinese farm today but he never turned up so I hope I'll be able to go another time; this is a farm near here which the Chinese set up a few years ago and which now comes under direct control of the Ministry of Agriculture so I was curious to see what was distinctive and valid about it since I haven't been able to find a Chinaman in person to talk to. The presence of other countries in Sierra Leone in one guise or another is remarkable in its geographical and ideological breadth: 1) Mao's China is here developing rice farms as well as a sugar-cane project at Magbas, and before they came the other lot from Taiwan were here doing much the same thing; 2) Rumania provides agricultural machinery; 3) Canada finances a research project on cassava production; 4) the EEC, The FAO, The IDA, The World Bank are all up to something; 5) West Germany finances the timber industry and the Bo-Pujehun Project; 6) Austria is involved in iron ore mining; 7) Switzerland controls bauxite mining; 8) The extraction of rutile is assisted by a US company; 9) The French are building the main road going to Kabala in the north, and many of the other construction projects have been carried out by the Italians and the English; 10) Japan has

provided 3 ferries to run between Freetown and the airport; 11) The USSR has provided aid to Sierra Leone's fishing industry and effectively controls all comings and goings in the port of Freetown; 12) Cuba has trained Shaki's elite troops, the Red Berets; 13) And finally all sorts of neighbouring African countries have complicated links with Sierra Leone (for example when there's trouble in the country, like the attempted coup of 10 years ago, Shaki turns to Sheku next door and brings in Guinean troops to restore order). I received my first batch of letters from Europe, after 3 weeks. On my way to the Cheshire Home at 2 o'clock I stopped at the house of John Lansanna whom I met last night on my way home. He works at the Chinese farm as an Agricultural Officer where he is paid 100 Leones a month if he turns up every day he is supposed to work otherwise he is paid 100 Leones a month if he turns up every day he is supposed to work otherwise his pay is cut back; the workers whom he supervises are paid 2.26 Leones per day which works out at less than 50 Leones a month, and 50 Leones is the price of a 120lb bag of rice. It seems incredible that rice, which is the staple diet of Sierra Leone, should cost 20 pence per pound which is the same as the price in Europe. And it's a mystery how people survive when they have rent to pay, clothing and schooling for 5 or 6 children, as well as food to buy. Even in the case of this John who earns twice the wage of the workers under him and who is not married and has no children, he has to pay 6 Leones a month for the rent of a minute room and 30 Leones a month to his 'landlady' for food which she prepares for him so he claims he's hard up every month like everyone else. I don't actually like the fellow, he seems relatively unintelligent and proud at the same time but as long as I don't end up seeing him too often it will be alright: I'm aware of the fact that, rightly or wrongly, a pumwe is worth his weight in gold and if you can be friend one and show him off to those around you, you make a very good impression, which tends to mean that I'm expected to see someone every single day once I have met them.

Last night I walked about the town till midnight with Alpha, very late for me particularly since I was up at 7 to let the workmen into the house. He also said he would come around again this evening, I hope he doesn't become too regular. We spoke for 3 hours in French and it all came back to me after several years, I even found myself thinking in French this morning. He told me about his father dying in France and of his mother back in Guinea being hounded by all her brothers-in-law who wanted to marry her: I didn't quite

understand the story but sorcery came into it and it has been the cause of his leaving Guinea for a while, someone had cast a spell on someone else and he was in some way affected.

I've learnt how names are passed on: you call your son a name of his own plus either your name or that of your father, so if your name is John Conteh you can call your son Peter John or Peter Conteh and he can call his son Siaka John or Siaka Peter in the first case, and Siaka Conteh or Siaka Peter in the second case. This is how it was explained to me by John Lansanna but it's quite possible that I misunderstood what he said.

14.8: last night I received the visit of a group of young people who live up the road and we played cards ('7 up') for about 2 hours amid a lot of giggling and laughter because I couldn't understand them most of the time. They are all members of one family and each have an English and a Mende name- Jasper, Julietta, Edwar, Nancy, Jessica, the 3 girls are all 17 and in form 3 so they'll be taking o' Levels in at least 2 years time; their relationship to each other takes some working out, but I think the two J's are daughters of the same father and different mothers while Nancy is the daughter of one of their elder sisters and is referred to by the two J's as their daughter, not niece. As I think I have explained before, on your father's side of the family you can only have fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, and sons and daughters, no uncles, aunts, cousins, nephews, or nieces; by extension it is incestuous and taboo to marry anyone from your father's side of the family although you can marry into your mother's side and that in fact is a very common arrangement. They all found it amusing if not incredible that in Europe one sticks to monogamy at least in theory and I don't think they thought it was a good idea.

Some statistics I picked up this morning: in 1968-69 illiteracy, they say, was 80.3% in Sierra Leone and the average income per person was 70-80 Leones per year; today I don't know what the level of literacy is but the average annual income per person is put at 200 Leones, although I think it's one of those useless statistics which are bandied about because to divide the official national income by the total population hardly tells you anything at all. No one knows what the true amount of money earned in the country is, no one knows what the true population is, and anyway to take an average made up of enormously differing incomes distorts any conclusions you may wish to draw from the

figure you arrive at; similarly to list 3rd World countries in the poverty league by official income per capital is virtually useless.

Some expressions in Krio: 'you de go?' (Are you going?), 'how de time of day'. 'How de body' (how are you), 'me no sabi krio' (I don't know krio).

This morning I went to see Mr. Hannibal Kamarra (a lovely name anyway) who runs the small industries workshop which comes under a Ministry of the same name, because he had asked to see me in case the link with Leamington Spa might be able to help him with new weaving patterns and materials. I watched? Men weaving patiently one with a loom and the other by just running a spool of cotton in and out of a dozen or so threads stretched between two sticks; the latter was making strips which are eventually sewn together to make a bedspread sold for 70 Leones after 10 days work. Most of the cotton is spun in the villages and many of the dyes are natural dyes also prepared out in the villages, so the end product is a rough but very genuine cloth. Mr. Kamarra struck me as a sensible man so I hope I'll be able to do something to help him.

There is a habit here for close friends to hold hands, or so it seems, because last night when walking around with Alpha we ended up holding hands, something I didn't particularly enjoy no doubt because of its associations and the fact that in western society it is something one wouldn't dream of doing. Inevitably that makes me wonder how homosexuality is seen here- is it largely a 'creation' of western society or not? The children at the Cheshire Home Walk about barefoot everywhere and on everything- rusty nails, broken glass, opened tins, and as for muddy puddles they go out of their way to wade through them, how do they manage? Every time I see something which we would regard as dangerous to step on I pick it up but really the ground around the Home is so littered with such things that I'm fighting a losing battle. I suppose one could again retort that in fact children in Africa don't manage very well and many die as a result of infected cuts, but I think it remains true that they have a greater resistance and maybe we would do better to expose ourselves a little more to the elements or at least not take so many precautions against them; after all at a certain point extra precautions and protections are counterproductive, we lack in our bodies the iron and the calcium which a greater exposure to nature and its perils would provide us with. The children are also remarkably self-sufficient: there are 2 girls aged 10 and 12 who are not handicapped but who live at

the home in return for doing everything to look after the others- washing cooking, shopping and so on and it's hard work. Washing clothes consists of banging them down vigorously on flat stones, soaking them in soapy water, then banging them down again, which is no doubt how clothes used to be washed in our grandparents' days. The whole of their daily lives is run by the children themselves and the matron who supposedly supervises them does virtually nothing except be there in case of need; the sense of community, mutual respect and responsibility is impressive. For example a standard pastime is to pick lice out of each other's hair, or to plat it; they have tried both on me and they claim that today, just after I had washed my hair, they found a solitary louse on my head, and on another occasion they started pulling out my hair to prove to me that some of it was going grey- should I be getting worried?

I've been befriended by a white dog who comes into the house at every opportunity and sits by me or follows me around, but unfortunately dogs here have everything under the sun- flees, rabies, mange- so even though this dog looks alright I'd better be careful. Maybe it likes me not because I do anything to show affection for it but because I do nothing, like kicking it, to show my despite for it.

Abdullah, aged 10, has a supply of cigarette ends which he smokes, and claims he has been smoking since he was 5, I wish I could get him to stop. Sierra Leone is just developing its tobacco industry so that many of the large companies are starting production here of what I'm told are pretty rough cigarettes and consequently they are advertised and promoted by tobacco companies as always thirsty for profits.

15.8: I went this morning with Alpha to a village 8 miles from here where they found alluvial diamonds a month ago. In fact I was supposed to drive the car of a wealthy uncle of Alpha's, that is one of the many cars, but when we got to his house we found that he had left taking with him the keys of all the cars, so we had to take a poda-poda there and back. There was no work today because too many strangers to the village turned up and they were waiting till the operation is more manageable; what they do then is rake the ground takes the earth down to the river to wash it and then just pick out the diamonds, all very easy. The discovery of diamonds was made by a woman who was collecting potato leaves when she uncovered what looked like diamond just lying on the ground;

since then, to my amazement the owner of each house in the village had marked off a piece of land around his house as his property. Normally there are no such things as defined boundaries of property around one's house, but in a case such as this it was sufficient to make one's claim by just laying down pieces of wood on the ground, and these boundaries are respected, no one would dream of taking earth from your plot down to the river to wash. It seems incredible that this should be so given that theft in general is very common. My own conclusion is that a very deep and respected conviction that the fruits of the land are sacrosanct still survives to this day. So by the wayside you find bananas, nuts, corn and animals completely unguarded but everyone knows who they belong to and nobody touches them; similarly, maybe, with diamonds, they are the gifts of the earth and to scabble in another man's patch would be an inconceivable offence against mother earth (as for the owner of the land they would think nothing of stealing from him anything not connected in some way to the earth). So, our visit was interesting but I didn't come away with a handful of diamonds, and quite honestly I don't think anyone ever does: the village was next to the river Sewa which is indeed the diamond-rich river of Sierra Leone, but I doubt that you can find many diamonds by just raking your field of potatoes.

It becomes almost a litany to say that this morning I met another young man who stopped me in the street, asked me where I lived, and threatened to come round to see me this evening; it takes some energy to talk to people all the time, especially when they are uninvited, but of course I'd much rather have it that way round than the opposite. Partly because of these visits I'm not getting on with my blood-pressure gauges, also because in the mornings the house is upside down with painters and other assorted workmen.

16.8: He didn't come! Instead I had relaxing evening sewing sheets which I had managed to rip apart during my nocturnal struggles against the heat, and listening to the radio: I think some supernatural power intervened to keep all possible visitors away last night because someone has turned up every evening for about 2 weeks now. There is a bread crisis: first I was told the porters had been held up at the bakery because of the exceptionally heavy rainfall, then that there is a shortage of flour. I think the real reason might be to do with the big general strike in Freetown at the moment which has brought

many things, including flights to a standstill. The trouble seems to have arisen when the Labour Congress, which represents all the Trade Unions, wrote a letter to the President demanding principally a reduction in the price of rice which has gone up 25% since I arrived. He didn't bother to reply so the Congress called a general strike as it said it would and it is hoped that at least we will deign to meet representatives from the Congress to discuss their grievances. Their demands are eight in all and go from better roads to better health, schools, cheaper rice, meat and fish, measures to fight unemployment and inflation- in short a general improvement in the performance and commitment of the government to the needs of the people is exhorted. We shall see what happens next, but a general strike for one day in Freetown is already an exceptional step. It's remarkable how one only finds out what's going on in Freetown when it's on the BBC World Service news, and of course that's even more true of international news: papers here are published twice a week and consist of about ten tabloid pages with some news and comment on what's happening within the country and only rarely is there a reference to foreign news as in the case of the recent attempted coup in the Gambia. Everyone relies on the BBC to know what's going on in the world, and only now do I realize how inadequate, powerful and potentially dangerous that can be: while undoubtedly the BBC provides the most complete and impartial news you can hear, that doesn't mean that it has no slant at all on the news it reports. For example the current hunger strike in Northern Ireland is seen only in the light of what the BBC chooses to say about it; and I was disgusted one day when, in a lighthearted summary of events of the day in Britain, the broadcaster reported the death of two people following the death of another hunger striker: he made it sound as if all those who die over there are only being childish and deserve no better fate, I could have strangled him because no one has a right to be flippant over the death of human beings, particularly when as much as ¼ of the whole world listens to the BBC as its only source of news. If you listen carefully to the wording and the order of presentation of news items, you realize what powerful propaganda roles it can, and does, play; in our daily lives we are not aware of this fact because we are free to learn the news from other sources as well. I mentioned this fact to Lawrence and to Moussa just to check I wasn't getting carried away, and I was surprised how strongly they agreed with me, I had always associated the BBC World Service with

something immovably British and something to be proud of, but all I can say now to Mrs. Thatcher who wants to cut back on the BBC is that she will be removing the best to leave the more murky side of the service which it provides to the world.

On a less controversial note, I heard a dedication this morning from a nurse in Bo to a nurse in Serabu 35 miles away, on a BBC programme, and I must say it was a pleasant surprise, it make you feel important to hear Bo mentioned on the radio.

People here are totally unreliable as far as time is concerned, countless times they have failed to turn up and never will they apologize for it; yet I've found that they make a point of impressing on you that if you promise to go and see them at a given time they will be waiting for you. It's all part of the general game of making promises and commitments you won't keep, of talk rarely followed up by action. I went through a period of having great faith in the average Sierra Leonean and I thought it a pity that many were pessimistic about the fundamentally rotten nature of the black man. While I still believe these views to be true, I've also come to realize that, for whatever reasons (and a psychologist/ anthropologist could have a field day here), the average person does tend to think firstly and only of himself. There are strong family ties but beyond them each man's actions seem to be guided by the sole desire to suit himself. Honesty, reliability, industriousness, integrity are all characteristics with which the white man is credited in contrast to the black man, and the belief applies to both sides equally; unfortunately there is a lot of truth in it but also a considerable amount of falsehood- in the sense that the white man isn't all he is made out to be and in the sense that the difference is not something intrinsic to the two races, but rather a convenient myth. The myth doesn't help things to change. At the moment I'm eating guava in the dark-delicious- and thinking how clever I have been in managing my money so far, I have spent a total of 200 Leones since I came. I took the children to the bar again but the man who offered to buy drinks last week didn't turn up. Instead I met a man from SLBS (Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service) on holiday in Bo, and he told me that had he been on duty he would have interviewed me on the radio about the work I am doing with the children of the Cheshire Home and about the One World Link which I briefly talked to him about no doubt another lot of empty promises but had he really interviewed me it may have done the Link some good. As I was leaving the Home I saw Mamie, who is 5,

out in the rain so I took her in but in the process I realized that she had been out there for a good reason and got covered in what she had gone out to deposit, after which I had to walk the 3 miles home with a distinctive smell emanating from my T-Shirt. For what it's worth I was told by the other children that the Mende or slang word which was relevant at the moment is caca, exactly the same as the Italian and maybe the Spanish or Portuguese that must have brought the word here; similarly an elderly man or woman is called papa or mama which must also come from a latin root.

I just went into the bathroom to rinse a mug, I flashed on the torch and I thought I saw a body in the bat am I going mad?

Listening again to the World Service I heard a professor from Warwick University being interviewed about a word processor that can convert ordinary script into Braille instantaneously. In the same day, 12 hours apart, Bo and Warwick University mentioned, and I happened by chance to be listening both times: I'm probably the only person in the whole world to whom hearing those two places mentioned means something, Alpha says that there are crocodiles, hippos, elephants, and lions in Sierra Leone, all of which he has seen at one time or another, and I've seen none.

17.8: I came down to Freetown by comfort bus, a small van which in fact wasn't as uncomfortable as it may have been; it's a wonderful day for a change, not a drop of rain and blue skies which allowed me to see the countryside properly for the first time, very impressive. We went past plantations of oil palms in neat rows, and a series of small villages where a group of women and children would be waiting for us to sell bananas, fish, roast corn, drinks, and even palm wine; then miles of desolate though lush and green bush with no sign of life at all; and finally the approach to the town with impressive new roads built in honour of the OAU guests of last year.

During the journey I felt I was, and am, living a moment of liberty, I hope it lasts; I read Chinua Achebe's "No Longer at ease". Also very good, and I reached Freetown quite prepared to face all the hazards of the big town, besides I now know my way around so it's less intimidating. Nevertheless when I arrived at the lorry park I knew I wanted to reach Siaka Stevens street about 2 miles away and I only had a vague idea of the right direction to walk in: it was like walking in a forest not knowing what animals are lurking

behind the trees, you have to pretend to know where you're going or else you're finished, and you have to keep on walking no matter what distractions appear through hisses and calls and outstretched hands to hold you up. In fact if you don't keep your eyes on the ground you end up falling through a gap in the paving stones and into the gutter.

I got through the ordeal and reached the immigration offices where they kindly renewed my residence visa in half an hour instead of making me wait a day like last time (I say ' kindly' though of course they were only doing what they should normally do all the time, but here you have to be grateful for every blessing whether you had a right to it anyway or not). I then set off for the Nigerian Embassy to try and extract a visa from them because I will be staying 48 hours in Lagos on my way back home; the last time I went there, on my previous visit to Freetown, I found the offices closed for 4 days because of the Ramadan weekend. This time the offices were open but there was no one in them so I had to wait a total of 3 hours for the official or his secretary who where supposed to be there to return; in the meantime I set off to have 3 passport size photographs taken since I was told by an aspiring taxidermist in the queue at the embassy that they would be necessary. The first place I went to the man took the picture then realized there was no film in the camera so he took it again and then decided the camera wasn't working anyway and he sent me away empty handed; at the second place they told me there had just been a power cut in their part of the town because of the general strike; and finally after much trooping about desperately in the heat I found a place that momentarily had camera, film and light so that after a half hour wait I finally emerged the owner of the 4 photographs of me unshaved and unkempt in my dungarees hoping they wouldn't object at the embassy to my appearance. When I eventually got in to see someone at the embassy I was told to come back in the morning with 3 forms filled in each with a photograph attached, and when I offered to fill them in there and then I was told that was not allowed and that anyway the office was about to close (at 3 o'clock). Patience is a virtue.

In one paper here they express indignation at the BBC World Service report that said Freetown had been brought to a standstill by the strike (a government owned paper of course). In fact things seem to be calm though no one knows what's going on behind the scenes, no doubt a lot of wheeling and dealing and the usual empty promises being made.

I came out to the Peace Corps rest house and claimed a piece of floor space since the place is already full of Americans on a project called 'Crossroads Africa': they are a mixed group ranging from a Hawaiian of 19 and a Canadian of about 50, and they each paid 2,400 dollars to come out to Liberia for 2 months and help build a school. They are now rushing around the area before returning to the US in 3 days time. I personally wouldn't be prepared to pay out that amount of money to tour around with a bunch of not too intelligent compatriots but maybe I'm being idealistic.

I've met here a Peace Corps called Jim who is at the moment talking about spoons as status symbols in the villages: a spoon will always be kept for the guest and at most 2 or 3 of the highest dignitaries will eat with a spoon, the rest use their hands. I've seen whisky and brandy in the shops here selling at between 30 and 50 Leones, a man's monthly wage.

18.8: This morning I went out to the beach at Funchia where I had arranged to meet Jim but he never turned up; before that I had gone into town to hand in my application for a Nigerian visa and I was told it may not be ready for 48 hours but I'm fairly sure I'll be able to get it tomorrow if I'm sufficiently insistent and if I plead with the all-powerful secretary at the office. The beach is fantastic, not a soul to be seen, long expanses of sand and clean sea: the postcards which I bought off the Canadian last night all have scribbled on the bottom 'P.S.: Found a paradise in West Africa... "Hawaii" is here!' Which is possibly an exaggeration or at least inaccurate in as far as I'm sure Hawaii is not deserted as the beaches here are. I decided to walk around and a fisherman rowed me across a stretch of water for 5c; I then got picked up by two young men who followed me for the rest of the day and I had to buy them drinks in the end and make up stories to get rid of them. A large portion of the bay was being used for fishing, which is carried out with an interesting technique: 2 boats go about 200 yards out and 2 miles apart, from the boats to the beach there are two ropes and between the boats the net is cast so that a large rectangle is marked out; 20 men on the beach at the end of each rope tug at it for a whole morning till the net has been dragged all the way in to the shore and then the fish are just picked out of the water and collected in baskets. I was told by one of the boys that the other reason why no one was in the water was because of the sharks which come to

within 5 yards of the shore and manage to kill at least one person every year; I've been told by other people that no one has ever been attacked by a shark in Sierra Leone so maybe the boy was only trying to impress me.

I came back into town and went to a chop house: if that doesn't give me the runs nothing will, the water was just city water and the meat was totally indefinable, it's better not to know what it was.

It's another splendid day- in this country it either rains so heavily that you can't go out or else it's so hot and humid that you don't feel like going out, maybe therein lies a cause for the lack of economic progress in these countries.

I notice the consular cars have sensible number plates, for example UK 1, UK 2, UK 3, or FRA 1, FRA 2, and so on with ITA, US, GER; presumably the lower the number the higher up you are in the order of seniority within the consulate. Also each country makes a particular effort to use cars made by their national car manufacturers like Fiat, Ford, Mercedes, Renault and so on.

There is a network of interests in Freetown which I find hard to understand but which has been carefully outlined to me: for example, the country may receive a gift of 100 bags of rice to be distributed free to the people; instead the Ministers to whom they have been entrusted sell them to the rice mills presumably clean the rice; the mills then sell a portion to the electricity company in return for the guarantees that their power will not be cut off during the day; and finally, the electricity company puts the rice on the market at the normal price. In this way everybody is happy except those to whom the rice was destined in the first place.

Last night I went out with 3 others, Jim, another American girl, and a Sierra Leonean, to 2 night clubs and it was just like stepping out of this country for a while, so quiet in terms of people and so loud in terms of music. I ended up drinking, and spending, a fair amount, but after all this is a holiday as well as everything else it's supposed to be. When people ask me what I'm doing in this country it's not easy to reply, I have 2 or 3 standard answers which I awkwardly work through but I have no label to classify me like all the other whites here, and it ends up that what I'm doing sounds either trivial or very impressive while in fact it is neither. When we were at one nightclub a Sierra Leonean twice came up and asked first Jim and the second time me if he could dance with the girl

in our group and when they had finished he thanked us without a word to the girl, she seemed to have no value for him as a person only as a companion.

I've seen advertised a local version of the Merchant of Venice to be performed in 2 weeks time and given the title 'wa Paun Flesh', straight and to the point! In the afternoon I went out to Lumley beach and had my second ever swim in the Atlantic after the West of Ireland 5 years ago, slightly warmer here and equally beautiful, I think this will become one of my memories of Sierra Leone.

At the rest house I met a 'terminated' Peace Corps who's back in this country on the promise of a job as assistant to Unesco anthropologist who offered him 750 dollars a month in return for a 50 dollar loan 3 months ago- he's only just realized that he was conned and intends to report the existence of someone posing as a UNESCO worker to that organization. 'Termination' is what happens to you if you misbehave while out here with here with the Peace Corps, though the title sounds much more fatal than that; according to this victim his crime was, after 9 months here, to ride his motorbike though the streets of Bo with two friends in a state of advanced inebriation and thus disturb the peace. The other 2 had their bikes confiscated for 3 months but this fellow suffered the ultimate sanction because he upset the Peace Corps officer out here who is a black American; allegedly he referred to him and his Sierra Leonean assistant as 'boys' and it was taken as a racial comment for which he got the boot. The story sounds most odd to me and I'm sure there were faults on both sides: the Peace Corps seems far from intelligent, and his superior doesn't emerge as any less stupid if he thinks a racist would be out here working among Sierra Leoneans. I'll now be racist and say that the story doesn't really surprise me judging from what I've seen of Americans!

19.8: I got my visa at lunchtime today so all is set, I now return to Bo for exactly 2 weeks; Freetown is no longer the intimidating place it was now that I know my way around, but I'm sure Lagos, where I have to spend 2 days on my way back, will be full of surprises. On my way back from the beach last night I glimpsed on the hill one of the President's lodges which apparently was donated to his Excellency by the Lebanese community and he proceeded to sell it to the State for 6 million Leones- you would have trouble building a villa for that amount in Italy or anywhere else in the world, so a price

tag like that out here is just farcical, Shaki must be so wealthy and he's been in politics for 30 years, why doesn't he do everyone a favour and emigrate to the Bahamas?

I had a great time last night reading all the pamphlets in the rest house designed to assist the poor culture shocked volunteer: one pamphlet gave instructions, and I'm not joking, on how to make a cup of instant coffee, without mentioning that an 8oz jar costs 12 Leones here so you have to be a millionaire to afford it; another instruction was to allow the water you intend to drink to boil furiously for 10-20 minutes, and you were advised to peel the outer skin off any roasted peanuts you may buy. There was also a section entitled 'Selected Briticisms and West Africanisms' which translates words like these: biscuit= cookie; boot= trunk; biro= ball point pen; sellotape= scotch tape, cheeky= fresh, chemist= drug store, chips= French fried potatoes, cooker= stove, drawing pin= thumb tack, dual carriageway= divided highway, duster= chalk eraser, football= soccer, form= class, fortnight= two weeks, fullstop= period, I'm coming= I'm going and will return, jam= jelly, petrol= gasoline, post= mail, plaster= band-aid, puncture= flat tyre, queue=line of people, return ticket= round trip ticket, roundabout= rotary, sit an exam= take an exam, straightaway= right away, sweets= candy. I would have thought that at least some of those words were known to the Americans but the people I asked all confirmed that they wouldn't have known their meaning, is it possible?

Here is the first verse of the National Anthem of Sierra Leone: "High we exalt thee, realm of the free, great is the love we have for thee, firmly united ever we stand, singing thy praise, o Native Land. We rise up our hearts and voices on high, the hills and the valleys re-echo our cry, blessings and peace be ever thine own, land that we love, our Sierra Leone."

- I wonder how appropriate these words are today.

20.8: Last night I came up to Bo with Jim who will stay a few days at my house; he has been touring around West Africa during the school holidays since he works as a teacher in Kabala in the far north of the country and is now just rounding off by visiting southern Sierra Leone. He was in Gambia throughout the coup attempt and said he had a great time on the beaches: he was very keen to have some photographs developed which showed him chatting with the heavily armed Senegalese troops, and he said most of the

soldiers were put up in a luxury hotel and had very little to do. I notice that the BBC World Service is very pro Jawara in Gambia, and that the intervention of Senegalese troops as well as a few British SAA men was implicitly praised. I personally tend to agree that Jawara is a good man and it is best that he should be restored to power, but Jim told me that people were very hard up in the country and the claim that Gambia is the only respectable democracy in West Africa is a gross exaggeration. What I object to, however, and the local papers here have been keen to point this out, is that a Senegalese occupation of a neighbouring country is justified by the powers that be, and a Lybian occupation of a neighbouring country is condemned by those same powers. In both cases the intervention was in support of the existing President and in both cases one of the original clauses of the Organization of African Unity, namely that no country should interfere in the affairs of another country, was contravened. If one wanted to extend the analogy even further one could point out that in both cases a suggested merger of the two countries concerned followed: just a few days ago the Presidents of Senegal and Gambia announced that talks were taking place concerning the possible creation of a single country, Senegambia. No doubt Gheddafi clearly has different ambitions to Diouf in Senegal, but it is also true that Reagan has chosen to make Gheddafi his number one enemy in Africa and that all the world's media plays along with him; consequently any parallels between the situation in Chad and Gambia are played down, also because Britain had strong vested interests in seeing Jawara restored so the Senegalese intervention could not be criticized. As I have said before, the presentation of news in a given way is a more powerful tool to manipulate the opinion of large portions of the world's population than any other at the disposal of the major powers.

As we were leaving Freetown last night in a comfort bus I was sitting by an open window and a young boy ran past stretching his arm in through the window and trying to wrench my watch off: of course I was too surprised and react by holding on to his arm and injuring him as the bus accelerated away, but I should be glad he got away empty-handed.

I asked Jim what he had gathered after one year here and he told me that an average man of any standing at all will have 7 wives though there is one chief who has about 200 wives and is too old to do anything with them except employ them on his farm; the

standard exchange rate is one cow for one wife. Initiation ceremonies into the Secret Societies, which almost everyone goes through, now take a few weeks but they used to take 7 years during which women learnt how to cook, dance, look after children, and men learnt how to hunt, wrestle, and conduct a household. If a man wants to marry an uninitiated woman he must pay to put her through the initiation first; he then must pay the bride price which will be calculated according to the age, background, and guarantee of virginity of the woman.

I came back to the house to find a mysterious dried fish in the fridge and every single match used up, I imagine the painters must have had a ball while I was away..... Well, today I was struck down by a mysterious ailment: after all my complacency about surviving the chop and the water in Freetown I went through about 10 hours of real discomfort today. I went to the Cheshire Home but I felt extremely tired and I had a headache which got stronger and stronger until I had to lie down soon after I got home in a quiet and dark room to sweat it out. Earlier I had felt a pain across my chest which might have been due to carrying the children around on my shoulders but that has never happened before. I had no food all day except some bread and I felt so weak that I couldn't even walk about. However, it seems that I did the right thing because whatever it was gradually passed and now I feel alert again.

Jim has gone out to see some fellow Peace Corps he met earlier in town and I'm waiting for him to come back so that I can go to bed; one of the volunteers he met this morning told him that the rest house here in Bo was broken into twice in the last 2 days and that he himself had a 600 dollar camera plus 100 dollars in cash stolen and he wasn't insured, which seems normal amongst them because they say the premium is too high, I think they're mad.

I know at least that it wasn't or isn't malaria that I have because I haven't been bitten recently; apparently the worst time for mosquitoes is in the mango season because the males eat the fruit and it is only the females who prefer to eat us all of which is new to me, I wish I could go to bed!

21.8: Jim never came but slept on the floor at the rest house because the rain was so heavy last night he couldn't come home, or so he says. As for me, I don't think I slept at

all last night and even today I decided not to go to the Cheshire Home because I still felt only half alive, I wonder what it is?

Mohamed, the cleaner at Cheshire Home came to see me this morning: it emerged that he earns 50 Leones a month and pays rent of 9 Leones for himself and his wife and yet he has asked me to buy for him when I get home and send out to him a radio-cassette recorder which would eat up 2 months 'wages (maybe he's hoping I'll make him a present of one). He's a strict Muslim which means no alcohol, no cigarettes, and prayers 5 times a day and, in theory, a commitment to leave everything up to God: if a man steals your chickens you mustn't take him to court or say a word against him, but rather you should leave it to God to punish him. I wonder how well adhered to that rule is and how it affects general opinion about theft.

This morning I staggered out to see Hannibal Kamarra, the Small Industries man, who was just sitting around doing nothing because they had run out of materials: every month the same thing happens, the workers, (4 of them), are employed by the Ministry which pays their salaries but they're never given enough materials to do all the work they would like to do, I can't imagine why. After 11 years service Hannibal, who is in charge of the little team, still only earns 65 Leones a month, so he wants me to help him set up his own business at home for which he requires someone to let him have the materials since he already has a Canadian loom waiting to be used. It's not going to be easy but he seems to me really deserving of help: he didn't complain bitterly about his conditions of work and only told me about them when I asked, but he clearly wants to better himself and quite rightly so.

I met Albert Lamin who had been away in Freetown for 10 days: while he was there he attended a meeting between the workers and the President where promises were made which aren't being kept, such as the reduction in the price of rice, Albert said that as a result an underground opposition movement has arisen and has started making plans: in his words 'we intend to blow up a strategic area of the country very soon' is this the revolution one step nearer or is it just talk? In any case I told him to wait 2 weeks till I have left the country.

I also met John Lansanna who extracted 1 Leone out of me to pay for his sister's bus ride to Taiama. By this stage I was desperate to get home and lie down so I was abrupt with

him but after all if I don't like him why should I do him any favours? I suspect he wants to take advantage of me and he may not be the only one: it's amazing how people take you up then drop you from one moment to the next. I haven't seen Benson for 10 days or Alpha for 5 or Barba for 2 weeks, maybe just as well.

Jim bought a radio in Freetown made by a company called Sierra but nowhere was it marked what country it was manufactured in (certainly not Sierra Leone despite the similar name); I suspect very strongly that it came from South Africa, also because the first 2 languages in the instruction booklet were English and Dutch. Despite official OAU policy to boycott all South African goods - ironic but not surprising.

25.8: A gap of 4 days in the diary: it was malaria after all and it's a terrible thing. On Friday (21st) I stayed at home in the afternoon but in the evening I thought I was better again, for the second time, and I went out to Coker's bar for a drink with Jim; when I got back I was struck down for good. I didn't know the symptoms of malaria and since I had faithfully taken all my tablets every Sunday, I didn't take the idea too seriously; also Jim, who was never had malaria, suggested I might be dehydrated which was quite possible since I never drank at all in the afternoons at Cheshire Home so I believed him and proceeded to drink like a fish. He left early on Saturday morning and I was left to sweat it out on my own: constant headaches, waves of pouring sweat, moments of shivering, inability to eat more than 3 pieces of dry bread a day, and extreme weakness. Also the inability to get any sleep because lying down the headache seemed to be worse, and sitting up was a physical effort; at times I couldn't move and yet I had to if I was to get some water or open the door. One night the water went off altogether and I had to ration what I had because it also seemed to be a period of uninterrupted sun and no rain; fortunately the water came back the next day. Time passed very slowly and the heat and stuffiness was oppressive, I was tortured by thoughts and worries and dreams in a flurry of mental activity I could have done without, it was all a vicious circle, I was weak and I couldn't eat so I became weaker, I was tired and I couldn't sleep so I became more tired, and so on. In the past few days I've experienced insomnia, migraine and old age, just as well they're only temporary ailments in this case!

Malaria locks itself on your forehead and behind your eyes and the slightest movement is painful, even just moving your eyes from side to side; it comes and goes in waves that gradually wear down your resistance, particularly when you're on your own but I mustn't dramatize it too much, it wasn't the end of the world.

On Saturday Neil brought me a batch of post which came all at once because it was held up by the general strike in Freetown which has now been suspended for the moment; he confirmed I had malaria and promised to bring the chloroquin pills to counter it in the afternoon. Unfortunately he didn't come till 5 which was a long time to wait with the promise that he would have come as soon as possible. And by the time he came I had already taken the first 4 pills because a Peace Corps happened to come to see me and he went out immediately on his motorbike to get the pills when I told him I was waiting for them. When Neil did come he promised to mention to Jenny Gibson that I wasn't well and to ask her to come to see me on Sunday evening, and I also sat waiting for her but she never came either. I'm sure that had she been able to she would have come, perhaps she wasn't even told.

Then on Monday Brian Straken called to say that he had arranged for us to visit Yakaji the next day. It's been a great disappointment to me that 2 of the things I had most looked forward to I have been unable to do, the trip to Yakaji and a talk given last night to the Christian Fellowship group by Moussa entitled 'is a coup ever justified? Which I wanted very much to hear given that it may well be an extremely topical subject (of course the answer to the question itself is that a coup is justified when it's justifiable and not when it isn't which gets us nowhere, but the opinions expressed during the discussion would have been of interest). As for going to Yakaji another time, Brian will be away for the rest of the week and after that I'm due to leave so I won't get to see the village though I hope the link up with a village in England will go ahead and Brian has promised to do all he can to set it up.

When he saw me and I told him that I hadn't been well for a few days he decided it was best if I went to Serabu Hospital and he arranged for someone to come and pick me up to take me there in the afternoon. I'm extremely grateful to him for his intercession, if it hadn't been for him I would probably still be languishing in my hothouse on my own; he is a unique man and someone I very much respect, he is what more people should be like.

So, I set off in a van on the 35 miles trip to Serabu where there is a mission hospital considerably more human than the Bo Government Hospital; the road was abominable, all potholes and puddles which meant we had to crawl and bounce along and it took us well over an hour. I was questioned by a Dutch doctor who has only just arrived out here for a couple of weeks and had only come across malaria in books but he had no doubt about it and asked me if I wanted to be admitted; at first it seemed I would be in the public ward, no that I minded, then one of the few rooms in the private wings became free so here I am in bliss and comfort- I think I started getting better as soon as I saw the cool room and the mosquito net with no holes! Just as I never imagined there could be a hospital as bad as Bo Government so I never expected one as impressive as Serabu. They bring very good meals including butter, toast, cheese and eggs which I haven't seen since I came to this country, and cold water in a thermos flask always at your bedside; so , when they brought supper at 8 I was able to eat everything while in the last 4 days I had to force myself to eat even dry bread- It's amazing what a lifted spirit can do. There will be a lot to do when I get better and many people to see but the main thing is to be better by next Thursday, the 3rd of October, when I plan to leave Bo. Here in Serabu I've met Sierra Leoneans who care for other people, are efficient and skilled as well as pleasant, it's encouraging to see that not everyone is corrupted by a corrupt environment.

In fact my visit to Serabu proved providential because I was able to talk to Sister Hilary who is interested in the link and who should be receiving medicines from Leamington Spa, so maybe there was method in this madness of having malaria! Africa is a strong continent, it contains a crude power which will never be mastered it's a dog that won't lie down and be tamed. Whatever happens to you, you know things could be worse: if your house is broken into you should be grateful you're not ill, or haven't been cheated too much, or haven't had to bribe too much, or haven't had to travel over abominable roads too often, or haven't been bitten madly by insects, or that you have some water or some gas or some electricity or some kerosene. The variations on what can go wrong are countless; and yet everyone gets by, you take reasonable precautions and get on with your life. If you try to go against the tide you haven't a chance of winning on your own: there is no justice, if you take someone to court for stealing your money he will win the case because he can bribe the judge more than you; there are no secrets, all operations are

in the open with money as the universal lubricant, in fact all it is a more straightforward and simple version of what's going on all the time all over the world, so you have no right to be self-righteous about corruption.

Some points: they don't use sweeping brushes but rather a bunch of twigs held in the hand which means they have to bend over till they almost touch the ground to clean out a room; if one member of a family secures a job however poorly paid he will be hounded by close and distant relatives for a share in his 'wealth', they will come uninvited to his house to eat and they will borrow liberally from him, as well as not bothering to find a job themselves because his earnings are enough, in their opinion, to keep them going as well. With extended families it means that there's no way a man will ever eat more than a plate of rice whatever he might earn; and so for borrowing it is understood all round that if you've got money to spare then you can give it to your friends and relatives, saving becomes an impossibility because you either spend all you have or else others spend for you what remains. No wonder a man is doomed for life to struggle to make ends meet. Even if there weren't corrupt governments exploiting him, his cultural environment is enough to suck him dry. It is, I suppose, a basic form of communism in the sense that if you have more than your immediate needs require them others take the excess. it's a state of affairs much bemoaned though always with a resigned laugh, tradition is strong and slow to change. What is disappointing is that there is no gratitude; it is your perfect right to call in on anyone, eat and drink, and leave without a word of thanks, and some people survive that way without seeing anything wrong with it.

All the coins in this country were struck either in 1964 or 1978, the 1964 ones being about 20 times more common; it seems that they have never run out even though inflation is rampant, and it's a mystery how that can be so. The largest banknote, as I have already noted, is 10 Leones so that suitcases full of money have to be carried around by those who are making a fortune of 10 in the past 2 years; there are no effective price controls because the government inspectors are prepared to be blind if you pay them enough, and farmers aren't given the official government price for their produce because the official buyers agree among themselves only to offer a given lower price so that they can make a more handsome profit in the resale. The Lebanese buy Chinese rice for 6 Leones/ bag, take it up country, and resale it for 30 Leones/ bag. The Lebanese are the most indecent

and brutal speculators one could imagine: they are here to squeeze the poor, they absolutely never marry outside their own ranks, and they do everything in their power to keep the gap between them and the Sierra Leoneans as wide as possible. They bribe politicians generously so they're safe; some don't even pay their electricity bills because they know the right people, even when those bills amount to 1000 times those of the Sierra Leoneans who are cut off if they don't pay; and they are disgustingly obsequious to white people including myself, calling me Sir- they are the leeches, the cancer, the lowest of the low, and even Dante would have had trouble placing them in a suitable ring in his Inferno.

26.8: I've just had breakfast and feel absolutely fine so I may be out of hospital today though it will be 2 weeks before I'm back to normal; I had hundreds of tests done to show that I have nothing wrong with me now, the first time in my life I've had any tests, indeed the first time I've had to go into hospital. I was confronted with a bowl of rice pudding, another event I have avoided since I was 10: I have never liked or eaten rice pudding for some strange reason (not so strange when you think I was first confronted with this delicacy when at boarding school and no doubt the first impact could have been made more gentle). Here I tried to eat it because to waste food in Africa seems like straightforward theft, but I'm afraid that after 2 warnings that I might be sick I had to stop, no doubt the memories it brought back overpowered my stomach which was still recovering from the shock of being fed after 4 days inactivity. Generally I eat almost everything but there are exceptions: rice pudding, custard, liver and, no doubt to the horror of most people, Honey, I feel guilty about not liking honey because I feel it's my fault and not the honey's fault but I must admit that this remains a weakness which I am yet to conquer.

An Irish hospital in the depths of Africa , it's just like stepping back home; there must be more good works done per person among the Irish than in any other race in the world- God created Ireland for a purpose after all and it's the last nation to deserve it's torment at home.

I've remembered that Jim told me he had a baby chimp in his house in Kabala which he bought from some children who were throwing it up in the air for fun, and he paid 10

Leones for it. He hopes to take it home with him but there are US 'immigration' difficulties since chimps are an endangered species, so he can either fly it to Canada and then smuggle it in (but how big will he be in a year's time), or he can try to convince the US authorities that he was saving its life by bringing it home with him which is probably true.

All the treatment I got in fact in the hospital was an extra dose of 4 of the chloroquin tablets which I had been taking anyway, so I ended up taking 14 in 4 days instead of 10 in 3 days. In any case I was cured and took a taxi to Bo this afternoon feeling weak but healthy; as for payment the total came to 30 Leones including vitamin and iron tablets which I am to take for a few weeks, and they didn't make me pay on the spot but trusted me that I would let them have the money as soon as possible. The taxi had wonderful suspension so that I hardly noticed the potholes on the way back and the trip was very comfortable: there were 8 of us in the car 4 in the back and 4 in the front, another thing I wouldn't have believed possible before I came here.

Some thoughts: to take an interest in or to pursue women is expressed in Mende as 'to chase titty' and is a widely used term; the opposite of small small (little) in krio is beaucoup so somehow French has slipped in there unobtrusively; 'small small' also has a particular usage in that you can't say 'small' just once, it has to be repeated and it can apply to quantity as well as time: 'give me small small fish', or ' I will be away small small'; another expression is 'sweet' meaning tasty so even when talking of a lemon which is bitter, if you like the taste you have to say it is sweet.

Back in Bo it's hot and sticky, not a healthy climate, so it would probably have taken me a month to get better had I stayed in Bo all the time; of course as soon as I got home I proceeded madly to wash all the floors as well as my clothes for a week which tired me out even more. I'll have to swallow my pride and start taking taxi rides, particularly out to the Cheshire Home which is a couple of miles away; maybe I should claim from my health insurance all the taxi rides at 60 cents a time as an integral part of the expenses of my illness.!

27.8: I went to the bank, the market, and Mrs. French's; there I met a VSO I had spoken to before and she solved the riddle of the daraprim (prescribed by British doctors) and

chloroquin (prescribed by US doctors):the second is a stronger version of the first, so taking daraprim regularly means you have a greater chance of getting malaria since some mosquitoes have developed a resistance to it, but the you take a course of chloroquin and you're sure to get better. If you only take chloroquin habitually then you are less likely to get malaria but if you do it's that much harder to get rid of it because your body is already accustomed to the strongest drug; the US government for the moment prefers this policy and it won't authorize Peace Corps to take daraprim, though they of course can do what they like.

I had a long talk with David French who told me among other things that the newly ordained Bishop of Bo in the church of Sierra Leone (i.e. The Church of England) can't get into the house which the mission owns and which was reserved for him but which is at the moment occupied by Sabach, the Lebanese owner of the supermarket, and he refuses to move out. The reason is that he can't easily find another house of a similar size in Bo and also because he has paid rent for several years in advance, so whoever let it to him is partly at fault, but one would think the Lebanese could be more cooperative towards the poor homeless Bishop.

I met Albert Lamin and he offered me lunch while he told me the latest developments in the political situation: the President has now declared that the Labour Congress, which has called for a second indefinite national strike next Monday, has no legal status and cannot speak for all the workers in denouncing the government's total failure to keep the promises that brought the last strike to an end. In doing so Shaki is forgetting that he himself formed the Labour Congress years ago specifically to unite all unions under one body, and he's also forgetting that until last week he was negotiating with the Congress which he now claims has no right to negotiate with him. The promise he made was that the price of rice would drop from 30 cents/ cup to 18 cents/ cup thanks to government intervention, and what has happened instead is that rice has become impossible to find and only at prices even greater than 30 cents/cup- because, of course, the government Ministers are inexorably tied up with the exploitative rice trade. That is why the strike has been called and quite rightly so: I sense that Shaki doesn't know what do to and is a little desperate but we'll see what happens. What is different about this strike compared to the last one is that the document has been signed by representatives of the army and the

police who are finding it as hard as everyone else to make ends meet- in the history of Africa since independence the disillusionment of the army and the police has almost invariably been the clear-cut sign that a coup or a revolt is about to take place. If the military and the police are disgruntled no matter what the government does, and it is only panicking, the writing is on the wall. Lamin says Shaki will be gone with the month of September and very likely even next week I'll have problems leaving the country: the ferries from Freetown across to the airport won't be working and that means a 100 miles detour by road through Porto Loko. This is the first time since independence that there has been general strike, and the only other time was in 1954 when Shaki himself led a violent general strike: everything has turned against him now, there's no way out. A man came past the Cheshire Home today with a young chimp he was trying to sell, it clung to me like a baby and was really pathetic but it would have been madness for me to take him. I also had a long talk with Mrs. Jusu, the matron in charge at the Home, and she told me that they plan to build an extension so that they can take more children and also cater for visitors like myself at anytime of the year. But the estimated cost is 57,000 Leones and they have nowhere near that amount, I don't know what they're going to do to raise the money; they've also tried to plant things in the land that was donated to them under the auspices of Sierra Leone's first President, Sir Milton Margai, after whom the Cheshire Home in Bo is named, but the land is not fertile; they have applied to have water mains extended to the Home but they have been told that it's too high up. The largest donation which any Lebanese gives these days, according to Mrs. Jusu, is 20 Leones.

28.8: Here goes a philosophical bit with reference to me and malaria and the after-effects: Man is like a boat which floats with the currents; every now and then the boat has to be pulled back to the Warf with a rope before it wanders too far into deep waters when the rope might snap; alternatively the boat is forced in for repairs when a hole appears in the bow; in either case a return to simplicity on the Warf is salutary.

Neil Trainer came this morning and we arranged a meeting of people connected with the link 2 days before I'm due to leave; I also gave him the money to pay for the hospital and I can only hope I'll get it back from the insurance sooner or later; and we agreed that I

should leave money for Alyson, whose house this is, to pay for gas, electricity, and anything else I might have consumed, a total of 30-40 Leones.

I've just returned from carrying an empty gas cylinder in the heat of the day all the way into town and all the way back because there is no gas to be found in town, they said maybe next week, and I'm supposed to take it easy, I must be mad. On the other hand I have only a whisper of gas left in the existing cylinder and if it runs out over the weekend I'll be left with the impossibility of boiling water to make it drinkable, apart from not being able to cook.

This evening Lawrence came and also Barba who has been away in Kono for a few weeks: Lawrence said he admired Nyerere and Nkrumah but not Sekou Toure whom he thinks is wrong in stubbornly refusing to allow foreigners into his country to exploit the vast mineral resources of Guinea; Barba did not agree in that he sees Sheku as a true African socialist with the right ideas words, and actions. He went on to tell me of the days when his father was away in Mali for a year and he was left to look after himself: he left form 4 at school and with a couple of friends he spent 9 months travelling around Sierra Leone and Guinea. They used to go up to Kono and collect water in a bucket from the river, pick out the diamonds sitting in the water, sell them for 300-400 Leones and set off to travel till the money ran out. A great life he says, but now he regrets having left school. He also said in Guinea people will offer you food but not shelter, in Sierra Leone they offer shelter and not food, and in Mali (the poorest of the 3) they offer you both food and shelter. I haven't a clue how true anything Barba has told me is but it doesn't really matter, I like the man for his soft-spoken and dignified manner of speaking and that's enough. He told me that the countries he admires and most wants to visit are Germany and Japan comes into Africa just like every other country has, in reply I found I was on song about South Africa this evening, and corruption, and the developed versus the underdeveloped world: I came to many enlightening conclusions which you have to speak out aloud before they all fall into place. Corruption, like (or unlike) beauty, lies in the eye of the beholder: the North thrives upon it though few people see it that way or are prepared to accept the fact since it is all so subtle and institutionalized; the South expresses the same faults more openly leading to criticism from without and disillusionment within, both of which aren't justified in the form they normally take

today. The world is so full of Rights and Wrong, Truths and Myths, Clarity and Cloudiness, Love and Hate, Good and Bad, but as far as people go they are fundamentally the same the world over: the task is to break down barriers, myths, fictitious differences, and start again- may it come one day this world, like the proverbial blue moon which isn't really too rare, if you're prepared to look for it every night.

Problems are like relatives- nobody asks for them but everyone has them.

29.8: this morning the gas finally ran out completely; there has also been no kerosene for a week and with the general strike coming up in 4 days time there's no way those goods will be available for some time yet. I'll have to eat out and drink bottled drinks for the next 5 days.

Sierra Leone is varied; Freetown is Graham Greene territory, there he wrote his novel "heart of the matter" which describes the few old buildings made of wood including the City Hotel with its verandah and wooden posts, the streets, the Cotton Tree, the old port, and the slope down to the sea, none of which have changed to this day. The deep inland regions are Livingstone country with rivers, dark forests, animals, inaccessible villages and a simple life close to nature. Finally Bo is like an Arab trading post full of travellers and traders with comings and goings, bustle and chaos. The Chinese are like eels, they flash through the water and are hard to catch. They've come here, set up rice farms all over the country including Bo, and an impressive sugar cane project at Magbass, but no one as ever seen a chinaman in the street, apparently they keep to themselves and don't mix, very mysterious. They also have the hospital at Rotifunk, in Freetown they built the fantastic Siaka Stevens stadium which is as impressive as any I've seen, and they're now building a main police station and civil servant living quarters, but even as you drive past the building sites you never see the Chinese foremen who must be there somewhere. As far as the rice farms are concerned, the Chinese came about 5 years ago, set them all up and left about 2 years ago with the promise of returning every 2 years to check their progress. They have been criticized by some people for deliberately leaving the farms unable to stand alone so that they can have an excuse to return regularly but I don't see the logic in that, I think it's more likely that their supervision wouldn't be required if the Sierra Leoneans ran their farms properly. It doesn't seem that they make any attempt to

promote Maoist ideology, and though the government itself is lukewarm towards communism everyone I've spoken to thinks Chinese-style communism would be unsuited to Sierra Leone and that it's not taking on anyway. So the only apparent benefit seems to be in trade and there they certainly have monopolized certain sectors through a policy of low price low profit low quality flooding of the market. Some examples: soap, toothpaste, toothbrushes, talcum powder, razor blades, toilet paper, clothes pegs, thread, cloth, T-shirts, bags, nuts and bolts, nails, spades, buckets, electric plugs, tea cloths, tin mug, kettles, pots, plates, cups, thermos flasks, metal bowls, paper, pencils, oil lamps, tea, rice, camphor, jam, tinned meat and fruit, mosquito coils, playing cards, and bicycles. In all these areas competition is minimal or nonexistent so a revenue does flow to China but considering transport costs it must be minimal.

By the Siaka Stevens stadium there is a beautiful swimming pool which you can see when you drive past: it hasn't been used once because the Ministry of Health has judged it not to come up to its standards of cleanliness and there are people swimming in swamps and rivers where river blindness originates; and besides if the Ministry is so concerned about the health of the people why doesn't it do something about the hospitals first?

It's a myth that oranges are orange, they are green: they've just become available and there's no doubt that outside they are green and only inside are they orange which makes me believe that it's true that some oranges we eat in Europe have had colouring injected into their skins.

Wuyah, one of the girls at the Cheshire Home, told ma that one day a black man told them all that originally white woman was made from the rib of white man but that black man was made by mixing shit and sand together- why do these stories have to exist Barba told me that cannabis grows here and is on sale for 10-20 cents for a large bunch everywhere, and that it is smoked a lot to alleviate problems such as 2 or 3 days without food one of his friend is a drug pusher which led him to tell me of an interesting philosophy of his: when he goes to a new town, region, or country, he befriends all the bad people first and that way he knows he's safe. He never goes to their houses or frequents them but keeps on good terms and salutes them in the street. A proverb says if you have to leave your child alone make sure you leave him with the most wicked man in

town, that way no harm can come to him- better the devil you know than the devil you don't know?

I've been told policemen must pay their superiors a set amount per week in collected bribes or else they're dismissed, and the big men just sit back and rake in the money. Also taxi drivers pay the owners of the cars a fixed amount and keep for themselves what they can earn above that; in Freetown one can pay up to 80 Leones/day to the owner, a very great amount particularly when the standard prices for a taxi run there is 30 cents. These seem to be 2 examples of how, if you have money or authority, you can hold on to them and make a fortune on the backs of other people, the quantum jump from poverty to wealth cannot be made by any honest means available. Even to get an ordinary job you often have to bribe your way in.

30.8: last night I went with a VSO girl called Jo to a party given for the new batch of VSOs who have been in Bo for the last week preparing to be sent out on their own and I ended up meeting some interesting people. It was the sort of occasion I generally don't like, a group of rosy-cheeked falsely cheerful expatriates making small talk and escaping as much as possible from the realities around them; however, though in the past I might have felt uncomfortable in those surroundings I was quite happy in this case just to observe people from my corner. A VSO from Ghana travelling through West Africa told me how you can find nothing in Ghana, all the cocoa and gold produced is smuggled into neighbouring countries where better prices are offered, up to 10 times the prices paid by the Ghanaian government. The official exchange rate is 5 cedi to the pound and on the black market you can get 80 to the pound; so he and 2 friends paid 20 pound cash for a ticket that should have cost 400 pounds to fly to Abidjan, Monrovia, Freetown, Conakry, Dakkar, and Banjul- I was extremely jealous. He told me he lives on 5 pounds notes sent to him by his mother which is more than his monthly salary, and there is no problem of theft as there would be here: they even leave their houses unlocked and things lying around but nothing is ever stolen, remarkable really. As for politics he said the present President Limann will be defeated at the next elections after only 2 years of civilian rule, but then no civilian has ever succeeded in Ghana since the coup of 1967. what is

desperately needed is a devaluation but as soon as that has been done in the past prices rose so much that a military coup resulted so there's no way of winning.

The consumption of free beer was staggering at this party, for whatever reasons living in Sierra Leone seems to turn you into a heavy drinker on the rare occasions that you all meet together, but I don't know how they manage not to get tired of the same choice of 2 beers day in day out.

This morning Barba came to take a pot away to repair since it has a mysterious hole in it, and he told me that Benson has been away all this time sorting out his documents because he lost, or had stolen, his wallet 3 weeks ago.

My departure seems even more in jeopardy as from Monday evening it is rumoured there will be no petrol on sale.

I read in the paper yesterday of a case of ritual cannibalism and it is not the first since I came here. A pilgrim who wanted to go to the Holy City this year was short of funds and it was suggested to him that God would provide him with funds if he offered a human sacrifice, so a girl was chosen who was the only adopted daughter of a woman who had no children and whose sister offered one of her own for adoption. The girl was drugged, kidnapped, and taken to the mountain where her heart and the skin on her forehead and the palms of her hand were taken from her while still alive; then her throat was cut and the vital parts and blood eaten and drunk. They then cut her head off and buried it until an astute policeman exposed them. It is a terribly gruesome story to relate but from what I've been able to gather here I have no doubt that it is true and it only shows what a strong influence traditional belief still has even in a case like this where the person concerned presumably thought of himself as a devout Christian. This took place in Njaluahuh Chieftdom and may be just an isolated case but one is tempted to think that cases like this would rarely be discovered even if they were more frequent.

David Thomas, the retired miner, stayed for 10 minutes this morning and told me that David Sheku, a junior civil servant, was openly selling rice on the Kissy Road yesterday which he certainly should not have been doing- which only proves that the rices, and consequently the present troubles, are in the hands of the authorities. In his one words, he says the President has too many vices- 1st Vice President, 2nd Vice President, Vice Secretaries etc, and eventually they will all turn against him, those with capital v's and

those with small v's. I'm told that in the villages it is the custom to turn most viciously on the man who helped you most to reach your position of power. You must cut down your best friend to know where you stand, you are safer surrounded by enemies than by friends (which after all is very similar to what Barba was saying about friends). Shaki has taken the custom right up to the Presidency which may be what has enabled him to remain in power so long but which has also been, in my own opinion, a gradual digging of his own grave: if you play rough you might have a series of short run victories but in the end you'll meet defeat, and it will be all the harder to take them, Albert's wife dreamt recently she saw the President dancing and that means trouble for a man, for he is dancing to keep the soles of his feet from being burnt by the hot ashes.

I called in on Mrs. Foray last night and she has just sent a large bunch of bananas, last time it was several eggs plants. And Jenny Gibson came around as another godsend: she has lent me a spare gas cylinder till I leave, and she has lent me an atlas of Sierra Leone from which I'll photocopy an old map of Bo since apparently it is possible to have photocopies done by a Lebanese in town to my amazement.

Another piece of good news is that a student to whom I lent a book told me that the airport staff belongs to one of the few unions who are not joining the general strike although I don't think that means I'll definitely be leaving in a few days time.

Some more Krio: leffa= leave it; na lie= it's not true; I go take am= I will take it/ him/ her/ them; eata= eat; to thief= to steal; I don go= I have gone; light= electricity, bulb; and in Mende, bisie= thank you; bua= hello; malowe= goodbye.

I went out for some chicken at Korioko's, one of the 2 or 3 restaurants, and it was very good for 4 Leones; the waiter laughed when I said I only wanted water to drink but I reasoned it was better to conserve my limited resources since anything could happen between now and when I actually get home, so to buy a drink as well as food would have been extravagant!

I received the visit of 2 schoolchildren who wanted financial help for returning to school in 10 days time. Then a man to whom I had given 1 Leone 3 weeks ago came to see me: the first time he needed money to travel home after having an operation in Bo, this time he was back for another operation and wanted more help. I gave all these visitors food and water but I did not give them money- if you give them nothing you feel guilty and if

you give them something you feel guilty you haven't given the same to everyone else who needs it. Unfortunately I've had to submit to the reality that money does very little fundamentally to solve problems on all sides.

Some thoughts: which part of the world is more developed?; the North or the South?; so many of the achievements of modern countries have brought more problems than they have solved. Pressures, seen and unseen, characterize life in Europe and elsewhere which here do not exist, society dictates modes of behaviour which one must be strong willed to escape from. As far as time is concerned here there is no need to rush, no need to be punctual, no need to worry oneself to death about daily problems, if Martians should one day choose to land on the earth I hope they would happen to land in Africa and not in the United States or Europe or else, if Martians are in any way different to humans, I imagine they'd go back home and report that there is nothing to be learnt from the earth and its inhabitants.

A problem, or a curse, everywhere is selfishness, but isn't selfishness fear? Fear determines the shape of the world today, is it destined to do so for ever?

31.8: Abdullah came to me last night with a story, true or false, that his father had threatened to beat him for losing 10 cents: in this morning his father measures out 10 cups worth of groundnuts and in the evening he expects one Leone since each cup is sold for 10 cents, if he doesn't get the full amount he beats the boy. I gave him 10 cents and he wasn't beaten though for all I know the story may have been made up anyway.

At the Cheshire Home this afternoon an Englishman appeared 'to make a small contribution' to Mrs. Jusu; all very commendable except that he had brought a photographer with him and was keen to immortalize the generous gesture on film. I think he was English though I may be wrong and he said that as he was passing through the area he had stopped by to donate 100 Leones, but I found it strange that he went out of his way not to talk to me and when Mrs. Jusu asked him if he wanted to see the children he backed away and vigorously declined the offer. I have no right to judge, but certainly Sierra Leone is a country where 100 Leones can mean 2 months wages to one man and 2 days earnings to another man- if you're donating 2 days earnings to someone who doesn't see that amount of money in 2 months you shouldn't really want to immortalize your generosity with a photograph album but which benefits the children only marginally. It is

rumoured today that 2 men were shot today at the airport by the ISU (Internal Security Unit), which is the most ruthless and the most feared section of the armed forces, in a confused incident to do with a strike against an unpopular manager- if it's true then the omens are bad. It is said that the authorities are also thinking of postponing the opening of the schools which should be in a week's time because it is generally known that whenever students join a strike or a protest in this country they are ruthless and fearless, and they have already made it known that they fully support the present strike.

I had a talk with the boy who lives at the back of the house and who is normally employed to the housework for the occupant of the house I'm in: he told ma about the 1977 troubles around Bo when there was tribal warfare around election time between the Mendes of this area and the Timnes from Port Loko and the ISU joined in for good measure. One leader of the Mendes, I am told, had a juju or magic on him as result of which neither machete nor bullet could cut him down and indeed he did survive the troubles and only died 2 weeks ago, most probably poisoned. I haven't been able to find out the exact number of casualties of those troubles because no one knows for sure, but estimates go from several hundred to several thousand; in any case it was a major event which people here have not forgotten about and it makes them particularly nervous now that trouble might be brewing again.

1.9: Alpha reappeared for breakfast after a few weeks prospecting for diamonds, and he brought a "brother" with him whom I hadn't met before: they told me how last night the diamonds they had dredged from the river and were about to wash were stolen by the local people and how there was absolutely nothing they could do about it. A group of 7 or 8 of them go 100 kilometres every day using up 5 gallons of petrol in the land rover (and 100 km back in the evening) to this village where they take 5 bags of rice each day to the Chief for permission to work there and rice is impossible to find in the market these days. They also pay for a section of the river in which to operate and wages to the workmen they employ, which all comes to a total cost of about 150 pound/day. In the last few weeks they have received no return on their investment but obviously they have calculated that it is worth their while to pay out all that money since a few diamonds

would cover all their expenses so far- the diamonds they stolen last night were worth a few thousand pounds.

This is a remarkable country with so much wealth and potential wealth and at the same time so much poverty and real poverty, men don't learn from the history that such a state of affairs can't last, they only hope that it will last long enough to enable them to grab they money and run. This country has diamonds, iron, bauxite, rutile, newly discovered oil deposits, cattle, fish, wood, fertile land for agriculture, I can't imagine a more potentially wealthy country particularly since it doesn't have a problem of overpopulation and yet the majority of the people live from day to day in a state of deprivation.

Today is day one of the famous strike; we shall see how things go.

12 o'clock: the President has just spoken on the radio but he was hard to understand because he sounded drunk, though that may be the fault of the broadcasting equipment; the main point is that he declared, amid fanfares and music played at the wrong speed, a state of emergency to last 3 months over the whole nation, whatever that may mean. I went into town and it was completely dead, only a few people moving around but all the stalls closed and a ghostly silence everywhere; for Bo, as for Africa in general, it is extremely unusual for there to be silence like that because people work 7 days a week, there is never a day of rest and never a moment when there isn't bustle, noise and movement. Now it's as if the lifeblood has been drained from the town and what is more ominous is that the same blood is boiling behind closed doors waiting to burst out. There is the sensation that a tug a war is taking place, something is about to snap. A state of emergency means the power of arbitrary arrest to stop people assembling; it seems excessive to prevent just a strike, clearly the present trouble is seen by all sides as much more than that- the only other time a state of emergency was announced to prevent trouble was in 1977 when probably more trouble was created than prevented by the move. Lawrence tells me the 4 objectives are to block the ferries to the airport, the electricity supply to Freetown, all communications, and the Guma Valley dam which supplies water to Freetown; I don't know how they're getting on but here in Bo the electricity went off at 12.15 and hasn't come back since. As far as I'm concerned it's becoming increasingly unlikely that I'll be able to leave and it might be best to sit tight in Bo rather than setting off into the unknown the day after tomorrow.

This evening I went to Mrs. Kamarra's house: she is the principal of Queen of the Rosary secondary school which is linked with the school in England, and her husband is the manager of Barclays Bank in Bo, a very educated and enlightened couple. Most of the people I've met here connected with the link with Leamington were there to hear what conclusions I had reached after 2 months here, and I told them that I'm sure the link will work and be beneficial, something I wasn't so sure about when I came as I am now that I'm leaving. Moussa told the story of a boy at school who had problems with English in a class he taught, in particular with old English – wherefore, thence, etc, and who thought that 'bring thee hence' meant 'bring some hens'; it sounds a made up story but I'm quite sure it's true. Mrs. Kamarra, when talking of the various honours and orders handed out every year by the government, such as The Order of the Rokel (a river of Sierra Leone), said they seriously considered introducing an Order of the Mosquito, but I'm less inclined to believe that story!

It is now rumoured that the leaders of the Labour Congress have been arrested, a suicidal step, and that Guinean troops have been called in to defend Shaki, also a dangerous move because they have a reputation of being ruthless and wild. Meanwhile, I heard on the radio that the proposed confederation of Senegambia is to come into being on January 1st, 1982; I can't help feeling that though it may be a good idea, nevertheless it is the direct result of the Senegalese intervention in Gambia last month and that's not a good reason for countries to merge.

2.9: it turns out that Albert Lamin is a son of the last Paramount Chief who had 12 wives and over 50 children; he's the only one with a degree and is the most likely candidate to succeed the present Chief when he dies: the Chief is 50 and Albert is 32.

The situation today is that Bo seems to have returned to normal but in Freetown there is looting and shooting, the airport is closed, the offices of the Tablet, the main opposition newspaper have been blown up by Shaki's gang, and the editor Pios Foray is in hiding. I found all this out when I went to visit Mrs. Foray who is clearly very worried about the life of her son but she is a person of strong faith and says she is convinced God will protect those who do good. I hope she's right. She had received a phone call from a friend of Pios to say that thugs came to destroy the offices of the newspaper, something

they have tried to do several times in the past, and fortunately they all managed to escape. Mrs. Foray looked tired and worried, knotting a handkerchief in her hands and wondering what would happen to her if he should die or even be imprisoned since her livelihood depended on him; she told me that Pios usually sent up a few hundred copies of the Tablet to her in Bo, free and that she earned some money selling them to Sabbach who sold them to the public; also, she had an astronomical telephone bill of, she said, 1,700 Leones which Pios was due to pay. If her son didn't return to work soon she would be in trouble and the prospects of that happening in these troubled times, apart from the fact that all the printing machinery had been destroyed, are small. No transport came from Freetown today.

3:9 This morning I left Bo on the understanding that I may be back if it turns out that the best way of leaving the country is to get a taxi from Bo to Monrovia in neighbouring Liberia and fly on to Lagos from there; I don't think that would work since I would require a visa to enter Liberia and I can't get that without going to Freetown which is one place I am determined to avoid. In this cases trouble always starts in the capital and spreads later to the provinces once everyone can see which way the wind is blowing, so it would be madness to go to Freetown now; indeed I headed this morning for Port Loko which is about 40 miles from the airport planning to reach the airport by going round the bay of Freetown rather than across it on the ferry which won't be running anyway. If one goes from Bo to Freetown at Ma Siaka, 47 miles from Freetown, there is a junction where the road to Port Loko turns off and I travelled that far in a Peugeot 504 taxi with another 10 people; because the ferries aren't going anyone who wants to reach the airport must pass through Ma Siaka anyway so there was no sense in going into the capital. The only thing was that in Freetown I knew I could stay at the City Hotel for 5 Leones a night while going to Port Loko was taking a jump in the dark and this is certainly not the time to be wandering about not knowing where you're going. Yesterday I had the brainwave that I could ask to stay with the Xaverians who have a mission in Port Loko and so today I set off in hopeful search of them – it looks as if I might spend both my first and my last night in Sierra Leone in an Italian mission: From Ma Siaka to Port Loko I took a truck which broke down several times but each time a complex twisting of wires got it going

again; on the other way I saw my first chimpanzee hopping across the road in front of us; apart from a few alarming stories from people who had come from Freetown saying that people were getting shot in the street more by mistake than design. I saw no trouble on the roads and reached Port Loko in the early afternoon. In Krio they refer to Freetown as Sa Leone because for most people Freetown is Sierra Leone o it's no surprise that all sorts of things might be going on there while in the rest of the country there is nothing but fear and nervousness to be sensed; after all Freetown now has estimated population of over 1/2 million people which is 10 times, at least, any other town in the country.

Unfortunately I ended up leaving Bo rather surreptitiously with only Albert Lamin there to see me off at 8 in the morning, and I wasn't able to say goodbye to everyone I had met: Benson was still away as was Brian Skanten, and Hannibal Kamarra was to give me a present of some cloth weaved by him but when I went to his workshop last night it was all closed up because of the strike; I had also arranged to collect a tape which was being prepared for me by one of the many "recording studios" on the main road, and that too was lost to the strike which meant 3 Leones thrown away on the blank cassette. I had grown very fond of Mende music even if I couldn't understand a word and I had plenty of opportunities to hear it since everywhere you go here there is music, either in English or Mende, either recorded or sung by groups of people celebrating a feast or a wedding or a death. In particular at the Cheshire Home the children were always singing songs they had learnt at school or from their friends; one song said "if you humble yourself before the Lord he will lift you up", another was about a little Japanese girl and a third was about waiting for the school bus in the rain. When I said goodbye to the children it was very sad and 2 or 3 of them began to cry, in particular Gbonu who had always been the most shy and yet the one who most enjoyed my visits; I had grown so used to them and I suppose they were used to me and once I go it will never be the same even if I write and send them things. On my last day I bought them all soft drinks and did "vivi" with all of them, which was their way of describing being swung around by the arms, a considerable physical effort in the case of some of the older ones; in return they gave me some drawings though the majority of drawings remained taped to the walls all over the house. I wonder for how long. They also gave me some ginger and limes, and then I was gone.

I'll never see those abandoned children again and what will happen?, I'll have to somehow forget them while not forgetting them at the same time.

I can't believe I've left Bo now, the 2 months I spent there were worth 2 years anywhere else, in fact no amount of time elsewhere could have given me and done for me what my stay in Bo gave me and did: I met 2 or 3 of the most impressive people I have ever met, I lived in a manner, a simplicity that are difficult to find back home; I'm afraid that even now at the end of my stay in Sierra Leone I'm still convinced as I was when I first arrived that there is no way of describing the totality of life here, the vocabulary which we think can describe everything in the world can do nothing of the sort, when one comes across something completely alternative in the world to what one has known before how can it possibly be described? – it's like trying to describe the wonder of a sunset to someone who has been blind all their lives.

I arrived in Port Loko and ran into a group of Peace Corps who had come in from the villages for an agriculture meeting and with whom I ended up spending the afternoon; again some more intelligent than others and one girl who said far from running away from any trouble she was looking forward to some action and had very intention of going down to Freetown to see what was happening. It has been announced that the opening of the schools has been postponed, as had been rumoured, for 3 weeks, a bad sign. I found my way to the mission where I met Carlos, a theology student from the Basque country who has been out there 1 year and is just getting used to the language and he said that as far as he was concerned I could spend the night there; later I met Father Jim, one of the few American Xaverians, who was very welcoming and helpful, so here I am installed in Port Loko.

I went back to the bar with Carlos where we found the same group still drinking 5 hours after I first met them and conversation turned to Secret Societies and witchcraft since there is a Bundu Society (women) rite this evening. Apparently witches are able to "eat" the insides of people by just looking at them or thinking about them and so cause them to die; I'm in no position to tell if these things are true or not but I think that though one is inclined to think it's not possible that these things can happen I have been here long enough and I've read enough to know that it's a mistake to be too dismissing. What seemed like an educated and intelligent Sierra Leonean in the group at the bar told us that

a witch can summon up the image of a man on a mirror on request and if the customer wants that person to die all he has to do is break the mirror. We were also told that initiation rites into Secret Societies and other religious rites can include deep cuts being made in the head and chest, or even extracting organs and putting them back again or putting rods into the eyes, all of which is done without harming the person concerned – I quite believe that the power of mind over matter, which is what all these stories are about, is something much more powerful than we are prepared to believe in our clinically scientific world and that these things than we will ever know. Carlos says there are 3 Xaverians who belong to the Limba Secret Society because, in their opinion, it is the key to the culture and to a fellowship and influence that can come in very useful, all of which is certainly true though it is hard to see how they can reconcile their own beliefs with some of the more occult demands of the Secrets Societies. One thing is certain and that is that absolutely none is prepared to say there is nothing to all these stories and claims made about the powers of the ancestors and of witches.

Rumours, and they're all one has to go on: it is said that more than 10 people have been killed in Freetown and that Siaka Stevens is in Conakry, capital of neighbouring Guinea: apparently as he was leaving in this helicopter his own APC youth turned against him and started shooting at him – if it's true then things must be really bad. Some of the volunteers here who only arrived in the country a short time ago at the start of their 2 year stint are panicking and are clearly worried, but what can you do in these situations when no one knows the real state of affairs? – the BBC a few days ago mentioned that a strike was about to begin but since then nothing because their information came from Pios Foray, whom I heard several times during my stay here in recorded reports on the BBC, is on the run. In fact Sierra Leone normally gets more than its fair share on the BBC's Africa Today programme from 7.30 to 8.00 am because the presenter, called Hilton Fyle, is himself Sierra Leonean: he speaks with an impeccable English accent and he's extremely good at his job so he seems to be popular everywhere and some people claim he is the most well-known Sierra Leonean in the world.

All this unrest is not surprising if you think that a small tin of tomato paste, which is widely used in cooking, cost 18 cents when I came and it costs 80 cents now; a pint of

kerosene cost 20 cents when I came, 1 Leone now; rice 20 cents and abundant before, hard to find at 30 cents now.

4.9: The fathers here have a network of short-wave radios to keep in touch since they are in charge of all the schools in the northern half of the country, mostly as administrators of the teachers' salaries entrusted to them by the Ministry of Education; I listened this morning in case there was any news of the airport but not a word. What I've decided to do is to try and make my way to Lungi, where the airport is, this morning since there is a rest house there for the Xaverians and one father permanently there; I hope that he will be prepared to put me up if necessary or if I'm lucky I'll be able to get a flight today. I think it's best to be as close to the airport as possible so that I can leave as soon as there is a flight and also because petrol is starting to run out so the sooner I reach the airport the better. If I can't stay at the mission there I don't know what I'll do since the Airport Hostel costs 27.50 Leones per night, and presumably I won't be allowed to sleep at the airport. The other volunteers think I'm mad to set off without knowing where I'm going, but I feel that is better to move now before things get any worse. The latest news is that at least 8 people have died and secondly SLBS reported that an American Trade Union representative is behind all the troubles: he has been here 5 years and a few months ago he was to have been deported for subversive activities against the State but it now emerges that he has been here all the time under house arrest and that he has signed a document, it is claimed, in which he admits to having supplied vehicles, materials and a cheque for 3000 Leones/month to the Labour Congress. So they now have a scapegoat and it could be dangerous but really I can't imagine anyone believing such rubbish: it makes absolutely no sense that the US should want to destabilize Sierra Leone when they are the 5th largest source of imports for the country and the 2nd largest buyer of exports. Indeed the US should be delighted with Shaki and I don't think the plight of the workers here is something they would care about in the least, so it seems to me a pathetic attempt to jump onto the bandwagon of anti-Americanism that has characterized the politics of several countries in the last few years. Nevertheless, however true or false these claims may be, it remains true that if events take a nasty turn there might be attempts on behalf of the authorities to make things difficult for all the white foreigners here since everyone is referred to as Peace Corps in the street, including myself, whether they belong to that

organisation or not. When the group of volunteers here heard the news 2 girls in particular started talking about taking up an offer made some time ago to them by the Xaverian fathers that if there should ever be trouble they would arrange for all of them to be taken to the villages where it is much safer to be at these times; they were particularly worried since Port Loko is the headquarters of the army and if the army came into the town in force everyone, and girls especially, would find it very unpleasant.

I now have to find ways of reaching Lungi from here: it's only 40 miles but the road is very bad and also few Lorries are moving about today so I might have to pay an astronomical price to convince someone to take me there.

8.15: received definitive news that the airport is closed indefinitely because of lack of fuel for the planes due to the strike; the news was brought by a father on his way from Lungi to Makeni where the Bishop lives and who is supposed to be flying by KLM today as well; he also told me that from Makeni they can send messages to Italy for a short period each day on their radios so I wrote down a message saying I would be at least one week late in getting home and he promised to have it sent as soon as possible. I think I'll still try to reach Lungi today.

I now just have to live from one moment to the next because anything could happen, it is a test of patience and of nerves: "If you can keep you cool when all about you are losing theirs", so Kipling recommends. Not knowing what is happening and so not knowing what the best thing to do is, that's the problem.

I was told this morning that monkeys here are shot and eaten as a very delicate meat, you can buy a monkey about 3 feet tall for 3 or 4 Leones, already skinned, and most of the volunteers say they have eaten monkey, deer, and even snake which, like all other odd things it seems, is said to taste like chicken.

Another story about a custom in southern Sierra Leone and Liberia: when they shake hands they also snap their fingers because originally slaves would have their index fingers cut off to indicate that they were slaves so if they were born a free man you could define your status by snapping your fingers. Liberia and Sierra Leone came into being as countries to which freed slaves could return from America and England respectively and even now there is a clear distinction made between the original occupants of these countries and those who settled there 200 years ago. In Sierra Leone most people around

the coastal region have English names because these were the names given to them by the masters of their ancestors, and it is only inland that African names are predominant, unfortunately this distinction is clearly visible in the political world and in the case of scholarships granted to students, for example, the majority go to students with English names because their fathers hold influential positions and not to students from inland who are usually far more deserving candidates. As far as Liberia is concerned the main reason given for the coup last year was that the indigenous population had had enough of over 100 years rule by the class of ex-slaves. In fact the two countries each have characteristics which are unusual for Africa as a whole: Liberia is one of who countries which have never been colonized, the other being Ethiopia were the period of Italian occupation before the 2nd World War hardly amounts to colonization; and Sierra Leone is the only country, I think, where a leader of an opposition party has been democratically elected into power, as happened to Siaka Stevens in 1967, thus defeating the incumbent President by legal means. Ironically one could say that Liberia never really was independent but instead was tied, and still is, very strongly to the US; and in the case of Shaki he declared the country a one party State in 1977 so that the same thing wouldn't happen to him as did to his predecessor.

A stroke of luck: I was about to leave the mission in Port Loko when father Bongiovanni arrived from Makeni where he had been in hospital with malaria, and he has been told to take it easy for a week at the rest house in Lungi, so he has agreed to take me with him this afternoon in his Suzuki jeep. He seemed far from ill, barging about energetically and very cheerful but I think that must be his style and no doubt he's been told to rest because otherwise he'd try to do everything as before. In honour of his return we had farfalle in brood and pizza, wonderful Italian food which seemed all the more special out here; they have been very kind to me here and insisted I eat with them though I was prepared to go out and find something in town. Apart from the coincidence that he is going today to Lungi, it also emerged that he knew the name of Picozzi: we have known the Picozzis for years in Italy and they gave me the name of a Xaverian father in Coatbridge to whom I wrote to get the addresses of the fathers out here. Thirty years ago the same family taught English to the first group of Xaverians to come to Sierra Leone, including the present Bishop Azzolini. Even more incredible, when I was telling him about myself it emerged

that he also knew very well an Italian girl with whom I worked in a pub in North London last summer. Valeria, because she came from a village close to his own in Italy, uncanny. I asked him about his malaria thinking we could share some opinions of it but he replied, poor man, that he has had it 3 times this year and that a couple of years ago he would have an attack every week for 5 months, I don't know how he kept going; he's certainly an impressive man and the energy he has is overwhelming.

It is now rumoured that Siaka Stevens is in his fortified residence at Mahera, 3 miles from Lungi, so if they want to get him that's where they'll be going to find him.

Evening: we reached Lungi safely in a couple of hours, sailing through all the road blocks, and had a great chat on the way. He was wearing his soutane as he always in times of trouble and that was a vital help; more than once I was introduced to the armed soldiers at the road blocks as a missionary doctor on my way home to Europe, and they were extremely polite to us. We passed 2 other vehicles on the road and it was clear that beyond a certain point you couldn't go without showing all your documents and justifying your journey. Had I tried to reach Lungi this morning I wouldn't have found any transport and even if I had I would have made a fuss and almost certainly demanded a substantial bribe – in times like this law and order is kept with arms but it also means those soldiers who are armed become mini-tyrants who do what they like. I've already been remarkably fortunate so far in getting here, I don't know where I'd be if Bongiovanni hadn't taken me down here this afternoon.

On the way Bongiovanni told me about the big witch trial which was taking place in Port Loko last week following the death of a small boy. A woman had come to see a well-known doctor because her child was ill but when she reached his house she saw the doctor's own son who was clearly not well and she lost faith in the doctor if he couldn't even look after his own child properly. She left and since she had come a long way that morning from an outlying village she started looking for some food and shelter for the night; 2 old women gave her some chop but when she had finished eating and after she had told them the story of the doctor, the old women told her she had just "eaten" the sick boy; she rushed to the house and found the boy dead. The 2 women and a young man were arrested on charges of suspected witchcraft and at the trial in a main square of Port Lolo the judge told them straight out that he didn't believe in witchcraft and asked for

proof of their powers: they asked a soldier to bring a pawpaw from the market and then threw it from one to the other for a few minutes. When they had finished the pawpaw was cut open and found to be totally hollow, in front of all the crowd. At this stage the Paramount Chief saw his chance and he intervened asking each of the 3 suspects for 1 cow, 1 goat, 1 gourd of palm wine and 100 Leones as a penalty, but the 3 replied by saying they were not the only witches in town so the case has been adjourned and they have promised to name the others. It's a mystery why they confessed to being witches unless they want a showdown for some reason.

Another story: 3 children were out in the bush to collect water and a baboon grabbed one and started eating him, something which is highly unusual; the other 2 children ran back to the village and called for help until men came and killed the baboon. The Chief (again) then declared that if hadn't been a baboon but a witch with a mask and he demanded each man of the village should pay him 10 Leones to pay for a witch-doctor to get rid of the curse. Ten Leones is a lot of money to anyone and many men couldn't pay so they went to father Bongiovanni and asked him to help: he pleaded with the Chief on their behalf, and the Chief in the end accepted to make do with the 300 Leones collected so far. Unfortunately many Chiefs are out just to make money and don't care about the wellbeing of their subjects- the more demanding ones don't normally last long.

Bongiovanni himself is impressive and was, in my opinion the right approach: he tries to get the villagers to help themselves and if they want to build a school or a dispensary or a chapel he says to them that he will provide them with rice so they can work on building what they want rather than on growing the rice. He travels around from one village to the next on a bicycle and covers up to 100 miles in a week, staying in people's houses wherever he goes; after a week or two in the bush he comes back for a wash and a square meal at the mission.

Talking of Secret Societies he told me that some of them rely heavily on marijuana and palm vine to create a frenetic atmosphere when they meet; they female Secret Society has a terrible initiation rite of circumcision from which many girls and women die because of the way it's carried out (I think that's an exaggeration myself). In Bongiovanni's view the reason for the rite, apart from the fact that men are also circumcised, was originally to deprive the woman of any enjoyment of sex so that she would have no reason to be

unfaithful to her husband. Again I'm not sure of the anatomical exactitude of the claim though Bongiovanni is clearly a revolutionary feminist in African eyes and that might influence his opinion on the practice of female circumcision; he feels strongly about the subservient role played by women in society here and does everything in his power to prevent passive acceptance of the status quo, I wish him luck in his crusade.

The Xaverians came into the north of the country when the Holy Ghost fathers gave up the struggle in this predominantly Muslim area and retired to the south; this was 30 years ago and since then they've kept at it and built a few churches but more importantly, schools. At the beginning there was no school in Port Lolo, today there are 24 and the Xaverians now have almost 1,000 teachers under their supervision, having had a handful 30 years ago.

At Lungi we found father Rossini who was pleased to see us since he was getting lonely on his own there; while Bongiovanni is in his early thirties and dynamic, father Rossini is in his late fifties and has been here something like 25 years, so between them there should be no shortage of stories about this country that never ceases to provide surprises. Here we're right on the sea with a wonderful view across the bay to Freetown. On the horizon you can see an oil tanker which has been waiting 3 days to come in but can't till the dockworkers go back to work; and that means no fuel for the country within a few days-until it moves in I can't move out.

The news from Freetown gets worse all the time, looting, stoning, shooting scuffling; here I'm safe and so lucky to be in that position. We tuned in at 7.30 to the radio link with the other missions and later to a separate 2 metre band radio that links only Lungi and Freetown, and that's where we heard what news we know. Rice in the capital is on sale for 50 cents/cup and all over the country the strike is holding out- this time they're not going to give in still Shaki does something dramatic or goes, the longer he hides without saying a word or doing anything about the situation to resolve it the worse it must get for everybody. When will I get out?

After eating at 7 we sat outside talking till the rain began and at about 10 there was nothing left to do but turn off the generator and go to bed. Father Rossini said that when he's on his own he sometimes goes to bed as early as 8.30 because there is absolutely nothing to do; normally there are 3 of them here but one is on leave at the moment so

Rossini is on his own and I certainly wouldn't like to be here for days on my own, it's enough to drive you mad. The house itself is very old and has about 12 rooms but no money has been spent on it and it is falling apart; also the area is one of the most strongly Muslim and the people are far from cooperative; theft is a great problem as well as vandalism; to top it all the cook who has been attached to the mission for 30 years is drunk most of the time and is strongly suspected of being behind the disappearance of many things in the house. Just before the other father left for Italy he was up one night and half asleep he thought the light of the lighthouse across the bay was a thief wandering about so he started shooting and it was only the next day that Rossini noticed the bullet marks at knee height on a pillar just outside his own bedroom-if the shots had been only marginally to the right and higher he could have been shot in his bed by his fellow missionary! In fact this other fellow was so neurotic about the thieves that he used to get up for an hour in the middle of the night every night to keep guard and it's only this month that they've started to employ a night-watchman. No doubt when you've been out here a number of years your nerves are worn down and you're liable to become slightly unbalanced, especially if you hardly ever see another white person! In fact the Xaverians now have a problem of elderly missionaries who have been here for 20 or 30 years and who are no longer young or dynamic enough to do the same job they used to do; what's sad is that most of them by now have nothing to go back to, no close relatives or attachment to their birthplaces, they've made their lives out here and really they have nowhere else to go, indeed they beg their superiors to allow them to stay until they die. What all this means is that there is an excess, I'm told, of young missionaries who want to come out here over the number of places available and that rather holds up the process of rejuvenation so necessary to a mission- the methods and priorities today are far from those of 30 years ago.

And now, after groping in candlelight to write up today's adventures, it's time to go to my damp but no doubt comfortable bed.

5.9: Some statistics: Custom rates on a car of less than 200 cc are 75%, over 2000 cc they are 100%, and on whisky and all other spirits a rate of 14 Leones/litre is charged, so it's not surprising these things are so expensive; the national average income pro capita today is placed at 200 Leones/year, but such a figure means very little.

In the last 5 years, I'm told, things have got much worse: roads are no longer repaired; medical supplies aren't sent to the hospitals; too many people are completing their schooling and there are no jobs to go to because once they've been to school they think it is beneath them to soil their hands doing agricultural work, so the expansion in education has done as much harm as good; prices have risen sharply while earnings haven't changed noticeably; and finally, the regime has maintained a degree of repressiveness which has made opposition difficult. At the root of all this is undoubtedly gross economic mismanagement but it is also true that Sierra Leone for a variety of reasons is almost unmanageable as it presents itself today and the same thing applies to many African countries: I'm quite prepared to believe that Shaki started off with good intentions and was a relatively honest and upright man but unfortunately he could never have held on to power this long if he hadn't started making compromises over his ideals to the point where his supply of dignity has completely run out. What dealt the killer blow to this country, apart from the oil crisis, was the Chairmanship of the OAU last year when an estimated 150-200 million Leones was spent on building a special OAU village, buying a fleet of Mercedes , building new roads in Freetown, and generally entertaining the various Heads of State in a sumptuous manner; when Liberia held the Chairmanship last year the President, Tolbert, wasn't even able to last out his year of office before being overthrown by his subjects and economics played a major role in sparking off the coup. I think Shaki is now beginning to pay the price of his self-indulgent charade last year. Perhaps many people would like the pattern to continue next year when Gheddafi holds the Chairmanship and see him overthrown in office but I think Lybia is too wealthy a country for an internal revolt to bring him down.

Most of the houses occupied by Europeans seem to have ceilings made of plywood with 2 inch wide slats of wood, always painted green, forming squares on the ceiling, in fact pastel colours such as green pink and light blue are the typical colours in which brick houses are painted; the houses usually have flat roofs and gutters which allow the rainwater to be collected in large rusty barrels. Despite publicity around the capital that tells you 'brick is beautiful'! There remain many mud huts in the villages which either have thatched roofs or, if you're lucky, corrugated iron roves. I asked a volunteer teacher I had met why the school year went from September to June, as in Europe , when surely a

more reasonable period would be March to December, because he had been telling me how difficult it was to teach at the hottest time of the year in the dry season; he replied that even if the school year were changed it might be easier for him to teach but then it would be harder for his students to learn because, as a result of the corrugated iron roofing, it would be impossible to hear anything in the rain season. It's not surprising few students get round to taking O and A Levels considering the cost of the books and the inclement climate, and even if they do there is no guarantee they will receive the certificates they want: last year the questions in one paper were somehow leaked in one school and as a result all the papers in that subject for the whole country were invalidated by the West African Examination Council in Nigeria which marks the papers, so the students affected have to wait another year, and pay for it, before they can take the exam again. I say pay for it because although in theory education is free in Sierra Leone, in practice clothing and books have to be paid for by the student as well as fairly heavy examination fees; as a result a common arrangement is for a boy to work for a white person in return for the costs of his schooling being paid and the arrangement works very well except that there aren't enough 'employers' around- just before I left the house in Bo at least half a dozen boys came to see me asking to work in the house. Noticeably the arrangement seems to be for boys only and not girls, so for a girl to complete her schooling is all the more difficult unless she has parents prepared to pay; a second obstacle is pregnancy or marriage which usually come half way through a girl's schooling. It's not unheard of for teachers to impregnate one of their pupils and indeed when I asked Albert Lamin about the security of tenure of his job as a teacher he told me that he could only be dismissed for gross moral misconduct.

Everything is used over and over again, nothing is wasted. Out of old tyres they make sandals and bags, tins are used for measuring rice, groundnuts, etc., or they are cut to make funnels or small buckets; the shells of certain vegetables such as marrows are used as bowls; and every single part of a cow or a fish, except the bones, is eaten. Palm wine is tapped at the top of the palm and is 100% the juice of the tree: if drunk fresh it is fairly innocuous, though I think it tastes soapy; if left for a day or two it ferments and becomes very potent indeed, in fact it even ferments in your stomach if left long enough so a 10 cent cup can be made to go a long way. The name usually given to it is amole.

In each town there are scores of tailors who work away all day at pedal-driven sewing machines, and it is the norm to buy material and have a garment made by a tailor since they are relatively cheap. Alternatively your wife makes the clothes, so you would rarely buy anything ready made unless you live in a town and you want to impress with your fashionable clothes.

Rice and kerosene are the two prized possessions of Sierra Leoneans on which they depend for their livelihood - rice for food and kerosene for the lamps which they leave lit all night to keep the devil away. I was surprised to hear that kerosene is so precious but apparently fear of the dark among people of the villages in particular is very great: the devil and his works are everywhere, even where I'm sitting a large cotton tree which stands on the shore 200 meters from a small island is taken as a sign of the devil- symbolism is strong here. Last time Bongiovanni was here he went swimming out to the little island and back despite warning from the local people that he would be defying the devil. And on his way back he scraped his back over some rocks so that as soon as he emerged from the water the villagers were delighted to tell him that the devil had scratched his back in anger. However, such beliefs also work the other way: often when he is touring the villages Bongiovanni prefers to sleep in a school or any empty building rather than in the house of the people, and sometimes he is exhorted not to spend the night alone in a given place because the devil is said to inhabit it at night, but when he emerges the next morning unharmed his reputation is enhanced and people start believing there must be something after all to his God.

Salaries: an unqualified teacher gets 800-1000 Leones per year and this goes up to 2.500-3.000 Leones for a teacher with a degree; the big jump occurs when you become principal and then your earnings shoot up, and in fact many principals lose sight of their scholastic duties and start manoeuvring for promotion into the Civil Service or politics; similarly many teachers only hope to make it into those same areas and don't care about their pupils at all. I've calculated that teachers received a wage increase of 3-5% last year with inflation running somewhere above 100% year, and I only happen to know about teachers because the Xaverian fathers manage their salaries so other categories might have fared either better or worse.

Shaki is staying at the house of a Doctor Kamarra in Mahera for the moment; the doctor has a private clinic there where he charges 37 Leones per visit. As for dental treatment there are 2 or 3 dentists in the whole of the country and they're all in Freetown and all charge 100, 200, 500 Leones; now and then a team of Dutch dentists comes out and with a mobile laboratory they tour the country giving dental treatment free for a month—apparently it's not true, as is generally believed, that Africans have strong teeth, many of them are tortured all their lives with toothache. I have come across in my short stay here an impressive series of forms of aid from Holland: a team of Dutch doctor come twice a year to operate on the children who have had polio, and if they didn't do it I doubt anyone else here would; when I went to Serabu I met a pleasant young Dutch doctor who had come out here during his holidays to work in the hospital and it was he who admitted me with malaria; finally, the Dutch dentists who come seem to be the only ones in that field as well. Maybe something could be learnt from their approach.

An Italian has just come to the mission having taken the ferry across from Freetown; he says soldiers forced the men to work the ferry at gunpoint and that UTA, the French airline, plans to land this evening and tomorrow which would be the first plane in 4 or 5 days to come or go; I'll have to see if it's worth my getting on as far as Monrovia in Liberia or Abidjan in the Ivory Coast which is where UTA fly to. This Italian is going to Monrovia tomorrow on business and has been in Sierra Leone on and off for 30 years, in his opinion the present troubles are unprecedented and are to be put down to the long run effect of the presence of the Lebanese in the country. The Ministers only do things through the Lebanese and they get their cut in return: so a bridge building contract was given to a Lebanese for 12 million Leones while a Dutch firm had offered to build it for 5 million Leones, and an oil tanker was bought from a Lebanese for 6 million, kept unused for 1 year, and then resold for its true value of 3 million Leones. In 1974 this country had so much money that they called in advisers to help them spend it but since then it has all disappeared into thin air which only Ministers and Lebanese businessmen seem able to breathe.

The visitor repeated for the benefit of myself and Bongiovanni a story which had become famous among the Xaverians he re with whom he has always been very friendly. He used to own a bakery in Freetown and he employed a Scottish girl at one time to do the

accounts; one day 1,000 pounds disappeared from his safe and the thief wasn't caught. While he was away in Italy on business the man's wife called a witch to see if he could trace the culprit since this is one of the areas in which they specialize; the witch asked to be invited to dinner with a large number of other guests and he also stipulated that all the guests should take off their shoes before he arrived; when he came he started by picking out those that belonged to the man and said their owner was not present, and then he picked out the shoes of the Scottish girl and said the owner of that pair had stolen the money and he was right.

In the afternoon, we went to the airport to watch the arrival of the UTA flight. There were about 70 passengers waiting to board and they had all come across on the ferry that was made to run at gunpoint; apparently the authorities have also forced the dockworkers to unload one oil tanker and they have forced some hoarders to sell their rice in the market. The soldiers will now have to oblige the workers at the oil refinery to work and then the transport workers to distribute the oil or petrol not an easy task. Here in Freetown they're making every effort to keep the power station functioning so as to avoid trouble at night in the dark but I don't know if in the provinces they will still have electricity, particularly if fuel to operate them has run out.

The UTA plane arrived with the help of just 2 French engineers who did all the checking in then landed the plane with the help of 3 or 4 Sierra Leoneans, no one else was working; the army took care of the customs and presumably of the control tower. The seventy passengers got on headed for Abidjan and then Paris but not a single passenger got off and the plane was surrounded by soldiers, mostly Red Berets trained in Cuba and armed to the hilt though in fact they succeeded. To me it was a surprise that a few men were able to guide a plane in and out but on the other hand it came in daylight and they knew they had the airport to themselves so I suppose there was no problem; the only risk lay on coming at all though I'm sure that consideration has been outweighed by the thought of the amount of money they will be able to encash if they remain the only airline to come in the next few days, and that might well be the case since no other airline has its own engineers here.

I weighed myself at the airport for the first time since I came here and I noticed I have lost 5 kilos some where on the way.

On the fathers' radio this evening they promised to transmit my message home as soon as the channel to Italy is clear because apparently for climatic reasons it's not always possible to transmit, or at least it hasn't been so far; they also said the secretary of the Teachers Union has been imprisoned and he hasn't even had the chance yet to call out his members in strike. The latest rumour is that 8 children have died from suffocation as a result of tear gas canisters being thrown about by the police and army: meanwhile the APC youth are running riot through the town and have sabotaged the whole network of traffic lights.

One more witch's test to discover a thief is to tie a band around the suspect's arm and if it swells up he is guilty: it seems so arbitrary but no doubt it works, particularly if the suspect believes totally in the power of the witch. This is a country, a situation, and a reality that must be seen, heard, and experienced to be believed.

6.9: it's bucketing down and the siege continues- this is just like a siege with everyone locked up in their homes waiting for either the last killer attack or the famous relief force to bring the wait to an end! SLBS and BBC say nothing, and if it wasn't for the fathers' radio network we would know nothing of what is going on, and that must be the uncomfortable position that the majority of people find themselves in.

I'm told Shaki always takes with him a selection of doctors and witch doctors to defend himself against the natural and supernatural and maybe he needs them more than ever now with people cursing him all over the country; suddenly no one has a good word to say for him and only a few days ago criticism of him was guarded. It's interesting how quickly public opinion can change and people can jump to the other side of the fence and pretend to have been there all the time, though maybe it's only human nature and an instinct for survival- not that in this case there wasn't unspoken criticism of the President all along. Certainly as soon as the Shah started losing his grip in Iran almost everyone was prepared to ditch him having been the best of friends before, and as far as Italy today is concerned you would think the whole population was made up of heroic partisans from what people try to make out!

Here in the mission we have a limited amount of food and if the strike continues much longer we'll run out, but I'm sure the mass of the people is already short of food because

there is very little available now; really one must admire the determination of the workers who are prepared to strike and lose their wages as well as bring considerable discomfort upon themselves, there's no sign of them giving in. It is clear that the country as a whole is on a tightrope which gets weaker and weaker as time goes on, something must give somewhere somehow soon.

A figure: the 3 luxury hotels around Freetown, Mammi yoko (part owned by UTA), Bintumani (part owned by British Caledonian), and Cape Sierra, can cost to the normal guest 70-80 Leones/ night for a single room and 170-180 Leones/ night for a suite, this latter figure being approximately the national average annual income per person.

I went to mass this morning with about 10 other people (normally a few more come but the rain this Sunday morning dampened the enthusiasm of some and I was intrigued by the singing which was loud and mournful and out of tune, in a country full of natural rhythm I expected a slightly more lively service, and it also struck me that the Gospel, which recommended the avoidance at all cost of pagans and tax collectors (what's wrong with tax collectors?), can have said very little to the people present.

Another trip to the airport where UTA arrived on time and a Nigeria Airways representative told me they plan to resume services within the next few days so I'll wait till I can get a direct flight with them to Lagos; I think they must have reached an agreement with the 2 UTA engineers to help them as well because there is still no airport staff working, and probably the flight that came in yesterday was attest to see if it was possible to resume services to Freetown. Three nuns arrived on this flight and told us that they had been told in Amsterdam that a coup had taken place in Sierra Leone- I wonder what other news they have in Europe at the moment? I hope this record of my stay here is not lost or stolen, at the moment it's my most precious possession.

Father Rossini tells me that the first lot of Chinese from Taiwan came to this country and did a good job but when the UN officially recognized Mao's China they left, and the lot that replaced them have different methods which are more controversial. It is rumoured, and 2 fathers here who used to work in China confirm this, that the men who come over here are all prisoners who are given a sentence of so many years service in Africa, a very clever system it seems to me. That would explain why you never come across a Chinaman and why only men, always single, come over here.

One of the fathers in Freetown is chaplain to the Pademba Road Prison and he went there this morning but wasn't allowed to see the newly arrested men; he was told however that they number 204 including 15 Labour Congress leaders, and while he was there another 50-60 were brought in; the whole road and the surrounding area has been closed off in case any attempt is made to free the men. It has also been announced, by the Minister of Education, that the President's decree putting off the opening of the schools for 3 weeks is to be ignored, so the schools are to open normally tomorrow morning. The whole situation is so confused that no one knows what order to believe and besides, the teachers are hardly going to go to work while the secretary of their Union is in prison.

The Italian left for Monrovia today where the UTA flight is stopping off to do the refueling it normally does here, it turned out, not surprisingly, that he comes 7 or 8 times a year and each time he takes back home with him 40-50,000 Leones; in theory he comes to collect the rent for the warehouse where he used to have his bakery and which he now lets to a Lebanese businessman but of course he's up to many other shady tricks. He deals in leopard skins and ivory which he smuggles into Italy and then sells for a fortune; at the moment he has 4 skins blocked at Rome airport since they were found in the false bottom of his case but he's fairly sure he can use some contacts to get them out sooner or later. In 30 years of toing and froing God knows how much he has robbed this country of; and of course like all crooks of some standing he believes he's a fervent Christian and is well known to all the fathers here for his hospitality and generosity towards them. In return he gets a good deal because they help him out both legally and illegally with his money: there is an arrangement whereby he hands over a given amount of money to the missionaries here in Leones and when he gets back to Italy he is given the equivalent in Lire by the Xaverian headquarters there; however, the missionaries don't get through the 300,000 Leones he 'earns' here per year so the rest is smuggled out in cash with the help of the fathers who carry the money through the customs on the pretext of seeing their friend off and maybe giving him a last blessing! In fact the main source of his earnings is a container which he sends back and forth from Italy full of things ordered by the hotels like waiters' uniforms, glasses with the hotel's name stamped on them, and crates of mineral water (which here sells at well over 1 pound/bottle). To that can be added what he can squeeze out of various sources, for example Ghana Airways recently mislaid a

large copper plate which he had bought for 500 Leones in Freetown and he showed us the claim he was making for a plate of the value of 2,500 Leones.

Finally, on the way to the airport this gentleman started telling us how ridiculous bureaucracy had become in Italy: to own a bar you now have to have the equivalent of 4 o'levels and if you haven't got them you have to sit an exam to test your suitability for the job even if you've been running a bar successfully for years; secondly, to open a bar nowadays you require something like 28 permits and pieces of paper, including a check made by the firemen that your coffee-making machine isn't liable to blow up one day. In this respect of course the man's quite right, Italy is a bureaucratic jungle of a density unheard of in the rest of the world.

Rossini's experience of Sierra Leoneans: those who are lucky enough to earn salaries find themselves without a penny 3 or 4 days after being paid because of the debts of the previous month to be paid off and because they don't know how to avoid spending all the money they have in their hand at any given moment. This second point is more relevant because they could manage much better on what they earn than they actually do, they live like lords for a few days drinking and having a good time and when the money runs out they return to their normal struggling to make ends meet-maybe it's not a totally illogical system because at least that way they escape spectacularly from their poverty for a few days in a way they would never be able to do if they saved and distributed their expenditures through the month, or at least not for many years. The only fault is that the women and children never enjoy even the temporary spending spree. Certainly living from day to day and never thinking of, or working towards, or even expecting, a better future is a fundamental characteristic of people here. Similarly with religions they switch from one to the other from one day to the next, following the faith that offers the most material, rather than spiritual, benefit as soon as possible; not even in their names is there a permanence, for you will find that overnight they decide to add a name or change it all together because it sounds good, and they're particularly fond ever and never to be explained.

7.9: Sierra Leone used to be called the white man's grave because so many Europeans, particularly missionaries, died here; today, some say, it should be called the black man's

grave because of the persistently high death rate though it sounds exaggerated to me. On the other hand there is probably some truth in the claim that as many people die as before the advent of the white man's medicine which did its best to squeeze out the traditional medicine of always.

Some more vocabulary: in Temne, hello= cusie (= bisie in Mende; = seke in Limba); aubergine= kobokobo; in Mende, boy=hindui, girl=nahi, dog=gle, chicken= tenga, duck=do, face=gami, hand= tucui, mouth=bele, eyes= biami, nose= muhocwe' ear=woli, leg=bale, teeth=yongwe, elbow=nocwe, finger=yengai, foot=gwe, back=uomi, neck=bobu, breast=nieni; and colours are interesting:red= boli, black=teli, white=yagwe, green= yagrengwe, blue=yabluegwe, pink=yapinkigwe, and so on (all these words come from the children at the Cheshire Home and I presume they are correct).

More stories from the 2 fathers I'm staying with: every 2 years when the Porro Society has its initiation ceremonies a young boy is sacrificed, he's taken from the village by a 'mask' representing the founding ancestor of the society, and the child's parents cannot intervene. When it comes to the circumcision of the boy he only becomes a man if he doesn't bite into a leaf which is placed in his mouth during the operation which of course is done without any form of anaesthetic. Another test for witchcraft is to put a liquid into the eyes of a chicken, lock it up in a dark room for 4 hours, and when it is let out if its eyes are closed then the person is a witch; and another test for a thief is to place a knife in a fire and then onto the suspect's arm, if it sticks then he is a thief and if it runs smoothly he isn't. These tests seem very arbitrary as I have said before, but they are used and often one of the fathers has done the knife test and says he didn't feel the hot blade against his arm. It's important to differentiate here between witches who practice white magic and are used to detect thieves among other things, and those who practice black magic who are feared and despised and on whom tests such as the chicken test are carried out; alternatively when suspected black magic witches died the test used to be to place their spleen in water and if it sank the person was pronounced a witch and suffered the disgrace of having no burial. In an appendix to this diary, I shall explain more of what I've been able to find out about the Secret Societies, ancestor worship, and witchcraft. One more episode concerns a Chief who called in a witch to solve some problem he had: before he arrived the Chief had a 20 cent coin buried in his garden and to test his powers

he demanded that the witchdoctor find the coin; this he did in no time with the help of a sort of divining stick. In the north there is one renowned witchdoctor who is also the Chief and in his village everything is left unlocked and none ever steals; Shaki often goes up to see him and keep on the right side of him, or if he is summoned by the President or anyone else he charges 400 Leones just for travel since he takes a whole truck load of equipment with him.

Furthermore, there are jujus and anti-juju which definitely are effective: if a spell has been cast upon you and you have the juju in you, you must always carry around with you a little sack worn around your neck which a witchdoctor gives you, and at night you must place the sack under your pillow. There is a book apparently called something like 'juju in my life' written by a British Chief of Police who spent 12 years in Ghana and had to leave in the end because he couldn't stand the pressures put upon him by his enemies by means of juju; the final straw was when he was attending horse races in a stadium and he noticed he didn't have his anti-juju with him so he took the precaution of going to the very top of the stadium far from anyone else and the next thing he knew he was lying on the ground half dead on the outside of the stadium having fallen from the very top.

Sacrifices are not limited to the Secret Societies: a virgin girl is supposed to be buried alive in the foundations of every mosque in the country, but that may only be anti-islamic slander.

At the time of the election of 1967 Albert Margai was said to have kept the skeleton of a woman in a fridge for superstitions reasons though this was never proved. And in 1973 one of Shaki's Ministers wanted to rise rapidly up the ladder of power and so he consulted a witchdoctor who told him what to do (this whole story is definitely true): he had to kill a pregnant woman, extract the foetus, cut it and drink its blood, it's too horrible to imagine. Anyway this Minister did as instructed but was caught, tried and hanged- hanging is always used in these cases.

Radio new: petrol, normally 3.50 Leones/gallon (already high for a country like this) has reached 5 Leones/gallon in some places; the official price of rice is now 15c/ cup and in Port Loko some women were fined for selling it at 25c/cup in the market- but that's what they bought it for before the troubles. I was told today that my message was received by a listener in Naples and so it should be passed on to my parents.

Diamonds: the Sierra Leones Star found in a Makeni in the 70's was the size of a small orange, I'm told, and sold in New York for a few million dollars, the 3rd largest diamond ever found (969 carats). Today the smallest diamond you can buy in Freetown is 0.05 carats and sells for 80 Leones – and I was offered an uncut diamond (supposedly) the size of a cherry stone for the same amount when I was in Bo. At the time of the boom 5 to 10 years ago people would move in to the area around Sefadu and build a hut saying it was their home; instead they dug into the ground looking for diamonds so you had to be careful not to fall down these holes feet deep, and today the place looks like a battlefield full of craters. As for the official diamond mining companies which were largely South African and British controlled they were anxious to get the most out in the shortest time so they desperately depleted all the best seams and dug under whole villages which are now caving in. in the mid- 1970's the population of Koidu and New Sembehun reached 76,000 having been a tenth of that before the mining began.

Diseases: river blindness is caused by a worm that enters your foot if you wade through mostly stagnant water, it can take years to have its full effect but there is hardly anything that can be done about it and you slowly lose your sight. There is a type of very common fly which can get into your clothes and sheets and then lay eggs just under the surface of your skin; the worm hatches under a swelling like a boil which gives you strong headaches and you can get rid of it by squeezing the worm out or enticing it with a coating of butter or margarine so that it has to come out to breathe. One father had 18 such lumps on his back once and it was some time before he realized it. Alternatively, if you avoid these hazards there's malaria which is much more common than I anticipated though now days it is more unusual to get cerebral malaria which causes you to hallucinate and can even be lethal; or else rabies, there are literally hundreds of rabid dogs roaming around- just a few weeks ago the father her had to shoot a rabid dog that wandered into the compound. All these things are only likely to enter your life if you stay here 20 or 30 years as some Xaverian fathers have done, not if you come for a few years at a time, but nevertheless they are present and you have to be careful; for example there are a number of poisonous snakes and if you spend a lot of time in the bush you can't help coming across them.

Finally Leprosy: apparently it is still unknown how leprosy is contracted though it is fairly certain that it isn't contagious as is sometimes believed; however it is thought to originate in conditions of bad hygiene and general standard of living so it is possible that several people in an area get it. It can be stopped spreading by means of a course of pills taken every 2 weeks for 3-6 months and there are organized mobile teams which go round the country discovering new cases and monitoring existing ones. The effect of leprosy is to make extremities such as feet, hands, and the nose, lose their sensitivity so that one can walk on hot coals and feel nothing though of course damaging the soles of one's feet; consequently the test for leprosy is to rub a small area with a strong acid which should burn if one does not have leprosy. I asked Rossini how lepers are treated by the rest of the community since traditionally they have been considered unclean and have been ostracized, and he told me that they are accepted and no longer persecuted, I should think so too.

Football: not a single match ever ends without fighting between the opposing players and supporters and the referees are quite used to abandoning the pitch at an appropriate moment. It is never particularly vicious fighting but particularly after a goal the idea of losing the match is seen as so humiliating that the honour of the side must be defended at all costs.

8.9: British Caledonian came in normally yesterday and as I predicted there followed a report on the BBC World Service today for the first time in almost a week. In fact the reporter flew in on the plane but never got off, he just waited for 3 hours for passengers to get on bound for London and interviewed them on the flight back, maybe he didn't want to run any risks; he said nothing we didn't know already except that the dead were 'at least 3', which means very little, and that S.I.Koroma, the 1st Vice President, has set up a crisis committee to deal with the situation – it's just possible that if he is an able enough politician things might return to normal and he might take over power, but the general opinion is that he has nothing like the hold Stevens had. On the fathers' radio this evening they said that it was rumoured that the 204 prisoners would be released soon though technically they are in for treason and that is punishable by hanging; at a meeting

of the crisis committee attended by representatives of all the major Union Koroma and Kamarra-Taylor, the 2 Vice Presidents, were openly abusing Shaki for his handling of the situation so it seems there is no one left in support of him, if he manages to regain control of the country it will be an extraordinary achievement.

I found among the papers at the mission here in Lungi a document of Colonial times referring to the Christian marriage ordinance, which applied only to Christians of course, whereby bigamy was punishable by 'imprisonment, with or without hard labour, for any period not exceeding seven years'- I should think such a law did little to encourage conversion to Christianity in a country like this where bigamy or plurigamy (if such a word exists) is the absolute norm.

Some semantic speculation: the word Bo in Temne refers to a character who appears during the coming of the chief ancestral spirit of the Porro Society, and among the Mano tribe in Liberia Bo means to cut, a reference maybe to circumcision during the initiation rite into the Porro Society; however, since Bo town is in Mende country, I don't suppose the meaning of the word in other languages is of much relevance (for that matter Bo in Italian is a very expressive word meaning 'I don't know' so where does that get us?). At the same time it is true that the words mama, papa, and caca all have identical usage in Italian and in Mende and I suppose the Portuguese introduced the terms, unless they are just a coincidence so, if one wanted to be romantic about this matter, one could claim that the town of Bo got its name because one day a Portuguese explorer who went into the interior, when asked on his return where he had been replied Bo, I don't know! (Assuming of course that the word Bo exists in Portuguese and has the same meaning as in Italian).

I also found a book here by an Italian called Gello Giorgi who was for a long time a doctor in Sierra Leone and wrote 2 books about experiences, one a novel and one a detailed description of the workings of the Porro Society which I've just read, very interesting. This doctor has a considerable reputation here largely because he was able, between 1959 and 1967, to reduce the number of people suffering from a particular type of leprosy from 15% to 0.02% of the population by travelling round the whole country with a team of nurses and the necessary medicines. However, among the Xaverian fathers he is remembered for his character and his methods: he was a vegetarian and hardly ever

ate anything at all and yet he was never ill, he always dressed like a tramp and carried out operations in his vest, often you would see him with blood on his hand which he hadn't washed off properly, and despite (or thanks) to all this he was a brilliant doctor and surgeon. Father Rossini acted as a male nurse for him more than once up in the north where there were no proper hospitals or dispensaries, and he was asked to knock out the patients or distract them with Giorgi often helping him to slap or punch the patients, particularly if they started coming round half way through an operation0 incredible methods but no doubt the only ones possible.

Another gory story which shows what a fear there is of theft and what solutions some people find to the problem: in Port Loko a Lebanese trader kept having goods stolen from his shop and he worked out that a tunnel had been dug which emerged under the floorboards of his shop so one night he waited for the thieves to come and when he saw the floorboards being lifted up he swooped down with a machete and chopped off the hand of the offender. Naturally he was considered perfectly within his rights to do so and in general it is acceptable even to kill anyone you see wandering about on your property, their very presence there is punishable by death if you so choose. Life has relatively little value and the termination of life has few repercussions on one's conscience.

From the very beginning here I noticed that many people had neat scars on their faces and I calculated that they must be self-inflicted for some reason: I've now found out that they are considered signs of beauty, and in many ways they are. Apart from the scars which have a mystical significance and which are inflicted during the initiation rites into male and female Secret Society, many mothers of small children make neat cuts with a razorblade on the temples, the forehead and the cheeks of their babies which remain for life. Oils are poured into the cuts to widen the scars so that they have a uniform shape rather like an eye placed vertically about 1/2inch long and 1/4 inch at the widest point; Wuyah and Nassa had 12 such scars in group of 3.

This evening there is wailing and singing coming from a house across the road where someone must have died either 3 or 7 or 40 days ago since on these days the Muslims hold a nightly vigil over the departed member of the family. In these cases a priest is present and has to be handsomely paid but in the case of the death of a Christian the

priest is required to be present for only one hour on those same nights and he isn't usually paid for it.

3 more words: don don= finished, palaver= fuss (commonly used here, much more than in Britain today), and poto=white man.

9.9: Finally I boarded a plane to Logos today though the strike goes on and there was still no airport staff working, only the French engineers; at the airport a Catholic know to the fathers took me through all the 'palaver' with various officials asking for money all the time from whom he defended me. The whole process was a joke, even the policemen working there felt they deserved some material reward from the departing passenger but by now I certainly don't feel intimidated any more and I just smile and say I have no money; in fact I still had 50 Leones in cash and by the time paid the airport tax of 10 Leones I had 40 Leones while in theory you're only allowed to take out 20 Leones, I offered the money to the fathers but they insisted I took it and Bongiovanni walked through the customs with me, with the money in his pocket. Also my visa had expired 2 days ago and they were about to make a fuss even if it wasn't my fault I hadn't been able to leave, but again the intervention of the fathers sorted that out instantly. It was all a game of toing and froing, smiling and persuading at every obstacle, which is after all how you have to get used to living here. I waited 3 hours in the waiting lounge for the plane to arrive and I ventured into the duty free shop, as they had the audacity to call it: whisky was on sale at 30 Dollars/litre and Brandy for 60 Dollars/litre- if anything more expensive than some shops in Freetown. Also while waiting I met a Sierra Leonean 7th Day Adventist who told me he is not allowed to smoke, drink spirits or wines or even coffee, or to chew kola nuts which are very commonly nibbled to keep one awake and alert since they contain caffeine- indeed I think they must be contained in Coca Cola since they export over 1 million tons of kola nuts per year and I can't imagine where else they can go; as far as I'm concerned I don't know how people can chew them, they taste of extremely bitter grass. It seems questionable to me to impose a puritanical rigidity on people here when their lives are already hard enough and uncomfortable enough as it is but perhaps I have no right to judge; similarly I was encouraged by the approach of the Xaverian fathers I met because practice is made to come before preaching and a deep

respect for the wealth of traditional culture and environment is maintained, but I did also come across missionaries who seemed to want to do little else than convert more people to their faith and that, in my opinion, is a tragic limitation which I wouldn't have imagined possible to have survived till 1981. Finally before boarding the plane I saw a headline of we Yone, a government paper, of a few days ago which said Kabia, Secretary of the Labour Congress, had been earning 5,400 Leones per year through payments made by the famous American Trade Unionist: the paper also claimed "Kerosene is back!" which is also completely untrue as far as I know. It's amazing how unsubtle and the childish the authorities can be: there used to be a time when everything that appeared in print was taken as gospel truth because it was thought by the common people no falsehood could, almost by definition, appear in a newspaper, but today I'm sure the reverse is true and everyone acknowledges that you can't believe anything which is written in a paper.

In Freetown the strike continues though the atmosphere is more calm and the general feeling is that some compromise will come soon; even as it is the workers have shown a remarkable patience and determination so far because the strike has not been broken since it began 9 days ago and these days have meant very considerable suffering and discomfort to the workers themselves, as far as I know a situation like this is unprecedented in Africa where a total indefinite general strike drives a President into hiding and yet doesn't lead to a coup straight away; it is admirable the way the people have conducted things, it may even be politically mature, but what does the future hold for them, what will happen?- it looks as if all possible alternatives to Shaki have been weeded out over the years and at the same time Shaki is too unpopular to hold on to power for long and the army or the police are too weak to take over power. Possibly an interim solution will be reached soon but I think it won't be long before more trouble breaks out and another strong man takes over- and the record of the strong men who have emerged so far in Africa is unfortunately far from good.

On the plane it was a scramble to get seats and I, with my meagre remnants of British politeness (foolishness), found myself without a seat with about 10 other people; at first it seemed as if my defeat might be turned into victory when we were all escorted to the virtually empty 1st class compartment and allowed to sit on the sacred seats of the rich;

however the airline contrived to rid the 2 or 3 genuine 1st class passengers of the pollution we represented and they installed 2 extra rows of narrow seats at the back of the economy class where the space for the doors was usually kept free, and I was one of the chosen half dozen who had to migrate from the very front to the very back of the plane in shame. We flew from Freetown to Abidjan, capital of the Ivory Coast which is one of the richest countries in West Africa; it has reached that position through a policy of welcoming all foreign investment and presence to the point where there are 6 times as many Frenchmen in the Ivory Coast today as there were before independence. Certainly the town is stunning- large, neat, many skyscrapers, wide roads, similar to an American city- and quite obviously many people live very well there, including presumably some of the local people. It has always been claimed that the Ivory Coast is in many ways less independent than before the French colony became independent state, and I'm sure that the poor in the inland regions of that country are as poor as those elsewhere in West Africa, but it's impossible to assess the present position of the country without value judgments being made about what 'independence' really means. What one can point out, however, is that ex-French colonies in general do stand out for their relative stability and order when compared with the ex-British colonies of the area: the French left behind them a more centralized and efficient administration with politicians of a suitable calibre to take over power from them; the British, on the other hand, took it easy and didn't impose too much on the African population, an intellectually admirable approach per se but one which perhaps in the end was ill advised. Notably the British sought as much as possible to use the existing Paramount Chiefs as their local administrators with the unfortunate consequence that the easiest way to bring them over, if not by force, was through material incentives: the corruption so evident today in African states and so strongly criticized by the developed nations as the major obstacle to economic and political development was ironically introduced by those same colonizing nations, it didn't exist before the white men came and it is certainly not the result of some innate fault in the makeup of the black men who rule today. Not only were money or goods used to buy loyalty but also the self-awarded luxuries in the colonial administrators' lives are largely to blame for the 'corruption' of today: the association of vast wealth with a job in the administration of a colony was something those same administrators did nothing to hide and consequently

both immediately before independence and after it the African men who entered the civil Service if their countries came to expect the same lifestyle as their colonial predecessors. Before Africa was colonized money per se was not a sought after commodity and it was only through a partial exposure to what money can do for a man during the colonial period that a greed for money developed; even today money is only seen by the majority of the population as something to make you rich quickly, something which is only auxiliary to labour leading to a gradual improvement of one's lot. The above analysis applies equally to all colonizing nations of course so what differentiates British from French administration of their territories was that in one case a velvet glove was used and in the other an iron gauntlet with the result that today the countries in West Africa that have known most instability and have shed the most blood are Nigeria, Ghana, and now Gambia and Sierra Leone, (all ex-British colonies), and not Ivory Coast, Senegal, Guinea and Mali (all ex-French colonies). All this does not lead one to praise French methods but maybe it should lead one to criticize British methods, or at least to attribute to them more of the blame for the present state of African politics than is generally attributed: Britain, and not Africa, went wrong somewhere along the line, almost certainly by mistake and with the best intentions. Given the France sought to administer her territories as if they were an extensions of her own national boundaries, one could try to be clever and conclude that ' France ruled by extension and Britain only got as far as ruling by intension', but I would never have the courage to claim such a quip as my own!

10.9: Last night I reached Lagos, a nightmare: I asked various people about hostels and transport to them and I was amazed to find out that there is no airport bus so you are obliged to take a taxi which coasts up to 20 Naira (20 Pound) for the 10 miles into town, and that the very cheapest accommodation costs a further 20 Naira/night the exchange rate of 1 Naira= 1 Pound is what I was given by the bank because they calculated 10 Pound= 12.06 Naira and charged a 2 Naira commission which apparently is fixed whatever amount of money you want to change. If I'm lucky I'll be able to leave Lagos for Sofia on Sunday next and today is Wednesday but even in that case I don't think I can afford to spend 4 nights in a hostel at those prices, so last night I slept at the airport as well as I could. One good thing was that I only had a 48 hours visa for Nigeria and I had

to explain at the customs that I would be staying at least 4 days in the country since the flight to Sofia is only once a week on Sundays; fortunately the customs official didn't take the chance to charge me exorbitantly for his help and he granted me six day visa without a word. As I was roaming round the airport looking for a suitable bench to claim for the night I met 2 Irish nuns who were waiting for someone arriving from Amsterdam, and when I told them of my plight they expressed amazement and shock that anyone should come into Nigeria on his own without knowing anyone in the country. They told me there wasn't an inch of space for me to sleep in the mission where they were staying for the night but after an hour's discussion they promised to come back for me in the morning and take me to a hostel on the way to the mission they came from which is 500 kilometres inland from Lagos.

It's now 8am and I hope the nuns come and that they find me since we didn't specify a meeting place; the night spent stretched between two metal seats was far from comfortable in that every time I turned over I had to shift a folded jacket which acted as a pillow from under my head to under my back to under my ankles. I find it uncomfortable here even though I haven't been harassed as I might have been. The atmosphere gets on one's nerves and the prices don't cheer one up either: a large beer, about I pint, cost 1.20 Naira and any sort of roll costs 1 Naira. The airport itself is wonderful, better than any I have been in Europe, for example there is an X-ray machine to check your hand luggage at every single gate and conveyor belts everywhere to save you walking miles down endless corridors; but how can the majority of people live with such high prices? I saw in a newspaper that the starting salary for a clerk is 1,500 Naira/year and I assume that is considered a lot; perhaps Sierra Leone was even human compared to Nigeria where oil has created vast wealth for some and relative poverty for the most people. All along I had dreaded coming here because I knew that Nigeria had the reputation of having a high crime rate and a unique level of corruption but I hadn't expected to be in the position of not being able to afford to stay here. This whole situation now and over the past ten days has been like taking an exam for which you have no preparation and you only hope you'll be able to improvise and not panic, so far so good.

I was having breakfast when I caught sight of the nun of yesterday seeming very worried and flustered looking for me; we got into a car with a driver for an unknown destination

and all my genuine expressions of gratitude towards this nun only seemed to make her nervous so after a while I joined her in maintaining a stony silence. However it did emerge that she intended to take me to a hostel at Ibadan, 114 kilometres from Lagos, where I might be able to find a room for 14 Naira/night, and that point I did start to become worried because I would very much have preferred to stay at the airport than be taken to some distant town I had no desire to visit, I was just plucking up courage to speak when we stopped at the house where the nuns had been staying the night before and it emerged that once they left there would be plenty of room for me to stay there, which seemed obvious but maybe the nun didn't want to say I could stay there till the father in charge had agreed to the arrangement. In any case, I'm extremely grateful to all concerned because here I am now in another mission protected once more from the African elements!

When the nuns were at the airport last night they had their car towed away by the police for some parking infringement and they had to pay 60 Naira to get it back, so maybe that's why they were edgy this morning. In addition the traffic in Lagos is enough to drive you mad: in a town of possibly 6 or 7 million people where many have one or two cars and the roads were only built for a much smaller volume of traffic, traffic jams of 6 and 7 hours are relatively common and you can't possibly to get into town and back in less than a morning by car; Also, or maybe as a result of this state of affairs, the style of driving is something that beats the Italians hands down, I have never seen anything like manoeuvres they make here, cutting in and out, edging, hooting,- almost every car is bashed and dented at some point. At the sides of the roads are rows of deserted and cannibalized vehicles, so the whole effect is similar to driving dodgem cars through a lively cemetery, a terrifying experience.

Here at the mission I asked if it was possible to phone Balkan Airlines to alter my booking from last Sunday to this coming Sunday but I was told that telephones are few and far between and even when you have one that is no guarantee that you will be able to use it at your leisure because they very often don't work; however, there is another father apparently who lives near here and who has a telephone at least in theory, so tomorrow I shall Endeavour to trace him. The person here is a member of Saint Patrick's Missionary Society and there are also nun who live nearby who are qualified doctors and who are

trying to set up a dispensary in the area, a laudable but strenuous task. I spent the day reading Nigerian newspapers and watching television, and one of the strongest points to emerge from both is a determined anti-Americanism: the fact that the US was the only member of the UN Security Council not to condemn the South African intervention of the past few days in Angola is heavily criticized; the fact that the US was the only nation out of 119 to vote against a motion in the world Health Organization's recent meeting condemning the sale and dishonest promotion of powdered milk for babies, is seen as ample proof that commercial interests come before all else in America. Yet I was surprised to notice that the advertisements on the television are presented either with impeccable British accents or with an aggravating American slur, presumably because products still sell better if associated with those 2 countries. There's no doubt that Nigeria sees itself as one of the leading nations of black Africa, if not the absolute leader, and already threats have been made that Nigeria will equip itself with the nuclear bomb to counter the programs of the arch enemy, South Africa – it doesn't seem to me the best way to go about The problems of the African continent today.

In one of the papers I read an editorial on the Black Maria tragedy: 9 policemen were acquitted last week of any responsibility for the death of 50 prisoners a year ago in a Black Maria van. 68 people were crammed into a van meant for 28 and left locked inside for 2 hours so that the majority asphyxiated- the prison officers were aware of this but did nothing and now they have been acquitted because, it is claimed, of lack of evidence against them. I don't know why the prisoners were ever locked up like that, though the article says the van was being used as a temporary cell, but for the judge to conclude that the police was guilty of negligence and nothing else seems brutal in itself.

The father here told me that Freetown used to be known as the town of 'smells, bells and yells' and I suppose that is applicable today as ever: the smells, both pleasant and unpleasant, are something you notice immediately, the yells you have no choice about noticing, and the bells, in the sense of handbells shaken to attract your attention at the market, are almost a welcome sound amid the cacophony of Freetown daily life. At the evening meal I met 3 nuns who are trying to set up a dispensary and they told me a private room in a hospital costs anywhere between 50 and 100 Naira per day without treatment; the government hospitals are supposedly free but the medicines have to be

paid for as well as an admission fee- they told me of one woman 2 weeks ago who bled to death because she couldn't afford to be admitted and was turned away by 2 hospitals. Nigeria has over 200 tribes and languages and is divided up into 19 states each controlled by one of the 5 official parties, only in 4 or 5 states is the same party in power as is at a national level so considerable breakdown occurs between the central and the local governments. There are horrifying stories of crime: gangs of 30- 40 youths mug anyone who happens to be in the wrong place at the wrong time, including even missionaries, but as in all these cases it may be perfectly possible to live in Lagos without ever having an unpleasant experience; on the other hand I think large cities in Third World countries must rank among the most desperate places you can find.

Yoruba, the language of one of the three major tribes, is said to be second only to Chinese in complexity and difficulty to learn, there are up to 12 intonations of the same basic word that totally alter the meaning of it and very few Europeans have ever mastered it.

11.9: I made my way by taxi into town to find the offices of Balkan Airways, I hour to go in and 3 hours to come out (as well as a total of 10 Naira which one of the fathers insisted on giving me, that was sharing the taxi as well so it would have cost a fortune if I had taken it alone). I can't say I was enchanted with what I saw of Lagos, too many buildings and people and what seemed a high degree of pollution, but my stay should be brief. When I reached the office of the airline I had to wait 1 hour in the queue and most of those before me were asking to be booked onto the flight which leaves for Sofia this Sunday; they were all being told there was no room left on the plane and I was getting very worried lest I should have to spend another week in this town, but when it came to my turn I meekly explained that it had not been my fault I had missed my normal flight and by some miracle the girl at the terminal booked me on to the next flight without saying a word- not surprisingly since she would have been lunched by the irate Nigerians in the office who had been refused the same favour, the relief is something I shall remember for some time because it was so unexpected and illogical that I should have a further stroke of luck after all the good fortune I've had so far to find refuge both in Lagos and at Lungi. On the door of the house here a poster quotes Murphy's Law

whereby ‘if anything can go wrong it will and at worst possible moment’ – Mr. Murphy may be right but in my case once most things went wrong the Supreme Being responsible seemed to change his mind in mid-stream and started bending over backwards to put things right again, so far anyway.

I’ve noticed that my travel insurance expired 2 days ago and since it also covers health I’ll have to do everything possible to keep well in the next few days or else I too will be turned away by doctors and hospitals for not being able to pay the fees! If nothing else crops up now I should be home on the morning of the 15th, exactly 12 days after leaving Bo, but of course anything can happen.

12.9: I met father Bermingham who arrived last night from Rome and who is the airport chaplain here (though there is no chapel at the airport because he has refused to accept the offer of a single room to be used by all the different denominations at different times of the day, so I don’t know what he does as airport chaplain). Having just returned from Europe he told us how Italy is being run by communists even if they call themselves Christian Democrats and Republicans, which is certainly an original view, and that the transport company in Dublin, the CIE, is also being run by communists. He told me Lagos has a high number of mentally unbalanced people and that even the fathers posted here return home every year instead of the normal 2 years because this town really can drive one mad, the pressures of crowds, the traffic, the climate and the bureaucracy are a test of endurance.

13.9: There is a great natural beauty in African people, a wealth of character expressed with ready smiles and large open eyes; I went to the children’s mass this morning and I had the chance to observe all the people present in their magnificent Sunday clothes; their religious fervour is also impressive, the minimum time a mass is allowed to last is 1 hours $\frac{1}{4}$ and they think nothing of services lasting up to 3 hours, and in their donations they are very generous several of them being very wealthy as well. At the children’s mass there was a lot of clapping and drumming and audience participation: instead of a sermon 4 children acted out a scene about the need to forgive each other and everyone had a good time. In many ways the church here is much more progressive than in Europe because

there are fewer traditionalists hard Liners to hold up long overdue reforms, there is vitality rather than stagnation, a lesson to be learnt. I was taken out to the airport by car by one of the sisters here and fortunately we set out in plenty of time because we got caught up in a 'go slow' (traffic jam) and after that we proceeded at speed the wrong way up a one way road complaining about the traffic coming dangerously the other way so to get out of that position we had to cut across a small embankment onto another road.

Checking-in was a bun fight but I'm used to that now: people seem to queue at all angles and in all directions and you'll find 5 people queuing and pushing when only one is travelling and the other 4 are relatives, or else they start unpacking and repacking their cases when they're on the conveyor belt about to be taken away, never a dull moment anyway. I thought of phoning home but today the telephones aren't working, I tried to change my remaining Naira into Lire but the bank had no Lire, I thought I'd wash my hands but there's no running water at the airport today: everything looks impressive here but hardly anything works concurrently with anything else.

Cut of curiosity I asked the price of a simple black wooden bracelet at the souvenir shop and I was prepared to pay 2 or 3 Naira, the man hummed and hawed then asked for 25 Naira so I just laughed and walked off leaving him to make protestations on the lines that it was real African handicraft. I have learnt to laugh at smart Africans who think that a white man is either very rich or very stupid or both, and usually they aren't at all offended: in Bo for example I saw a second hand copy of a book on sale in the street and I knew that a brand new copy cost 4 Leones which I had already judged to be too much for such a thin book, so I asked the boy how much he wanted for his copy and he replied 6.50 Leones- they have no modesty in their demands and are prepared to ask for 10 times the fair price for something without batting an eyelid.

Just before I left father Jim at the mission told me that he has to pay 350 Naira per year for the schooling of the 2 boys who work for him, a considerable amount of money but in line with the remarkably high prices in the country or at least in this town. The boys were in charge of the cooking and managed well enough although the requirements of father Jim were things such as jelly and chips and shepherd's pie which are ludicrously out of place here; in April the previous houseboy and cook had a row in the kitchen and the cook ended up stabbed to death with a kitchen knife, hardly a Christian act, though father

Jim added that such episodes are extremely rare here. The names of the boys I've met are interesting: Donatus, Romanus and Augustus are but a few and presumably originate from a following of the Roman Catholic Church, another surprise to me. No doubt you could spend a lifetime in Africa and still have as many surprises as when you first came. Father Rossini at Lungi has been 25 years in Sierra Leone and he repeatedly said to me that you have to laugh, you can't afford to get worked up about anything out here because the people are like children, they never grow up until they suddenly find themselves old: it's all a game, life is one long game and you have to constantly laugh at yourself and at others to maintain your sanity, you have to jockey for position though you know you'll never really leave your fellows and opponents behind.

14.9: It's done. I've climbed my mountain and I'm satisfied. After 2 months I'm finally on my way home and I've done everything I wanted to do in coming out to Africa. I arrived in Sofia at 5.10 this morning and had to wait there for a flight to Rome at 15.30; at first I was told that I had no booking on the flight to Rome even though my ticket clearly said I had and I had to wait till the hostess, who didn't speak a word of any comprehensible language, had sorted through all the passengers from Lagos who wanted to go on to Vienna, London, Madrid, Frankfurt, Prague, Warsaw, Moscow, Paris, and of course Rome. I guessed what the trouble might have been since it has happened several times before in countries that are not used to Scottish names and which find the prefix Mc puzzling and impossible to pronounce: the hostess had typed into the computer terminal the name Allister and of course the computer replied that I didn't exist, so when I explained the mistake to the hostess the problem was solved and my boarding card was obligingly spat out by the computer. So the final hurdle and the final ghost of a chance that I may be stranded for a few more days in Freetown or Lagos or Sofia, had been overcome (I hope). The return stopover in Sofia proved very different from the one on the way out when I was given a hotel room and meals free: this time I had to wait in the airport for over 10 hours without food and without the possibility of changing any money because there was no bank, not much fun.

In Tripoli on the way over from Lagos we all went to the waiting lounge for ½ an hour at 2 in the morning and when it was time to return to the plane we found a bus waiting for

us at the exit of the gate so we all got on even though the plane was only a couple of hundred yards away; we waited patiently for something to happen and then someone noticed the bus had no driver and had just been parked by chance with its doors open, so after a good 5 minutes we all got off and walked back to the plane feeling very stupid and sheepish. Perhaps we can be excused for our stupidity by claiming that we were all half asleep which is true.

Flying to Rome has reminded me of something Moussa asked me about: he couldn't understand why the Romans today didn't still wear togas as at the time of their empire. Indeed 'civilization' has been a great leveller, every person and every race has sought to catch up with whoever was visibly ahead and to be the same rather than to be different has become the predominant criterion of civilization, particularly after the introduction of newspapers and television. It is quite legitimate to ask whether more has not been lost in the long term than has been gained in the short term. In the case of Africa the same attempt to be included rather than excluded has been made to some extent, particularly by the educated who return to their homelands after periods in Europe to be labelled 'beentos' because they have been to the civilized world and seek to bring some of it back with them in the way they behave and talk and dress and think; however, I don't think Africa will ever lose its distinctive flavour, it is a well too deep to fill. After reading Chinua Achebe's 'Things fall apart' which deals primarily with how traditional African culture was suppressed by the white man's superior culture, one can't fail to notice how much remains today of that unique African culture- what I have read and have been told about Sierra Leone today and what I have written down in this diary proves to me at least that only the surface has been scratched by the white man's attempt to 'civilize' Africa.

One particular character in Achebe's book is the Chi, the personal God whom each man has who guides him, against whom he must not act and to whom he must entrust his fate entirely: as far as I'm concerned the events in my life in the last 2 months, and in the last 12 days in particular, prove beyond any doubt that a Chi adopted me in Bo and took me home. For that I hope to remain for ever grateful.

CONCLUSION

Since my return I have tried to gather news of what has happened recently in Sierra Leone but all I've been able to find out is that the 'go slow' ended on October 3rd, after one month, and that the President somehow regained control of the situation. October 3rd, 179 persons detained in prison were released but long before that the general strike had petered out and it is now suggested that the leaders of the Labour Congress were bribed or induced to call it off. Had a strong man existed in the country during this period things might have gone very differently?

It is a disappointment that the strike didn't lead to any concessions or changes being made, but precisely for that reason I think this can only be a lull before another storm, and it's difficult to know which of the two is more desirable since the majority of the population bears the brunt of both. Something like 100 people died during the recent troubles and general elections are due before the end of this year which will inevitably result in more unrest.

Although I spent a relatively short time in Sierra Leone it was an invaluable experience and education which I won't forget or underestimate. I hope that this diary will have shed some light on the realities of life in Sierra Leone because it will only be through change without as well as within the Third World that true progress will be embarked upon, and such change can only come about if people are informed of the conditions in which 'the other half' are obliged to live.

I hope, finally, that the One World Link will expand as a movement and will bring a breath of fresh air into North-South relations since I am convinced that it is the responsibility of every man and woman to cultivate the 'Art of Awareness' within themselves, before it's too late.

APPENDIX 1

The following is drawn from a pamphlet which I had the chance to read while in Bo. The Pamphlet was banned soon after publication by the government because it touched upon subjects about which little is supposed to be divulged and consequently its author has remained anonymous. I hope it will serve the purpose of providing more information about the people who live in and around Bo and for that reason I have included it in this diary.

Mende Religion and Culture

The Mende people do not pray to gods of wood and stone, nor do they deify trees, peaks, pools and sacred rocks: they seek to reach through these visible symbols the spirits closely associated with them. Many Mende farmers used to have in their possession a small 'rice god', called 'Nomoli', but this appeared to be a servant rather than a god; the farmer would never pray to it but rather would flog it ceremonially and command it to help him with his rice farm and to produce a big crop.

The main features of Mende religion are the strong belief in a Supreme Being, Ngewo, (pronounced Ngwayo), and in ancestral spirits as well as in a magico-religious power called 'hale'.

I. The Mende idea of god:

There are many stories connected with the origin of the Supreme Being. The main points seem to be that the creator originally lived amongst men and women, but when they offended him and broke his laws he became angry and left them to take up his abode in the heavens. His common name in Mende is Ngewo, which is abbreviated from ngele-wolo meaning the big sky, and he is in fact regarded as a male sky-god.

One of the best known stories tells of how God and man originally lived together under a very large tree, and that one law God had given was that no one must ever light a fire under the tree; one child ignored this law, and when God saw smoke curling up into the branches of the tree he went away in anger and was not seen again. The people noticed, however, that a great cloud had appeared in the sky where formerly there had been no cloud so they concluded that he had hidden himself beyond their sight and hearing behind the cloud, hence the name Ngewo. He left the fowl as his representative so that communication between him and man could be started by the offering of the fowl's blood as a libation on the ground. This explains why the Mende-man always precedes a 'curse' by offering a fowl and calling upon God – Ngewo yei-o, mu bi lei ve, come down, o Ngewo, we offer you a fowl.

Another story, in which the parallel with Christian belief is noticeable, tells of how God once walked through a village where the women were pounding rice, and one careless woman threw down the pounding stick (ngete) and it struck him, whereupon he left in anger; why does womankind have to be blamed by all creeds for mankind's misfortunes? Anyway, this woman in sorrow started to build a tower of mortars in the hope of reaching God, and many came to her assistance; finally they were one short and she suggested pulling the bottom mortar away to place on top; this was done and the whole structure collapsed so the people still wait for a way of access to the supreme being, again the story sounds very much like a version of the tower of Babel episode.

An alternative old name for God is Leve. The world and all its creatures are considered as sent down from above by Leve, hence they saying Leve njeini. Leve has sent it down.

The male sky-god is closely associated with his female consort in Mende thought, Mother Earth, Maandoo; hence the old saying 'Ngewo jahu taa ngi nyahei Maandoo' meaning 'by the power of Ngewo and his wife Mother Earth'. Nothing escapes Mother Earth, all returns to her bosom and she passes it on to Ngewo, and conversely Ngewo conveys most of his blessings to man through Maandoo. It is certainly apparent today that the fruits of the earth are still considered sacred as I had a chance to observe concerning the code of conduct with respect to theft.

Perhaps the mystery of the sacred month of Nanoi (July) could be explained in terms of the close relation between Ngewo and Maandoo. During that month the Sande and

Humoi Secret Societies cease to function and the sacred medicine corners (hale gundoi) are closed; rice and other crops planted in this month will never mature, and it is in every sense a dangerous and much dreaded month. All this could be explained by Ngewo and Maandoo drawing closer together at the beginning of the rainy season to consult about the past and the future.

Although Ngewo seems to be too remote to be concerned with the prayers of mere man, his name is constantly on the Mende-man's lips in a way that suggests he is seen as a benevolent being. The greeting, 'how are you?' Is answered by the words 'Kaye ii Ngewoma', No blame on Ngewo, or thank God as it was explained to me. When a baby is born the mother is blessed with the words 'Ngewo I nyinii nei nda' 'May God make the breast sweet to the child'. The words addressed to a sick person are 'Ngewo I bi bawo' 'May God heal you'. Similarly 'Ngewo I mu mahugbee (May N. watch over us); Ngewo I bi luba (May N. bless you); Ngewo I mu lo gboma (May N. cause us to meet again); Ngewo I bi lembi (May N. give you long life); Ngewo I bi yakpuamei nyande (May N. bring you success); Ngewo I bi lawai wolo (May N. enlarge your brow).

Furthermore all the ritual connected with swearing is based on the assumption that Ngewo always vindicates the truthful person, if necessary with violent and brutal means. Earthquakes, thunderbolts, lightning, famine, death, and calamity of every kind if beyond the control of man is expressed in the phrase Ngewo mia, It is God. Unfortunately this is very much true today where an excessive degree of fatalism and lack of trust in man's own abilities has led the majority of Sierra Leoneans to extend the concept of inevitability to all the hardships they encounter, so that even problems connected with political, social and economic injustices are seen as insoluble. The case of the recent general strike is a perfect example, after all the hardship which caused the strike and all the hardship the strike itself brought, it seems that people have given up and returned to work; Barba always told me that Sierra Leoneans are not a determined race and it looks as if he was right.

II. Ancestor Worship:

The Mende sky-god is too remote, so the ancestors are turned to and prayers and sacrifices are made to them. They are near to the Mende-man, they know him and he knows them; if he neglects them they will be angry and vent their wrath on him but if he pleases them he will secure their aid.

Mende religion is primarily a dependence on departed ancestral spirits whose names are called one by one when prayers are made to them; the place where the prayers and sacrifices are made, whether a sacred rock, tree, pool or hill, is only the place of meeting, it isn't praised itself. It is the meeting place of the departed and the living.

Amongst many African tribes the departed ancestors have come to be regarded as great heroes and finally to be deified. The tendency has been for them to be represented by idols of wood and stone. This has not been the case with Mende ancestor worship, and the nearest approach to this is probably in the Secret Societies of Porro and Sande: when the cry of the Porro Devil is heard it is considered to be the voice of the original founder of Porro and he is supposed to be continuing his work through the living head of Porro Society. Thus the original founder is almost deified, but he is represented by a living head of a Society and not by an image or idol.

Another tendency among African tribes is to think of the Creator as having delegated certain powers to lesser gods, eg. rain gods, fertility gods, etc., and these have also been represented by idols. In Mende belief there is a vague notion of certain jinei being used by the Creator for various purposes, some good, some bad; they are not departed spirits but belong to a supra-natural order and are often associated with swearing stones, with various kinds of magic or with thunderbolt medicine (Ngeegba). Whilst these powers are considered to exist in an undefined sort of way, there is no attempt among the Mende people to deify them.

When prayers are offered to the ancestral spirits they always end with an appeal to Ngewo, in the words Ngewo jahu, by the power of God. The word jahu is of Muslim origin as is the word Amina used in reply to any sort of blessing or expression of goodwill. There does seem to be a problem as to how far the ancestral spirits are regarded as mere mediators between Ngewo and men, and how far they themselves have the power

to act and answer the petitions made to them. As far as the farmers are concerned their faith is undoubtedly in the power of the ancestral spirits to do good and evil themselves, to protect or injure, to bless or curse, but in general prayers and sacrifices are made at different levels by different groups and so it is difficult to decide the overall relationship between men, their ancestors and their all-powerful sky-god. The prayers can be classified as follows:

A. Communal Prayers

- (1) By the Family
- (2) By the Village
- (3) By the Chiefdom

B. ' Secret Society' Prayers

- (4) Porro- for men
- (5) Sande- for women
- (6) Humoi- for all

(1) Family Prayers

Within the family circle the main purpose of sacrifices to the ancestral spirits is to obtain their help when a member of the family dies. The spirit of the newly departed is believed to hover around the grave until the 'crossing over the river' ceremony is held. This takes place the third day after a woman dies and the fourth day after a man dies: one explanation offered for this variation is that in very early times the wife would be put to death to accompany her deceased husband to the land of the spirits, and in this case she must go before him to make all the necessary preparations. The purpose of the sacrifice is to call the ancestral spirits from the realm of the departed, across the river, so that they can come for the newly departed spirit and take him with them. Failure to do this would mean that the newly departed would hover around and might prove a menace to the people in their homes, or on their farms, or in their dreams.

The sacrifices made to the spirits on these, and on all other, occasions are referred to as the 'putting of red-rice' (mba gbolu wu). The red-rice refers to cooked rice mixed with red palm-oil, and this, along with cooked chicken, is put on the family graves; if the family is wealthy an offering of a sheep or a goat or a cow may be made= in any case most of the offering is eaten by the family themselves. If the offering made on the graves remains undisturbed this is a sign that the spirits have not accepted the sacrifice, they are angry and must be placated with more offerings; if the sacrifice is consumed – and children or animals usually ensure this- then the spirits are satisfied, and all are assured that departed has been safely taken to the realm of the spirits. This realm is referred to as Nanyagolehu, The place of the white sand. When the prayers are being made to the spirits the prayer leader will call the names of all the departed he can remember of that family, all the male members that is, and will end the list with the most recently departed: in case he has forgotten anyone he will end the list by adding 'and all those whose names I have forgotten, please call them'. He then proceeds to beg the summoned ancestors to accept their offering, to forgive them for any omissions or failures, to continue to help and protect them, and to conduct their newly departed safely across the river. Similar offerings are made by the family if a member has a dream in which one of the departed members appears to him. This is taken as a sign that they are feeling neglected and need another red-rice offering; such dreams are taken very seriously and in the event of a member of the family failing to do his duty in any way he will eventually feel such a strong sense of guilt that it will affect him physically or mentally and finally- after consulting a diviner- he will conclude that he has failed in his family duty and must seek to placate the angry spirits who have been tormenting him.

Similarly if a person has been proved to have committed witchcraft against another, resulting perhaps in his death he will make a confession over that grave and red-rice will be offered in the hope that he will be forgiven. This can only be done when the offended family is willing to forgive the witch concerned.

A family may turn to the ancestral spirits for guidance in certain issues- a sacrifice is offered and the mind of the spirits sought before a start is made on the brushing of a new farm, for example. After the pronouncement of a special prayer by a senior member of the family and the offering of red-rice, the mind of the spirits is ascertained by a simple

act of divination. They take a kola nut and split it in two halves, and then they say to the spirits 'if you are fully agreed then accept this kola nut'. The kola nut is thrown up in the air and allowed to drop: if the halves fall on rounded ends together that is taken as a sign of acceptance, but if they fall on flat ends or if they fall on different sides that is taken as a sign of rejection and they have another throw and make various vows until the halves fall the right way up- which seems a rather foolproof method of obtaining approval to me! (a kola nut is shaped like a strawberry and is roughly the same size, and having a line of cleavage which is approximately vertical then it can easily be split into two halves which have one flat face and the rest very curved; traditionally splitting the kola has signified a sign of welcome to a visitor to your house so perhaps in this case the spirits are being welcomed in a similar way into the realm of the living).

(2) Village Prayers

At a time of crisis, eg. If the community is threatened by famine, disease, or drought, and at times when the life of the community depends on the cooperation of nature as at seed- sowing time and harvest, the help and protection of the ancestral spirits is sought by the whole community.

Every village has its own prayer place and its own prayer leader; some of the graves of the ancestors will be at this sacred spot and as a rule there is an enormous cotton tree or a great rock or stream nearby, (cotton trees are so called because of their soft trunk, and in French they are known as 'fromagieres'. Cheese trees; often big men used to be buried among their roots in a sitting up position because these trees can live for centuries, like the famous cotton tree of Freetown). A typical rite at the time of rice sowing is as follows:

When the families have fully prepared their farms for the sowing of the rice the Chief calls them together to make arrangements for the sacrifice. They clean the patch leading to the prayer place (ta hemei) and if they haven't a suitable sheep or goat for the offering all the young men go out hunting while everyone else is expected to bring a small amount of rice. Finally they call the prayer leader (ta hemoi) to perform the rite. He will demand one gourd of palm-wine (ndo gbulei) for himself and for the spirits (ngafanga); he then goes

to inform the spirits of the sacrifice they intend to make and to ask them to be prepared and not to go away on any other business. At the prayer place he makes a preliminary prayer introducing himself and his people: 'I come to you, I and all my children, all the women, all the men, we come to you for help. By God's power make our rice yield well and drive all sickness from us by God's power.' The rice is then portioned out to the various families to prepare and a special person is given various parts of the meat- liver, lungs, heart. - And also a fowl which is specially prepared for the spirits. The remainder of the meat is cooked for those who take part in the sacrifice and the dance which follows. When the rice is all prepared and water has been offered to the spirits for hand washing, the rice is then taken in handfuls and distributed over the nearby graves with the remainder again being given to those present to eat.

A similar rite to this is performed at the very beginning of the harvest season when thanks are offered to the ancestral spirits, the offering being made with new rice in this case.

(3) Chieftom Prayers

Every Chieftom has its own Chieftom shrine which is reserved for rites concerning the whole Chieftom (of which there are 146); it is a very serious offence for any private individual or group to make prayers or sacrifices at this shrine. Once again the shrine is usually to be found where there is some outstanding natural phenomenon such as a deep pool or a large rock. The main occasion for prayers and sacrifices at these central points is the death of the Paramount Chief. If, however, a person has a dream and is warned by the departed spirits that they feel neglected and if he reports this to the Chieftom authorities, they may decide to placate the spirits by making a special offering at the Chieftom shrine. The prayers leader on these occasions is one who has inherited the office from his fathers and who is invariably connected with one of the ruling families, of which there are usually 2 or 3.

Secret Societies.

The above groups fit into a model of the Mende family as whole as follows:

Family Invisible

Ngafanga=spirits

(1) (2) (3)

Family Visible

Nunga=people.

The bonds between the two parts are greatly strengthened through the Secret Societies. Although much of the inner working of Porro and Sande are known only to the initiated, the broad principles on which they work are widely known.

(4) Porro.

The main function of the Porro Society is the initiation of boys into manhood, a process which used to take 5 years as recently as the early 1960's but which today has been reduced to a few months or even a few weeks with the advent of a national education system. Before a boy enters Porro he is considered to be a child even if he is all appearance an adult; he has not the full status of the clan and in the past this could result in ostracism of various sorts. A boy retains the name given to him as a child (mbatui) until he is initiated, when he is given a new name; having reached the status of an adult member of the clan it is an insult to call him by his childhood name and his mother must obey his command always because he has been raised above her in the hierarchy of the community. Those who are initiated together are called 'togbai', comrades, and though there may be many years difference in their ages they look on one another as equals, and the bond between them is lifelong and unbreakable: one of the first mottos of the Society is 'I fear not death but fear estrangement from the Society', and indeed it is not only an initiatory society but also plays a powerful political role, rather like a Masonic Lodge.

All the rites take place in a secret portion of the bush called 'kamela' and the entrance has a raffia screen (kane) as a warning for non-initiates to keep away, in particular women: if women walking past the kamela forget to make their presence known they are damned and become sterile and they can only regain their fertility by being accepted into the ranks of Porro and being considered men. For this purpose, among others, each Porro Society has at least one female member, called Mabole, who represents the wife of the principal spirit, Goeni. Similarly female Paramount Chiefs have to be initiated and be considered, as far as the Society is concerned, men from the day they join Porro. The couple Gbeni-Mabole gives forth the new life to the initiated member of the Society and the rite of circumcision clearly defines whether the newborn is male or female because up to the age of puberty the belief is that all children are both male and female.

The next stage of initiation involves scarring and various hardships like sleeping on the bare ground or under wet blankets, or being continually woken up during the night; for long periods the candidates will be given no food so that they have to steal to survive and then they're severely punished- to get them used to the injustices they will inevitably meet in later life. In this process of initiation the youth is considered to have been swallowed up by the 'hani wai' or 'ngafei', the big spirit or the Porro Devil. The imprint of the teeth of the ngafei remain on his back for ever and are made by incisions in which certain juices are squeezed causing blisters which leave a pattern on the skin, notably the practice of scarring the face as a sign of beauty is something I mentioned in this diary and presumably is not unconnected with the scarring rite of Porro.

Having left the imprint of his teeth on the youth's back the ngafei then regurgitates him and the old life is ended, he now emerges as an adult member of the clan. In some Porro groups this is symbolized by pushing the youth through the hollow trunk of a large tree: as he disappears the cry goes up from all the men 'our child is dead', and when he finally reemerges at the other end the men give the Porro cry Kpo-o-o-o and shout 'a man has been born'.

There are usually 3 stages or categories in the Porro Societies which of course are not restricted to the Mende territory but can also be found in a slightly different form among the Temne, the Kono, and the Bulom tribes.

The first category, Yuyira, includes the majority of the members and their knowledge is limited to initiation and society secrets.

The second category, Missi Binima, includes those specialized in medicine, magic, dancing, music, and acrobatics. It takes more time and more money to enter this category and for example many Muslim traders belong to it so that they have a guarantee of commercial promises being kept.

The third category, Kaimaheisha, is restricted to Chiefs and sons of Chiefs and it specializes in political and administrative skills.

As far as medicine, both, black and white, harmful and beneficial, is concerned, there are some standard recipes which can be acquired through membership of the Porro Society. For harmful medicine pieces of sheep, frogs and toads are used, boiled up with herbs in a cauldron and reduced to a powder. This powder can either be placed on the palm of the hand or blown in the direction of the victim or else it can be rubbed on objects belonging to the victim. In civil courts non-Christians or Muslims used to swear on medicines rather than on the bible and even today they are held in great fear- and there is plenty of evidence to show that such fear is well founded.

Today the Porro Society has lost some of its hold of old over the politics, education and moral code of conduct of the people of Sierra Leone, but nevertheless it is still a force very much to be reckoned with and its function of providing a solid bond of brotherhood and mutual loyalty between its members is as important as ever.

Some proverbs used in the Porro teaching are valid in themselves:

“Don’t kill all the ants to kill the one that bit you”

“Youth is sweet like fresh palm-wine but old age has the strength of fermented palm-wine”

“Never push aside your elder’s finger unless he puts it in your eye”

“The bird that sings too much gathers many companions but it also attracts the cat”.

(5) Sande.

The main function of Sande is like that the Porro, to initiate into full membership of the clan. In spite of the unpleasant operation of excision, the period spent

in the secret grove where the initiation takes place is looked upon as a highlight in the life of all Mende women. They spend several months in this sacred grove and they learn all the ancient songs of their tribes, many of them being danced songs with very expressive movements and some being so old that the words are no longer in current use. These songs represent every part of life- from work and the driving of birds from crops, housework and the cleaning of rice, spinning cotton and planting, songs of humming birds and the hooting of owls, monkeys feeding, bells ringing, a white woman walking with shoes, and so on. They also spend much of their time in useful occupations, mainly cleaning and spinning cotton for weaving on native handlooms; between the busy farming seasons this cotton preparation used to be the main occupation of Mende women, and their husbands' source of wealth which justified him in keeping so many wives. But the most important preparation of all is for marriage and motherhood.

Without this training and initiation a Mende girl would not be acceptable for marriage since the rites performed before she leaves the sacred grove are considered vital if she is to bear children. It would, in fact, be a most serious offence for a man to make any approaches of a sexual nature to an uninitiated woman; today such a rule is hardly adhered to.

As with Porro, the key is the leader, called Sowoi, whose function it is to act as a mediator between the departed spirits and the women of the clan. When the main rites connected with the initiation of girl are performed she wears a black wooden mask with raffia skirts attached, and in this role she is no longer a human being but has 'become' the impersonation of all past Sowois of the clan: as with Gbeni in Porro, the mask is not just a piece of wood but contains within it the spirit it represents, and a peaceful person by nature can become vicious when possessed by the mask. A certain conservatism of Mende women stems from their membership of Sande because it implies a strict and inflexible code of conduct and a determined role in the community which cannot be questioned without incurring the wrath of the Sowoi and those behind her. During the initiation period the girls used to go to work in the farms naked and if they heard a man approaching on their way they would cry out in a high piercing voice 'A ye Joo! Hiindo ee nya lo kein!, O Mother Sowoi! Let no man look on me!'; they would hide in the bush till the man had passed without looking at them. If either deliberately or accidentally, he

were to see them it would be an offence against the Sand taboo. Similarly to women who trespassed against the Porro taboo the offending man in this case would end up making a full confession to the Sowoi once his sense of guilt had caused him to be ill and once a diviner had confirmed that the cause of his illness was his offence against Sande; the Sowoi would make the necessary offerings to the departed spirits and ask them to forgive the man after which she would ceremonially wash him clean of his offence.

The prayer place for the Sande Society may be inside the sacred grove used for initiation purpose or it may be near the prayer place for the whole community where a little 'spirit house' would be erected for the purpose.

(6) Humoi.

The Humoi Society is similar to Porro and Sande but it differs in that it has no "secrets" and one cannot be initiated into it. It is a cult with its Priests and Priestesses who gain their office through heredity; as leaders of Humoi they are custodians of all the sexual and fertility taboos of the tribe. There are 2 distinct groups:

1. Pelebu Humoi, which functions in the town
2. Ndogbo Humoi, which functions in the forest.

In Mende thought the fertility of human beings, animals and vegetation is all bound up together: if a woman eats eggs, or kills an animal, her own fertility can be endangered; if love takes place between a man and a woman in the forest, the fertility of both themselves and the forest is thought to be endangered. The Humoi Priests preside over the laws concerning the fertility of all that is found in nature.

1. Pelebu Humoi.

In Mende tradition there are many sexual taboos which if violated incurring the wrath of the ancestral spirits. The offender has no peace and his guilt drives him to seek reconciliation, and this can only be done through the Humoi cult: to the priest he makes the necessary confession and they perform the cleansing rite which brings him peace.

Some of the taboos are as follows:

- a) A woman should never expose herself naked before men at day time
- b) Intercourse by day is an offence
- c) No intimacy between a man and his mother-in-law is allowed; this rule is very stringent, he cannot sit near her, he cannot sit on her bed, not even in her absence he must not hold her hand or carry her, not even to get medical aid
- d) The rule of incest must not be broken. As I explained before, the main category of forbidden relationships is based on the Mende idea of the family in which the family unit is really the life-stream on the male side of the family. If your father's father had 6 sons you would refer to each of them as father (keke), and not uncle (Kenya). Their wives would also be called mother, and not aunt and their children would be called brothers and sisters (ndewenga) by you, and not cousins (yagbeisia). However large this group may be it constitutes your family group and all the women within it are a prohibited relationship for any of the men within it: within the life-stream all the members are, in a sense, the one person. A man may marry a woman who belongs to his mother's family group and in fact this is a very common arrangement whereby his mother's brother (Kenya) will find a wife for the man. Humoi serves to provide the sanction behind the distinctions between keke and ndewenga, and Kenya and yagbeisa. A man who violates any of the taboos mentioned above would, in the past have felt a deep sense of guilt, would have become ill and would then have confessed his sin in an attempt to prevent his death.

The nearest approach to an initiation in Humoi is the rite of 'bending the child over the skin of a bush-cat' (Ti ngi wele moni-koli hu): in the event of either parent having violated a Humoi taboo the life of the yet unborn child might be affected since the consequences of the parent's sin might affect the child before or after birth, or even in later life, and so a cleansing rite has to be performed. The child is held over the skin of the moni, one of the smaller members of the cat family sacred to the Humoi Society, while prayers are made for its protection against the consequences of its parent's sin, might affect the child before or after birth, or even in later life, and so a cleansing rite has to be performed. The child is held over the skin of the moni, one of the smaller members of the cat family

sacred to the Humoi Society, while prayers are made for its protection against the consequences of its parent's sin, with the following words: 'Ngele wolo dama', or 'Folo jia', or 'Simongama'- Intercourse at dawn, or by day, or incestuous- to which the response is Fofe, Be spared, made 3 times by the parents.

In former times it used to be the custom for every Mende child to experience this rite, rather like a baptismal rite, which was conducted by the Priestess in charge of Pelebu Humoi, Mama Tengbe, but nowadays it is rarely practiced.

2. Ndogbo Humoi

The following differences may be noted between Pelebu Humoi and Ndogbo Humoi: Pelebu is in the hands of Priestess who keeps all her equipment in a corner (kundo) of her house, whereas Ndogbo is in the hands of Priest who has no such corner, but instead he has a very sacred place in the thickest forest and woe to any unauthorized person who goes near it. The Priests of Ndogo Humoi nearly always have the name Kelewa, and like the 'Devils' of Porro and Sande they inherit large wooden masks which are handed down from generation to generation: this 'Devil' is sometimes referred to as 'manjavoi', or 'njia Humoi', all signifying that this is a speaking devil, and when his voice is heard everyone hides. When major disputes arise about forest boundaries between families or Chiefdoms, the matter may be finally settled by calling the Ndogbo Humoi Devil and oaths are taken in his presence to accept his judgment.

Apart from the chief crime of carnal knowledge in the forest, other minor offences exist against Ndogbo Humoi, mostly connected with the farms and the felling of trees- anything that offends the sacredness of the soil and the vegetation.

The Mende man measures his actions against the wrath or satisfaction of the ancestral spirits in all aspects of his life. If he commits adultery he feels no guilt because his ancestors never saw it as a sin, but if he commits incest the burden of his guilt drives him to seek reconciliation at any cost. As an alternative code of conduct to that introduced by the white settlers there's no reason why the traditional measures of right and wrong should not be at least as valid: certainly a system which plays on the mind of the people, trusting

that their sense of guilt will do more than any amount of investigation to bring them to justice, is intuitively admirable and it is after all what most religions the world over rely on.

3. Hale- Magico- Religious powers.

This is sometimes called dynamism. The Mende word 'Hale' covers a wide area of meaning from ordinary medicine to sorcery:

- a) Hale is the term used to describe all the medicine and powers of European doctors, the powers which heal.
- b) Hale is the name given to all the different sorts of herbs and leaves (tifeisia), found in the bush and made into either drinking or rubbing potions, again for healing purposes.
- c) Hale is the name given to herbs which have destructive, harmful, or irritating power. In this case it becomes Hale nyamui (bad medicine).
- d) Curses and swears (sondui) are always based on Hale: the ingredients vary from herbs to bones and parts of the body, and the ingredients as well as the technique are communicated by the departed spirits to the 'owners', and passed on from generation to generation. There are Hale nyamui because they destroy those against whom they are directed, and they have no healing powers except when used for reversing a curse they have already inflicted (I suppose one can change one's mind about cursing someone but it doesn't seem very logical).
- e) Sorcery (Kuede) is based on Hale nyamui, the kuetemoui, the sorcerer, is known to possess Hale nyamui with which he can destroy a person at any distance, and he may be hired to do this for a large fee so that the victim has no idea of the source of his sudden destruction.
- f) Hale is also the general name for all Secret Societies.

If originally all sickness was regarded as due to supernatural causes, then supernatural help was needed to save and heal; this seems to be the basic idea behind Hale.

Hale nyamoi, on the other hand, serves the opposite purpose; this power is believed to come from the spirits (ngafanga) who communicate in dreams which herbs and what

treatment of them will be effective. Destructive power is transmitted from one person to another, but behind all this is the belief that it is God's power which allows the Kuetemoi to destroy life. The great dilemma of Mende belief is that all good and all evil originate from the one source and is in some way reward and punishment for a man's actions: this is the 'arrow that flies by day and the terror by night' from which the Mende man has no protection since God himself is at the other end.

Witchcraft.

Witchcraft is often identified with kuete, but there is a fundamental difference between the two. Normally witchcraft does not depend on the use of Hale but rather it depends on a power resident inside the witch and located in the spleen or pancreas (namei). It was for this reason that in the past the ceremony of testing for cleanness (kohu-gole) used to be applied when a person died: the corpse was opened up and the namei put in water, if it sank the person was pronounced a witch and suffered the disgrace of having no burial. If 'clean' then there was a big family celebration and a proper burial was given. This test seemed to be made on all persons regardless of their reputation with respect to witchcraft.

Normally witchcraft activity takes place at night when an attack is made on the soul substance of a victim, which is said to be 'eaten' leaving only the lifeless shell to waste away. (A perfect example of this is given by the story I was told while at Lungi about the recent witch trial in Porto Loko). There is no Hale to restore one who has suffered the attack of a witch, no antidote or anti-juju.

There is also a type of witchcraft which operates by day and inflicts a sharp blow on the back of the neck which soon proves to be fatal, but this is more unusual.

In a community where everybody believes in the power of witchcraft many 'impossible' things can and do happen. Diviners (totogbebla) are always ready to assure their customers that their suspicion of being the victims of witchcraft is well founded, even if it is the fear rather than the reality of having the evil eye on them that drives them to die of worry.

Demons.

Another type of supernatural enemy is that of demonic forces which are exercised by the other spirits, beyond the departed spirits, capable of possessing those whom they decide to enter. When this happens the victim may be mentally unhinged for a time, he may lose the power of speech, or want to run into the bush- there is a bush spirit (ndogbo yosoi) which is believed to lure people into the bush, where they wander and may never return unless diligent search is made for them. There are water spirits (jinei) which sometimes attack people who go finishing or swimming and cause them to drown, other spirits are said to promise great wealth to those who follow them, or great happiness. Against all these spirits there is no protection.

4. Social and Moral Standards.

A well defined pattern of social and moral standards arises from all the aspects of Mende belief mentioned so far:

(a) Sex and Marriage.

Within the framework of the extended family Mende marriage according to customary law has provided a firm foundation for family life. In theory the laws if the Humoi have prevented incestuous marriage or relationships and the Sande taboos have prevented sex before initiation and marriage, at least till recently. Polygamy is inevitable and has also been encouraged by the tradition of giving daughters in marriage to chiefs; widespread polygamy has led to widespread adultery against which there is no taboo of any sort. I am told on good authority that there exists one region of the Far East where the men outnumber the women and consequently the women normally have more than one husband, though I'm not sure whether to believe this; as far as Africa is concerned I suspect that the widespread habit of one man having several wives stems not only from demographic reasons but also from the general belief that women are in some way inferior to men and as such are disposable commodities.

(b) Murder.

The worst sin of all is murder. Murder in cold blood is very rare but by indirect means it is more common though it becomes complicated to specify what exactly amounts to murder: to swear a person on 'bad medicine' is as near as one can get to murder but the responsibility is placed on the person who accepts the swear (which he might do even when he knows he is guilty), i.e. The recipient of the swear. In this case the person who introduces the swear medicine is not considered to be responsible for the eventual death of the recipient. Sorcery is generally used with murderous intent but little is ever done about it since it is almost impossible to defeat. The general feeling about witchcraft is different in that it is greatly feared but also vigorously fought against: there is a special witch group, for example, known as the boa constrict- or group 9ndili) and if it becomes too active in a town the community will appeal to the chief to bring in the anti ndili medicine (kondobleisia) as a counter offensive.

(c) Inheritance.

The extended family being patrilineal this determines the laws of inheritance exclusively in favour of male members of the family: when a man dies his widow and children and property all remain with his fathers and brothers- for example Alpha's mother in neighbouring Guinea was claimed by her various brothers-in-law when her own husband died. It is true. However, that the widow is being given more freedom in Sierra Leone under recent legislation. Another important aspect of inheritance relates to the ownership of land: almost every Mende person is a member of an extended family which has corporate possession of some of the bush, and he shares in that ownership. Land is not 'owned' by any individual and he does not divide it up for his sons to inherit; a whole area is owned by a family and any member of it only has to request to be allowed to sow and plant a portion of it and his request will be met, within reason. This has been pointed to as a great strength in social tradition of the Mende people in that it minimizes rivalries and jealousies and guarantees employment and an income for all who want to work, but a detailed study would have to be made to assess its real merits and faults because most

probably such a system stifles any entrepreneurial instinct in a man and maintains farming at a level of subsistence and no more.

(d) The Rhythm of Mende life

Traditionally life has been determined by a given rhythm which constitutes part of the cultural inheritance of the Mende people, particularly women. It begins with the morning bathe and general emphasis on personal hygiene, something I certainly noticed during my stay in Bo, and following that the daily routine of sweeping, meals, greetings, work and play is well established. Rules of etiquette between man and woman, parent and child, young and old, are well understood and adhered to, and in particular the use of greetings and respectful silence is very refined and communicative. In addition there is the rhythm of the seasons of vast contrast, abundance followed by shortage, uninterrupted sunshine by almost incessant rain, relative wealth by absolute poverty.

Finally there is dancing and singing, a constant rhythmic movement to express every aspect of life. The wealth of lyrics may be accompanied either by women with shakers (segbulei) or men with drums (kili, mbili, or sangbei), depending on the occasion. Whether it is the occasion of rice planting or rice planting or harvesting, or times of initiation or mourning, or simply a general inebriation on a moonlit night.

(e) Proverbs and Stories.

A multitude of proverbs (saleisia) and stories (domeisia) provide an extremely colourful and effective means of transmitting traditional beliefs and modes of behaviour, as is the case with all ancient cultures which modernization and 'civilization the world over has sentenced to a slow and anonymous death.

It would seem, therefore, that there is wealth of traditional culture which survives to this day in the Mende territory around Bo. Generally the educated sum up what they owe to their ancestors in terms of jealousy and spite (ndima nyoa), and then of ownership of land; the uneducated remain closer to tradition, they appreciate its value and depth to the full, and they see their inheritance in terms of goodwill, solidarity and unity, respect for elders, and much needed guidance and support. Furthermore, the particular nature of

Mende tradition and culture leads women to have a greater insight into the workings of Mende society and to be more tied to, and tied down by, tradition.

APPENDIX 2

ETHNIC GROUPS OF SIERRA LEONE		VALUE OF PRINCIPAL EXPORTS (Le 000's)	
	1966		1978
Krio	2,0%	Diamonds	108,977
Temne	30,0%	Coffee	23,698
Mende	31,0%	Cocoa	11,922
Limba	8,4%	Palm oil	5,811
Fulani	3,0%	Bauxite	5,321
Loko	3,0%	Palm kernel cake	1,790
Kroo	0,2%	Piassava	1,067
Susu	3,0%	Ginger	938
Mandinko	2,3%	Timber	891
Sherbro	3,0%	Kola nuts	409
Kissi	2,2%	Palm kernels	222
Kono	5,0%		
Kuranko	3,6%		
Other	3,3%		
		(Lloyds Bank Economic Report, 1980).	