# The Political Economy of Predation and Intergenerational

# Conflict along the Upper Guinea Coast

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*Quand on dit qu'il y a guerre tribale dans un pays, ça signifie que des bandits de grand chemin se sont partagé le pays. Ils se sont partagé la richesse; ils se sont partagé le territoire; ils se sont partagé les hommes. Ils se sont partagé tout et tout et le monde entier les laisse faire. Tout le monde les laisse tuer librement les innocents les enfants et les femmes. Et ce n'est pas tout! Le plus marrant, chacun defend avec l'energie du désespoir son gain et, en même temps, chacun veut agrandir son domaine.*[1]—Ahmadou Kourouma

This is a story about an out-of-the-way place.[2] Macenta Prefecture, Guinea, is one of the remotest parts of the Republic of Guinea, itself one of the least well-known countries on the African continent. Until 1987, there was no paved road reaching into this corner of Guinea, and the 1,000 kilometer trip from Macenta to Guinea's capital, Conakry took about one week over rutted, treacherous, dirt roads. Macenta's isolation was an artifact of historical and political forces as well as material ones. This marginality was both a cause and an effect of the Demystification Program that serves as the focal point of this book. The process of marginalization, however, is filled with twists and paradoxes, so we will have to reach backward into regional history to adequately explain it.

This chapter sets the scene for the rest of the book by describing the political, economic and social dynamics of warfare in the precolonial period, and the ways that

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[1] When we say that there's a tribal war in a country, that means that some highway bandits have carved up the country. They have carved up its wealth; they've carved up its territory; they've carved up its people. They've carved up absolutely everything, and the whole world lets them do it. The world allows them to freely kill innocent people, children and women. And that is not all! The funniest part is, each one defends his spoils with the energy of despair and, at the same time, each one wants to increase his territory." (2000:51).

[2] This term was used to greatest effect in Anthropology in Anna Tsing's *In the Realm of the Diamond Queen: Marginality in an Out-of-the-Way Place* (1993). Readers of that book will recognize many similarities between the situation she described and the one described here.
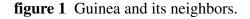
persistent warfare helped to shape social practices and institutions throughout the region that became Sierra Leone, Liberia and Eastern Guinea.  In this chapter and throughout the book, I emphasize the importance of intergenerational struggle, especially between young and elder men (both of whom are competing, in part, for women).  The intergenerational competition is one of the primary contradictions built into the social systems of this region, in which elder men (and to a lesser extent, elder women) used both visible and invisible powers to monopolize young men and women's productive and young women's reproductive capacities.  This system was often threatened by the disruptions of 16th-19th century internecine slave-raiding wars, and elder men thus had to call on their structural competitors—the young men—to fight to preserve the very system that would continue to marginalize them until they too became elders.  Not surprisingly, younger men often found that warfare was their best chance to jump ahead in the elder-dominated (gerontocratic) hierarchy.

This structural contradiction is linked to particular instances of conflict in this region, including the Demystification Program that occupies us later in the book.  Authors have increasingly written about the contemporary regional war in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea as being characterized by youth-elder competition (Abdullah et al., 1997; Ellis, 1999; Ferme and Hoffman, 2002; Richards, 1996).  I concur, but suggest that this social organization of conflict is not a novel phenomenon.  Given the historical material we can recover from the late precolonial period (e.g. Anderson, 1971; Park, 2000; Seymour, 1860), it would seem that the same dynamic between conflict and contradiction was at work then.  Whether this dynamic stretched back still farther into the 16th-18th century is a matter of speculation, but there is little reason to believe that the structural dynamics in play were radically different from those at work in the second half of the 19th century.

The political economy of precolonial violence grew out of two concurrent shifts. Around 1500, the Mande empire located in the area around present-day southern Mali and Eastern Guinea (fig. 1) began to dissolve, and people began to move away from the empire's center to escape local power struggles and skirmishes (Massing, 1985). At about the same time, European slavers arrived on the coast of present-day Senegal, Guinea-Bissau, Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia, seeking slaves from the interior. These two dynamics in tandem turned the forest-savanna frontier I write about here into a zone of persistent instability as small-scale slave raiding wars turned neighbors into enemies.

As far as we can reconstruct it, it appears that precolonial violence was opportunistic, non-ideological and entrepreneurial. It could thus be oriented in any direction, according to the competitive advantage sought by the attackers (d'Azevedo, 1962; Park, 2000; Shaw, 2002). The models of the feud (Evans-Pritchard, 1940), or even of the dynamic between "good company" and violence against those accused of sorcery

**figure 1**  Guinea and its neighbors.

(Knauft, 1985) thus do not apply.  Nor, in most cases, could this localized raiding

be assimilated to the violence associated with state formation (Tilly, 1985).  The

entrepreneurial violence of slave raiding was governed by the logic of pillage.  As

Rosalind Shaw (2002) argues, even such classic anthropological topics of interest as

divination and witchcraft accusations were often subsumed under and conditioned by the

entrepreneurial principles that took shape in the context of this region's articulation in the world economy and the demand for African slaves.[3]

My use of the term "pillage" does not imply that these practices were anarchic or without organizing principles. Violence-as-pillage was highly structured in its strategies and its orientation even though it was not dictated by political or religious ideology. We can begin to piece together the puzzle of these structures using three sources. First is the oral history of the region, which describes the late precolonial period (this region was only conquered by the French between 1905-1908). Second are the texts left by explorers, missionaries, slavers, and travelers. Third and indirectly are the practices of the 1989-2003 regional war in this region (Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea). In the next chapter I argue that although much has changed since the time of precolonial slave-raiding, many of the principles of personhood, power and capacity invoked and used by the combatants in the contemporary war bear striking resemblances to descriptions we have of and from the precolonial period.[4]

This book attempts to reframe the question of violence. Teleological historical narratives tend to place violence in brackets. It is a rupture and an aberration, difficult to explain, and better off forgotten (or if remembered, then done so in the service of a different kind of effacement—"never again."). In my account of the Central West

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[3] Against the logic of pillage stands contrasted violence organized by the logic of principle. In this region, such principle has been primarily of a jihadist nature, and for over 200 years groups have asserted their fitness to rule over others by reference to their own identities as civilized and monotheistic, in contrast to those whom they attack. The tensions between pillage and principle as dynamics of violence in the region will continue to surface throughout this book, but in this chapter, we focus on pillage.

[4] I do not argue that relations are identical in precolonial and contemporary wars. However, the contemporary war does suggest analogies to the precolonial period. That is, when a set of facts in the current situation correspond to similar ones from the past (for instance in the use of *sale* protective amulets as part of the mystical arts of war—see below), we may take the contemporary uses of *sale* as a clue to help us form useful questions about the past, although they cannot answer those questions with certainty.

Atlantic (C.W.A.) region's[5] history and society, violence has been a consistent factor in people's decisions and strategies since at least c. 1500. This violence has taken different forms, but has never disappeared.[6] Consequently, rather than being a rupture in the flow of "normal" life, warfare and other forms of violence are constitutive aspects of the normal: of agricultural practices, of interethnic fluidity, of marriage alliance, and of ritual. The aspects of social life that make themselves available to synchronic analysis are themselves products of violent events that have taken place over time. In the rest of this chapter and those that follow, I describe some of the aspects of kinship and descent, marriage alliance, stranger-host relations, and power association[7] organization that are ways of managing, binding, and making sense of the existential and social insecurity caused by violence. This book consistently draws the reader's attention to violence as a constitutive as well as a destructive force, catalyzing the social practices that manage its centripetal potential.[8]

**The Structural Dynamics of Upper Guinea Coast Warfare**

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[5] This term is from D'Azevedo (1962), and refers to present-day Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia.

[6] Even the periods of colonial and independent rule that saw no overt warfare were characterized by considerable violence, as I describe in the chapters that follow.

[7] I use this term, coined by McNaughton (1988) to refer to the complex of institutions such as the Poro, Sande, Komo, Kono, Ntomo and others that have often been called "secret societies."

[8] This has become an approach to violence characteristic of socio-cultural anthropology. See Das, 1995; Davis, 1992; Harrison, 1993; Knauft, 1985).

> Contra the New Barbarism [thesis][9] the violence of the Sierra Leone conflict is shown to be moored, culturally, in the hybrid Atlantic world of international commerce in which, over many years, Europeans and Americans have played a prominent and often violent part. Although a small and highly localized conflict, the war has a global range of symbolic and dramaturgical reference…. The challenge is to understand that "we" and "they" have made this bungled world of Atlantic-edge rain-forest-cloaked violence together (Richards, 1996:xvii).

Since Christmas Eve, 1989 a regional war has devastated first Liberia, then Sierra Leone (1991-2001); later Guinea (2000-2001), picked up momentum again in Liberia and reached a denouement in the exile of Charles Taylor to Nigeria.[10]  Several authors have attempted to explain the reasons for and the internal logic of this nomadic regional war, and their analyses can contribute to an understanding of  some aspects of life during wartime in the precolonial period.  Among these are the Hobbsean/Malthusian model, proffered by Kaplan (1993); the economic model, presented by Collier (2000); the sociological model, argued between Richards on one side, and Abdullah, Muana, and Bangoura (1997) on the other; the political model, by Reno (1993, 1997); and the cultural model, by Ellis (1999).

For our purposes, Reno's and Ellis's accounts of Sierra Leone and Liberia are the most helpful.  Somewhere between Collier's emphasis on warlords seeking economic gain, and Richards' analysis of the decline of the patrimonial state, lies William Reno's model for explaining warlord states.  Because he is a political scientist, Reno emphasizes the political realm in trying to explain the regional war.[11]  Like Richards, he describes the

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[9] Here Richards refers to Robert Kaplan's influential 1993 article and book entitled "The Coming Anarchy," which argue that wars such as Sierra Leone's were caused by a combination of Malthusian demographic pressures and the anarchic potential of local societies, now unleashed by the collapse of the states that had lived parasitically off Cold War gamesmanship.

[10] The regional war was also an important contributor to the civil war that divided the Ivory Coast, especially in the western region around Man, Danane, and Toulepleu.

[11] Reno's notion of the political is far closer to that of most anthropologists than to most of his colleagues'. As he has said, "I tell my graduate students to go out and do anthropological fieldwork, then to come back and try to analyze their data using the categories of Political Science" (p.c., 2002)  His first book on Sierra Leone (Reno, 1995) was based on some two years of fieldwork, and he continues to return there.

decline and collapse of the patrimonial state that has systematically sabotaged its own institutions so as to facilitate a more thorough looting of the national patrimony.[12]

Reno's publications since 1990 have chronicled the relations between Sierra Leonean and Liberian state/warlord elites and a series of transnational entrepreneurial actors who have fuelled these wars, sometimes by providing security services in place of the national army (as in the case of Executive Outcomes and Sandline, P.C. in Sierra Leone and Ukrainian, Burkinabe, Israeli and American mercenaries in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone). He has chronicled the dealings of French timber firms and American tire companies in striking deals with Charles Taylor when he was still a rebel warlord, and has described the French, Israeli, Dutch and Lebanese businessmen who specialized in providing drugs, weapons and ammunition while exporting diamonds and hardwood from these conflict zones.

From Reno's perspective, it is the failed state and its doppelganger, the "shadow state," that are the most salient aspects of the present situation in the C.W.A. area (Reno, 2002). In order to explain the apparent absence of ideologically-motivated political or military activity in Sierra Leone and Liberia, he points to the difficulties social movements face within failed states. Civil society becomes irrelevant when there is no independent space for it. The kind of patrimonial rule that characterizes the present governments in all three countries of the C.W.A. region destroys the capabilities of the state in order to monopolize illicit economic activity. As I describe in the next chapter, Reno's model of a powerful "shadow state" operating behind the cover of a weak front is exactly the way that Loma speakers and other southwest Mande-speaking people in the region describe political action. The disjuncture between appearance and reality in the traditional sphere is often attributed to the operation of the region's power associations or "secret societies," like the Poro and Sande.

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[12] This "politics of the belly" has also been described by Bayart (1989, 1997) and the dangerous game of state destabilization for individual profit has been treated by Chabal and Daloz (1999).

Ellis's 1999 account of the Liberian 1989-1997 war not only gives the definitive chronological description of that war and its complex factionalisms, but also explains the war's dynamics within the regional logic of the power associations' notions of power. One of his arguments is that Poro practices, including human sacrifice, that had once been used only for the communal good, had become individualized in ways that developed in tandem with the coercive monopolization of power by Big Men who ultimately became warlords. The case study in Chapter two supports this thesis in some ways. At the same time it makes clear that the actors themselves derived much of their authority from their ability to place their actions within a tradition of "mystical arts of war" stretching back into the precolonial era. Thus it may be that the links between the power associations and violence have always been oriented toward the individual gain of powerful actors.

In this chapter, I suggest that these power associations, and the regional aesthetics of power (organized around the metaphor of front and behind) are not autonomous cultural, religious or symbolic systems. They are ways of doing politics that came to be what they are under conditions caused by persistent warfare. The dramaturgy and symbolism of esoteric practices are thus linked to material circumstances. I am not interested in arguing for the primacy of one over the other. Thus I agree with Ellis's argument (contra Collier's materialism and Richards' claim of novelty) that there is an interaction between precolonial and contemporary dynamics of power and domination. There are at least 150 years of intensive interaction between the Poro and the experience of warlordism. The two most likely developed in dialectic over time to become what they are today.

The sociology of peacetime Loma-speaking society must thus be understood in the context of the sociology of wartime Loma-speaking society. This is probably the case across the Central West Atlantic Region. Most of the institutions and social idioms that

organize Loma-speakers' worlds have come to be what they are today as the result of managing centuries of radical insecurity. What may appear at one moment as a logical web of interlinkages organizing peaceful village life can also be seen as a moment in a gradually changing set of strategies for dealing with insecurity. This was not an insight that social scientists working in the region during the period 1920 to 1990 were likely to place at the foreground of their analyses, because relatively peaceful conditions prevailed. In retrospect, it appears that Loma-speakers handled the disruptions caused by colonial domination and by overbearing postcolonial states in much the same ways that they dealt with the more radical forms of insecurity caused by war. Loma-speakers have consistently sought autonomy through discretion in preference to transparent relations with the states that have encompassed them.

Max Gluckman, referring to the micropolitical conflicts emerging from the contradictory principles of matrilineal descent and patrilocal settlement in Victor Turner's 1957 study of Ndembu society, wrote:

> …when the conflict emerges from the opposed interests and claims of protagonists acting under a single social principle, judicial institutions can be invoked to meet the crisis... But when claims are advanced under different social principles, which are inconsistent with one another even to the point of contradicting one another, there can be no rational settlement. Gluckman, Preface to *Schism and Continuity in an African Society*. (1996:xviii).

We may also apply Gluckman's insight to more global dynamics, including the organizing principles of warfare in the C.W.A. region. Contrasting the contemporary war with the historical materials on society and warfare in the region during the 19th century, a set of patterns emerges. Day-to-day life is often regulated within the shared "social principle" I call Gerontocratic Hierarchy. This system rests on the assumptions that people may be located in relation to one another through an interlinked hierarchy, especially relations between elder men and women and their juniors, which run parallel to relations between landowners and newcomers.

Loma lineages are corporate groups. The lineage's oldest male is its head, and succession passes laterally to his brothers in descending age, then to the oldest man of the next generation. In the past, a lineage was a productive unit, and combined forces to make a single, large rice farm (see Chapter eight). The members of the lineage consumed this rice from a single large granary, thus the lineage head and his senior wife had significant control over the lineage's productive resources and the fruits of the lineage's labor. This is no longer the case, as each constituent household (a man, his wife or wives, their unmarried children and various dependents) is a productive unit, though some lineages continue to plant a collective field in addition to their household ones.

Widows of lineage members are encouraged to pick another husband from within the lineage, though in Giziwulu and Pelema, I found this to be more an ideal than a reality.[13] When a man dies, his cola, coffee and cocoa trees, as well as his use rights to the portion of land he has customarily cultivated, are equally divided among his sons. Women pass on their personal property to their daughters,[14] but do not have land use rights or trees to bequeath.

It is elder men who serve as lineage heads or are in line to inherit this status. Although they no longer control the lineage's output of rice as they did during the precolonial and early colonial periods, they are still entitled to a sizeable portion of the younger lineage members' production of rice, oil, meat, and palm wine. These elders gain most from the gerontocratic relations of hierarchy, and attempt to ensure their reproduction from generation to generation. The power associations, dominated by elder blacksmiths, midwives, healers, and hunters, all use esoteric forms of knowledge to control dangerous forms of power, and lend authority to the forms of symbolic

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[13] Leopold mentions an ideal priority of potential marriage partners within the Loma levirate (an order that was never described to me), but notes that most often a woman was free to choose among all the men of the lineage.

[14] This line of female inheritance parallels that of preferred inheritance of women's ritual roles within the Sande and other power associations by their daughters.

domination I call Gerontocratic Hierarchy. I describe many of these aspects in detail in the third chapter, entitled "Personhood and Power."

Against this, I propose that there has for many centuries been an immanent and contradictory principle that I call Entrepreneurial Capture. As against the condition of peaceful stasis, this principle opposes warfare and disruption. Against the gerontocratic authority of the elders comes the force of youth. Against the rights of the owners of the land come the prerogatives of the war chiefs. These principles are schematic and rather functionalist as I present them here. As ideal types, they are meant only to help us untangle some patterns from a welter of complex and contradictory historical material. The following chapters return to this problematic, in trying to understand the ways that the principles of Gerontocratic Hierarchy and Entrepreneurial Capture have clashed, and more often how, even when,

> there is a temporary respite… the deep conflicts between groups and individuals … continue. Through the intervening, comparatively peaceful period, struggles continue till they precipitate a new crisis. Each crisis marks the culmination of a period of altering alignments of power and shifts of allegiance. Gluckman, ibid: xviii.

The usefulness of the Gerontocratic Hierarchy/Entrepreneurial Capture schema is that it helps us to see seemingly unrelated events, such as the precolonial slave-raiding system, the Demystification Program of the 1960's, and the warlordism of the 1990's as being linked through their connection to this basic structural contradiction. I have plotted the following diagram in order to emphasize the facets of this opposition. I will describe each dynamic in greater detail in this and the next three chapters, but preview them here in a simplified, schematic form.

| Gerontocratic Hierarchy | Entrepreneurial Capture |
|---|---|
| Stasis | Change/Disruption |
| Elders | Youth |
| Peace | Warfare |

| | |
|---|---|
| Poro/Sande | Individual Esoteric Skills |
| *Badenya* | *Fadenya*[15] |
| *Ziɛle* | *Booyema*[16] |
| Hyperpolygyny | Even Distribution, Husbands-Wives |
| Late Marriage | Earlier Marriage |
| Autochthony | Portable Identities |
| Owners of the Land | War Chiefs |

The dynamics opposing Gerontocratic Hierarchy and Entrepreneurial Capture may help us to compare the war that has raged in the C.W.A. region since 1989 and many aspects of warfare existing in the late 19th century.[17]  Fighting during both periods was not ideological in nature, but fuelled by the quest for political-economic advancement. The tribal wars, as they are called both in Liberian English and in Guinean French (simply *kô* in Lomagui[18]), were dedicated to the capture of slaves, or occasionally to the control of trade routes over which these captives and other trade goods were transported

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[15] This pair of terms, which I explain later in the chapter, come from the northern Mande languages and are described in Bird and Kendall (1980).

[16] This pair of terms come from the Loma language.  Meaning literally "cool heart" and "own-hand-on," they are usually translated as "security" and "liberty."  They are related to, though not synonymous with, *badenya* and *fadenya*.

[17] It is difficult to make concrete claims about the particularities of life and warfare in Loma-speaking country before 1850.  However, the scattered evidence does support the picture extending back to the 1500's of shifting, interethnic alliances, fortified villages growing around successful war chiefs, and persistent slave raiding (d'Azevedo, 1962; Malcolm, 1939).  During the 19th century, the situation changed considerably along the coast with the outlawing of the slave trade in the U.K., U.S. and France, British patrols of the coast, and the growth in the "legitimate" trade.  However, this does not seem to have slowed the warfare in the interior.  Indeed, as Holsoe has argued (1977), outlawing the slave trade along the coast may have increased the intensity of raiding in the interior.

[18] Loma-speakers in the Wubomai chiefdom in Liberia used the term γ*ilikilikôi*, literally "the rolling wars" (Leopold, 1991:21).  I never heard this term during my research, but it gives a frighteningly clear image of how the ebb and flow of fighting must have been experienced by those with little control over them.

(Leopold, 1991:20).  As Facinet Beavogui, the preeminent historian of the Loma-speaking region, has written:

> Up until the French colonial penetration, at the end of the 19th century, slave raiding warfare was the greatest public affair in Loma country, a highly political activity that mobilized civil society in its entirety and left its mark on the principal levels of social formation.
> Along the edges of this institution developed, in the favorable climate of endemic violence, another phenomenon—brigandage.  War and banditry were thus, from the 16th to the 19th centuries, the two biggest factors acting on the life of people in the Loma country.  (Beavogui, 2002:31).

Beavogui describes the profits of this warfare accruing primarily to war chiefs, who doled out smaller portions to their lieutenants.  Foot soldiers received no regular pay, but were paid by the fruits of their looting.  While the Europeans on the coast garnered most of the profits, Loma-speakers and other people of the near hinterland raided one another for profit and self-preservation at the same time. From the late 15th century, the forest-savannah border became a troubled region.  Political instability in the *Mandingue* (the northern Mande heartland around what is now the Mali-Guinea border area) was soon amplified by the Europeans' demand for war captives.   Intervillage raids were the order of the day, and as d'Azevedo (1962) has described for the C.W.A. region, what resulted was an exceptionally fluid social situation.  Populations gathered in large, multiethnic communities around strong war chiefs.[19]  Each fortified town was largely independent of its neighbors, and as the societies of the forest region did not have centralized political authority, warfare emanated from a single town or sometimes a loose and shifting alliance of several towns.  Writing about the similar Mende-speaking region of Sierra Leone in the nineteenth century, Malcolm describes,

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[19] This modus operandi continued into the colonial period. In this passage from a 1934 inspection tour in Beyla *cercle*, a colonial administrator complains that the "exodus" of local men disrupts colonial attempts to collect taxes.

> The native passes under fallacious pretexts from one canton to another, placing himself under the protection of a more powerful or better chief—that is, if he doesn't cross the border to go live in a neighboring [French] colony or the territory of a foreign power.  (Aujas, Rapport Politique, décembre 1934.  Archives de l'A.O.F., Dakar. Carton 7G20(17).)

large towns, each with a rather vague and indeterminate sphere of influence over the adjacent countryside, and each quite independent of the others.  A town might on occasion ally itself with a powerful neighbour; but it might as easily find itself soon afterwards at war with its former ally, for war was an everyday occurrence (1939:47).

As Paul Richards (1996, 2002) has emphasized, whatever the economic incentives toward warfare, this was not merely a situation of individuals haphazardly seeking their own economic advantage.  There was a social organization to warfare, many aspects of which Loma-speaking elders can still describe today.  Beavogui traces the outlines of this process:

> The systematization of violence so profoundly marked Loma society that the education of each generation aimed at only one major imperative:  training of the citizen in martial activities that would allow him to assure the survival of the collectivity, through the perfect mastery of all the techniques of warfare….  The state intervened to fill in any gaps that still existed in the education of its different members.  This apprenticeship took place in the sacred forest of the Poro for the boys, and the Zadegui, or Sande for the girls.  (Beavogui, 2002:33-34).

Beavogui makes the important point that initiation into the esoteric world was not simply a matter of cultivating secrecy for its own sake, an impression one is likely to get from some of the earlier ethnographic accounts of the Poro (e.g. Harley, 1941).  This training was also more than vocational.  As Bledsoe (1980b) has emphasized, both boys and girls already knew many of the techniques they supposedly went to the Poro and Sande "schools" to learn, and certainly could have learned many of them—from the construction of fences, traps, and liana bridges to the rules governing sexuality and fertility—outside the sacred forest.

Bledsoe's materialist claim (1980) that the primary justification for sequestering youth in sacred forests was to monopolize their labor[20] bears the stamp of peacetime ethnography.  For many of the practices, dispositions and cultural idioms of Loma power

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[20] Though it was probably not intentional, Bledsoe's argument was identical to one of Sékou Touré's justifications for "demystifying" the Poro in Guinea's forest region.  Elders, he said, were monopolizing the productive capacity of youth, an illegitimate practice when their energies were essential to the construction of the new nation.  For more on this, see Chapter nine.

associations only take on their full significance in the context of radical danger.  One example of this is the linkage between hunters' societies, with their esoteric knowledge for controlling both the physical and spiritual powers released by the killing of other sentient beings, and the civilian militias that have utilized this knowledge in the context of the recent regional war.  The Mende *kamajosia* (in Sierra Leone) are the best known such group in the C.W.A. region.  I take this topic up again in the next chapter.

The power associations, however, were only one facet of the social organization of Loma warfare.  Another is the institution of the *kôkôlogiti*, which might be loosely translated as confederations.  These institutions, which existed in the southern Loma-speaking region, resembled chiefdoms (called *zuti* in the northern Loma region) in some ways, but their most important characteristic in the precolonial era seems to have been that all villages within one *kôkôlogi* vowed never to attack one another.  Meanwhile, there was a great deal of competition among the *kôkôlogiti*, and they frequently raided one another.

Within each village's or *kôkôlogi*'s armed force, there was also a well-defined chain of command. Young men began at the level of *dugi* (foot soldier), continued to the status of *gbologue*, who defended the most exposed points, including outposts guarding the approaches to the village, and the fortified walls, or *sɛγe*.  Having proven their prowess, they continued to the status of warrior, or *sɛvhɛzeγenui*.  Within this class of "officers," Beavogui distinguishes four grades:  *towanui*, *balafilinui* (lit. "ram's mane person," referring to his costume), *koiwôlôbhôlônui* (lit. "big leopard skin person," again in reference to his distinctive war costume), and *nulibhôlônui* (lit. "otter skin person").  The highest grade among these officers would serve as *kôkɛ,* or war chief (Beavogui, 2002, 36-37).

The kinds of tensions between youth and elders that Richards isolates as central to the war in Sierra Leone are, he argues, part of a "crisis of modernity." I do not share his opinion in this matter, as I see historical precedents here, too.[21] As Rosalind Shaw (2002:245) points out, the expropriation of wealth—especially in the form of human lives —was always seen by the majority as an illegitimate means of self-enrichment. Women, children and the elderly were unlikely to benefit from the slave-raiding system, though they could easily fall prey to it. Younger men, as noted above, were placed at those positions most likely to endanger their lives, but they received relatively little of the spoils of war. Beavogui has analyzed the dynamics of colonial conquest in light of the tensions between elders and youth. The Loma and other inhabitants of the forest region (though this is not fully acknowledged in Guinean nationalist historiography) presented by far the greatest resistance to colonial penetration of any group in the territory that was to become Guinea. Though this resistance was consecrated in the nationalist imaginary as having taken place on principled grounds, Beavogui disagrees. The warlords who controlled the vast majority of the wealth in the Loma-speaking area, and whose wealth was predominantly based on the ownership and sale of slaves, did not want any other power muscling in on their monopoly of control.[22] Nzebela Togba Pivi, chosen by the socialist regime as the Loma's representative resistance hero, was certainly one of these. One of

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[21] This point depends upon how one defines "the modern." Certainly, the persistent warfare I describe here from roughly 1500 onward coincides with the age of European exploration, the establishment of European colonies in the new world, and the upsurge in demand for African slaves as plantation laborers that both spurred further violence in West and Central Africa, and was integral to the development of modern Europe (which Europeanist scholars date from c. 1500). I believe that Richards uses the term "modern" to refer to social formations and media in the latter half of the late 20th century. It is this characterization with which I disagree, preferring to emphasize that the current moment of crisis is rather typical of that encompassing modernity that stretches back some 500 years.

[22] This is an argument Person makes about the warrior and creator of West Africa's last precolonial empire, Almamy Samory Touré. Namely that he *was* resistant to colonial incursion, but that it was anachronistic to attribute the intentionality of 1950's and 1960's anti-colonial nationalism to him. See especially his chapter in Crowder, 1972), that begins, "After more than half a century of colonial activity and a complete overthrow of the traditional structures of African society [?] one might expect the earlier periods of the country's history to be judged with at least a minimum of objective detachment. Far from it: the case of Samori shows that this is not so" (Person, 1972:111).

the most powerful warlords in the southern Loma-speaking region, he regularly raided neighboring villages, reducing many Loma-speaking people to slavery and killing many others.  As an elder in a southern Loma-speaking village told me:

> Samory invaded Bhilu [confederation], and his sofas[23] took some people as slaves, others fled to villages within the alliance in Liberia [i.e. further west, out of reach of the sofas].  Samory's sofas attacked and left—didn't stay.  N'Zebela Togba also attacked Bhilu.  He killed many, took others as slaves.  People fled the village.  It was completely abandoned.  My father was enslaved in Beyla. (Y.G., Bayema 11/99).

It is thus that Beavogui explains the fact that once Loma-speakers abandoned their armed struggle against the French, they were generally "model" subjects.  The warlords had exercised physical and esoteric domination over the ordinary population and their captives, but had not achieved legitimacy.  Although this directly contradicts the nationalist historiography, it is still the way that non-elite Loma-speakers describe the past.

I have already introduced the structural factors that opposed elders and youth, landowners and newcomers, but we have so far said little about the ways that the political economy of predation affected men and women in different ways.  As becomes apparent below, tensions along gender lines and those along generational lines were intimately woven together.

Gendered Dimension of the Slave Raiding System

In their pioneering 1982 book, Claire Robertson, Martin Klein and their contributors argued that, "At the peak of the [Atlantic Slave] trade, men dominated in the numbers crossing the Atlantic, but women were more numerous than men among those enslaved, this confirming our conviction that most women and children were taken by African purchasers before reaching the barracoons of the coast." (Klein, 1997:viii-ix).

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[23] Sofa is the northern Mande language term for the warlords and lieutenants of emperors such as Samory.

Most data indicate that two to three enslaved men were shipped from West Africa to the New World for every woman.  The brutal nature of plantation slavery in the Americas meant that,

> Low birth rates were largely a product of an extremely unbalanced sex ratio on American plantations, which when coupled with bad nutrition, few incentives to reproduce, and high abortion rates meant that slave populations could not keep ahead of their own mortality except by renewed imports from Africa (Thornton, 1997 [1982]:39).

Warfare and raids for slaves on the African continent killed many men, in addition to the greater number that was sold into the Atlantic trade.  In the Loma-speaking area, as elsewhere throughout West Africa, old people and recalcitrant male captives were likely to be killed on the spot, in addition to those warriors who had been killed in battle.  Of those remaining, the majority of women remained within West Africa, though they were normally transferred or sold away from their area of origin, as localized cross-cutting ties of marriage and alliance would have made their continued captivity untenable.

Facinet Beavogui's Loma-speaking informants told him that in the late precolonial period (c. 1880-1906), the price of a slave in Loma markets ranged between 60 and 300 *guinze* iron currency pieces, which would have been equivalent to between three and 14 bars of salt, or between 10 and 45 gourds (150-900 liters) of palm oil.  According to colonial records from 1894 cited by Beavogui, slaves cost 600 guinze, or one bull in Kissidougou (slightly to the north of Macenta), and half that in Beyla, both areas located within 100 km of Macenta.[24]  Beavogui argues that prices for slaves fell sharply during this period as a result of the large number of people sold into slavery against imported firearms by the emperor Samory Touré (Beavogui, 2001:67-69).

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[24] Neither Beavogui nor I gained any details about the price of female as opposed to male slaves in the area.

In this slave economy, men were either sold toward the coast; concentrated in farming hamlets surrounding major fortified war towns[25]; or in some cases, integrated into the entourage of the war chiefs (*kôke*) who captured them.  Women were sometimes sold and also sometimes lived in captives' farming hamlets, but according to Beavogui, "whether in the Loma or Manya milieux, the majority of women taken as captives during battles or bought in markets, were destined to become the spouses of their masters." (2001:81).

It is worth noting that the link between those female captives who became wives and those male ones who became part of the military infrastructure of the powerful slave-raiding centers is not coincidental.  The dynamic here is precisely the one that Edna Bay (1997) has described on a much larger scale for the kingdom of Dahomey in the 18th and 19th centuries.  The quality that these slave warriors and wives had in common was that they had been forcibly detached from the kin networks that had bound them.  In Chapter ten, I describe the problem of trust, and the ways that Loma-speakers describe the unpredictability of those people who have divided allegiances, such as wives marrying into a new lineage or refugees arriving from a neighboring area.  Those captured in war or bought at a market had been forcibly stripped of connections to their lineages or villages of origin, and owners of captives were careful to keep them sufficiently distant from their origin so that they would not be able to retrace these links.  In this context, the only lineage to which they (and more importantly, their children) could develop an allegiance

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[25] Beavogui (2001:77-78) lists anywhere from one to ten satellite servile farming hamlets surrounding nine different fortified villages or chiefdoms in the area that became Macenta Prefecture.  He estimates the servile population as constituting 40-50% of the total population in the period around 1900, similar to the proportions noted by the French at that time in the Beyla, Kissidougou, Kerouane, and Kankan regions.

would be that of their owners.[26]  In a society with unilineal descent ideology and rules of marriage exogamy, the incorporation of slaves into the lineage is the only way to bypass the ambivalence created by "normal" marriage alliances between lineages that may otherwise be in competition.  As in most African societies, the children of Loma-speaking free men and captive wives were born free, and after a few generations, their servile matrilineal origins were largely erased.[27]

Demographic Shifts and Marriage

The violent setting of the period of intervillage slave-raiding had other gendered dimensions.  Loma-speaking men describe one as a kind of historical puzzle.  In the past (from the precolonial into the colonial period), they say, there were very few women, and too many men.  It was very difficult to find a wife.  In the present, there are more women than men, and it is easy to find wives.  While men often had to wait until the age of 30 or even 35 to live with a woman for the first time, now many men father children at 17 or 18.  Men usually described this historical shift to me in order to explain why the elaborate planning of arranged marriages had diminished over time.

This folk model of demographic change over time appears to contradict the information we have about the effects of the Atlantic Slave Trade on the demographics of African societies.  Men were both killed in battle, sold as overseas slaves in greater numbers, and also killed when they appeared to be unwilling or unruly captives.  Women

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[26] The harsh conditions of servility were not so easily accepted by captives.  Beavogui describes (2001:79-80) a series of ritual steps used to secure the obedience of new captives, especially when they lived together in farming hamlets away from the main town.  They were given new names in a ceremony not unlike a rite of passage, and were also made to take an oath (*kpɛlɛgi*) similar to those still used today (see Chapter five), consisting of a ritual meal followed by an oath, where the understanding was that the consecrated and esoterically powerful ingredients in the meal would kill anyone who reneged on his promise.  Similar meals are part of the initiation into many of the power associations in the region.  See also Mungo Park's descriptions of African slaves' resistance and attempts to escape in the region just north of present-day Guinea (2000).

[27] As described in Chapter three, this is an important difference between southwestern Mande societies, and northern Mande or Fulbe societies.

were more often kept as war spoils, became junior wives in polygynous households, and were less frequently sold to the slavers on the coast. Thus, in the precolonial period, there should have been a surplus of women, not the scarcity described by Loma-speaking men.

One way that women became scarce in this context was when a large number were monopolized by one or a few powerful men. This indeed seems to have been the case according to travelers, missionaries and colonial administrators who saw the region between the 1860's and 1940's.[28] The war chief or landowning Big Man often had more than twenty wives. Even in a village where the women outnumbered men by a ratio of 2:1, just a few such big men could skew the situation back to scarcity for all the other men in the village. David Brown has described a similar situation in the area that became Eastern Liberia:

> In the case of the Klowe… the elders were themselves actively involved in the acquisition of wives through lineage channels, and their relationships with the young were therefore not merely supervisory but also competitive. According to Klowe informants, unmarried males of forty years or more were by no means unknown—as would indeed be anticipated in a gerontocratic society practicing polygyny, but lacking major differences in wealth. (Brown, 1984:40-41).

The links between gerontocratic hierarchy and hyper-polygyny (large numbers of wives married to a small number of powerful elder men) were not necessarily disrupted by colonial conquest. Powerful precolonial chiefs and war chiefs gave way to the colonial canton chief. Often the same men made smooth transitions from one status to the other. Their prerogatives in the realm of monopolizing women went unchallenged until the Touré years (1958-1984), when sweeping changes to the legal code in 1962 and 1968 outlawed polygynous marriage (Gulphe, 1970).[29]

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[28] Schwab (1947) refers repeatedly to situations where Loma chiefs have many wives. He adds, "If a man can acquire a monopoly of the desirable women in his locality he secures an extraordinary advantage in the labor market. By lending ("giving," it is called) his "superfluous" wives to other men, such a magnate is able to attach them to himself in a form of servitude. (1947:186)

[29] Existing polygynous households were not dissolved. I describe this process more fully in Chapter nine.

The regional West African war of the past 18 years appears to have brought back into use the practices of hyperpolygyny and more particularly the capture of women as spoils of war, at least among male combatants. During most of the cross-border attacks into the Macenta area of Guinea when I was living there, combatants looted villages and took young women as porters to carry the war booty. They also sometimes took men, but these men were frequently killed either when they reached the Liberian border or when they reached the rebel base camp. Women were kept alive and retained to cook, wash clothing, and provide sex to combatants.[30] This topic requires further empirical study, but one is led to suggest that given the history of the interrelations among warfare, gender and generation, people from the C.W.A. region may deploy a complex set of strategies to manage violence. Mats Utas (2002), who has done research among former combatants in Liberia, has found that during the 1989-1997 war, many families attempted to "place" daughters in the entourages of warlord commanders. If a girl became a favored member of a powerful warlord's household, her family and even her entire village could be protected as a result.[31] In these cases, we could say that lineages offered wives in a "prophylactic" idiom, to ensure the goodwill of those powerful warlords most likely to enslave or kill them.[32]

Polities and Violence

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[30] This situation is separate from the one in which combatants sought recruits. In that case men (and sometimes children and women) were kidnapped during attacks and then forced to become fighters. This did not seem to happen much in the cross-border attacks into Guinea, but was common in both Sierra Leone and Liberia.

[31] Ellis (1999:129) describes a parallel strategy among young men: "Quite a few Gbandi youths appear to have joined ULIMO-K in order to prevent it from committing atrocities in their own areas."

[32] In Chapter six I consider the ways that such a historical angle on the topics of kinship and marriage in the region might cause us to reconsider some aspects of the alliance relations between wife-givers and wife receivers in this forest-savanna frontier region.

The political realm—like that of kinship and marriage—invites an analysis of the parallel structures of violent expropriation in the past and now. Reno's work, cited above, is instructive in two senses. First, it points out the ways in which the forms, the longevity, and expansion of warfare would be impossible if it were not for the partnership between local elites and foreign entrepreneurs connecting them to the global capitalist sphere. He makes an explicit comparison:

> Most studies of patrimonial states accordingly identify two choices for African rulers: preside over total collapse into anarchy (Somalia) or accept as inevitable at least some reform designed to restore autonomous institutional state capacity to manage resources and provide services. But the survival of leader Charles Taylor's "Greater Liberia" with the aid of foreign firms belies this notion of the inevitable collapse of patrimonialism[33].... As the institutional state fades, along side it grows this more non-institutional, patrimonial political authority, or "Shadow State." Our inspection of the Taylor regime in Liberia reveals, however, that this new direction in patrimonialism is not entirely novel. Rather, the close ties between Taylor and foreign firms bear striking resemblance to relations that existed between West African coastal chiefs and European traders in the middle of the last century. In this regard, Taylor's Shadow State looks backward as much as it does to the future (Reno 1993:175).

Reno later goes on to describe the warlord (non)state's recourse to violence as a productive, and not simply a destructive capacity:[34]

> Surprisingly, violence is little studied in this regard. Where violence attracts attention, it is held to demonstrate a regime's distance from society in the same sense that patrimonialism is divorced from "normal" state behavior. But violence is inseparable from power in the Shadow State. From precolonial times to today, the ideology of control over wealth and its distribution through force, a *mise en valeur*, emerges as an alternative means to rule when a societal consensus is absent (Reno, ibid:183).

In this passage, Reno points us once again to the skewing factor I term the "peace mirage," that has distorted many analyses of the Upper Guinea Coast region. Because

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[33] Reno published this passage in 1993, and thus was describing Taylor the warlord's control of most of the Liberian hinterland. The fact that his description still holds today (now that Taylor has become President) suggests that the kind of careful attention to social and historical context that characterizes his work may hold greater promise of predictive accuracy than the usual typological and quantitative analyses proffered by political scientists.

[34] Similar productive aspects of violence and illicit political economies have been the subject of much of Achille Mbembe's (e.g. 2003) and Janet Roitman's (2005) recent work on Cameroon and other parts of the continent.

many academic studies of the region were undertaken during the relatively peaceful 1920-1990 period, they took peaceful social relations as the norm, and any aberration from that as (implicitly) pathological. While the violent past was acknowledged in many cases, there was no notion that a violent political economy of predation might return to the area. Unfortunately, it has. Reno's 1998 book, *Warlord Politics and African States*, continues the analysis cited above by showing how the intervention of paramilitary firms such as Executive Outcomes[35], "have played an important part in the transition of weak states to the market-based tactics and non-bureaucratic organization of warlord politics." (Reno, 1998:218). His analysis of these alliances indicates yet again that the logic of violent expropriation in the C.W.A. region has carried over across several major socio-political shifts, and that even as its contexts and the particularities of some strategies have changed, we are likely to find more continuities than breaks.

One of its most significant aspects of the sociopolitical dynamics of conflict in the C.W.A. region in the past and the present is the way that international dynamics, such as the demand for tropical hardwoods or the international market in light armaments, have interacted with local dynamics, such as the structural competition between young and elder men. During the period of the Atlantic Slave Trade and again in the period of warlordism that has dominated the region over the past 14 years, there is a systemic symbiosis between two economies: the international illicit economy of extraction and

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[35] Executive Outcomes is a diversified firm run by former South African paramilitary operatives (now out of work in the majority-ruled South Africa) and diamond mining specialists.

disruption, and the local Big Man economy of wealth–in–people.[36]  It is clear that each

has shaped the other, and that intergenerational conflict probably would not have taken

the forms it has if the Atlantic Slave Trade had not, for several centuries, made slave-

raiding warfare a profitable form of pillage in this region.

Managing Insecurity, Jumping Ahead in Line

In the precolonial context of pervasive and recurrent warfare, how did people

manage?  It was essential for them to find ways to bind and to control these unpredictable

and destructive forces, and one of the ways they did so was by turning to the invisible

world.  A related question is how elder men assert(ed) the kinds of domination I have

described in the last chapter.  If wealth-in-people is based on domination by physically

weaker elder men (and women) over physically stronger young men, and if the field of

competition is often defined by warfare, raiding, and other forms of brute physical

domination, how have elder men kept the upper hand?  As I have already suggested, part

of the answer is that they have not.  Warfare and insecurity favor the relative equalization

of power between younger and elder men.  Yet those who gain the upper hand in this

region, even in times of war, almost never do so merely by resorting to physical capacity,

or even to superior weaponry.  These elements are significant, but only in combination

with a larger set of practices that constitute Loma-speaking persons in their full sense.

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[36] Rosalind Shaw (2002) in particular has traced the connections between these two economies from past to present.  In Sierra Leone as in Guinea, it is important to remember that although the Atlantic trade had been renounced by England, France, and the United States at the beginning of the 19th century, the practices of local depredation continued in many ways unabated until about the turn of the 20th century.  This was due to a number of factors, including the fact that Spanish and Portuguese colonies continued seeking slaves until the 1880's, the disruptions caused by both colonial conquest and by late pre-colonial empire builders such as Samory Touré, and probably by the sheer momentum of a system of slave raiding that had influenced the region's societies and economies for some 300 years.

The person in Loma-speaking society is a nexus of skills, knowledge, and competencies, most of them gained over a lifetime of striving and experience. Such capacities are mediated through the polysemic category of *sale*, which can denote products from the Loma pharmacopoeia, objects such as masks or sacrificial shrines, or the associations that own each type of "medicine" (Højbjerg, 1993). An individual's capacities become synonymous with her or his person. Periods of conflict are productive for exploring the interrelations among notions of personhood, social dynamics, and the uses of *sale* in Mande societies. During periods of relative stability, these factors are always in play, but remain subrosa. During times of strife, they not only come out in the open, but discussions and disagreements about them become explicit and heated. Getting it right, for instance in the case of bulletproofing *sale*, can be a matter of life or death.

Among Loma speakers, few of these capacities are inheritable. An individual's identification with the totemic animal of his or her father is inherited,[37] but most aspects of identity accumulate over the course of a lifetime. Although most *sale* is owned by a group—some with long regional histories, others ephemeral—every Loma-speaking individual is the intersection of a different combination of *sale* knowledge and membership, some of which they have acquired by necessity (to heal a life-threatening illness) and others by choice. There are close links between Loma speakers' life-long process of seeking and using specialized knowledge and the northern Mande concept of *fadenya* (Bird and Kendall, 1980). In the context of the regional war of the 1990s and 2000's, it has often been young men who have laid claim to the most powerful forms of "traditional" *sale* surrounding the undertaking of war.

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[37] As described briefly in the last chapter (and at greater length in Chapters five and six), the patrilineage is the corporate descent group organizing significant social action in Loma-speaking villages. Each totemic clan is made up of many lineages and is only significant sociologically because Loma speakers normally practice marriage exogamy between totemic clans. In Guinea, the totemic clan name (Beavogui, Koivogui, Guilavogui, etc.) becomes one's family name. Women retain their patrilineal clan name after marriage. In Liberia, by contrast, naming is less regular. Many people take their fathers' first names as last names, though they are well aware of their clan names, too.

Such *sale* often contained either offensive or defensive capabilities, such as various bulletproofing treatments known as *anti-bal*, or the one described below, used during the period when the regional war had come into the part of Guinea where I was doing research, at a time when the village where I was working was awaiting imminent attack:

> the latest weapon in the Loma arsenal:  manioc plant branches and stalks.  That's right.  They are, it is said, the "totem" of the rebels' *sale*.  Two uses have been described to me in the last two days:  One, that by beating the branches on the ground, or exposing the leaves in the direction of the rebels, their invisibility treatment is rendered useless, and they become visible.  Secondly, when faced with a rebel, especially one "who has seen that you have *anti-bal* and that none of his bullets hurts you," then starts to run away in fear, you take the manioc branch, turn your back to him, wait a second, turn back to face him, and snap the branch in two.  This will kill him, or at least make him fall down, injured.  Almost everyone in town is carrying at least one 50cm length of manioc stalk as they go about their business (fieldnotes, 9/17/00).

The exigencies of innovation involved in gaining and subverting powerful *sale* during times of war opened a path for younger men to jump ahead in line, according to the logic of "entrepreneurial capture." Many young men did grab a bit of power for themselves by acquiring special capacities in the mystical arts of war.  Youths in many villages were doing the same thing under conditions of war.  In Pelema, it was the young men who patrolled the town all night, and who manned the militia roadblocks day and night. During this period, one young militia member in Pelema who was said to possess esoteric powers shook the hand of every person entering the town while wearing a special ring.  If his ring heated up or pinched him, the stranger was identified as a "rebel," and

was questioned further by the civilian militia. This young man claimed a kind of

knowledge that no other person in the village could gainsay. In a neighboring village, a

young man of 25 or so claimed to have been visited by Oudoh Bilivogui, a famous

precolonial *kôke* (war chief) in a dream. Many people had described this *kôke* to me:

when Samory Touré's sofa lieutenants had attacked his region, he was said to have simply

sat in the top branches of a tree, from where he shot *sale*-treated stones that killed them in

their dozens. This young man said that many of Oudoh's secrets were now his. If he was

able to show the efficacy of his newfound secrets (as I was told he was), he could claim a

power no man in the village could equal.

The control and use of the mystical arts of war thus intimately linked

idiosyncratic and individualistic forms of *sale* and their use to intergenerational conflict.

In Liberia, a more organized form of the same kinds of war *sale* was said to have

empowered the young Loma-speaking men of the Lofa Defense Force, a civilian militia

that arose to defend Loma villages in Lofa County against the abuses of ULIMO militias

(Ellis, 1999:105, 128). In 1999-2000, after the Liberian war had ostensibly ended, these

young men retained positions of prominence in their villages that would have been

impossible before the tumult of the war. Several Liberian Loma-speakers told me that

these young men had not abused their power, but that elder men were nonetheless afraid

of them and intimidated by the powerful *sale* they controlled. Like one woman described

to me who discovered her midwifery skills through a dream that came to her while

another woman in her village was undergoing a days-long labor, young men claimed

specialized *sale* knowledge that operated outside the gerontocratic hierarchies of the

power associations. Individual, as opposed to institutionalized, forms of *sale* allowed

them to make an entrepreneurial opening in the gerontocratic system, much as people

describe 19th century warlords having done.  It is crucial to emphasize that the knowledge these young men claimed was supremely "traditional."  Young Loma warriors in 2000 did not reject the notions of power, capacity, and knowledge accepted by their elders, they claimed to trump their elders through their access to knowledge even more traditional than that of their fathers and grandfathers.  They were returning to the knowledge of their great-grandfathers' generation.

This chapter has attempted to sketch the outlines of a set of institutions and practices that link intergenerational competition, Loma speakers' notions of personhood, and international political economy in an emergent relationship.  The variable geometry described by that relationship has defined the parameters within which Loma-speakers and their neighbors have exercised power both in times of war and peace.  I have underlined a salient contradiction in that relationship.  Elder men have had to rely on the physical prowess of young fighters to enforce their gerontocratic prerogatives when their social and symbolic preeminence have been challenged.  However, it is precisely during those times of war when young men's assistance is most valuable to them that young men are most likely to strip their elders of their privileges, and even their lives.  The question is whether such fighting is oriented toward jumping ahead in line (and perpetuating the socio-political relations that gave rise to the conflict) or dismantling the system itself.