Preconditions of access to knowledge: The 'colonial situation' of Sjoerd Hofstra's fieldwork among the Mende in Sierra Leone (1934-1936)

Sjoerd Hofstra at work with Mende informants in the rest house, Panguma 1936: S. Hofstra (1898-1983) - African Studies Centre Leiden, CC BY-SA 4.0, https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=36766425

Name: Sjoerd Kompier
Student-number: s1796852
E-mail: sjoerdkompier@yahoo.com

Study: History (MA)
Specialisation: Colonial and Global History

MA-thesis supervisor: Dr. F.H. Sysling
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Introduction

Our opening scene depicts the Dutch anthropologist Sjoerd Hofstra, sitting behind a table which, as we learn from a different photograph, was outfitted with deep bowls under each of its legs. Presumably this was to prevent mice from gnawing on his precious notebooks and other written material, which we see spread out all over the tabletop. His fieldwork among the Mende in the British Protectorate of Sierra Leone would last a total of eighteen months between 1934 and 1936. The man we see sitting between two other Mende, watching over the scene with what seems to be a bemused look on his face, was Thomas Conteh. During the entirety of Hofstra's fieldwork, Conteh worked as an interpreter, assistant and primary informant; a temporary profession which he seems to have been practicing when this picture was taken.

If Hofstra were to walk over to one of the windows, he would be able to look out over the town of Panguma, situated in the east of Sierra Leone. Other windows would offer him a view on the hills which surrounded the town, covered in tall bush-vegetation, Mende rice-farms and oil-palms. Panguma was, with more than two thousand inhabitants and four-hundred dwellings, a town of considerable size in the Lower Bambara District. Hofstra would almost exclusively reside here during his fieldwork.[1]

When we contextualise the photograph we can tell more of the conditions in which it was made, as well as the 'colonial situation' of Hofstra's 'ethnographic episode', as the historian of anthropology George Stocking Jr. would phrase it.[2] The rest-house in which it was taken was one of two of its kind in Panguma. Formerly, these bungalows housed the British District Commissioner, who had moved further east to the town of Kenema. These representatives of British colonial authority started taking up their posts after the British established a Sierra Leonean Protectorate in 1896. Two years later, the British fought the Hut Tax War with its inhabitants, among whom the Mende. Instigated by a new taxation on huts, the war stood for a broader felt dissatisfaction with colonial overrule. Nine months of fighting resulted in a British victory, after which the British started to fragment the large chiefdoms of the Mende into smaller and controllable political units; a foundation on which they could actualise the principles of Indirect Rule.

The British had not engaged in armed struggles with the Mende since the Hut Tax War. However, this did not mean that the Mende did not have a vivid remembrance of its violent

[1] The picture was likely taken by his wife Woutje Hofstra, who accompanied him on his second trip to Sierra Leone.
[2] G.W. Stocking Jr., *After Tylor: British Social Anthropology; 1888-1951* (Madison, 1995) 368.

nature and aftermath, in which many villages were burnt to the ground. Panguma District was one of the centres of resistance, and the lineage of Nyagua (Quee), one of the presumed leaders of the war effort, was still in power when Hofstra visited Panguma.[3] The Dutchman engaged with multiple older villagers who lived through the war, and who were hesitant to reminisce freely about those times.[4] When Hofstra touched upon this topic with Conteh and Conteh's nephew Said Kallon, they remarked 'that they had revealed more things to [him], spoken more frankly than they would with other Europeans'.[5] If their parents had heard them, they would have been angry with them. Both Conteh and Kallon had received a Christian education with the Methodists missionaries, who had been increasingly active in the region since 1924.[6] There, they learnt to speak the English language and grew comfortable engaging with Europeans. From this contextualisation we can gather that the presence of the colonial administration and the mission loomed large in the background of Hofstra's entire anthropological venture.

Both the missionary and colonial presence were precisely agents of the 'culture contact' which Hofstra originally set out to study during his fieldwork. The 'culture contact' approach was primarily championed by Bronislaw Malinowski, Hofstra's anthropological mentor at the London School of Economics. By offering synchronic accounts of the societal institutions of the 'changing African', Malinowski actively sought rapprochement to the practical interests of mission-societies and colonial administrations. At least high up in the chain of command, these 'practical men' offered their listening ears to anthropological insights.[7] In a general sense, both the mission and the colonial administration became increasingly interested in African cultures during the first half of the twentieth century.

For British colonial administrations, this had everything to do with its own attitude towards its many new African colonies, which started shifting from the establishment of law and order to 'development' in the 1920s and 30s.[8] Colonial governments saw a changing Africa, rife with problems caused by 'culture contact', resulting from its increased colonial penetration

[3] A. Abraham, *Mende government and politics under colonial rule: A historical study of political change in Sierra Leone: 1890-1937* (Freetown, 1978) 154.
[4] S. Hofstra, 'Notes: Opinion about older and new times: Changes brought about by Europeans' (4th September, 1936) Archival Collection: Research Fieldwork of Sjoerd Hofstra in Sierra Leone (1934-1936), African Studies Centre Library, Leiden University (Hereafter ACSH), Box 5, Red Box 3 –. The collection is made up of five moving-boxes in the archive of the African Studies Centre in Leiden, The Netherlands. References to Sjoerd Hofstra's archival material are made with reference to Michele Portatadino's Archival Guide of the collection.
[5] S. Hofstra, 'The giving of information' (26th May 1936) ACSH, Box 5, Red Box 3.
[6] G.W. Olson, *Church Growth in Sierra Leone: A Study of Church Growth in Africa's Oldest Protestant Mission Field* (Michigan, 1969) 119-121.
[7] B. Malinowski, Practical Anthropology, *Africa, Journal of the International African Institute, Vol. 2, No. 1* (1929) 22-38, 22.
[8] J.M. Hodge, G. Hödl, M. Kopf eds., *Developing Africa: Concepts and practices in twentieth-century colonialism* (Manchester, 2014) 6-7.

following the Conference of Berlin. Still, they saw the continent as filled with opportunities for economic exploits as well. Science was optimistically seen a tool for illuminating the Dark Continent. In turn, Africa, with its status as a 'great laboratory', had a profound impact on the development and professionalisation of scientific disciplines.[9]

Likewise, missionaries increasingly saw anthropological insights as valuable during this time, as these could ameliorate their chances of apostolic success. By 1914, plans were made by the British Board of Study for Preparation of Missionaries to create a College for Missionary Study, with lectures by anthropological experts on its curriculum.[10] The First World War would ultimately congeal these plans, but other efforts followed in the 1920's. One of these efforts, underlining anthropology's value for the mission, took place in the Belgian town of La Zoute, during the International Conference on the Christian Mission in Africa in 1926. Notably, Lord Lugard was among its two-hundred attendants. The former Governor of Nigeria had recently given a new impetus to colonial policy by publishing *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa,* in which he emphasized the importance for missionary work for the spread of civilization. Another attendant with his feet entrenched in both missionary and administrative efforts was Hans Vischer, the Secretary of the African Education Committee of the British Colonial Office. The conference was planned by Joseph F. Oldham, the secretary of the International Missionary Council. During the latter's keynote address he emphasized the fact that it was no longer enough to simply 'get out there', as his missionary predecessors had done, but to 'get into the main stream and life of Africa'.[11]

When we return to Hofstra, the emerging symbiosis between the colonial administration, the mission and Malinowski's anthropology is most clearly distinguishable in the scientific organisation which facilitated his research. The International Institute of African Languages and Cultures was the product of the new alliance between missionaries, administrators and 'human scientists'. Its principle aim was to use scientific knowledge and research to solve the practical problems which presented itself to those administering 'primitive races'.[12] Noteworthy

[9] This connection is perhaps most clearly illustrated by Lord Hailey's African Research Survey. During an extensive inquiry spanning from 1929 until 1938 he examined the extent to which scientific insights were used for practical purposes in the African colonies, as well as possibilities for the future.
[10] M. Michaud, The Missionary and the Anthropologist: The Intellectual Friendship and Scientific Collaboration of the Reverend John Roscoe (CMS) and James G. Frazer, 1896–1932, *Studies in World Christianity Vol. 22, No. 1* (2016) 57–74, 63.
[11] J. Davis, The Christian Mission in Africa: International Conference held at Le Zonte, Belgium, September 14-20, 1926, *Social Forces Vol. 5, No. 3* (1927) 483-487, 484.
[12] H. Tilley, *Africa as a Living Laboratory: Empire, Development, and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge, 1870-1950* (Chicago, 2011) 70.

are the reoccurring names of Lugard, who acted as its chairman; Vischer, fulfilling the role of Secretary General and Oldham; being its Administrative Director.

Thus, when Hofstra encountered colonial officials and missionaries in the field in Sierra Leone, they often welcomed him, as his work could ultimately benefit them. When travelling, the Dutchman dined with missionaries and officials, he could spend the night in their rest-houses and they would often tour him around 'their' towns. The colonial administration provided him with free railway travel and open access to its educational facilities. Yet, what interests us in this study is the ways in which both of these groups shaped Hofstra's fieldwork in a more scientific sense. As we can surmise from the contextualisation of the photograph of Hofstra and his informants, there was a multitude of ways in which the 'colonial situation' could impact the Dutchman's access to knowledge of the Mende.

In this study, we explore the 'colonial situation' of Hofstra's 'ethnographic episode', by asking how the missionary presence, the presence of the British colonial administration, and ultimately the Mende themselves, 'preconditioned' his access to knowledge in and around Panguma. What we mean by 'preconditions' are the forces at work in and around Panguma which coincided with Hofstra's fieldwork and which made anthropological knowledge accessible to him. If these conditions were not met, Hofstra would have had limited access to certain topics, or none at all. The above-mentioned groups each know their own historiographic strand, which deals with influences on anthropological knowledge-production in the twentieth century.[13] The present study hopes to add to each of them.

Historiography: Shaping anthropological knowledge-production

The relationship between the anthropologist and the missionary has not always been acknowledged by the former. Anthropologists working in the twentieth century often wrote of themselves as the missionary's antithesis, the latter being ethnocentrism personified. The accounts which missionaries produced of the peoples they tried to convert were often deemed deeply flawed on grounds of prejudice, as they ultimately sought to change those they studied.[14] Perhaps this stance was not surprising in the light of the discipline's increasing professionalisation of both theory and practice at the turn of the twentieth century. As Travis

[13] The historiography which is mentioned here deals with the influences of these groups on Anglophone anthropology, primarily with British social anthropology.
[14] S. van der Geest: Anthropologists and Missionaries: Brothers Under the Skin, *Man, New Series, Vol. 25, No. 4* (1990) 588-601, 588-589.

Cooper suggests, in these times of disciplinary self-fashioning the missionary seems to have been an 'anthropological foil' or a tool for disciplinary counter-identification.[15]

Yet, the historical linguist Marcus Tomalin, among others, has deemed the denial of professional relationships between the groups to be unfounded on the face of the historical record. His own research centred around interactions between missionaries of the Church Missionary Society and several anthropologists, among whom Franz Boas, working among the Canadian Haida-peoples. While investigating these encounters between 1870 and 1925, he found that regardless of the existing suspicion and distrust, Boas made extensive use of missionary linguistic analysis.[16] Other studies broadened our understanding of mutual influence by pointing at missionaries collecting for ethnological museums, those leading ethnological expeditions and to others who provided 'raw' ethnological data for armchair-anthropologists.[17] The narrative of animosity and distrust is further eroded when intellectual friendships between missionaries and anthropologists are considered. An example would be Maud Michaud's study of such a friendship between the Anglican missionary John Roscoe and the leading anthropologist James Frazer, the former seeing mission and anthropological investigation as 'two sides of the same coin'.[18] So, it becomes increasingly clear that boundaries between the two parties were blurry. Anthropologists and missionaries frequently built on each other in the decades preceding what the anthropologist Jack Goody called 'The Expansive Moment' of British social anthropology, which started in 1918.[19]

Hofstra's case can contribute to this reappraisal by shedding light on missionary influence on anthropological fieldwork in this interwar period. As shown by Christopher Morton, missionaries could provide anthropologists with epistemological access to their congregation. The attitudes of the Kenyan Luo towards the anthropologist Edward Evans-Pritchard were shaped by the fact that the latter was accompanied by Walter Owen of the Church Missionary Society. Owen was known as a critic of policies involving forced labour and an 'obvious irritant' to the colonial government, but he was deeply admired by his

[15] T. W. Cooper, The Uncanniness of Missionary Others: A Discursive Analysis of a Century of Anthropological Writings on Missionary Ethnographers, *Religion and Society: Advances in Research, Vol. 9* (2018): 68–85, 71.
[16] M. Tomalin, 'No connection or cooperation'? Missionaries and anthropologists on the Pacific Northwest Coast *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, Vol. 15, No. 4* (2009) 833-852, 836. – Other studies exploring this relationship are found in: P. Harries and D. Maxwell eds., *The Spiritual in the Secular: Missionaries and Knowledge about Africa* (Michigan, 2012).
[17] M. Michaud, The Missionary and the Anthropologist: The Intellectual Friendship and Scientific Collaboration of the Reverend John Roscoe (CMS) and James G. Frazer, 1896–1932, *Studies in World Christianity Vol. 22, No. 1* (2016) 57–74, 62.
[18] Ibidem, 58.
[19] J. Goody, *The Expansive Moment: Anthropology in Britain and Africa: 1918-1970* (Cambridge, 1995).

constituents.[20] Because of Owen's bond with the Luo, Evans-Pritchard was able to study them in more detail. From the moment that he set foot in Sierra Leone's capital Freetown, Hofstra too encountered missionaries who, according to him, were broadminded and able to see the value of anthropological knowledge.[21] He would make extensive use of

Ever since anthropology as a discipline started its ongoing process of academic decolonization in the 1960s, studies have emerged which examine the relationship between the discipline and colonial administrations. Almost fifty years ago, Talal Asad spoke of the fact that the colonial encounter had shaped the 'practical preconditions' for anthropological fieldwork, as it gave the West access to cultural and historical information about the societies it dominated.[22] Pels and Saleminck draw our attention to the influences of the colonial *préterrain* or the 'the local colonial milieu' on fieldwork, pointing at Raymond Firth's acknowledgment of the 'informal, often covert, constraints of colonial society on anthropology'.[23] Others, such as the historian Henrika Kuklick, have pointed to the 'colonial exchange' between academic anthropology and colonial governments.[24] In addition to the above-mentioned IIALC, she names a range of anthropological examples, among whom we find a number of Bronislaw Malinowski's students. Perhaps the most notable example being Gordon Brown and District Commissioner Bruce Hutt's symbiotic experiment among the Hehe in Tanganyika. Both men recognized the value of cooperation and tried to actively meet each-other's needs.

Often however, primarily due to the ambitious scope of the respective study, authors examine the effect of colonialism on anthropological fieldwork from a bird's-eye point of view. This means that we rarely learn of the way in which the colonial presence concretely influenced fieldwork in practice. As we take a more modest scale, we hope to add insights to our understanding of these colonial influences.

Lastly, we turn to historiography focussing on African agency during anthropological research in colonial contexts. Ever since the 1990s, when Roger Sanjek called for the recognition of anthropology's 'hidden colonialism', or the downplaying of non-Western agency in the production of anthropological knowledge, a growing body of literature is developing

[20] C. Morton, *The Anthropological Lens: Rethinking E.E. Evans-Pritchard* (Oxford, 2019) 202-203.
[21] S. Hofstra, 'Verslag 24-27 Jan' (24-27th, 1934) 30, ACSH, Box 4, SISWO Envelope: Folder "Verslaf".
[22] T. Asad, 'Introduction', in T. Asad ed., *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (London, 1973) 9-19, 16-17.
[23] P. Pels and O. Saleminck, Introduction: Five Theses on Ethnography as Colonial Practice, *History and Anthropology, Vol. 8, Nos. 1-4* (1994) 1-34, 14-15.
[24] H. Kuklick, *The Savage Within: The social history of British anthropology, 1885-1945* (Cambridge, 1991) 182, 216.

which heeds his call. [25] Lyn Schumaker has significantly contributed to this understanding by shedding light on the roles played by African assistants in processes of knowledge production of the scholars of the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute in Tanganyika. Not only did these assistants act as informants and translators, but also as cultural brokers and builders of trust. In many ways they were able to provide anthropologists with epistemological access to African communities.[26]

Yet, African agency during ethnographic episodes often encompassed more than the help of African informants and research assistants alone. An example which has received considerably less scholarly attention is the agency of rural African political authorities, which was arguably as important for the anthropologist's epistemological access to African communities. As the anthropologist Christian Straube would phrase it, these authorities could figure as 'gatekeepers' of anthropological field-sites.[27] While he himself uses the term to describe the considerable sway which white mine-owners and foremen held over the research projects of anthropologists of the Rhodesian Copperbelt, it is applicable to the realities of Hofstra's fieldwork as well.

Preconditions of access to knowledge

As mentioned, fifty years ago, Talal Asad spoke of the way in which the colonial encounter shaped the 'practical preconditions' of anthropological fieldwork. True as this might be, this power-imbalance was only part of what constituted access to knowledge, as it leaves out African agency. Similarly, the term *préterrain* adequately learns us that anthropological research in colonial contexts did not take place in a vacuum; yet, ultimately it has the same limitation. African communities are not immediately included in this colonial *préterrain*. As such, we run the risk of excluding African communities from the 'colonial situation', while the considerations of the Mende were as much a part of this situation in 1930s Sierra Leone as those of the mission and the colonial administration.

Therefore, we want to use 'preconditions of access to knowledge' as an analytical tool, which allows for a clear and uniform assessment of the factors which constituted access to

[25] R. Sanjek, Anthropology's Hidden Colonialism: Assistants and Their Ethnographers, *Anthropology Today* Vol. 9, No. 2 (1993) 13-18, 72. – A. Bank and L.J. Bank eds., *Inside African Anthropology: Monica Wilson and her Interpreters* (Cambridge, 2013). – Most notably A. Bank's contribution: The 'Intimate Politics' of Fieldwork: Monica Hunter and Her African Assistants, Pondoland and the Eastern Cape, 1931–1932.
[26] L. Schumaker, *Africanizing Anthropology: Fieldwork, networks, and the making of cultural knowledge in Central Africa* (London, 2001) 14, 92.
[27] C. Straube, Speak, Friend, and Enter? Fieldwork Access and Anthropological Knowledge Production on the Copperbelt, *Journal of Southern African Studies, Vol. 46, No. 3* (2020) 399-415.

knowledge during fieldwork. Whereas Asad used the term 'preconditions' in passing, we want to broaden this category of forces working on fieldwork by including African agency, and place it central to our analysis.

Our first chapter starts, just like Hofstra's own African venture started, with the Dutchman's first movements in Sierra Leone. This allows us to follow the formation of a network of key actors; administrators, missionaries and Mende, on which he would rely during his fieldwork. In addition to that, this section will provide us with an overview of the manner in which Hofstra selected his field-site. We can thereby illustrate the fact that Hofstra indeed recognized certain preconditions of access to knowledge beforehand; conditions which he knew he should meet for his venture to be successful.

Following this introductory chapter, chapter two and three will isolate two lines of enquiry from Hofstra's larger anthropological project. This allows us to explore, in a manageable way, how the mission and the British colonial administration shaped or even preconditioned his ability to access these topics. We start by looking at the influence of the mission on Hofstra's inquiries into the marriage practices of the Mende. As will, become clear, the missionaries offered him inroads into Mende society, as well as their own body of knowledge on the topic. Then, we will examine Hofstra's study of the Poro, the primary male 'secret society' of the Mende. As we will see, the society, with a range of societal functions, got caught up in the violence and the air of suspicion characterizing the first phase of colonial state-building: the establishment of colonial law and order. In this sense, colonial state-building preconditioned Hofstra's access to the Poro and its 'secrets'. For both of these lines of inquiry, we will briefly assess what kind of information the Dutchman's Mende-informants were willing to share.

In our last chapter, we further highlight Mende-agency by shedding light on the precondition of *ndomahei*-approval, which loomed large over Hofstra's entire anthropological venture. Even if British Indirect Rule in Sierra Leone had stifled precolonial political dynamics of the Mende and disintegrated their large political units into small, controllable chiefdoms, a Mende *ndomahei* or 'Paramount Chief' still functioned as a gatekeeper. For a successful anthropological venture, it was necessary for such political figures to approve.

By exploring these preconditions of access, the present study seeks to add insights to the historiographic strands mentioned above. Yet, the fact that we gather multiple forces working on Hofstra's research project in one study means that we can ultimately say something about the 'colonial situation' of Hofstra's 'ethnographic episode'. Studies focussing on fieldwork-influences tend to study research projects in general terms; they seek to understand

general influences of either the mission, the colonial administration or African individuals or communities. Such studies, however insightful, necessarily offer a fragmented account of the forces shaping a research project at any given time. In the present study, we practice fragmentation as well, as we isolate two lines of inquiry from the entirety of Hofstra's fieldwork. In the end however, this will allow us to illustrate that Hofstra's fieldwork was truly the product of the dynamics of a specific 'colonial situation'.

Lastly, in order to further situate Hofstra himself in the 'colonial situation' of the Mende-area, we offer two vignettes of his fieldwork-experiences in two appendices. Appendix A deals with Hofstra's place in the 'supernatural' sphere of Mende-society and Appendix B with the emotional ties in fieldwork. While their contents are related to the themes in our main study, they do not alter our core arguments.

To each of these ends, we will use the recently released field-archive of Sjoerd Hofstra, to which we will return shortly. First, we briefly show why the Dutchman himself has gone under the radar for historians of anthropology.[28]

Sjoerd Hofstra: Absent Without Leave

In Raymond Firth's preface to Kenneth Little's anthropological monograph *The Mende of Sierra Leone* (1951) he congratulated and thanked the latter for producing such a long-awaited account.[29] He refers to the traveller Graham-Greene's ventures through Sierra Leone as well. Yet, Firth does not mention Hofstra.[30]

Hampered by the isolating effects of the Second World War, as well as the responsibilities of newfound vocations in Dutch museums and the University of Amsterdam, Hofstra would never publish a full-length account of the Mende. Despite frequent inquiries and incitements from his institutional patrons of the IIALC, only four articles on the Mende appeared from his hand. Among the list of possible explanations, Hofstra's daughter, the historian Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra, mentions the appearance of Little's monograph as well.[31]

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[28] Notably, Jack Goody, one of the chroniclers of the anthropological discipline, did not even list Hofstra as one of the Mandarins, Malinowski's most esteemed students. Goody's colleague Adam Kuper and Raymond Firth do place him in this group. – A. Kuper, *Anthropology and Anthropologists: The British School in the Twentieth Century* (Abingdon, 2015; first edition 1973) 44. – R. Firth, Siegfried Frederick Nadel: 1903-1956, *American Anthropologist, Vol. 59, No. 1* (1957) 117-124, 118.

[29] R. Firth, 'Preface' in, K. Little, *The Mende of Sierra Leone: A West-African People in Transition* (London, 1967) 1.

[30] Little himself does mention Hofstra's work in his 'Author's Note', the two briefly corresponded about the work and the Mende as well.

[31] M. Gijswijt-Hofstra, *Among the Mende in Sierra Leone: The letters from Sjoerd Hofstra (1934-36)* (Leiden, 2014) 252. – In this publication we find the letters which Hofstra wrote to his adoptive mother from Sierra Leone (hereafter ATM).

Self-doubt seems to have been another factor, as Hofstra contracted blackwater fever not once, but twice, pulling him away from the field for long stretches of time. His awareness of the complexity of social reality and his disdain for hasty generalizations likely fuelled his uncertainty regarding the completeness of his Mende-material.[32]

The way in which Hofstra's career would unfold was obviously not known when he first set out for West-Africa. Bronislaw Malinowski and the IIALC had high hopes of him, as becomes clear from the correspondence between Malinowski and Joseph Oldham. The Pole even described him as 'one of the most promising young men [he had] met during the last few years'.[33] Even though Malinowski's enthusiasm waned a bit in the following year, he saw value in the Dutchman's slow research method when comparing him to 'more rapid and facile observers'.[34] Furthermore, the articles which Hofstra produced were appreciated. Max Gluckman even wrote Hofstra personally in order to urge him to publish his full-length account, as he found Little's book to be uninteresting and old-fashioned.[35]

Given the fact that the Dutchman did not continue his career in Great-Britain, it is not surprising that Hofstra did not appear on the radar of historians of anthropology when his extensive field-archive became accessible in 2014. Or when Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra published the field-correspondence which he had with his adoptive mother in the same year. Even if Hofstra did not end up being an influential figure within British social anthropology, these sources provide a vivid account of a process of anthropological knowledge production.

Hofstra's adoptive mother, Maria Frederica Overdiep-Ham, had paid for her son's studies and had always been invested and interested in his anthropological work. We see this reflected in their correspondence, which forms a chronologically unfolding account of Hofstra's entrance to the field, the circumstances in which he lived, his increasing comprehension of the language, the recruitment of his informants, the creation of an interpersonal network in official, missionary and Mende circles, as well as his descriptions of both exceptional events and everyday hassles. They are explained to Mrs. Overdiep and thus to us. In his foreword to the published letters, the anthropologist Paul Richard even describes Hofstra's correspondence as

[32] L. Laeyendecker, 'S. Hofstra: Bedachtzaam en zijn tijd ver vooruit', in J. Goudsblom, P. de Rooy and J. Wieten eds., *In de Zevende: De eerste lichting hoogleraren aan de politiek-sociale faculteit in Amsterdam* (Amsterdam, 1998) 82-95, 91.
[33] Letter from B. Malinowski to J.F. Oldham (20th December, 1931) ACSH, Box 5, Scanned and printed version of S.H. correspondence.
[34] Now, Malinowski, described Hofstra as 'somewhat passive'. – Letter from B. Malinowski to J.F. Oldham (5th December, 1932) ACSH, Box 5, Scanned and printed version of S.H. correspondence. – Letter from B. Malinowski to J.F. Oldham (20th December, 1935) ACSH, Box 5, Scanned and printed version of S.H. correspondence.
[35] Letter from M. Gluckman to S. Hofstra (21st December, 1951) ACSH, Box 5, Red Box 1.

his 'ethnography incarnate'.[36] To a large degree this depiction is accurate, as the letters are indeed an invaluable source for understanding Hofstra's fieldwork. Yet, as with every mode of communication, the nature of the information conveyed is to some extent dependent on its audience. Here, the audience is comprised of a mother, concerned for a son travelling to faraway lands. This means that some of Hofstra's fieldwork experiences are brushed over or left out, notably those hinting at danger, be it for his Mende-circle or himself. The letters also downplay Hofstra's place in Panguma's political climate, as will become clear in our last chapter.

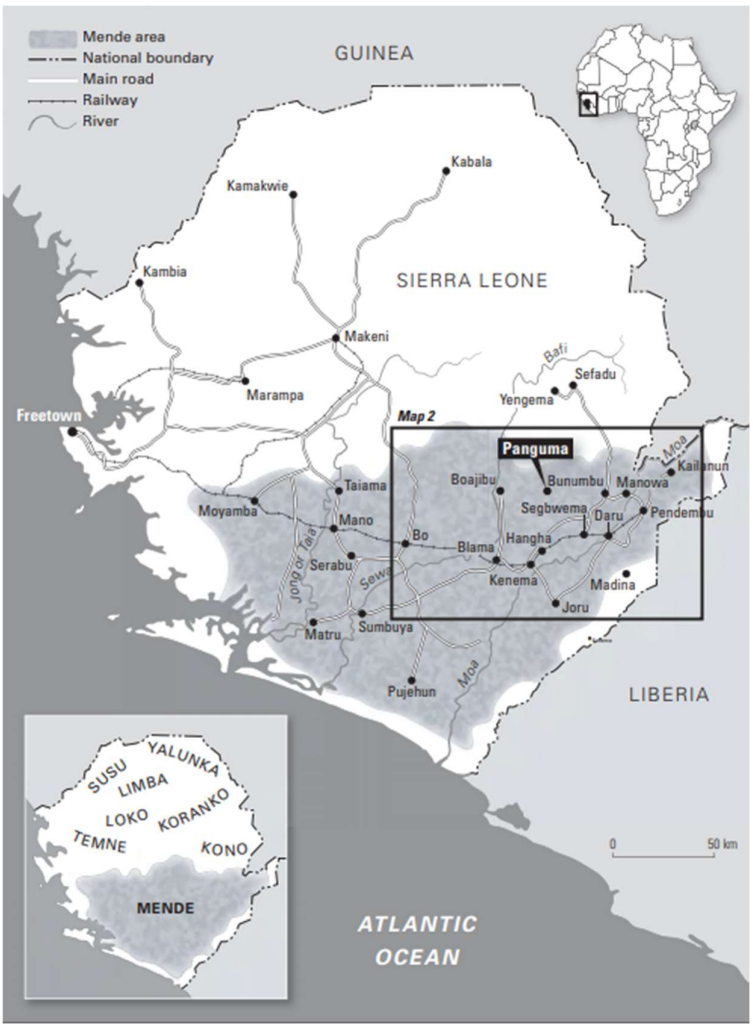
This is one of the reasons why we use complementary source-material, which we find in Hofstra's field-archive, comprised of five moving-boxes stored in the archive of the Africa Studies Centre in Leiden. Therein we find the Dutchman's fieldnotes, as well as his Sierra Leonean correspondence with missionaries, government officials and Thomas Conteh. In addition to that, it contains reports of talks with a variety of Europeans in Sierra Leone, as well as written texts for lectures, dealing with his fieldwork-experiences.[37] Together, these sources offer Hofstra's perspectives on his fieldwork and the events in and around Panguma. At the same time, they are multivocal. Because of the fact that Hofstra was interested in the effects of 'culture contact', his notes contain information about the manner in which his informants dealt with the changes brought forth by the colonial encounter.

For now, we start with Hofstra's departure from London, his disembarkment in Freetown and his first steps on the African continent.

[36] M. Gijswijt-Hofstra, *Among the Mende in Sierra Leone: The letters from Sjoerd Hofstra (1934-36)* (Leiden, 2014) x.

[37] Although Hofstra was not an accomplished photographer, the 400 photographs that he took during his stay are now accessible as well on Wikimedia Commons.

Ch. 1: Arrival in Sierra Leone and the selection of a field-site



Sierra Leone and the Mende-area.

The secretary of the IIALC, Ms. D.G. Brackett, had made it clear to Hofstra that the Institute's funds should be used for research as much as possible. Receipts should be kept and travel would be in second class.[38] Work at the costs of the Institute was not to be seen as a leisurely enterprise. On board, among tourists traveling to Madeira and Las Palmas, missionaries, traders and colonial officials, Hofstra started talking to the passengers whom he thought to be valuable

[38] D.G. Brackett also co-authored and published (1934) an article about history and geography textbooks used in Africa. – Letter from D.G. Brackett (IIALC) to S. Hofstra (31st October, 1933) ACSH, Box 5, Red Box 1, Correspondence Rockefeller Foundation and IIALC (february-1932-augustus 1936). – The map of Sierra Leone and the Mende-area has been copied from M. Gijswijt-Hofstra, *Among the Mende in Sierra Leone*, published originally in: W.T. Harris and H. Sawyerr, , *The springs of Mende belief and conduct: A discussion of the influence of the belief in the supernatural among the Mende* (Freetown, 1968).

sources of information. As promised beforehand, Hans Vischer had provided Hofstra with the names of useful contacts both on the ship and in Sierra Leone's capital Freetown. In this regard, his time both as a missionary and as Director of Education in Nigeria (1914-1919) provided him with a useful West-African network.

Thus, Vischer was able to provide a letter of introduction to Mr. Lipscombe, working for the Department of Education in Sierra Leone. Lipscombe notified Hofstra of pressing education problems which were specific to the country.[39] In addition to that, he introduced the Dutchman to other colonial officials, one of whom, Major Dare, had travelled all across Sierra Leone as head of its Survey Department. While Hofstra did not specify what he discussed with Dare, it is unlikely that he glossed over the topic of a possible field-site with an official with such expertise. Dare would have been able to give information about societal developments in the Protectorate as well, most importantly about the railway connecting Freetown to Pendembu in the east. The track crossed the Mende-area, located in Central and East-Sierra Leone. Its construction started after the Hut Tax War of 1898.[40] After the war, the building of the railway furthered both the consolidation of British overarching authority and possibilities for imperial oversight. In addition to that, the railway facilitated the development of the land's natural resources. It is no coincidence that its direction followed the west-east-axis of the oil palm-belt, with the oil-rich kernels being the Protectorate's main export product.[41] So-called 'feeder roads' would provide motorized lorries access to towns in the vicinity of the track. Along with missionary stations, mining districts, government headquarters and military barracks, Hofstra identified this railway as an arena of the 'culture contact' he sought to study.[42]

After Hofstra's arrival in Freetown on the 20th of January, 1934, his embryonic network started to grow rapidly. Not only did the Dutchman become increasingly acquainted with societal developments and practical information, these new contacts helped him decide on the

[39] Letter from Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (20th January, 1934) ATM, 18. – The optimistic paternalism accompanying the new ideals of development blinded missionaries and officials for the disjunction between their own ambitions and African needs. Until a few years prior to Hofstra's visit, students of the Freetown-based Fourah Bay College (FBC) followed a curriculum not unlike that of a classic British education. The programme, which often prepared students for a career as a missionary or teacher, taught them Greek and Latin but not much more. From talks on board, Hofstra concluded that Western education would prove to be a most interesting theme in the study of 'culture contact'. African education would be the prima arena in which Hofstra practiced Malinowski's 'practical anthropology'. This aspect of his fieldwork certainly merits its own separate study. – Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (18th January, 1934) ATM, 23.

[40] The direct cause of the war was resistance against the imposition of a direct taxation on houses in the newly established Protectorate, implying that the houses were in fact rented from the British.

[41] T.N. Goddard, *The Handbook of Sierra Leone* (New York, 1969, first published: London, 1925) 170, 180. – The British had imposed a yearly household-tax of five shillings and the kernels were the primary means of gathering enough money.

[42] S. Hofstra, Notes: 'Appreciation of what Europeans do for Africa' (date unknown) ACSH, Box 4, The Orderly File Folder "Questions".

region in which he would settle down as well. Originally, it was the plan that Charles Alleney Macavoray, Hofstra's Mende teacher at the London School of Oriental and African Studies, would follow the Dutchman to Sierra Leone. It was clearly the intention that they would continue to work with each other there. Alleney gave Hofstra two letters of introduction which he could present to Alleney's uncles, the rulers of Tikonko and Bo in Central Sierra Leone. In these letters, Alleney asked if his uncles could help Hofstra wherever they could. Furthermore, the letters imply that Alleney wanted some of his nephews to work for Hofstra, either as 'boys' or informants.[43] Yet, when Hofstra sent his teacher a letter on board of his ship to Sierra Leone, it returned as undeliverable. For an unknown reason, Alleney ended up staying in London.[44]

Thus, Hofstra opened his eyes for alternative regions and field-networks. Before his departure from England he had made sure he could stay with Reverend James Horstead, the principal of Fourah Bay College (FBC) and soon to be archbishop of West-Africa. At the college he met Dr. Alfred Sumner, to whom Vischer had written a letter of introduction as well. Sumner was also known by IIALC-affiliate and linguist Diedrich Westermann, as he, himself a Sherbo by birth, had produced grammars for the Sherbo, Temne and Mende languages.[45] Sumner had considerable experience as a teacher and was well-informed about the life north of Bo. In addition to these knowledgeable men, the students of FBC and a range of government officials in the Department of Education, Hofstra got acquainted with a group of Wesleyan Methodist missionaries who happened to be in Freetown to visit a mission-conference. Primarily active in and around the eastern towns of Bunumbu, Segbwema and Kailahun, they were in a prime position to inform the Dutchman on alternatives to Alleney's home-region.

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[43] Letter from C.A. Macavoray to A.K. Macavoray (Almamy Kamgbai) (undated) ACSH, Box 3, Folder "Panguma". – Letter from C.A. Macavoray to Chief Boyima of Bo (undated) ACSH, Box 3, Folder "Panguma".

[44] Charles Alleney Macavoray certainly merits his own study, as much remains unknown about him. The contact which he had with Hofstra continued after the Dutchman's first and second stay in the field, when he returned to London. Alleney was active in London civil society, discussing and introducing papers and talks for learned societies such as the Royal Anthropological Institute. Yet, he had to make ends meet by playing in movies and by reading palms in the streets of London, an activity which caused him to be jailed for four days. It appears as if Alleney possessed a deep sense of pride for both the Mende and his family, and sought to play an active role in the representation of his people. One can only imagine how different Hofstra's fieldwork experiences had been if Alleney had indeed accompanied him. On the whole, the experiences of African teachers in the metropole have been sparsely studied, which hides form sight the fact that African agency in anthropological research did not necessarily commence in the field. Ian Brown explores the history of the SOAS 'from the Director's office rather than as viewed from the classroom and the common room'. – I. Brown, *The School of Oriental and African Studies: Imperial Training and the Expansion of Learning* (Cambridge, 2016) 4. – A notable exception is Sarah Pugach's study of the Berlin-based African *Lektoren* in: S. Pugach, *Africa in Translation: A history of colonial linguistics in Germany and beyond, 1815-1945* (Ann Arbor, 2011) 141-159.

[45] Alfred Sumner graduated from an United Brethren in Christ Mission School in Shengeh and the Rufus Clark Training School before he went to the United States to pursue his studies. He would be the first black graduate from Lebanon Valley College in Pennsylvania, thereafter he spent two years at the Mission Training School in New York before returning to Africa: Source: https://libguides.lvc.edu/c.php?g=333761&p=2241441 (visited on 17-4-2021).

Overall, Hofstra grew to appreciate these Methodists, as he thought them to be broadminded and appreciative of anthropological insights.[46]

Thus, Hofstra's field-site was by no-means selected before he left Freetown; neither was it prescribed to him by the colonial administration. Therefore it is possible to examine the considerations and factors underlying this important decision. How did Hofstra select his field-site?

One of the instances in which colonial assumptions could slip into this process revolved around the notion of 'tribal characteristics'. In the colonial imagination positive or negative character traits were often perceived as being generally applicable to a given 'tribe'. In talks with Hofstra, multiple officials and missionaries emphasized the positive character traits of the Mende and at times pitted them against the more negative ones of the Temne. The Mende were prized for their courtesy and open-mindedness, they possessed a natural dignity and were not shy or nervous in new circumstances.[47] Perhaps these officials and missionaries were not trying to convince Hofstra to study 'their people', as the Mende were already selected, but it is likely that they wanted to make sure that he did not change his mind. Regardless of these motivations, Hofstra probably did not let these assertions influence him too much, as one of his specific fieldwork-interests was personal differentiation. His doctoral thesis had focussed on the spectrum between individuality and collectivism in 'primitive life'. What it does illustrate is, for example, that the Methodists attempted to draw Hofstra to their region. As mentioned, Hofstra noticed that they saw value in anthropological information.

Other considerations were more in line with the colonial assumptions of his time, as he characterized his departure from Freetown as a departure from civilisation itself: 'Here in Freetown I am still partly in the civilised world with electric light and running water. Soon these will also be lacking.' Yet, he led this dichotomy in another direction than some of the 'colonialist types' he had encountered. Having dabbled in the artistic as a writer of prose-songs before his studies, he would later profess that he liked to be an artist and a scientist at the same time. He set out to complete a 'picture' of the Mende, to 'paint a situation in words' or to describe events 'almost as is done in a novel', not unlike an artist seeking to express himself in order to fulfil a creative urge.[48] Characteristic of the romantic 'seeker'-mentality typical of those intellectuals disgruntled with industrialised society, he saw his venture as an exercise in societal

[46] Hofstra was not against the Christian faith, yet he recognized the fact that a European version of Christianity, with its specific social ethics, could not be readily transferred to other cultural and social contexts.
[47] S. Hofstra, 'Verslag 24-27 Jan' (24-27th, 1934) 30, ACSH, Box 4, SISWO Envelope: Folder "Verslaf".
[48] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (15th April, 1934) ATM, 66-67. – Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (8th July, 1934) ATM, 95. – Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (19th August, 1934) ATM, 109.

reflection as well. As he wrote to his mother, one of the aspects which had attracted him about his journey was the fact that he would get the opportunity to think about the meaning of civilisation and its absence. 'I would very much like to find out how the simple negroes live without electricity, books, churches, etc., what it means to them, and which values civilization has and which dangers, for us and for them.'[49]

His notion of a viable field-site was further influenced by the assumption that there existed a traditional form of Mende life. This form was then diluted the closer one came to the railway. In order to explore this third consideration we will follow Hofstra's railway-travels, starting from his departure from Freetown on the 2nd of February, 1934. Regarding the place of the railway in colonial imagination as a harbinger of civilisation, we can state that it was a rickety harbinger at best. It was jokingly rumoured that passengers had to bring an umbrella with them during the raining season in order to stay dry. The track was excessively curvy too, as the government had offered to pay the responsible contractor per mile of train-track.[50]

Apparently, the Methodists had succeeded in their effort to draw Hofstra to their region, as Hofstra only stopped for one night in Bo before he proceeded further east to Kenema. Here, the Dutchman first writes of the way in which the power-imbalance in colonial society could affect his fieldwork. Provincial Commissioner (P.C.) Stocks guided him through the market and the court square, providing information on the Mende throughout. Wondering whether this was the right of every European, Hofstra followed Stocks when he 'entered everywhere without asking'.[51] In Kenema, Hofstra felt like he was in 'real native life' for the first time, which Stocks was 'of course, far better able to show [him] as anybody else.'[52] That notion persisted until the next stop, in the railway-town of Segbwema, when Hofstra regrouped with his new missionary acquaintances.

There, the utility of the missionary network proved itself to the Dutchman, as its members quickly catalysed his research project. Hofstra visited the town's mission house, where he explained his work to a number of young Mende, who were then encouraged by the acting missionary A.P. Sanders to supply him with as much information as they could.[53] During Hofstra's two-week stay in Segbwema, at least three of these mission-affiliated Mende indeed

[49] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (30th January, 1934) ATM, 32.
[50] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (5th February, 1934) ATM, 33. – S. Hofstra, Lecture: 'Het denken der natuurvolken' (The thought of primitive people) (Rotterdam, 1st September, 1940) 5, ACSH, Box 5, Green Folder "Over Mendi".
[51] S. Hofstra, 'Verslag 24-27 Jan' (24-27th, 1934) 27, ACSH, Box 4, SISWO Envelope: Folder "Verslaf".
[52] Ibidem, 25.
[53] This is likely Reverend A.P. Sanders – S. J. Yambasu, Order and Disorder: The Mende and Missionary Case, *Paideuma: Mitteilungen zur Kulturkunde, Vol. 39* (1993) 111-134, 122. – Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (18th February, 1934) ATM, 40.

came to visit him. Especially the nurse Samuel Ndoko would later play an important role in Hofstra's anthropological venture. Yet more importantly, it was via the mission that Hofstra first came into contact with Thomas Conteh, whom he employed as an interpreter and who would rapidly prove to be indispensable for Hofstra's fieldwork.

Conteh introduced Hofstra to Mende life in a far more intimate manner than P.C. Stocks ever could. This is best illustrated by one of the first times Conteh helped him. When Hofstra heard crying one morning in Segbwema, Conteh went on to enquire and found out that a young boy had died the day before on the road to the hospital. Whereas Hofstra was at first shy to go, expecting the family to be unappreciative of the presence of an outsider, Conteh reassured him that the people were instead glad when strangers came to show their sympathy.[54] Here, Hofstra's access was provided not primarily on the basis of the authority of his companion Stocks, but on Conteh's knowledge and interpretation of a social event. In addition to his ability to gauge such events, Conteh was able to inform Hofstra on the local interpretation of the cause of death: a *boa-constrictor*. In its human form, the *boa* had selected the boy, to whom he returned during the night in order to wrap firmly around his breast. The next morning the boy vomited and his bones had 'felt soft' according to his mother.[55] As Conteh was the son of a *ndomahei* in the town of Daru, he had a considerable network of his own. He quickly surpassed Commissioner Stocks as Hofstra's expert-guide in Mende matters.

As mentioned, Hofstra stayed in Segbwema for two weeks, as he used the town as a temporary base from which he could further scout possible field-sites. To that end, he made further use of the missionary network, by touring the region with two Bunumbu-missionaries, in their car. In terms of the study of 'culture contact', Hofstra made a distinction between three types of settlements, dependent on their placement in relation to the railway; small villages relatively far from the tracks, larger towns alongside 'feeder roads', and railway-towns.

Eventually his choice fell on Panguma, belonging to the second category. In Hofstra's mind, Panguma was suitable for a number of reasons. First off, it was a town and thus one of the fundamental units in any chiefdom, as the landowners who controlled the countryside resided there.[56] Such landowners or 'big men' ('one who scatters money') were more likely to be 'men of the world' and were subsequently perceived to be more able and more ready to give ethnological information than villagers. In this sense, towns were expected to harbour diverse

[54] S. Hofstra, 'Verslag 13th February' (13th February, 1934) ACSH, Box 4, SISWO Envelope: Folder "Verslaf".
[55] Ibidem.
[56] K.L. Little, Mende Political Institutions in Transition, *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute, Vol. 17, No. 1* (1947) 8-23, 9.

interests and experiences. In terms of 'culture contact', Panguma was an ideal hodgepodge of those forces capable of inducing societal change; there was trade in palm-kernels and circulation of money, there were a number of shops owned by Syrians and Creoles, missionaries of the United Brethren in Christ had opened up a primary school and the town knew a Muslim community with a small mosque.[57] All of these factors made Panguma suitable for the study of 'real Mendi life and also of aspects of change', again implying the existence of an untampered Mende life.

When we explore Hofstra's considerations further, it becomes clear that he recognized fully that his 'field' was a negotiated space, with the *ndomahei* being its primary gatekeeper. He was in need of a ruler who understood and approved of his work:

> It is a necessary condition for the success of fieldwork to have the help or at least the consent of the chief. A fieldworker who would start his studies in a village or a smaller town, would, even if he had the consent of the paramount chief, experience a great reluctance on part of the people to give any information of fear of the chief. It would take a long time to overcome suspicion.[58]

As such, one of the cornerstones of his selection-procedure was the recognition of future African agency in his research project. Firstly, he foresaw the considerable sway the *ndomahei* would hold over his endeavour, and secondly, he accounted for the ability of individual Mende to redact their statements in order to avoid harm.

This recognition of *ndomahei*-influence tied in with his multicausal dismissal of Segbwema as a viable location for his fieldwork. Hofstra wrote to his adoptive mother that Segbwema's *ndomahei* was not against him, but he did not co-operate with him either. He was not interested in the Dutchman and his work.: 'Then one doesn't get co-operation from the population in the end'.[59] Furthermore, Hofstra found Segbwema's *ndomahei* to be less educated and distinguished than James Quee of Panguma, he was even seen as a bit greedy.[60]

Other, though less important, considerations were of an aesthetic and practical nature. These were not communicated to the IIALC but do arise from the letters Hofstra wrote to his adoptive mother. Surrounded as it was by substantial hills, Panguma had made a pleasant, attractive impression on the Dutchman.[61] Upon arrival Hofstra was the only white man in town,

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[57] S. Hofstra, 'Notes on the progress of fieldwork among the Mendi' (date unknown) 13, ACSH, Box 3, Folder "Panguma".
[58] Ibidem, 14-15.
[59] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (1st April, 1934) ATM, 57.
[60] Ibidem.
[61] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (18th February, 1934) ATM, 40.

but he was certainly not the first to set foot there. Until a few years prior, the town had even housed the District Headquarters:

> There is therefore a good water supply and a good rest house, a sort of bungalow, very different from the usual rest houses made from clay. After a comparison of several places, I think that I can best settle there at first.[62]

Running water, which he expected to be lacking when he left Freetown, made it possible for the rest-house to be outfitted with a bathtub and a shower. In addition to safeguarding Hofstra's comfort, the piping provided hill-water to a handful of street-pumps as well. While settling in Panguma, the Dutchman grew quite content in his four-room bungalow, with its veranda and garden. Thus started Hofstra's and Conteh's first period of fieldwork.

[62] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (18th February, 1934) ATM, 40.

Ch. 2: 'Polygamy complex': The incidental 'anthropologization' of Mende marriage practices

Bringing Hofstra into contact with Conteh was not the only way in which the mission aided the Dutchman. As the latter had noticed in Freetown, some of the missionaries from Bunumbu were equipped with 'scholastic minds', a given which likely played a part in Hofstra's field-site selection. The missionaries paid considerable scholarly attention to topics which were of direct relevance to their proselytizing mission, such as Mende marriage-patterns.[63] This was recognized by Hofstra, who made use of these efforts for his own inquiries.[64]

> Among the Methodist missionaries, who are on a much higher plane than the representatives of the American mission, one has sympathetic persons who try to empathize with the people and also put in a lot of work studying the indigenous language. Their only disadvantage is that they have an ineradicable "polygamy complex". As long as one avoids that delicate point, one can have a long discussion.[65]

Thus Hofstra wrote to his adoptive mother of missionary sensitivity regarding this most delicate point. Yet in reality, it was a recurring topic during his talks with the Methodists. It was by no means avoided. The nature of some of these interactions speaks to Peter Pels's assertion that disagreements between anthropologists and officials should not just be seen in terms of opposition but as signs of convergence as well.[66] He finds that in the first half of the twentieth century, administrators in Tanganyika became increasingly convinced that their expertise should be professionalised along anthropological lines. Furthermore, he and Oscar Saleminck suggest that we see academic anthropology as a specific instance of ethnographic practice,

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[63] Mende polygamy had both social and economic meanings. Having multiple wives meant that the husband was affluent, as he had sufficient means to pay multiple bride-prices. Thus, the amount of wives a man had largely determined his societal status. As the prime means of existence for the Mende was rice-farming, a labour-intensive crop, having multiple wives meant more acreage and thus a more bountiful harvest. In this sense, without denying the possibility for a loving relationship, marriage could be seen as a capital investment. This meant that those with an excessive amount of wives had the means to ascend the socio-economic ladder firmly in their hands. Young men could bind themselves to a 'big man' and work for him on his farm until he was given a woman to marry. – K. Little, *The Mende of Sierra Leone*, 142. – In Hofstra's time there were *ndomaheis* with as many as two hundred spouses. Conteh likely had five or six wives.

[64] Hofstra's archive contains a number of language books, such as 'Simple Lessons in the Mende Language', as well as translations of Bible books.

[65] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (14th February, 1935) ATM, 169.

[66] P. Pels, Global 'experts' and 'African' minds: Tanganyika anthropology as public and secret service, 1925-61, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, Vol. 17* (2011) 788-810, 789.

instead of the other way around.[67] As we will see, the emphasis on ethnographic holism; the interrelation of societal aspects, was not brought to Sierra Leone by Hofstra, but had already been established, by what Jean Michaud would call 'incidental ethnographers', in missionary circles.[68] On the topic of Mende polygamy, we can speak of a local ethnographic tradition which Hofstra would not supplant but in which he would instead participate.

Lyn Schumaker argues that such incidental ethnographers established 'patterns of access to knowledge' of African communities, or European 'pathways to places and people'.[69] Most importantly, the mission preconditioned Hofstra's fieldwork by providing access to people, as many of his informants had been trained by the mission. Yet, by virtue of their own enquiries, the missionaries partially 'anthropologized' Mende-communities as well.[70] In this chapter, we will build on these notions of Pels, Saleminck and Schumaker in order to illustrate how Hofstra made further use of the scholarly fruits of these preestablished patterns of access to knowledge. Furthermore, we examine how the nature of this process of 'incidental anthropologization' influenced the way in which Africans such as Thomas Conteh responded to Hofstra's inquiry.

Incidental 'anthropologization'

A noteworthy document in Hofstra's archive is the programme of the Sierra Leonean Missionaries Retreat of 1934. Questions guiding the retreat's discussions centred around government legislation against polygamy and the mission's stance towards Mende-rulers with excessive amounts of wives. Another discussion-group focussed on the question whether the mission should work to limit the power and authority of these rulers, as the imposition of Indirect Rule in the Protectorate had strengthened this authority and thus the chiefly ability for marital hoarding.[71] The Methodist missionary Harris, who helped Hofstra select his field-site, stated that *ndomaheis* were able to cut down opposition more easily, while in pre-colonial times

[67] P. Pels and O. Saleminck, Introduction: Five theses on ethnography as colonial practice, 5.
[68] J. Michaud, *'Incidental' Ethnographers: French Catholic Missions on the Tonkin-Yunnan Frontier, 1880-1930* (Leiden, 2007) 11.
[69] L. Schumaker, *Africanizing Anthropology*, 91-92.
[70] L. Schumaker, *Africanizing Anthropology*, 15.
[71] Unknown author, Polygamy (Missionaries' Retreat, Dec. 1934) ACSH, Box 3, Acme Manilla folder: S.H. notes anent family situations, (English), Dec. 1934. – In 1934, an official from the Provincial Commissioners Office in Kenema sent Hofstra multiple copies of Vergette's booklet on 'Certain Marriage Customs of some of the Tribes in the Protectorate of Sierra Leone', suggesting that he should 'go through the booklet very carefully with a few sensible and well-informed mendi people', who were 'thoroughly up to their finger tips into what Mr. Vergette so ably recorded very many years ago' – Letter from H.B. Williams to S. Hofstra (17th September, 1934) ACSH, Box 5, Envelop 'Koninklijke Nederlandse Academie'.

a *ndomahei* could perhaps be killed when he was 'too greedy' in this regard.[72] The fact that polygamy itself was problematic seems to have been readily accepted by the retreat's organizers.

The guiding force of the conference had been a research project finished by one of the Methodist missionaries, who processed it into an paper which was read and discussed during the gathering. The author, Kenneth Crosby, had been in Sierra Leone since 1929 and had made himself useful for the Methodist missionary effort in a number of ways. In 1933, he became the first principal of Bunumbu Union College, a training centre for Mende schoolteachers which had previously trained the mission's catechists.[73] Additionally, Crosby did much to popularize the Mende-script and emphasized the importance of vernacular literacy and writing skills in general. In line with these convictions, he translated large parts of the Bible in this local script.[74] Crosby had promised Hofstra to send him his paper when the two first met in the train from Freetown and he eventually did so in December of 1934. Implying that he liked to have it published if Hofstra thought it worthwhile, he stressed that he would like Hofstra to keep the copy; 'to make what use of it (if any)' that he could.[75]

We indeed find a copy of Crosby's paper in Hofstra's archive, containing the latter's notes in the side-lines. As was common for missionaries, Crosby saw little to commend polygamous marital practices and he criticized them heavily. In the side-lines of Hofstra's copy, the Dutchman nuanced or rebutted these criticisms one by one, often falling back on comparisons with European realities. Crosby pointed to irregularities in the relations between Mende-men and women caused by polygamous marriage practices, as well as to the fact that these practices caused the command of labour to be in the hands of the wealthy, who could afford to have more wives. According to Hofstra, these irregularities were inherent to every family system. Furthermore, he deemed the command of labour in Europe to be as dependent on wealth and privilege as it was for the Mende. Whereas Crosby cited Mende folk tales about the instabilities of polygamous married life and the unsuitable atmosphere if offered for child-raising, Hofstra pointed at similarities with European novels about married life. Lastly, Crosby stated that equality in married life was inconceivable within a polygamous system. The

[72] S. Hofstra, 'Verslag 11th February' (11th February, 1934) ACSH, Box 4, SISWO Envelope: Folder "Verslaf".
[73] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (14th February, 1935) ATM, 169.
[74] K. Tuchscherer, Kenneth Hubert Crosby (1904–1998): pioneer scholar of the Mende language, *Journal of African Cultural Studies, Vol. 11, No. 2* (1998) 217-220.
[75] Letter from K.H. Crosby to S. Hofstra (30th December, 1934) ACSH, Box 5, Red Box 1, Folder: Correspondentie binnen Sierra Leone 1934-1939.

Dutchman brushed the assertion aside on the grounds of it being based on an idealised view of European society, where he did not see marital equality either.[76]

Admittedly, sharp rebuttals like these can be entertaining to read at first. Yet, focussing on these opposing valuations would hide from sight an important convergence. In the conclusion of his article, Crosby stated that him and his colleagues should be less vague and more informed in their stance on the matter if they were to be convincing.[77] Thus, before Crosby wrote of the presumed shortcomings of the system, he set out to study and describe it in full. Therefore, his denunciation of polygamy cannot simply be seen as an instance of moral dumbfounding. Crosby did not just blatantly state it was a bad practice, he gave a list of reasons why he thought it was a detriment to lower-class Mende. At most, his denunciation was an instance of motivated reasoning. The exact nature of the differing value-judgements of Crosby and Hofstra points at significant convergence in their respective notions of the way in which polygamy should be studied. It is in these passages of Crosby's paper that we can clearly see his influence on the Dutchman.

If we read Hofstra's notes in the side-lines of Crosby's paper, as well as the accompanying sheets with questions and lines of inquiry stemming from Hofstra's reading, we cannot reasonably conclude that he saw Crosby as an amateur. Instead, he saw Crosby's article as a useful source on which he could himself built.[78] Furthermore, the men had similar base-assumptions of how Mende-society could best be studied. One of Crosby's opening statements, in which he reminded his audience that polygamy could not be abstracted from the general social organisation, was underlined in red in Hofstra's copy. In addition to this shared attention to ethnographic holism, both men understood that African realities were changing due to contact with Europeans. The missionary paid attention to changes brought to the division of labour by the abolition of serfdom in 1928 and identified new ways in which Mende men had put themselves in relations of dependency, which Hofstra acknowledged.

In addition to these assumptions, among which the importance of language comprehension should be listed, their methodologies showed similarities as well. Crosby had turned to Mende kinship-terminology in order to understand their marriage patterns, as Hofstra

[76] Furthermore, Crosby saw a direct causation between the frequent occurrence of venereal diseases, sterility and polygamy, but Hofstra linked these ailments to living conditions rather than the legal form of marriage.
[77] K.H. Crosby, *Polygamous marriage among the Mende* (unpublished, 1934) 27, ACSH, Box 4, Acme Manilla Folder.
[78] Hofstra met Crosby a second time, when he was invited to stay a weekend in Bunumbu. During this second visit, Crosby himself would function as an informant for Hofstra. He asked the missionary about the mission's success in regard to conversions, how they went about handling their teachers, catechists and the pupils of Bunumbu Union College – S. Hofstra, Notes, '16-18 Febr. 35' (16-18th February, 1935) ACSH, Box 3, Folder "Education".

himself did. Much of Crosby's information was attained from members of his congregation. These were not all Mende of modest means, as we learn that one of them, A.J. Kallon, perhaps a relative of Conteh's nephew Said, had a brother who himself had forty wives. For Crosby, insights did not only come from the lower strata of Mende society. The same was true for Conteh, who himself had five or six wives and whose father in Daru likely had many more. For both men, data complementing the sessions of direct questioning was provided by a statistical inquiry which mapped the overall demographics and marital status of the sample. For Hofstra this was the town of Panguma, and for Crosby a total of twenty villages surrounding Bunumbu.[79] Like his paper, the results of Crosby's demographic enquiries are present in Hofstra's archive.[80]

African agency: The pitfalls of honesty

Thus, the Methodists 'anthropologized' Mende-polygamy before Hofstra arrived in Panguma, and the Dutchman made use of the fruits of this enquiry. Yet, Lyn Schumaker's notions of 'anthropologization' and 'patterns of access' leave place for African agency, as African experiences with missionaries and administrators affected the ways in which they reacted to the anthropologists who followed.[81] The fact that Hofstra and Crosby differed in their value-judgements ultimately did matter for their respective studies. Informants approximated the risks of talking about polygamy with missionaries and anthropologists and redacted their answers accordingly.

Hofstra was interested in the effect of the presence of the mission on Mende-society; a prime example of 'culture contact'. As a consequence, he inquired as to what his mission-affiliated informants thought of the social ethics of the mission. He found out that they almost unanimously found monogamy to be without value. Conteh, for example, did not think that salvation before God was dependent on whether he had one or two wives.[82]

Yet, due to the mission's 'polygamy complex' Conteh would likely not have shared this information when a missionary asked him the same question. He had been trained as a catechist in Bunumbu, but one of the reasons why he was suspended was because the mission found out that he had multiple wives.[83] He himself seems to have kept this a secret, but his second wife

[79] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (24th October, 1934) ATM, 134.
[80] K.H. Crosby, 'Results of questionnaire on Polygamy' (date unknown) ACSH, Box 3, Acme Manilla Folder.
[81] L. Schumaker, *Africanizing Anthropology*, 92.
[82] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (30th April, 1934) ATM, 77.
[83] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (14th February, 1935) ATM, 169.

Lucia complained to the mission when he married a third time.[84] By answering such questions honestly, Crosby's informants had significantly more to lose than those of Hofstra, as the way in which they talked about polygamous marriage could have a direct impact on their status in the missionary network. Hofstra's informants could talk more freely, as they felt that their position in the missionary network was not endangered if they spoke with him. Far from it, he offered a listening ear for their grievances. Hofstra was convinced that he had come to know more about instances of deception and Mende-opinion of monogamy than the missionaries themselves.[85] Three months into his fieldwork, he wrote to Ms. Overdiep:

> The demands on the part of the missionaries are perhaps too stern for the negroes. The result is the same behaviour, plus lies. It's a difficult problem for the mission. Because I now know a few of the people who have been educated by them and are partly working for them, I find out better what the actual practice is like.[86]

In this chapter, we have examined a precondition of access stemming from the missionary presence in the Mende-area. Most importantly, the 'patterns of access to knowledge' shaped by the Methodist mission were indispensable for Hofstra's venture. Yet, we have argued that Hofstra made use of the scholarly fruits of these preestablished inroads into Mende-society as well. In doing so, we compared the research practices of the Dutchman with those of the 'incidental ethnographer' Kenneth Crosby. We have argued that their differing value-judgments should not negate the methodological convergence which ultimately made a disagreement of this nature possible. This convergence meant that Hofstra could use Crosby's study for his own ends. Yet, the way in which both men valued Mende-polygamy is still important for our understanding of Hofstra's enquiries into the topic, as it influenced the way in which Africans reacted to him. We will see this form of African agency return when we examine a second line of inquiry, which highlights a precondition formed by the British colonial administration.

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[84] According to Conteh, he had married a third woman because his second wife Lucia, who had also been trained by the mission, did not cook for him. – S. Hofstra, Notes: 'Marriage difficulties of monogamy' (24th May, 1936) ACSH, Box 4, Green Folder – Another reason for his suspension was his inquisitive nature and predilection for mingling in village-affairs. Given this fact, it is perhaps not surprising that Conteh liked working with Hofstra. Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (18th February, 1934) ATM, 38.

[85] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (8th April, 1934) ATM, 61.

[86] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (30 April 1934) ATM, 76. – This conviction returns in a report in which Hofstra propagated the value of anthropological insights for the mission. Therein he elaborated on anthropological impartiality in the eyes of the local populace and the restraint which the Mende would show when faced with missionary or administrative enquiries in sensitive topics. In turn, potential converts were perfectly capable of seeing through the hypocrisy of catechists who championed Christian morality while being secretly polygamous themselves. – S. Hofstra, To the Roman Catholic Mission Station at Blama and the United Brethren in Christ Mission (date unknown) ACSH, Box 5, Red Box 2.

Ch. 3: West-Africa's final riddle: Preconditions of access to the Poro and 'secret' information

In preparation for their fieldwork in Africa, Malinowski's students co-authored a memorandum about research in West-Africa, to which each of them later added a brief schematic piece about a specific topic. Hofstra's contribution focussed on secret societies, and he finalised it on board to Sierra Leone.[87] In Panguma, Hofstra was able to study the Poro from up close. In this chapter, we will examine how the colonial presence preconditioned Hofstra's access to the society and its 'secrets'. Furthermore, we again see individual Mende assess the dangers of sharing information.

Education, defined either as the act of transmitting knowledge or as the arena in which children transitioned into functioning members of society, was by no means brought to Africa by the mission. In Sierra Leone, as in other parts of Africa, these functions came together in what became known as 'secret societies' in Western discourse. Mende-towns harboured lodges of the Poro for boys and the Sande for girls. During their puberty, the Mende-youth partook in an initiation ceremony and followed a training in the designated Poro- or Sande-bush.[88]

In addition to this educational and initiatory role, the Poro could be seen as quasi-governmental and legislative, as, certainly in precolonial times, it controlled *ndomahei*-power. Furthermore, it functioned as an political assembly, in which topics such as Mende-warfare, political succession and *ndomahei*-burials were discussed. According to Hofstra's successor Kenneth Little, its officials canalized and embodied supernatural power. Comparing them to the medieval European churches, he stated that they acted as a legislative body by laying down various rules of conduct and behaviour and remitting those breaking taboos.[89] The adjective 'secret' was added because supernatural punishment would be inflicted on those speaking of its ceremonies and bush-gatherings to non-members.[90] They could get ill or bring other misfortunes upon themselves. As almost every Mende-man was a member of at least the lower

[87] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (18th January, 1934) ATM, 22.
[88] Depending on the duration of the initiate's stay, which itself depended on the size of the purse of the parents, boys and girls were trained in all aspects of Mende life, including their future social roles. Boys learned to sing, drum and dance, but also to obey their elders. Local law and customs were included, as well as mock courts and trials. Instruction by local specialists in local crafts such as weaving, basketry, netmaking, trap-setting and bridge-building became available for those who could afford to stay for a longer time. The different tasks performed during farming and public duties figured on the curriculum as well – K. Little, *The Mende of Sierra Leone,* 121.
[89] K. Little, *The Mende of Sierra Leone*, 240.
[90] S. Hofstra, Lecture: Het denken der natuurvolken (The thought of primitive peoples).

Poro-level, these secrets had a public nature in male company. Still, its secrets were hidden from strangers, women and children.

Thanks to its authoritative status in Mende life, as well as its 'mysteriousness', the Poro had taken a central place in the British colonial imagination for as long as it had been encountered. Images depicting aspects of its secrecy, such as the curtained entrance of the Poro-bush or its masked dancers, were popular scenes on exoticized postcards sent to the metropole.[91] Yet, to the British colonial administration, this 'mysteriousness' was more than just scenic. The British distrusted the Poro precisely because of the secrecy which surrounded it, and certainly because it formed a body of authority which they could not control as easily as the local *ndomahei*. A prime example of this distrust was the fact that in the aftermath of the Hut Tax War, the British thought that the lodges of the Poro harboured political dissidents and organized resistance to the colonial apparatus. The central planning possible by the Poro's overarching structure was seen as the prime facilitator of the quick and unified resistance effort in 1898.[92]

This distrusting attitude was further fuelled by the fact that lodges of the Poro were at times conflated with so-called murder-societies as the Human Leopard Society, which were outlawed.[93] Shrouded in secrecy and feeding colonial concerns regarding cannibalism until well in the twentieth century, their members were rumoured to murder in order to collect organs, blood and human fat for the making of *bofima*, a medicine granting political power and wealth.[94] Both legal and illegal societies were recurring topics in the articles written for *Sierra Leone Studies*, the journal published by the colonial administration.[95]

During this first phase of colonial state-building, which emphasized the establishment of law and order, the British were continuously vigilant regarding the murder-societies. Reported cases figured prominently in colonial documentation in the direct aftermath of the Hut

[91] N. Guyer, Picturing Secrecy? The Visualization of "Secret Societies" in Historical Photographs from Sierra Leone, Liberia and Cameroon, *Visual Anthropology, Vol. 27, No. 4* (2014) 410-414, 411.
[92] A. Abraham, *Mende government and politics under colonial rule,* 158-160.
[93] K.H.B. Keefer, Poro on Trial: The 1913 Special Commission Court case of Rex v. Fino, Bofio and Kalfalla, *African Studies Review, Volume 61, Number 3* (2018) 56-78, 58.
[94] Ibidem. – Other presumed benefits of *bofima* we find in R.G. Berry's narrative: A great point was made of supremacy over the white man, in the white man not being able to find out what was being done, and that the eating of human flesh would give power over the white man. For, say they, " the white men have more power than the black men ; but in this cannibalism you get some power so that when you do wrong you will not be found out by the white man. – R.G. Berry, The Sierra Leone Cannibals, with Notes on Their History, Religion, and Customs, *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy: Archaeology, Culture, History, Literature, Vol. 30* (1912-1913) 15-70, 51.
[95] In these articles, discourse surrounding these societies was at times central to the reification of dichotomies underpinning colonial ideology. In cases in which bodies were found, western expertise and rationality, personified by British medical officers, were placed in direct opposition to indigenous emotionality and superstition. Autopsies performed on the corpses of supposed victims would often reveal animal bitemarks instead of wounds caused by humans. – H. Ross (P.C. Southern Province), Man-Killing Apes, *Sierra Leone Studies, No. 6* (1922).

Tax War. Specialized courts were established and colonial officers were granted judicial powers which went against the principles of Indirect Rule if Human Leopard activity was presumed in a given chiefdom.[96] The amount of cases dwindled after the 1910s, following the strengthening of British influence in the Protectorate, but even though these cases were mainly registered in a single chiefdom (Imperri), fear of the murders kept resonating in colonial minds until decolonisation.[97] Especially in the first two decades of the twentieth century, disdain for the Poro followed shortly, as illustrated by Special Court Judge William Griffith's depiction of secret societies in his description of the cases in 1915:

> What they need is a substitute for their bottomless wells of secret societies, for their playing at being leopards or alligators and acting the part with such realism that they not only kill their quarry but even devour it. In my opinion the only way to extirpate these objectionable societies is the introduction of four R's – the fourth, Religion, being specially needed to supply the place of the native crude beliefs. … The remedy must go deeper than mere punishment: the Human Leopard Society must be superseded by Education and Religion.[98]

This conflation of legal and illegal societies was the reason why Hofstra disliked the term 'secret societies', as its adjective implied that it concerned itself with illegal activities.[99]

The twofold British suspicion of the Poro seems to have led to Mende attempts at alleviating distrust in the first part of the twentieth century, as some of its lodges started to open themselves up to European membership. Hereafter, the secret societies and the beliefs surrounding them where no longer merely used to affirm differences between the colonizers and the colonized. The Austrian ethnologist Ralph Eberl-Elber even centred one of his books

[96] K.J. Beatty, *Human Leopards: An account of the trials of human leopards before the Special Commission Court; with a note on Sierra Leone, Past and Present* (London, 1915) 6-14.
[97] P. Richards, Public authority and its demons: the Sherbro leopard murders in Sierra Leone, *Africa, Vol. 91, No. 2* (2021) 226–48, 230.
[98] W.B. Griffith, Preface, ix, in: K.J. Beatty, *Human Leopards.*.
[99] S. Hofstra, Lecture: Het denken der natuurvolken (The thinking of primitive peoples).– After his fieldwork had ended, Hofstra was asked by the D.C. of Kenema whether he had come across any information about the Human Leopards during his fieldwork. We find a draft of the Dutchman's response in his archive, in which he states that it is hard to get any information on the murder-societies. Yet, from one of his notes, we learn that Kaifala, a chief of a section of James Quee's territory, had asked Quee if he wanted to start a lodge of the Human Leopards in Panguma. Quee declined. We do not know the contents of the letter which Hofstra eventually sent to the D.C., but the Dutchman makes no mention of Kaifala in the draft-version. – Letter from D.C. of Kenema to S. Hofstra (3rd May, 1939) ACSH, Box. 5, Red Box 1, Folder: Correspondentie binnen Sierra Leone 1934-1939. – Draft Letter S. Hofstra to D.C. of Kenema (draft) (date unknown) ACSH, Box. 5, Red Box 1, Folder: Correspondentie binnen Sierra Leone 1934-1939. – S. Hofstra, 'Secret societies' (10th October, 1934) ACSH, Box 2, Folder Mende aantekeningen.

around the feat of him joining the Poro, thereby solving West-Africa's 'final riddle'.[100] Senior District Commissioner (D.C.) H.G. Warren referred to his membership as well in his 'Hints to newly-appointed Assistant District Commissioners'.[101] In the colonial imagination, the Poro became a possible signifier of expertise, as membership could indicate that individuals were authorities on 'their' people.

Still, membership was not universally appreciated in administrative and missionary circles. The above-mentioned shift was only partial. When the Methodist Reverend A.E. Greensmith joined the society in 1904, there was a large backlash among both his colleagues and the Christian public.[102] Similarly, it was W.R. Lyons, one of Warren's young assistant D.C.'s, who would ultimately put a stop to the attempt of the anthropologist Northcote-Thomas to join in 1917. According to the latter, it was on the eve of his initiation when Lyons telegraphed the chief, forbidding him to go near 'the Poro, Bundu, or any other sacred bush'.[103] Under-secretaries and clerks of the British Colonial Office were baffled by the 'wooden-headed way' in which Thomas's research regarding the murders and mysterious associations had been 'deliberately wrecked by the very people whom it most concerned to know it.'[104] Northcote-Thomas himself hinted at Lyons's young age. Perhaps he was not yet accustomed to co-habitation and the blurring of racial categories in the 'bush-life'. The anthropologist Paul Basu perhaps rightly relates Lyons actions to the colonial colour bar and the loss of the 'white man's prestige' resulting from a European participating in indigenous life.

Hofstra's access to the Poro

Even when Hofstra was initiated, almost twenty years after Northcote-Thomas's failed attempt, the practice was still frowned upon. The Dutchman noted that Blackmore, the Director of Education of Sierra Leone during his stay, made a frightened impression on him when he told

[100] R. Eberl-Elber, *West-Afrikas Letztes Rätsel: Erlebnisbericht über die Forschungsreise, 1935* (Salzburg, 1936).
[101] H.G. Warren, Secret Societies, *Sierra Leone Studies, Abridged Edition of No. I, II and III* (1918) – W.B. Stanley, Carnivorous Apes in Sierra Leone, *Sierra Leone Studies, No. 1* (1918).
[102] R.G. Berry, The Sierra Leone Cannibals, with Notes on Their History, Religion, and Customs, 37. – Eleonora Rohland, Angelika Epple, Antje Flüchter, Kirsten Kramer, *Contact, Conquest and Colonization: How Practices of Comparing Shaped Empires and Colonialism Around the World* (published online, 2021).
[103] Quoted in: P. Basu, N.W. Thomas and colonial anthropology in British West Africa: reappraising a cautionary tale, *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute, Vol. 22* (2015) 84-107, 101. – Thomas would be initiated in in the northern town of Yonibana.
[104] Ibidem.

the man that he was initiated.[105] Still, it was this colonial phase of state-building, characterized by attitudes such as Blackmore's, which preceded and preconditioned this initiation.

In contrast to the membership of the above-mentioned Ralph Eberl-Elber, whom Hofstra seems to have deemed a sensationalist charlatan, we do have information on his own initiation, in January of 1935.[106] The Dutchman had already discussed the possibility of joining with *ndomahei* James Quee, who wanted him to be admitted together with his own son Joe Quee, who had had a career in the Survey Department of the colonial administration. It often happened that young boys who entered the colonial labour market via the mission-route were initiated into the Poro when they returned to their home-region. However, this original plan was disturbed when James Quee passed away on the 12th of December, 1934. Hofstra will have for a moment lost hope of future membership. Yet, shortly after his father passed, James's uninitiated son Joe Quee arrived in Panguma. The town's elders thought it wise to initiate him before the upcoming election, as non-members could not be part of the political community. Out of respect for the late James Quee, they admitted Hofstra as well. The Dutchman seems to have received an exceptional treatment, as he was carried out of the Poro-bush in a hammock and adorned by the wives of the late-*ndomahei* with jewellery normally reserved for *ndomahei*-children.[107] Both men were in the Poro-bush for four days instead of the usual four months, but this will still have been a unique opportunity for Hofstra to examine its initiatory ceremonies.

What set Hofstra apart from other European members was the fact that during his second stay in Panguma, he was promoted to the *Mahavebu*, the Poro's seventh and highest rank.[108] To his adoptive mother he wrote that 'theoretically', he now belonged to the highest political authority in the country, and that he could 'so to say, get to know all the secrets of the Poro.'[109] In a lecture on Mende-thought which he gave back in the Netherlands, he stated that his initiation into the Poro had made him a 'full member of the tribal community'. This status meant that he was not only allowed, but even obliged to attend even the most private discussions held

[105] S. Hofstra, Notes: 'Further about ignorance of officials' (January, 1935) ACSH, Box 1, Reliance Carbon Duplicate Book 4 'Change'.
[106] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (6th September, 1936) ATM, 226. – Hofstra about Eberl-Elber: Last year he travelled around in Sierra Leone and neighbouring areas and he has "studied" some nine tribes in nearly eight months. The prospectus is rather boasting and says that the author had managed "tiefen Einblick in das Leben und die Seele der westafrikanischen Menschen zu gewinnen" [to acquire a profound knowledge of the life and soul of the West African people]. When one realizes how difficult it is already to get to know a smaller region seriously, one knows what such an opinion is worth.
[107] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (22nd January, 1935) ATM, 161.
[108] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (6th September, 1936) ATM, 225. -- Nowhere do we find information about Hofstra's four days in the Poro-bush. After his initiation, he was bound by secrecy like any other initiate.
[109] Ibidem, 225.

in the Poro-bush.[110] The extent to which Hofstra wanted to stretch this assertion seems to have depended on the audience which he addressed. In one of his scarce academic articles on the Mende he made reference to his Poro-membership as well. But here he professed that his membership had given him 'a more or less recognized status in the Mendi community'.[111] In these circles it started to be seen as naïve to imply full membership of a community under study, a critique for which his colleague Siegfried Nadel was lauded for example.[112] It becomes clear that he nuanced his earlier statement to a considerable extent when faced with an audience made up of his colleagues.

The ambiguous way in which he spoke of his place in the Poro-community leads us to ask what his membership concretely meant for his access to knowledge. What did Hofstra mean when he wrote that he had 'a more or less recognized status in the Mendi community'?[113] Which doors opened for him? Hofstra wrote to his adoptive mother that his membership allowed him to be present during a variety of Poro-gatherings and ceremonies, among which the burial-discussions of a former section-chief.[114] Perhaps more telling is the fact that he could be present during the ritual washing of a woman who confessed of having spied on Poro-secrets: 'This ceremony only took a short while and was also secret, but as Poro members Conteh and I could be present.'[115] As a former 'stranger', he could now be present during a rather exclusionary ceremony himself.

In addition to the direct access it could offer, a side effect was the fact that his membership figured as a token of trust. This is most clearly seen when Hofstra encountered the Tongo-society, which tracked down and combatted cases of 'sorcery' and 'bad medicine' such as the earlier-mentioned *boa-constrictor*. In precolonial times, its members could be called upon to track down and kill Human Leopards as well. Because of this infringement upon the British monopoly on lethal violence, the Tongo had been outlawed and repressed by the colonial administration after the Hut Tax War. It is thus perhaps not surprising that Hofstra found the Tongo-players to be hesitant to work when there were Europeans present. They had postponed their activities as they thought that a D.C. was planning on visiting the town. Hofstra wrote that the Tongo-leader seemed to be afraid of him too, as he thought he might report his activities to

[110] S. Hofstra, Lecture: Het denken der natuurvolken (The thinking of primitive peoples).
[111] S. Hofstra, Personality and differentiation in the political life of the Mendi, *Africa, Vol. 10, No. 4* (1937) 436-457, 440.
[112] R. Firth, Siegfried Frederick Nadel: 1903-1956, *American Anthropologist, Vol. 59, No. 1* (1957) 117-124, 120.
[113] We further explore this placing in Appendix A: Gbessi's secret
[114] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (9th August, 1936) ATM, 213.
[115] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (26th July, 1936) ATM, 209.

the colonial administration. Apparently, the leader's image of Hofstra shifted after Conteh and his nephew Samuel told him that the Dutchman was a Poro-member and that he had a farm in Panguma. A few days later, the Tongo-leader came to visit Hofstra in Panguma in order to talk about his family's history, perhaps even motivated by the fact that Hofstra could ameliorate the Tongo's image in colonial minds.[116] This range of examples illustrates that his initiation into the Poro was not merely a nice gesture; it had a demonstrable effect on the Dutchman's ability to lead certain enquiries.

Still, Hofstra readily admitted the ambiguity of his position in the Poro-community. Like his inquiries into Mende-polygamy, the Mende assessed the dangers of sharing information. Hofstra felt that if not for his informants, he would not have seen as much as he had, as people would have likely 'deceived him somewhat', in order to keep their secrets.[117] This was likely the reason why Hofstra instigated the initiation of Conteh, who was not a member of the Poro when Hofstra met him in Segbwema. As mentioned, Conteh was the son of a *ndomahei* from Daru, a town which harboured the Bili-society besides the Poro. In a talk between Conteh and his nephew Said Kallon which Hofstra witnessed, Kallon was quite surprised to hear about his nephew's initiation. Historically being members of the Bili, their family had always looked down upon the Poro. Because of certain food taboos, the whole ordeal could potentially even bar Conteh from the chieftainship of Daru. Conteh replied that he did not care to become chief, but that he only wanted influence, that he had done it for his master (Hofstra) and that he hoped that his parents would understand that.[118] It is unknown when exactly Conteh was initiated into the Poro. What Hofstra's notes do tell, is that Conteh was allowed to be present when the Poro convened in order to discuss the burial of James Quee and the upcoming elections. At this time, Hofstra was not a member himself, and his notion of what was said was obtained through Conteh.[119]

Mende-willingness to inform (partial) outsiders about the Poro knew its own development during the colonial encounter. Fear for the supernatural punishment could make place for scepticism regarding the actual amount of danger, especially for the mission-educated.

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[116] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (16th September, 1936) ATM, 230-231.
[117] S. Hofstra, Notes: 'The attitudes towards the secrets of the Porro' (date unknown) ACSH, Box 3, Folder "Mende aantekeningen''.
[118] S. Hofstra, Notes: 'Bili and Porro' (26th May, 1936) ACSH, Box 4, Green Folder. – This instigated initiation is reminiscent of Edward Evans-Pritchard's fieldwork technique for the gathering of information on 'witchdoctors' among the Azande. He paid the fees required for the training of his informant Kamanga and effectively studied this secretive sphere of Zande-life through his experiences. – E.E. Evans-Pritchard, *Witchcraft, Magic and Oracles among the Azande: Abridged with an introduction by E. Gillies* (Oxford, 1976) 98-102.
[119] S. Hofstra, Notes: 'James Quee's illness and death' (date unknown, 1934) ACSH, Box 3, "The Orderly File" Folder.

Rashid Quee, the brother of James Quee and one of the Mende in Hofstra's circle, had only joined the Poro because he wanted a political position which necessitated membership. Otherwise he was sceptical of the tales of supernatural punishment. Hofstra found Joe Quee, like his uncle Rashid, to be different from the majority because of his sceptical attitude, his lack of fear and 'love for truth'.[120] David Fama, one of Hofstra's more occasional informants, stated that the younger generation was less afraid to talk about Poro-affairs, as they had less respect for the taboo. Overall, Hofstra found younger people who had enjoyed some form of mission-education to speak more freely about topics related to the society.

This third chapter examined the manner in which the colonial presence preconditioned Hofstra's access to the Poro. During the colonial encounter, the Poro got caught up in the violence and the air of suspicion characterizing the first phase of colonial state-building: the establishment of colonial law and order. Together with the fact that the British presence diluted the power of the society, this resulted in the Poro opening up for the initiation of 'strangers'. On an individual level, those willing to run the risk of speaking of the Poro's secrets were equally products of the colonial encounter. However, Hofstra's Poro-membership should not solely be seen in the light of colonial power-dynamics.

[120] S. Hofstra, Notes: 'The attitudes towards the secrets of the Porro' (date unknown) ACSH, Box 3, Folder "Mende aantekeningen''.

Ch. 4: The Ndomahei-dance: Ethnological information as currency in chiefdom politics

As illustrated by Helen Tilly, in the first half of the twentieth century Africa was compared to a 'great laboratory', a label heavily implying the existence of controllable variables and research circumstances such as sterility and vacuum.[121] Historical research has since then made such comparisons untenable. In the preceding sections we have already seen that Mende agency was interwoven with the preconditions of access stemming from the mission and the colonial presence. Panguma's inhabitants were by no means idle guineapigs in Hofstra's venture. The Dutchman was dependent on a range of inhabitants of Panguma during his process of anthropological knowledge production. The fact that his fieldwork spanned a total of eighteen months, in which he almost exclusively resided in Panguma, meant that he inserted himself in the town's local dynamics, which were influenced by the colonial situation. Thus, to Panguma's inhabitants, who provided Hofstra with information or who tolerated him in their presence, he was often more than merely an anthropologist. If we set out to interpret Mende-cooperation, we need to assess Hofstra's field-presence in this broader sense. As we will see, this field-presence affected Hofstra's position in the political dynamics of Lower-Bambara Chiefdom. In turn, this position could shape the precondition of access determined by *ndomahei*-approval of anthropological research, which Hofstra already acknowledged when he started selecting his field-site.

Given the fact that Panguma's inhabitants estimated Hofstra's field-presence as more than merely anthropological, an underlying theme will be the conceptualisation of ethnological information as a political currency. This conceptualisation is loosely derived from the historian John Parker, who identifies the anthropologist couple of Meyer and Sonia Fortes as political agents of change or 'factors of disequilibrium' during their fieldwork among the Talensi, which ran parallel with Hofstra's own study. According to Parker, the couple inserted itself into 'a world struggling to come to terms with the forces of colonial change'.[122] Nambiong, the local *tongrana* or 'chief', only started to openly talk to the couple after he began to fear for his political position, when the British started to install the principles of Indirect Rule. What this

[121] H. Tilley, *Africa As a Living Laboratory,* 2.
[122] J. Parker, The Dynamics of Fieldwork among the Talensi: Meyer Fortes in Northern Ghana, 1934-7, *Africa, Vol. 83, No. 4* (2013) 623–45, 623.

shows us, is that the Fortes's got themselves involved in a particular colonial situation in which the provision of ethnological information could at times be seen as a political investment.[123]

Not unlike the Fortes's, Hofstra was seen as a broker between the Mende and the colonial administration, and was therefore useful for both Panguma's population and its powerful political players. On the other hand, there was a political faction which was less well-disposed towards European influences, of which Hofstra was a representation. As such, Hofstra's research project became caught up in Mende politics. Therefore, as will be argued in this section, we should see both ethnological information and fieldwork-accommodation as a possible currency used to acquire political capital in Mende chiefdom politics. We will explore this statement for both political situations existing during Hofstra's fieldwork, beginning with the period of political stability under *ndomahei* James Quee. Then, we will examine it against the backdrop of political unrest resulting from Quee's death and the chaotic election which followed. When we study this latter period, it will become clear that Hofstra himself was not a passive player in Mende chiefdom politics. First, we will briefly examine the background of James Quee, Panguma's political leader when Hofstra first arrived.

Quee's father had been Nyagua, one of the supposed aggressors of the Hut Tax War, who died in exile in Ghana (Gold Coast) in 1906.[124] This did not cause Quee to turn his back to European influences. We learn that he himself had been to Europe as the 'boy' of an Irish Major, which suggests that he had received a Christian education. Thereafter, in the times when the oil-rich palm kernels were sold for high prices and money was circulating in the region, he made his money as a trader in consumer-articles.[125] He was not ill-disposed towards the Christian faith, as he acted as the treasurer of Panguma's United Brethren in Christ Church. Allegedly, he had had a drinking problem which he faced after he was cured of a severe illness in the Methodist hospital in Segbwema. After this seemingly redemptive hospitalization he partially adopted Christian habits, but he would never become a monogamist.[126]

Quee was elected as *ndomahei* in 1933, with a large majority of the electors or 'tribal authorities' behind him. He proved to be a popular ruler, as emphasized by many after his untimely death one year after, in December of 1934.[127] This continuous popularity likely

[123] J. Parker, The Dynamics of Fieldwork among the Talensi, 624.
[124] A. Abraham, Nyagua, The British, and the Hut Tax War, *The International Journal of African Historical Studies, Vol. 5, No. 1* (1972) 94-98, 98.
[125] S. Hofstra, Notes: 'Fodobasi' (10th February, 1935) ACSH, Box 3, Folder "Psychology". – S. Hofstra, Notes: 'Equality and distinctions' (January, 1935) ACSH, Box 3, Folder "Psychology".
[126] S. Hofstra, Notes: 'Chief James Quee' (date unknown) ACSH, Box 4, ''The Orderly File' Folder 'Questions Religion'.
[127] A. Abraham, *Mende Government and Politics under Colonial Rule*, 286. – S. Hofstra, Notes: 'James Quee's illness and death' (date unknown, 1934) ACSH, Box 3, "The Orderly File" Folder. – 'I had a talk with the clerks

stemmed from his lax and reserved way of ruling, which sought to prevent disturbing and antagonizing other 'big men'. Likewise, he gave some of those who voted against him political positions after his election.[128] For related reasons, this favourable view was shared by the colonial administration. As becomes clear from Hofstra's talk with the Bo-stationed D.C. Simson, the latter found Quee to be a 'very good chief' and a 'strong ruler'. This likely meant that the British did not have to use their scarce time and resources in solving administrative problems such as boundary disputes, court cases against the *ndomahei*, and insufficiencies in the house-tax income.[129]

During his life, James Quee had engaged with the European presence on several fronts. Thus, upon Hofstra's arrival, Quee and his political circle quickly understood the nature of the anthropologist's work.[130] Not only that, Quee immediately saw the possibilities for his chiefdom when Hofstra arrived. In order to illustrate this twofold awareness, we briefly return to Hofstra's first period in Panguma and a development immediately preceding it.

Panguma once housed the District Headquarters, which later moved further east to Kailahun. According to the *Handbook of Sierra Leone* (1925), this meant that there was a 'trained dispenser' and perhaps even a Medical Officer present in Panguma not long before Hofstra arrived. These medical services were taken away from the town's inhabitants when the D.C. moved. This drastically limited their access to Western medical options, as now the nearest facilities were in Segbwema, an hour and a half drive by motorized lorry away. Not everyone will have been able to pay the fares. It will not have been readily available at all times neither, as it was used to move the palm-kernels to the railroad as well.

Thus, it is not unlikely that James Quee saw the reintroducing of these medical options in Panguma as politically attractive. Seemingly, he would get the chance to do so when Hofstra visited his town.[131] It happened to be that the local D.C. had notified the town of Hofstra's coming while using the latter's academic title: 'Doctor' Hofstra. Unsurprisingly, immediately

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of Giehun and Foindu, who told me that the people in the country are very sorrowful. They liked James Quee, because he did not disturb them. People should like his son to be chief, they said, because they expect him to be like his father.'.

[128] S. Hofstra, Notes: 'Differential factors in the exercise of the chiefs authority' (21st December, 1934) ACSH, Box 2 – S. Hofstra, Notes: 'James Quee's illness and death' (date unknown, 1934) ACSH, Box 3, "The Orderly File" Folder. – S. Hofstra, Personality and differentiation in the political life of the Mendi, 455.

[129] S. Hofstra, Notes: 'Political bribery in chiefs elections' (21st May, 1936) ACSH, Box 3, Folder "Politics".

[130] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (early March 1934) ATM, 45.

[131] Quee was not the only ruler who tried to establish a prolonged European presence in his chiefdom. Again, confused by Hofstra's academic title, the *ndomahei* of Pendembu, the last railway-stop, had offered him a piece of land and a few houses if Hofstra was willing to do medical work there. When Hofstra unmasked himself as someone who was merely interested in the language and culture of the Mende, the offer was not withdrawn. – Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (early March, 1934) ATM, 43.

after the Dutchman's arrival, Panguma's inhabitants started to visit the Dutchman's rest-house in order to receive treatment for their constipation, pneumonia, worms and other ailments.[132] Quee quickly realised the misunderstanding and tried to explain to the townspeople that there existed multiple types of doctors in Europe, but not everyone understood this. In order to avoid his subjects from forming the idea that Hofstra was able but simply unwilling to help them, Panguma's *ndomahei* and his faction advised the Dutchman to take up medical work. An hour of medical treatment each morning would both benefit the latter's comprehension of the Mende language and help familiarise Hofstra and the townspeople with each other. Of course, this also meant that Quee could provide his town with at least some of the sought-after medical options.

Quee's advice led Hofstra to fall back on his new contacts in the missionary network. Together with the earlier mentioned Mr. Ganna, who was in Panguma for a few days, he contacted the hospital in Segbwema for help. The missionaries were willing to provide Hofstra with a few days of medical training, as well as a chest filled with medicine.[133] Furthermore, they seconded nurse Samuel Ndoko from their service, in order to guide Hofstra for the first period. Apparently, the results were satisfactory on both medical and anthropological levels:

> I wish you could see me at it, Moeteke! It gets me in touch with all sorts of circumstances and family relations. I write down the names, age, etc. of the people who come here. If you help the people a bit like this, they are much more open with you than when you simply walk around asking them about their language and customs.[134]

Thus, Quee successfully orchestrated Hofstra's introduction in Panguma, and in doing so, he effectively hit two birds with one stone. He could provide his subjects with additional medical options, and prevent Hofstra from leaving Panguma due to disappointing results. One can only imagine the difficulties for his fieldwork if the image of Hofstra as an egotistical physician had rooted itself in the minds of those on whom he relied for his ethnological information.

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[132] We find further evidence for the value of Western medicine in the minds of the townspeople in a letter which Conteh wrote to Hofstra during the latter's fieldwork intermezzo. When the Governor visited Panguma, 'the Bambara people' (who remain unspecified) asked the man to rebuild the dispensary. In addition to that, they asked for a medical officer to come visit every month. Both of these pleas ended up being successful, as Dr. Kearney of Segbwema started to visit the town regularly ever since. More importantly, the dispensary was built as well, so we learn from a letter sent to Hofstra by Rev. Max Gorvie in 1937 – Letter from T.C. Conteh to S. Hofstra (6th May, 1935) ACSH, Box 5, Red Box 1, Folder ''Correspondentie binnen Sierra Leone 1934-1939''. – T.N. Goddard, *The Handbook of Sierra Leone*, 71. – Letter from M. Gorvie to S. Hofstra (10th October, 1937) ACSH, Box 5, Red Box 1, Folder ''Correspondentie binnen Sierra Leone 1934-1939''.

[133] S. Hofstra, Lecture: 'Het denken der natuurvolken' (The thought of primitive people).

[134] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (14th March, 1934) ATM, 49. – Moeteke is a Dutch term of endearment, meaning 'Mother'.

The Dutchman learnt from Quee's brother Rashid that Panguma's ruler, early on his stay, had ordered his subjects to stop bothering Hofstra with 'begging', as he was afraid he would leave again.[135] Quee was aware of the possibility of Hofstra leaving his chiefdom for another welcoming *ndomahei*, thus he actively tried to keep him in Panguma.

When Hofstra first arrived, Panguma's inhabitants primarily saw his utility in a medical sense. Yet, the assessment of his usefulness was expanded when the Dutchman settled more permanently. Some of the inhabitants understood his aim and some did not. Some thought Hofstra to be a colonial servant, and some saw him as a rich man who simply wanted to see Africa.[136] Regardless of the exact person he was in their eyes, for many of Panguma's inhabitants Hofstra was first and foremost a European, who stood in close contact with the colonial administration. Therefore, he both knew and was able to arrange things. Some for example asked him why the price of the palm kernel prices had dropped.[137] Bockari Konuwa, who as Quee's speaker automatically became regent-chief after the latter's death, asked Hofstra if he was able to postpone the election until after the yearly house-tax was collected.[138] As acting *ndomahei* he would then rake in one-sixth of the total sum. Konuwa also tried his luck at 'reeling in' Hofstra by attempting to tie Hofstra to his family. Especially before Hofstra's marriage with Woutje, multiple people tried to establish kinship relations with the Dutchman by offering him their daughters in marriage, among whom the above mentioned Bockari Konuwa.[139]

To be sure, the Dutchman's line to the colonial administration was indeed short, or by any means shorter than the one of the townspeople. When Panguma and its surrounding area were struck by a regional outbreak of smallpox, Hofstra quickly contacted P.C. Stocks, whom had shown him around Segbwema earlier. Together they made sure that a medical officer came to take measures and vaccinate those who desired it.[140] According to Hofstra, Quee and his faction were too reticent in this matter, but they appreciated him taking matters into his own hand. The colonial administration acted quicker if it was a European who voiced the request. Still, Hofstra uttered his surprise about the amount of trust which people had in his influence.[141]

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[135] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (18th March, 1934) ATM, 51.
[136] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (14th February, 1935) ATM, 167
[137] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (15th April, 1934) ATM, 67.
[138] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (14th February, 1935) ATM, 167.
[139] Letter from T.C. Conteh to S. Hofstra (23rd September, 1935) ACSH, Box 5, Red Box 1, Folder ''Correspondentie binnen Sierra Leone 1934-1939''. – Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (14th September, 1934) ATM, 122.
[140] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (30th September, 1934) ATM, 126.
[141] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (30th September, 1934) ATM, 126.

The fact that Panguma's inhabitants valued Hofstra, both on a medical level and for his contacts, made him an asset in Bambara's political sphere. Therefore, Quee's bond with Hofstra was to be communicated to Panguma's inhabitants for it to be converted into political capital. Normally, Mende-alliances guarantying political support were kept hidden for strategic purposes, yet in the case of Hofstra, it seems as if James Quee liked to be seen with Hofstra in public.

Thus, we learn that Quee appreciated it when Hofstra accompanied him to the election of a new section-*mahei* in Lalehun, a subsection of Quee's territory. Hofstra felt like Quee was proud that he travelled with him.[142] A more telling instance can be deduced from Hofstra's description of the dancing he did in and around Panguma. The new section-*mahei* of Lalehun had seen Hofstra dance in Panguma and was 'very keen' that Hofstra 'as his friend' would do the same in Lalehun. During festivities which followed the tax-collection, James Quee had apparently taught him a special dance which they performed together as a 'final glory number'. Notably, Quee told Conteh that he did not want Hofstra to dance with anyone else, 'for, so he said, some people might have diseases'.[143] The anthropologist William Murphy draws our attention to the relation between dance and power in Mende political symbolism. He finds dance to symbolise 'the rhythmic coordination required in political alliances', in which the phrase 'let us dance together' is uttered.[144] It is likely that Quee's concern for Hofstra's health was not the reason, or the sole reason, as Mende-dance was as much a political performance as it was entertainment.

When we return to Quee's dancing, we can illustrate this political function by showing what kind of information was communicated, both verbally and non-verbally. The dance was an occasion during which Mende-rulers could say those things which they would normally keep for himself. According to Hofstra, Quee boasted about his land and about the qualities which got him elected over his opponents. He heard him emphasizing the fact that he was already rich before his election and that he therefore did not have to bother his subjects for money. He named those who were against him and those who were indebted to him. During dances, Quee also made sure to visit the houses of these political opponents, in order to treat them to an exhibit of his authority.[145] Furthermore, it becomes clear that Quee did not mind bragging about his

[142] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (3rd August, 1934) ATM, 105.
[143] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (30th April, 1934) ATM, 74-75.
[144] W.P. Murphy, The sublime dance of Mende politics: an African aesthetic of charismatic power, *American Ethnologist, Vol. 25, No. 4* (1998) 563-582, 567.
[145] S. Hofstra, Notes: 'Differential factors in the exercise of the chiefs authority' (21st December, 1934) ACSH, Box 2

knowledge of Europe. So, he bragged about his visits to Dublin in the service of an Irish Major.[146] Quee seems to have regarded his knowledge of European ways, inaccessible to the majority of the other Mende, as part of the basis of his authority. Prior to the dance he shared with Hofstra, he had decided on a court case after which he bragged about his knowledge of English law. Getting Hofstra to dance with him exclusively will have conveyed a similar message, on top of the fact that it communicated Quee's bond with someone who was seen as useful by his subjects.

Hofstra's end of this bargain, of which he was perhaps not even aware at this point, was access to a large range of topics. As will become clear, as gatekeeper of the field, Quee accommodated Hofstra in both direct and indirect ways.

As has become clear from the nature of Hofstra's entrance in Panguma, this accommodation could take the form of an advisory role. Quee knew the ins and outs of his town, and was able to assess how his subjects would react to Hofstra's medical work. In addition to his 'positive reception', this medical work offered the Dutchman opportunities to study Mende conceptions of illness and treatment. The morning-hour of medical consultations also proved to be one of his scarce possibilities to talk to Mende-women. This advisory role did not cease after Hofstra's entrance, as Quee informed the Dutchman of those events which had ethnographic potential, such as the burning of the rice-fields.

Furthermore, he could provide opportunities for lines of inquiry through his political position. As we have seen, he made sure that the Dutchman could join the Poro, which contributed significantly to the latter's access to both events and knowledge. He also permitted the Dutchman to attend legal cases in his personal court, as well as the funerals of other rulers.[147]

Even more directly, Quee was willing and at times even proud to provide Hofstra with 'the best information' himself.[148] Panguma had the reputation of speaking the oldest and 'best' form of the Mende language, and many of its inhabitants were proud of it. So too, Quee and his faction. In the early period of his fieldwork, the Dutchman tried to visit Quee once every day, in order to learn useful words and sentences.[149] We find another example of Quee's own valuation when his daughter passed away in early March of 1934. He made sure that the burial

[146] S. Hofstra, Notes: 'Dancing' (11th April, 1934) ACSH, Box 2, Archive box, Brown Folder. – S. Hofstra, Notes: 'Africans who have been in Europe' (11th January, 1936) ACSH, Box 1, Reliance Carbon Duplicate Book 4 'Change'. – James Quee had been in Dublin one or two times when he was young as a 'boy' of an Irish Major, in small companies he would sometimes tell of his times there, of the tall buildings and his visit to a theatre. He found Europeans in Europe to be more polite than those in Africa.
[147] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (6th June, 1934) ATM, 85.
[148] S. Hofstra, Notes: 'Notes on the progress of fieldwork among the Mendi'.
[149] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (14th March, 1934) ATM, 49. – Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (24th October, 1934) ATM, 134.

ceremony took place in an unabridged form, as he wanted Hofstra to get the most elaborate impression possible. Conteh penned down all of the speeches and Mende-sayings and afterwards Hofstra was allowed to ask questions. Later, Conteh discussed his notes with a few older men and consulted with Quee over the end-result. As the latter was not satisfied, due to its brevity, he brought in a town-chief and other elders who knew even more of the 'proper' burial sayings.[150] Thus, it becomes clear that Quee had his own notion of what constituted 'worthwhile' information.

A downside of this focus on 'authenticity' and 'the best information' was that it did not necessarily correspond with everyday realities. Later on during his fieldwork, Hofstra would increasingly pay attention to ritual disagreements and mistakes; people who were laughed at for their ignorance of rituals or soothsayers who were disgruntled because the greed of those who hired them left them ill-equipped to perform their tasks.[151] In Hofstra's eyes, this was valuable information, as it chipped away from the Western conviction that the lives of African peoples were dominated by rigidly defined religious rules.[152] Even if Quee understood the core of Hofstra's mission, their valuation of ethnological data differed.

Regardless of the limitations of Quee's own information, it was crucial for Hofstra's fieldwork that Quee was on board. Because Panguma's *ndomahei* condoned of Hofstra's research, his subjects were more comfortable to engage with anthropological inquiries on their own accord: 'The chief calls me his friend and as soon as the population knows this, one has access to much.'[153] This becomes especially clear when we return to the topic of polygamy. Together with Conteh and Rashid Quee, Hofstra visited all of Panguma's houses (400-500) in order to ask for the composition of the individual households. Most households were willing to part with this information, but a small number of them was hesitant to do so, as they were afraid it might get them into trouble. It happened to be that all of these reluctant households originally came from a small village and had only recently arrived in Panguma.[154] One of the reasons why Hofstra did not choose a smaller village as his field-site was the fact that he presumed that its inhabitants would be less ready to share information, as they were unaware of the stance of their *ndomahei* on anthropological inquiries. It is likely that Panguma's new arrivals were indeed not aware of Quee's condonement of Hofstra's work.

[150] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (18th March, 1934) ATM, 51.
[151] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (21st April, 1934) ATM, 69.
[152] Ibidem, 69.
[153] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (1st April, 1934) ATM, 57.
[154] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (10th November, 1934) ATM, 140.

James Quee needed to keep Hofstra close if he wanted to gain politically from the Dutchman's Mende-research. The most evident way of doing this was providing Hofstra with opportunities to do his fieldwork. In both direct and indirect ways, this fieldwork accommodation proved to be indispensable for Hofstra's work as an anthropologist.

A most precarious precondition: Political unrest and anthropological fieldwork

In December of 1934 this period of political stability ended abruptly with the death of James Quee, caused by an illness unknown to us. Hofstra was quite affected by this, as he had come to regard him as a friend. Quee ultimately succumbed in the Dutchman's car, as they rode back to Panguma when the doctor in Segbwema.[155] Partly because of his own emotions, Hofstra wrote that he was 'somewhat astonished' by how quickly prominent townspeople started to discuss Quee's succession after the burial.[156] The election process which ensued would outlast Hofstra's second stay in the field, which came to a premature end due to blackwater fever.

At the start of this election, Hofstra again recognized the gatekeeper status of the *ndomahei*. This becomes clear from letters which he sent to his adoptive mother, stating that his work would not be endangered by the death of Quee. He wrote that the regent-chief Bockari Konuwa, Quee's speaker, was a good friend of his and whoever would eventually succeed Quee would probably also be well-disposed towards him.[157] From his notes and later correspondence, an image emerges which was less straight-forward. The election process knew angles of which he understandably did not always notify Ms. Overdiep; angles which will illustrate the precariousness of this last precondition, or by any means the precariousness of *ndomahei*-cooperation of the sort which Hofstra experienced with James Quee. In order to understand these angles, it is necessary to briefly delve into some of the political developments brought forth by British colonialism, both in the whole Mende-area as specifically in Bambara-chiefdom.

In one of his articles, 'Personality and Differentiation in the Political Life of the Mendi', Hofstra did much to de-essentialise past narratives of the existence of a uniform 'Mende-ness'. Still, the often heard criticism levied against ahistoricism in the functionalist social anthropology of his time is partially applicable to this description of Mende-chiefship.[158] The

[155] Appendix B will provide additional context in this regard.
[156] S. Hofstra, Personality and Differentiation in the Political Life of the Mendi, 445.
[157] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (13th December, 1934) ATM, 149.
[158] Notable examples dealing with ahistoricism and the lack of attention to the colonial situation in writing about non-European cultures are critiques of functionalism written by Gutorm Gjessing and Perry Anderson. Their articles, among other contributors of what became known as the 'New Left', are dealt with in: P. Forster,

Dutchman wrote that the Mende country 'was divided into a number of relatively small chiefdoms', and 'each chiefdom [had] more or less well-defined boundaries with the adjoining chiefdoms'.[159] In a synchronic account this was no mischaracterization, but this rigidity was a product of the colonial encounter and had deposed a more fluid form of boundary-setting, which through warfare left space for the creation of larger chiefdoms, such as the one of Quee's father Nyagua. Another noteworthy passage in this article is the statement that European contact 'on the whole' did not yet have a 'strongly disintegrating effect' on the Mende.[160] In reality, European colonialism had a profound impact on Bambara's political sphere. The historian Arthur Abraham stated in 1978 that, after the Hut Tax War, the British deliberately fragmented the larger dominions into smaller, more controllable chiefdoms. So too was Nyagua's territory carved up. It becomes clear from his notes that Hofstra was well aware of both these precolonial political developments and the effect of the colonial encounter upon these dynamics.[161] Still, to a large extent he chose to exclude this historical perspective from his article.

Furthermore, Hofstra's descriptions of Mende-chiefship likely hid from sight dissenting forces and stances within Lower Bambara's political sphere. In the colonial archive, Abraham found a report composed in 1908 by Governor Leslie Probyn (1904-1910) regarding rumours suggesting that inhabitants of Nyagua's fragmented dominion were planning on raiding and looting trading stores in the railway-towns of Blama and Hangha:

> The latter [Nyagua] took a prominent part in the Rebellion of 1898, and was deported by the Government; the area under his dominion was divided by the Government into chiefdoms, and the people were called upon to elect paramount chiefs in the new chiefdoms thus created. The paramount chiefs thus appointed after the rebellion have always been disliked by the Nyagua family, and the plot may be regarded as an attempt by some members of the Nyagua family to bring discredit upon the chiefs.[162]

'Empiricism and Imperialism: A Review of the New Left Critique of Social Anthropology', in T. Asad ed., *Anthropology and the Colonial Encounter* (London, 1973) 25.

[159] S. Hofstra, Personality and Differentiation in the Political Life of the Mendi, 438. – The word 'partially' is used here because Hofstra did mention the fact that the post of *ndomahei* had been made more attractive by the colonial administration. Chiefs could be less easily deposed (or killed), they received the right to levy new taxes as well, in the form of a yearly bushel of rice and a can of palm oil.

[160] S. Hofstra, Personality and Differentiation in the Political Life of the Mendi, 438.

[161] S. Hofstra, 'Change in the nature of political leadership' (date unknown) Box 1, Reliance Carbon Duplicate Book 4 'Change'.

[162] Quoted in: A. Abraham, *Mende Government and Politics under Colonial Rule* (Freetown, 1978) 185.

Admittedly, Probyn merely spoke of a plot, but there is evidence which suggests that, during Hofstra's stay, there was a powerful political faction which was less well-disposed towards European influences than James Quee.

During the election following the death of James Quee, this faction seems to have been represented by James's brothers Quee 'Frenchman' Gboli, the caretaker of Nyagua's grave, and Quee Red.[163] Both men were sons of Nyagua. Yet, as they were only half-brothers, the kinship bond they shared with James was not as strong as the one between the latter and his son Joe. Quee Gboli had his difficulties with the British administration, as he had previously been charged with a criminal offence, which resulted in his three-year-long imprisonment.[164] Neither of these Quees figure in Hofstra's notes before or after these elections, nor are they mentioned in the correspondence with his adoptive mother. It is therefore not unlikely that Hofstra had not run into these men before the election process. Hofstra's notes imply that they did not live in Panguma. The men had not received a Christian education and did not seem to have tried their luck in trade. In short, they did not belong to the kind of 'men of the world' who drew Hofstra to Panguma in the first place. As will become clear, their political faction could count on a large amount of support in the chiefdom.

The other large faction was represented by Joe Quee, the son of the late James Quee. Joe lived and worked in another part of Sierra Leone but returned to Panguma after his father died. As mentioned, James Quee had felt a stronger connection with his son than with Quee Gboli and Red, and before he died he stated that he preferred his son Joe Quee to become chief over one of his brothers. Conteh stated that he even disliked these half-brothers.[165] According to Joe, his father's lax way of ruling was given in by the fact that he wanted to pave the way for his son to succeed him. James had also given his son a Christian education, which resulted in a job in the Survey Department of the colonial administration.[166]

The stakes of the election were high, as illustrated by the fear for the usage of powerful and deadly medicine among some of the key actors. The first two nights after his arrival in Panguma, Joe slept in Hofstra's rest-house. To his adoptive mother Hofstra wrote that this was to prevent too many people from visiting Joe, yet from his notes it becomes clear that Joe switched houses every two nights in order to prevent his enemies from knowing his

[163] S. Hofstra, Notes: 'Praying and the relation to spirits' (11th June, 1936) ACSH, Box 2, Archive Box. Brown Folder 'Ngafanga'.
[164] A. Abraham, *Mende Government and Politics under Colonial Rule,* 286.
[165] S. Hofstra, Notes: 'Political inheritance rules for chieftainship' (24th May, 1936) ACSH, Box 3, Folder "Politics".
[166] A. Abraham, *Mende Government and Politics under Colonial Rule,* 286.

whereabouts. He was afraid they would bewitch him in his sleep. A concrete example of such threats was noticed by Conteh, who heard Quee Red swear on James Quee's grave that 'all persons who were busy in trying to make Jo chief might be killed.'[167] The *ndomahei* of Dodo, who was in Panguma for the burial, stressed the fact that Joe's life should be protected by strong medicine. By some of Hofstra's circle, the election was framed as a contest between old and young, with Conteh and his nephew Said Kallon even stating that Joe Quee was only respected by educated young people.[168] Quee Red's interpretation was much the same, as he continuously espoused Joe to be 'a baby who went to everybody who offered him his breast'.[169]

Contrastingly, Hofstra found Joe Quee to be a sensible, strong-willed and sympathetic young man; the 'more modern type'.[170] It becomes clear that Hofstra, like James Quee, preferred Joe over his uncles. It is difficult to evaluate the nature and symmetry of their relation, but Joe regretted Hofstra leaving for the Netherlands for a few months: 'He has some support from me and doesn't trust all his followers.'[171] A clear example of this support was Hofstra's advice in political matters.

In a talk with Assistant D.C. Simson of Bo, the topic of bribery of supporters during Mende-elections came up. Simson laughingly remarked that money was 'flying then all over the country', but that not much could be done against it.[172] Hofstra noted that D.C. Shaw of Kenema had prosecuted cases of bribery in Panguma, but that he was perhaps more rigid than the likes of Simson. During the election after James Quee's death, bribery, or 'purposeful generosity', occurred as well. In fact, this was likely D.C. Shaws case which the Dutchman discussed with Simson. In regard to this topic, there is again an interesting hiatus to be found when we compare his article on political differentiation with the image which emerges from his notes and correspondence. When dealing with the factors of wealth and bribery during chiefdom elections he wrote:

> Cases of bribery occur, as I know, and the fact that I frequently heard people talking about the spending of money for the election, shows that it is not uncommon. The Government tries to supress bribery; one case which occurred in the chiefdom to which my description mainly refers

[167] S. Hofstra, Notes: 'James Quee's illness and death' (date unknown, 1934) ACSH, Box 3, "The Orderly File" Folder.
[168] S. Hofstra, Notes: 'Political inheritance rules for chieftainship' (24th May, 1936) ACSH, Box 3, Folder "Politics".
[169] S. Hofstra, Notes: 'James Quee's illness and death' (date unknown, 1934) ACSH, Box 3, "The Orderly File" Folder.
[170] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (22th December, 1934) ATM, 150.
[171] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (14th February, 1935) ATM, 167.
[172] S. Hofstra, Notes: 'Political bribery in chiefs elections' (21st May, 1936) ACSH, Box 3, Folder "Politics".

was tried before the District Commissioner, and he ordered the tribal authorities, who admitted having received money from one of the candidates, to return it.[173]

From correspondence between Conteh and Hofstra in the latter's fieldwork intermezzo, it becomes clear that this candidate was Joe Quee. The money came from the inheritance of his father, over which James's brothers and Joe had previously quarrelled in court. What Hofstra withheld from the account in the article, and likely from his talk with D.C. Simson, is the fact that he was himself involved in getting Joe Quee to make use of bribes.

Kaifala, the section-chief of Lalehun and one of Joe's supporters, approached Hofstra in order to get him to convince Joe to spend more money.[174] Hofstra first ascertained whether Joe Quee was indeed still willing to run in the election, thereby also pointing at the possible dangers. The young man was indeed determined, stating that it was his duty to continue his father's work. Yet, he was afraid that if he were to put his inheritance on the line, he might end up losing everything. Victory in the election was by no means guaranteed. Hofstra pointed out that the Mende expected some present and that Joe could not reasonably expect that they would vote for him simply because James Quee had been popular. He could not have all: 'That is the case in every business.'[175]

Eventually, Joe Quee heeded the advice of his supporters. The bribes helped him to attain 49 votes, against Quee Gboli's 34. The two other factions, Momogbanya and Morima Farma, received four and two votes respectively. These were added up to Gboli's, resulting in a nine-vote lead for Joe Quee. The colonial administration considered the lead to be too small and ordered Gboli and Joe to decide between themselves. This however did not work out, as both men distrusted each other. Now, it became clear that Joe was right to have doubted the shaky political alliances which he had formed, for his uncle Rashid Quee jumped ship to Quee Gboli and Quee Red and revealed to the public the extent of Joe's bribery. Regent-chief Bockari Konuwa had received money, as well as all of Bambara's section-chiefs and multiple speakers. After Joe's bribing was brought forward to D.C. Shaw, the colonial administration decided to 'dive in deeply', as Conteh wrote to Hofstra, who had returned to the Netherlands for a year.[176]

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[173] S. Hofstra, Personality and Differentiation in the Political Life of the Mendi, 448.
[174] S. Hofstra, Notes: 'James Quee's illness and death' (date unknown, 1934) ACSH, Box 3, "The Orderly File" Folder.
[175] Ibidem.
[176] Letter from T.C. Conteh to S. Hofstra (6th May, 1935) ACSH, Box 5, Red Box 1, Folder 'Correspondentie binnen Sierra Leone 1934-1939'.

When Hofstra returned to Panguma in 1936, together with his wife Woutje Hofstra, the election process was still not completed. Joe Quee's majority was not considered null and void, but some of his supporters had lost their political positions. Regent Chief Bockari Konuwa had been deposed by the colonial administration for his political partisanship. Kaifala, the section-chief who asked Hofstra to talk to Joe Quee about making use of bribes, had been deposed by his subjects, likely on the instigation of Quee Gboli's faction.[177] Furthermore, Conteh reported the death of five of the tribal authorities who voted for Joe Quee, a given which will have strengthened Quee Red's belief in effectiveness of his swears. This tightened Joe Quee's lead over Gboli to a meagre four votes.[178]

Thus commenced a period of relative stability, wherein the government would choose a winner. With a new ordinance issued in 1934, the British allowed themselves to 'legally' mingle in local politics if the normal electoral procedure did not yield a clear winner. [179] In this phase, all factions wanted to leave a good impression on the colonial administration, and many of the political players were again aware of Hofstra's place in the political landscape and the political value of his 'friendship'.[180] Joe Quee seems to have been willing to accommodate Hofstra just as much as his father had before him. Like his father, he insisted that Hofstra should 'know everything'.[181] Here, the most evident example is the fact that Joe Quee provided the Hofstra's with a piece of land for a rice farm. This farm provided them with the opportunity to closely examine every step in the agricultural process.[182]

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[177] T.C. Conteh, Court Case with Diawo (date unknown, 1935) ACSH, Box 1, Instanter Reporter's Note Book 9.
[178] Letter from T.C. Conteh to S. Hofstra (16th August, 1935) ACSH, Box 5, Red Box 1, Folder 'Correspondentie binnen Sierra Leone 1934-1939'. – Letter from T.C. Conteh to S. Hofstra (13th June, 1935) ACSH, Box 5, Red Box 1, Folder 'Correspondentie binnen Sierra Leone 1934-1939'.
[179] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (7th June, 1936) ATM, 193.
[180] Even in this time, tensions could still rise. In July of 1936, a rumour was circulating in Panguma that Quee Gboli had travelled to French Guiana in order to hear from soothsayers whether he would win in the election. The soothsayers had given him no hope, thus now Gboli would return with *haleibla* or 'fetish-men' who were able to kill Joe Quee. This frightened the latter's supporters, who wanted him to go into hiding. Joe was not without fear himself and consulted Hofstra. Eventually he left Panguma for one day. Ultimately, Quee Gboli arrived in Panguma on his own, but Conteh stated that Gboli could have left the *haleibla* somewhere near, in order to make use of them when Joe Quee had won the election. In Hofstra's notes we find a second version of this rumour, wherein not only Joe Quee, but his 'big supporter' (singular) would also be killed. Nowhere is stated who this 'big supporter' was, but Joe Quee's other 'big' supporters Kaifala and Bockari Konuwa had already been dealt with, they had lost their political positions. It could even by Hofstra himself, as arguably he was the only real 'big supporter' left. We should of course not forget that it was a rumour, but the existence of the rumour itself is evidence of continual political tension. – S. Hofstra, Notes: 'A restless week because of Quee Gboli's coming' (6th July, 1936) ACSH, Box 5, Red Box 3. – S. Hofstra, Notes: 'A day in Panguma' (30th June, 1936) ACSH, Box 3, Folder "Economics".
[181] S. Hofstra, Notes: 'The attitudes towards the secrets of the Porro' (date unknown) ACSH, Box 3, Folder "Mende aantekeningen''.
[182] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (7th June, 1936) ATM, 193.

Joe Quee's supporters even tried to persuade him to visit the Dutchman more often: 'You are friends after all'.[183] Perhaps these supporters wanted Joe Quee to be seen together with Hofstra in order to show continuity with the bond which existed between the anthropologist and James Quee. Joe was however wary of overplaying this relationship, as he was convinced that visiting Hofstra too often would bring the Dutchman in a difficult position. Regent-chief Farma, who now resided over the court, disliked Joe Quee as well.[184] At the moment, Farma was helpful towards Hofstra, but this could change if he were to find out the Dutchman's political allegiance. Now, when the votes had already been cast, communicating his bond with Hofstra to the voting public could have negative effects for his ally.

Hofstra himself seems to have been more cautious in this new and multifaceted political climate as well, writing to his adoptive mother that he lived 'as usual' with Panguma's inhabitants, and that he did not think that regent-chief Farma's faction suspected him of supporting any particular faction: 'So I am able to do my work quietly.'[185]

A more concrete example of the way in which Hofstra's work got caught up in Lower Bambara's chiefdom affairs, is found when we return to Hofstra's initiation into the highest rank of the Poro. It proved to be difficult to get all political factions on board: 'What the one party approves and does, the other party is inclined to reject.'[186] He did not think that it had anything to do with the way in which the factions regarded him personally, but it was difficult to bring them to a consensus. Again, Quee Gboli and Quee Red are silent in Hofstra's notes and correspondence during this period. They did not provide him with information or fieldwork possibilities. Nowhere is it stated which factions did the rejecting and which did the approving, but the above-mentioned stances of Joe Quee suggest that it was him who was willing to accommodate Hofstra the most.

We find the eventual outcome of the election in Arthur Abrahams study. The reason why he briefly wrote about this specific case is because of the clarity in which it illustrates how direct British Indirect Rule could be in the political sphere of the Mende. If a candidate was not favoured by a local official, they were prone to interfere if they could. The stalemate between Joe Quee and Quee Gboli lingered on for quite some time as neither of them was inclined to

[183] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (7th June, 1936) ATM, 194.
[184] When section-chief Kaifala was deposed, a decision which was ratified by Regent Chief Farma, Kaifala approached Joe Quee. The latter was convinced that Farma disliked him, and wanted to depose all of his 'strong men'. Joe then asked a number of 'big men' to come with him to Kenema, where they would approach the D.C. about the case. Farma then fined Joe Quee eight pounds, as he had gone against his decision. – Letter from T.C. Conteh to S. Hofstra (16th August, 1935) ACSH, Box 5, Red Box 1, Folder 'Correspondentie binnen Sierra Leone 1934-1939'.
[185] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (7th June, 1936) ATM, 193.
[186] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (23rd August, 1936) ATM, 220.

support the other. In order to gain insight into the candidates' actual support among Lower Bambara's residents, the votes of individual households were counted. Now, Joe Quee received 3.120 votes, and was crushed by Quee Gboli's 4.242 votes.[187] Normally, this would have led to Quee Gboli's nomination, but P.C. J.S. Fenton chose Joe Quee, pointing at his literacy, his former employment for the Survey Department, and his clear criminal record.[188]

If we entertain the thought for a moment that Hofstra had not fallen ill and instead had continued to do his work in Panguma, we can assess how precarious the precondition of access of *ndomahei*-approval could be. Had Fenton not intervened, Quee Gboli would have become Panguma's gatekeeper.[189] Nothing points to the fact that he would have accommodated Hofstra's research, in any case not in the way in which James Quee had done.[190]

As established, *ndomahei*-approval and accommodation preconditioned Hofstra's fieldwork in important ways. Yet, there was always an aspect of trade involved, as those who had Hofstra 'on their side' could gain political capital. The fickle nature of this trade becomes especially clear when the votes had been cast during the election, when both Hofstra and Joe Quee wanted to prevent regent-chief Farma from finding out the Dutchman's political preference.

[187] A. Abraham, *Mende Government and Politics under Colonial Rule*, 286.
[188] Ibidem.
[189] As Arthur Abraham has found, some officials of the Colonial Office disagreed with the pick of J.S. Fenton. S. Robinson of the Colonial Office stated that administration could depose a chief for 'subversive conduct', but that it could not debar a candidate (Quee Gboli) for 'previous misconduct'. Other pointed at the numerical majority of Quee Gboli. Ultimately, the Colonial Office would leave the matter in the hands of the local official. – A. Abraham, *Mende Government and Politics under Colonial Rule*, 287.
[190] Furthermore, Joe Quee would likely have left Panguma. He could even have been forced to leave by the Provincial Commissioner, as Hofstra describes in a case which he encountered when he first met P.C. Stocks – S. Hofstra, Personality and Differentiation in the Political Life of the Mendi, 442.

Conclusion

In this study we set out to assess how the 'colonial situation' in 1930s Sierra Leone influenced the 'ethnographic episode' of the Dutch anthropologist Sjoerd Hofstra. In doing so, we have isolated 'preconditions of access to knowledge', stemming from the mission, the colonial administration and the Mende-themselves. These preconditions shaped the Dutchman's fieldwork experiences and made his venture possible.

In our first chapter, we followed Sjoerd Hofstra's first movements in Sierra Leone, in order to illustrate the fact that Hofstra indeed recognized the existence of these preconditions before he selected his field-site. It was likely the existence of a mission network made up of missionaries who saw value in anthropological insights which drew the Dutchman to the east of Bo. In Kenema, along the railway, Hofstra wondered what the colonial presence would concretely mean for his fieldwork-experiences after he saw Provincial Commissioner Stocks open doors wherever he liked. Lastly, we saw him acknowledging the role a *ndomahei* would play during his fieldwork, as well as his comparison of multiple local rulers before he ultimately settled down in Panguma. Thereafter, we continued by examining the way in which the specific colonial situation in Sierra Leone and Panguma's region preconditioned his access to knowledge. In doing so, we explored concrete examples of fieldwork influences stemming from the mission, the colonial administration and the Mende themselves.

Hofstra would indeed make extensive use of the missionary network, as it provided him with inroads into Mende-society. These 'patterns of access to knowledge' preconditioned his own inquiries. Most importantly, the education of the mission provided access to people; a group of Mende which could both speak the English language and readily engaged with Europeans. This meant that Hofstra could make use of mission-affiliated Mende like Thomas Conteh, Samuel Ndoko, David Fama, Mr. Ganna and many others. Yet, as illustrated by his copy of Kenneth Cosby's paper on Mende-polygamy, he was able to use the fruits of these preestablished patterns of access as well. In a scholastic sense, missionaries like Kenneth Crosby diverged less from anthropologists than posited by the likes of Bronislaw Malinowski, for whom the missionary was a foil against which 'the anthropologist' emerged. Hofstra and Crosby primarily diverged in their ultimate valuation of Mende-polygamy. While this divergence catches the eye, the specific form it took signifies methodological convergence, which made Crosby's paper a useful source for the Dutchman.

Yet, the differing value-judgements of Hofstra and Crosby ultimately did matter. What set Hofstra and Crosby apart was not their methodology, but the manner in which Africans

reacted to their inquiries. The study of polygamy was shaped by African agency, as informants assessed the pitfalls of honesty and redacted their statements accordingly. Thus, Hofstra quickly became convinced that he had come to know more than his incidental colleagues about what the Mende actually thought of Methodist social ethics, as well as polygamous marriage.

This same group op mission-educated Mende, which included Joe Quee, was willing to speak Hofstra of the 'secrets' of the Poro. Again, individual Mende were well capable of assessing the dangers of oversharing. Hofstra's access to the Poro was further preconditioned by the 'air of suspicion' characteristic of the period of colonial state-building which directly preceded his fieldwork. This distrusting attitude targeted the Poro for two reasons; the Poro's status as an 'ungraspable' body of political authority, and its conflation with murder societies like the Human Leopards. This last example speaks to Talal Asad's claim that anthropologists like Hofstra could do their work due to the colonial presence, which provided the general power-imbalance needed for careless and safe observation.

If we were to solely adhere to Asad's limited notion of 'preconditioning', or concepts such as the colonial *préterrain,* in order to assess the colonial forces shaping fieldwork at any given time, we would perhaps stop here. Then, we would have indeed shown that Hofstra's fieldwork did not take place in a vacuum. Yet, as we have seen for Hofstra's research, this is only part of what constituted access to knowledge. We have argued that the Mende should not be excluded when we speak of a 'colonial situation' of an 'ethnographic episode'.

The British colonial administration may have opened (or barged in) doors, only Mende-rulers could open their respective 'gates'. Even if British Indirect Rule had altered the Mende political system and eroded the authority of its rulers, these gatekeepers still had enough power to hold considerable sway over anthropological research projects. For Hofstra, it was not enough for a *ndomahei* to simply allow him access to his village, he needed him to publicly approve of his work in order to get access to knowledge. Part of what made a *ndomahei* such as James Quee actively accommodate fieldwork is the fact that Hofstra's broader field-presence, first as a dispenser and in second instance as a broker, had value for his subjects. Thus, the ethnological information and fieldwork opportunities which kept Hofstra from leaving Panguma became a currency by which James Quee could attain political capital. The same was true for his son Joe, who sought Hofstra's support after his father's passing.

What becomes apparent is the fact that in Sierra Leone, Hofstra moved through spaces which knew a multitude of power-dynamics, working at different levels. Access to the Poro was the product of excessive displays of British power in the (recent) past. The power of the mission was mainly felt by those Mende who were connected to it, or who relied on it for

opportunities. Yet, on a local level, the non-educated Mende had the most to fear from the authority nearest to them, their *ndomahei*; the authority of the British, however real, was relatively distant. As most of the time, the *ndomahei* held the greatest sway over the lives of those Mende offering Hofstra anthropological information, the importance of his approval cannot be underestimated. Furthermore, even if we acknowledge that each group preconditioned the Dutchman's study in its own distinctive ways, a constant is the fact that the Mende exercised their agency by assessing the dangers of oversharing information.

When we return to the lines of inquiry dealing with Mende-polygamy and the Poro, we see that preconditions of access ran parallel and intersected with each other. As illustrated by the group of households new to Panguma, who were hesitant to share information, *ndomahei*-approval was necessary for Panguma's inhabitants to engage with Hofstra's demographic inquiries. Likewise, even if the colonial 'air of suspicion' may have preconditioned Hofstra's ability to join the Poro, it was James Quee who ultimately instigated his initiation. Furthermore, Hofstra need not have been initiated into the *Mahavebu*, the Poro's highest rank. Such Poro-promotion was unprecedented for Europeans.

Fragmenting Hofstra's larger research project by isolating lines of inquiry enabled us to show different dynamics within colonial society working at once. Our usage of 'preconditions of access' as an analytical tool has allowed us to clearly illustrate that Hofstra's 'ethnographic episode' was truly the product of the dynamics of a specific 'colonial situation', even if we only were able to describe isolated parts of this episode.

We hope that this study has opened up possibilities for future studies. As Victoria Dalzell would phrase it, Hofstra left behind a clear 'ethnographic shadow' for his successors to find.[191] This shadow was a long one, as Hofstra was a harbinger of the change he himself set out to study. As we have seen, his presence in the field was not confined to his role as an ethnographer. He acted as an amateur physician while his rest-house functioned as a provisional dispensary. By improving their access to Western medicine, he broadened the medical arsenal of Panguma's inhabitants. More importantly and perhaps less deliberate, he supported a political faction which harboured many of the young and educated Mende, who sought to engage with opportunities in the colonial labour market. An interesting continuation of the present study could focus on the way in which Panguma's inhabitants interacted with other Europeans after the Dutchman left. Furthermore, the story of the Joe Quee's election does not seem to have ended were we left it. In Hofstra's archive we find a copy of a letter sent to his

[191] V.M. Dalzell, In the Shadow of Other Anthropologists, *Anthropology and humanism*, *Vol. 44 No. 2* (2019) 282-292.

successor Kenneth Little, who visited Panguma during his own fieldwork. In it, Hofstra asked Little to clarify a rumour about Joe Quee being in trouble.[192] For each of these questions, new archives will have to be found.

Yet, the possibilities of Hofstra's field-archive itself are by no means exhausted either. Future research could for example focus on the experiences of the Mende who worked most closely with Hofstra, such as Thomas Conteh. Here, they figured as side-characters, but it can prove enlightening to let them take centre-stage themselves. Why did they decide to work for Hofstra? Did they use Hofstra to traverse the colonial encounter, with its new challenges and opportunities? Other sources shed light on the applied aspects of Hofstra fieldwork, mainly focussing on the sphere of education in the Protectorate. During the course of his stay, he inspected a number of mission- and government schools and talked to numerous officials, missionaries and Mende about the nature and aims of Western education in Africa. By all means, we end with an open invitation to make use of the archive of a man who, by virtue of his profession and open mind, left a detailed and vivid account of the African changes brought forth by the colonial encounter.

[192] Letter from S. Hofstra to K. Little (14th September, 1949) ACSH, Box 5, Red Box 1, Folder 'Correspondence with the British Colonial Office.

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Appendix A: Gbessi's secret

In our chapter dealing with Hofstra's relation to the Poro, we established that the colonial encounter made him a partial member of its community in the sense that he received access to certain events and knowledge inaccessible to the non-initiated. In order to expand and diversify the argument behind the colonial precondition of access to 'secret' knowledge, we briefly examine Hofstra's encounter with Gbessi, a Mende man who behaved like a woman.[193] This will allow us to further explore Hofstra's societal status in the Mende-area, as well as its effect on his access to 'secret' information.

Gbessi was between thirty and forty years of age and had 'quite the voice of a woman', 'walked slowly and hesitantly like a woman', '[made] on the whole the same movements and gestes' (gestures), and did work normally done by women, such as assisting in childbirth. He seemed to have no sexual needs, he would never 'feel' anything in that regard. The man travelled around Sierra Leone's Southern Province as a masked Bundu-dancer of the Sandei-society, the female equivalent of the Poro. The dances performed by these 'devils' had a range of functions, but mainly served entertaining and religious purposes. Gbessi's mother had been a leading figure in one of the lodges of the above-mentioned Sandei. During Hofstra's stay in Panguma, Gbessi was arrested and even flogged in the town of Dodo. This is where he first met the Dutchman, and where he told his story.

When Gbessi's mother died, she appeared to him in a dream, in which she told him where to find charms which would make him a gifted Bundu-dancer. Under the surface of a river, he encountered *ngafes*, or non-ancestral spirits, who indeed provided him with a charm. Yet, they demanded that he would live the rest of his life as a woman, as men were not allowed to dance for the Sandei. After three days Gbessi found himself in his own house again.[194] This

[193] In a letter to his adoptive mother, Hofstra hypothesized whether 'strong dream experiences' could explain Gbessi's behaviour. From Hofstra's notes we learn that Gbessi behaved like a woman before his mother appeared in his dreams, and before the *ngafei* provided him with the charms. – Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (21st June, 1936) ATM, 199.
[194] Ibidem, 199.

story, the explanation which Gbessi gave for his particular gender expression, was shrouded in secrecy.

This becomes particularly clear when Hofstra asked Gbessi to show his sexual organ: 'He was first reluctant to show it, but agreed because I am a European. Towards natives he would probably not show it, and on the other hand, the natives do not like to inspect it, I think'. This latter suggestion is backed up by the fact that both Conteh and his nephew Samuel did not want to lay eyes on it: 'They said that it is dangerous because the *ngafei* with Gbessi has connections, will be angry if anybody tries to see it.'[195] Usually, both men were curious, but this was knowledge which they did not want to have.

According to Dodo's *ndomahei,* Gbessi had been spying on a group of bathing women, who then brought him to his attention*,* as it was strictly against custom for a man to observe women bathing. After consulting with the local D.C., he fined Gbessi. Hofstra was however doubtful of this narrative, as Conteh knew that Dodo's women normally liked the Bundu-dancer. Samuel added that there were more men like Gbessi; 'who are between men and women.' Both Conteh and Hofstra suspected the *ndomahei* of 'money-hunting'.[196] The Dutchman, likely informed by his Mende-companions, did not find Gbessi's treatment and fine to be in accordance with 'native rules and feelings'. Thus, the group decided to interfere:

> We decided that it would be better to take the man back to Panguma, to give him some money and then let him go to the Southern chiefdoms. In this way he escapes the fine of the Dodo chief. My interference in this sense was perhaps against the letter of the D.C.'s decision, but in this case I found it worthwhile to act on my own responsibility. The decision of the D.C. did not seem to me to be quite in accordance with native rules and feelings in general (apart from Dodo chiefs). Perhaps English attitudes towards sexual rules may also have had influence.[197]

After this act of drive-by applied anthropology, the *ngafei* who gave Gbessi the charms angrily came to him in a second dream, of which Gbessi again informed the Dutchman. He had revealed his secret and would therefore be taken to the parallel world of spirits. Apparently, Hofstra made his appearance in this dream as well, in order to intervene. He convinced the *ngafei* that Gbessi had revealed the secret for his sake: 'The *ngafei* was then not angry because Europeans

[195] S. Hofstra, Notes: 'A man who behaves like a woman' (24th June, 1936) ACSH, Box 2, Archive box, Brown Folder 'Ngafanga'.
[196] Ibidem.
[197] Ibidem.

and spirits are of the same group.' In this dream, Hofstra and the *ngafei* were equals. The Dutchman noted that Conteh and Samuel seemed to believe the contents of this second dream.

What this second dream suggests, together with his ultimate willingness to let Hofstra 'inspect' him, is the fact that Gbessi regarded the Dutchman as a 'supernatural outlier'. This in turn effected his inclination to share information. Hofstra could not be affected by the Mende-supernatural, a given which circled back to Gbessi's assession of his own vulnerability: Was he himself safe if he told this outlier? Ultimately, Gbessi was not wholly certain of his categorization of Hofstra, and he took a precautionary measure. Before he left Panguma, he asked the Dutchman for an additional five shillings, as he was concerned that he might still become ill some day because he revealed the secret. Then he would be in need of some extra cash in order to get cured.

This belief in the supernatural invulnerability of Europeans was widespread, as becomes clear from Hofstra's correspondence with his adoptive mother:

> It is interesting, moreover, that here we, white people, are considered to be strong fetishists, with magical powers on whom native magical means have no effect. Therefore one is, aside from the political protection and the natural hospitality of the population, completely safe here as a white person. "Otherwise several D.C.'s wouldn't be alive any more", Conteh said. And yesterday the Gbandi medicine man said to me, "My medicine is very strong, only on God and a white person it has no effect.''[198]

In most if not all other cases, being an insider provided access to knowledge, be it in the case of Hofstra's own initiation in the Poro or because of the actual insider-status of Conteh or his nephew Samuel. But here, we find a telling example in which the opposite was true. Gbessi's case reveals another dimension of the way in which the colonial encounter preconditioned Hofstra's access to 'secret' knowledge. For some Mende, conflicts and power dynamics which arose out of this encounter had placed 'the European' in the same spiritually untouchable and opaque category as the *ngafei*. Conflicts with D.C.'s could not be solved by supernatural means, for these officials were unaffected by even the most powerful magic in the eyes of those wielding it. Even if the categorisation of Europeans and spirits was not total and rigid, as illustrated by Gbessi's precaution, Hofstra being an 'supernatural outlier' is what made Gbessi part with his secret.

[198] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (31st August, 1934) ATM, 116.

Appendix B: The personal dimension of fieldwork

Even if it is not possible to gauge it's symmetry, we can surmise that James Quee and Hofstra shared a bond that transcended the rather cold and calculated interdependency which emerges in this study's fourth chapter. Upon Quee's death, Hofstra wrote to his adoptive mother: 'I hadn't expected to experience this. It really affected me, because I liked the chief rather a lot'.[199] These emotions are also found in Hofstra's private notes.[200] Assessing Hofstra's total presence in the field through the lens of opportunism was analytically useful for our study of Mende-agency, but this focus hides from sight the fact that Hofstra grew to be appreciated by a portion of Panguma's residents. Here, we briefly explore this more personal dimension of anthropological fieldwork, by zooming in on Hofstra's involvement in episodes of grief in Panguma. As in the rest of this study, the available source material shines more light on Hofstra's perspective than those of Panguma's inhabitants. Still there is some valuable information to be distilled from his fieldnotes and correspondence.

The first of these episodes of grief has been briefly touched upon before, and is formed by the death and burial of one of James Quee's daughters, who was fourteen years old when she passed in the beginning of March of 1934. This burial seems to have been merely an ethnological event for the Dutchman, as he had only just arrived in Panguma. He joined in the burial-procession and was present during one of the later ceremonies, during which some of the townspeople gave speeches (the ones translated by Conteh) and gave gifts to the parents of the girl. In his correspondence with his adoptive mother he primarily talks about the way in which

[199] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (13th December, 1934) ATM, 149.
[200] 'In the office were mainly four women: Kaadi, Seila, Rashid's wife and a sister of James Quee, Kaadi was silently crying. Poor James Quee. How soon and unexpectedly finished his life. His face had a calm expression.' – S. Hofstra, Notes: 'James Quee's illness and death' (date unknown, 1934) ACSH, Box 3, "The Orderly File" Folder.

he handled this particular ethnological event; which specific ceremonies he was able to witness.[201]

When we progress in time to James Quee's own illness and death, a different picture emerges. Hofstra had been in Panguma for approximately nine and a half months. In the first period of fieldwork, Hofstra visited Quee almost every day, and as mentioned, he would accompany him on a number of occasions. He was planning to make a tour around the chiefdom with Quee when the latter fell ill. On the day of his planned transfer to the hospital of Daru he felt better and thus refused to leave Panguma. His tax collection would soon start as well. When Quee fell ill again, he tried to be cured by local medicine and ritual washings in Panguma, but to no avail. Multiple dignitaries in Quee's political circle then came to Hofstra in order to press him to persuade the *ndomahei* to seek further help. Quee himself wanted to discuss his health with the Dutchman as well, who managed to convince Quee to come to Segbwema for a consult. There, Quee's condition quickly worsened to the point that Dr. Kearney (Segbwema) and Dr. Laird (Daru) lost all hope and eventually allowed local hiccough-medicine to be practiced in their hospital. Quee's relatives, Panguma's 'big men', and Hofstra himself frequently visited the *ndomahei* with the motorized lorry or Hofstra's car, but in the end it was decided that he was to be transferred back to Panguma. There, Quee's circle wanted to try a last medicine to cure his hiccough. The doctors gave him some morphine and he was transported with Hofstra's car, his own son Charles who drove, his daughter Dora and his brother Nabi Quee. Quee would not reach Panguma alive: 'It was a sad journey, in the dark, with a dying man.':

> 'At Talia we had to attach my car behind the chiefs lorry with a rope. So we went further in the dark. It was a very sad and also dangerous journey. My lights did not work and Conteh had from the chiefs lorry to light the way for my car with a lamp. The journey took us over four hours. It could have been done in 1 ½ or 2 hours. Had that been the case the chief would have reached Panguma alive. Now, he died on the way, about half an hour before we reached Panguma, at about 11 o clock. It was silent in my car. I asked Dora: „Is he still alive?''. „He is sleeping'', she said. They did not cry. When we had so much trouble before and the chief was still alive, they „zuchten'' (sighed) often: ngews! or: o Lord! Now they were silent. For Charles, it was also sad. He was driving my car.
>
> On the way Kaifala and Tucker wanted to bring the chief in the lorry and then to go as quick as possible to Panguma. The others, however, refused. They seemed to find that unfair to

[201] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (March, 1934) ATM, 46.

me, because I had been kind and also because the lorry was to shakey and cold for the chief. Dora and Charles refused to let the chief go from my car.'[202]

During the burial ceremonies, Hofstra gave his own speech. He describes a heavily emotionalized Dora leaning against him. This time, this burial was much more to Hofstra than merely an ethological event. As he wrote to his adoptive mother: 'This whole business has made me share in the ups and downs of the people very closely, as you'll understand'.[203]

A fact speaking to the mutuality of this sentiment can be found when Hofstra returned to Panguma after his fieldwork intermezzo in the Netherlands, almost a year and a half after James Quee's death. Upon his second arrival in Panguma, a large group of its inhabitants were awaiting him. A band played and the schoolchildren walked in a parade with a banner 'Panguma welcomes you'. The festivities were further spruced up by dancing performances of dancers of the Poro and the Sandei. A few days later Kaadi, the 'head-wife' of the late James Quee, came to visit the Hofstra's. She apologized for her absence during the festivities, as 'too many memories had become stirred up within her.'[204] At least at some level, Hofstra had become a part of Panguma's emotional community during his fieldwork.

[202] S. Hofstra, Notes: 'James Quee's illness and death' (date unknown, 1934) ACSH, Box 3, "The Orderly File" Folder.
[203] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (13th December, 1934) ATM, 149.
[204] Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (31st May, 1936) ATM, 191. – At this time, Hofstra had made it a habit to attend all of the burials in Panguma, even when the deceased was poor, or had no friends and family. As Conteh had mentioned in Segbwema, people appreciated this: I was there, just as I attend all funerals without distinction and also to contribute something for the costs. The people appreciate it, I believe, that I do this indiscriminately. With this family particularly one could see that. They value your presence at a funeral and to them I am no longer there as an observer. – Letter from S. Hofstra to Ms. Overdiep (26st July, 1936) ATM, 210.