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The Lebanese traders in Sierra Leone

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THE LEBANESE TRADERS
IN
SIERRA LEONE

HENDRIK LAURENS VAN DER LAAN

The Lebanese Traders in Sierra Leone

THE LEBANESE TRADERS IN SIERRA LEONE

PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor
in de economische wetenschappen aan de
Katholieke Hogeschool te Tilburg
op gezag van de Rector Magnificus, Prof. Mr. H.J.M. Jeukens
in het openbaar te verdedigen
ten overstaan van een door het College van Dekanen
aangewezen commissie
in de aula van de Hogeschool

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Preface

I had the good fortune to teach Economic Organization at the University of Sierra Leone for a period of nearly ten years. This work opened my eyes to the great gaps in printed information about the economy of Sierra Leone. This explains the original objective of this book: *to prepare a careful description of a neglected topic*. Needless to say, I was convinced that of all neglected topics in the field of economics the role of the Lebanese was the most important. Many Sierra Leoneans have encouraged me by sharing this view.

A second objective emerged in the course of my research when I discovered that the Lebanese should not be studied in isolation but against the background of the economy of Sierra Leone as a whole. I realized that I had to learn a great deal more about the economic history of the country. This meant extra work, but has enabled me to present their activities as being *closely interwoven with the economic history of Sierra Leone*. Economic factors and relationships dominate in this book. It differs therefore from other studies of immigrant trading communities which are mainly sociological or political in character.

My third objective has been to give *a fair and unbiased account*. This has not been easy because the Lebanese have come in for a lot of criticism and they have not defended themselves in writing.

I must point out here that I have not tried to write a survey of the Lebanese in West Africa. I hold the view that the economic histories of the various countries in West Africa differ in certain important respects and I am convinced that the operations of the Lebanese in these countries reflect these differences to some extent, so that general conclusions are not permitted. When occasionally I have felt that a comparison with the Lebanese elsewhere was appropriate or stimulating, I have used a note to point this out.

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The printed information which I consulted posed three problems. The first one was practical. The references to the Lebanese are scattered over numerous publications and in many cases the relevant passage consisted of only one sentence so that I found it hard to decide in what way the author considered it significant. A second problem was posed by publications on West Africa. How far could I assume that general conclusions and observations about West Africa applied to Sierra Leone? I had lived in this country long enough to know the hazards of doing so without considerable care. However, I had to study these publications and, in fact, I owe a great deal to them. I have listed the more useful ones in the second section of the bibliography. The third problem resulted from a serious bias in my sources, which were written by Europeans and Sierra Leoneans, but hardly ever by Lebanese. Moreover, many of the references to the Lebanese consisted of criticisms, as I have already mentioned. On examination I found that though these negative comments were rarely totally invalid, they unduly accentuated the faults of the Lebanese. At the same time there was a tendency to overlook the merits of the Lebanese. I had to overcome this bias by interviewing many Lebanese, so that in the end I could reconstruct their point of view. This was the most difficult aspect of my research, but it was also the most rewarding one. I was compelled to look at incidents and developments — whether well-known or obscure — from a stand not previously occupied by other scholars. In several cases I gained new insights which may be stimulating to those who are primarily interested in the role of European enterprise in colonial Africa or in the process of African emancipation in the 20th century.

I worked in Sierra Leone from 1959 to 1971. During the first five years of this period I paid some, but no special attention to the Lebanese. The idea of writing this book was conceived in 1964. For the next five years I achieved little in the form of tangible results because of my teaching and administrative obligations at Fourah Bay College. These were years of gradual orientation towards the subject based on newspaper items, casual conversations, and haphazard observation. There was no need to reach conclusions quickly — something which I have come to appreciate in retrospect. Since September 1969 when I joined the Afrika-Studiecentrum in Leiden I have been able to work full time on this subject.

My fieldwork was done between September 1969 and March 1971 and consisted of interviews and systematic observation. I interviewed 273 Lebanese in Sierra Leone and 70 other people (Sierra Leoneans, Europeans, Indians, etc.). The interviews gave me an opportunity to assess the competence of the Lebanese and to discover the things that mattered to them.

Events and subjects which figured largely or repeatedly in interviews I have tried to trace in reports and newspapers, often with success, but, of course, much of what I heard had never been put on paper because it had seemed unimportant at the time or it had been done stealthily, or because the Government had chosen not to publish it. I was therefore left with much oral information that was not confirmed by any documents. Most of it I abandoned with regret but some remarks which I considered reliable and essential have been included in this book.

The plan of the book is as follows. The historical introduction in Chapter 1 is followed by ten chapters which are economic in character. Chapter 2 presents those aspects of the economic history of Sierra Leone which were significant for the Lebanese while Chapter 11 summarizes my conclusions about the Lebanese entrepreneur. Thus Chapters 2 and 11 form the two cores of the economic argument which I present. The intervening chapters describe the activities in which the Lebanese have participated and the role they have played in them. Although there is a great deal of detail in these chapters, the interaction between the Lebanese entrepreneur and the Sierra Leonean environment is always the central theme.

Chapters 12 and 13 are mainly sociological. They present in a simple way the information which I gained in interviews and from observation. This seemed the best solution for an author who has no formal training in sociology. For readers who know little about the Lebanese it may be useful to read these two chapters immediately after Chapter 1.

Chapters 14-17 are political in character. The attitudes of and measures taken by the authorities in Sierra Leone are described and their implications for the Lebanese are discussed, in particular the economic ones. The final chapter supplements the economic conclusions of Chapter 11 in the light of the social and political information in Chapters 12-17. In conclusion there are some remarks about the future of the Lebanese in Sierra Leone.

Fourah Bay College has contributed to this book in several ways and I am glad of this opportunity of expressing my gratitude to the College Authorities. It was the College that gave me the opportunity to teach in Sierra Leone for many years, without which this book would never have been written. The College also granted me two sabbatical terms which I devoted to the initial research for this book. Later, during my fieldwork, the College accorded me the status of Visiting Research Fellow and provided me and my family with housing and other facilities.

I am grateful to the Afrika-Studiecentrum for accepting my research

VIII *Preface*

project fully and unconditionally when I joined it, and for giving me the opportunity to complete this book without being encumbered by other duties.

I further acknowledge a grant which WOTRO, the Netherlands Foundation for the Advancement of Tropical Research, made to finance my fieldwork.

Professor Dr. L.H. Janssen of Tilburg University has helped me in many ways since our first meeting in 1966. I have benefited a great deal from his concise comments on the various drafts of this book. Other people who have read the whole manuscript in draft form are Dr. A.G. Hopkins of the University of Birmingham; Dr. J.M. Blell, general medical practitioner in Freetown from 1938 to 1970; my wife, Dr. M. van der Laan-Bachofen; Mr. J.P. Birch, C.B.E., General Manager of UAC (Sierra Leone) from 1946 to 1958; and Mr. H.E. McCartney, Chairman of UAC (Sierra Leone) from 1962 to 1969. Parts of the manuscript were read by Professor Dr. J.R. Cartwright of the University of Western Ontario; Dr. P.J. van Dooren of the Koninklijk Instituut voor de Tropen in Amsterdam; Dr. A.M. Howard of Rutgers University; Mr. C.H. Fyfe of the University of Edinburgh; and Mr. S.M. Taylor, Chairman of the SLPMB from 1950 to 1958. To all these people I owe a great debt. They saved me from several errors and confirmed many points where the printed sources gave an incomplete account. Of course, they are not responsible for any errors of fact or interpretation that may remain.

Mr. F. Salloukh, the Lebanese Chargé d'Affaires in Freetown, and Mr. G.B. Haddad, Secretary in the Embassy, answered many questions and introduced me to many Lebanese businessmen. I greatly appreciate their help. I cannot mention all my informants by name, but I shall long remember the kindness and frankness which so many of them showed to me.

I am also grateful to the Librarians of Fourah Bay College, the Afrika-Studiecentrum, and the Foreign and Commonwealth Office in London, and the Keeper of Public Records in London, for their assistance. I am pleased to thank the Editors of the Sierra Leone Geographical Journal for permission to reproduce a map. Finally I am grateful to Mrs. M.W.J. van Hal and Mrs. A.W.M. van den Nieuwendijk for having willingly done most of the typing for this book.

Leiden, February 1975

H.L. van der Laan

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Currency exchange rates

1 £ (WACB) = 1 £ sterling
2 Leones = 1 £ sterling

List of abbreviations

APC	All People's Congress
B(B)WA	Bank of (British) West Africa
CFAO	Compagnie Française d'Afrique Occidentale
CSO	Central Selling Organisation
DC	District Commissioner
EUB	Evangelical United Brethren
FCSC	Freetown Cold Storage Company
GBO	G.B. Ollivant & Co
GDO	Government Diamond Office
IDB	Illicit Diamond Buying
IDM	Illicit Diamond Mining
Le	Leone
NDB	National Development Bank
PC	Paramount Chief
PWD	Public Works Department
PZ	Paterson, Zochonis & Co
RTTC	Rokupr Transport and Trading Company
SBWA	Standard Bank of West Africa
SCOA	Société Commerciale de l'Ouest Africain
SLDC	Sierra Leone Development Company
SLPMB	Sierra Leone Produce Marketing Board
SLPP	Sierra Leone People's Party
SLST	Sierra Leone Selection Trust
UAC	United Africa Company
WACB	West African Currency Board
WAPCB	West African Produce Control Board

A historical introduction

The Lebanese are an immigrant community in Sierra Leone. Similar communities exist in nearly all West African countries; migration from Lebanon to West Africa began in the 1880s and has continued ever since, in varying numbers and with interruptions during the World Wars. The area of what is now the Republic of Lebanon experienced heavy emigration during the second half of the 19th century. The majority of the emigrants travelled to North and South America, and indeed it appears that the small minority which came to West Africa would have preferred to go to the Americas, but landed in West Africa by accident or due to lack of money.¹ The early immigrants were the nucleus of the present communities for they asked relatives to join them and sponsored these until they had established their own businesses. Their descendants are still an important group in the communities of today.

1.1 *The arrival in Sierra Leone*

We do not know when the first Lebanese immigrant arrived in Sierra Leone. We are reasonably certain, however, that he arrived in one of the seaports, because the early Lebanese travelled by ship. A newspaper of 1895 contains what is probably the earliest reference to the Lebanese in Freetown.² I therefore take 1895 as the year in which the story of the Lebanese community in Sierra Leone began, although we must allow for the possibility that evidence will turn up to show that some Lebanese arrived even earlier. They could very easily have escaped the notice of the press and the Government, because to most people they appeared as just another variety of Europeans. A different source of information is

2 *A historical introduction*

provided by the recollections of members of the Lebanese community. On one occasion these recollections were compared by some leading Lebanese who had to draft a petition to the Governor. They concluded that the first Lebanese had arrived in 1896.³ The discrepancy with the newspaper reference may be explained as follows: the men who arrived in 1896 settled in Sierra Leone and were remembered by name. They had been preceded by some others who had stayed in Sierra Leone for a short time only and were not remembered by their compatriots.

With regard to Bonthe, the other seaport of Sierra Leone, I was told that the first Lebanese arrived there in 1903.⁴ We may assume that the Lebanese who settled in towns like Port Loko, Moyamba, and Pujehun had passed through Freetown or Bonthe, normally after an orientation period there of several months. We cannot, however, rule out the possibility that some Lebanese who had originally disembarked in Conakry or Monrovia later travelled in smaller craft along the coast to Kambia, Port Loko, and other inland ports of Sierra Leone.⁵

There was one group of people in Sierra Leone who did not consider the Lebanese as merely another variety of Europeans. The Muslims in Freetown noticed that the Lebanese spoke Arabic and were well disposed towards them. I was told that the early immigrants lived in the area east of Freetown where they rented accomodation from the Mandingos.

1.2 *Two names*

There has been some confusion about the correct name of the immigrants. Two names have been in use: Syrians and Lebanese. When the early immigrants were asked for their nationality, they described themselves as Syrians because they came from the Province of Syria in the Turkish Empire. They avoided the name Turks, because they disliked Turkish rule; indeed some had left their home country because of oppression and conscription. Thus, for the early period, i.e. until 1920, the name 'Syrian' may be considered correct. Some immigrants were more precise and called themselves 'Syrians from Mount Lebanon'.

After the defeat of the Turkish Empire in 1918 France became the Mandatory Power for the northern part of the former Province of Syria and divided it in 1920 into two new states: Lebanon and Syria. As a result most of the Syrians in Sierra Leone, but not all of them, became Lebanese. The others remained 'Syrians' or rather they became citizens of the new Republic of Syria. To avoid confusion I shall call them 'Syrians

proper' in this book. The old name 'Syrian' continued to be used in its old meaning because the new distinction was inconvenient to both Europeans and Africans — and unnecessary for the British authorities.⁶ It was only after 1954, when the Lebanese Government appointed its own representative in Sierra Leone, that the name 'Lebanese' came to be used more frequently. Then, in the late 1950s the newspapers and the Government began to use the word 'Lebanese' in preference to 'Syrian'. Educated people in Sierra Leone normally speak of the 'Lebanese' nowadays, but 'Syrian' is still widely used and understood.

I shall use the name 'Lebanese' throughout this book, even in paragraphs concerning the period before 1920, when the word 'Syrian' would be better. The reader should be aware, however, that the name 'Syrian' will appear in some quotations and in the name of the riots of 1919. The 'Syrians proper', of whom there are very few in Sierra Leone,⁷ are mentioned separately in only two chapters. Most of what is said about the Lebanese in the other chapters applies to them as well.

1.3 *Difficult beginnings*

The great majority of the Lebanese arrived with very little money. Some of them may have tried to find wage employment, but nobody was prepared to employ them because they had no useful experience and did not know the country or any of its languages. They took to trading and began to sell cheap imported goods in the streets of Freetown. It was then that everybody noticed that they were different from the Europeans. The Creoles called them 'Corals', a name which is discussed in Chapter 5. It was a time of poverty and hardship, but the Lebanese worked hard to improve their position. Soon they were able to rent shops. This success led to complaints by African traders in Freetown, Bonthe, Port Loko, etc. who lost business to them.

The African animosity against the Lebanese manifested itself in 1914 and 1919. In November 1914, after much delay, the Turkish Empire joined Germany and Austria and declared war on Britain and France. Thus, the Lebanese in Sierra Leone suddenly became subjects of a hostile state because they were Turkish citizens. At its next meeting the Freetown City Council passed a resolution requesting the Government to intern all enemy subjects.⁸ However, the Lebanese escaped internment because the Governor believed that they were anti-Turkish (see further Chapter 17). Even if the resolution had no effect, it was still a clear token

4 *A historical introduction*

of Creole hostility, though it is doubtful whether the Lebanese realized the full extent of it. Perhaps the prosperous years during World War I lulled them into a false sense of security. If so, they were rudely awakened by the violence of 1919.

1.4 *The Syrian riots*

The riots which occurred in Sierra Leone in 1919 have been called the Syrian (or anti-Syrian) riots because they were directed against the Lebanese. They began in Freetown on 18 July.⁹ The shops of the Lebanese traders were stoned, the doors battered down, and the stocks looted. One Lebanese was killed. As the Police were unable to control the rioters the Government decided to place the Lebanese under protective custody in the Town Hall and two smaller buildings. For eight weeks they had to stay there in enforced idleness, considering and discussing their plight. Some may have argued that only the Creoles were hostile and that the people in the Protectorate were friendly, but they had to change their minds when they heard that similar riots had occurred in several Protectorate towns. The Lebanese who had traded in these towns soon joined their compatriots in Freetown in protective custody. We may assume that the Lebanese who could read English carefully studied the Creole newspapers, which vilified the Lebanese and blamed them for the rice shortage. They knew that their shops had been looted and that they could do nothing to protect what might be left. But the worst aspect of their situation was their uncertainty about the future. Would the Government deport them en masse? They did not doubt that this was what the Creoles wished. However, they wanted to stay in the country in which they had built up their businesses, especially as the situation in their home country was very unsettled at that time.

Their future was in danger, indeed. In August the Acting Governor asked the Colonial Office whether he should allow the Lebanese to remain in Sierra Leone or deport them in the interests of peace. Fortunately for the Lebanese, the Secretary of State for the Colonies completely rejected the idea of deportation and instructed the Acting Governor to protect them and to assure them of continued protection and reasonable compensation for their losses. He further ordered that the population should be warned by proclamation that any violence against the Lebanese would be severely punished.¹⁰ Finally, on 13 September the Lebanese were released from protective custody and returned to their shops. They

were invited to submit claims for the losses and damage caused by the rioters, and a commission appointed to consider these claims awarded the Lebanese a total of £ 63,117.¹¹

The intervention from London turned the disaster of the riots into a political victory for the Lebanese. Their position before 1919 had been uncertain, for though they had assumed that they could stay and trade in Sierra Leone for as long as they wanted, there was no legal basis for this assumption (unless they became naturalized). The Government assurances of 1919 meant in effect that the right of long-term residence was granted to the Lebanese. If a Lebanese immigrant chose to settle in Sierra Leone, he could count on the protection of the Government on no other condition than that he obeyed the laws of the country.

The intervention from London was a bitter disappointment for many Africans, and in particular for the Creoles. They no longer expected to receive a fair hearing when they informed the Government of their grievances and complaints about the Lebanese. The Creoles were further disheartened by the knowledge that many British officials suspected them of having instigated the riots. They were worried that the Lebanese would make further inroads into their long-established economic positions. Thus, bitterness and frustration marked Creole attitudes towards the Lebanese in the years that followed.

The riots were followed by many enquiries and reports, which have formed a valuable source of information for historians. They show that in 1919 the Lebanese had shops in at least 24 towns.¹² The sums that were paid out as compensation give an indication of the stocks they held before the riots and indirectly of their capital.¹³ There is further information about the positions of Lebanese and African traders in the kola, rice, and general merchandise trades. This is discussed in more detail in Chapters 3, 4 and 5.

1.5 The period 1919-1949

For fully thirty years the Lebanese lived safely under the assurances given by the British in 1919. They consolidated their economic position: they formed an increasing proportion of all the shopkeepers in Sierra Leone and their role in the produce trade expanded. It is not easy to document their progress, because newspapers and reports of this period contain only a few references to the Lebanese. This may not have been accidental, for I believe that the riots of 1919 taught the Lebanese to watch their step.

As they feared the Creole newspapers, which were ready to notice — and magnify — any fault or crime of theirs, they wisely tried to keep out of the news. The colonial administration was equally anxious to keep them out of their reports; they avoided mentioning them by name and resorted to vague references, such as 'a certain community'.¹⁴ It seems that they were afraid of being accused of either favouritism towards or discrimination against this particular group.

In the 1920s the Lebanese became important in lorry transportation (see Chapter 6) and in the 1930s in gold mining (see Chapter 7). Their participation in these areas has been recorded in more detail than their commercial advance. This has helped me a great deal in my attempts to reconstruct the general economic advance of the Lebanese during this period.

1.6 *The growth of the Lebanese community until 1945*

Demographic data for the Lebanese are scarce. The figures which I was able to find are presented in two tables. The early figures appear in Table I and the more recent ones in Table XX on p. 301.

It seems that the Lebanese community remained small during its first fifteen years, but then there was heavy immigration which was only stopped in 1914 by the outbreak of the war. The period 1910-1914 was thus crucial for the community. Two developments during that time must be mentioned here. First, the Lebanese began to venture out of the sea-ports of the Colony: by 1911 one third had moved to the Protectorate (now the Provinces), see column 2. Secondly, they felt confident enough to bring their wives out from Lebanon and to raise their families in Sierra Leone. This appeared strange, not to say irresponsible, to the Europeans, who left their wives and children at home because they considered West Africa too unhealthy. A count of 1913 showed that there were 25 Lebanese children in Freetown, all of them born in Sierra Leone.¹⁵

The census of 1921 shows a Lebanese population double that of 1911 but the growth occurred largely in the Protectorate. The number in the Colony itself had actually fallen since 1913 as a result of the exodus which followed the riots of 1919.¹⁶ The Lebanese community doubled again between 1921 and 1931. This was due not only to immigration, but also to natural growth: there were some 300 Lebanese children under 16 in 1931.¹⁷ During the 1930s the community grew at a slower pace because the depression reduced immigration. Later, during World War II, which severed all links with Lebanon, no immigration took place.

Table I. *The Lebanese in Sierra Leone, for selected years, 1901 - 1938, by area and by sex*

	Colony	Protectorate	Total	Males	Females
1901	41	0	41	38	3
1910	72	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1911	175	91	266	217	49
1913	212	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1921	177	386	563	415	148
1924	226	503	729	n.a.	n.a.
1931	413	753	1166	843	323
1938	n.a.	n.a.	1400	n.a.	n.a.

Sources:

1. R.R. Kuczynski, *Demographic Survey of the British Colonial Empire*, Volume I, *West Africa*, p. 191-4, for 1901, 1911, 1921, and 1931 figures.
2. *Annual Report on the Medical Department for the Year ended 31st December, 1913*, p. 75, for 1910 and 1913 figures, which refer to Freetown only.
3. Despatch of 11 January 1925 from Governor Slater, Public Record Office, C.O. 267/607, for 1924 figures.
4. Colonial Office, *Annual Report on Sierra Leone for 1938*, p. 24, for 1938 estimate.

Notes:

- a. n.a. = not available
- b. No census was held in the Protectorate in 1901 and the figures for this year in the columns 2-5 are based on the assumption that there were no Lebanese yet in the Protectorate.
- c. The Colony (column 1) included Bonthe.
- d. The Census figures for Freetown were 145 in 1911 and 160 in 1921. These figures may be compared with the figures for 1910 and 1913.
- e. The 1924 total of 729 consisted of 480 males, 126 females, and 123 children.

1.7 *British restrictions*

After about 1930 British colonial policy became increasingly concerned with the well-being and development of the African population. Inevitably, certain measures which reflected this new orientation were detrimental to Lebanese interests. A notable example was the reorganization of the produce trade which the Government introduced after World War II. This involved two supplementary measures: the promotion of marketing co-operatives of African produce farmers, and the establishment in 1949 of the Sierra Leone Produce Marketing Board, a public corporation responsible for the export of produce. The reorganization greatly reduced the opportunities of the Lebanese who were engaged in the produce trade.

This is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 3.

In 1952 the British adopted a more restrictive policy concerning immigration, whose object was to restrict the number of non-African immigrants. With regard to the Lebanese the British wanted to keep the community in Sierra Leone as small as was reasonably possible. Although this new policy was inspired by concern for the African population, it ignored Lebanese interests and aspirations. This is further discussed in Chapter 15.

The Lebanese were painfully aware of the shift in the British attitude towards them.¹⁸ Moreover, the economic situation in the late 1940s was bleak,¹⁹ so many Lebanese experienced lean years and were pessimistic about the future. Then, suddenly, the diamond boom brought them greater prosperity than they ever could have hoped for.

1.8 *The diamond boom*

The prosperity which Sierra Leone experienced in the mid-1950s was the result of the rapid expansion of diamond mining. Formerly all diamond mining had been confined to the Kono District, but in 1954 African miners began to dig for diamonds in several other areas. This led to a genuine diamond rush, the consequences of which are discussed in Chapter 8.

A number of Lebanese began to buy diamonds from the African miners; indeed, it is common knowledge in Sierra Leone that some of them have earned fortunes in this way. Less obvious was the fact that the Lebanese shopkeepers profited from the diamond industry, for the money which the African diamond miners earned was largely spent in Lebanese shops. In fact, it is likely that the combined profits of the Lebanese shopkeepers were higher than those of the Lebanese diamond traders. It is they who were largely responsible for the metamorphosis of the community which occurred after 1954. There were many signs of modernization: old houses were replaced by new concrete ones, new lorries and cars were bought, and many Lebanese travelled to Lebanon, some for the first time. The new prosperity attracted a number of young, better trained men from Lebanon, whom I shall call 'new immigrants'. Some of these had been born in Sierra Leone and had gone abroad for their education with no intention of returning, but they changed their minds when they heard of the diamond boom. They were admitted freely, because the immigration restrictions of 1952 did not apply to them. Other new immigrants were

admitted because their training qualified them for special jobs. The diamond boom was further significant because it favoured Lebanese importers who had just begun and provided a basis for manufacturing, an area in which a few Lebanese were interested.

1.9 Nationalistic restrictions

The position of the Lebanese deteriorated again during the 1960s as a result of a number of restrictions which the Government imposed on foreigners after the country had become independent on 27 April 1961. Some of the restrictions were specifically designed to curb the influence of the Lebanese and to reduce their opportunities. The effect of these restrictions on other foreigners was only a secondary consideration for the Government and the members of Parliament. It must be borne in mind that the Lebanese were the most numerous among the non-African foreigners and far more influential than the African foreigners in Sierra Leone. It was therefore to be expected that the politicians had the Lebanese uppermost in mind when they drafted the restrictions. In fact, some details are a useful indication of the nature and extent of Lebanese enterprise at the time.

The restrictions raised the question of citizenship. Who was a citizen of Sierra Leone and who was a foreigner and therefore subject to the restrictions? The independence constitution provided the first answer to this question. It stated among other things that people of mixed descent were citizens. This meant that the Afro-Lebanese (children of a Lebanese father and a Sierra Leonean mother) became citizens at independence. Not everybody agreed on this point, however, and Parliament adopted an amendment to the constitution in January 1962 which deprived the Afro-Lebanese of their citizenship. This decision was later reversed again; in 1965 it was decided that the Afro-Lebanese would be treated as citizens in economic matters, and in 1973 they were accepted again as full citizens. The full Lebanese — with some exceptions, see Chapters 15 and 16 — have been foreigners since independence.

Although the various economic restrictions on foreigners are discussed systematically in other chapters, it is convenient to present them here in a table. The general ones (items 4, 6, 7 and 10 of Table II) have caused more concern to the Lebanese than those which dealt with specific commodities. The table shows that the first Act imposing general restrictions was adopted in May 1965. In October 1967, after a change of govern-

Table II. *Acts imposing economic restrictions on foreigners*

Number of Act	Short title of Act	Date of commencement	Replaced or repealed by:	Further discussed in Chapter:
1. No. 61 of 1962	Land Development (Protection) Act, 1962	17 Jan. 1963	Act No. 30 of 1966	13
2. Govt. Not. No. 649 of 1963	Distribution and Sale of Rice in Sierra Leone	15 June 1963	Act No. 25 of 1965	4
3. No. 28 of 1963	Land Development (Protection) (Amendment) Act, 1963	12 Sept. 1963	Act No. 30 of 1966	13
4. No. 9 of 1965	The Non-Citizens (Restriction of Retail Trade) Act, 1965	24 May 1965	Act No. 30 of 1965	5, 6, and 10
5. No. 25 of 1965	Rice Corporation Act, 1965	1 Aug. 1965	—	4
6. No. 30 of 1965	The Non-Citizens (Restriction of Trade or Business) Act, 1965	1 Oct. 1965	Act No. 6 of 1966	5, 6, and 10
7. No. 6 of 1966	The Non-Citizens (Trade and Business) Act, 1966	3 Febr. 1966	N.R.C. Decree No. 53 of 1967	5, 6, and 10
8. No. 30 of 1966	The Non-Citizens (Interests in Land) Act, 1966	22 Sept. 1966	—	13
9. N.R.C. Decree No. 53 of 1967	The Non-Citizens (Trade and Business) Act, 1966 (Repeal) Decree, 1967	5 Oct. 1967	—	5, 6, and 10
10. No. 9 of 1969	The Non-Citizens (Trade and Business) Act, 1969	21 Aug. 1969	—	5, 6, and 10
11. No. 5 of 1970	The Non-Citizens (Trade and Business) (Amendment) Act, 1970	26 March 1970	—	5, 6, and 10
12. No. 16 of 1970	The Non-Citizens (Trade and Business) (Amendment) (No.2) Act, 1970	24 Sept. 1970	—	5, 6, and 10

ment, all general restrictions were abolished (item 9). New restrictions were imposed in 1969, after another change of government. These restrictions were more comprehensive than the ones of 1965 and have been in force ever since.

It is not yet possible to assess the full effect of the restrictions on the Lebanese. In 1970 I gained the impression that they were discouraged and had lost some of their turnover, but that the effect was less than the politicians had expected, mainly because the Sierra Leonean businessmen were not ready to replace the Lebanese fully in the activities which they had had to give up because of the restrictions.

1.10 *The Lebanese shopkeeper*

A brief description of the Lebanese, their shops, and their buildings may be helpful to readers unacquainted with Sierra Leone.

The central area of Freetown contains many Lebanese shops.²⁰ Roughly speaking the Lebanese predominate in the eastern part of central Freetown; to the west their shops intermingle with the European and Indian businesses, and to the east and south with African traders, including many Nigerians. Some streets are so crowded during the day that quiet observation of the Lebanese shops is impossible, but in the evenings one has a better chance to look around. The buildings of the Lebanese are large concrete structures which have three or four storeys and measure 30 to 40 feet along the street. The ground floor is reserved for the shop and the upper floors form the living quarters. Normally the Lebanese trader and his family live above their shop. Between the buildings there are narrow alleys from which stairs lead to the upper floors. Outside stairs are preferred to inside ones because they are considered safer. Moreover, they make it possible for the shop and the living quarters to be used by different families. The concrete houses are relatively new, most of them having been built in the 1950s, but there are still a few older houses, originally built and owned by Creoles, which are now let to Lebanese. The upper floors of the modern houses have balconies on the street side and the Lebanese love to sit there in the evenings, talking, drinking coffee, looking out in the street, and calling out to their neighbours. Living close together and frequently visiting one another in the evenings the Lebanese form a closely knit community of their own.

In the evenings the ground floor of each building looks like a row of garages: a succession of steel doors separated by narrow walls, each door

rolled down to the ground and padlocked. Above the doors the name of the shopkeeper is painted in large letters. Occasionally an empty crate is standing on the pavement. In the early morning the steel doors are opened giving free access to the shop. The Lebanese shopkeeper prefers an open front as it provides better ventilation and enables passers-by to see the goods that are for sale. Inside, the pillars which support the upper storeys are prominent. There is a long counter in the middle, usually glass-covered and on the walls there are shelves on which the goods (rolls of textiles for instance) are displayed. Smaller articles lie inside the counter under the glass. The shopkeeper or his wife stands behind the counter, and there may be one or two African assistants.

Nearly all customers are Africans. The shopkeeper looks at them to see whether he has seen them before. If so, he greets them. However, the majority of the customers in Freetown are unknown to him, and as it is an unwritten rule that an unknown person is free to enter the shop, to look round at leisure, and to leave without buying or even saying anything, the shopkeeper does not speak to him. This silence, therefore, is not a sign of indifference. While he waits, he tries to guess what the customer wants and can afford, which is useful when the customer asks for something. The shopkeeper also keeps an eye on potential thieves; to minimize the risk of theft only a few articles stand in front of the counter, and these are too bulky or heavy to be snatched away.

Most of the Lebanese shops depend on the pedestrian customer, who normally is not in a hurry and has not decided yet on the shop in which to buy. He may ask for what he wants in several shops and may also glance at the goods in the shops which he passes. This does not cost him much time because shops that sell the same type of goods stand side by side. Moreover, on the pavement in front of the shops there are street sellers who offer similar goods for sale.

Garrison Street Market is the busiest market in Freetown and the streets in its vicinity are usually full of pedestrians. The Lebanese shopkeepers consider the sites in this area as the best ones in Freetown, and those who have no building of their own are willing to pay high rents. The shops near the market (in Little East Street, Garrison Street, and Kissy Street) specialize in textiles, fancy goods, and foot-wear. Farther away from the market there are shops selling enamelware, metal goods, toys, provisions, drinks, sewing material, linoleum, etc. The shops which do not depend on pedestrian customers are found along East Street. They specialize in building materials and other bulky goods, and profit from the fact that this street is a wide one in which cars and lorries can park easily.

Map I. Geographical distribution of Lebanese enterprise in Sierra Leone

Source: For details of preparation, see H.L. van der Laan, 'Lebanese Enterprise in Sierra Leone: a Partial Analysis', *Sierra Leone Geographical Journal*, No. 13, 1969, pp. 45-50.

There are Lebanese shops in some 80 towns and villages in the Provinces (see Map I). Four provincial towns — Bo, Makeni, Kenema, and Koidu — have large commercial centres with many Lebanese shops, but the latter two have been the most prosperous in recent years. Some provincial shops are modern and occupy the ground floor of a two-storey building like those in Freetown. The interior of these shops resembles the Freetown shops but there are also old-fashioned shops in one-storey buildings, made of timber and corrugated iron sheets. In such buildings the living quarters are next to or behind the shop. The low roof extends in long eaves covering the verandah in front, which keeps the shop shady and cool, but makes it dark, which is a distinct disadvantage for shopkeepers who wish to display their goods attractively. The old-fashioned shops are typical of the villages, the modern ones of the towns. Most towns can boast of a main shopping street with at least a few two-storey buildings. This is the commercial heart of the towns, where both the market and the lorry park (where passengers wait for transport) can be found. Normally the Lebanese shops occupy the best sites.²¹ The provincial shops are less specialized than those in Freetown but they stock more provisions and attract more European customers. The village shops have no specialization at all and the choice of goods is usually small. A weighing machine in front of a Lebanese shop indicates that the shopkeeper buys produce from the farmers. In the towns African tailors and their sewing machines are conspicuous in front of Lebanese textile shops.²²

There is not much difference in appearance and dress between the Lebanese and the Europeans. Special characteristics of the Lebanese are the dark hair and the moustaches of the men and the scarves of the women. Elderly white people are normally Lebanese, because Europeans past working age are rare in Sierra Leone. These features are not universal, however, and it is quite possible to mistake some Lebanese for Europeans and vice-versa. It is the commercial environment which prevents such mistakes from happening frequently.

Some aspects of the economic history of Sierra Leone

The study of an immigrant group can be approached in two ways. The internal approach starts with the group and tries to explain the activities and successes of its members on the basis of the characteristics of the group. This approach appeals to sociologists. The external approach, on the other hand, begins with the environment in which the immigrants have to make a living and seeks an explanation for their activities in the opportunities which are available in the environment. The external approach appeals to economists. As I have said in the Preface, this book is based on the external approach.

This chapter provides the background to Chapters 3-10, in which the economic activities of the Lebanese are described. Three topics have been singled out here: transportation, European commercial participation, and African participation, all of which have played a major role in the economic history of Sierra Leone during the years that the Lebanese have lived in the country. The reader must remember that when selecting material for this chapter I was guided by the requirements of this book. Hence activities in which the Lebanese have not played any role are omitted or mentioned only in passing.

2.1 *Transportation*

Before 1895 there were only two ways to transport goods in Sierra Leone: porters and boats. Water transport was far superior to portage and was used wherever possible.¹ The coastal region of Sierra Leone was fortunate in having many estuaries, rivers, and creeks which allowed for water transport during all seasons.² The Interior was not so lucky, because,

Map II. *The transport situation in Sierra Leone before 1895*

apart from a few rivers which could be used by canoes for part of the year,³ all transport of goods depended on portage. In Map II I show an approximate boundary between the Coastal Belt and the Interior, the former representing an area of low transport costs and the latter an area of high transport costs.

The Map also shows the 'heads of navigation'.⁴ European sailors who explored the West African coast after 1500 followed the rivers to the heads of navigation, that is the point beyond which their vessels could not go. It is often forgotten that these points formed barriers for locally built Bullom boats, and in many cases for canoes as well. A number of 'inland ports' such as Kambia, Port Loko, and Pujehun developed in the vicinity of these points and the routes between the inland ports and the seaports of Freetown and Bonthe became the main arteries of the water transport system of the Coastal Belt. Since the ocean-going ships which were built in the second half of the 19th century were considerably bigger than before, they could not reach the inland ports any more and called only at the seaports. As a result the seaports grew in significance towards the end of the 19th century and the inland ports declined.⁵

Since the Coastal Belt was broader and better provided with waterways than many other parts of the West African coast, Sierra Leone was a privileged part of West Africa in the 19th century as far as transport and trade were concerned.⁶ The Coastal Belt consisted of two parts: the Sherbro River system in the south with its mostly sheltered waterways, with Bonthe as its central harbour, and the Northern Rivers area based on the estuaries of the Scarcies and the Sierra Leone River, with Freetown as the main harbour.

It should be mentioned here that two other names have been used for what in this book is called the Interior. It was long called 'up-country' but as this name is now used as a synonym for the Provinces, I have avoided it. The other name was 'hinterland'. As this may suggest a special connection with a particular harbour, it is less suitable than the word Interior.⁷

Water transport favoured and stimulated commercial agriculture in the Coastal Belt. Farmers who lived close to a river or creek found it worth-while to grow more than they needed and to take surpluses by canoe to a trader for sale. In the Interior the situation was different. The few products that came to the Coast from the Interior — or from the area which is now Guinea — were derived from mining, hunting, or forest gathering, but not from commercial agriculture.⁸ They were transported by porters organized in caravans. The longer the distance covered by a caravan, the greater were the logistic problems for the organizing traders.

In Sierra Leone, as in the rest of Africa, long distance trade has deservedly received attention and admiration from European observers.⁹ In comparison, water transport in the Coastal Belt seemed uninteresting to the early Europeans so they wrote little about it.

Many plans were made in the 19th century to open up the Interior and to tap its wealth. The railway was the obvious instrument to use. In 1895, therefore, the Colonial Office authorized the construction of the Sierra Leone Government Railway and work was started in the same year. In 1896 the Protectorate was declared, which brought the Interior, into which the railway was to be routed, under British rule. The construction of the railway was difficult and consequently took almost twenty years: the main line reached Pendembu in 1908, while the branch line did not get to Makeni until 1914. The railway was undeniable proof of the determination of the British to open up the Interior. As a feat of engineering it impressed people in Sierra Leone, in particular the Africans of the Interior. Although much later it became popular to deride the railway for its technical shortcomings, the early mood was one of pride and admiration, not in the least because the railway was the largest organization ever established in Sierra Leone.

The railway transformed parts of the Interior into areas of low transport costs, and thus stimulated commercial agriculture in these parts. This may be described as the 'railway revolution'. However, at the same time it contributed to the decline of the long distance trade.¹⁰ Porterage continued in the Interior but mainly for short-haul transportation to the nearest railway station or inland port. In so far as the inland ports depended on trade with the Interior they declined. However, the trade which originated in the Coastal Belt continued on the same level.

Lorries began to be used during World War I, but their effect was limited during the inter-war period. At the time they were seen only as auxiliary equipment to extend the existing transport systems. Thus some roads were constructed from the railway stations north- or southwards, and others from the inland ports eastwards (see Chapter 6). The latter revived the inland ports and blurred the boundary shown in Map II. Only in the central part of the Coastal Belt, near Freetown, did the boundary still exist to separate it from the Interior during the inter-war period.

After World War II the lorry made a much greater impact and it may be said that Sierra Leone experienced a 'lorry revolution' in the 1950s and 1960s, which transformed nearly the whole territory into a series of areas of low transport costs. The lorry revolution brought porterage to an end, except for short distances, and undermined rail and water transport. Al-

though the disappearance of portorage and the decline of water transport received little attention, the losses of the railway were a matter of great concern because they had to be borne by the Government.

Improved transportation was a major factor in the enlargement of the exchange economy in Sierra Leone and both the railway and the lorry revolution boosted trade.

2.2 European participation in trade

Three periods may be distinguished in describing the participation of the European traders, each with its own characteristics:

1895-1930: expansion

1930-1950: stagnation

1950 to the present: redeployment

The first period saw a rapid expansion of European enterprise, especially until the outbreak of World War I. The declaration of the Protectorate and the construction of the railway inspired new optimism in European traders, which was reinforced when health prospects improved.¹¹ The expansion was in the first place a geographical advance: some European traders established branches in the Interior in the most promising railway towns.¹² As the railway advanced only slowly, the establishment of these branches was spread over two decades and possibly even longer, because the war interrupted investment programmes. Also, the establishment of a network of branches required both capital and personnel, which could be obtained from Europe more easily by those traders who incorporated their enterprises. While independent European traders were still in the majority around 1900, the company had become the typical form of European enterprise in the 1920s. Some of these companies were of a different class from the rest, for instance CFAO (Compagnie Française d'Afrique Occidentale), SCOA (Société Commerciale de l'Ouest Africain), PZ (Patterson, Zochonis & Company), GBO (G.B. Ollivant & Company), and the African and Eastern Trade Corporation. These big companies had their head offices in Europe and operated in several West African countries. As they were similar in structure and operations, a collective description was useful. They have been called expatriate business houses or simply 'the firms'. In this book they will be referred to as the Companies, or, more elaborately, the European trading companies. It is impossible (and also undesirable) to treat the Companies in Sierra Leone in isolation, without reference to the operations in other parts of West Africa. In fact, the

situation in the other, bigger colonies may well have influenced the policy of the Companies in Sierra Leone. It must be remembered that basic policies were formulated in Europe and that there were sound reasons for having a uniform policy and organization in each territory. We have made use of information about the operations and policies of the Companies in other territories, notably in Nigeria and Ghana, but some deviations from the general policy may have occurred in Sierra Leone. Details will be given in Chapters 3 and 5.

Although the move into the Interior dominated the period 1895-1930, two other developments must be mentioned here. Around 1900 the Europeans began to sell more on the retail level: before that time they had been primarily wholesalers.¹³ Again, this indicates a more ambitious approach. When the branches along the railway had been completed, the branches in the Sherbro area (the former factories) were modernized and tied more closely to Bonthe. European enterprise during this first period should be described as expanding, optimistic, vigorous, and tending towards large-scale, well-run organizations.

In 1930 the mood of the European traders changed from optimism to pessimism. This must be attributed specifically to the crisis which started in America in late 1929, but it cannot be overlooked that even in the 1920s there had been signs that the Companies were becoming less determined. The pessimism led to a withdrawal of European capital and personnel. Some amalgamations of Companies were justified on the grounds that they would permit such a withdrawal.¹⁴ Also, the crisis wiped out much European capital, forcing the luckless owners to return to Europe. But although the withdrawal of men and capital brought about a weakening of European commercial enterprise, the reorganization which took place simultaneously bolstered it up. For the time being we must assume that the two effects were of equal but opposing strength and led to a period of stagnation.¹⁵

Geographically, the policy of the Companies in this period could be described as 'holding the line'. They did not advance farther inland after 1930, although they had planned in their optimistic days to establish branches in all parts of the country. They decided in 1930 to be content with the frontier of penetration which they had reached by then and to leave the areas beyond this frontier unworked.¹⁶ The Companies undertook extensive reorganization of their commercial networks in the depression years, closing as many branches as possible. Amalgamations and 'gentleman's agreements' enabled them to eliminate geographical duplication, that is the operation of two or more branches in one town. But no

town or village in which they had operated was abandoned: at least one building was kept open. For twenty years the Europeans succeeded in holding the line, although they found it difficult to do so during World War II.

There was a revival of confidence in the post-war period and the Companies formulated new policies. The United Africa Company (UAC), the company which succeeded the African and Eastern Trade Corporation in 1929, described its new policy as the redeployment of capital and manpower, that is 'the withdrawal of capital and manpower from established lines of business' and 'the reinvestment of the released resources in new lines'.¹⁷ Roughly speaking UAC and the other Companies withdrew capital from trade and invested it in manufacturing and services. Significant, for instance, were the investments in the field of after-sales service, which were necessitated by growing imports of technical goods.

For our analysis the withdrawal from trade is important, consisting as it did of a geographical withdrawal, and a systematic withdrawal, that is by section, division, or department. The geographical withdrawal began in about 1950 in the villages at the periphery.¹⁸ It meant the closing of branches and the sale of buildings, and was a move back to the ports. By 1968 the Companies operated in only seven towns in the Interior: Bo, Kenema, Koidu, Makeni, Blama, Segbwema, and Pendembu.¹⁹ It is illuminating to contrast this policy with that of the first period: then there was advance and penetration, now there was withdrawal and retreat. The contrast should be emphasized because it helps us to understand the precarious position of the Companies in the second period, when for twenty years they were suspended between expansion and withdrawal. It also explains why they could not speak with confidence about their plans and policies in the second period.

Most of the new activities undertaken under the redeployment policy were located in or near Freetown. There was therefore a concentration of operations and consequently a reduction of the time which managers had to spend in travelling and inspecting. The pre-war situation had been characterized by many compounds scattered over the country. The situation which the Companies achieved in the post-war period was one of fewer compounds, the majority of which were concentrated near Freetown.

Systematic withdrawal from trade occurred in the retail trade for instance. In the 1950s the Companies ceased selling at the retail level in many places, even in those where they retained their branches. Later on some gave up produce buying as well. Then, in the 1960s the Companies withdrew from the import trade in certain lines. But in spite of all these forms of withdrawal it should not be assumed that the trading turnover of

the Companies fell. On the contrary, the diamond boom, and the general increase in prosperity, greatly increased the turnover.

2.3 *African participation in trade*

Before 1895 the people in the Coastal Belt had a considerable lead over their future compatriots in the Interior. This advantage was so great that I have introduced two separate groups into our analysis: the Coastal Africans, that is the Africans living in the Coastal Belt, and the Interior Africans, that is those who lived in the Interior (see Map II).²⁰ The Coastal Africans possessed commercial skills and experience. There were hundreds of traders (exporters, importers, and middlemen) among them, each with his own store or shop. More important perhaps, there were tens of thousands of farmers who practised commercial agriculture or were familiar with it.²¹ British money was used in many places and imported goods, techniques, and ideas had spread widely. There was sufficient trade to encourage independent transporters to operate Bullom boats and schooners in the Coastal Belt. Another sign of the magnitude of the trade before 1895 were the market buildings in Freetown. The bigger ones were all located on the waterside of the city and testified to the concern of the City Council for proper spacious buildings to attract traders and farmers who could supply the urban population with food. All agricultural surpluses were taken to the ports, where they were split into exports and urban food.²² The best sites for shops were also on the waterside.

One group of Coastal Africans, the Creoles, have received special attention from scholars.²³ Their history was different from that of the other Coastal Africans, and so were their political and social institutions. In the 20th century there has been a tendency to emphasize the contrast between the Creoles and the rest of the population of Sierra Leone. As a result the similarities between the Creoles in the Colony and the other Coastal Africans have often been overlooked. This is a pity because it has bedevilled the understanding of African participation in trade.

In this section we wish to describe the commercial history of the Interior Africans and the Coastal Africans separately, so as to provide a clearer insight into their economic position.

There are several indications that there was little trade in the Interior in the 19th century.²⁴ When 'stranger traders' (Coastal Africans, Europeans, or Lebanese) first penetrated the Interior, the people there were inexperienced in commerce, but gradually they learnt about trade and

money. The period 1930-1950 was one in which they caught up rapidly. This was due to the slowing down of the European efforts and to low produce prices which formed a strong incentive to look for the best terms of exchange. Yet it was not until 1950 that the Interior Africans started businesses of their own,²⁵ opening shops and beginning to buy produce. Much of their enterprise was diverted to the diamond fields from 1954 on, but the capital and experience gained there was later used as a basis for new ventures, mainly in trade and transport. The mobility of the Interior Africans increased greatly after 1950 and many of them drifted to the towns, including the towns of the Coastal Belt. The majority of the petty traders who operated in Freetown in 1970 could be described as Interior Africans.

The commercial history of the Coastal Africans after 1895 is more complex. The people in Freetown benefited a great deal from the construction of the railway and from the expanding colonial administration. There were numerous opportunities for employment, including jobs in the Interior with the railway or the Companies. In many ways the Africans who had advocated the railway and the declaration of the Protectorate proved to be right, but at the same time the leading Creoles felt frustrated: the Creole officials were given less responsibility than they had expected, and even the bigger traders could not expand their businesses as fast as the Europeans, because they could not draw on reserves of capital and personnel from Europe. However, this frustration was not accompanied by any real losses or by an absolute decline, for prosperity in Freetown was great, at least until the outbreak of World War I.

The Coastal Africans elsewhere also benefited from the commercial expansion after 1895, but much less than in Freetown. The Companies expanded in Sherbro and many people of that area became storekeepers for the Companies, both there and in the Interior. In the Northern Rivers area, where the Companies invested little, African traders continued to play an important role.

The crisis of 1930 hit the Coastal Africans just as badly as the Europeans. Many men who worked for the Government, the railway, or the Companies lost their jobs because of reorganization and retrenchment. The Census of 1931 reported an exodus of Creoles from the Protectorate.²⁶ Furthermore, many traders were ruined or undermined by the crisis. The effect in Freetown was worse than in Sherbro and the Northern Rivers where the new roads provided a partial compensation for the low produce prices (see Chapter 6).

In the third period, that is after 1950, many new opportunities opened

up for the Coastal Africans, mainly in the form of good jobs in the civil service and with the Companies. By 1970 the lead of the Coastal Africans over the Interior Africans had become much smaller. Naturally, this was a source of frustration to them. For a proper evaluation of the position of the Coastal Africans it is necessary, however, to study the redeployment of their capital and manpower which has taken place in the 20th century. Mobility has blurred the distinction between Coastal and Interior Africans — including the descendants of both groups — but any Government would be well advised to take the distinction into account when studying measures to promote African enterprise.

2.4 Transport and commercial organization

The advent of both the train and the lorry caused changes in the organization of commerce by favouring a particular size of enterprise and a particular pattern of operation. There was a change from small- to large-scale operations after 1895 as a result of the new railway, and a change in the opposite direction after 1950 as a result of the lorry revolution. This section contains an explanation and elaboration of these changes.

Before 1895 small commercial enterprises were the rule in Sierra Leone. Neither agriculture nor transport favoured large enterprises. Cargoes transported in the Coastal Belt were limited by the size of the Bullom boats which could carry up to ten tons. Such trends towards large-scale operations as there were resulted from the use of larger ships on the route between Europe and West Africa, and were confined to Freetown and Bonthe. The prevalence of small enterprise made for widespread economic opportunities and the absence of monopoly powers. Thus the Coastal Belt possessed a well-established competitive commercial system.

The railway in contrast favoured large enterprises. Consignments of produce railed to Freetown were much bigger than the cargo of a Bullom boat and only bigger exporters were equipped to handle them. Furthermore, rail consignments were unaccompanied, a new feature in trade inside Sierra Leone. This was cheaper, but could be used only by enterprises which had employees in Freetown as well as in the branches along the railway. The telegraph system along the railway enabled the employees in the different branches to remain in touch with the management in Freetown and vice-versa, and thus consignments were met on arrival. The railway favoured integrated companies, each with a head office in Freetown and several branches in the railway towns. This technical factor

reinforced the reasons for the emergence of the Companies which we gave in Section 2.

Both the railway and the Companies were multi-compound organizations with exacting logistic problems and an immense task of inspection. Their managements, located in Freetown, tended to cope with their tasks by policies of centralization, as, for instance, in the field of stocks and personnel. The affinity between the railway and the Companies expressed itself in consultations: in times of expansion, about future plans; in times of depression, about reorganization. The period 1930-1950 saw a close and effective alliance between the Government (as owner of the railway) and the Companies. The railway needed the patronage of the Companies as a major item of revenue, and the Companies needed the railway to preserve the pattern of their operations.

An increasing number of lorries came on the roads in the 1950s and a shift from rail to road occurred. The speed of the lorry was much appreciated by the traders in the Provinces. If a trader had excess stocks of produce, lorries which ran a shuttle service to Freetown could evacuate the stocks faster than the train could. If, on the other hand, he ran out of stocks of merchandise, the lorry could fetch new supplies more quickly than the train could. These new possibilities for the traders in the Provinces had to be matched by changes in Freetown where the Companies had to increase their stocks of merchandise, and where additional produce stores had to be built. As soon as these were provided, the traders in the Provinces could fully exploit the flexibility of the lorry. At first they were anxious to possess their own lorries, but later they were content to rely on independent lorry operators.

If the Companies had continued to operate in the same centralized way as before, their branches would have been unable to compete with independent traders. In fact, the Companies foresaw these problems and decided to withdraw, as we described in section 2. By dismantling their multicomponent organizations they reduced the tasks of inspection, of stock control, and of personnel management.

Most of the abandoned compounds were taken over by independent traders, so that a kind of commercial fragmentation occurred which was assisted by an improvement in the telephone services and by the willingness of lorry drivers to take letters and messages from one trader to another.

Unlike the Companies, the railway, the other multi-compound organization, could not withdraw piece-meal. It continued to operate but incurred increasing losses, until finally, in June 1967 the Government had the

courage to announce that it would close down the railway. A start was made in 1969 when the branch line to Makeni was closed.

It is possible to see a general association between inland water transport and the Coastal Africans, between the railway and the Europeans, and between the lorry and the Lebanese and Interior Africans. Thus, this section would seem to suggest that the transport situation in Sierra Leone favoured the Coastal Africans before 1895, the Europeans from 1895 to 1950, and the Lebanese and Interior Africans after 1950.

2.5 The European concept of commercial development

The dominant view among European businessmen in the period 1895-1930 was that development could, and ought to, take place through trade; by trade they meant the exchange of European products for African products. They wanted to buy tropical produce which did not grow in Europe and they wanted to sell manufactured goods which could not be made in Africa. Trade, as envisaged by the Europeans, consisted of an outflow of produce (see Chapter 3) and an inflow of general merchandise (see Chapter 5). Both the collection of produce and the distribution of general merchandise formed part of this trade. Nevertheless, the export stage for produce and the import stage for merchandise were crucial: it was there that the important decisions were taken and trends could be spotted. The Companies were therefore anxious to control the export and import stage and to direct their operations from Freetown, the point of export and import. They described their operations as the two-way trade,²⁷ and it must be noted that not only in the harbour, but at each trading point there was a produce flow in one direction and a general merchandise flow in the opposite direction.

The exchange concept was very influential, mainly because of its simplicity. It was understood by the African farmers in spite of the language barrier. The simplicity was, however, deceptive. It concealed the problems of organization and infrastructure. The European traders allotted to themselves the role of shaping the pattern of the trade flows, including the channels and the 'valves',²⁸ and of constructing and managing the necessary buildings. They also undertook to provide the capital to finance the stocks of produce and general merchandise that would be stored in these buildings. By allotting the trading role to themselves, they became more interested in a large volume of trade than was their counterpart in the exchange, the African farmer. We shall see in the following chapter

how they tried to boost the volume of the produce trade. But even in their enthusiasm the Europeans did not suppress the African farmer. The farmer was free to produce and free to trade. This freedom was a source of pride for the colonial administration. One author has concluded that the farmers in West Africa had 'of their own free will responded to the price inducements of a world-wide market'.²⁹ The voluntary response of the farmers was proof that they shared in the benefits of trade. This was intuitively clear, but could also be proved by economic theory. Nor was the African farmer supplanted: there were several proposals to establish plantations, and to transform the African farmers into plantation labour, but very few were realized.³⁰

The exchange concept implied direct trade between the farmers and the European traders. To this end they established a wide network of branches, but even the strongest Companies soon discovered that there were too many farmers and that they lived too far apart.³¹ The Companies abandoned the idea of direct trade and a gap opened between the majority of the farmers and the Companies. It was in this gap that the Lebanese ensconced themselves under the approving eyes of the Companies. As auxiliaries of the Companies they were shopkeepers in the general merchandise flow and middlemen in the produce flow. Typically, the Europeans have shown a preference for the word 'middleman' in their comments about the Lebanese. This corresponds with their general bias in seeing the produce flow as the basic element of the two-way trade and the general merchandise flow as the subsidiary element.³² The Europeans overlooked the fact that the African farmer held the opposite view: his purpose was to obtain general merchandise. This forgotten 'African bias' will be dealt with in Chapter 5.

Behind the exchange concept was a comprehensive view of the development of Africa. The Europeans took it for granted that Nature was rich in Africa. They assumed that there was wealth in the form of fertile soils, a favourable climate, and perhaps minerals. They also concluded too hastily that the Africans had been unable to exploit this wealth because of their ignorance. The great opportunities would continue to lie idle unless they were developed from outside with the aid of scientific knowledge, experience, capital, and tools from Europe. Each individual who possessed these ingredients was welcome: Englishman, Frenchman, African, and Lebanese, and his contribution to development would determine his position. The development of Africa was seen as a high ideal that ought to unite people and override racial and national differences. How ever often this ideal was eclipsed by greed, laziness, and prejudice, it would be

foolish to deny its existence and influence. We found in our research that it had considerable influence in Sierra Leone in the period 1895-1930.

Every economic crisis reveals latent conflicts. The crisis of 1930 brought such an exposure in West Africa. Harmony and unity were swept away and separate groups, notably the farmers, the middlemen, the Companies, and the Government, were recognized as having disparate and conflicting interests. Worst of all, these economic groups belonged to different races and nationalities. In Sierra Leone the farmers were Africans, the middlemen Lebanese, the Companies British and French, and the Government, although British, had to represent African interests. Between all these groups conflicts existed or were suspected. As the depression continued, suspicions deepened and the conflicts compelled the Government to study the situation in case it would have to intervene. Two major questions emerged: Did the African farmers benefit from the trade system established by the Europeans? And if so, was their gain not too small compared with that of the European Companies? These questions were asked everywhere in West Africa, in Nigeria and the Gold Coast with more insistence than in Sierra Leone.³³ Africans accused the Europeans of abusing their position — loosely described as monopoly — to influence prices to their own advantage. The view that there was a conflict between African and European interests, and between British and Sierra Leonean interests, gained strength. Racial tension and nationalistic feelings were increased by the crisis.

The political position of the Companies changed as a result of the crisis. They came to be called 'extra-territorial'³⁴ or expatriate companies. This recognized the fact that their interests might conflict with those of the territory in which they operated. The Companies were affected internally, too. The European employees feared further reorganizations which might affect their own position. Yet few dared to resign and return to Europe because of the serious unemployment problem there. They were also discouraged by the accusations which were levelled at the Companies, feeling that their work was being maligned. The African employees, all Coastal Africans at that time, suffered, too. Many of them lost their jobs, and those who were retained felt anxiety about their future. Moreover they found it harder to serve loyally in a Company which was accused of serving the interests of Europeans at the expense of Africans.

Considering the severity of the storm, it is surprising how much of the European concept survived and manifested itself again in the third period, that is after 1950. For instance the Government tried to return to the old situation, but with important modifications suggested by the cri-

sis. Commercial development remained at the heart of economic policy — as it still is today. Agricultural production for export continued to be encouraged, but it was felt that the Government should intervene between farmer and produce buyer with a minimum price, thus protecting the farmer (see further Chapter 3 on the SLPMB). Nothing underlines the continuity with the past more than the fact that the scheme of intervention tackled the produce flow first. We note also that the Government did not interfere with the freedom of the farmer, although the advocates of plantations grew more numerous around 1960.

The Companies accepted more changes than the Government. They abandoned several elements of the original concept, for instance the two-way trade and the — illusory — direct contact with the farmers. Internally they embarked on a policy of Africanization, that is the appointment of Africans to positions formerly reserved for Europeans.³⁵ This policy removed African frustration and resentment, and increased the local goodwill of the Companies, but it also reduced their homogeneity, and consequently their strength.

It is appropriate to discuss here a factor of a different nature which has also influenced the strength of the Companies, and, in fact, of all large organizations in Sierra Leone. Standards of honesty in business fell rapidly in the 1950s,³⁶ and all managers faced increasing problems resulting from dishonest employees, who embezzled money and other assets, and who abused the powers delegated to them. Embezzlement was a special problem for the large organizations, because respect for corporate property was sometimes lacking in people who were known to respect personal property unconditionally. In theory the dishonesty of employees could be prevented by frequent inspections, but these were time-consuming and could spoil human relations as they suggested distrust. Many Europeans were reluctant to carry out more than a perfunctory check on their African subordinates for fear of offending them.³⁷ This fear provided them with a strong incentive to remodel their organizations so as to minimize supervision, and the fact that employees most tempted to embezzle money or abuse their position were those stationed in remote branches was a further factor in the dismantling of the multi-compound organizations (see Section 4). Although increasing dishonesty has led to a fragmentation of commerce, and a concentration of stocks and personnel in a few centres, it has not been serious enough to deter investment in single compound enterprises such as factories, mines, shops, and warehouses.

The Government machine, another large-scale organization, has faced similar problems as the companies of the private sector.³⁸ It appears that

the departments with geographically dispersed operations have had a poorer record than the ones which are concentrated in one spot. Government cannot embark on geographical withdrawal like the Companies but has to consider this difference in performance when studying new tasks.

2.6 *An inventory of Lebanese economic activities*

Table III shows the activities in which the Lebanese have participated in Sierra Leone. In accordance with the analysis of this chapter I have distinguished three periods in the Table. It is no coincidence that these are the same periods we used in Section 2. Indeed, European commercial participation was of crucial importance for the Lebanese.

Table III. *Economic activities of the Lebanese, by periods*

	1895 - 1930	1930 - 1950	1950 - present
Produce trade	xx	xx	xx
Kola trade	xx	xx	x
Rice trade	xx	xx	xx
General merchandise trade	xx	xx	xx
Lorry transport	xx	xx	xx
Launch transport	x	x	x
Gold mining	—	xx	x
Diamond mining	—	—	x
Diamond trade	—	—	xx
Services	—	x	xx
Manufacturing	—	—	x
Construction	—	x	x
Agriculture	—	x	x

Note:

xx = significant participation

x = minor participation

None of the activities mentioned in the Table was fully controlled by the Lebanese, so we have to discuss their rivals as well, among whom we must distinguish the Europeans — mainly the Companies³⁹ — the Coastal Africans, and the Interior Africans. (This grouping corresponds partially with a racial one and therefore I was reluctant to use it at first, but when I noticed that my informants used it consistently, the reluctance lessened. Later when I discovered that each group was remarkably homogeneous in economic methods and objectives, I applied the grouping

without qualms. I noticed then that it was an excellent instrument for detecting economic changes.) As each activity is discussed in the following eight chapters we shall pay special attention to changes in which the Lebanese gained ground at the expense of either Europeans or Africans. Recent changes in which the Lebanese lost ground to Africans will be discussed, too.

The produce trade

We shall discuss the produce trade first, because it was the primary factor in the two-way trade which has been characteristic of commerce in Sierra Leone for many years. Until the mid-1950s the bulk of the purchasing power of the population of Sierra Leone was derived from the sale of produce and any expansion of the general merchandise trade depended on a prior increase of the produce flow. As the Europeans saw the produce flow as the index of commercial development and studied it carefully, the produce trade is relatively well documented. There is, however, a tendency in this material to overrate the contribution of the Europeans and to underrate the role of the Africans and the Lebanese. We shall make some allowances for this bias in the analysis below.

Lebanese participation in the produce trade began in about 1905, that is some ten years after they had begun to sell general merchandise.

3.1 *What is 'produce'?*

Produce refers in general to all agricultural products, but in the expression 'produce trade' it has acquired a more specific meaning. Only about ten products are generally recognized as produce in Sierra Leone: palm kernels, palm oil, cocoa, coffee, ginger, piassava, ground-nuts, benniseed, kola nuts and rice.¹ The first eight products have been exported to Europe, the last two only to other West African countries. This difference in destination is so important that some authors either do not consider rice and kola nuts as produce at all or at best think of them as marginal produce. Apparently the destination of Europe is a cardinal element in the character of produce. To bring this out clearly I shall call produce

that is shipped to Europe 'trans-ocean' produce.²

Why have only eight products qualified as trans-ocean produce among the varied vegetation of Sierra Leone? The reason is technical: only a few could be successfully shipped to Europe. Only products that were durable could survive the journey to Europe without spoiling. Moreover, only firm products which could be stacked up in the holds without being crushed could be shipped cheaply. These two criteria limited the commercial selection to six products: palm oil, palm kernels, ground-nuts, ginger, piassava, and benniseed. We may assume that the European traders in Sierra Leone regretted the fact that they could not export perishable crops, because they had learnt to appreciate the taste, appearance, and usefulness of some of these.

Durability was important within Sierra Leone as well. It affected the farmers who had to dry and process their produce to make it more durable. They had to remove the perishable parts from the cocoa beans and the piassava.³ (From the botanical point of view it is interesting that seeds, nuts, and beans dominate among produce. They had to be sufficiently durable to survive the dry season until the next rains would create favourable conditions for germination.) Durability also simplified the task of the traders. They could use slow but cheap transport, if they wanted, and they could assemble large consignments, if these were cheaper to transport. It was not speed that mattered to the produce trader, but capital to finance his stocks.

It must be noted that the trader's insistence on durable products did not suit the farmer. Many perishable products which he wanted to sell could only be sold locally in a limited market. His cash crops fell into two groups: produce for which trade is organized on a large scale and a permanent basis, and local foodstuffs for which the trade is haphazard and on a small scale. Unless we adopt the point of view of the traders, we are likely to overlook the distinction between durable and perishable cash crops.

The Government has always tried to increase exports of produce. It made its own efforts in this field by introducing the cocoa and coffee crops and by promoting the careful preparation of piassava. The Government has also been interested in preservation techniques such as canning and refrigeration which would widen the range of agricultural exports, but in all projects based on these techniques serious problems of organization and production arose.⁴

It would be a mistake to think that durability only mattered for the produce trade. It has always been important for the indigenous economy as

well. Durable products are necessary to feed the population during the agricultural off-season. This function will be discussed in connection with rice in Chapter 4. Here we note that millet, maize, and cassava are minor durable foodstuffs in Sierra Leone. Because they are not exported, they are classified as local or native foodstuffs, but they could easily be called 'local produce', if we consider durability more important than the destination in a definition of produce.⁵ The trade in, and the commercial storage of these products is likely to increase with urbanization, leading to similar problems to those that have already been experienced with rice.⁶

The farmer distinguishes produce on the basis of his own work. First there are the annual crops: ginger, ground-nuts, benniseed and rice. Secondly there are the tree crops. Some trees are planted: all cocoa, all coffee, and most kola trees, and some oil palms; the farmer cares for his plantations and they form an important investment for him. Two important trees are wild: the oil palm and the raphia palm. The fruit of the first one yields palm oil and palm kernels,⁷ the leaves of the second one the piassava. The harvesting from the wild trees could be termed 'forest gathering', but it is normally described as 'agriculture' in Sierra Leone. However, if there is much work on the farms and plantations the harvesting of oil palm fruits and piassava is reduced or postponed; it is less rigidly seasonal.

Finally, it must be remembered that the farmers consume some items of produce, and consequently, they have less to sell for export. Examples are rice, ground-nuts and palm oil. We propose to call the three 'switch produce'. The economic results of 'switching' produce are particularly clear in the case of rice (see Chapter 4). Increasing exports of switch produce should not always be acclaimed, because it may mean a poorer diet for the farmers. This problem does not arise with other produce, and increasing exports of palm kernels may even result in a better diet, if the palm oil which is produced jointly with the kernels is consumed by the farmers.

3.2 *The mechanics of the produce trade*

The produce trade is a collecting trade. It buys hundreds of thousands of small parcels of produce from numerous farmers living far apart in the villages of Sierra Leone. The small size of the original parcels and the geographical dispersal of the farmers are basic factors in the pattern of the produce trade. The trade resembles the drainage system of a river:

many tributaries bring their water to the main stream which discharges all the water into the sea. It must be noted that the wide dispersal of the farmers would have mattered less if they had been able to travel easily, but until about 1950 the majority of the farmers in the Interior was largely immobile.

Produce buying involves three elements: examining, weighing, and bulking. The examination concerns the quality of the produce: Is it dry? Is it mouldy? Is there much dirt in it? etc. The produce buyer will reject inferior produce or buy it at a lower price. Then he weighs the parcel and states the amount he is willing to pay. After the purchase he bulks his stocks for transport. Most produce is packed in jute bags, but there are three exceptions: palm oil is put in drums (formerly in casks), piassava in bundles, and kola nuts in baskets. In recent years it has become normal to speak of 'produce receiving' instead of produce buying. The new term underlines the technical and routine character of the operations of the traders.

Produce buying is highly seasonal. As soon as the crops are harvested and processed farmers want to sell. The produce season is thus concentrated in the months of November to March. It is a time of hectic work for the produce traders. Fortunately, however, the trade in palm kernels and piassava is spread out over the whole dry season and gives way to the other products where necessary.

The final task of the produce traders is the exportation of the produce. When consignments of produce are shipped to Europe, the exporters strictly adhere to the standards of international trade. Normally produce is exported in new jute bags. The exporter fills the bags to a standard weight, sews the bags up and puts his marks on them. He thus guarantees the quality and enables the buyer in Europe to address to him any claim for underweight or defective quality. Because of the problems of getting claims honoured, buyers in Europe have always preferred well-known reputable exporters. This, of course, favoured the Companies.

The whole process of storing, bagging, and transporting from the moment of first purchase till the moment of exportation is called the 'evacuation'. In principle each crop has a separate pattern of evacuation, but we shall disregard this complication. Evacuation is speeded up by some, and slowed down by other considerations, as, for example, in an imaginary company which has integrated produce buying and exporting. Such a company has good reasons to accumulate stocks at the buying end. It will be easy to make up suitable consignments from these stocks — a full railway wagon or a full lorry — for despatch to the harbour. Suitable con-

signments lower transport costs and provide a minimum of administration and a maximum of security. Again, the produce may be packed straight into new bags at the buying end, in order to save rebagging in the harbour. But on the other hand, the desire for cash speeds up evacuation because the sooner the new crop is on the high seas, the sooner the company will receive payment from the buyers in Europe. So if there is one organization, the economies of bulking and the saving on working capital have to be weighed up against each other by the management when it comes to decide on the optimum speed of evacuation. The Companies in Sierra Leone seem to have considered the economies of bulking to be the more important, for the evacuation of produce was, until about 1950, rather slow.

There have also been situations where the produce buyer and the exporter were separate enterprises. Usually the produce buyer has little capital and sells quickly to the exporter, although the transport situation encourages him to do some bulking. It seems that an increase in the number of independent produce buyers has always speeded up the evacuation of the crops, in particular the evacuation to the harbours. One result of this is that the stocks in the harbour increase in relation to the pipeline stocks, (i.e. the stocks at the buying end and those in transit). The desire to dispose of stocks of produce quickly has been explained here by the wish to free working capital, but there was often another consideration as well. In periods of fluctuating produce prices — the normal situation before World War II — many produce buyers wanted to pass their stocks on lest they were caught with excessive stocks when prices fell.

3.3 *The European Buying Stations*

When the construction of the railway was begun in 1895, the produce exporters in Freetown anticipated a flood of produce from the Interior, but they knew that they had to seek out the farmer in order to get it. Those who had the capital, established branches in the Interior hard on the heels of the advancing railway line. These branches were called Buying Stations, a name which even today is reserved for the buildings established in those early years by the European Companies and firms. All these buildings were put up close to the railway stations and were also conspicuous in other respects. They consisted of a concrete floor of some 3000 square feet, a timber frame, and walls of corrugated iron sheets. They had high roofs to ensure good ventilation. A store for general mer-

chandise and living quarters for the manager completed each Buying Station. All building materials used were unknown in the Interior, making the Station look very foreign. The amount of money invested in the Buying Stations was impressive on the scale that Sierra Leone was used to, but the Europeans felt that these investments could not fail as property along railways had appreciated in value everywhere in the world. The Europeans tended to build solidly — most buildings were still in reasonable condition in 1970 — and were not afraid of some excess capacity, which, they felt, must disappear soon.

The operations in the 'Line Stations', (i.e. the Buying Stations along the railway line), could be controlled closely from the head office in Freetown because the telegraph system which served the railway was also open to the general public. Thus the Companies with Line Stations were able to integrate and centralize their operations. Even the bagging and marking for export was delegated to some of the Line Stations if the manager was competent. The telegraph also enabled the head office to alter buying instructions, e.g. concerning prices, quickly, and to plan the size of export consignments on the basis of advance information from the Line Stations. A fixed relation developed between the buying prices in Freetown and those in each of the Line Stations, with the freight rates charged by the railway determining the differentials. This meant that the farmers at the farthest Stations received the lowest prices. Their position did not improve until 1931 when the railway rates were revised (see Chapter 6). There is every reason to believe that integration based on the railway paid off and was a major factor in the expansion of the European Companies between 1900 and 1930.

It is probable that the reorganization which the Companies undertook after World War I in the Sherbro area was inspired by the desire to apply there the lessons learnt in the railway system. The old factories were renamed River Stations, and stood in the same relation to Bonthe as the Line Stations stood to Freetown. The motor launches which were introduced at the same time provided fast communication and transportation. Even so, messages in Sherbro travelled more slowly than those in the railway area.

A third type of Buying Station developed, the Out-Station. Where a feeder road was built away from the railway, it was possible to build a Buying Station at the far end of it. (This was done for instance at Boajibu and Mandu.) Produce from the Out-Stations was carried to the Line Stations in lorries. However, as we shall see in Chapter 6 the Companies were not eager to buy and use lorries. This was one reason why they built

Map III. *Buying Stations in Sierra Leone in 1925*

Source: The information about the Buying Stations is taken from T.N. Goddard, *The Handbook of Sierra Leone*, pp.193-9.

few Out-Stations. Another reason was that communication between head office and Out-Station was difficult because the telegraph system did not extend to the towns away from the railway.

In 1925 there were 103 Buying Stations, namely 62 Line Stations, 39 River Stations, and 2 Out-Stations. Map III shows how these 103 Buying Stations were distributed over the country and how we have grouped them in five areas. They belonged to twelve European trading firms and companies, with the four biggest Companies owning 70 Stations.⁸ The Europeans had invested most in the Sherbro area and in the terminal section of the main line of the railway. Although they were also well represented on the branch line and in the middle section of the main line, they had neglected the coastal section of the railway and the Northern Rivers. This neglect was due to the poor produce potential of these areas and to the efficiency of existing African enterprise.

As we said in Chapter 2 the Companies did not advance farther inland after 1930, as any plans to build new Buying Stations were shelved because of the crisis.⁹ I am reasonably certain that only four new Buying Stations were built between 1925 and 1930: two at Batkanu, one at Kailahun, and one in Kono.¹⁰ It would therefore be sufficiently accurate to take Map III as representing the high-water mark of European commercial expansion. The Line Stations and the railway line have formed the infrastructure of the produce trade in the Interior for some fifty years. This provided a large degree of continuity for the trade in this area.

We turn now to the staff of the Buying Stations. At first Europeans who were called Factory Agents¹¹ and dealt personally with the African farmers were in charge in the Line Stations. This solution was logical, for it showed that the Europeans were in earnest. Both the foreign-looking building and the white face behind the counter showed the African farmer that a new commercial period had begun. But it was also ambitious and expensive. The costs of a Buying Station — salaries, maintenance, inspection, etc. — were high and could be covered only when trade was brisk. Thus, the Europeans needed a high volume of produce, and they became 'tonnage hunters'.¹² The Factory Agent knew at which tonnage his Station would cover its overhead costs and he set out to exceed this and so justify his Station and his own position. At times Stations were closed because too little produce came in,¹³ but on the whole the General Managers in Freetown were reluctant to close Stations. Since each Station carried some of the overhead costs of the stores and offices in Freetown they wanted to keep the number of Buying Stations as high as possible. This reasoning made them tonnage hunters, too. But there was

another argument against the closing of a Station. Each General Manager feared that a rival Company would capture the trade in a particular town, if he closed his own Station there. So rivalry compelled the Companies to keep marginal Stations open.

Every serious and prolonged fall of world produce prices exposed the tenuous position of the Companies and led to proposals to cut costs. One of these proposals concerned the replacement of European staff by Africans in order to save on salaries,¹⁴ but this was long opposed. Eventually, the first Company that yielded in Sierra Leone was PZ.¹⁵ The other Companies retained their European Factory Agents longer, but the slump in 1929 forced them also to appoint African 'storekeepers' (as PZ had called the Africans who were sent to the Line Stations to take over from the Europeans) in all but the most important Buying Stations.¹⁶ This was an important saving, but the overhead costs of the Buying Stations remained high. We shall see in section 8 what solution the Companies adopted after 1949 for their Buying Stations.

3.4 *The Lebanese produce buyers, until 1930*

The opportunities for new entrants into the produce trade were extremely limited around 1900, especially for the Lebanese who lacked experience and capital. The Coastal Belt was firmly in African hands, because there were many experienced traders there and the farmers were well-informed about prices. It is true that there were unexploited opportunities in the Interior, but everybody knew that the Europeans were poised to take full advantage of those in the wake of the railway.

It is probable that the Lebanese did not actually aim at becoming produce traders, but unexpectedly they had an opportunity which was due to two miscalculations of the Europeans about the Interior. First, it appears that the Europeans had underestimated the cultural barriers there. They had assumed that the people in the Interior would display the same economic attitude as those in the Coastal Belt, and that they would flock to the Line Stations as the others had come to the factories in the Coastal Belt. In fact, the Europeans discovered to their dismay that the Interior Africans reacted slowly and sold only small quantities. And when they wanted to explain and persuade, they found that English and pidgin which they had used in the Coastal Belt were not understood. Secondly, the Europeans had overestimated what I would call the 'catchment area' of each Line Station, that is the area in which the farmers cultivated and

processed produce for sale to the Station. The farmers who lived more than ten miles from the Line Station did not normally sell produce, because it required too much effort to carry it so far.¹⁷ (Only Mano developed as a flourishing Station because the Jong River enlarged the catchment area.) Neither the Europeans nor the Lebanese were aware of these miscalculations at first, and it cannot be described as a European policy to incorporate the Lebanese as auxiliaries, nor as a Lebanese plan to capture a position between the African farmers and the Companies, but this is what happened after some years. It is difficult to trace the various stages of this process but I think that it can be reconstructed as follows:

At first the Lebanese were itinerant traders who sold general merchandise (see Chapter 5). They depended for their trade on the labourers who constructed the railway, Government offices, Buying Stations, etc. They were disappointed that the farmers in the Interior had no money and they told them that they could obtain money by selling palm kernels to the European traders along the railway. It does not seem far-fetched to suggest that the Lebanese hawkers looked for the refuse left over from making palm oil and checked whether the palm nuts were left there. In villages where that happened they explained that the nuts could be cracked and that the kernels inside could be sold. In this way they promoted the produce trade without actually taking part in it. This influenced the Europeans in their favour, because they noticed that the catchment areas in which the Lebanese traded yielded more produce.

A store is essential for produce buying, and the decision of a Lebanese to rent a building for this purpose marked the beginning of his career in the produce trade. The buildings that were rented were African huts which could easily be converted into stores for produce. Some Lebanese rented huts in the railway towns, which usually meant that they had to operate side by side with the Companies. We shall come back to them later. Others — we may call them pioneer traders — rented huts several miles from the railway. A former District Commissioner wrote in 1925:

'I have seen the Syrian trading in all kinds of out of the way places where neither European nor African was trading. He thought something might be done in the way of business, so he rented a house and set to work to see what could be made of it. If the venture was not successful, he moved on elsewhere, taking trade with him, buying the produce of the people and selling to them his merchandise.'¹⁸

His choice of a particular village was presumably based on what he had seen during his itinerant operations. He was prepared for a failure and

would live simply in his outpost until the farmers sold substantial quantities of produce for a few years in succession. Only then would he settle definitely and spend money on improving his building. A major problem of the pioneer trader was the transportation of produce from his outpost to the nearest Line Station. Some Lebanese seem to have organized caravans of porters¹⁹ but this was expensive and if he tried to save by lowering the price at which he bought palm kernels, the farmers might decide to carry their kernels directly to the Line Stations. Trading in the outposts was not very profitable if lorries could not evacuate the produce in bulk, and lorry transport remained insignificant till about 1925 (see below). Only one type of location — near river crossings — was satisfactory for the early pioneer traders, and in particular on the side farther from the railway, such as at Ngofor, Manowa, and Mongheri. Many farmers had to cross the rivers at these places on their way to the nearest Line Station. When they passed by with their produce, the Lebanese trader earned nothing, but when the river was swollen or could not be crossed for another reason, the farmers stopped and were prepared to sell. The Lebanese then had to stock this produce till the river could be crossed again, and later to organise the transport to the Line Station. This was both a genuine benefit for the farmers and a profitable, although uncertain opportunity for the trader.

While the early pioneer traders struggled, several traders in the railway towns prospered. They discovered, to their surprise, that the Companies did not oppose them, provided they bought produce in small quantities from the farmers and resold it in large quantities to the Companies. The Lebanese accepted this role as a satisfactory stepping stone in the produce trade. They had the patience to examine and weigh innumerable small parcels of palm kernels, ground-nuts, ginger, etc. They took time to explain why produce should be dry and how clean it should be. They had to face the distrust of the farmers who were used to measurement by volume but now had to get accustomed to measurement by weight. They had to listen to grievances of farmers who felt that they were not being treated fairly and they had to be prepared to bargain if the farmer considered this appropriate. In short, they had to meet the African farmer more than half-way to gain his confidence. Thus, many Lebanese acquired a reputation of being friendly, of knowing the local language, and of taking the Africans seriously.

Meanwhile they looked for other opportunities and additional income; for example some began to buy kola nuts and rice. Since the Companies showed little interest in them, the Lebanese could not sell these products

at the Line Stations but had to make their own arrangements to transport them to Freetown. A common solution was a partnership between a Lebanese in the Interior and another one in Freetown. The latter would take delivery of the consignments of kola and rice and organize the sale. The profit on each consignment was then shared. (Mutual trust was essential because the partners could not afford to visit each other frequently. The Freetown partner especially, who calculated the profits, had to be trustworthy.) This arrangement enabled the Lebanese to take advantage of the railway in the same way as the integrated Companies did. Indeed, it appears that the Lebanese in the railway towns earned more on kola and rice than on trans-ocean produce.

The fortunes of the Lebanese produce buyers improved further after 1925, with the men in the outposts being the chief beneficiaries. Lorry transport became more attractive in the 1920s, especially after the Government started a programme of road building — to be discussed in more detail in Chapter 6, which also contains a map of the road system completed in 1931. However, here we are concerned with its effect on the produce trade, for many Lebanese settled in villages along the new roads and established some thirty new outposts. These were an advantage for the farmers, as was recognized by a Government report in 1926:

'Buying centres have been opened up along these roads and producers can now sell their produce within a mile or two of their homes instead of having to undertake a journey of several days to the railway. The time thus saved enabled them to collect more produce.'²⁰

These buying centres or 'outposts', as I prefer to call them, also conferred benefits on the produce traders. They could now evacuate their produce in bulk by lorry; — this was cheaper than head-loading. As a result some marginal outposts became profitable and new outposts flourished in places where no trader had been willing to settle before. It may be argued that these new profits were made because of the lorry rather than through produce; certainly this seems to have been the prevailing opinion in the 1920s. Most outpost traders who could afford it bought a lorry. Not only the Lebanese opened new outposts, but a handful of independent European traders as well.²¹ The Companies, however, hardly responded to the new roads,²² because they had found the Out-Stations difficult to operate. Koinadugu District illustrates this difference in approach. The Companies never established Buying Stations there, but the Lebanese settled in both Fadugu and Kabala. Although the Lebanese outpost was much simpler in appearance than the European Out-Station, it fulfilled the same function.

There was another reason why the Lebanese in the outposts wanted to have their own lorries: it took away the feeling of isolation which the earlier pioneer traders had known. Now if a trader felt lonely or if a member of the family fell ill, he could drive to the nearest railway station for help and company. The life of a pioneer trader in a village far from the roads began to look risky and unbearable in the late 1920s and most of the Lebanese who lived there decided to move to a village on one of the new roads.

What we have discussed in this section occurred mainly in the Interior where the railway created new opportunities for the Lebanese. The situation in the Coastal Belt was less dynamic during this period; indeed, it appears that the Lebanese made little progress in the produce trade in this area for many years. They could not compete successfully with the Companies in Sherbro and with the established African traders. Eventually, the road building programme of the late 1920s brought a change, especially as it seems that the Lebanese in the inland ports were quicker than their African rivals in obtaining and operating lorries (see Chapter 6).

By 1930 Lebanese produce buyers could be divided into two groups according to their location. The first group operated in the railway towns and inland ports in the immediate vicinity of the Line and River Stations of the Companies. The second group operated in the outposts which supplemented the Buying Stations of the Companies. The relations with the Companies will be discussed in section 5 below.

Soon after a Lebanese had settled somewhere as a produce buyer, the farmers used to ask him for credit. This has often been called 'agricultural credit' in Sierra Leone and is consequently seen as productive credit. This is a mistaken opinion, however, as nearly all of it has been consumptive credit as will be explained in Chapter 5. Normally the farmer promised to repay after the harvest. (In some areas the 'standing crop' on his field — rice, ginger, or some other annual crop — served as security.²³) After the harvest the farmer would bring his crop to the store of the Lebanese trader, who would calculate its value, subtract the debt, and pay the balance to the farmer. The various forms of pre-harvest credit had assumed such proportions in the 1920s that the Government felt compelled to regulate it by law.²⁴

The typical outpost Lebanese was in a stronger economic position than the farmers: he was the only produce buyer, the only merchandise seller, the only source of credit, and often the only person to provide mechanical transport. There is no doubt that he wanted such an exclusive position which made him powerful and indispensable, a man who ruled in the eco-

conomic sphere, on a par with the Chief who ruled in the political sphere. If he could get on well with the Chief, his position became even stronger (see also Chapter 14). Economic theory would describe the outpost Lebanese as a monopolist and would expect him to make high profits, but it appears that he has rarely done so. He wanted a strong and secure position but did not abuse it. His restraint on this point was prompted and dictated by his social relations with the villagers (further to be discussed in Chapter 13). My interviews pointed in the same direction, because in general two explanations were given for the success of the Lebanese produce buyers. One was that they operated in areas with a lot of produce, and the other that the people liked them: a good location and good social relations were the primary factors in their success.

3.5 *The Companies and the Lebanese, until 1930*

We have already mentioned that the Companies did not oppose the Lebanese who began to buy produce in the railway towns. At first sight, it seems strange that the Factory Agents did not object to these new rivals so close to their own Stations. The reason was that they had grown tired of the many small parcels of produce which all needed to be examined, weighed, and paid for separately. They were therefore glad when the Lebanese relieved them of the tedious work caused by the small parcels. This is confirmed by a comment of 1926 about one of the Companies which:

'used to buy a proportion of their produce from the Syrians, which saved dealing with the individual native and worrying over bags of kernels one at a time, all of which requires staff. From the Syrians it can be bought in large quantities.'²⁵

So it seems that the Factory Agents accepted the Lebanese with approval because they fulfilled a bulking function and did the work more cheaply than the Europeans. The division of labour became officially recognized when the Companies began to speak of the Lebanese as 'middlemen'.²⁶ The Lebanese saved the Factory Agents not only work, but also frustration and friction arising from the language barrier. It was not easy for the Factory Agents to find out why some farmers were pleased and others disappointed after a produce transaction. They did not understand everything when farmers complained, and could not explain fully what was wrong with produce which they rejected. Lebanese produce buyers who succeeded in learning the local language became a kind of interpreter —

and buffer — between Factory Agents and farmers. They conveyed grievances and complaints in two directions and this was greatly appreciated by the Companies.

The attitude of the Companies towards the outpost Lebanese was even more benevolent. The outposts were clearly supplementary to the Buying Stations and created produce supplies in areas in which there had been only subsistence production before. These middlemen were even more useful than the ones in the railway towns in the eyes of the Companies, who helped them by selling lorries on hire purchase (see Chapter 6).

When selling to the Companies, the Lebanese delivered their produce in used jute bags, but they made sure that the quality and weight corresponded with the standards of international trade. The Factory Agents liked to buy from Lebanese because they could then transfer the produce to new jute bags without much checking. We must not assume that the Lebanese acquired this knowledge without problems. They may well have made costly mistakes at first, especially when their knowledge of English was still poor; too poor to understand the explanations of the Factory Agents.

When the Lebanese were accepted as middlemen, the Companies began to see themselves primarily as exporters. This shift came about in the 1920s. The Companies could afford to be benevolent, because the Lebanese were utterly dependent on them. (This point is not often made by European writers, but it was keenly felt by the Lebanese.) They needed the Companies as buyers of their trans-ocean produce, because they could not export to Europe on their own account, as importers in Europe did not want to deal with small obscure produce traders in Africa. The Lebanese had no alternative therefore but to sell to the Companies at the Line and River Stations. The Companies could fix their buying price and it was the job of the Lebanese middlemen to adjust their own prices when buying from the farmers in such a way as to make a profit. Even having a lorry did not remove this dependence on the Companies, because a lorry could not leave its feeder road and had to off-load its produce at one of the Buying Stations in the railway town where the feeder road began. In Chapter 6 we shall see that this type of dependence began to change around 1928.

The Companies also extended credit to the Lebanese. Most of this was trade credit, that is the receiver was allowed to buy general merchandise up to a certain limit, but did not have to pay until a month later (see also Chapter 5). I have been told that the Companies accepted the Lebanese as credit customers in the 1920s:²⁷ PZ seems to have been the first one²⁸ and

competition compelled the other Companies to follow. Credit was normally limited to £ 50 because suing for a debt of more than this amount was complicated.²⁹ Some Companies stipulated that a Lebanese should have no dealings with any other Company. Such a so-called 'tied middleman' promised to sell all his produce to the Company he was tied to, and to buy all his general merchandise from it. To be a tied middleman of one of the big Companies carried prestige and could be the basis for certain privileges, including more credit. Many Lebanese preferred to be free, however, and tried to get credit from as many Companies as they could. Something that made the Companies liberal in their credit policies³⁰ was their understanding that the general merchandise stocks in the Lebanese shops stimulated the produce trade, as many people decided to prepare extra palm kernels in order to buy something in the shop. A combination of Lebanese manpower and European capital seemed the most promising formula in the 1920s to advance farther into the Interior and to persuade more farmers to grow and sell produce. European capital was put at the disposal of Lebanese traders both as trade credit and in the form of unpaid instalments on lorries. Altogether this was a large amount, probably excessive in relation to the two-way trade which the Lebanese handled. Both the Companies and the Lebanese realized this with a shock when the economic crisis came.

3.6 Lebanese failures and successes, 1930-1949

The great majority of Lebanese produce buyers suffered seriously during the slump of the 1930s. As produce prices fell in the world market the Lebanese had to scale down their own buying prices. In Segbwema and some other places the trade in palm kernels came to a halt completely because transport costs to Freetown were higher than the prices which could be obtained there. The Government lowered the railway rates for palm kernels in 1930 and 1931 and reduced the export duty on this product from 30 to 10 shillings per ton in 1934, but even so the trade in palm kernels was in distress. The agricultural officers reported that the Lebanese in some places bought palm kernels at a small loss because they wanted to keep their general merchandise trade alive.³¹

The plight of the Lebanese was worsened by the way in which the Companies reacted to the crisis. They resorted to closer co-operation and agreed to have one buying price for each product, to be adjusted according to changes in the world market. This common price was first

fixed for Freetown and Bonthe and later for each town where they maintained Buying Stations.³² This cut out competition and allowed for the closing of some Stations. The General Managers in Freetown issued strict instructions to their African storekeepers who had just taken over from the European Factory Agents to adhere to these prices and not to compete with each other, and they obeyed the instructions to the letter.³³ As a result the Lebanese faced a united front when they wanted to sell produce and were unable to play one storekeeper off against another. As they could not push up the price at which they sold they had to adjust their buying price where possible, but, as we have just seen, some prices could not be lowered further without killing the two-way trade.

The Companies also tried to reduce the amount of credit which they had extended to the Lebanese. With produce prices halved, the amounts seemed excessive and the Companies began to demand repayment. I suspect that the Companies compared notes and discovered that many Lebanese had obtained credit from several of them so that their total debt was excessive.³⁴ The demands for repayment could not have come at a worse time, for the Lebanese had less cash than ever before and the credits which they themselves had extended to the farmers were frozen. As produce prices fell, many farmers discovered that the value of their harvests was not enough to pay their debts and they had to pledge their next crop before it was planted. Moreover, the trading practices which had grown up in the 1920s made it impossible for the Lebanese to refuse credit on essential goods. It is likely that rural debts grew in the 1930s; the burden of them was certainly felt more than before. Compared with other countries the situation in Sierra Leone was not bad,³⁵ but nevertheless agricultural officers were worried about it. In retrospect the indebtedness seems to have been largely a temporary problem caused by the slump, but the officials could not know this at the time. One consequence of the slump was that the goodwill of the Lebanese among officials declined in the 1930s, because they were seen as unscrupulous men who exploited the indebtedness of the farmers by charging high interest rates. The Money-lending Ordinance of 1941 which laid down maximum rates of interest was a belated result of these views.³⁶

If we assume that rural indebtedness grew, we must also conclude that the Lebanese accumulated claims on future harvests, but ran out of cash. Fortunately for them, there was no bankruptcy law in Sierra Leone and the Companies had no alternative but to nurse their Lebanese debtors through the slump at the old level of credit. The anxiety of the Company

managers about their Lebanese debtors meant a considerable strain on the relations between Lebanese and Europeans. I suspect that there was a similar strain between the Lebanese and the African farmers, for it was attractive for a farmer who was in debt to carry his palm kernels to a trader in another village who would pay him cash. Naturally, the Lebanese watched their debtors and their farms but it was nearly impossible to check on the production and transport of palm kernels.

Several prominent Lebanese saw their enterprises crumble and fall in the early years of the slump. Among them was Dimitri N. Yanni who had traded in Freetown and built up a chain of trading stations in the Protectorate. He had modelled his business on the Companies and called it the Lebanon Trading Company. Four of his stations were on the railway (Rotifunk, Yonibana, Magburaka, and Makeni) and one was at Port Loko. Most of his supplies came by rail to Freetown, but an increasing proportion came by launch from Port Loko after a road had been built from there to Batkanu. Although he was a big trader he did not export produce to Europe,³⁷ unlike his nephew George Yanni who dealt in piassava.

But before we discuss the failure of George Yanni we must describe the piassava boom in the Sulima area. This area had long been neglected, but a German company, West & Co, that had its headquarters in Liberia and a branch in Sulima, began to ship piassava to Germany in the mid-1920s. The Sulima piassava was inferior to that from Sherbro and had hardly been bought at all by English brush makers who insisted on Sherbro quality. The German buyers, however, were content with Sulima piassava.³⁸ The trade soon flourished, the Woermann Line called at Sulima once a month and exports rose quickly.³⁹ Two African traders, Lamin Massaquoi and Nat Harris, played an active role in the trade,⁴⁰ and some Lebanese were also attracted, of whom George Yanni was the most successful. He established trading stations in Sulima, Zimmi and some other villages and called his business the Aleppo Trading Company. Lebanese and African piassava traders could not export easily at first because the importers in Germany trusted only the Companies. After the Government had fixed minimum quality standards for piassava in 1928 and had opened a Produce Inspection station in Sulima in early 1929, however, things changed.⁴¹ No piassava could now be exported unless it was examined and sealed by a Produce Inspector. The seal meant an extra guarantee for the German importer, for if the quality was defective, he could address a complaint to the Government in Freetown. With this avenue of redress, German importers were prepared to buy from small

exporters like George Yanni who succeeded in selling piassava to Germany. He probably was the first Lebanese to export trans-ocean produce from Sierra Leone.⁴²

The Lebanon Trading Company and the Aleppo Trading Company were simple firms although their proprietors intended to incorporate them eventually. The crisis brought them great problems for they incurred heavy losses on their stocks and their main creditor, UAC, urged them to repay the credit they had received.⁴³ It was agreed in 1932 that the two firms would be incorporated and that UAC would receive the shares in payment for the debts of the two Yannis. In this way two substantial Lebanese enterprises came under the aegis of UAC. George Yanni was left in charge of the Aleppo Trading Company in Sulima until 1934 when he was relieved of his post by a British manager. He was appointed a Director of the Lebanon Trading Company in the same year, but Lebanese influence declined and the two firms were effectively absorbed into UAC. The trading stations of the two firms became Buying Stations of UAC, thereby adding some towns in the Coastal Belt to the ones shown in Map III: Port Loko, Rotifunk, and Zimmi.

We have been able to describe the fate of these two Lebanese firms in some detail,⁴⁴ and there must also have been others that were ruined by the crisis. So on the whole the future of the Lebanese produce traders seemed very bleak in the early 1930s. This was a mistaken assessment, however, because their relative position had in fact improved. Many Coastal Africans had left the Protectorate around 1930 and the Companies had weakened, at least in the Protectorate, as a result of a policy of centralization which allowed the new African storekeepers far less freedom of action than the Factory Agents before them. The authority of the General Managers of the Companies had also been curbed and they had to refer more decisions to their head offices in Europe. In contrast the Lebanese had stayed in the Protectorate in the same numbers and retained their freedom of action. For several years, however, these changes in relative strength remained unnoticed.

The world market prices for palm kernels and other trans-ocean produce began to pick up towards the end of 1935 and they kept rising for the next two years, which was a very favourable development for the Lebanese. Several of the bigger traders began to export to Europe — I gather that they shipped palm kernels and some other products to Germany.⁴⁵ It was an advantage for them that they could make decisions more quickly than the General Managers of the Companies who often had to cable to Europe before they signed a contract.⁴⁶ This advantage existed only in a

rising market but at the time many traders expected that prices would go on rising for several years. Many European managers were worried that the Lebanese exporters would capture a large share of the produce trade, and the attitude of the Companies changed from benevolence to hostility.⁴⁷ Lebanese exporters also bought supplies in the Protectorate in competition with the Companies. They did so by co-operating with relatives in the railway towns and inland ports, asking them to offer higher prices than the storekeepers in the Buying Stations and to send their supplies as quickly as possible to the harbours by rail or by a combination of lorry and launch. This co-operative effort was lucrative and safe as long as world prices rose.

The Lebanese showed great optimism and resilience in the recovery of 1935-37. It appears that many of them did very well during those two years. Their optimism and new prosperity are reflected in the immigration figures of the late 1930s (see Table XVII in Chapter 14). But when the war started in 1939, the exportation pattern was disrupted. All export to Germany was stopped immediately, and all shipments to Britain and its allies were controlled by the Government. Later the Government extended its control over the produce trade as well, and the West African Produce Control Board became responsible for the buying of palm kernels and most other produce. The WAPCB preserved the pre-war system of the produce trade⁴⁸ but guaranteed a minimum price and took over the responsibility for exporting produce. Thus although the Lebanese who had been exporting these products lost their position as exporters, they could count on a satisfactory minimum price for their supplies. In 1943 the Government made it obligatory for the farmers to sell a certain quantity of palm kernels, which had become an important strategic supply. This palm kernel quota system guaranteed a steady volume of trade to the Lebanese produce buyers. Piassava, however, was not supported by the WAPCB and a serious surplus developed.⁴⁹ After the war the palm kernel quota system was abolished and the prices of cocoa and palm kernels were raised in 1946 and 1947, but no other changes were made by the Government until the SLPMB was established.

3.7 The SLPMB and its effects on the produce trade

The reorganization of the produce trade which had been canvassed for more than a decade was effected in July 1949 when the SLPMB was established.⁵⁰ The SLPMB is a public corporation modelled after the Market-

ing Boards which had been established a little earlier in Nigeria and the Gold Coast.

The primary objective of all Marketing Boards was to improve the position of the farmer, mainly through ensuring him a fair price for his produce. (It is by no means certain that the farmers have benefited from the Boards in the past 25 years,⁵¹ but the effect of the Boards on the welfare of the farmers is not the subject of this section.) We are concerned exclusively with the effect of the SLPMB on the operations and profits of the produce traders in Sierra Leone. Even so, we will have to go into considerable detail about the Board.

Each product which falls under the control of the Board has a 'producers' price', that is the price which the farmer (or producer) ought to receive. The producers' price is published at the beginning of the buying season⁵² and is kept constant for four to six months, that is till the whole harvest has been bought. Since the Board is under no obligation to keep the producers' price at the same level year after year, the farmers and traders are always guessing and talking about the new price in the weeks before the buying season opens. Palm kernels, the main product of the Board, are bought throughout the year and the Board does not open or close the buying season. If the producers' price for palm kernels has to be changed, the Board tries to do so at a time when trade is slack. It is inevitable that the traders lose or gain on their stocks on such an occasion.

The Ordinance which regulates the operations of the Board includes a Schedule which lists the products which fall under the control of the Board. Palm kernels, cocoa, ground-nuts, palm oil, and benniseed have been scheduled produce throughout. Kola nuts and rice have always been unscheduled, and piassava which was scheduled from 1965 to 1968 is better treated as unscheduled, too. Coffee and ginger have been on the schedule for part of the time,⁵³ and as a curiosity it should be mentioned that some local produce (maize, Guinea corn and pigeon peas) were on the schedule in the 1966/7 season. Only the Board is allowed to export scheduled produce. The Government may change the schedule at short notice and without consulting Parliament.

When the SLPMB began its life in 1949, it was merely a paper organization and needed agents to fulfil its tasks. The Board selected five Companies as agents: UAC, PZ, CFAO, SCOA, and G.B. Ollivant. All five had long been established in the produce trade and possessed stores and other facilities in Freetown, Bonthe and the produce areas. Table IV shows that the Companies handled the bulk of the Board's business⁵⁴ — indeed, they could have handled all of it, but the Government did not con-

Table IV. *Shares of Buying Agents in palm kernel and cocoa purchases averaged over the years 1953 - 1956*

Name of Agent	Palm kernels		Cocoa	
UAC	23%		30%	
PZ	22%		26%	
CFAO	15%		15%	
SCOA	12%		25%	
GBO	4%		0%	
Total of Companies		76%		95%
A. Genet & Co	6%		—	
Total of Europeans		82%		95%
J. Milhem & Sons	4%		2%	
A.M. Jaward & Sons	5%		1%	
Total of Lebanese		9%		2%
K. Chellaram & Sons	1%		—	
Total of Indians		1%		—
Total of Africans	8%	8%	3%	3%
	100%		100%	

Source:

SLPMB Reports, Appendix A

Note:

The African Buying Agents have been combined to shorten the Table. The cocoa percentages do not add up to 100 because of rounding.

sider it wise to have the Board rely exclusively on them, and therefore appointed some smaller agents as well. In 1949 these were: A. Genet & Co, Ltd., a French Firm; J. Milhem & Sons, a Lebanese firm; Thompson Brothers, a Creole firm; and Yanni, Rawlinson & Co, an Anglo-Lebanese firm, which withdrew in 1950. All these smaller enterprises operated in Sierra Leone only. In the next four years the Board appointed another eight African firms, the Indian company of K. Chellaram and Sons, and the Lebanese firm of A.M. Jaward & Sons. The Board had another reason to prefer the Companies: it trusted them more than other produce buyers. It realized that dishonest agents could jeopardize the objective of the Board if they paid the farmers less than the producers' price.⁵⁵

The official designation of the agents is 'Buying Agent'. This was in fact a one-sided name in the early years, because most of them also acted as shipping agents of the Board. We shall therefore speak of them simply as 'Agents'. It is the task of the Agents to receive produce at their produce buying points, nearly all of which are Buying Stations. The Agent then

packs the produce in new jute bags marked with the letters SLPMB and a code number identifying the Agent. Thus the Board can trace bags with underweight or defective quality to the Agent who has been responsible.

The Board became responsible for the evacuation of scheduled produce in 1949. It planned to make use of rail transport for produce from the Interior and launch transport for produce from the Coastal Belt.⁵⁶ For each launch route the Board estimated and fixed a reasonable transport allowance to be paid to the Agent who arranged the transport; for rail transport the Board could simply use the railway rates. The Agents who had Out-Stations did not receive an allowance for lorry transport to the nearest Line or River Station. The transport allowances gave the Board effective control over the bulk evacuation of produce between the buying points of the Agents and the export harbours.

The bulk evacuation pattern as it was envisaged in 1949 perpetuated the pre-war pattern, but it soon had to be modified because of three new developments. The first concerned the Sherbro area. Many ships were no longer willing to call at Bonthe, because the port was silting up and the consignments of produce there were not very big. The Companies had come to the conclusion by 1949 that it was better to abandon Bonthe as a harbour and to route Sherbro produce to the nearest railway stations (Bo, Mano, and Kangahun) and thence to Freetown.⁵⁷ The new evacuation pattern for Sherbro produce came about in the early 1950s.⁵⁸ There is a close connection between the decline of Bonthe and the emergence of Bo. Since Bo had been made the capital of the Protectorate in 1946, many new administrative offices had brought money and prosperity to the town. The additional supplies of produce further stimulated trade. New stores had to be built to accommodate the produce before it was railed to Freetown, most of which were erected for Lebanese traders, for instance Milhem. Not only Bo benefited, but Kenema did too. After the completion of the Zimmi-Giema road in 1951, the Southern part of Sierra Leone — best described as the Trans-Moa region — began to deliver its produce in Kenema and the Lebanese built new produce stores, mainly along Dama Road.

A second change occurred because of the inability of the railway to carry all produce which the Agents wanted to despatch. In 1951 the Agents in Makeni could not despatch their palm kernels and when their stores were full they ceased buying.⁵⁹ This was a major disappointment for the farmers who could not get the cash they had counted on. When the same problem occurred again in 1952, the Board authorized evacuation by lorry.⁶⁰ The welfare of the farmers made this decision necessary, but

the Board was concerned about the loss of revenue for the railway and considered the idea of erecting its own produce stores in the Provinces.⁶¹

Thirdly the Board opened its own stores at the new Queen Elizabeth II Quay in Freetown. From these stores it made its first export shipment in June 1954. Since then the Board itself has shipped the bulk of its produce, although a few Agents continued to act as shipping agents, mainly for produce shipped from Bonthe.⁶² Thus in 1954 the Board changed from a paper organization into a substantive exporter, and because of its direct participation it needed more working capital, then estimated at some £ 750,000.⁶³ At the same time the Agents needed less working capital.⁶⁴ They diverted the funds which were no longer needed in the produce trade to the general merchandise trade, which was just then booming because of the diamond rush. The Agents were able to save even more on working capital if they speeded up evacuation to Freetown, because they were paid on delivery to the Board's stores. Moreover, they received their commission (2 per cent for palm kernels and 1½ per cent for cocoa) earlier after 1954, that is no longer at the moment of shipping, but on delivery to the Board in Freetown.

The Agents preferred evacuation by lorry after June 1954, because it reduced their need for working capital.⁶⁵ While the Board had authorized road transport only reluctantly in 1952, it seems to have lost its reluctance soon and by 1956 the bulk of scheduled produce was carried to Freetown by lorry.⁶⁶ Apparently, the Board was no longer prepared to sacrifice the efficiency and profitability of its own operations to the revenue interests of the railway. Its reports mentioned with appreciation the 'fast door to door service' which the lorries provided after the opening of new bridges between Bo and Freetown.⁶⁷ As the road system improved and return loads of general merchandise could be picked up more easily the transport costs fell relatively to the fixed transport allowance — so much so that in 1960 the Board revised the transport allowances downwards.⁶⁸ Evacuation by lorry was now cheaper as well as faster than using the railway.

Evacuation by lorry has reduced pipeline stocks and increased harbour stocks. Less storage space is therefore required in the produce areas, but more in Freetown. The stores of the Board provided most of the additional space in Freetown, but some produce traders, mainly Lebanese, invested in new produce stores for themselves, largely to the East of Freetown.⁶⁹ The storage capacity which the Companies created in the produce areas between 1900 and 1930 is now far in excess of what is needed. In 1970 I saw several Buying Stations that were closed and others that seemed too big for the produce that was stacked up in them. Redundant produce stores

may be seen in many railway towns and even more in the Sherbro area (Bonthe, Sembahun, etc.) and in Sulima.⁷⁰

We have discussed the changes in the evacuation pattern in some detail because they show that the amount of capital which the Agents — and in particular the Companies — needed has declined and that the SLPMB has provided more capital than before in the form of buildings and of working capital. Assuming that the total amount of capital which was necessary to finance the produce trade remained the same, it is clear that after 1949 the private sector contributed less and the public sector more, a shift which went largely unnoticed because nobody objected to it. The Companies saw alternative investment opportunities and decided to re-deploy their capital outside the produce trade. Some withdrew entirely from produce buying while others continued on a reduced scale.⁷¹ This had an important effect on the Lebanese, discussion of which must be postponed to the next section.

The Government did not object to this shift either, because it was anxious to control the produce trade through the Board. Both British officials and Sierra Leonean politicians firmly believed that the Board was a powerful instrument both for helping the farmer and for generating agricultural development. All through its history the Board has been under pressure to undertake additional tasks,⁷² and this almost led to the collapse of the Board in 1967. We shall discuss this in some detail, because it seriously disrupted the produce trade.

The approach to economic development which prevailed in West Africa in the 1960s emphasized production, industrial as well as agricultural, at the expense of trading. The Government of Sir Albert Margai fully shared this one-sided approach and encouraged the Board to invest in plantations and factories. The Board did so without realizing that its capital resources were limited, and that it could not withdraw working capital from its trading operations without risking a liquidity crisis in an unusual year. An unusual situation in fact occurred during the 1965/6 buying season: the amount of coffee offered to the Board was much higher than anticipated. The excess coffee which the Board accumulated came from Guinea and Liberia and was smuggled into Sierra Leone. It was euphemistically called 'tourist coffee'. Unfortunately, the Board could not export the surplus, because Sierra Leone, as a party to the International Coffee Agreement, had agreed to export only a certain volume of coffee: its quota, and not more. The surplus was held in Freetown and a large sum of the Board's working capital was locked up in it. This caused a minor liquidity crisis in early 1966 which was solved by the irregular 'coffee deal'

of June 1966.⁷³ But at the beginning of the 1966/7 season the liquidity problem reappeared. In December 1966 the Board lacked the money to pay its Agents when they delivered produce in Freetown. Agents continued to deliver in Freetown, but faced serious liquidity problems themselves. At the end of 1966 the Board owed Le 1 million (£ 500,000) to its Agents. In January the Board succeeded in obtaining a bank loan of Le 1.5 million but this provided only temporary relief.⁷⁴ At the height of the buying season the Board owed approximately Le 3 million to its Agents.⁷⁵ Some Agents could draw on reserves, but most of them had no cash to pay the farmers. They then issued papers acknowledging receipt of a parcel of produce and stating its value and promising to pay later. Most farmers accepted these IOU chits, albeit reluctantly. Some farmers and traders in the south needed cash so badly that they decided to smuggle produce into Liberia.⁷⁶

Such a disruption of the produce trade had never occurred in Sierra Leone before and caused grave political discontent in the produce areas. It contributed to the fall of the SLPP government in the elections of March 1967.⁷⁷ The military government which took over later that month gave high priority to the desperate affairs of the Board. A drastic reorganization plan was worked out in April and May in which many tasks were scrapped in order to safeguard the basic trading task of the Board. After reorganization, the Board became creditworthy again and received a loan of Le 3.9 million from the Standard Bank of West Africa.⁷⁸ The policy of the Board has been cautious ever since and probably will remain so because of its traumatic experience.

3.8 *The Lebanese after 1949*

The establishment of the SLPMB was a great blow for all Lebanese produce buyers, with the exception of the two firms which were appointed as Agents. The objective of the Board was to intervene in trade in favour of the farmers and consequently at the expense of traders. But all traders did not suffer equally. While the Companies succeeded in securing a position as Agent, with reasonable commissions and allowances, the Lebanese — except the two Agents already mentioned — could not secure any position and had to foot the bill.

This may be illustrated geographically. A certain geographical division had developed in the inter-war period: the Companies operated in what I would like to call the Inner Zone, that is from the Buying Stations to the

harbours, and the Lebanese in the Outer Zone, that is the area beyond the Buying Stations. The views of the Government on the Outer Zone were vague in 1949 and not unanimous. At first the Government planned to continue the arrangements of the WAPCB, that is fixing prices in the towns where there were Buying Stations and leaving prices in the Outer Zone free. Under the WAPCB the Lebanese in the outposts paid less than the Companies in the Buying Stations so that they earned a middleman's profit. But the Government changed its mind between the introduction of the SLPMB Bill and the debate in the Legislative Council in June 1949, when it moved an amendment requiring all produce buyers to pay the producers' price, making underpayment an offence. The Council adopted the amendment without much discussion and may not have considered all its implications. The amendment improved the position of the farmers in the Outer Zone — quite in line with the welfare objectives of the Board — but discriminated against the Lebanese produce buyers in the Outer Zone. Their middleman's margin was scrapped. It was as if the Government had said that their role as middlemen had been useless or had been abused.

It must be remembered that many officials favoured plans for the Outer Zone in which no role was allocated to the Lebanese. They wanted to persuade the farmers to establish produce marketing co-operatives. Conditions for agricultural co-operation were favourable after 1945. Many farmers had been away during the War, for instance as soldiers in Burma, and they returned to their villages with new ideas and a new sense of their rights. Also, many farmers had observed the Lebanese for so long that they knew pretty well what mattered in the produce trade. It was further important that cocoa had become a significant crop in the South-east. Because of its value the farmers were willing to make special efforts to get the best price. Several Mende Chiefs supported cocoa cultivation and the new co-operatives whole-heartedly. Finally, it was hoped that the Marketing Board, by keeping prices constant, would create a sheltered climate for the African co-operatives.⁷⁹ The Government established a Co-operative Department in 1948 and its officers were quite successful in organizing the farmers in produce marketing and other co-operatives. Other Government departments also gave support. The Produce Inspection branch, for example, sent its examiners to do some pre-grading of supplies accumulated by the co-operatives in the villages. Officials helped with transport to the Buying Stations, or asked the Companies to organize the transport.

There was no room for both the Lebanese and the co-operatives. Indeed,

they were rival solutions for the produce trade in the Outer Zone. Where the co-operatives bulked, cleaned, and provisionally graded the produce, the services of the Lebanese middleman were no longer required. Moreover, if the 'thrift and credit co-operative' could provide it, the Lebanese were superfluous as a source of credit. Finally, the co-operatives were confident enough to organize lorry transport to the Buying Stations, and shrewd enough to play one lorry owner off against another when they wanted to charter a lorry.⁸⁰ A leading Mende Chief, P.C. Kai Samba I, went so far in his support of the co-operatives as to evict several Lebanese from his Chieftdom.⁸¹

With Chiefs, the co-operatives and British officials watching them, the Lebanese dared not pay less than the producers' price. (Perhaps they were too cautious, because nobody was ever prosecuted for underpayment.) Their nominal profit margin was nil, unless Buying Agents overpaid (see below). It seems that the Lebanese made some attempts to make a profit on produce indirectly. Some products were exported in different qualities, for instance cocoa and piassava. The Lebanese usually described a parcel as belonging to the lowest grade and paid the farmer the corresponding price.⁸² If they managed to sell such produce to the Companies as a grade higher, they made a good profit. This practice may well explain why the co-operative movement was most successful with these two crops. The Lebanese also rejected much produce as dirty or inferior, or paid the farmers for a lesser quantity after having liberally estimated how many pounds of weight would disappear because of picking and cleaning.⁸³ For piassava two types of bundles developed: the one of 70 lbs which the Lebanese demanded and the cleaned and sealed one of 56 lbs which was exported.⁸⁴ Some Lebanese even resorted to false weights to create a profit margin on produce.⁸⁵

In spite of the practices just described the Lebanese produce buyers saw their profit margin on produce decline, and they had to look for other ways to earn a living. For those who possessed a lorry, transport offered some opportunities. They tried to carry freight for the Companies and the co-operatives. But it was in general merchandise that most Lebanese found a partial compensation for the restricted profitability of the produce trade.

Many Lebanese traders left their outposts in the 1950s and 1960s. We estimate that there were some 30 villages in the Outer Zone in 1970 in which one or more Lebanese had lived and operated in the past, but which had been abandoned by them. In another ten villages there were still Lebanese traders, but they were old and their businesses seemed mori-

bund. There is no doubt that there has been a Lebanese withdrawal from the Outer Zone. My informants advanced several explanations: some saw it as a direct result of the establishment of the SLPMB. Others attributed it to the diamond trade which lured many young Lebanese away from the villages. Again, others felt that the Lebanese were no longer willing to live in primitive conditions, and that most of them, especially the young and the women, preferred life in the towns. The lorry also played a role, as some Lebanese transferred from an outpost to the nearest town and sent their lorry regularly to the outpost to buy produce and sell general merchandise. Such an 'itinerant' lorry preserved the old relationship, at least for some years. Sometimes an African trader or a former shop assistant acted as agent in the outpost. It is interesting that in Koinadugu District which was opened up by new roads between 1949 and 1954, the Lebanese did not settle in the villages, but stayed in Kabala and operated from there with their lorries along the new roads. But the solution of the itinerant lorry did not work for long. Other traders, like the Indians, sent their lorries into the villages to sell general merchandise, and soon captured part of the trade. Some farmers bought or hired lorries to take their produce to a town and looked around till they found the trader who paid most for their produce. The replacement of the ferries by bridges caused the Lebanese outposts in those places to wither away: the delay caused by the ferry which had brought them business disappeared as the lorries no longer had to stop. Finally it is important that rural indebtedness largely disappeared in the 1950s.⁸⁶ The Lebanese could not have left the villages if much of their capital had been still tied up there in credits given to the farmers.

The lorry not only undermined the Lebanese, but also the co-operatives. As it became cheaper to travel to the nearest town, it became tempting for the members of the co-operatives to take their own parcel of produce to town and to sell it themselves. The small lorries which appeared on the roads in about 1965 made transport still cheaper and the number of women passengers, travelling alone or accompanied, greatly increased. They carried their own parcels of produce, mainly palm kernels, to town for sale. As the mobility of the population increased, the need for traders (Lebanese or African) in the Outer Zone declined. It seemed to me in 1970 that no bulking of produce was done in the villages any longer, except perhaps in Koinadugu, and that the co-operative movement was declining rapidly as a result of cheap transport and a strong sense of individualism among farmers.

We now turn to the position of the Lebanese in the Inner Zone. First of

all, the chances of becoming a Buying Agent were extremely small because the Board adopted a restrictive policy towards them.⁸⁷ The Board was not unwilling to try other produce traders besides the Companies, but preferred to give a chance to African Buying Agents. After the appointment of A.M. Jaward & Sons in 1952 the Board rejected all Lebanese applicants for the next nine years. Since the African Agents did not achieve much success during the 1950s, the Companies and the Board dominated the trade. The Lebanese were inclined to see the Marketing Board as a European device to protect the Companies and to bar the way to Lebanese aspirations.

Yet in the produce areas the Companies and the Lebanese co-operated in many ways. The Companies were willing to pay part of the commission from the Board to those Lebanese produce buyers who saved them work by bringing in large quantities of properly graded and prepared produce. Such 'overpayments' (the producers' price plus part of the commission) gave the Lebanese a small and legitimate profit margin on their produce transactions.⁸⁸ Competition between the Companies raised the margin, but it remained an uncertain income for the Lebanese, because the Companies could suddenly agree to end competition among themselves if they wanted, as they had done in the 1930s. Another deal was popular after 1954: the Lebanese produce buyer and lorry owner would undertake to sell his produce to Company X, provided Company X used his lorry to carry its produce to Freetown.⁸⁹ Apparently the Lebanese compensated for his loss on produce with a profit on transport. Finally, general merchandise linked the Companies and the Lebanese together, allowing compensating transactions.

We saw in Chapter 2 that the Companies began to abandon most of their Buying Stations in about 1950. A withdrawing Company tried to find an independent trader who was prepared to take over its Station, partly because the Company would receive payment for its property (or at least rent) and partly because the new trader would keep up the flows of produce and merchandise, on which the Company had relied in the past. UAC made an effort to set up its former storekeepers as independent traders in the Stations they abandoned. They hoped that the same man in the same building would guarantee the same trade. In this way several Sierra Leoneans — Creoles, Sherbro, Vai, Mende, etc. — started their career as independent traders. The policy of UAC could well be described as external Africanization as it promoted African advance but outside its own organization. UAC supported its 'factors', as they were called, in two ways. It allowed them to rent the buildings, and it made them sub-agents

of the SLPMB. Unfortunately, however, many factors failed.

The other Companies were less determined to get African traders in the Stations they withdrew from and considered Lebanese candidates as well. The Lebanese had certain advantages. They had long traded in produce on their own account. Moreover, many of them were prepared to buy⁹⁰ the Buying Station which made the withdrawal less expensive for the Company. When a Lebanese acquired a Buying Station he also became the sub-agent of the Company that had owned the Station before. The Board tacitly accepted the sub-agency arrangement, but never mentioned it in its publications. As long as the Board could hold the Agent responsible for the errors or frauds of his sub-agent, it had no serious reason to object to this arrangement. The Board allocated to each sub-agent a separate code number, usually that of his Agent plus an extra digit for further identification. The Board also sent new bags and record books to sub-agents in the same way as to Agents. A sub-agent was allowed to deliver directly to the Board's stores. Normally, an Agent and his sub-agent shared the commission of the Board equally. I estimate that there were some thirty Lebanese sub-agents in 1960 and that the number of African sub-agents was considerably smaller — perhaps ten.

We have already seen that the Lebanese withdrew from the Outer Zone. It was fortunate for them that the Companies withdrew at about the same time from the Inner Zone. This meant that the more successful Lebanese produce buyers could occupy the places vacated by the Companies and gain re-entry into the produce trade through the back-door. Some Lebanese sub-agents were men who had traded in the outposts; others, perhaps the majority, were men who had always lived in the railway towns and inland ports. The prospects of the Lebanese improved further when in 1956 UAC decided to give up produce trading completely, no longer buying by 1958. It was followed by G.B. Ollivant three years later, and the Board was then compelled to appoint new Agents. Ten were appointed in 1961, of whom six were Lebanese.⁹¹ The dropping out of UAC and GBO also left a financial gap in the trade that was partly filled by the Bank of West Africa, which began to finance the produce trade in 1961.⁹² Its branches in Kenema, Segbwema, and Pendembu also financed Lebanese Agents and sub-agents.

Although the number of Buying Agents was raised from 18 to 26 in 1961, the Board was still in favour of a restrictive policy, partly because if appointments had been made according to objective criteria, the number of Lebanese Agents would have been embarrassingly high. The restrictive policy was unfavourable for the sub-agents. Not only were they barred

from becoming Agents, but they were also made to be dependent on the goodwill of existing Agents. When a sub-agent negotiated with his Agent about the way the Board's commission and allowances should be shared between them, the Agent was in a strong bargaining position. However, the Companies did not abuse this position; they had the reputation of dealing fairly with their Lebanese and Sierra Leonean sub-agents. In the mid-1960s the Board abandoned its restrictive policy and the number of Agents doubled, largely because sub-agents were made Agents. On an unpublished internal list of 1968 we counted 35 African Agents (mainly in the South and including five co-operatives), 29 Lebanese Agents, 4 European Agents, and 1 Indian Agent, 69 Agents in total. Numerically the Lebanese accounted for less than fifty percent of the Agents, but the volume of their purchases was higher.

The coffee problems of 1966 provided indirect evidence that the Lebanese had reached first place in the produce trade and had supplanted the Companies as the Board's chief partners and advisers. When the Board could not dispose of its surplus stocks of coffee, two Lebanese offered their help. One was a partner of A.M. Jaward & Sons, and the other a partner of J. Milhem & Sons. Their efforts to find buyers abroad were later described by a commission of inquiry.⁹³ But what interests us here is the fact that these efforts came from the two Lebanese firms which had the longest standing as Buying Agents. They were concerned about the deteriorating liquidity position of the Board and realized what the consequences would be for themselves and the other Agents. We have already seen that their fears came true in the next buying season. An interesting detail was that both men succeeded in finding buyers, but, as there was not enough coffee to satisfy both buyers, the contract with one of them had to be cancelled.⁹⁴

I shall now try to describe the situation as it appeared to me in 1970. Produce receiving (or buying) had become a routine matter, both for farmers and traders. Farmers seemed well-informed about prices and qualities and knew the approximate weight of their parcels, presumably because they had measured the volume before bringing it to a trader.⁹⁵ The Agents and sub-agents could be recognized by their bigger stores and the weighing machines at the doors. There were further smaller traders who might be called unofficial buyers, because they were not recognized by the Board. Their stores were smaller and they still used hanging scales or table scales for weighing. We saw several Lebanese who operated as unofficial buyers. Usually they were poor and dependent on a relative living nearby, who was an Agent or sub-agent, to whom they sold their pro-

duce. It seems that the Agent or sub-agent paid somewhat more than the producers' price to the unofficial buyer to keep him in business, so the relation contained an element of subsidy or charity. On the other hand, it was convenient for the Agent or sub-agent that he now had the opportunity to send some farmers on to the unofficial buyer when he himself was very busy. Usually, farmers with small parcels, diffident sellers, and the women with a few pounds of palm kernels were sent on.

I estimate that the Lebanese, as Agents, sub-agents, and unofficial buyers, received some 70 per cent of the scheduled produce in 1970. This high percentage could hardly have been predicted in 1949, when the future of the Lebanese in the produce trade seemed bleak. One can attribute this unexpected development partly to the resilience of the Lebanese, but there is another factor as well. Many Lebanese have an unshaken faith that the produce trade justified their presence in the country in the past, and that it still does so today. It is in the produce trade that the traditional character of Lebanese enterprise reveals itself most strongly. Participation in it, even as poor unofficial buyers, is dictated by the past, often by the expressed — or assumed — wishes of the trader's father. Second- and third-generation immigrants dominate in the produce trade; new immigrants are rare. There are more conservative men in the produce trade than in any other activities in which the Lebanese are engaged. Fortunately, there are still opportunities for a conservative trader, as many farmers remain faithful to a particular one. Villagers who travel to a town may take their produce to the trader who formerly lived in their village, and they can enjoy talking about common acquaintances. Often the son inherits these customers, or, if he grew up in the village, he is patronized by the friends of his youth. We must, however, expect a slow decline in the Lebanese share in the produce trade as personal links between farmers and Lebanese traders fade away.

CFAO, PZ, and SCOA still played a role in 1970 in financing both their own stocks and the operations of their sub-agents. They maintained stores in Freetown, in which stocks were sometimes kept. Stores belonging to the Companies or to bigger Lebanese Agents provide a temporary solution when the Board's stores cannot take delivery of all produce and a long queue of lorries is waiting at the Quay to be unloaded. Bags of produce which are rejected by the Board's storekeepers are taken to the private stores of the Agents to be cleaned, dried, and rebagged. As some products are easily affected by rain during transport, e.g. coffee, the need for private produce stores in Freetown will continue.

We must conclude this section with some comments on unscheduled

produce in which the Lebanese could trade without needing the approval of the Board. These products were piassava, ginger, and coffee, and our interest is centred on the trading situation in the years that these products were not on the schedule. Normally the Board has been unwilling to put piassava on the schedule. The market is small, and buyers are few and have special requirements. Moreover, the export trade is concentrated in Bonthe and therefore difficult for the Board to control and direct. It seemed for some time during the 1950s that piassava would be re-routed from Bonthe and Sulima to Freetown, but many producers and traders preferred Bonthe and continued to deliver it to the exporters there. When the Board put piassava on the schedule in July 1965 the producing areas were not in favour of it. They probably feared that it would draw trade away to Freetown. However, the Board descheduled piassava in 1968 and the product has continued to be exported via both Freetown and Bonthe ever since. The Lebanese share of exports was 41 per cent in 1954 and 61 per cent in 1955. The European share was 41 and 26 per cent for those two years.⁹⁶ Since then the Lebanese share has continued to increase at the expense of the European Companies.

In ginger the Lebanese have been particularly strong. They accounted for 85 per cent of exports in 1954 and for 93 per cent in 1955.⁹⁷ After ginger was scheduled in 1961 the Lebanese Buying Agents accounted for 94 per cent in 1961/2 and for 98 per cent in 1962/3.⁹⁸ The repeated de- and re-scheduling of ginger during the 1960s caused great problems to Lebanese traders and seemed unfair to them. One Agent was said to have exported 200 tons of ginger privately in 1969, although ginger was scheduled at the time.⁹⁹

Coffee was on the schedule of the Board from 1949 to March 1953. Very little coffee was sold to the Agents and the Board was convinced that most of the crop was smuggled out of the country. In the end the Board decided to deschedule. This had the desired effect: legal exports of coffee increased quickly. For eight years coffee was free. There are no figures to show which percentages were handled by the Companies and by the Lebanese, but after coffee was scheduled again in 1961, the Lebanese Buying Agents accounted for 39 per cent of the Board's purchases in 1961/2 and for 29 per cent in 1962/3.¹⁰⁰

3.9 *The kola trade*

The trade in kola must be discussed separately, because kola is not trans-ocean produce. Kola nuts have been exported from Sierra Leone for many years, but they have rarely gone to Europe. Their main destination was the other West African countries. Kola differs from trans-ocean produce in two other respects. The kola nuts are not very durable. They have to be packed loosely with wet leaves in between them, which have to be renewed or sprinkled with water regularly to maintain humid conditions. Without thorough care during storage and transport the nuts will spoil. Also, kola cannot be stacked up and is normally exported as deck cargo in what are called 'blais'. 'Blai' is a Limba word for a basket woven of reeds. The blais used in the trade hold 50 kilograms of kola nuts.

Everywhere in West Africa the kola nuts are transported northwards from the Forest Zone to the Savannah Zone, and the natural destination of kola nuts from Sierra Leone is Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, the Gambia, and Senegal. Long ago African traders had realized that the kola could be transported to these countries by ship and they organized the trade by sea. Muslim traders dominated but the Creoles increased their share during the 19th century. The Northern Rivers, including Tonko Limba chiefdom, were an important source of supplies. Consignments were accumulated in Kambia and Freetown and then shipped north in schooners and other sailing ships.

After the construction of the railway the Interior began to yield kola, too. The people harvested more from the existing trees and planted additional ones.¹⁰¹ Having set aside some nuts for their own use, they prepared ('washed') the remainder for sale. As we saw in Section 4, the Lebanese were prepared to buy kola, for instance in the railway towns beyond Blama. They sent their consignments to their partners in Freetown for sale or for export. Table V shows that exports rose quickly after 1905. The additional quantities available for export came from the Interior, while the supplies from the Coastal Belt remained constant. The rail-borne supplies soon equalled and then exceeded the water-borne supplies of the Coastal Belt, and the strength of Lebanese kola traders in Freetown grew proportionately. They may have had another advantage as well, for it is very likely that the prices which the Lebanese paid in the Interior were lower than those paid by African traders in the Coastal Belt. This would mean that Lebanese traders in Freetown obtained cheaper supplies than their African rivals. They did not fail to exploit the new opportunities and began to export. The fact that they spoke Arabic may

have been an excellent introduction to the Muslim importers along the Coast. By 1914 they dominated the kola export to Dakar.¹⁰² By 1920 the trade was 'almost entirely' in the hands of the Lebanese;¹⁰³ African traders seem to have withdrawn from the kola trade, and production in the Coastal Belt declined. Very little kola comes from the Northern Rivers nowadays.

The kola trade was the most promising line for the Lebanese in Freetown in the 1920s. Of the 21 Lebanese that were listed as traders in the Handbook of Sierra Leone in 1925, eighteen were described as trading in kola.¹⁰⁴ It was fortunate for them that they faced little competition from the Companies.¹⁰⁵ Their success should not be belittled, though. Kola exporters needed a great deal of capital. This was because stocks of kola deteriorated more quickly in Bathurst and Dakar than in Freetown because of the lower humidity in the north. Therefore the importers in these towns kept their stocks low and frequently — but irregularly — ordered further supplies from Freetown. The burden of holding and financing stocks was shifted as much as possible to the exporters in Freetown. Although it required capital there is no doubt that this was profitable for them — indeed, any Lebanese who exported kola in the 1920s could be assumed to be well-to-do. One Lebanese exporter, Michael Abdallah Blell, formed a partnership with Sarkiss Mahdi and asked him to settle in Bathurst to sell kola from Sierra Leone. The Freetown partner regularly shipped kola to his partner in Bathurst and profits on these consignments were shared. This is an interesting parallel with the partnerships which some Lebanese had formed to make the best use of the railway.

Table V shows that the exports of kola increased further during the 1920s. For many years kola was the second export earner of Sierra Leone, surpassed only by palm kernels. The Government appreciated the contribution of the Lebanese in this field, but refrained from praising them publicly because this would have offended the African traders who had lost control of the trade. Although the export of kola did not carry the same prestige as the export of trans-ocean produce, it was the most a Lebanese could hope to achieve for many years. The Lebanese also organized the export of kola to Nigeria in the 1920s,¹⁰⁶ where kola was railed from Lagos to Northern Nigeria. However, this trade later declined when more kola was harvested in Southern Nigeria.

When the crisis of 1930 came prices fell steeply and at times kola was almost unsaleable.¹⁰⁷ Export to Nigeria fell away to almost nothing, and the Gambia and Senegal bought less, too. The exports of kola from Sierra

Leone have exceeded the 2000 tons per year level on only four occasions since 1930. World War II disrupted the trade and post-war exports have been generally lower than those before the war. Even the trade to Bathurst declined, possibly because kola nuts from French Guinea began to be transported over land to the Gambia.¹⁰⁸ Kola exports from Ivory Coast further undermined Sierra Leone's position.

Declining exports were unfavourable for Lebanese kola traders in Sierra Leone, and their position deteriorated further because of the emergence of new groups of African traders. In 1954 the Lebanese still held 70 per cent of the kola export market,¹⁰⁹ but in 1970 the number of Lebanese kola exporters had fallen to three. Those who gave up switched over to the general merchandise trade, and Mandingo, Temne, Susu, and Hausa traders have taken over. This has happened without any assistance from the Government and is an interesting example of African commercial advance.

Table V. *Exports of kola nuts from Sierra Leone, 1900 - 1930*

tons		tons	
1900	748	1916	2,484
1901	570	1917	1,702
1902	735	1918	2,302
1903	759	1919	2,995
1904	778	1920	2,657
1905	769	1921	2,541
1906	1,155	1922	2,699
1907	1,374	1923	2,544
1908	1,162	1924	2,538
1909	1,324	1925	2,442
1910	1,511	1926	3,015
1911	1,599	1927	4,462
1912	1,652	1928	3,299
1913	1,865	1929	3,123
1914	1,925	1930	2,271
1915	2,042		

*Sources:*A. Macmillan, *The Red Book of West Africa*, p. 249T.N. Goddard, *The Handbook of Sierra Leone*, p. 163Sierra Leone, *The Protectorate Handbook 1955*, p. 52

The rice trade

Rice has been the staple food of Sierra Leone for many centuries. In the past each village had to be self-supporting in rice and there was no need to transport rice or to trade in it. It was the emergence of large concentrations of 'non-farmers' in the towns and in the mining areas which commercialized rice cultivation. Since then it has been the task of the rice traders to buy rice in the villages and to sell it in the towns and mining areas. Rice trading has been profitable because the non-farmers have been eager to eat rice; in fact, the unwillingness of the majority of them to change over to other foodstuffs such as cassava and bread has been a major feature of the rice trade: the demand for rice is inelastic in Sierra Leone.

The 20th century has witnessed a continuous, at times stormy, expansion of the demand for rice. On the whole the supply of rice for sale has not expanded to the same extent and there have been many years in which minor shortages of rice occurred. On at least two occasions there was a serious shortage which caused a national upheaval. Government policy has been based on the view that inadequate supplies retarded the rice trade and economic development in general, and measures to improve and stimulate rice cultivation were taken as early as the 1920s. Only a few of these measures are discussed in this chapter. They were chosen because they had an effect specifically on the rice trade.

There has been another retarding factor in the rice trade, which, unfortunately, has been largely ignored. As trade expanded more working capital was needed to finance the increasing tonnage. At first there was sufficient African capital, but at a certain stage — a few years before World War I — this source became inadequate and foreign capital was drawn in. We shall see below how Lebanese and European enterprise

entered the rice trade, what part they have played in it, and how even then lack of working capital remained a problem, but before we discuss this in chronological order we must devote three sections to some special features of the rice trade.

4.1 Types and forms of rice

Rice is cultivated on uplands and lowlands (usually called 'swamps' in Sierra Leone). Upland farming is the oldest form of rice cultivation and depends directly on the rainfall. The rice is sown in May or June after the first rains have fallen,¹ it grows during the rainy season and is harvested immediately afterwards, mainly in October. The rice in the swamps matures under different conditions. It finds enough moisture in the soil long after the rainy season is over. In fact, the moist soil and the sunny days of the early part of the dry season provide excellent growing conditions and account for the good harvests in December and January.

The main agricultural change that has taken place in Sierra Leone during the last hundred years is the shift from upland rice farming to swamp farming. The initiators of swamp cultivation were Temne farmers in the Scarcies area who cleared some mangrove swamps in about 1880 and converted them into rice fields with elementary water control.² The results were so good that their example was followed by many farmers in the northern part of the Coastal Belt. The Government began to promote the use of swamps for rice cultivation in the 1920s. (A major consideration behind this policy was the fear that upland cultivation would lead to impoverished soils.³) In general the co-operation between the rice farmers and the Agricultural Department has been good and successful. In recent years the Department has attempted to popularize swamp farming in the Interior in the 'inland swamps'.

The rice harvest consists of heads of rice, which are taken from the fields and subsequently threshed and winnowed. This yields the 'paddy' or husk rice, that is the grain in its protecting husk. There is a considerable amount of trade in husk rice although the consumer buys only dehusked rice. The husk can be removed by pounding the rice in mortars followed by winnowing. The product of hand processing is called 'native cleaned' rice, but 'home-pounded' may be better understood abroad.⁴ In 1936 the first rice mill was established in Sierra Leone (see below); many others were installed later. Their product is called 'milled' rice. Housewives prefer milled rice to native cleaned rice because it needs less cleaning in the kitchen.⁵ All imported rice is milled rice.

Dehusked rice is sold in bags of 168 lbs or bushels of 84 lbs. The bushel is also used as a measure for husk rice, in which case it has a weight of 60 lbs. The retail trade in rice takes place in the markets where women sell milled or native cleaned rice by the 'cup', normally a tin which originally served as a container for 50 cigarettes.⁶ Three groups of traders may be distinguished: the traders who buy husk or native cleaned rice in the villages by the bushel, which they then sell in bags to the wholesalers in the towns, who sell to the market women. The majority of consumers deals only with these women.

4.2 *The storage of rice*

A considerable amount of rice is put away in stores after each harvest. The creation of a food reserve is necessary because Sierra Leone has a prolonged dry season in which plants cannot grow.⁷ The reserve provides food for the population in the unproductive season. Since perishable products could not be stored in the past, the population resorted to durable products and discovered that rice was better suited for storage than most other foodstuffs.⁸ Thus, good keeping qualities were a major reason for the adoption of rice as a year-round food in Sierra Leone.

• Before the days of the rice trade the farmer stored his reserve of rice in barns near his house, keeping the rice in the husk because it was less vulnerable to pests that way. In the course of the year the women would fetch rice from the barns when it was required and clean it before cooking. Each farmer did a certain amount of planning. At sowing time he prepared enough land for the harvest that he wanted. There were a number of risks which prudent farmers guarded against by using more land. If no trouble occurred their harvests would be bigger than necessary and their barns would still contain part of last year's crop when the new harvest was brought in.⁹ Improvident farmers, on the other hand, underestimated the risks and had too little rice available if trouble occurred. The shortage was mainly felt between May and September while the new upland crop was growing, so the farmers called this period the 'hungry season'. Certain years were so unfavourable that whole villages experienced a hungry season. Even if no starvation occurred the people were compelled to eat food that was less palatable and nourishing.

The subsistence storage which we have just discussed differs in some respects from the commercial storage which traders undertake as part of their operations. Although commercial storage has grown enormously

during the 20th century, even today as much as 90 per cent of the rice harvest goes into subsistence storage.¹⁰ The stocks of the rice traders reach a peak just after the harvest and decline gradually until the next harvest at a rate which is determined by the purchases of non-farmers. In bad years stocks may be exhausted before the new harvest and the non-farmers may experience a hungry season, too. But there are also years in which part of last year's commercial stocks is still available when the new harvest reaches the market. The fact that there are two harvests in Sierra Leone complicates the pattern of commercial storage. Stocks are at their lowest in September, but rise in October and November when the early harvest (upland rice) is bought. They rise further in December and January when the late harvest (swamp rice) is bought. The peak is reached in February.¹¹ No new local supplies become available between February and October and the stocks of the traders decline, gradually and regularly, during this period.

The commercial stocks have to be financed; this is done by the rice traders and wholesalers, who use their capital to buy the rice at harvest time. The capital is immobilized while the stocks are in their possession and is freed only gradually when the rice is sold. The traders receive a reward for their investment because their selling price is higher than the buying price, and the difference grows between February and October, for the price of rice exhibits an annual movement: normally it is low from October to February and rises gradually afterwards to reach a peak in September.¹² This movement explains why the rice traders are prepared to hold stocks. (In theory the farmers could obtain the same profits if they held on to their harvests for some six months, but in practice they do not do this, but sell immediately after the harvest.) African and Lebanese traders have provided most of the capital to finance the rice trade in Sierra Leone — the Europeans have shown little interest. When we look at the other countries of West Africa we see that the Lebanese have been more numerous in the countries where rice was the staple food than in the other countries where yams were the staple food.¹³ Since yams cannot be stored easily, yam traders need less capital for commercial storage than rice traders. On the other hand the possibilities for regular trading are greater in the rice trade. This may well explain why the Lebanese had more scope for their capital and enterprise in the rice than in the yam countries in the early decades of urbanization.

The preponderance of husk rice is less pronounced in commercial than in subsistence storage. Most traders have their rice cleaned or milled before it is transported because dehushing reduces the volume by 40 per

cent. The problems of keeping stocks of milled and native cleaned rice are, however, considerable¹⁴ and serious losses have occurred, so the decision when to mill is an important one for the trader.¹⁵

4.3 *The rice market*

The rice market of Sierra Leone has some special features. First, as we have already seen, demand is inelastic, which means that consumers reduce their purchases only slightly when the price goes up. As a result traders always profit when they raise the price because of a real or expected shortage. Price control has some effect in protecting consumers but breaks down, especially at the retail level, when there is a serious shortage. Secondly, the market is largely isolated from the world market. There are no countries nearby from which rice can be bought, so that the decision to import rice has to be taken at an early stage, with all the risks of a change in the situation in Sierra Leone while the foreign rice is on its way. Private traders are therefore reluctant to import rice, unless they receive specific licences or other assurances from the Government.¹⁶

The year 1954 was a turning point in the rice market. Before that time rice was imported only occasionally and the decision to do so was usually taken after long deliberation. Since 1954 rice has been imported every year and the orders were placed in the early months of each year, the only point of debate being the amount that was required. What we say below applies to the rice market as it was before 1954.

As we have already said there was a tendency towards shortage all through the 20th century, but for various reasons an actual shortage was largely unpredictable. A shortage occurred when the commercial stocks which had been accumulated by February of a particular year were too small to feed the non-farmers until October of that year. When the shortage was caused by a partial crop failure, the traders made a special effort to buy rice: they offered higher prices to obtain their normal quantities. However, a higher price was not always successful in persuading the farmers to part with their rice, as we shall explain in section 6. On many occasions the shortage was caused by an increase in demand, for example when the number of non-farmers increased substantially or when they had more money to spend. When such an increase in demand occurred (or was foreseen) before the end of the harvest, some alert traders bought extra rice from the farmers but this was no longer possible after February. Indeed, the most serious shortages have occurred

in years in which demand grew unexpectedly between February and October. Paradoxically, these have often been years of prosperity in which a local or general boom occurred, for instance in gold or diamonds or during a war. It was the new prosperity which enabled the non-farmers to buy more rice than anticipated.

The rice market was largely free before 1954 — with the exception of the war years — and private traders organized the trade to supply the non-farmers. Their main task was to estimate their demand and to buy sufficient rice (upland and swamp). It did not matter much where they held their stocks because the transportation to Freetown was simple to arrange. (The transport to the mining areas was more difficult.) The wholesalers in Freetown had to make sure that there was rice on sale every week until the new harvest and it often was a challenge to have sufficient rice for sale in August and September. If the wholesalers foresaw a shortage, they rationed the rice by refusing to sell part of their stock and by raising the price. This was sensible because a higher price effected some reduction in consumption, but it was also profitable for the wholesalers, because they could sell their stocks at a higher price. Thus, a shortage — whether expected or not — was favourable for the wholesalers, and a year with a 'good' shortage brought more profit than several regular years. The occurrence of a 'good' shortage once in a while made the rice market attractive for many traders, especially Lebanese and Africans. (The Europeans, the Companies in particular, were deterred by the unpredictability of the rice trade.) It is common to look down on traders who prefer speculative to regular trade, but the capital which they provided was very necessary to finance the expanding rice trade.

Supplying the non-farmers with rice was a difficult task, and to do their planning satisfactorily the wholesalers had to get information about all commercial stocks, including those in the Protectorate and those in the stores of their rivals. Indeed, regular co-operation and exchange of information between the wholesalers in Freetown was necessary for the proper functioning of the rice trade. Perhaps we are now more inclined to give the wholesalers of the past credit for their co-operation, because we learnt in the 1960s how difficult it is to organize the rice market, even when the authority and resources of the Government are employed. Unfortunately, most of what was said about the co-operation of the wholesalers in the days of the free rice market was negative, for the Freetown consumers suspected the wholesalers of co-operating for no other purpose than to exploit them. We shall see in section 5 that the Lebanese wholesalers were accused of exploitation in 1919, and this reputation followed

them through the inter-war period.

Although it is impossible to prove (or disprove) that such exploitation occurred in particular years, we want to describe the method which, according to the consumers, was used. At a certain time of the year, usually in May or June, the Freetown wholesalers were in a position to know with reasonable accuracy whether there was enough rice to last until the new harvest. Even if there was enough rice the wholesalers could still claim that there was a shortage. They could delay the transportation of Protectorate stocks to Freetown and they could raise their prices and explain to complaining buyers that there was a shortage. If the wholesalers stuck together and maintained their story, they could easily get 10 to 20 per cent more for their Freetown stocks. The profits on this method of cheating the consumers were obvious, so one can hardly expect that the wholesalers always rejected the method. On the other hand the consumers often suspected that a shortage was faked when in fact it was real.

It must not be forgotten that collusion between wholesalers carried certain risks. First, when the consumers did not believe that there was a real shortage they tried to find out what the real position was concerning stocks. The wholesalers could try to hide their stocks — an important aspect of what the consumers called 'hoarding'¹⁷ — but secrets could not be kept for long and the Government could step in by sending inspectors to check the rice stocks. Secondly, one of the wholesalers could betray his rivals by suddenly lowering his price, thus ensuring the complete sale of his stocks. If no real shortage had, in fact, existed, it was likely that some old rice would still be in stock in Freetown in October when the new rice came on the market, because the raised price effected a certain reduction of demand. Since the other wholesalers were also not interested in having a large stock of old rice in October, they usually followed the example of the rival who had lowered his price. This 'off-loading' was often a panic reaction towards the end of the season. In such years the peak price for rice appeared in July or August rather than in September.¹⁸ Such a breakdown of commercial co-operation was favourable for the consumers.

The suggestion that the rice wholesalers were guilty of collusion was believed by many people, including some British officials,¹⁹ but it was often forgotten that, to be successful, collusion required fairly complete knowledge of all available stocks and bona fide co-operation between the traders. I doubt whether these two requirements were often fulfilled.

Much has changed in the rice market since 1954, but the demand for

rice has remained inelastic²⁰ and minor shortages have still occurred occasionally. The attraction of the rice market for speculative capital²¹ has become smaller, but has not disappeared.

4.4 The rice trade until 1918

A regular trade in rice started in the 19th century, when the urban population of Freetown wanted rice and was prepared to pay for it. Most of the rice came from the northern part of the Coastal Belt, and in particular from the Scarcies area, which was quite a distance from Freetown, but transport by water was cheap. We have seen that the Temne farmers developed swamp farming in about 1880. Since the oil palm did not flourish there rice, ground-nuts, and kola nuts were the main cash crops in the north, and of these rice had become the most popular towards the end of the 19th century. The early rice trade, including transport, was entirely in African hands.

Two changes occurred in the first two decades of the 20th century: traders began to make use of the new railway to transport rice to Freetown, and the Lebanese began to engage in the rice trade. As Lebanese participation was undoubtedly hastened by the railway, it is necessary to discuss in detail how the railway changed the rice trade.

The construction of the railway seems to have initiated the rice trade in the Interior. The labourers needed food and the engineers who were in charge asked the Chiefs for rice. As they received payment they realized the commercial value of what had been a subsistence crop until then. They became interested in selling rice every year, but had to look for new buyers after the railway engineers had moved on to the next section of the line. The Factory Agents of the Companies had instructions to buy trans-ocean produce and were not interested in local foodstuffs such as rice, but the Creole traders in the railway towns were not hampered by instructions and it seems that they were the first to rail rice to Freetown.

The rail-borne supplies from the Interior grew quickly and caused great concern to the established traders in Freetown whose operations were based on water-borne supplies of swamp rice. An early harvest of upland rice in the Interior which was quickly railed to Freetown made part of their stocks of swamp rice unsaleable.²² Moreover, they heard that the traders in the railway towns could obtain their rice at a lower price than they themselves had to pay in the Coastal Belt. They realized that the higher profitability of the rail-borne rice provided excellent chances for new rivals.

The farmers in the Interior did not receive much for their rice but they were content with what they got. They offered their surpluses for sale and began to use more land so that rice cultivation in the Interior increased greatly.²³ It must be noted that certain areas along the railway, between Songho and Kangahun for instance, yielded little trans-ocean produce and rice was practically the only crop there with which the farmers could obtain cash. This put the traders in a favourable position so that they could continue to buy at low prices. They purchased large quantities for the Freetown market where a surplus developed by 1906. Although this result of the railway had not been intended, it was a very welcome development which permitted a regular export trade. Exports took place every year from 1906 to 1915, when rice was shipped to countries like French Guinea, Liberia, and the other British West African colonies.²⁴

There were a few Lebanese in the railway towns during the first decade of this century, but I was told that they did not trade in rice.²⁵ It is quite likely that they were reluctant to buy a product for which the Europeans showed no interest. They may have changed their minds in 1910 because of the rice shortage of that year. The profits helped them to overcome their reluctance, and Lebanese participation in the rice trade became important from then on. It seems that the Lebanese in the railway towns soon bought more than the Creole traders, forming partnerships with relatives or friends in Freetown who took care of the sale of the rice. On the whole these partnerships worked smoothly and efficiently. A number of Lebanese in Freetown specialized in rice and began to invest in commercial stocks for sale in the months from February till October, though not many could afford this: there were only about a dozen in 1919.²⁶ After some time the Lebanese wholesalers dominated the rail-borne supplies while the established African wholesalers retained their control of water-borne supplies. As the rail-borne supplies increased, the Lebanese captured a greater share of the Freetown market. (The analogy with the kola trade (see p. 66) is particularly clear.)

4.5 *The rice shortage of 1919*

A serious shortage of rice occurred during 1919. The main cause was the abnormally low crop of 1918,²⁷ but it must not be overlooked that the demand for rice had been high for several years because the urban labour force had grown as a result of the war. The Government had prohibited the export of rice in 1916 and had imposed a maximum price. These two

measures had been enough to keep the rice market under control until 1919.

The consumers in Freetown suffered badly because of the shortage. At first they noticed little of it; the price control was reasonably effective and the knowledge that rice was being imported (see below) was reassuring. Then, towards the end of May, the consumers became worried. They heard that part of the imported rice would be railed to the Protectorate and they realized that the stocks in Freetown might soon be depleted. This was an awful prospect because it was still four months before the new harvest could relieve the shortage. Naturally some consumers tried to buy rice in advance to have enough until the new harvest. They discovered, however, that several rice wholesalers refused to sell rice or were only prepared to sell at a price above the controlled one. The population of Freetown understood how serious the situation was and became restless and agitated.²⁸ Very little was needed to cause an outburst of violence. A strike of railway workers which began on 14 July heightened the tension and riots broke out four days later. The rioters looted Lebanese shops and stores (see description in Chapter 1) and found a considerable amount of rice, which was sold in the markets for extremely low prices;²⁹ but as soon as this supply was exhausted the shortage returned and rice remained scarce until October.

The riots were a shock to everybody. They seemed impossible in peaceful Sierra Leone. Why had they happened? And who was to blame? Several months of accusations and inquiries followed. The view which became generally accepted was that the Lebanese rice wholesalers had 'brought the trouble on their own head',³⁰ because they had hoarded rice and had refused to sell it even 'for urgent personal need',³¹ and because they had exploited the consumers by charging higher prices than the controlled one.³² The Government shared this view. Two Lebanese rice traders were deported³³ and the Governor pointed out that the rioters had spared the shop of one Lebanese who did not trade in rice.³⁴ The Creoles subscribed to this view because they envied the Lebanese for their commercial successes of the preceding years. The other Africans largely accepted Creole opinion. They were easily stirred up because they were badly hurt by the shortage of rice.

Before accepting this view we must look at the role of the Companies and the Government in the rice market in 1919. The Companies were aware that any disruption of the rice trade could have unfavourable repercussions in Freetown which would also endanger their own operations. They therefore drew the attention of the Government to the impending

rice shortage as early as January. They also considered plans to import rice. In March they advised the Government in writing about a change in the controlled price for rice. They suggested an increase from 22s 6d to 28s a bushel, arguing that it 'would, to some extent, prepare consumers for the comparatively high price they would be compelled to pay for imported rice.'³⁵ The Companies also offered to import sufficient rice to meet the requirements of Freetown until the next harvest. This offer was made on the condition that the Government would not import rice for commercial distribution. The Companies could not say at which price they would sell the imported rice because the world price for rice was rising rapidly at the time. They undertook, however, to limit their profit margin to 5 per cent. The Government did not accept the offer of the Companies, nor did it raise the controlled price.

The Companies then acted without waiting further for Government assurances and ordered rice from abroad. When this rice arrived in Freetown, the controlled price was still at the old level, which was lower than the cost of the imported rice. The Companies were not prepared to sell the imported rice at the controlled price because it would have meant a loss to them. Just at that time the price of rice in the Protectorate, which was not controlled, had risen to exceptional levels reaching 40s and even 50s a bushel in the railway towns. The Companies therefore decided to rail their imported rice to the Protectorate. Until then rice had moved 'downwards' on the railway but in mid-1919 the flow was reversed. Between 1 June and 18 July 249 tons of rice were railed from Freetown to the Protectorate.³⁶ Apparently the Companies had come to the conclusion that the Government was either unwilling to act or quite irresolute, and they were no longer prepared to co-operate with it to alleviate the crisis. The rice wholesalers came to the same conclusion and also railed their stocks of local rice to the Protectorate. The Government had no allies left but was free to import rice on its own account. Unfortunately it ordered both too little and too late. On 28 June 31 tons of rice arrived for the Government, but they were not released immediately and were still in store at the time of the riots.³⁷

Neither the Government nor the Companies could look back on their actions with satisfaction. Although both had come to the conclusion that imports were necessary, the way in which the imports had been distributed had been disgraceful. The Companies felt that the Government had failed by not raising the controlled price in the Colony,³⁸ and by importing too little; the Government considered that the Companies had betrayed their original intention by diverting the imported rice to the

Protectorate.³⁹ I suspect that both the Government and the Companies had a bad conscience and wanted to cover up their mistakes. Moreover, it was a maxim of European society in the colonies 'never to wash their dirty linen in public'. They obeyed this for over a year. Then, in October 1920, Governor Wilkinson received a deputation of citizens of Freetown in connection with the aftermath of the riots. During the conversation he attributed part of the blame for the riots to the Companies. Among other things he accused them of having profiteered by sending their rice to the Protectorate. The Companies reacted by having the Secretary of the Sierra Leone Chamber of Commerce write an open letter to the Editor of *West Africa* in which the chamber strongly repudiated the allegations made by the Governor.⁴⁰ Thus the conflict came into the open. There has never been a more serious conflict between the Companies and a Governor of Sierra Leone.

Knowing this background of European inefficiency and failure we are no longer able to put all the blame for the riots on the Lebanese. It is now helpful to discuss again some of the expectations and actions of the Lebanese rice wholesalers. They and their African rivals expected a 'good' shortage and hoped to get high prices for the local rice in their stores. We can be sure that they were in favour of raising the controlled price. They were not pleased when they heard that the Companies had ordered rice from abroad, but were relieved when they noticed that this rice was railed to the Protectorate. (We do not know whether they or the Companies took the lead in railing rice 'upwards'.) We have seen that the Lebanese traders who had rice in their stores in July were blamed for hoarding it, but the same amount of blame — or more — should be put on those who had no rice left because they had sent their stocks to the Protectorate. Again, the Lebanese and African traders who sold above the controlled price in Freetown were convicted and fined, but their shrewder rivals who sent their rice to the Protectorate and sold there at even higher — but uncontrolled — prices were legally innocent. One thing is clear. It is impossible to pass a fair judgment on the parties that were directly or indirectly involved in the riots of 1919 without a thorough knowledge of the rice trade in Sierra Leone.

The riots and their aftermath had important psychological effects in Sierra Leone. The Government realized that it was dangerous to be negligent in the matter of rice, so it became a top priority of colonial policy to ensure sufficient rice for Freetown. As to the consumers, the riots instilled a deep suspicion of rice traders into their mind. This suspicion, often dormant for years, revives at the first signs of a shortage.

It has centred on the Lebanese and has often been an embarrassment to them. At the same time it drew attention to their influence. All through the inter-war period they were seen as the dominant rice wholesalers who had outstripped their African rivals. It may well be that all rice traders grew wary of holding stocks of rice in Freetown. They remembered that the stocks in Freetown had led to the accusations of hoarding and had been looted during the riots. Moreover, price control had made Freetown stocks less valuable than stocks in the Protectorate. Admittedly, it was possible to rail them to the Protectorate in 1919 but who could guarantee that the Government would not prohibit 'upward' rice traffic during a future shortage of rice? Holding stocks in the railway towns seemed safer and the telegraph system ensured a timely arrival in Freetown.⁴¹

The interest of the Companies in rice decreased sharply in 1919. They had gingerly⁴² tried to re-enter the trade in the early part of the year but the venture had turned out badly. Although they did not lose money, they were aware that they had lost the goodwill of the African public and the Government. Moreover, the whole venture showed that close co-operation with the Government was essential. Until good relations were restored they preferred not to deal in rice, and we shall see below that ever since the participation of the Companies in the rice trade remained lukewarm.

4.6 *The period from 1920 to 1935*

In 1920 Freetown was again threatened by a shortage of rice and imports proved necessary. As the world price for rice had risen to a high level these imports had to be subsidized so as not to disrupt the trade in local rice. The Government decided to assume the responsibility for the importation of the rice and to organize the distribution of it in Freetown and some Protectorate towns.⁴³ In this way the amount of the subsidy could be adjusted promptly and conveniently. Such direct participation in the rice trade was quite unorthodox in the light of prevailing economic views but the events of 1919 had helped the Government to overcome any hesitation. The subsidizing of a staple food and the direct participation in trade were nevertheless important precedents in colonial policy.

Imports were necessary again in 1924 and 1926. They prompted the Government to appoint a commission to study the 'rice industry'. The commission estimated that Freetown and environment required 6300 tons of rice per year, of which more than two thirds arrived by boat and the remainder by rail.⁴⁴ The monthly prices for 1925 and 1926 were tabulated

to show how difficult it was to forecast a surplus or deficit in the market. No specific measures were recommended but the report of the commission was one of the things which made the Agricultural Department decide to pay more attention to rice cultivation, and in particular to promote swamp rice.⁴⁵

The commission reported that the Companies were engaged in the trade in local rice.⁴⁶ They bought upland rice in the Interior and retained this at their Buying Stations until they heard of a shortage somewhere in Sierra Leone.⁴⁷ (Apparently Freetown was no longer the only area of potential demand for rice. It must be remembered that the growth of the road system in the 1920s permitted more internal transportation of rice from surplus to deficit areas.⁴⁸) The Companies bought only large quantities of rice; the actual buying from the farmers was done by small traders, who were mainly Lebanese.

The rice trade in the villages was accompanied by some undesirable features. Many farmers did not estimate their own requirements properly and sold too much of their crop in October. When they discovered in May that they had not enough seed rice for their farms they turned to the traders to borrow rice. Most Lebanese traders seem to have advanced seed rice on the following terms: the farmer had to repay two bushels of rice at harvest time for each bushel which he borrowed at sowing time.⁴⁹ These terms were not unreasonable because the price of rice was much higher in May than in October. We note that the trader gave credit for about four months. In some areas the farmers pledged or 'trusted' their rice farms to the lending trader so that he obtained a formal claim to the harvest.⁵⁰ Many farmers were grateful to the trader who advanced seed rice to them because without it they would have prepared their land in vain. They saw the arrangement as a joint investment of the trader and themselves. But even if we accept this view, the dependence of the farmer on the trader was beyond dispute and the danger of increasing dependence obvious. Many British officials saw this and had serious misgivings about the rice trade in the villages. They were worried about the improvidence of the farmers and considered the terms on which seed rice was advanced too onerous. They suspected the Lebanese of exploiting the rice farmers.

The officials should be commended for their concern to protect the farmers but their analysis was too narrow. The root of the trouble lay in the two-way trade which we discussed in Chapter 2. The two-way trade was faltering in several areas of Sierra Leone; some farmers there could not find enough palm kernels or other trans-ocean produce to satisfy their desire for general merchandise. They were tempted by the wares in the

Lebanese shops but had neither the cash nor the trans-ocean produce to pay with. We may be sure that they offered other products for sale, but the traders rejected nearly all of them. Only rice and kola nuts were acceptable. (It was possible to keep the discussion of the kola trade in Chapter 3 brief because there were no complications in the villages.) In most cases it was the desire for general merchandise that prompted the farmers to sell too much of their rice crop, but whether they acted improvidently cannot be said unless we know which articles they bought with the money. After having sold too much rice in October they had to borrow seed rice in May of the next year and the Lebanese trader agreed to repayment in kind. The two-way trade was modified by all this. First, the Lebanese trader continued to give credit, but now it was related to seed rice rather than to general merchandise. Secondly, rice was substituted for trans-ocean produce, although it was commercially inferior because it could be sold only in the limited domestic market, unlike trans-ocean produce.

The Lebanese were willing to accept these modifications of the two-way trade because they were able to shift part of the burden on to the shoulders of the Companies. A great deal of the capital which the Lebanese used to extend credit to the rice farmers was European capital which they had received in the form of trade credit, and Lebanese who financed many farmers tried to get more trade credit from the Companies. Again, whenever they considered it profitable, the Lebanese tried to pay off their debts to the Companies with rice rather than cash. Some European managers were reluctant, but even they would agree if they had doubts about the financial position of a Lebanese debtor. I was told that the Companies were drawn into the wholesale trade in rice in this way, often against their wishes. In the introduction to this chapter I mentioned lack of working capital as a retarding factor in the rice trade. It seems to me that European capital was mobilized by the Lebanese in the 1920s in the way just described to finance the growing rice trade.

The rice trade in the Scarcies expanded further in the 1920s. Since the Companies were poorly represented in this area, most of the trade was in the hands of African and Lebanese traders. It seems that the Lebanese captured an increasing share of the Scarcies trade in the 1920s, possibly because of credit transactions similar to those we have just described. Kassiri became an important Lebanese centre. There was also a small Swiss partnership at Rokupr (later called RTTC, Rokupr Transport and Trading Company) whose operations were based largely on rice. The Swiss had only a limited amount of capital at their disposal but I was told

that they extended credit to farmers on easier terms than the Lebanese.

When there was an abundant crop in 1931 some officials proposed the establishment of a regular export trade and the Governor supported these plans publicly in November of that year.⁵¹ The Agricultural Department decided to concentrate its efforts in the Scarcies area, opening a rice research station at Rokupr in 1934. The station experimented with imported strains of rice and distributed one strain that was particularly suitable for the Scarcies. At about the same time an application was sent to the Colonial Development Fund in London for a grant with which a rice mill could be purchased and installed, which was necessary because only milled rice could compete successfully and permanently in the international market.

The surpluses in the rice market continued for several years and the price of rice was unusually low. Both these made conditions favourable for the export trade. Even before the mill was installed, exports (of native cleaned rice) were made. More than 1000 tons were exported in 1935. This seemed to prove that the officials were on the right track with their plans. Unfortunately, they failed to realize that rice was 'switch produce', a term which I use to indicate that it can be switched from consumption by the farmer to consumption in the towns or abroad. Whether the farmers eat their rice or sell it depends largely on the amount of money they can earn in other ways. When prices for trans-ocean produce fell in the depression of the 1930s, many farmers tried to reach their former money incomes by selling extra rice. This was the main cause of the rice surpluses of the 1930s. The surpluses undoubtedly depressed the prices in the villages so that the farmers received little for their rice. Thus, the rice surpluses were more an indication of rural poverty than of long-term economic development as the officials optimistically believed.⁵² They were also a temporary feature. As soon as the price of palm kernels picked up in 1935 the farmers began to sell less rice. This reaction was not peculiar to the 1930s but has been general: when the farmers are poor they sell more rice and other switch produce, but when they prosper, they sell less. Normally rice has been abundant in the markets in times of poverty and scarce in times of prosperity. It was therefore impossible to establish a regular export trade of rice. The records of the Customs Department show occasional periods of exports but no long-term export trade.⁵³

4.7 *The period from 1936 to 1947*

This period was characterized by considerable Government participation in the rice trade. It began with the opening of the Government rice mill in Freetown in May 1936. The opening ceremony was performed by the Governor to underline the significance of this investment. Although the export plans largely failed, the mill became a success and was often worked to capacity. Husk rice, mainly from the Scarcies, was brought down to the mill in Bulloom boats and launches. A number of farmers in the Scarcies established co-operative societies which organized the transportation of the husk rice to Freetown. In this way the agricultural development in the north was closely connected with the mill.⁵⁴

Originally it was planned that the mill would treat the stocks of traders at their request for a certain fee per bushel treated. This suited not only exporters but also wholesalers who supplied the local market. Later it was decided that the mill should also buy husk rice and sell the milled rice on its own account, at its own risk. In this way the Government re-entered the rice trade. A small profit was made on these transactions and the Director of Agriculture explained, somewhat discomfited, that this was 'chiefly due to the rise in price of rice between the date the paddy was bought and the date the clean rice was sold'.⁵⁵ The period over which the price rose was also the period in which the Government financed the rice stocks, which meant that public capital began to be used for commercial storage in 1936. To a certain extent the Government had no control over the amount of capital that was used at the rice mill. When the traders expected a shortage they retained the ownership of the rice and paid only the milling fee. When a surplus was expected, however, more rice was sold to the mill either by traders or farmers.

The establishment of the mill compelled the Government to study the rice market with greater care than before. The results can be seen in the thorough analysis presented in the Agricultural Reports of 1936-8. The new knowledge was badly needed in 1937 because of a sudden rice shortage which was caused by a combination of three factors: the growth of the mining industry, the bad upland crop of 1936, and the rural prosperity based on the high price for palm kernels.

The shortage was handled competently. The Government prohibited the export of rice, ordered some rice from abroad, and made private imports more attractive by removing the import duty on rice. Some 4000 tons of rice were imported in 1937. This relieved the shortage, but could not prevent rice from being very expensive in that year. In May the

Government imposed a maximum price of 11s a bushel in Freetown and some Protectorate towns. For five months rice was sold at this maximum price, but after the new harvest it fell rapidly, reaching 5s in November, so that price control could be abolished again. It was a bad year for the urban consumers and the mine workers but the measures were adequate and no trouble developed.⁵⁶

The sudden change in the rice market was also a problem for the mining companies. They realized that worries about the staple food could cause serious unrest among their labour force. They decided therefore to supply their workers with rations of rice.⁵⁷ The mining companies preferred to buy just after the harvest and to take care of the storage themselves. This was yet another way in which European capital was used to finance the growing rice trade.

Important changes were introduced into the rice trade soon after World War II broke out. Freetown became a busy port because it was the Naval Headquarters for the South Atlantic and a convoy assembly point. Many people were recruited to work in the harbour and at various defence activities and the labour force in Freetown was larger than ever before. All these people needed rice and other food.⁵⁸ At first the Government intervened by prohibiting the transportation of rice from Freetown to the Protectorate and by imposing price control.

By 1941 more comprehensive measures were required. The Government started a buying scheme for rice to obtain sufficient supplies for the Army and the population of Freetown, and to secure the rice it offered a price of 6 shillings for a bushel of native cleaned rice. The actual buying was done by the Companies at their Line Stations. They had the facilities and the personnel and were prepared to buy rice as agents of the Government. When buying directly from the farmers the Companies discovered that the official 6 shillings, which was soon raised further, was far higher than the prices which the Lebanese had paid. They concluded that the Lebanese had made excessive profits, an opinion which was shared by the Director of Agriculture who wrote that the buying of rice in the Protectorate needed to be controlled by the Government if the producer was to get a fair deal.⁵⁹ (It must be remembered, however, that a war-time buying scheme in which the Government provided the capital and central storage space and bore the price risks differed greatly from the free market before the war. A Government agent could be content with a far lower profit margin than the independent trader had been.) In spite of their negative views about the Lebanese the Companies and the Government had to make use of some of them, especially Lebanese in

outposts and in railway towns in which the Companies possessed no Buying Station. They had to be accepted as a link in the rice buying scheme and were called 'rice contractors' or 'agents'.

The demand for rice rose further as more soldiers were recruited. I was told that rice was shipped to the Sierra Leonean soldiers in Burma because they liked it so much better than other rice. Moreover, London demanded that Sierra Leone send rice to the Gambia as it had done occasionally in the 1930s. It was impossible for the Government to obtain sufficient supplies of rice without resorting to compulsion. In 1943 an order was passed that all farmers should produce one extra bushel of rice and sell it to the Government at a price of 9 shillings. This was called the 'rice quota system'. The Chiefs were held responsible for the delivery of the full quota of their chiefdom. The traders, that is the Companies and many Lebanese, bought the rice, paid for it, and organized the transport to the central stores of the Government in Freetown.

Every system of compulsion creates hardships, but the rice quota system caused special ones. Since many young men had left the villages to work in Freetown or to join the Army, the labour force in the villages was greatly reduced. One estimate speaks of a reduction of 20 to 25 per cent.⁶⁰ No quota was demanded from the absentees, but the remaining farmers sorely missed the help of the young able-bodied men who were away. Moreover, the quota system made no allowances for smaller local crop failures. Occasionally farmers had to borrow money to buy rice for the quota they had to deliver. The Government, understaffed and pre-occupied by defence matters, had to delegate the administration of the quota system to the Chiefs and, to a lesser extent, to the traders. Many Chiefs and traders lost goodwill with the farmers because of their role in the rice quota system. This happened to the men who administered the system conscientiously and even more so to those who exploited it for their own benefit. The rice quota was lowered in 1946 and the whole system was abolished in 1947, to the relief of the Government and the farmers.⁶¹

4.8 *The period from 1947 to 1954*

Freedom returned to the rice market in 1947. The compulsory quota was abolished and the official buying scheme came to an end. When the rice agents ceased their buying operations on behalf of the Government, the Companies withdrew from the rice trade, but most of the other agents became independent rice traders. A great deal of capital was withdrawn

from the rice trade, for instance by the Companies, but more important was the withdrawal of the public capital which had financed the buying scheme. Most of the capital that remained in the trade was owned by Lebanese and Africans who were not content with the low profit margins which the Government had earned on its capital. In order to realize a higher profit margin, they had to increase the difference between the price paid to farmers and the price charged to consumers. It appears that the farmers lost more than the consumers, because the rice traders, who were reluctant to bear the price risks of a free market, decided to buy at low prices only.

The rice farmers were dissatisfied with the low prices and their grievances were understood by members of the Protectorate Assembly. One of them tabled a motion in May 1949 calling for a guaranteed minimum price for rice. It must be remembered that the plans for establishing the SLPMB were nearly completed by that time. They promised a new deal for the farmers who sold trans-ocean produce and it seemed only fair that the rice farmers should be given similar support. The Protectorate Assembly seems to have shared this view because it accepted the motion with a large majority.⁶² Higher prices for the rice farmers became a political cause in 1949 and one that was championed by the Protectorate politicians. Although the administration considered this a good cause, it failed to act immediately, mainly because its former rice policy had been determined by another goal, namely, to ensure sufficient rice for Freetown. Was the new goal compatible with the old one or was there a conflict of interests between the consumers in the Colony and the producers in the Protectorate?⁶³ Towards the end of 1950, a committee of nine was appointed to 'report on the production and marketing of rice'. Its recommendations should be 'in the best interests of both producers and consumers'.⁶⁴

The work of the Rice Committee was supported and influenced by a soil conservation survey which three high-ranking officials had undertaken in 1949. With regard to rice, the officials recommended the creation of a reserve, which should be bought and stored by the Government. Ultimately, the reserve should be 'equivalent to about one-sixth of the average annual crop'.⁶⁵ Concern for the consumers was reflected in the two permanent objectives of the reserve: the elimination of seasonal shortages and the prevention of exploitation of the public.⁶⁶ The officials were further concerned about the fertility of the soil which was endangered by the cultivation of upland rice. They felt that the Government, when creating the reserve, 'might well confine its purchases to

swamp rice and pay a sufficiently high price for it to encourage its cultivation at the expense of upland varieties.⁶⁷ The colonial administration seems to have been in favour of these proposals, for the Director of Commerce, who was responsible for matters concerning rice, had been working along these lines; for instance the husk rice which he bought for the mill in Freetown consisted entirely of swamp rice, and it could be said that his buying price 'supported' swamp rice farmers. Furthermore, a second rice mill was planned for Mambolo (opened in 1951) which would depend exclusively on swamp rice. All this meant that there was official interest in swamp rice, but none whatsoever in upland rice. The buying and selling on behalf of the mill enabled the Director of Commerce to create some stocks with which he could intervene in the Freetown market, when the price rose unexpectedly⁶⁸ — a reserve of the type that the report proposed. (It is not clear whether the intervention was effective, because the Government had to resort to price control in 1949.)

The Rice Committee presented its report in May 1952. It recommended that 'a guaranteed price to producers should be fixed annually'.⁶⁹ This amounted to permanent support for the rice farmers comparable to the support of the SLPMB.⁷⁰ The Government soon agreed and fixed producers' prices which were announced in August 1952. Thus a new buying scheme for rice came into being. Agents were appointed to buy rice at all trading centres on the railway line and in Port Loko.⁷¹ Provision was made for the purchase of upland rice, but on terms which were less favourable than those for swamp rice: only dehusked rice was purchased and the price was low — at any rate lower than that for swamp rice.⁷² The new scheme represented an obvious compromise, not only between farmers and consumers, but also between soil conservation and the protection of the farmers. These four interests would have to be weighed afresh against each other each year when the Government fixed the new buying price. The Director of Commerce was made responsible for the whole scheme, which worked satisfactorily for the next two seasons.

The re-introduction of an official buying scheme was unfavourable for the African and Lebanese rice traders in the villages and in Freetown and I have no doubt that it was detrimental to Lebanese interests. It was perhaps an even greater set-back to the Lebanese than the establishment of the Marketing Board, because their rivals in the rice trade were fewer and weaker than in the produce trade.

4.9 *The rice shortage of 1954/55*

The diamond rush of 1954 caused a serious shortage of rice. The men who worked in the diamond fields were non-farmers who had to buy their rice in the market. (As they did strenuous work and usually earned well, they probably ate more rice than before.) The total demand for rice in Sierra Leone therefore greatly increased during 1954 — by some 6000 tons perhaps — and this additional demand was concentrated in the southeast of the country. Although some diamond diggers had been townspeople, most of them had been farmers who, by abandoning their farms, were responsible for a decline in rice production. The shortage was therefore caused both by an increase in demand and a decrease in supply, in which the former factor was the more important.

The rice traders responded to the new situation by sending rice to the diamond areas where they were able to sell at higher prices than in Freetown. Already in early 1954 it was possible for the traders in the Scarcies area to pay a higher price to the farmers than that offered by the Department of Commerce so that official purchases of rice in 1953/4 were lower than in the previous year. Until then the Scarcies rice had been transported by water to Freetown and Mambolo, but in 1954 it was taken by lorry to Bo and beyond. By that time lorries could make the journey to Bo with only four ferries en route. It is likely that the Lebanese rice traders in the Scarcies area played an important part in the diversion and transportation of the rice.⁷³

By May 1954 the price of rice in the Provinces, which was not controlled, had risen to 35s and 40s a bushel (native cleaned) and possibly higher in the diamond boom towns, which meant that the diamond diggers were outbidding the Freetown consumers. Since the maximum price in the Colony was 30s a bushel, wholesalers in Freetown could earn a profit by sending rice to the Provinces — as had been the case in 1919 (see Section 5). In order to reduce or stop this 'upward' traffic of rice the Government raised the maximum price in the Colony to 38s a bushel for native cleaned rice and to 45s for milled rice.⁷⁴ The Department of Commerce, which earlier in that year had exported rice, hurriedly ordered 4500 tons of rice from Italy, the nearest supplier.

The Freetown consumers set their hopes on the upland rice harvest of October. The traders had other plans, however. They knew that they could offer high prices to the farmers and still make a profit when selling in the diamond areas. It is interesting to read the debates of the Protectorate Assembly which was in session that same month. Its members

compared notes about production and sales in their own areas and concluded that a serious shortage was imminent. Indeed, very little of the upland crop was sent to Freetown so that a considerable quantity of rice had to be imported. The Department of Commerce ordered rice from Burma which arrived in Freetown in January 1955. It was most welcome because most of the Scarcies harvest, which under normal circumstances would have arrived at that time, had already been bought by traders in the diamond areas.

Early 1955 was a time of hardship for the people of Freetown. The cost of living had greatly increased, while wages had not yet been adjusted. Rice was very expensive and only the less palatable foreign rice was being sold. The distribution of the Burma rice may not have run smoothly at first or perhaps some traders hoarded rice. At any rate many people were afraid that stocks of rice would soon run out, because never before had there been a shortage of rice in February. They noticed that palm oil and ground-nuts were expensive and often unobtainable and concluded that all trade had been disrupted by the diamond rush. Dissatisfaction and unrest were characteristic of the attitude of the people in Freetown.

This was the background of the general strike and the riots of February 1955, in which eighteen people were killed and extensive damage was done to property. Some rioters were politically motivated and ransacked the houses of three African ministers,⁷⁵ other groups surged through the main shopping streets, damaging buildings and trying to break into shops. The latter caused much damage to the Lebanese traders who 'bore the brunt of the rioting though the dispute which gave rise to the trouble had nothing to do with them.'⁷⁶ At least fourteen Lebanese shops were looted.⁷⁷ The riots of 1919 and 1955 had much in common. In both, the shortage of food, in particular of rice, caused unrest among the people so that they were prepared to listen to men who claimed to know why there were problems and who had caused them. It was then a small step to violence.

Wages and salaries were raised after the riots so that the people had enough money to feed themselves. They learned to eat the imported rice, the distribution of which was further improved. Further consignments of rice, this time from Pakistan, arrived in July. Slowly confidence was restored among the consumers and the fear of long-lasting shortages dissipated.

4.10 *The period from 1955 to 1974*

The controls which the Government imposed on the rice market as a result of the shortage of 1954/5 became a permanent feature because the balance between farmers and non-farmers which was disturbed in 1954 was not restored to its previous position so that for some twenty years the non-farmers had to be largely supplied with foreign rice. It has been estimated that during the 1960s the rice trade handled twice as much imported rice as local rice.⁷⁸ The Government raised the rice prices substantially in July 1974 because it hoped that the farmers would be induced to sell more rice, thus reducing the need for imports. It is still too early to say whether this effect will be achieved.

The primary task of the Government in this period consisted in estimating the tonnage that needed to be imported. The agricultural officers prepared estimates of the new harvest each year so that supplies of local rice could be forecast. The demand for rice was then extrapolated from the previous year and the difference was ordered from abroad. The Government had a preference for rice from the Far East, which was cheaper, but whenever a shortage developed unexpectedly, rice was ordered from one of the Mediterranean countries. For some years the Government ordered rice on its own account, while for others, it granted licences to private importers. Whatever method was used the Government made sure that there was enough rice. Importing was complicated by a psychological consideration. It was considered to be 'immoral' and a sign of laziness to import rice. Indeed, in the villages a farmer who did not grow enough rice for himself and his family was considered a social failure, and this view became generally held on the national level so that Sierra Leone had a bad conscience when importing rice. Self-sufficiency in rice was unanimously acclaimed as a desirable goal.⁷⁹ It was always justified with economic arguments but the social and moral implications should not be overlooked. Against this background we must see the reluctance of the Government to import more than the minimum required. This meant that situations often developed in which both traders and consumers expected a minor shortage and a temporary rise in prices. The attempts of traders to profit from these situations (and the attempts of consumers to buy in advance) have greatly complicated the distribution of rice.

As the distribution of imported rice became a major task in the 1950s, the Government decided to establish a separate Rice Department which took over the work formerly done by the Department of Commerce in connection with rice. In 1965 the Rice Corporation, a public corporation,

was established and replaced the Rice Department. What is said about the Rice Department in this section applies equally to the Rice Corporation.

Although there was price control the Rice Department did not expect it to be an effective means of protecting the consumer in times of shortage. Its main aim was therefore to hold sufficient stocks to be able to sell when rumours about a possible shortage began to circulate. Unfortunately, its stores were too small at first so that it had to sell quickly to rice wholesalers, some of whom were even able to take delivery of foreign consignments at the quay. Indeed, technical problems of storage space compelled the Rice Department to leave the organization of the rice distribution largely in the hands of private traders, but this meant that it had little control over 'hoarding' and 'profiteering', so that the protection of the consumer was no longer assured.

Commercial interest in rice increased greatly in the 1950s and 1960s and many traders wrote to the Rice Department asking for an appointment as rice dealer. (It is conceivable that the official profit margin satisfied them, but I believe that the prospect of rising prices — in spite of price control — enticed many traders.) A special Tender Board was set up to consider all applicants and to determine the quantity (the 'quota') that each could handle. Because of the profitability of the rice trade, rice quotas represented a certain value and all kinds of attempts were made to obtain one — or to prevent rivals from getting them. Some quotas were even sold as we shall see in the next section. It is not surprising that the consumers became very critical of the commercial distribution of rice. These complaints certainly played a role when the Government decided in 1969 to increase the number of rice dealers or agents to some five hundred and to publish their names in the *Gazette*.⁸⁰ This seemed a promising way to protect the consumers, but it increased the distributive task of the Rice Corporation.

Although the Rice Department handled more foreign than local rice its policy was greatly complicated by the presence of local rice. It took several years before the Department knew what price difference between local and foreign rice was necessary to ensure the simultaneous sale of both. In 1967 it sold local rice 24 per cent higher than foreign rice.⁸¹ When fixing its buying price for local rice, the Department was influenced by the estimated total demand. If a lot of rice was needed, it was inclined to offer a higher price to the farmers. However, if the buying price was too high, it encountered problems in finding storage space for local rice.

The Rice Department, and the Rice Corporation since 1965, had to co-ordinate these various prices, taking into account the world price of rice and the amount of subsidy that the Government was willing to give to consumers. It was a complicated exercise and it is not surprising that several mistakes were made.

4.11 *The Lebanese since 1955*

As the Government assumed overall control of the rice market in 1955, the position of the rice wholesalers in Freetown changed completely. It seems that the Lebanese rice wholesalers were not unhappy with the change. Working with large consignments from abroad was easier than accumulating stocks piecemeal from various areas and buyers. They were interested in obtaining import licences and in buying large quantities from the Rice Department. Since they possessed capital and storage space and had contacts with the market women, they were accepted by the Rice Department as an essential link in the distribution of imported rice. However, African traders were also interested in this part of the rice trade and the Tender Board decided to give preference to African rice traders, allocating most if not all rice quotas to them.⁸² This seemed the end of Lebanese trading in imported rice, but several African traders who had neither the experience nor the storage space to handle their quota approached the Lebanese and proposed some form of co-operation with regard to their quota. Other African traders found it easier to sell their quota to a Lebanese wholesaler.⁸³ In this way some Lebanese continued to participate in the trade, in spite of the efforts of the Government to squeeze them out. One of the wholesalers, the firm of J. Milhem & Sons, occupied a special position because it succeeded in importing 6000 tons of rice at short notice in August 1959 when a sudden shortage caught the Rice Department unawares.⁸⁴ When private importation was allowed again in 1960, the firm of Milhem was the only non-African wholesaler to receive a licence to import rice — a reward for its quick action the previous year.

Pressure to bar the Lebanese completely from the trade in rice was mounting further in those years and culminated in a parliamentary motion to bar non-Africans from the rice trade, which was adopted in December 1962 (see Chapter 16). The Government was not unwilling to implement the motion but encountered legal problems. In the end a simple Government Notice was published to the effect that non-citizens were no longer allowed to trade in rice after 15 June 1963.⁸⁵

The restrictions applied not only to the urban Lebanese who sold rice to the market women, but also to the rural Lebanese who bought rice from the farmers. This second effect had not been intended and the Minister of Trade found it necessary to grant permission to Lebanese in at least nine Districts to continue their rice trading.⁸⁶ The Rice Department retained the services of six non-African firms,⁸⁷ most of which were Lebanese owned. This compromise lasted for two years only, because the Act of 1965 which established the Rice Corporation contained a clause barring all non-citizens from the rice trade.

The exclusion of the Lebanese from rice buying was not popular with the farmers. Many farmers, in the Scarcies area for example, felt that they were better off with the Lebanese than with the African rice buyers, mainly because the Lebanese lived in the area while the African traders lived in Freetown and operated through agents. The military government of 1967/8 appointed a commission to consider the repeal of the restrictions in the field of rice buying,⁸⁸ but because of political changes the commission never completed its task.

Lebanese participation in the rice trade came largely to an end in 1965 but not completely. I still met some Lebanese in 1970 who had been naturalized as citizens of Sierra Leone and were allowed to trade in rice. Furthermore, there are many Afro-Lebanese, in the Scarcies area for example, who trade in rice.

The general merchandise trade

It is necessary to present a broad picture of the general merchandise trade, first of all because Lebanese participation in it is as old as their presence in Sierra Leone, and secondly, because many other groups as well as them — Coastal Africans, Europeans, Indians and Interior Africans — have participated in the trade.

We shall see that these groups occupied different stages of the trade in the course of time and that there were also shifts in their strength, ambition and determination. Before we describe and interpret these shifts, however, we have to devote three sections to some permanent features of the general merchandise trade.

5.1 *What is general merchandise?*

The term 'general merchandise' has acquired some special connotations in Sierra Leone.

A. General merchandise refers only to imported products that come from overseas.¹ There is no logical reason why it should exclude produce or minerals which are exported from Sierra Leone, but the use of the term is always restricted.²

B. General merchandise suggests manufactured goods. It consists of manufactured goods in the narrow sense, such as textiles, metal goods, and machinery, but also of foodstuffs which have been prepared and preserved in factories.³ The emphasis has always been on the first group. This explains why many people attach some kind of superiority to general merchandise. The metal products were superior to what blacksmiths in Sierra Leone were able to make and in imported textiles the spinning and

dying was better than that of local products. The absence of factories largely explains the composition of general merchandise imports.⁴ The recognition that certain products could not be made locally — or not as well — has increased their appeal to the consumers, and lent prestige to the traders who sold them.

C. General merchandise implies that the buyers will be Africans. Non-Africans have always been too small a group in Sierra Leone to influence the assortment of general merchandise.⁵ The majority of the African consumers have normally had little money to spend. Traders have been aware of this and have offered small quantities and cheap varieties wherever possible. There have always been two conflicting views about the rationality of the African consumer in general, and we may assume that they have also been held in Sierra Leone. Some people have always believed that the African consumer is ignorant and gullible, and an easy victim of unscrupulous traders. Others have stated that he is a discriminating buyer who spends a lot of time examining the goods and enquiring about them.⁶ The first opinion could be supported by pointing to the trinkets and rum and the second by pointing to the tools, medicines, blankets, textiles, etc. among the imports. It would be wrong to dismiss either view. Certainly it is useful to see ignorance as a special feature of the new consumer. He is a person who has money for the first time and faces an assortment of unknown goods. He will make many mistakes among his early purchases, but through trial and error will become an experienced consumer. The presence of large numbers of new consumers at various times has certainly been a factor in the fortunes of general merchandise traders in Sierra Leone.

D. General merchandise excludes perishable goods. The explanation lies in the fact that overseas imports come by ship.⁷ Importers knowing the length of the passage order only goods which do not spoil in the holds during the journey, i.e. durable and preserved goods.⁸ Stocks of general merchandise are not liable to deteriorate and clearance sales are seldom inspired by fear that stocks may spoil. Consequently, though durability is an advantage, it is also a temptation. The general merchandise trade cannot be understood unless a persistent tendency to overstock is recognized.

5.2 *Importing*

Importers are persons or organizations who buy general merchandise abroad and organize importation into Sierra Leone. Their task is

- a) to estimate demand in Sierra Leone
- b) to find and order supplies abroad
- c) to ship supplies
- d) to import and warehouse in Freetown
- e) to sell in Sierra Leone.

The operations of importers may be permanent or incidental and may cover a wide range of goods or a specialized section. The problems and policies of permanent importers who cover a wide range of goods are well known. Typical of these importers are the big European Companies. We may assume that what has been published by, or about, these Companies in general, applies to their branches in Sierra Leone as well.⁹ After a description of their operations, which has to be brief, we shall discuss the activities and opportunities of the specialized and the incidental importers.

The Companies maintain buying offices in Europe, Asia, and North America. These offices compare the offers of various manufacturers. The delivery date and the anticipated sailing time to Freetown are important factors when the Companies place orders, because the logistic problems of the general merchandise trade are enormous. The Companies want to avoid running out of stocks in Freetown, because their reputation can only be maintained if they seldom disappoint clients. The flow of imports, however, is irregular, because ships discharge large consignments at intervals of several weeks. Orders should be timed so as to provide a regular flow of consignments. If a shortage develops in Sierra Leone — the importers know this before the public experiences it — it cannot be remedied quickly; if stocks are available in Europe it may take a month, but if the goods have to be ordered from the factories the shortage may last several months. To all this must be added the risk of strikes by dock workers or sailors.¹⁰ The Companies have tackled the logistic problems of the flow of imports by ordering early and holding large stocks in Freetown and elsewhere in West Africa, which requires a great deal of working capital to finance stocks on the high seas and on shore. Thus, the dominant position of the European Companies can be explained to a large extent by the fact that they were the only importers who were able to acquire such large amounts of capital.¹¹

Logistic problems have one advantage for the Companies. They deter the manufacturers from setting up their own distribution system in Sierra

Leone. There have been few attempts by overseas manufacturers to establish a subsidiary in Sierra Leone to organize and promote the sale of their products.¹² Most manufacturers rely on a particular importer for the distribution and promotion of their products, with the obligations of the parties laid down in a sole-agency agreement. When a manufacturer is dissatisfied with his importer, he approaches another one when the current sole-agency expires.

Another problem of the Companies is contact with the consumers. Many consumers never visit their shops and stores, but even if they did the language barrier would hamper contact. The trade mark has overcome this problem to a certain extent. Pictorial trade marks on provisions, soap, plain textiles, metalware, etc. have played a role in guaranteeing the consumers constant quality, and the importer steady sales. The Companies have always asked for the protection of trade marks.¹³ Another point is that since the economy of Sierra Leone has always been relatively simple, the Companies have been able to forecast the purchasing power of consumers reasonably well, and calculate the supplies they would like to import on this basis. As long as the farmers, who were known to buy a narrow range of goods regularly, formed the majority of the consumers in Sierra Leone, the Companies did not make many mistakes. But when the urban population grew in the 1950s and 1960s it became far more difficult to forecast the demand of consumers. The estimating of demand is further complicated by the transit trade to Guinea, through Koindu and Kabala. No figures are available about the magnitude of this trade, but its fluctuations are clearly noticed in Freetown.

The Companies have always wanted to standardize supplies. Without some degree of standardization, the general merchandise trade would become unmanageable. UAC for instance was estimated to carry 50,000 'lines', that is individual articles, in 1950.¹⁴ Keeping records of so many lines is an enormous burden, but the Companies cannot dispense with it, because they conduct their operations in many places, and also because their managers in Africa are often absent on leave. Whatever system has evolved in the merchandise trade is due to the efforts of the Companies. There is for instance a generally accepted division into six groups:

Provisions, including drinks and tobacco

Textiles

Hardware, including building materials

Haberdashery, including fancy goods and footwear

Technical goods

Others¹⁵

This division suits both the buying offices in Europe and the distribution arrangements in Sierra Leone. Another concept we owe to the Companies is that of the 'staples'. Examples are: leaf tobacco, tomato paste, salt, sugar, tinned sardines, grey cotton, white cotton, matchets, corrugated iron sheets, cement, matches, white enamel bowls, singlets, etc.

It is possible to list five characteristics of staples:

- a) they are imported in large quantities
- b) they are uniform in character and appearance¹⁶
- c) they are considered as necessities
- d) they do not experience great fluctuations in demand¹⁷
- e) they are durable.

All these characteristics mean that the trade in staples carries few risks. Overstocking is no reason for worry because an importer is virtually certain that he will sell his excess stock in the future, after the next harvest for instance. Importers of staples have found the traditional character of the trade and the conservative attitude of many African consumers a reassuring feature of commerce.

Staples have offered more scope for standardization than other products. They have favoured centralization, too, because the Companies' buying offices could bargain harder with the manufacturers on points of price, quality, and packing, and stocks could be held centrally. The Companies have always had an advantage in, and a preference for, staples.¹⁸ It is not that the profit margin is high, but simply that they suit a large organization well. This rule is not limited to private enterprise; a public corporation charged with importing would exhibit the same preference for staples.¹⁹

In view of the scope of the operations of the Companies and their strength one is driven to ask whether other importers ever got a chance, and if the Companies were friendly or hostile towards them. In a number of specialized fields, such as medicines, technical goods, toys, books, footwear, etc., independent importers have worked successfully in Sierra Leone. The Companies did not see them as genuine rivals, because they operated in a narrow and difficult field.

'Incidental' importers have always started when favourable circumstances developed: an unexpected increase in purchasing power, a new fashion, a shortage, a special offer from a manufacturer or exporter, an unwanted agency, or a new system of licences or quotas, especially if non-economic factors influenced the allocation. The Companies have always considered the incidental importers as inferior. They upset the delicate supply planning of the Companies and spoil their trade by importing

only those goods that would sell quickly or at high prices. The Companies have always seen incidental importers as parasites and have generally been hostile towards them. We shall see later in this chapter how after World War II many Lebanese traders graduated from being incidental importers to being permanent ones.

There is a clear connection between incidental importers and non-staples. Some products are obviously non-staples because they display a great variety in quality, colour, shape, or design; for instance printed textiles, toys, grammophone records, etc. Others are non-staples because they depend on fashions, e.g. shirts, dresses, etc. Non-staples arrive in small consignments suitable for small importers. Usually quick ordering is an advantage, so the incidental importer is better placed. Periods of prosperity have always favoured non-staples and small importers. In such periods the range of imported products grows quickly.

The range of general merchandise is an important index of the trade. There have always been influences which favoured the extension of the range: the consumer wants greater variety, and the incidental importer searches for new products. Although the Companies tried to stabilize the range because of their standardization policy, they were forced by the competition of the incidental importers to bring in new products, especially in times of prosperity. The restraining influence of manufacturers was absent in Sierra Leone. In fact, the only organization which has effectively slowed down the extension of the range has been the Government. In practice, all measures which the Government has taken in connection with imports have restricted the range of general merchandise.

We shall discuss some of these measures here. In 1932 the Government introduced Imperial Preference. Under this system lower import duties were levied on products manufactured within the British Empire than on those manufactured elsewhere. This discouraged imports from Japan, France, Germany, etc. When Japanese textiles continued to come in, quotas were imposed on them in 1934. Imperial Preference was modified several times and finally abolished in 1965.

World War II brought stringent control of importing, shipping and international payments. No goods could be imported except under licence and these were given only sparingly. The licensing system has been retained ever since. Every importer has to have a general licence, and for certain products a specific licence is required for each consignment. In the course of the 1950s licences were granted more freely, and when exchange control was relaxed after 1958, importation became free in practice. This situation continued throughout the 1960s.²⁰

We must further mention two minor measures. From 1919 on the colonial government was under international obligation to regulate the importation of (distilled) alcoholic drinks. This barred inferior liquors and restricted the import to a number of well-known brands. The colonial Government also discouraged the importation of non-British cars by restricting the so-called car loans to its civil servants to cases in which British cars were bought.

The Companies always co-operated with the Government in the administration of import restrictions.²¹ We may also assume that they welcomed the restrictions, because they assisted their standardization policy. While restrictions lasted, the consumers faced a narrow, constant range of goods, about which they acquired an increasing amount of information. From the welfare point of view this was desirable. (This advantage disappeared when numerous products flooded the market after the liberalization of restrictions.) Finally, restrictions were unfavourable for new and incidental importers, for new products and non-staples.

The power of the importers can be under- as well as overrated. If we look at the first or import stage of the general merchandise trade we find that they are the people who decide what shall be imported in Sierra Leone. What will be available in the shops depends on them. But if we look at the last stage of the general merchandise trade, the picture is different. Importers have no control over what is bought by consumers, in fact they have little control over or contact with the consumer, as sales promotion on the lines of industrialized countries has been absent until recently.²²

5.3 Stages of trade and commercial organization

The packing in which general merchandise is shipped to Sierra Leone is both sturdy and, for most products, standardized. It is convenient to retain this packing after unloading for as long as possible, as this prevents damage and theft and reduces work: there is less counting in the stores and fewer entries in the books. We shall speak of 'wholesale trade' as long as the original packing is retained. When this packing is broken — and the crate, carton, pack, or bale is opened — the trade reaches the retail stage. (It is further possible to distinguish a 'sub-retail stage' where bottles or tins are opened and the contents are sold in locally determined quantities.²³) Wholesale stocks dominate in Freetown and three major commercial centres: Bo, Makeni, and Kenema. In some fifteen minor

centres, there are still considerable wholesale stocks, but in smaller places retail stocks dominate.²⁴

We turn now to the commercial organization of the general merchandise trade and the roles of importers, wholesalers, and retailers. It is clear that every importer is also a wholesaler and the crucial question in Sierra Leone is: Why have some importers confined their selling to the wholesale level while others have engaged in retail selling as well? We shall first look at the Companies. From 1900 to about 1950 they considered retail operations an essential part of their business. At first they had no alternative, at least not in the Interior where there were no traders to whom they could delegate the retail stage of the trade, so they combined wholesale and retail selling in their Line Stations. Retailing did not increase the costs of the Station very much, while it added to the profits because of the additional retail profit margin. What started as being necessary in the Line and Out-Stations was applied later in all branches. There was another consideration, too: retailing guaranteed some contact with the consumers. The Companies have always been afraid of being cut off from the consumers by a screen of traders who would probably have their own interests, possibly conflicting with those of the Companies. They would have liked to establish so many branches that the bulk of the consumers could buy directly from them, but the expense of such a policy was prohibitive. And so a class of traders developed between the Companies and the consumers.²⁵ (The conditions for this class improved when the Companies began to withdraw from retail trade in about 1950.²⁶) These traders should be divided into two groups: those with buildings and those without. We shall call the former 'shopkeepers', although this word is uncommon in Sierra Leone, and the latter 'hawkers', although 'petty traders' might correspond better with current usage in Sierra Leone. This physical distinction has many economic implications — for the size of stocks held, the continuity of operations, relations with customers, and so on. We may deal here with the first point. The hawker cannot hold more stock than he — and possibly one helper — can carry. For a shopkeeper there is no limit to his stock but the capacity of his building, because everything has to be piled up in it for safekeeping at night. Hawkers trade on the retail and possibly sub-retail level, but shopkeepers can keep and sell wholesale stocks. The bigger the building is, the more likely they are to have wholesale stocks and combine wholesale and retail. Most shopkeepers defy any attempt to classify them as wholesalers or retailers. Especially in the commercial centres one must assume that they are both.

In the previous section we mentioned the specialized and the incidental

importers. On the whole the specialized importers refrained from retailing and relied on independent shopkeepers for the distribution of their products. This suggests that retail profits are only attractive if an importer carries a wide range of goods. The same impression is gained if one sees what a wide assortment most shopkeepers have. Concerning the incidental importers, it seems that most of them are shopkeepers who branched out into importing. It must be remembered that the prestige of the importer is far above that of the shopkeeper, while the shopkeeper is again far above the hawker.

It is the ambition of hawkers to become shopkeepers and the ambition of shopkeepers to become importers. We believe that this ambition is very strong and entices traders to graduate to the next stage even if they are not ready for it, or in periods when prospects are meagre.

The relations between importers, shopkeepers, and hawkers are complicated: they need each other as suppliers or customers, but they fear each other as potential rivals. We cannot hope to present a complete picture of all the changes in the commercial organization of the general merchandise trade, but a fair amount of information will be brought to light when we consider the fortunes of the Lebanese in the following sections.

5.4 *The Lebanese as hawkers*

At first the Lebanese traded as hawkers or pedlars. An early account describes the typical Lebanese pedlar as going about Freetown with a board set out with a few articles in front of him, and its strap round his neck; his stock in trade consisted mainly of coral beads made of celluloid.²⁷ Other articles were added later: mirrors, pocket-knives, pomade, and cheap jewellery.²⁸ The coral beads drew most attention. Real coral beads were very expensive, fetching £ 2 or £ 3 a bead. So the imitation beads, which were offered for a few pence, found many customers. It is not clear whether these buyers knew the difference between the real product and its imitation. The Creoles believed they did not; they called the Lebanese 'Corals', expressing a threefold contempt for the imitation beads, for the ignorant buyers, and for the unscrupulous sellers.²⁹ The Lebanese hawkers were conspicuous, because of their skin colour, but probably also because the pedling of imported goods had been rare in Freetown until then. The situation in the rest of the country was different; Lebanese pedlars were not the only ones there.

The Lebanese came at an auspicious time. The construction of the rail-

way demanded labour in Freetown and in the areas through which the line would pass. Many labourers earned money for the first time in their lives and spent it on glamorous, but inexpensive things. It was in these articles that the Lebanese specialized. A missionary in Moyamba District noticed them in the 'barries' (covered meeting places) in 1905 selling colourful beads, mirrors, knives, razors, combs, etc.³⁰

It is not clear which importers brought these products into the country. They would have shared the contempt in which the Creoles considered these products, and may have decided not to display them in their own shops; they were therefore willing to relegate the trade to the Lebanese hawkers. It seems that the Lebanese were already given credit by European importers in the early days when they were still hawkers. This could point to European importers as the source of the coral and other cheap goods.

It was a hard life for the Lebanese. The men in Freetown had to rise early in their rooms along Fourah Bay Road, and carry their stock in a box to central Freetown where chances to sell were greatest. After a long day out in the sun they had to return home. Yet they learned a lot. They learned which articles appealed to passers-by and which type of people bought from them. They learned to speak Krio or one of the tribal languages, and how to bargain. They discovered which streets were the best places to wait for customers. Most of all, they had the feeling that they could determine their own success by being alert for new knowledge and opportunities; and success came. The experienced ones sold their stock quickly, went back for more, and returned with a full tray to their regular spot. Quick turnover was the secret to profits and the accumulation of capital. For many immigrants who had come with little or no money, hawking profits were the basis of their commercial career.

5.5 *The Lebanese as shopkeepers*

They did not remain as hawkers for long, at least not in Freetown. We gather that virtually all the Lebanese in Freetown had become shopkeepers before World War I. This advance was a measure of both their success and dislike of hawking.³¹ Since trade was expanding rapidly, it was probably difficult to find shops and rents were high. So they contented themselves with small shops to the East of the busy streets, notably in Kissy Street. Later they succeeded in renting shops in Wilberforce Street, Rawdon Street, and Waterstreet. It seems that most of their landlords

were Creoles. It was only in 1920 that a Lebanese was able to buy a house from a Creole owner.³²

When a Lebanese acquired a shop, he had more space and could display more general merchandise. He also acquired a fixed address, a symbol of the continuity and permanence that had entered his operations. This element changed his relationships with his suppliers and customers.

The credit standing of a Lebanese improved after he had become a shopkeeper. The supplier considered a shopkeeper a safer debtor than a hawker. If necessary, he could go to his shop to urge him to pay. The European importers have generally granted credit rather liberally to the Lebanese shopkeepers. Many Lebanese were given an account by the European Companies. They could buy goods and have the cost debited against their account, the upper limit of which was fixed by the Company. By regularly repaying a Lebanese shopkeeper remained creditworthy. The Europeans were satisfied with this arrangement: the Lebanese operated their accounts well and proved reliable debtors, at least in normal times.³³ In theory European importers judged every shopkeeper by his record when fixing the ceiling of his account, but in practice it seems that they gave credit more easily to Lebanese than to African shopkeepers. Sierra Leoneans have always complained about this, seeing it as a form of discrimination on racial grounds. (Much later they suspected the banks of similar discrimination.) They objected to the distortion of competition at their expense. On a deeper level they were indignant, too: Did not the Europeans imply that Africans were less honest than the Lebanese? It is useful to point out that the reliability of the Lebanese debtors was as much shrewdness as honesty. They knew what penalties awaited a shopkeeper who defaulted on his debts to a European supplier. The European community was small and the news would soon go round. He would be blacklisted and have problems in getting stocked up, unless he paid cash. British officials would hear, too, and he did not want a bad record with them as it might lead to his deportation. A Lebanese could not easily disappear leaving his debts unpaid; and fleeing the country would require a great deal of money and would probably mean travelling on a British ship.³⁴ If he settled in another part of Sierra Leone he was bound to be recognized sooner or later, because there were so few white men in the country.

The Lebanese have always tried to push up the ceiling of their credit accounts, at least this is the reputation they have among the Companies. In normal times the Companies did not resist greatly: as long as they could see that the stocks in a debtor's shop corresponded in value to his

debts, the risk was small. In a slump, however, the Companies always took fright: they put a lower value on their own stocks and on those of clients, they urged the shopkeepers to repay and lowered credit ceilings. This happened for instance in the depression years of 1930-1934. The Lebanese were unable or unwilling to do these things and the Companies had no way of forcing them because there was no bankruptcy law.³⁵ Anxiety about Lebanese debtors troubled many managers of the Companies at the time and marred relations between Europeans and Lebanese.

We saw in Chapter 3 that the Companies gave credit to Lebanese shopkeepers in the villages in order to stimulate the produce trade. They were also prepared to give credit to Lebanese shopkeepers in Freetown, who never bought produce. They accepted the urban shopkeepers as ancillary channels in their distribution system, as they could economize on European personnel, if they allowed the Lebanese to play a bigger role in the distribution of merchandise. The latter were keen to do so, but had to be helped with some trade credit.

For most products the policy of the Lebanese shopkeepers agreed with that of the Companies and they did indeed function as extended channels of distribution, but for a few products problems arose. This happened with non-staples. I imagine that problems developed along the following lines, taking cotton prints as an example: inspecting the designs of his regular supplier a Lebanese shopkeeper might feel that they would not sell well and visit another importer. If he found promising designs there he would buy them, even if he had to pay cash. This endangered his relation with his regular supplier, who would consider the Lebanese disloyal and ungrateful for the credit facilities granted to him.

Some shopkeepers undertook to buy from one Company only, in exchange for special credit facilities: they were 'tied' to the Company.³⁶ Shopkeepers with some cash found it worth-while to compare suppliers: after having bought once or twice from a new supplier, the latter would normally be prepared to grant a credit account. Thus a shopkeeper could buy from two suppliers, and moreover display a wider variety in his shop than either supplier.³⁷ In the 1920s, a period of prosperity, the assortment of general merchandise widened and shopkeepers had a greater interest in comparing suppliers and choosing promising articles. In the depression this advantage of the independent shopkeeper disappeared partly and remained small till the early 1950s. During the period from 1910 to 1950 it was normally too risky for the shopkeepers to play off importers against each other and most of them stayed loyal to their suppliers, but in a number of prosperous years the Companies realized that many Lebanese want-

ed more freedom when choosing their stock. The rationing system of World War II underlined once more how dependent the shopkeepers were on the importers. It was this new dependence which enabled the Companies to reduce the amounts of credit with which they had worked before the war.

Turning to the relations between the Lebanese shopkeeper and his African customers, it is necessary to distinguish between:

- 1) the farmers (of produce and rice)
- 2) the employees of the Government, the trading companies, and the missions
- 3) the mineworkers (after 1930)
- 4) the tributors in gold mining (1935-1955, see Chapter 7) and in diamonds (1954 to the present)
- 5) the construction workers.

The incomes of farmers and tributors are irregular and vary with the price of produce and the size of the harvest or the quantity and value of the minerals recovered. This is very different from the other groups of consumers who have fixed incomes. Also, the farmers and the tributors have always been largely rural consumers, while the others have been mainly urban ones.

We turn first to the farmers. As they have always formed the largest group among the African consumers, their consumption habits are worth studying and the conclusions of other countries can usually be applied to Sierra Leone. It is normal for the farmer to spend all the money he earns from his produce on general merchandise.³⁸ It has been pointed out that the two-way trade in the villages is a small-scale replica of the exchange of exports for imports in the ports.³⁹ The exchange in the village is seasonal: most of the sales of general merchandise take place just after the produce harvest. This has consequences for both the traders and the farmers. It suited the farmers to purchase seasonally products which wear out gradually, like textiles, but it was awkward for articles that have to be replaced unexpectedly or are needed suddenly. Farmers who have used all their produce money straight away will have to ask for credit when they want to buy something later on. This may lead them into debt. Indeed, in the inter-war period there was rural indebtedness in several areas of Sierra Leone⁴⁰ based on credit extended by Lebanese shopkeepers to the farmers. This situation was most unhealthy, especially in years of low produce prices. Quite a controversy developed about the causes of this. Some people put the blame on the Lebanese shopkeepers: they suspected them of imposing onerous terms on credit sales and at the same time

stimulating them in order to increase their profits. Others blamed the farmers for lacking the foresight to put money aside for contingencies. We cannot hope to decide the issue after such a long interval, but one point which has been missed in the arguments has to be underlined: the farmers considered many of the articles which they bought on credit essential. The tools were vital when making a farm, the household utensils were indispensable to the women. This was especially true if the home-made articles which had been used in the past were no longer available. Other articles for sale had been incorporated into local customs and were demanded by hospitality or reverence for the dead. The Europeans were curiously ambiguous on this point: on the one hand they recognized general merchandise as a powerful means to stimulate the farmers to produce more; on the other hand they saw them as luxuries which the farmer could give up at any time, as an increase in the standard of living which could be dropped in bad times without great pain. The Lebanese shopkeeper adopted the African view. He could not refuse to give credit on essential goods. If he had done so, he would have betrayed his ignorance of the community in which he lived.⁴¹ Many of the staples of the Companies were goods which the farmers considered essential. Therefore their sale continued in bad times, provided the shopkeeper gave credit. The Lebanese shopkeepers were prepared to do so, but asked the Companies for more trade credit on these goods in order to finance their own credit sales to the farmers.

For most of the period under review it was difficult or impossible for the farmer to travel. He heard about the outside world, but all he could see of it was the general merchandise in the shop in his own or a nearby village. He admired the products and the 'white men' who had manufactured them. The textiles were thinner and cooler than what had been made in the village, and the prints had patterns which could not be made locally. The matchets and fish hooks lasted longer; the bowls and cooking pots did not break or burn, and the medicines were more effective. Most Lebanese shopkeepers understood this admiration — they partly shared it. A Lebanese therefore displayed his merchandise to advantage, and did not see his shop as a mere 'store' like the European did. He realized that his customers would be disappointed if a transaction was rushed through: he was prepared to bargain if this underlined the significance of the transaction. At the same time he attributed to himself the role of dispenser of all these wonderful articles: he should not thank the farmer for his patronage, but rather the farmer should be grateful to him for selling these goods. It was beneath him to make an effort to make the farmer buy,

though he was prepared to display the goods, to answer questions, and to show the articles for which the customer asked. And of course the customer was free to look round for as long as he wanted. Perhaps some Lebanese tried to influence their customers but found out that the latter would rather rely on the experience of their friends? But it seems to me more likely that the Lebanese feared that the glamour of their shop and their own prestige would be harmed if customers sensed that they were urging goods on to them. It is in line with this interpretation to state that the Sierra Leonean consumer has always been used to a great freedom of choice. This suited his individualism, but this should not be seen as the only or main explanation. It is partly the attitude of the shopkeeper that has created a choosy, self-reliant consumer who will resist any attempt of Government and trader to prescribe what he should buy.

We have spent some time on the Lebanese village shopkeeper, because for many Sierra Leoneans he is the typical Lebanese trader. We shall see below, however, that this image is no longer true of the majority of the Lebanese.

We can be brief about the other consumers. The second group were the employees of the Government and of the Companies, so most of them were in secure jobs and lived in towns. Before 1930 they were the only urban consumers. The Creoles have always formed a large proportion of this group, and as they did not buy from Lebanese shops, the opportunities for the Lebanese in for instance Freetown were limited. However, the reluctance of the Creoles to buy in Lebanese shops diminished in the 1930s.

Mining, which started in 1930, was preceded and accompanied by exploration and construction. A large labour force was required for these preliminary activities as well as for mining itself. Some of the labourers were attracted from the Coastal Belt but most of them were recruited in the Interior. The Lebanese lost no time to cater for these new consumers and a high proportion of wages earned in mining found its way to their shops. In some cases the logistic problem was great; the mine at Makong for instance was twenty miles from Matotoka on the motor road so all supplies had to be head-loaded to Makong along the foot path. It was easier for the Lebanese who opened shops in Lunsar, Ngelehun, Matotoka and Mabonto.⁴² Tributors have only operated in the gold and diamond fields. The shopkeepers could not distinguish them from the mineworkers. As their earnings fluctuated, their purchases were more irregular than those of the mineworkers.

The fifth significant group of consumers were the construction work-

ers. Construction is labour-intensive and major projects or a wave of small projects require large numbers of unskilled men, in addition to a number of artisans. In the period under review there was the construction of the Government railway, the defence works in the two World Wars, the construction of the iron ore railway, and the residential building wave of the 1950s and early 1960s.

The mineworkers, the tributors, and the construction workers were largely young men who left their villages in search of adventure as well as money. They were excellent examples of what I call 'new consumers'. Most of them spent their money carelessly, for not intending to become permanent wage earners, they did not work out a budget for essentials but indulged in unusual and glamorous articles. Such consumers had been a boon to the Lebanese when they were still hawkers, and a similar situation which occurred near the mines in the 1930s helped the Lebanese to survive the depression. When World War II broke out, the Government recruited many men for the Army and for civilian defence work. The amount of money in circulation increased by 300 per cent between 1940 and 1943⁴³ and we may assume that a great deal of this money was spent by inexperienced consumers. The Lebanese in Freetown, Port Loko, and Kambia were the chief beneficiaries.⁴⁴ A similar rapid increase in the money circulation occurred between 1953 and 1957,⁴⁵ the years of the diamond boom.⁴⁶ Again there were many new consumers. Contemporary comments described the African diamond miners as spendthrifts who would eagerly pay for the most expensive goods without knowing how to use them.⁴⁷ The Lebanese could sell nearly everything they had in their shops, including articles which had 'slept on the shelf' for years. The diamond boom was a golden time for all general merchandise traders, but in particular for the Lebanese shopkeepers. It was inevitable that the relations between these consumers and the Lebanese were superficial and payment in cash was the rule. Knowing that personal relations could only be casual, the Lebanese decided to rely more on their assortment, and display it well and in attractive surroundings.

We saw in Chapter 1 that many Lebanese live in concrete two-storey buildings, most of which were put up in the 1950s, with the upper floors as living quarters and the ground floors as stores and shops. The opening of these new shops was for many Lebanese an opportunity to modernize their shop interiors. New shelves were put in, and many wooden counters were replaced by new ones with glass tops and sides. This provided better surroundings for, and gave new appeal to the merchandise which they displayed. The stores in the new buildings were spacious and could not easily

be burgled, so they made it attractive for many shopkeepers to hold wholesale stocks. As the modern buildings were taller than most African houses and had a different shape they showed from far off where the shopping area of the town was.

By 1960 the majority of the Lebanese were urban shopkeepers trading in modern concrete buildings. The old image of the village shopkeeper still lingers on, but it becomes less and less appropriate.

5.6 The Lebanese as importers

There were some sixty permanent Lebanese importers in Freetown by 1970, and another 100 to 150 incidental or irregular ones.

The importers are a small but significant group among the Lebanese traders. Virtually all importers have been shopkeepers before and most of them still retain shops. Shopkeepers have always wanted to be importers, being attracted by the possible profits and the prestige. But only a few have ever succeeded. Lack of capital is the main obstacle. We may illustrate this with the example of an imaginary shopkeeper who specializes in textiles. As long as he buys from the Companies, the stock of textiles in his shop will largely be financed by trade credit. His own capital finances the remainder of the stock and the credits given to his customers. But as soon as he starts to import, he has to finance the full stock in his shop, and also consignments from abroad from the moment they are loaded on to the ship. He also has to pay the import duties on arrival and possibly rent for storage. But it is not only on the supply side that he needs more capital. A regular importer can defray his costs only if he buys more stock than he can sell in his own shop. To find buyers for the extra stock he will have to extend credit to other shopkeepers on the same terms as the Companies, or even better ones. A shopkeeper who becomes a regular importer may need three or four times as much capital as before. It must be added that importing from Asia demands even more capital than importing from Europe. Since Asian goods are longer on the seas, the interval between payment to the manufacturer and sale in Freetown is longer. This has been a particular problem of Lebanese textile traders who import from Japan.

Perhaps half the importers have been 'Freetown Lebanese', i.e. men who have lived and worked in Freetown for most of their lives. They have certain advantages: they know more about the terms of the Companies and the level of supplies in Freetown, they have an account with a bank, have

built up goodwill,⁴⁸ and can contact overseas suppliers quickly. It is perhaps surprising that so many importers are not 'Freetown Lebanese', but men who have gained their experience and capital in the Provinces and, finding that a small town could not satisfy their ambition, have decided to transfer to Freetown. There has been a gravitation of Lebanese capital and talent to Freetown for the last 40 years.

Lebanese importers were rare before World War II.⁴⁹ They were shopkeepers who bought part of their supplies directly from abroad, and obtained the remainder from the Companies. They imported textiles, toys, and probably some haberdashery and miscellaneous goods. They were proud of their overseas contacts and advertised themselves as direct importers. It may be argued that Imperial Preference and the quotas on Japanese goods retarded their emergence in the 1930s.⁵⁰

Substantial Lebanese participation in importing came only in the 1950s. A number of factors coincided to create a favourable environment. Four of these factors were internal: a) the diamond boom; b) the liberalization of import licensing and exchange control; c) the excess storage capacity in their new buildings; and d) the geographical withdrawal of the Companies. As the Companies closed their branches, more shopkeepers in the Provinces decided to travel to Freetown to stock up, where they could see the goods imported by their compatriots.

There were also external factors. As the world supply of manufactured goods increased considerably in the 1950s, manufacturers had to look for new buyers and began to answer enquiries of unknown firms in Africa. They were wary and demanded payment in advance, but became more flexible in time. By 1955 the Lebanese handled 19.4 per cent of the imports of Sierra Leone.⁵¹

Many new products were introduced in the 1950s. Each manufacturer tried to find an agent in Sierra Leone. He was often unwilling to appoint one of the Companies as his agent, because they were already agents for rival brands, so he turned to Lebanese or Indian firms. He expected that a small Lebanese firm with one agency would make a greater effort to promote his product than a European Company with many agencies. Many of these new sole agencies were profitable, because the demand grew faster than was anticipated when the contract was signed.

When the Lebanese began to import, they had to learn about many new activities, like business correspondence, how to study catalogues and choose products, how to order from abroad, and how to pay. They had to travel overseas to visit manufacturers and to negotiate sole agency contracts with them. At home they had to learn about advertising and af-

ter-sales service. Specialized enterprises provided some help: manufacturer's representatives, commission agents, and the commercial banks who prepared and financed the necessary documents and made the international payments. On the whole the Lebanese importers managed to master the new skills, though families that had always cared for education succeeded more quickly than others. The diamond boom also indirectly promoted Lebanese participation in importing. Many of the new immigrants who had been attracted to Sierra Leone by the boom decided after some time that they could use their talents and training better in the import trade. There were also many established Lebanese in Sierra Leone who were unwilling to transfer the money which they had earned during the diamond boom to Lebanon. Among investment opportunities in Sierra Leone, importing seemed the most lucrative.⁵²

Foreign travel is a popular aspect of importing. A typical programme would be six weeks in Europe visiting manufacturers, followed by a holiday of a few weeks in Lebanon. Trips are usually made in the months of July, August and September, when business is slack in Sierra Leone. It is not easy to assess the merits of these trips; some are for pleasure, some can hardly be effective at all, if only because of the language barriers, some are routine visits of agents to manufacturers: essential but not strenuous. Most important are the visits which break new ground, when new countries and new manufacturers are visited. The number of countries from which Sierra Leone has imported merchandise has risen continuously after World War II. Indeed, there were years in which the imports from Western Europe, Asia, Eastern Europe, and China grew quickly. The Lebanese played a part in finding and tapping these new sources. This has helped to keep the prices of general merchandise down in Sierra Leone. It has also widened the range enormously.

With so many sources of supply and so many importers, the flow of imports cannot easily be kept under observation. There are often gluts in the market which depress wholesale prices. The regular importers blame occasional importers for this state of affairs. The long delivery time of Asian goods further complicates the situation.

Importing has been profitable for the Lebanese, because they started at the right time. Many of them decided to stick to it after the boom years were over. Some importers registered their own trade marks for items such as condensed milk, 'cabin bread' and shirting, importing enough to be able to arrange with the manufacturers to supply products of agreed quality or specifications.

When the Lebanese first began to import significant quantities, they

sold most of their supplies to Lebanese shopkeepers. It may be that the shopkeepers felt morally obliged to buy from them; it may also be that the importers gave special terms (lower prices or more credit) to their compatriots. A visitor of 1957 was struck by this feature and spoke of 'ethnic patronage'.⁵³ But in 1970 there was no evidence of this any more: Lebanese shopkeepers in the Provinces bought from European, Indian, and Lebanese importers, being led only by economic considerations.

5.7 The car and lorry agencies

The cars and lorries that were imported before World War II were mainly British and American, and the agencies were held by the Companies and one specialized importer, Staveleys. This situation did not change until the mid-1950s. By that time French, German, and Italian car manufacturers became interested in selling cars and vans in West Africa. Renault was the first of the continental car manufacturers to appoint an agent in Sierra Leone, choosing Mr. Mustapha Hassan, a Lebanese. This illustrates the point which we made earlier that some manufacturers did not consider the Companies suitable candidates for an agency, because they represented rival manufacturers. Mr. A. Yazbeck was appointed agent of the Mercedes-Benz factory in 1957, and J. Milhem & Sons received the Fiat agency in 1959. Another Lebanese was interested in the Volkswagen agency, and even established Continental Agencies in partnership with some Germans in order to qualify for it. In the end the Volkswagen factory gave the agency to Breckwoldt & Co, a German importer.

Every car agent has to possess a well-equipped garage in order to service the cars which he has sold and to do major repairs. He undertakes to employ well-qualified and experienced mechanics and must hold sufficient stocks of spare parts. These obligations require capital and cost money. Normally a car agent does well at first, but begins to lose money as soon as sales go down, because he cannot earn enough to cover the cost of after-sales service. Several car agents have tried to reduce their stocks of spare parts to improve their financial position, which inconvenienced the owners greatly, so the problem was the subject of an official inquiry in 1960.⁵⁴

The normal pattern did not apply to Yazbeck who had a difficult start but experienced excellent years after independence, when the Mercedes replaced the Humber as the most prestigious car. Several ministers bought a Mercedes car and their example was followed by many people.

Yazbeck felt that these customers expected good service and built a modern garage which was opened by the Prime Minister in 1963. Yazbeck recruited mechanics from Europe and Lebanon to give up-to-date service. It was fortunate for Yazbeck that the rules concerning official car loans for civil servants were liberalized after independence. Formerly only British cars could be bought with such loans, but after 1961 non-British cars qualified for a loan, too. The diamond dealers also had a preference for Mercedes cars and bought the more expensive models (see Chapter 9). They often had to buy a new one because of the wear and tear on the roads in the diamond areas.

The firm of Milhem was less fortunate with the Fiat agency in spite of a very profitable start. In 1966 the agency was transferred to Mr. S. Shouei-ri, a Lebanese who came to Sierra Leone in the 1950s. He had less capital than Milhem but possessed the necessary technical background.

Japanese car and lorry manufacturers became interested in the Sierra Leone market in the 1960s. The Toyota company transferred its agency from CFAO to the Lebanese firm of Baydoun & Abess which made a determined effort to introduce Toyota lorries. Until then the Bedford lorries imported by UAC had dominated the lorry market but the Toyota lorries, which were cheaper, were soon preferred by many lorry operators. UAC still had a strong position because it offered hire purchase terms, which compelled Baydoun & Abess to sell on hire purchase, too, but for shorter periods than UAC did. The Michael family of Bo obtained the agency for Isuzu lorries in 1963, but their sales remained low because they could not offer hire purchase terms. Mr. Allie Hassan of Bo obtained the Datsun agency in 1964. He was particularly successful with the small commercial vehicles which could be converted into small buses, the so-called 'poda-poda' buses. He later asked relatives to join him in establishing the Datsun Motor Company which was able to offer hire purchase terms. Toyota and Datsun cars have also been imported. They are somewhat cheaper than comparable cars of European manufacture. After the Renault agency had been transferred to CFAO in 1968 Mustapha Hassan and his new partner, Said Jaffa, obtained the Mazda agency. Since then many Mazda cars have been imported from Japan. The competitive position of European cars, and especially of British cars, deteriorated in the late 1960s. After more than fifty years of operations in Sierra Leone Staveleys decided to close down in 1969. The Rootes agency which it held was transferred to Yazbeck who tried to revive interest in Rootes cars by reducing prices soon after he had become the agent. A.D. Yazbeck & Sons Ltd. has become one of the largest enterprises in the

motor trade in Sierra Leone. It is directed by Mr. Tony Yazbeck who succeeded his father on his retirement to Lebanon. The company is also financially interested in ACAE (African Commercial and Agricultural Enterprises Ltd.) which began to import David Brown tractors in 1970 for use in agricultural schemes sponsored by the Government. Yazbeck has organized maintenance and repair facilities for these tractors.

5.8 *Retail trade restrictions and their background*

Lebanese shopkeepers and other foreign traders have been subjected to economic restrictions since 1965. These restrictions formed part of a long series of economic measures directed against non-citizens which we discussed briefly in Chapter 1. Table II on p.10 enumerates all these measures. In this chapter we are only concerned with six Acts, namely with those listed as items 4, 6, 7, and 10-12 in the Table. The scope of these Acts is wide, so we shall discuss those parts which concern trade in this section; the other provisions will be discussed in Chapters 6 and 10. On reading the Acts it may seem that transport, services, and manufacturing were more important than trade, but this is not true. Trade, in particular retail trade, was the main area to which the restrictions applied and this was clearly expressed in the title of the first Act.⁵⁵ There is therefore every reason to discuss these restrictions in some detail. (In this context 'retail trade' means the retail stage of the general merchandise trade.⁵⁶)

The purpose of the Acts was twofold. On the one hand they intended to exclude non-citizens from the retail trade; on the other they wanted to encourage citizens to engage in it. The emphasis was on the exclusion of the foreigners and we shall say little on the other aim, but it must be remembered that any activity from which non-citizens were barred automatically offered increased opportunities to others. The definition of a 'non-citizen' is the same in all Acts, but the legislator did not always think of the same categories of non-citizens, as we shall explain below.

It is necessary to distinguish the Acts of 1965 and 1966 from the later Acts of 1969 and 1970. We shall call the earlier ones the SLPP Acts and the later ones the APC Acts, after the ruling political parties. It must also be pointed out that the three SLPP Acts had the same purpose and scope and should be seen as three successive versions of the same Act. Practical problems compelled the Government to draft a second and third version. This is not surprising in view of the complexity of the subject. Similar problems occurred in 1969, which were solved by the two amend-

ments of 1970. The need to distinguish between the SLPP and the APC restrictions is also due to an interval of 22 months in which no restrictions applied, which began in October 1967 when the military government repealed the existing restrictions (see item 9 in the Table).

One basic rule was laid down in all Acts. Non-citizens were not allowed to open new shops so that the number of foreign-owned shops would be frozen at the level of 1965. This was very hard on young foreigners, Lebanese for instance, who had planned to establish their own shop in the near future. Many of them decided to set up on their own immediately when they heard that restrictions were proposed.⁵⁷ Another rule was that shopkeepers could not transfer to another town, unless they had permission from the Government. The details of trade restrictions were laid down in some Public Notices which dealt with the articles to which the restrictions applied, the borderline between retail and wholesale trade, and the geographical extent of the restrictions.

The SLPP restrictions applied to eight articles: sugar, tinned milk, tinned tomato puree, salt, tobacco, cigarettes, matches, and kerosene.⁵⁸ The Government intended to add other articles in time, but these eight seemed particularly suitable to start with, to test the impact of retail restrictions. The APC restrictions were considerably more ambitious because they barred foreigners from 38 articles, including the earlier eight.⁵⁹

For each article the borderline between wholesale and retail was specified. For instance a non-citizen was not allowed to sell 23 or fewer tins of milk, though 24 tins were permitted, being considered wholesale. These borderlines had been worked out after consultation with the importers, for if they had exceeded the quantities in which the manufacturers normally packed these articles, foreign importers would have been forced to give up importing them. This the Government did not want.

The SLPP restrictions applied to some 150 towns in the Provinces and to the whole of the Western Area.⁶⁰ This meant that foreign traders who lived elsewhere, for instance in the villages in the Provinces, were not affected. The Government proposed a similar arrangement in 1969, but Parliament amended the Act so that it applied to the whole country. The significance of this alteration will become clear later.

We must now turn to the African traders who were the beneficiaries of the SLPP restrictions. The Census of 1963 reported that there were 38,223 retail traders that had a business of their own, of whom 21,383 were men.⁶¹ If we subtract 2000 Lebanese and other overseas foreigners,⁶² we arrive at some 36,000 African traders, including 19,000 male traders. The Census does not specify the nationality of these traders and there may

be many African foreigners among them; in fact, this is what my own observations suggest. As to the Sierra Leonean or citizen-traders, I believe that many of them could be described as Interior Africans. We argued in Chapter 2 that Interior Africans took up trade only after 1950; it is quite possible that the number of African traders has grown still further after the Census of 1963.

We must now describe the operations of the African traders. It is useful to distinguish three categories: the village shopkeepers, the urban shopkeepers, and the street sellers. Many villages have a shop nowadays. We guess that there are between 3000 and 4000 towns and villages with at least one shop.⁶³ Most village shops are far from impressive; their assortment is small and consists mainly of provisions, drinks, patent medicines and other articles which may be urgently required. Many village shopkeepers have to remain farmers in order to earn enough. Virtually all of them are Africans, and men from the village, that is local traders. This is a recent development, for until about 1950 most village shops were operated by Lebanese. During the 1950s the Lebanese withdrew from some villages which depended on produce (see Chapter 3) and their shops were taken over by Africans. More important at this time was the increase in prosperity and the fact that diamond tributors could come from even the poorest villages and return home with money. The opportunities for shops were thus created in many villages which until then had been too poor. This meant that the area in which African shopkeepers operated grew in two directions after 1950: into villages which had had no shop until then and into villages from which the Lebanese had withdrawn.

The urban African shopkeepers operate in towns. They all experience some Lebanese competition. Those who run shops in the main shopping streets, the most interesting examples of African traders, are apparently willing and able to face this competition. Many other African shopkeepers experience the competition only partly, as they operate shops in the residential areas of the towns and draw their clients from the immediate neighbourhood. Their assortment resembles that of the village shops and they keep their shops open till late at night to suit their clients.

Finally there are the street sellers. It is possible to distinguish two broad groups: the women street sellers, who sell local products, mainly food, and the male street sellers, who sell general merchandise. The women sellers are a long-established feature of the trade. They prefer to trade in the market buildings, but sell in the street if all places in the market are occupied. They have captured the trade in a number of imported foods, such as onions, potatoes and tomato paste. The male street sellers

are a recent feature of the trade. They sell combs, ball-points, cosmetics, handkerchiefs, socks, zip-fasteners, sandals, some provisions, and so on, all products which are cheap and are bought frequently. Their emergence must be seen as a result of urbanization and unemployment, for young men and boys dominate. Their numbers increase at times of high unemployment, and many drop their trading as soon as they can get a job; so they are a floating population of traders. The shopkeepers do not like them, because they operate in their largest numbers precisely at times that trade is slack. A few successful street sellers become shopkeepers after some time, because street selling is too strenuous and too uncertain to be desirable as a career. It is done as a temporary occupation or as a stepping stone.

Consumers in Sierra Leone can turn to many traders when they want to buy general merchandise. There are African, Lebanese, and a few Indian traders, there are urban and rural shopkeepers, and male and female street and market sellers. The preferences of consumers are crucial for the fortunes of the traders. My interviews and observations suggest the following preferences: the rural consumer spends little in the village shop. He prefers to go to the nearest town and can afford to do so because lorry fares have become very cheap. When the rural consumer needs an article that he can postpone purchasing, he will plan to buy it in town on his next visit. Thus, the position of the village shopkeeper has become precarious. He is still appreciated because he sells on credit, and because he sells articles which are suddenly needed such as medicines, drinks, and provisions. But village trade can no longer support a Lebanese trader, for since they have been used to carrying a relatively wide assortment, a greater proportion of their stock would fail to sell. We saw in Chapter 3 that many Lebanese left the villages in the 1950s. Those who stayed behind were uprooted in the 1960s as a result of the changes just described. Most of the Lebanese village shops which I saw in 1970 were on the verge of liquidation. The mobility of the rural consumer is a grave disadvantage for the village shopkeepers: the Africans barely survive⁶⁴ and the Lebanese fail.

In contrast, trade in the towns is attractive and profitable. The general trend of urbanization and the purchasing power of the rural consumer are responsible for a satisfactory growth of trade. No ambitious trader stays behind in the village, so the consequent influx of traders has made urban trading keenly competitive. Traders tend to congregate in one area and the street sellers have found that their best chances are in the shopping streets and on the fringe of the markets. The shopkeepers prefer

shops near the markets and are prepared to pay high rents for them.⁶⁵ In some towns this has led to locational shifts, for instance in Bo: the old market on Kissy Town Road was replaced in 1956 by a new one farther east. As a result many shops along Dambara Road grew quiet, while the new shops on Fenton Road flourished.

The street and market sellers have drawn some trade away from the shopkeepers, who either do not sell the articles offered in the streets and markets any more or sell them in wholesale quantities only. This has lowered their turnover, but fortunately for them the articles carried by the street sellers are cheap and limited in number. The shopkeepers have to find compensation in selling more expensive articles and ones that are bought only occasionally. They try to increase the range of their goods and in the bigger towns they try to specialize. This trend is particularly common among the Lebanese.

The trends described above — urbanization, increased mobility, and the emergence of African traders — had their effect on the retail trade restrictions which were imposed on non-citizens. In 1965, a number of African urban shopkeepers who hoped to improve their position saw the Lebanese and Indians as the chief obstacle. The Government must have shared their views, and collected figures about numbers of Lebanese, Indian, and European retail traders.⁶⁶ Confirmation that the Government was thinking mainly of the Lebanese is given by the geographical aspect of the restrictions. At first they applied to all Chiefdom, District, and Provincial Headquarters: that is some 150 towns as we mentioned above. This covered most towns in which the Lebanese traders operated but not all. Two months later the restrictions were extended to another ten towns⁶⁷ — our records indicate that there were Lebanese in all of them.

The articles which were reserved in 1965 were staples, likely to provide a reasonable, steady turnover to the African traders. If they were selected by spokesmen of the traders, they suggest an unwillingness to build their business on infrequently used, risky non-staples. However, we cannot rule out the possibility that politicians and civil servants made the selection themselves, assuming that they were acting in the best interests of the traders. The selection was not favourable for the consumers, for the African traders soon raised the prices of several of the reserved products. Both the Government and the consumers concluded that the African traders were greedy men who were exploiting the restrictions to their own advantage, and were therefore unwilling to add other products to the original list of eight. I wonder whether the African traders deserved these negative comments? It is likely that the Lebanese had made do with small profit

margins on these products before they were reserved — a normal feature of staples. They had normally found compensation in the remainder of their assortment, but since the African traders sold a much narrower range of goods the possibilities for compensation were much smaller. They could not manage on the existing profit margins and had to raise their prices. This shows that the choice of the reserved products is extremely important. If staples are chosen, the consumer is likely to suffer, but if non-staples are chosen, the traders face an uncertain career.

In 1969 pressure came from male street sellers.⁶⁸ The main obstacle they saw in their way were foreign Africans, mainly Guineans and Nigerians, who traded in the streets of Freetown and the other big towns. They campaigned for the stricter control of African immigrants and for trade restrictions, and they were able to persuade the Government to act on both points. The trade restrictions of 1969 were directed against all foreigners, not only against those from overseas. This was an important shift of emphasis and one that was favourable for the Lebanese, because they were no longer in the centre of the attacks. A vocal group among citizen-traders was the Sierra Leone Petty Traders Association. This organization was based in Freetown and consisted of street sellers, mainly of the Temne tribe. In 1970 the Association campaigned actively in what I shall call the 'pavement issue'. Pavements for pedestrians differ in the trading opportunities which they offer to street sellers. This was recognized by them and there used to be keen competition for the best locations. Some pavements were free but others belonged to a shopkeeper, who was approached by a street seller and asked for permission to trade in front of his shop. Some street sellers paid rent to the shopkeeper, which gave them the right to give their stock to the shopkeeper for safekeeping overnight, while others promised to buy their supplies from him in return for the right to trade on his pavement. By 1970 many Guineans and Nigerians had been able to acquire rights to the most profitable pavements. The Petty Traders Association registered many protests, and the Government reacted in the end by sending letters to a number of shopkeepers in Freetown requesting them not to allow foreigners to trade in front of their shops.⁶⁹ Though there were several Lebanese among the addressees of the letter, they were only indirectly involved in the conflict.

The complexity of trade restrictions is well illustrated in the case of oil products. A discussion of the problems which have arisen in this field closes this section. The running of a petrol station became a lucrative business in the 1950s because of the increasing number of cars and lorries on the roads. In 1955 nearly all petrol stations were run by the trading

Companies⁷⁰ but as they withdrew, more and more stations were handed over to Lebanese traders. Towards the end of the 1950s the international oil companies established subsidiaries in Sierra Leone and terminated the agency arrangements with the trading Companies. The oil companies modernized the existing petrol stations and built many new ones, at the same time recruiting so-called 'contractors' to run them. These contractors were relatively independent traders. At first the Lebanese dominated among the petrol contractors, not because the oil companies preferred them, but because they were able to pay the required deposit while many African applicants could not. This made them envious and when the Lebanese contractors prospered — this could not be concealed — some Sierra Leoneans approached the Government with a proposal to restrict the running of petrol stations to citizens. Sir Albert Margai agreed at once and declared his intention to do so in December 1964.⁷¹ The SLPP Acts were, however, silent on this point. It seems that the oil companies persuaded Sir Albert to drop the idea; indeed, they had every reason to do this, for they had followed the practice of the trading Companies by selling petrol on credit for one month, and contractors in busy stations had run up debts which exceeded their deposits. When the oil companies asked the Lebanese contractors to repay these debts as a preparation for handing the stations over to an African contractor, the Lebanese complained that they could not repay, and the oil companies feared that they would have to write off many debts.⁷² When they described their worries, the Government complied with their request to postpone the restrictions. Four years later the APC government was prepared to postpone the matter again, but Parliament amended the Bill so as to add the operating of petrol stations to the list of restricted activities. Since then Lebanese and other foreign contractors have handed over their petrol stations. I was told that the oil companies lost money on ousted contractors because of trading debts which had to be written off.

5.9 *Concluding remarks*

We have seen in this chapter how the Lebanese graduated from hawking to shopkeeping, and how a considerable number of the shopkeepers have established themselves as permanent or occasional importers. This, in the context of Sierra Leone, has been an important and conspicuous success. For many years in the past the Lebanese had little capital of their own and depended on the trade credit of the Companies. Nowadays they have

their own capital and do not depend on bank and trade credit, although they still take up as much as they can. Part of their capital is now used in extending credit to customers,⁷³ African shopkeepers, and street sellers. Thus, from borrowers they have become lenders, which also underlines their success.

But there are clouds, too. The Lebanese shopkeepers have lost the trade in several staple products to the African shopkeepers and street sellers, a trend which began in the 1950s and was reinforced by the retail trade restrictions. Non-staples, notably textiles and fancy goods, have formed an increasing proportion of the stock of the Lebanese shopkeepers. They carry a higher profit margin but the demand for them is volatile. When trade is good, non-staples are a boon, but when trade is slack, they just do not sell, so a series of poor trading years would hurt the Lebanese shopkeepers badly.

Lorry and launch transport

We have seen in Chapters 2, 3, and 5 how the lorry helped to enlarge the exchange economy and extend trade over an increasingly large area of Sierra Leone. In this chapter we are concerned with the lorry owners, their operations, their problems and their profits. We are mainly interested in the lorries in the private sector, in particular those owned by Lebanese.

Since the operations of lorries are restricted to roads of a certain standard, we shall discuss these roads first. We must distinguish several types of roads which are associated with certain phases of road construction. Section 1 summarizes the information about the roads, and the next four sections discuss the economics of 'lorrying' in successive periods. Our information about launches, which unfortunately is limited, will be presented in the final section.

6.1 *Types of roads and phases of construction*

The Government began a programme of road construction in 1905.¹ The roads were built to facilitate the movement of produce to the railway stations and so to increase rail traffic. They were called 'feeder roads' because of their function in the produce trade, which was in keeping with the European preoccupation with produce. Needless to say, the movement of general merchandise was also facilitated by these roads. I shall call these roads 'line feeder roads'.

In 1926 the Government embarked on an extensive programme of road construction which continued till 1931 when it was cut short by the slump. An important element of this programme — technically the essential element — was the construction of river-crossings which were able to

carry lorries: streams were bridged and rivers were provided with ferries, ramps, and further installations.² The programme consisted of four types of road:

- 1) line feeder roads
- 2) river feeder roads
- 3) parallel roads
- 4) connecting roads.

The construction of line feeder roads, which had been neglected for several years, was vigorously resumed in 1926: some new ones were built and some existing ones extended. In many cases some kind of road which had existed before was brought up to motorable standards. Governor Slater also decided to construct roads that 'fed' produce to the navigable water-ways of the Coastal Belt,³ which I shall call 'river feeder roads'.⁴ The construction of these roads began in the inland ports which subsequently experienced an economic revival, first because of the money spent by the Public Works Department and later because of increasing trade.

Some roads were constructed parallel with the railway, for instance from Blama to Hangha, and from Magburaka to Makeni. They provided a road connection between two or more railway stations. In at least one case a road was built to provide a link between a river feeder road and a line feeder road — what I call a 'connecting road'. The parallel and connecting roads were built to serve travellers with cars or motor cycles, such as officials, company managers, prospectors, and overseas visitors. Until then these people had complained about the line feeder roads because they were cul-de-sacs. Indeed, they had lost a lot of time travelling back to the railway line and waiting for the next train to take them to another feeder road. They appreciated the new roads, because they saved them a great deal of time during tours of inspection.

The year 1940 marks the beginning of the third period of lorry operations. In that year the road from Freetown to Port Loko was completed, the first road between the Colony and the Protectorate. In 1947 an east-west link was completed between 'mile 47' on this road and Kumrabai Mamilla on the branch line of the railway, which provided a good connection with Bo. After the war the Government resumed its pre-war policy and built some long line feeder roads, leaving the responsibility for shorter roads to local government.

The development plan of 1949 included a proposal to replace ten ferries by bridges,⁵ an idea which found general approval. As the number of vehicles increased, the ferries had proved terrible bottlenecks for cars and

lorries, and officials and traders complained bitterly about the long queues. It took time for the plans to materialize, but in 1955 the first six bridges were completed. The bridges were evidence of a shift of priorities in the road construction programme: the quality of the road system became more important than its overall length, and convenience and speed for travellers took priority over tonnage of produce. This shift was partly dictated by the integration policy of the Government: the Protectorate Assembly was inaugurated in 1946 and District Councils were given greater responsibility. Such political bodies could only function well if travelling did not impose an excessive burden on their members.⁶

The year 1955 may be taken as the beginning of the fourth period of lorry operations. It became possible in that year to travel from Freetown to Makeni and Bo without having to cross a ferry. From then on, lorries could compete effectively with the railway, even over long distances. The long roads which connected Freetown with the main provincial towns came to be called 'trunk roads'. The main one runs from Freetown through Bo and Kenema to Kailahun, another from Freetown through Lunsar and Makeni to Kabala, and a third, completed only in 1969, runs from Freetown through Magburaka and Masingbi to Sefadu.

6.2 *The line feeder roads, 1906-1926*

The Railway and the Public Works Department experimented with some early types of lorry on the feeder roads, but as these experiments were not very promising, the private sector showed no interest at first. It was only in 1916 that the first commercial lorry appeared on the roads, introduced by a Lebanese trader in Bo.⁷ Soon afterwards a Creole trader put another on the road from Blama to Boajibu.⁸ It is interesting to note that the Companies were not in the vanguard of this new development.

The line feeder roads did not provide favourable conditions for lorry transport. Each road had a 'roadhead' at the far end, beyond which vehicles could not go. On most roads the railway station, where the road began, was also a dead end. Thus the lorry was effectively locked into one stretch, so the need for its services depended mainly on the length of the road. For many years the Blama-Boajibu road was the longest, with 24 miles. At the end of 1922 there were six lorries on this road, three on the Moyamba-Sembehun road, and one each on the Hangha-Panguma and the Pendembu-Kailahun roads.⁹ There was no lorry in Bo at the time, although Bo had the advantage that the feeder road to the north of the

railway line was connected with the one to the south so that one lorry could serve both roads. But a lorry owner could not earn high profits, for if he charged too much farmers would carry their palm kernels to the Buying Stations in the nearest railway town, and traders would hire porters to do the same with their stocks.¹⁰ At the same time the costs and risks of operating a lorry were great. There were very few drivers at the time; some Lebanese drove their own lorry but the majority of the drivers were Africans who had learned their skill in Government service but were by no means experienced. There were many accidents and the lorries wore out quickly. Maintenance was also a great problem because there were few mechanics, and if a lorry could not be repaired locally, it had to be sailed to Freetown for repair in the workshop of the importer.

The Companies bought some lorries, but were never enthusiastic about them. They emphasized the high costs¹¹ and considered them a luxury.¹² At a certain stage the Companies decided to give up running their own lorries and to rely on independent transport firms owned by Europeans, Lebanese, and Africans.¹³ For CFAO and the African and Eastern Trade Corporation this decision was not too difficult because they had the importing agency for the Ford and the Bedford lorry respectively, the makes that became most popular in West Africa.¹⁴ They sold most of their lorries on hire purchase terms to the transporters and stimulated road transport in this way.

The Lebanese faced the same problems as the Companies but showed more determination to overcome them. A lorry meant a fortune to them, so they maintained them with the utmost care. Some Lebanese, for instance Michel Michael of Mandu, became experienced mechanics and were called in by compatriots operating on other roads, if their lorries had broken down. Most Africans were pleased with the lorries of the Lebanese because they meant the end of long-distance head-loading, and enabled the traders in remote villages to pay higher prices for palm kernels than before. This was most noticeable at the roadheads, so that kernels were attracted from far away. The lorries were a source of excitement, too, and although this wore off along the feeder roads, farmers from far away continued to be surprised by lorries at the roadheads. All this brought much goodwill for the Lebanese owners.

One Lebanese, Joseph Bamin, obtained a Government contract to carry the mail between Moyamba and Sembehun. This road formed part of the postal route between Freetown and Bonthe: the mail went from Freetown to Moyamba by train, thence to Sembehun by lorry, and then by launch to Bonthe. Bamin's lorry also took passengers travelling on this

route. This inspired him to a new venture: he set up a bus service in Free-town and ran it for three years until it was taken over by the Government in 1928.¹⁵

Table VI. *Lorries registered by the police, 1924 - 1929*

	New lorries	Total of lorries
1924	6	58
1925	39	123
1926	48	136
1927	n.a.	n.a.
1928	54	208
1929	66	274

Source:

Annual Reports of the Sierra Leone Police Force

Notes:

a. All figures refer to the situation on 31st December.

b. n.a. = not available

c. Column 2 overstates the situation: in 1925 for instance there were only 92 lorries in running order.

6.3 *The period 1926-1940*

The road construction programme of 1926-1931 created favourable conditions for lorry owners, who bought many new lorries (see Table VI). We shall discuss the problems and opportunities of the lorry owners for each type of road in turn.

Among the new line feeder roads were some long ones, for example the roads to Kamakwie and Kabala. As the Companies did not establish branches in these two towns, the Lebanese were able to take advantage of the new opportunities: they established shops and produce stores and organized lorry transport to and from Makeni, a service which was greatly appreciated by the people in the Kabala and Kamakwie areas. Even more good fortune befell the lorry owners on some line feeder roads when several mining companies came to Sierra Leone around 1930. They had to transport machinery, supplies, building materials, and later minerals, and decided to use independent transport firms for most of their requirements. SLST for example signed a contract with a Swiss trader in Gandorhun, Georg Hertling, who used European and African drivers, to

transport supplies from Segbwema to the diamond mine at Yengema.¹⁶ The chrome mine in Bambawo used its own lorries to carry ore to Hangha Station but also made use of the lorries of a Lebanese trader at Ngelehun, George Samaha. Similarly, the gold mining companies had some lorries of their own, but used Lebanese transport firms from Magburaka as well.

Operations on the river feeder roads were similar to those on the line feeder roads, but competition was fiercer because the farmers had more commercial experience. The lorry owners discovered that the best locations for their headquarters were the inland ports, which were important points on the produce evacuation routes. If the Companies paid high prices at their River Stations the Lebanese sold their produce to them, but if the prices were low they approached the African owners of Bullom boats or schooners to see whether they were willing to carry their produce to the seaports on reasonable terms. Some Lebanese lorry owners bought their own launch in order to control the entire evacuation of their produce. They found it worth-while to employ a good mechanic, who could divide his time between the lorries and the launch. Our information about these lorry owners is limited. I have heard of one German, Waldemar Dressler, who operated a small fleet of lorries from Yonni-Pujehun until the outbreak of the war. There may have been some Africans as well, but the majority seem to have been Lebanese. Abraham Solomon, a Lebanese trader at Lunsar, benefited from the new road which SLDC built from Port Loko to its iron ore mine at Marampa, for he became the lorry contractor of the company.¹⁷

The parallel roads were built for cars but could also be used by lorries. They increased the profitability of some lorries, because a lorry which was idle on one feeder road could be employed temporarily on another one, for instance when the lorry on the other road had broken down. One of the reasons why the linking of the feeder roads had been proposed was that it was expected to make lorrying more profitable.¹⁸ It was on the parallel roads that the lorries began to compete with the train. A lorry owner on the Panguma-Hangha road, for instance, would compare the price for palm kernels at Hangha with that in Blama. The Companies offered higher prices in the latter town because the railway charged them less for a consignment from Blama to Freetown than for a similar one from Hangha. Since many lorry owners found it worth-while to take produce to a Buying Station closer to Freetown — and to pick up general merchandise in the same place — the volume of rail traffic in Hangha, Segbwema, and other stations began to fall.

Map IV. *Lorry roads in Sierra Leone by the end of 1931*

The connecting road in the north had a similar effect. Lorry owners in Port Loko sent their lorries farther inland to buy produce which had formerly gone to Makeni, and soon there was a serious reduction in rail traffic in Makeni.¹⁹ South of the railway the line and river feeder roads were linked up at Koribundu and Tikonko (see Map IV). The lorry owners in the inland ports exploited this new situation by sending their lorries as far as Blama to pick up produce, which was then taken to Sumbuya and sent by launch to Bonthe. Thus, railings from Blama also fell.²⁰

Four transport systems had developed by 1930:

- a) the railway system, based on trains and lorries
- b) the Sherbro system, based on launches and lorries
- c) the Northern Rivers system, based on launches and lorries
- d) the Sulima system, based mainly on lorries.

Both the Sherbro and the Northern Rivers systems began to grow at the expense of the railway system in about 1930. This meant a shift at the coast, too. The position of Bonthe improved as its hinterland grew. This was unfavourable for Freetown. In the north Port Loko revived as its hinterland grew,²¹ which was not unfavourable for Freetown, because all supplies to and from Port Loko had to go via Freetown. The only change in Freetown was that rail-borne trade decreased and water-borne trade increased. (The Northern Rivers system came to be called the River Line as it fulfilled a function similar to that of the railway line.)

If prosperity had continued, the Government might not have intervened to stop or slow down these geographical changes; but just at that time the crisis began and the Government, because of its sake in the railway, had to intervene. It took several measures to reduce road competition in order to preserve the traffic and revenue of the railway. In October 1930 the railway reduced its rates for palm kernels, and recovered much of the traffic which it had lost.²² In October 1931 the rate structure was further changed: flat rates were introduced beyond Bo on the main line and beyond Roruks on the branch line.²³ The Companies co-operated by setting uniform prices in the Buying Stations beyond Bo and beyond Roruks and the incentive for lorry owners to carry palm kernels or other produce from eastern stations to Blama or Bo disappeared. However, it soon turned out that the real problem lay farther west: it was the diversion of rail traffic to the inland ports. The Railway Conference of 1931, consisting of officials and businessmen, including one Lebanese,²⁴ recommended road tolls to restrict road competition. A Bill to this effect was introduced in November and proposed tolls at the following points:

- a) at the Mabile ferry beyond Batkanu on the Port Loko — Makeni road
- b) at the Tabe (= Bumpe) ferry on the Mattru — Mofwe — Tikonko — Bo road
- c) at Koribundu junction on 1) the Sumbuya — Blama road, and 2) the Pujehun — Bo road.

The tolls were to be levied on vehicles carrying imported goods.²⁵ Because of opposition in the Legislative Council the decision was postponed. The Government could accept this delay, because there was another development afoot: the ferries which had been free of charge proved far more costly than anticipated, and the Government, anxious to get rid of this responsibility, found UAC prepared to take them over. PWD was therefore able to hand the ferries over in the first half of 1932. UAC was given the right to charge ferry tolls on motor vehicles at all fifteen ferries.²⁶ This restricted road transport to a certain extent, but in an uneven way. There were three ferries between Port Loko and Makeni, and three between Pujehun and Bo, but none between Sumbuya and Blama, so that Sumbuya was not affected at all. UAC soon discovered that it lost money on the ferries²⁷ and asked the Government to take them back, which it did in January 1935; after this ferry tolls were no longer charged. The railway expected a revival of road transport and warned against the effect on its revenue, so the Government imposed a road toll, but only in the north. It amounted to £ 2 per vehicle and was levied at the Mabile ferry.²⁸ Apparently, this did not reduce road competition enough, and another measure was taken in 1937: the carrying of palm kernels and general merchandise by lorry was prohibited on one stretch of the Port Loko - Makeni road.²⁹ This ruling remained in force until the war, when petrol rationing gave the Government a new instrument to control road transport.

Intense competition between road and rail has occurred in many countries, but it would be a mistake to see the situation in Sierra Leone simply as another instance of a world-wide phenomenon. In the first place it was a combination of launches and lorries that competed with the trains; cheap water transport rather than cheap road transport explains the difficulties of the railway. Secondly, the parties involved formed a complex pattern of alliances. At first sight, it seemed a straight conflict between the Lebanese lorry owners and the British colonial Government, interesting to us as the first general conflict between the Government and the Lebanese. If there had been no other parties involved, the Government would certainly have taken more drastic measures than it did. It would not have been restrained by concern for the Lebanese or fear for their

influence, but at most by a feeling of fairness towards a group which had been praised a few years earlier for their pioneering role in this field.³⁰ What silent ally had helped the Lebanese? First there were the Africans who lived in the vicinity of the new roads. They appreciated the lorries on these roads, because they had greatly reduced head-loading.³¹ In some areas they themselves had built roads with a minimum of help and supervision from the Public Works Department³² and they were pleased when they noticed that lorry owners relieved local shortages of foodstuffs by bringing in supplies from far away.³³ The Government realized that it would act against the interests of many Africans if it seriously curtailed lorry transport.³⁴ But I suspect that the Lebanese had yet another ally, namely the Companies. In the past most Companies had operated with two separate organizations: one based on the railway and the other on Sherbro. PZ still had two General Managers in the 1930s: one in Freetown and one in Bonthe, with equal status. In the other Companies the Bonthe manager was subordinate to the Freetown manager, but was given great authority. Map III on p. 38 shows how important the interests of the Companies were in the Sherbro area. The Companies, or at least influential men in the Companies, approved of the diversion of rail traffic to the Sherbro area, provided it made produce cheaper, and were opposed to tolls at Koribundu and Bumpe. In the Northern Rivers, however, the Companies had few Buying Stations and did not benefit from the diversion of rail traffic to Port Loko, so they saw no reason to oppose the restrictive measures. There was therefore nobody to defend the interests of Port Loko, except the Lebanese, and their influence with the Government was too small. It is very likely, however, that goodwill towards the Lebanese increased in the Northern Rivers system as a result of their efforts to build up the River Line.³⁵

We have come to the conclusion that the various restrictions had very little effect on road transport. No doubt the lorry owners were worse off in the 1930s than in the late 1920s, but this was due to the depression, rather than to the restrictions. There was also a Government measure which was favourable to them. In May 1932 all Government lorries were withdrawn to Freetown. So afterwards the administration in the Protectorate hired lorries when they needed transport. Lorry owners benefited not only because of the money they earned but also because of the good relationships which they built up with the District Commissioners. This was important for the few European lorry owners, but far more so for the Lebanese, who came to be seen as indispensable elements in the commercial system of the country because of their lorries and shops. Lorry transport

was an important stepping stone, not only in their economic success, but also in their integration in the community.

6.4 *The period 1940-1955*

In September 1940 the road from Waterloo to Port Loko was opened to traffic. When the road had been planned, its main benefit appeared to be that it cut out the launch journey between Freetown and Port Loko for Government officials and personnel of SLDC. After the outbreak of the war the road also acquired strategic significance, because it was essential for the protection of the Northern boundary.³⁶ In fact, the Army assisted with the construction and completed it. These considerations seemed much more important at the time than the fact that the new road connected Freetown with the roads in the Protectorate, allowing a motor vehicle to travel from Freetown via Port Loko and Batkanu to Makeni. From there it could go on to Kabala or turn abruptly south in the direction of Bo.

The new road had important effects on Port Loko and Freetown. Traders along the Port Loko - Makeni road and along the Port Loko - Marampa road who possessed a lorry preferred Freetown to Port Loko when buying general merchandise and selling produce, because it cut out the transferring of consignments from lorries into launches or vice-versa in Port Loko. More and more lorries bypassed Port Loko and the launch route began to decline. The hinterland of Port Loko became the hinterland of Freetown. The decline of the town was delayed by petrol rationing and the military spending in the area, but in the late 1940s the process could not be stopped any more. And Port Loko's loss was Freetown's gain. All through the 1940s Lebanese traders left Port Loko and established themselves in Freetown though they maintained their contacts in the Port Loko hinterland and especially in Lunsar. Freetown experienced another change in the nature of its produce supplies: around 1930 there had been a shift from rail-borne to water-borne supplies. Now in the 1940s there was a shift from water-borne to road-borne supplies.

Vehicle repair and maintenance became easier, and consequently cheaper, after the opening of the Freetown - Port Loko road because vehicles in need of major repairs or a complete overhaul could be driven all the way to Freetown. Lorry ownership also became more attractive for businessmen in Freetown. Until 1940 the scope for lorry operations had been very limited in the Colony, but afterwards more Creoles engaged in lorry transport. It seems that the Companies took a greater interest in

lorries as well when they could operate them from their headquarters in Freetown. Many prospective lorry owners could not realize their plans until after the war, when a special opportunity occurred: the British Army sold a considerable amount of used and obsolete equipment, including lorries, when it left. These ex-service lorries were eagerly bought by Africans and Lebanese and dominated the roads for several years.³⁷ The attraction of lorry ownership was increased by the presence of many drivers and mechanics who had learnt to drive and maintain lorries during the war. The opportunities for Freetown-based lorries improved greatly after the road from 'mile 47' to Kumrabai Mamilla was opened in September 1947. The situation in 1948 was described as follows: 'There are considerable numbers of small hauliers operating one or two lorries who are competing for work.'³⁸ Most of the hauliers or lorry owners were Lebanese and Africans. Some information about ownership is available for 1949:

Lebanese	292
Africans	231
European Companies	54
Indian Companies	4
Government	186
Total	<hr/> 767

These figures were given in the Legislative Council in reply to a question from a Creole Member, who also wanted to know how many of the African owners were British Subjects, that is Creoles.³⁹ (Apparently the Creole share in lorry transport was changing, probably in an upward direction.) This information was not available, but I believe that Interior Africans began to buy lorries in substantial numbers in 1951. When the Korea boom enabled the SLPMB to pay high prices for cocoa and other produce, many Chiefs and well-to-do farmers considered lorries an obvious investment. Another factor was the completion of many short roads connecting isolated villages with the nearest road. Most of these 'trunk feeder roads', as I would like to call them, were constructed by local people who considered these roads to be their own, so it seemed logical that the lorries which used them were also African-owned. The lorry thus marked another step in rural African emancipation, for the population of the Interior showed an intense desire to travel after the war. Lorries convey passengers as well as goods and the sight of twenty passengers in the back is common. Thus the fares paid by passengers have been an important item in the earnings of a lorry. The decision to buy a lorry paid off

for many Africans of the Interior, but they were prompted by a psychological as well as a financial consideration. They gained prestige because their lorries satisfied the desire of their people to travel. They were also seen as leaders in progress and as the men who broke the 'monopoly' of the Lebanese lorry owners on whom they had depended in the past. So the enormous investment by African businessmen in lorries in the post-war period must be explained by both psychological and economic considerations.

The number of licensed commercial vehicles jumped from 426 in 1951 to 960 in 1952.⁴⁰ When the diamond boom began, the number increased further, but it must be pointed out that African ownership in the Protectorate had begun before the diamond boom. The emergence of African lorry ownership after the war seems to have proceeded as follows: first in Freetown, then in the cocoa areas of the Southeast, next in the Southwest, and finally in the North.⁴¹ In the mid- or late 1950s the number of African-owned lorries exceeded the number of Lebanese-owned lorries for the first time.⁴² The African advance in lorrying was not due to indifference on the part of the Lebanese, because the lorry profits were still very important for them in the first decade after the war. They responded eagerly to the new feeder roads which the central Government constructed in remote parts of the country: from Matotoka to Makali (1947-8), from Giema to Zimmi (1948-51), and the roads beyond Kabala (1949-54). As feeder road construction came to an end in 1953, this possible source of success for lorry owners disappeared.

It became exceptional for Europeans and Lebanese to drive lorries after the war and the growth of lorrying since then has depended on African drivers.⁴³ For many years (until the restrictions of the 1960s, see below) most African drivers worked for Lebanese owners and this relationship was an unusual one. The driver was more than a mere employee because the Lebanese owner left many decisions to him. He had to decide whether to wait in a queue for a ferry or to make a detour, and whether to accept cargo or passengers for the return journey. He had to cope with breakdowns and accidents.⁴⁴ Many owners found it worth-while to make their driver a partial owner of the lorry, for instance by promising to sell it cheaply to him after a certain period, thereby creating a strong incentive for safety and proper maintenance. Other owners did not object strongly when their drivers kept part of the revenue for themselves, for instance the fares of passengers.⁴⁵ I was told that some agreed to this practice and lowered the wages of their drivers accordingly. Under those circumstances the distinction between employee-drivers and owner-drivers was rather

meaningless and even today few passengers bother to make it. This is one of the reasons why the term 'lorry operator' is often used in Sierra Leone: it may refer to the drivers or the owners or to both.

6.5 The period after 1955

The programme to replace ferries by bridges yielded its first results in 1955 when six bridges were completed. In 1956 another three were finished, among them the long bridge at Taiama which shortened the road distance between Freetown and Bo considerably. The Public Works Department also upgraded the main roads so that they could carry heavier vehicles. (Towards the end of 1955 five-ton lorries were in the majority.) These three factors (no waiting at ferries, a shorter route, and more loading capacity per vehicle) improved the competitive position of lorry transport enormously. The lorries began to compete with the railway for traffic to and from Freetown, even on the main line. The SLPMB made increasing use of lorry transport for its produce after 1955 (see p. 55), and the lorries which had unloaded produce in Freetown were keen to pick up a return load of general merchandise. Just at that time the flow of general merchandise increased tremendously because of the diamond boom. The railway could not cope with the 'up-traffic' and lorries were in high demand to take merchandise to Bo, Kenema, and Kono. Lorry owners — Africans as well as Lebanese — charged high rates and earned large profits during the diamond boom.

The fat years came temporarily to an end in December 1956 as a result of the expulsion of the foreign diamond miners (see p. 166),⁴⁶ and the excess lorry capacity in 1957 prompted the opposition in Parliament to ask for measures which would restrict the lorry operations of the European companies.⁴⁷ Since 1956 the transport market has tended at times to have excess capacity. After independence the African lorry owners asked for restrictions on the Lebanese, and the SLPP restrictions of 1965/6 (see p. 118) also applied to lorry transport. The Acts distinguished between 'transport undertakings' and businesses in which lorries were used in a subsidiary function. Non-citizens in the first category had to cease their operations after six months, but non-citizens in the second category could continue to operate their lorries for their own use and even replace them 'with the prior approval of the Minister'.

The transport clause was a victory for the African lorry owners, but this does not mean that it was a great set-back for the Lebanese. Vigorous competition had lowered transport charges and profits, and two other

events which occurred just at that time depressed the prospects for lorry owners even further. In about 1965 the 'poda poda' began to appear on the roads. This is a mini-bus or a small lorry with a locally built wooden body on it that takes passengers and small loads. It is cheaper and more flexible in its operations than the lorry, so it is not surprising that many of them were imported and put on the roads. They took a considerable amount of revenue away from the lorries. In July 1965 the railway bridge across the Ribi River collapsed and nearly all rail traffic ceased for a period of 14 months. This might have meant extra business for the lorry owners, but the Railway Department decided to buy some fifty lorries in order to stay in business and to safeguard the future of the railway organization. The impending disposal of the railway lorries after the repair of the bridge further depressed the transport market in 1965 and 1966. As overinvestment and overcapacity had reached high levels, lorry transport had lost its profitability by the time the Lebanese were barred from it.

Not all Lebanese lorry owners were affected in the same way. The transport contractors came off worst for they had to give up and sell their lorries when the mining companies changed over to African contractors. The least affected were the Lebanese traders in the big towns who did not mind using independent African lorry operators. Many of them had already done so long before the restrictions, because when they wanted to send a consignment or charter a lorry, there were usually so many lorry drivers that they competed for the job. All the bigger towns have lorry parks where lorries and passengers assemble, so a Lebanese trader has no problems in contacting lorry drivers. It is even possible that the transport costs of many Lebanese traders fell after they had given up their own lorries. The Lebanese in remote or small places, however, could not always find African-owned lorries when they needed them. They were therefore glad that the SLPP Acts allowed them to keep their lorries which enabled them to get new supplies quickly.

The restrictions were abolished in October 1967. Some Lebanese decided to resume lorrying, but they realized that their best chances lay with the biggest lorries, that is those of seven tons. Since these were more expensive, fewer African rivals could afford them. On long hauls they could be operated more cheaply, especially for beer, soft drinks, and produce. The APC Acts of 1969 imposed even more stringent restrictions, ruling that non-citizens should cease operating all lorries and other commercial vehicles by September 1970. This measure proved too severe and an amendment was passed in February 1970 which gave the minister the power to approve operations after September 1970 in cases where there

was 'no suitable alternative transport operated by citizens'.⁴⁸ By that time the main groups affected were no longer the Lebanese, but some European businesses with specialized vehicles and the Indian companies that used their own lorries to supply their Provincial depots and to deliver to village shopkeepers. It was said that two Indian companies employed three hundred drivers even in September 1970,⁴⁹ so to prevent hardship the Government extended the deadline to December of that year.⁵⁰

I heard and read of allegations that some Lebanese circumvented the restrictions by registering their lorries in the name of Sierra Leonean employees or friends. If such cases occurred, they were probably confined to heavy lorries — the last Lebanese stronghold in the road transport market — and the Sierra Leonean was more than a nominal owner. He was financially interested to such an extent that he could be considered a partner.

6.6 *The launches*

The water-ways of the Coastal Belt are much the same as they were a century ago, apart from the silting up of the Sherbro River.⁵¹ There have been changes, however, in the vessels. After World War I the Government and the Companies imported motor launches, which were faster and more reliable than the sailing vessels. This was a major consideration for the owners, more important than the lowering of transport costs which were already low anyway. The Government launches provided transportation for officials and for the mail, and also took passengers on certain routes. The Public Works Department employed bigger launches to carry its equipment and materials in the Coastal Belt. It was on these vessels that the lorries were transported from Freetown to the inland ports where they began to operate on the river feeder roads. The greater speed of their new launches permitted the Companies to reorganize their operations in the Sherbro area in the 1920s (see p. 37). A Lebanese trader in Rotifunk, Joseph Akar, possessed a launch which played a role in the fish trade, carrying dried fish from Shenge to Rotifunk station whence it was railed to other towns.

There were few launches in the Northern Rivers area until the late 1920s when the river feeder roads of Kambia and Port Loko were built. Then trade increased in these towns and additional vessels were needed. They were not operated by the Companies, which had few Buying Stations in this area, but by small traders, Lebanese and European. In 1929 there were nine motor launches in Port Loko, whereas a few years before

there had been none.⁵² They seem to have belonged to Lebanese (to Ahmed Mohamed for instance). The combination of lorry and launch ownership was a special feature of Port Loko, although when the first private launch began to operate from Port Loko the crew had to be recruited in Sherbro. Farther to the north some Swiss traders⁵³ bought launches to serve the Scarcies area. They established their headquarters at Rokupr, downstream from Kambia, and called their firm the Rokupr Transport and Trading Company. At one time the RTTC fleet comprised four launches, one of which had been built locally in 1938 by a Swiss and some African artisans. It seems that other launches as well as this, had been built locally before World War II and that the know-how was available to mount the engines, shafts and propellers. All these artisans were needed in Freetown during the war, but around 1950 the construction of launches was resumed.⁵⁴

In 1956 there were 113 launches of which only eight were owned by Lebanese, five being registered in Bonthe and three in Freetown.⁵⁵ Launches were much more expensive than lorries, so not many Lebanese could afford them.⁵⁶ Then in the mid-1950s the outboard engine became popular in Sierra Leone.⁵⁷ Smaller vessels equipped with them began to compete with launches, especially in sheltered waters. At the same time more roads were built in the Coastal Belt and some traffic was diverted from water to road. The profitability of launches has declined since the mid-1950s and the launches which I saw in 1970 looked old and neglected.⁵⁸

In 1970 Lebanese participation in launch transport had declined to a few launches in Bonthe. As restrictions similar to those concerning lorries were applied to launches, Lebanese participation in water transportation may have come to an end since then. The participation of the Companies had declined much earlier, mainly as a result of the decline of Bonthe.

The gold mining industry

Mineral development in Sierra Leone was initiated by the Government in the 1920s.¹ The Geological Survey decided in 1926 to send its geologists on reconnaissance tours to search for mineral deposits.² Within a few years they discovered platinum, gold, iron ore, chrome ore, and diamonds. The obsolete Concessions Ordinance was replaced in 1927 by a new Minerals Ordinance modelled on the Nigerian one,³ and a Mines Department was established in 1928. The ideal miner which the Government had in mind, judging by the provisions of the Ordinance, was an experienced mining company from abroad with considerable financial resources. It had to be competent in prospecting and mining, and willing to pay fees, taxes and royalties. This preference for big experienced companies was reasonable because most mineral deposits can be mined only on a large scale using technically advanced methods. The Government could not know at the time that Sierra Leone possessed alluvial deposits of gold, diamonds and platinum which could be mined on a small scale with simple methods and would therefore attract local miners, Africans, Lebanese, and Europeans. It is the participation of these small local miners which makes it necessary to analyze gold and diamond mining in this book.⁴ We shall discuss gold mining in this chapter and diamond mining in the next.

The foreign companies started gold mining in 1930, and were the only miners until 1934. In that year African and Lebanese miners acquired mining rights and began their operations. The companies and small miners worked side by side until in 1944 the last of the companies withdrew and the first phase of the gold mining industry came to an end. A second phase began after World War II and lasted till 1956, in which inhabitants of the gold chiefdoms worked the remaining marginal

Map V. *Gold deposits and gold mining in Sierra Leone*

deposits under the Alluvial Gold Mining Scheme while some more difficult deposits were worked by two local companies. But all interest for gold mining disappeared when diamond mining proved more lucrative.

The Lebanese were the most important group among the small miners which operated between 1934 and 1944. Since there were also African and European gold miners, the industry provides an opportunity to compare the Lebanese with these two other groups with regard to time of entry, labour relations, and success and continuity of operations.

7.1 The mining companies

The first gold was found in 1926 by the Geological Survey some miles east of Mabonto (see Map V). Two British companies, the Coastal Exploration Syndicate, Ltd. and Maroc, Ltd., came to Sierra Leone and began to prospect in that area. The Coastal Exploration Syndicate was satisfied with the deposits and opened a mine at Maranda in 1930. It established a subsidiary, Sierra Leone Goldfields, Ltd., to conduct the operations in Sierra Leone, but it was not very successful and gave up in 1938. Maroc transferred its operations to Makong and Baomahun in 1929 after the Geological Survey had discovered gold in that area, establishing mines at these two places in 1930.⁵ The gold bearing ground was excavated by hand and washed to recover the gold. The early mines were far from the motor roads and the logistic problems of the mining companies were great. Maroc prospected in many areas of Sierra Leone⁶ and mined some smaller deposits without setting up a full mining camp. A third company came to Sierra Leone in 1934, namely the Gold and Base Metal Mines of Nigeria, Ltd. As it came late, it could not succeed in the normal way but tried new methods of recovery, for instance dredging. They imported a dredge which began to operate in 1939 and worked for more than three years, but after it had broken down the company withdrew in 1944. All three companies just described could be considered ideal miners as envisaged in the Minerals Ordinance.

Two other companies, the Sierra Leone Development Company and the Pampana Mining Company, were engaged in gold mining during the first phase of the industry. SLDC had come to Sierra Leone in the 1920s to mine iron ore, but when gold was discovered in the neighbourhood of its Tonkolili iron ore field, the company decided to work these and any other deposits out as quickly as possible to avoid complications when the mining of iron ore started. They applied for gold prospecting and mining rights in 1933 and succeeded in finding and working all deposits in their

iron ore lease within the next five years. The company withdrew from gold mining in 1938.

The Pampana Mining Company was a local company, established by Marcel Jourdan, a French importer in Freetown. He had no mining experience, but the officials welcomed his enterprise which aimed at the exploitation of the gravels of the Pampana River. He installed a dragline and a floating washing plant in 1936; but his company withdrew from the Pampana River in 1937 so as to allow Gold and Base Metal Mines of Nigeria to take over. The latter company was better equipped to prove reserves and was able to buy a dredge (see above). The Pampana Mining Company worked some minor deposits which it had retained, without much success, and gave up in 1941.

Finally, at the end of 1944 Maroc also closed down. In the opinion of the mining companies from abroad the gold mining industry in Sierra Leone had come to an end.⁷

7.2 *The small miners, 1934-1944*

It soon became clear that all promising deposits were alluvial, lying in or along small streams in the Interior, so that the mining could be done without machinery in most cases. The only problems were to find the right streams, to establish a camp, and to live in the bush. This assessment of the situation seeped through to the coast and to the Coastal Africans. Somebody, perhaps a Creole lawyer, studied the Minerals Ordinance and discovered that the conditions were not prohibitive for small miners:⁸ an applicant simply had to submit a form for a prospecting and later for a mining right. He also had to erect two beacons to mark the upper and lower limits of the section of the stream which he wanted to mine, and the fees were not high.

The Government was not very pleased with the applications of small miners, and it was only after arrangements had been made concerning the proper export of their gold⁹ — and the foolproof collection of the royalties — that the mines officials began to grant mining rights.¹⁰ In the course of eleven years 89 small miners received mining rights (see Table VII).

Mining done by individual miners — or by partnerships styling themselves as syndicates — started in 1934. It is interesting that African miners began a few months earlier than the Lebanese.¹¹ In 1935 African participation was still stronger than that of the Lebanese, but in 1936 the Lebanese caught up. Individual European miners came later than either the Africans or the Lebanese. They started only in 1935: a German and a

Table VII. *Holders of gold mining titles, by groups, 1930 - 1944*

	Companies		Individuals and syndicates			Total
	Foreign (1)	Local (2)	African (3)	Lebanese (4)	European (5)	
1930	2	1	—	—	—	3
1931	2	1	—	—	—	3
1932	2	1	—	—	—	3
1933	3	—	—	—	—	3
1934	3	—	10	3	—	16
1935	4	—	16	8	8	36
1936	4	1	15	15	8	43
1937	4	1	8	15	8	36
1938	4	1	7	19	6	37
1939	2	1	3	27	7	40
1940	2	1	4	32	6	45
1941	2	1	4	25	6	38
1942	2	—	2	18	6	28
1943	2	—	2	13	4	21
1944	2	—	1	8	3	14

Notes:

- a. The mining titles include provisional mining rights.
- b. The nationality or race of the holder of the mining title was determined on the basis of the name listed in the sources.

Sources:

Reports of the Geological and Mines Department for 1930 to 1938

Consolidated Report of the Mines Department 1939 - 1944, Freetown, 1947

Swiss were the first. Among the Europeans were several former employees of the mining companies who decided to try their luck on their own account after they had learnt enough about the deposits and the country and its inhabitants.

7.3 *The success of the various groups, 1930-1944*

The Mines Department was empowered to grant mining rights and leases. The companies, syndicates, and individuals who received such rights or leases I shall call mining title holders or simply miners. As the production of each of these miners was published by the Mines Department I was able to prepare Table VIII which shows the production of five groups of miners over a period of fifteen years. The total of each group is given at the bottom of the Table as a measure of its success. Column 1

Table VIII. *Gold production, by groups, 1930 - 1944 in ounces troy*

	Companies		Individuals and syndicates			Total
	Maroc (1)	Others (2)	African (3)	Lebanese (4)	European (5)	
1930	937	—	—	—	—	937
1931	6650	—	—	—	—	6650
1932	9611	2514	—	—	—	12125
1933	11447	4157	—	—	—	15604
1934	15353	5575	1276	393	—	22597
1935	16822	7570	2109	4708	1701	32910
1936	15883	8399	1843	11901	2726	40753
1937	13270	4415	905	18863	1685	39139
1938	11595	414	683	17550	2709	32951
1939	9957	1302	858	21757	3062	36937
1940	11379	3660	428	16795	3110	35373
1941	6008	3626	453	11441	4082	25611
1942	3463	3013	332	3185	2455	12449
1943	1798	—	113	294	867	3072
1944	202	—	203	533	178	1117
Total	134377 (=42%)	44646 (=14%)	9204 (=3%)	107422 (=34%)	22576 (=7%)	318225 (=100%)

Notes:

a. The name and production of each holder of a mining title is given in the sources.

The nationality or race of the holder was determined by us on the basis of the name.

b. The first five columns do not add up to the totals stated because of rounding.

Sources:

Reports of the Geological and Mines Department for 1930 to 1938 *Consolidated Report of the Mines Department 1939 - 1944*, Freetown, 1947

shows that Maroc dominated the gold industry extracting 42 per cent of the total, while the other companies together extracted only 14 per cent.

Columns 3-5 show the production of the small miners. They extracted 44 per cent of the total, a considerable achievement when one remembers that the Government had been hesitant to accept them as miners. We have grouped the small miners in three categories: African, Lebanese, and European. We note that this grouping disregards the African labourers being based exclusively on the title holder or miner. The Lebanese miners were responsible for 34 per cent of the total and did much better than the African and European miners with 3 and 7 per cent respectively. I also divided the total production of each group, that is the totals of

Table IX. *Holders of gold mining titles, by length of operations and by groups, 1930 - 1944*

Length of operations	Companies	Africans	Lebanese	Europeans	Total
0 - 3 years	—	21	30	11	62
4 - 6 years	2	3	10	3	18
over 6 years	3	1	7	3	14
Total	5	25	47	17	94

Sources:

Reports of the Geological and Mines Department for 1930 to 1938

Consolidated Report of the Mines Department 1939 - 1944, Freetown, 1947

columns 3, 4, and 5 by the number of miners involved, thus arriving at the average production for African, Lebanese, and European miners measured over the whole period in which they operated. The Lebanese miners came first with 2284 ounces of gold, the Europeans second with 1328 ounces, and the Africans last with 368 ounces. Since miners who operated for many years scored a higher total production, these figures suggest that the Lebanese and Europeans held out longer than the Africans. This is confirmed by Table IX. Seven Lebanese and three Europeans continued for more than six years but only one African miner did so. Many miners failed soon. The high failure rate is shown by the first line: 62 out of the 94 miners gave up within three years of starting. They were all small miners. We should not overlook the fact that many Lebanese failed, too: ten withdrew in their first year, and an equal number in their second and third year.

The success of the Lebanese was a mystery to the officials of the Mines Department. The Report of 1936 pointed out that the Lebanese met with 'remarkable success' although they were 'traders and not men of mining experience'. The next Report explained their success by the practice of tributing.¹² Labourers worked either as mine workers at a fixed wage or as tributors. A tributor earned no wage, but shared in the proceeds of the gold that he recovered. Tributing was popular with the labourer: it meant that he had the chance to obtain a sum of money which he would never get together from his wages. The tributors were men of the Interior, most of whom had learned how to mine gold while they were employed by the mining companies. Some of them would have liked to have been miners on their own account but could not satisfy the requirements of the Mines Department. Such men preferred to work with a miner who allowed them

a large degree of freedom in their operations. Tributing also had advantages for the employer. After he had given out a section of a stream to a group of tributors — five men perhaps — he left them without supervision, so that they could organize the work by themselves. He did not need to urge them to work hard, because they were anxious to find gold. The employer would come regularly to collect the gold. He would weigh it in the presence of the tributors and would pay out the share that belonged to the tributors at once. Tributing also reduced the risk of dishonesty: the temptation to hide a good find from one's employer was much greater for the wage labourer than for the tributor. Mutual trust between an employer and his tributors was essential. If tributors suspected their employer of cheating them, they would approach another miner and offer the gold to him and the latter would usually buy, although this was against the law.

The nature of the deposits encouraged tributing. There were many remote deposits which could only be mined if no supervision was necessary, and many poor deposits which could only be exploited if the tributors bore part of the risk. Most of these marginal deposits were too expensive to mine in the normal way, but tributing made their exploitation possible. It seems that tributing was introduced by Gold and Base Metal Mines of Nigeria in 1935 when it worked the swamp deposits near Kama-kwie. By 1937 it had become widespread: all companies derived part of their gold from tributors and many small miners relied entirely on them.¹³ It is significant that tributing grew in importance after gold production had reached its peak in 1936. After this time there is a noticeable drop in the average output of gold per labourer: in the years 1933-1935 it was more than five ounces per year; afterwards it fell, amounting to only two ounces in 1944.

The Lebanese took full advantage of tributing.¹⁴ It enabled them to operate with a maximum number of people and a minimum of supervision. The Shamel Brothers for instance had more than 1100 men working for them in 1936, an incredible number if one remembers that the Lebanese had no experience in supervising people. Many other Lebanese miners had hundreds of people working for them and were helped by only a few relatives with the task of supervision and the collection of gold.

The Lebanese established and maintained better relations with their tributors than the other miners, because they had lived longer in the gold areas. The African miners came from the Coastal Belt. Many were Creoles, but we also found Sherbro names. The Coastal Africans had to operate far from their homes and their problems were comparable to

those of the Europeans.¹⁵ Living in improvised camps was hard for them and their enthusiasm faded quickly (see Table IX). It is interesting that some 'Freetown Lebanese' and some early Europeans also withdrew soon. The Lebanese from the Interior had the great advantage that they had many contacts in the gold areas. They knew the Chiefs and were known to many villagers who wanted to earn money in the gold-fields. The traders in Makeni and Magburaka benefited most. The Shamel family was particularly active: the production of the various members of this family amounted to 38,834 ozs troy between 1934 and 1944, that is twelve per cent of the total.¹⁶

Gold fever certainly gripped some Lebanese¹⁷ but it is interesting that so few became miners. The highest number was 32,¹⁸ not many considering that there were some six hundred Lebanese male adults in Sierra Leone at the time.¹⁹ Until 1934 no Lebanese had earned his living outside trade and apparently the majority was unwilling to break with the trading tradition. The break was possibly easier for the Lebanese in the North because less produce was grown there than in the South.

7.4 Two post-war companies

When the war was over, the Mines Department made an inventory of remaining gold deposits. There were three items worth considering: a) the gravels of the Pampana River; b) the lode deposit at Baomahun; and c) many marginal shallow deposits. The first two have been worked by local companies and will be discussed in this section. The other deposits were worked under the Alluvial Gold Mining Scheme, see the next section.

The dredge of Gold and Base Metal Mines of Nigeria had closed down in 1942 for technical reasons but the gravels of the Pampana River had not been exhausted. Marcel Jourdan returned to his old idea and formed a new Pampana Mining Company in 1946. The dredge was repaired and started work in June 1947. It operated for the next six years, with moderate success. After the liquidation of the company, one of the shareholders, Alfred Woehrling, bought the dredge of the company and still recovered some gold;²⁰ all operations ended in 1956.

The lode deposit at Baomahun had been discovered in the early 1930s and Maroc had spent a fair amount of energy on its exploration between 1934 and 1937. In November 1937 operations were suspended, as Maroc did not want to invest any more, although the prospects were not bad. When Maroc withdrew in 1944 it allowed its prospecting licence to lapse.

The Mines Department at once closed the area to prospectors in order to keep the deposit intact. This was not easy because illicit miners often worked there after Maroc had left. Although these men could only work the outcrops and some loose material, their depredations reduced the value of the area for serious miners. The inability to check these illicit activities helped the Mines Department to overcome its hesitations when the Yemen Company applied for a mining lease over the area. The Yemen Company had been formed in July 1947 by ten Lebanese traders,²¹ some of whom had been miners before. They satisfied the Mines Department with regard to capital, because they brought together £ 10,000 and purchased new machinery. Their problem, however, was the recruitment of professional personnel. The Minerals Ordinance required the presence of a qualified mining engineer for underground mining. The Lebanese were able to attract a British engineer who had worked for Maroc before and afterwards mined on his own account. He started work with the Yemen Company in November 1947 and organized the underground prospecting, but left in November 1948 so that all operations had to be suspended. In March 1950 a new engineer arrived and the Yemen Company produced gold for some five years, using a labour force of about 150 men.²² The gold was partly derived from underground mining and partly from the loose material on the surface. All operations were suspended in 1956 and the mining lease lapsed in 1958. It seems to me that the Yemen Company was unsuccessful and never made a profit. This was largely due to the disappointing quality of the deposits, but to some extent also to the lack of experience of the directors in running a bigger enterprise.

Both the Yemen and the Pampana Mining Company were local companies in the sense that their head offices were in Sierra Leone. In a way the French businessmen in the one, and the Lebanese in the other company had the same approach. Their directors exploited opportunities that had been abandoned by overseas companies. They had reasoned that they could work more cheaply and effectively because they lived in Sierra Leone and knew the country. In the history of the Lebanese in Sierra Leone the Yemen Company was significant for three reasons: it was the first instance of Lebanese businessmen taking over property from a withdrawing European company. Secondly, it was an instance of Lebanese coming together and forming a limited liability company to start a bigger enterprise. (At least six families joined forces for this venture.) This was only rarely repeated in later years. Thirdly, it was the first time that Lebanese employed a European. There have not been many instances of this since then, but in nearly all cases the Europeans possessed technical skills

and qualifications which the Lebanese could not find in their own community. The relationships often displayed a conflict between the 'technical' European and the 'commercial' Lebanese. In the Yemen Company this conflict had appeared for the first time.

7.5 The Alluvial Gold Mining Scheme

The Mines Department estimated in 1945 that there were numerous marginal deposits left in the gold areas. Some had been found by the prospectors of the companies, but had been rejected as too poor in grade or too remote to make exploitation worth-while. Others were leftovers which miners had worked carelessly or had abandoned half-way. Although these deposits were too poor to attract the type of miners which the Minerals Ordinance had envisaged, it seemed a pity to leave them unmined, especially at a time when increased exports had high priority in Government policy. The Mines Report of 1945 proposed a simple mining scheme under which local inhabitants would be allowed to mine gold. Such a scheme would guarantee cheap operations because the local inhabitants could continue to live in their own villages and would mine in their spare time.

The mines officials had another reason for their proposal: they knew that many tributors had continued to mine after their employers had withdrawn from mining.²³ Such mining was illicit because the men possessed no mining right. Moreover, they could not sell the gold which they had recovered except on the black market. The Mines Department had no objections against these illicit miners on technical or economic grounds, and therefore proposed to change the Minerals Ordinance, which was done by an amendment in 1946.²⁴ It provided that illiterate persons without capital could apply for a simple licence to mine gold. 'Licensed mining' therefore now has the connotation of small-scale mining in Sierra Leone. Detailed rules were published in 1947 and the Alluvial Gold Mining Scheme went into operation on 2 January 1948. Mines Wardens were appointed who after inspecting the area which an applicant wanted to mine granted a licence for a fee of £ 2 per year. The formalities and costs were thus reduced to a minimum. Some responsibility was borne by the Chieftdom in which the mining took place, because if an applicant came from another Chieftdom, the approval of the local Chieftdom authorities was required. The new scheme created a new class of African miner, differing from those of the 1930s in two respects.

The latter were from the Coastal Belt and literate, while the former came from the gold areas in the Interior and were illiterate; they were a small but intriguing group among the African entrepreneurs of the Interior who emerged in the post-war period.

Table X. *Mining licences and production under the Alluvial Gold Mining Scheme, 1948 - 1955*

	Number of mining licences	Production in ounces troy	Average production per licence	Amount paid out to lic. holders
1948	237	316	1.3	n.a.
1949	225	247	1.1	£ 1,748
1950	180	332	1.8	£ 2,824
1951	139	270	1.9	£ 2,299
1952	113	132	1.2	£ 1,041
1953	85	101	1.2	n.a.
1954	82	56	0.7	n.a.
1955	54	13	0.2	n.a.

n.a. = not available

Source:

Mines Reports, for columns 1, 2, and 4.

Table X shows that the Scheme was not successful. Average production was very low, especially if it is remembered that up to five people could operate under one licence. Already during the first year the officials suspected that the real output was higher than what was officially recorded and that the difference was sold illicitly.²⁵ It was also disappointing that local inhabitants made little use of the scheme. Only people who had worked as tributors before found it attractive to apply for a licence and mined wherever they could come to terms with a Chief about the mining of promising leftovers.

The scheme created a new group of businessmen: the gold buyers. It was their job to buy gold from the licensed miners and to sell it to the commercial banks which were the official exporters. The gold buyers had to record all their transactions in their Record Book. Table XI provides information about the gold buyers.

Presumably most gold buyers had mined gold before.²⁶ It is significant that there were more African than Lebanese gold buyers, which may well indicate that the Africans were in a better position to trade in gold than the Lebanese.²⁷ The Government did not trust the gold buyers, suspecting

them of selling gold illicitly, which was quite profitable in those days of strict exchange control.²⁸

Table XI. *Gold buyers under the Alluvial Gold Mining Scheme, by groups, 1948 - 1956*

	Total	African	Lebanese	European
1948	15	10	5	0
1949	19	15	3	1
1950	19	15	3	1
1951	15	13	1	1
1952	14	14	0	0
1953	13	13	0	0
1954	9	8	1	0
1955	6	5	1	0
1956	1	1	0	0

Sources:

Mines Reports and files of the Mines Department

It seems that the scheme led to renewed interest in mining among the Lebanese. A few individual Lebanese miners were mentioned in the Mines Reports of 1950 to 1954. Their production was, however, small.

The decline of gold mining under the scheme was a direct result of the illicit diamond rush. When this was legalized in February 1956, the last miners left the goldfields,²⁹ which have remained deserted ever since.

The diamond mining industry

Diamonds were discovered by the Geological Survey in 1930, and like gold have been recovered from alluvial deposits. In 1930 observers might have predicted that gold and diamond mining would follow parallel courses. In fact they did not. For nearly twenty years all diamond mining was done by one European company and neither Africans nor Lebanese were allowed to mine: that is, European participation amounted to one hundred per cent. The company mined according to a plan and this is part of the reason why the mining of diamonds has continued for over forty years, while the gold-fields were practically exhausted after fifteen years.

In 1956 Africans were allowed to mine diamonds, too. They participated on a massive scale in the following years. There was also some Lebanese participation after 1956, but this was negligible.

A great deal has been published about the diamond industry,¹ much of which will be passed over here, as I have selected only those points that are necessary to understand the role of the Lebanese in diamond mining and trading. Diamond trading will be discussed in the next chapter.

8.1 *The Selection Trust*

The Geological Survey Department published its discovery of diamonds without delay. The first company that reacted to the news was the Consolidated African Selection Trust from the Gold Coast, a daughter company of the Selection Trust in London. Its prospectors arrived in Sierra Leone in 1931, and as their reports were favourable, mining started on a small scale in 1933. In 1934 a new company was formed, the Sierra Leone

Selection Trust (SLST) to conduct diamond mining in Sierra Leone. In 1935 a comprehensive agreement was concluded between the Sierra Leone Government and SLST under which the company was given the exclusive right to mine diamonds in Sierra Leone.² Only the area where the Sierra Leone Development Company mined iron ore was excluded. All other interests, that is, foreign mining companies and foreign or local miners or syndicates, were barred.

From 1935 on the diamond mining industry displayed a pattern that differed from that of the gold mining industry with its many enterprises. The pattern of the diamond mining industry was later described as 'unified control', or as the 'monopoly of SLST'. Those who disliked the company — a large and vociferous group in the 1950s — preferred the term monopoly because it suggested that plain greed had prompted SLST to ask for exclusive rights. This interpretation is incorrect, however, for the company had two clear objectives at the time. First, it wanted to obtain rights to possible unknown deposits without having to rush its prospecting programme — as Maroc had been compelled to do. The second motive was based on security considerations. Every diamond mine in the world is faced with the problem that diamonds are easily hidden and stolen by its employees and that there are usually unscrupulous men around who are willing to buy the stolen diamonds. The evil of Illicit Diamond Buying (IDB) has accompanied large-scale diamond mining for nearly a century. The agreement of 1935 gave SLST indirect protection against IDB, for the absence of other diamond mining companies made it more difficult for SLST employees to find a buyer for any stolen diamonds. (It may well be that the situation in the gold mining industry at the time heightened SLST's concern about IDB.) The agreement also gave SLST the right to claim as its rightful property any diamonds recovered by the Police, even if they were found far from the mine. The security motive was an important consideration therefore in the decision to opt for unified control. It must further be remembered that the financial position of the Government was bad because of the depression. It had to think twice before refusing to do what a mining company which was considering starting operations in Sierra Leone wanted. In terms of revenue, unified control has proved to be the best solution for the Government.

The same concern for security was evident from the Diamond Industry Protection Ordinance which was passed in 1936.³ It gave the District Commissioner (DC) for Kono the right to refuse non-Konos to settle or reside in Kono. When the DC suspected that strangers came to Kono to buy stolen diamonds he could refuse them entry or order them to leave.

Traders especially were suspect and the DC was in a good position to check on them, because the store licence which they needed for starting a shop was issued by him.

8.2 *The first African miners*

Africans started to dig for diamonds in Kono in about 1950. We are not certain about the time or the exact place where they started, or about their nationality or previous experience. The only thing we know for certain is that their operations were illicit, because the law had reserved diamond mining for SLST. This illicit start has coloured all accounts of and all comments on diamond mining and trading after 1950. Some observers took the view that the illicit miners were wrong and had no excuse for their action. Others argued that the law was wrong and that the diggers should not be condemned. The majority of Sierra Leoneans have felt at some time that both the diggers and the law were wrong.

A tentative reconstruction of the early years may start from the fact that diamond mining requires a special kind of knowledge and skill. A miner must know what diamonds look like and has to master the 'shaking' or 'jigging' skill which separates the heavy diamond crystals from the other material. Africans who had worked in the prospecting teams of SLST possessed this special knowledge and it is likely that the early African miners were former employees of SLST. However, it cannot be ruled out that the diamond miners may have been former gold miners. Gold also has a high specific gravity and its recovery from alluvial deposits strongly resembles methods used for diamonds. A gold miner who knows what diamonds look like is well-prepared to change over to diamond mining. Several considerations point to the possibility that former gold miners did in fact turn to diamond mining. First, the gold-fields in Tonkolili District were nearly exhausted and some gold miners may have travelled to Kono when two chiefdoms in this District were opened to African gold miners in 1950.⁴ Although there were no diamonds in the chiefdoms, the gold miners may have become interested in them while there. The second connection between gold and diamond mining concerns the Mandingos. People of this tribe had always had good relations with the Konos, and in the course of time a considerable number of Mandingos from Guinea had settled in Kono. Among them there may well have been men who had worked in the gold-fields near Kankan in the

1930s. We can now draw some conclusions about the tribe and nationality of the first African miners. If they were former employees of SLST they probably belonged to the Kono and Mende tribes, but if they were former gold miners, they may have been Temnes or Mandingos. And if they were Mandingos, they were almost certainly Guineans.

There is no oral tradition in Kono which mentions particular men as the first miners. We do not know whether one man started or many at the same time. They seem to have worked in little groups but whether these groups knew about each other or learned from each other's techniques is unknown. Accounts of African miners may later yield information about the date when their mining started⁵ but for the time being we have to rely on printed accounts, all of them written by Europeans. When the European employees of SLST discovered the pits of the African miners and realized their meaning they wanted to nip illicit digging in the bud. Their security guards awaited the return of the diggers and tried to arrest them: in 1950 four men were charged with illicit mining.⁶ Until contrary evidence turns up we shall take 1950 as the first year of African mining.⁷

SLST was in an awkward position. They knew that the Kono deposits were extremely vulnerable to illicit diamond mining (IDM), because they were widely scattered and therefore costly to patrol. Moreover, if the diggers came to know where the richer areas were and concentrated on them, the profitability of mechanized mining might decrease sharply. SLST wanted effective measures, but had to avoid spreading the news around and attracting other diggers. The colonial administration which was informed by SLST was equally embarrassed.⁸ The matter was hushed up in 1950 and 1951, but this became impossible in 1952.⁹

8.3 *The decision to license the African miners*

Both SLST and the Government were determined in 1952 to suppress illicit mining. At that time they still found support for this policy among the Konos. The illicit diggers, finding themselves hunted by the Police and denounced by Chiefs and politicians, tried to justify their actions. They argued their case by pointing to the gold industry where African miners had operated side by side with foreign mining companies, first with mining rights and later under licence. Why did not the Government create diamond mining licences for Africans similar to the gold mining licences? The argument was conveyed to politicians in Freetown, but they

felt that the interest of the country was better served by the continuation of unified control. This view was explicitly stated by the Minister of Mines during a visit to Kono in March 1954.¹⁰ The wishes of a few thousand African miners had to be sacrificed in the public interest.

But the suppression policy had to be abandoned because of a new development. In the first half of 1954 Africans began to mine diamonds outside Kono. They were successful and within a few months a major diamond rush was under way. By December it was estimated that 30,000 Africans were mining diamonds, illicitly but openly.¹¹ A number of Mende Chiefs and politicians were convinced that the diamond rush had to be legalized to prevent social upheaval and lawlessness. They felt that a licensing system similar to the one in the gold-fields was necessary, and realized that SLST would have to surrender its rights outside Kono to make this possible. A motion to this end was adopted by the Legislative Council in December 1954. The colonial administration was not against it because they knew that the Police Force was unable to patrol two or three other Districts besides Kono, but they were not free to express an opinion until March 1955 when the Colonial Office had reviewed the situation.¹² In a statement of April 1955 the Sierra Leone Government promised the introduction of the licensed mining of diamonds and 'substantial participation by the people of this country'.¹³ The negotiations with SLST and the preparation of the licensing scheme still took several months, but on 6 February 1956 the first licences were issued. Elsewhere I have described in detail how the policy change came about and what factors caused delays.¹⁴

In December 1954 the division of the diamond deposits had seemed an easy matter: if SLST got the Kono deposits, the deposits outside Kono could be allocated to the African miners. A complication arose, however, because the prospectors of SLST had discovered a rich diamond field in Kenema District in 1953, later known as the Tongo field. In November 1954 SLST applied for a lease and in June 1955 agreement was reached with the population of the area about the size of the lease.¹⁵ The shape of the Tongo lease indicates that the views of the local population mattered in the 1950s and were taken into account. The boundaries were drawn so as to fall fully within one chiefdom (Lower Bambara), which simplified contact between the company and the chiefdom authorities. This aspect had not mattered in the 1930s when SLST took out its tidy rectangular leases in Kono. In April 1956 the provisional boundaries were changed in a minor way to release some deposits near Panguma for African mining and to give SLST an extension to the south.¹⁶ The Tongo lease as it was

finally granted exhibited a most irregular shape. It was a small price to pay for the peaceful co-existence of African and European mining which has characterized the area.

The Tongo negotiations had an effect on the Kono situation. The original plan to reserve the whole Kono District for SLST became less acceptable to politicians and was abandoned. In the end SLST agreed to surrender several peripheral areas in Kono.

8.4 The exclusion of the Lebanese

The Alluvial Diamond Mining Scheme which came into operation in 1956 is based on the Alluvial Diamond Mining Ordinance.¹⁷ (This was different from the Alluvial Gold Mining Scheme which had been based on the Minerals Ordinance.) The magnitude of the rush and the complications of the diamond trade warranted a separate ordinance for licensed diamond mining. It must be noted however that SLST continued to work under the provisions of the Minerals Ordinance.

The holder of a gold mining licence could employ up to 5 assistants, but it was felt that a higher maximum was necessary in the diamond fields, because there had been at least 30,000 illicit miners. To reduce the work of the Mines Department the Ordinance allowed a licence holder to employ 20 men. Even so over a thousand licences had to be issued. Only the names of the licence holders have been registered by the Mines Department; there is no check on the employees except that they have to carry a tally while at work. Virtually all employees have been tributors who share in the proceeds of the diamonds they recover but receive no wages. I shall be referring to tributors only, ignoring the few labourers. At first there was no restriction on the nationality of the tributors: anybody could work in the diamond fields provided he observed the rules. It may be added that only Africans worked in the diamond fields. The possibility that any non-African would engage in the manual work of mining did not occur to the legislators, and in fact, this did not happen. After February 1959 foreigners were no longer allowed to work as tributors.

By specifying a maximum of 20 tributors the Ordinance created an important distinction between licence holders and tributors. It was the licence holder who took on the tributors and who sold the diamonds, and if he was energetic he would also direct operations and organize the finances. Because it was realized that he might benefit more from the Scheme than the tributors, politicians wanted to restrict the granting of the

licences to Sierra Leoneans. This fitted in with the nationalistic element which the African miners had introduced in their agitation for a licensing system. So one of the earliest attempts to define 'the people of this country' legally was made in the drafting of this Ordinance. I suppose that the first version read: a native of Sierra Leone is a person who 1) is a British subject or a British protected person; and 2) is a member of a race, tribe, or community settled in Sierra Leone. The first clause excluded Africans from Guinea and other French colonies, and from Liberia. The second clause excluded Hausas from Nigeria and Wolofs from the Gambia, etc., who, although belonging to the Commonwealth, did not belong to a tribe settled in Sierra Leone.

At the time the Lebanese in Sierra Leone could be divided into two categories: the aliens and those with British status. Most of the latter had been born in Sierra Leone and had acquired their British status at birth. The older Lebanese were therefore aliens while the younger ones possessed British status. The aliens were ruled out because of clause 1, but the younger ones could claim that they were a) either a British subject or a British protected person, and b) members of the Lebanese community which had been settled in Sierra Leone for some sixty years. They expected in 1955 that they would qualify for a diamond mining licence. (The older Lebanese did not mind being excluded as long as their sons got licences.) The politicians saw the Lebanese as one group and were unwilling to accept the distinction between those without and those with British status. They wanted to bar all Lebanese from diamond mining. They probably feared that the Lebanese would gain control of a substantial section of the diamond mining under the Scheme, if they were allowed to take out licences. They recalled the lesson of the gold mining industry: the Europeans had come first and taken the lion's share, the Lebanese had come later but had still done well, but by the time licences for Africans had been created, the fields had been practically exhausted.¹⁸ They promised themselves that no such thing would happen in the diamond fields: what the Europeans surrendered was to be reserved for Africans. The colonial administration seems to have agreed with the politicians. They were anxious to stimulate African economic advance.¹⁹ Moreover, they were hostile to the Lebanese, as we shall show in the next chapter.

The way to exclude the young Lebanese was found by adding the proviso that members of communities of European or Asiatic origin could not be considered as 'natives of Sierra Leone'. The implications of this will be discussed in Chapter 15. As with so many decisions of the decolonization period it is difficult to separate the responsibility of the British authorities

from that of the African politicians. I believe that the British followed a consistent policy of 'nothing for the Lebanese', and that the Sierra Leonean politicians were neither unanimous nor consistent. There will be several indications in this and the next chapter that politicians did not object to the idea that the Lebanese would get a share of the profits from diamond mining and trading.

8.5 *African mining after the legalization*

In 1956 there were many people who hoped that diamonds could be found everywhere in Sierra Leone, but it soon turned out that only three Districts had significant deposits: Bo, Kenema, and Kono. It must be

Table XII. *Licensed diamond dealers, by area, 1956 - 1972*

	Bo District	Kenema West area	Kenema East area	Kono District	Other Districts	Total
1956	82	28	50	16	105	281
1957	111	58	57	38	137	401
1957	86	42	38	18	58	242
1958	66	28	32	17	30	173
1959	104	57	45	44	10	260
1960	93	87	68	50	19	317
1961	53	33	15	12	11	124
1962	46	50	33	36	4	169
1963	47	49	37	32	3	168
1964	50	51	52	40	1	194
1965	49	58	67	27	2	203
1966	31	44	52	40	4	171
1967	25	38	47	40	1	151
1968	30	27	59	55	3	174
1969	31	21	55	84	5	196
1970	20	15	71	64	3	173
1971	23	9	72	79	5	188
1972	15	11	64	79	5	174

Notes

- Employees of the Diamond Corporation and the Government Diamond Office are excluded from the table.
- The second row for 1957 shows the situation after 1 October.

Sources:

Government Notices in the *Sierra Leone Gazette* and files of the Mines Department

noted that these deposits were located in the areas of only two tribes: the Mende and the Kono. People of these two tribes could mine in their home lands, but all other tribes had to migrate — seasonally or permanently — to Kono or Mende country to mine diamonds.

As the African miners have not kept records of their operations, we have no first-hand data about production in the different Districts. Table XII provides a rough indirect measure. It shows the number of diamond traders or dealers living and operating in the various Districts. Presumably high production attracted dealers, while low production was followed by the departure of some dealers or by the decision not to renew their licences.

Column 5 shows that in 1956 and 1957 one third of the dealers lived outside the diamond Districts. This was an indication of the optimism and ignorance of the first two years. From 1958 to 1965 more than half the dealers lived in the Bo District and the Kenema West area (see Map VI). Apparently the deposits in these areas were very rich to start with, because they continued to satisfy the African miners for more than ten years, in spite of the fact that they worked with little or no thought for next year's operations. Column 2 suggests that production in the Kenema West area began to fall off in 1965 and that the dealers stopped operating in the following years. Column 1 suggests a decline in the Bo District in 1966 and 1970. From interviews I learnt that the decline of 1970 was the more serious one and that its first signs had been noticed one or two years earlier.

The African miners of the illicit period knew how to dig pits and recover diamonds, basic skills which were quickly learned by new recruits that flocked to the diamond fields. It must be said that many miners did not learn more than this and remained unskilled. As the nature of the deposits was such that unskilled miners were normally not at a disadvantage, the incentive to learn more was small. Nevertheless there were African miners who improved their techniques and became quite skilful. Some learned by copying SLST and some by following the advice of the Mines Department. One improvement was systematic mining; mining with trenches instead of pits. This ensured that the whole deposit was worked. Secondly, pumps were used to remove water from the pits and trenches so that the miners could go deeper. Thirdly, work was planned and organised for a period of several months, the best example being the dams built in the rivers to mine the diamonds in the river bed. Such dam projects required a considerable amount of mutual trust, co-operation and managerial talent, and African miners may not have received the respect which

Map VI. Diamond mining and trading: main areas, roads and centres

they deserve for these projects.

Finally, the miner had to learn about the commercial side. At first he underrated the value of the diamonds but soon he began to learn that these crystals, in spite of their small volume, represented a high value. The majority of the miners had learnt this lesson by 1957. There was, however, a further problem. The value of the crystals is not proportional to their weight, because the bigger ones, being rare, fetch far higher prices. This problem has fascinated jewellers for centuries.²⁰ The miners have become aware of the high value of big diamonds, but only in a general way. On the whole they have continued to underrate them. This has greatly influenced the diamond trade as we shall see in the next chapter. It must be remembered that even long-established and lucky miners are only occasionally able to sell a big diamond, so they cannot learn from experience.

8.6 *African mining in Kono after 1956*

The agreement which the Government and SLST concluded in 1955 stipulated that SLST would surrender parts of the Kono District to the Government so as to allow licensed mining by Africans. This implied that a boundary between African and European mining would come into being. It took a considerable time to agree on this boundary and to mark it out on the ground.²¹ The new boundary delineated the Kono lease of SLST, the company having its right to mine within this lease confirmed and the Government undertaking to close it to African mining and to arrest and punish illicit miners. Outside the lease the Mines Department issued licences to African miners. Although SLST had been given the first choice in Kono, the deposits which it surrendered were quite valuable. Three groups of African miners have been interested in them: the Konos; other Sierra Leoneans; and Africans from other West African countries. Below I shall refer to the second group as the Temnes and to the third as the Guineans, who formed the majority of the second and the third groups respectively. (There is admittedly a loss of accuracy in these terms, but without this simplification it is impossible to present a clear account.) It was obvious from the beginning that there was going to be conflict and rivalry because there was no room for all three groups as well as for SLST. The Government concluded at an early stage that it was necessary to expel the Guineans. An ultimatum was issued in October 1956 and some 45,000 left. Some returned later, and quite a few entrenched them-

selves by claiming that they were natives of Sierra Leone. When a Mandingo or a Foulah claimed that he was born in Sierra Leone, it was hard for the DC to disprove it.

Nobody ever said or felt that there was no room for the Konos to mine under the Scheme. Both the Government and SLST hoped that content would return to the District when the Konos could mine on their own account. SLST was genuinely interested to let bygones be bygones and to regain the goodwill of the Konos. They showed this by devising the 'contract mining scheme' under which Kono contractors were allowed to mine small deposits within the SLST lease which were unsuitable for mechanized mining. This scheme started in 1959 and gave employment to a few hundred tributors. It showed that African and European miners could operate side by side without conflict.

The great question had been whether the Temnes would be allowed to mine in Kono. In 1956 the politicians answered in the affirmative. They presumably expected that the majority of them would go to the Bo and Kenema Districts to mine and that the minority could be accommodated in Kono. They rashly decided to repeal the Diamond Industry Protection Ordinance as it seemed an anachronism after the establishment of an indigenous diamond mining industry.²² The Legislative Council agreed and the Temnes were able to enter Kono freely after 22 November 1956. The new Diamond Industry Protection Ordinance which came into force at the same time applied only to foreigners: they still needed a permit to enter Kono and were granted one only in exceptional cases.

The reaction of the Temnes was massive: thousands of them went to Kono, joining those who had already gone there stealthily. There seems to have been a general belief in Sierra Leone that the deposits in Kono were far richer than those in Mende country, and this led many Temnes to Kono, although they could have had better and more regular work in the diamond fields in Mende country. This was a serious disappointment for the Government, because the Temnes were bound to exhaust deposits for licensed mining quickly, so that afterwards the Konos would be as frustrated as before the Scheme. Moreover, the Temnes would almost certainly cross over into the SLST lease after they had exhausted the deposits outside the lease. This in fact has happened regularly since 1957. The policy of the Government was therefore modified: the Temnes were allowed to enter Kono, but only in limited numbers. It was hoped that if numbers were low, they would stick to the deposits outside the lease.

It was not immediately clear which authority should decide on the applications of the Temnes who wanted to come to Kono. The Govern-

ment could have returned to the system of before 1956, but this was tantamount to admitting that the repeal of the first Diamond Industry Protection Ordinance had been an error. Moreover, the DC for Kono was ill-equipped to deal with thousands of applications. The matter was therefore handed over to the Chiefdom authorities of the seven chiefdoms in whose territory the SLST lease was located. They were coached in the paper-work involved and from mid-1958 every Temne in Kono was supposed to possess a permit or to leave the District. The Chiefdom authorities were too generous in the eyes of the Government and in January 1959 each chiefdom was given a limit which it was not allowed to exceed when issuing permits. As the permits were printed in Freetown, the limit could be enforced easily. The Chiefdom authorities remained responsible until September 1964 when their right to issue permits was abolished.²³ Since then all non-Konos (Sierra Leonean, Guinean, Lebanese, and European) have had to apply for a permit with the District Officer — the official who, under a new name, performs the work of the colonial DC. Legally the situation of before 1956 was restored in September 1964. In practice a large number of Temnes had acquired a moral right to be in Kono by having been there for several years. These rights were respected.

The permit system has been enforced by Police action. Such action became effective after it was laid down in 1957 that non-Konos had to carry their permit with them. If a non-Kono cannot show his permit at the request of a Police officer he is arrested and charged with contravening the Diamond Industry Protection Ordinance. (The Temnes were charged with contravening the by-laws of the diamond chiefdoms in the period 1958-64.) The Police have used regular checkpoints, but have also organized campaigns to detect non-Konos, the so-called 'stranger drives'. It has been established that there is less illicit mining in Kono after each campaign and SLST has urged the Government on many occasions to mount a new campaign. But when the Government decided on a new campaign, it did so reluctantly and often after considerable delay, aware of the interpretation which the illicit miners would give to the action: a move to help the European miner and hinder the African one. A full chronology of these campaigns is not necessary, but it must be pointed out that the problem of illicit mining increased after the depletion of the deposits in the Bo and Kenema Districts. In 1968 and 1969 several campaigns followed each other in quick succession. Troops were sent to Kono to support the Police. As the campaigns had a disastrous effect on the morale and discipline of the Police and Army personnel — the men without permits tried to bribe them — the Government was anxious to

solve the Kono problem, and in December 1969 it announced its intention to take over SLST. One of its considerations was that it was easier to denounce illicit mining when the Government was the major shareholder of the company. In 1971 DIMINCO was established to take over the assets of SLST in Sierra Leone. The Government holds 51 per cent of the shares of DIMINCO and SLST 49 per cent. No notable reduction in illicit mining has occurred and I expect that the problem will continue till the deposits are exhausted, probably within the next five years.

8.7 Conflicting views on the African miner

There is a great deal of ambiguity in the views which Sierra Leoneans have held on the African diamond miner. On the one hand they are willing to praise him for his initiative and enterprise, for his efforts and success. On the other hand they suspect him of turning to illicit transactions whenever the chance is there. Praise is always mixed with — and usually overshadowed by — disapproval. How can you commend a man for his enterprise today, if he is liable to break the law tomorrow? How can you be proud of him, if foreign journalists write scathing reports about the Kono situation at irregular intervals? This moral dilemma is the reason why the term 'African diamond mining' has never caught on in Sierra Leone.²⁴ This name would explicitly recognize the Africans as entrepreneurs — but also as potential law-breakers. It has struck me that the general belief that Sierra Leoneans are not good businessmen is never refuted with examples of successful diamond miners. They do not seem respectable enough to prove the entrepreneurial qualities of the Sierra Leonean. Yet I am convinced that African diamond mining has been a valuable training ground for technical, organizational, and commercial skills, the fruits of which will be seen in coming decades. I do not deny the moral dilemma; it influenced my own views until I realized that I could avoid it by considering African diamond mining in the Bo and Kenema Districts as largely legitimate, and African mining in Kono as largely characterized by illicit operations.

European views on the African miner have been greatly influenced by the opinion of SLST. It is not surprising that SLST denounced the illicit miners of the years 1950-56. In their eyes illicit mining was as bad as theft. After 1956 SLST denounced the Africans who invaded the company leases to dig illicitly. The right to denounce them was stronger after opportunities for African miners had been created elsewhere. It is further interesting to note the view of SLST about the law-abiding African miner:

SLST saw him as unsystematic and inefficient. He did not mine the whole deposit and he did not recover every diamond crystal in the gravel which he washed. On the contract mining sites SLST insisted on systematic mining. There is much truth in the argument of SLST, although some surveys indicate that the African miners scored a higher recovery rate than was generally assumed.²⁵ It must be mentioned that the argument that European-directed operations were technically superior to African-directed operations was not new in West Africa. It was also used when plantations were advocated in the 1910s and 1920s to supplant the African peasant farmer.

It does not seem likely that an objective comparison will ever be made. The main problem is that we do not know the volume or the value of the production of the African miners. They have not recorded their own production and records of dealers and exporters give too low a figure, see next chapter. Taking these uncertainties into account it may be said that the number of carats legitimately produced by African miners has exceeded the production of SLST in at least seven years. It may well be that diamond mining will come to an end before a consensus of opinion emerges about the African miner. If the final opinion is favourable, and if he is seen as an entrepreneur who has marked a certain phase of economic emancipation, it is essential that we establish more information about him. I have gained the impression that the large majority of the African miners have consisted of Interior Africans. Tribes largely or entirely consisting of Interior Africans have frequently been mentioned: Temne, Mende, Kono, Limba, Koranko, Loko, Foulah, etc. On the other hand Coastal Africans have played a minor role. Very few Creoles went to the diamond fields, and the people of Sherbro and the Northern Rivers have also shown little interest. It is significant that the production of swamp rice and piassava — typical crops of the Coastal Belt — did not decline in the 1950s, while all other crops declined seriously. Distance alone cannot explain this meagre response of the Coastal Africans, because many of the Guineans came from far away. It is likely that the Coastal Africans were content with the economic opportunities in their own areas.

8.8 *Lebanese re-entry through the back-door*

Some Lebanese have participated in diamond mining by way of the 'native firms'. The Alluvial Diamond Mining Ordinance of 1956 per-

mitted the granting of mining licences to native firms, i.e. firms in which more than half the partners were natives of Sierra Leone or in which more than half the capital was provided by them. This meant that, if non-natives wanted to mine, they had to do so in co-operation with natives, and only as junior partners or as minority shareholders. These unattractive conditions did not discourage all foreigners. Some Lebanese and a few Europeans have joined native firms, but such mixed firms have lasted only as long as mutual trust prevailed. Trust between Lebanese and Africans has been more common than between Europeans and Africans. There seem to have been two periods in which native firms flourished. First in 1955-6 when there was great optimism among educated Sierra Leoneans. They brought capital together, and ordered machinery. They intended to work as mining companies, similar to SLST but on a smaller scale. Mende and Creoles were the main shareholders in these companies, but some Lebanese were asked to join, partly because of their capital and partly because of their business reputation. If the African shareholders had a job in Freetown, the work on the spot devolved on the Lebanese. All these ventures flopped. Apparently machinery and literacy were no advantage in the early years. Speed of operations and the selection of promising sites were more important. A second boom in native firms occurred between 1959 and 1964²⁶ and was connected with the dam building projects. These firms were set up for the duration of a project and no machines were needed, except pumps. A fair amount of working capital was necessary, however, to feed the tributors during the early unproductive months. Several Lebanese in the villages along the Sewa were drawn in to help with the capital. In some cases the Lebanese were only lenders (see p. 189), in other cases they became partners and had a say in the planning of the project. It seems that on technical matters they deferred to the opinion of the African miners.

Some Lebanese I spoke to talked about their mining projects as if there were no African partners. This may have been an attempt to impress, but it may also have reflected the true situation in which the Africans had no function but to make the Lebanese project eligible for a licence. I guess that such firms were only established after 1961, i.e. after the good years were over. Only then could the Chiefs allocate land to Lebanese miners, without arousing the protest of their own people.

Lebanese mining, by way of the native firms, has been negligible. The caratage to which they have been entitled in this way has been small, certainly less than five percent of all diamonds mined under the Scheme. Their share in the profits of diamond mining — as distinct from trading

— has been meagre, too. I have not heard of any Lebanese who became wealthy because of mining.

A comparison of the role of the Lebanese in gold and diamond mining is instructive. Their participation in gold mining was significant, but in diamond mining it was negligible. There is no reason to assume that their interest in diamond mining was smaller. The explanation must be sought in the circumstances. I believe that legal restriction had some effect, but more important was the emancipation of the Africans of the Interior. In the 1930s they were content with the role of labourer or tributor; in the 1950s they were determined to mine on their own account.

The diamond trade

African diamond mining gave rise to the trade in diamonds in Sierra Leone. This trade was entirely illegal in the period from 1950 to 1956, because the supplies came from illicit miners. When African mining was legalized in 1956, the diamond trade also became legal. We shall discuss the marketing pattern which the Government designed for the legitimate trade, and further the main exporter and the dealers. We shall devote two sections to the Lebanese dealers because they have dominated the trade. Next we shall discuss the illegal transactions which continued after 1956 and the measures which the Government took to curb them.

Even before 1950 there was a kind of trade. It was entirely based on diamonds stolen from the SLST plants. This trade we shall discuss first, because it came earlier in time.

9.1 *Illicit diamond buying (IDB) before 1950*

Theft by employees became a problem for SLST in the course of the 1930s. As early as 1934 the company decided to establish a security force to operate mainly at the mine, supervising employees and preventing opportunities for stealing. In spite of the force theft continued. Fortunately for SLST there was a second line of theft prevention. The Minerals Ordinance contained a clause on unlawful possession, which applied to gold and diamonds.¹ Only the personnel of SLST could be lawfully in possession of diamonds. If anybody else was found in possession of diamonds he could be charged with 'unlawful possession'. The officers of the SLST security force were given the right to search the premises of people whom they suspected of IDB. They could charge these people with unlawful pos-

session if diamonds were found. Normally a conviction followed and the diamonds were forfeited and handed back to SLST. In this way a proportion of the diamonds which slipped through the security net at the mine were recovered by the company. Moreover, IDB became risky, because of the penalties for unlawful possession: imprisonment for up to one year or a fine, in addition to forfeiture of the diamonds. Potential IDB men could be watched closely, and if they then stopped buying diamonds, the employees of SLST might cease stealing for lack of customers. The unlawful possession clause was, albeit indirectly, very important for the security arrangements of SLST.

Traders, in particular, were suspected of IDB. They were almost the only people with ready cash. In 1931 there were very few traders in Kono. The Census of that year showed for instance that there were no Lebanese there.² When SLST engaged personnel and began to spend money in Kono, trade increased rapidly, and traders from elsewhere came to Kono to set up shops. Until 1936, when the Diamond Industry Protection Ordinance was passed, they needed only the permission of the Chief. A few Lebanese settled in Gandorhun (on the road from Segbwema to Sefadu) and one, a Mr. Koussa, in Koidu. After 1936 though, the non-Konos needed a permit from the District Commissioner as well. Some of those who had come earlier had to leave because their store licences were not renewed. SLST preferred local Kono traders in the area close to the mine. It made some attempts to dislodge Mr. Koussa, but these were unsuccessful because he had acquired a land lease.

It seems that this close control of traders was effective. IDB was suppressed in Kono and was localized far to the south in the railway towns, notably in Blama. SLST assumed that Africans — either employees or accomplices — carried the stolen diamonds south and that some Lebanese in the railway towns were willing to buy them. Presumably these Lebanese took the diamonds to Freetown. How the diamonds were transported to Europe remained a mystery. Few Lebanese could afford to travel to Europe, and those who could were ignorant about life and commerce there. It is therefore likely that Europeans were enlisted to carry the diamonds to Europe. Sailors were in a good position to do this.

The unlawful possession clause had some curious effects. Illicit buyers hid their diamonds carefully so that they would not be found during a search; and when they carried the diamonds with them when travelling, they devised ingenious methods to avoid detection. The security force and the Police Force tried to match the ingenuity of the IDB men, resulting in a constant battle of wits.³ One reason why the clause had been drafted

was the fact that 'unlawful possession' could be proved more easily than theft or the fencing of stolen goods. The possibility remained, however, that a man in whose premises or luggage diamonds were found was innocent. Some men who were charged with unlawful possession said in their defence that their enemies had hidden the diamonds in their house and had then informed the Police.⁴ In other cases sons or relatives had hidden the diamonds without telling the occupant of the house. There was thus a weakness in the clause.

European opinion in Sierra Leone strongly condemned IDB, and this view was shared by the majority of the Lebanese and Africans. During World War II the evil of IDB appeared in a worse light than ever before. It was believed that IDB concentrated on industrial diamonds and that these, because of their strategic value, were smuggled to Germany. IDB was therefore a form of treason. It was made an important factor in a novel set in war-time Sierra Leone.⁵ A Freetown Lebanese who was deported just after the war was assumed to have been guilty of diamond smuggling.

9.2 The illicit trade, 1950-1956

When African mining started, a different kind of illicit diamonds appeared. The illicit miners must be differentiated sharply from the thieving employees, because the majority of them saw their operations as completely different from theft. Neither SLST nor the illicit buyers appreciated this difference at first. The company condemned the illicit miners as strongly as the thieves. Both took diamonds which belonged to the company. Both upset its operations and reduced profits. The illicit buyers probably at first disbelieved the stories of the illicit miners and believed that the SLST employees had thought up a new story. Only when the number of diamonds greatly increased did they understand that a new and promising line of supply had been opened.

The Government received reports from three different sources in the early 1950s. SLST summarized the information collected by its security force. The District Commissioners in Bo, Kenema, Sefadu and Kailahun reported what came to their knowledge. Thirdly, the Police collected information in the Colony and, after September 1952, in Kono itself. These reports agreed that the illicit trade was flourishing as never before and that the additional supplies came from African miners. It was also clear that most of the illicit buyers were Lebanese shopkeepers in the railway

towns and that the number of Lebanese suspected of IDB increased. When assessing these reports the Government could make either the IDB or the IDM interpretation. In the IDM (illicit diamond mining) interpretation the miners, i.e. Africans, were seen as the cause of the trouble. They had discovered that diamond mining was profitable and were determined to mine as many diamonds as they could. These miners then approached a number of potential buyers until they found someone who was prepared to buy. The Lebanese buyers, in this view, were only aiding and abetting the African miners. In the IDB interpretation, however, the Lebanese were the cause of the trouble. They had persuaded the Africans to mine illicitly. The Africans, in this view, had been reluctant and benefited very little because they were poorly paid. The IDB men benefited greatly because they paid low prices and received high ones abroad. Their determination to make the most of the trade had led them to set up IDB rings which organized the smuggling.⁶

It is not surprising that the colonial government was reluctant to accept the IDM interpretation. It had assumed that the Africans, notably in the Protectorate, showed little enterprise and had to be helped and protected.⁷ The political situation seemed to demand measures to speed up emancipation in the Protectorate. It was hard to believe that there was in one of the most backward Districts a form of African enterprise which competed with European enterprise. It was much easier to accept the IDB interpretation and put the blame on foreigners. It was also more expedient, because the Lebanese had no political influence.

Unfortunately for the Government, the IDM interpretation was correct. Until the Government realised this in 1954, its measures had little effect. Suppression of IDB was given a much higher priority than the suppression of illicit mining. The Government hoped that illicit mining would disappear of its own accord as soon as IDB was suppressed. In the end the measures taken to stop illicit mining came too late. Again, the suppression of IDB had side effects. Since it was impossible to watch everybody, the Police had to single out certain people as more suspect than others. The choice of the Lebanese was justified on the basis of Police intelligence, but the generalization that followed was not. There was no reason to suspect all Lebanese. This attitude, unfortunately, prevailed in Government circles.⁸ It brought a further estrangement between the Lebanese community and the Government. It soon became impossible for the Government to appeal successfully to the law-abiding Lebanese for help to curb the diamond smuggling.

The efforts of the Police to break up the IDB networks were concen-

trated in Freetown, because until 1954 the Police Force operated only in the Colony and some isolated areas of the Protectorate. So Lebanese shopkeepers from the diamond areas who travelled to Freetown — ostensibly to buy general merchandise, but in fact to sell diamonds — put their head in the lion's mouth. It was a nerve-racking experience to travel on the slow train and to know that the Police were on the lookout for any Lebanese who had boarded the train at or beyond Blama. And even when a man got off the train without being stopped, how could he know that he was not being trailed by a plain clothes policeman who was hoping to find the big man who smuggled the diamonds out of the country? In fact, a 'diamond trafficker' might have great problems in finding a buyer in Freetown, as many well-established Lebanese in Freetown refused to have anything to do with diamonds. While a trafficker went round, he was constantly in danger of arrest. In November 1952 two Lebanese from Blama were arrested in the centre of Freetown with 250 diamonds in their possession.⁹ Both were sentenced to three month's imprisonment. Moreover, the judge ordered the deportation of one of them; although this deportation order was cancelled after an appeal, it served to scare many Lebanese who dreaded deportation more than any other punishment. Some Lebanese thought that it was easier to escape the attention of the Police if they travelled to Freetown by car, but the Police responded with road checks between Hastings and Waterloo; some traffickers were caught in this way.¹⁰ The Police also kept a close watch on the harbour and the airport. If a diamond smuggler was caught, he was charged under the Customs Ordinance and could expect the forfeiture of the diamonds and a fine of three times their value. Unless a smuggler was very confident about his hiding techniques, he would not attempt to travel with diamonds in his luggage or on his person; and still, some of those who tried were caught.¹¹

As the successes of the Police increased — 4790 diamonds with a value of £ 75,000 were seized in 1953 — some traffickers decided to travel to Liberia and sell their diamonds in Monrovia instead of in Freetown. This was quite a distance and roads were few, but it seems that Lebanese smugglers travelled by car to the boundary, then hid their car, and crossed the boundary on foot or by canoe. When they were in Liberia they could breathe a sigh of relief because neither the possession nor the sale of diamonds was illegal there, but they still had a strenuous journey to the nearest road-head, where they would be able to find lorry or car transport to Monrovia. The smugglers found hospitality with compatriots or even relatives there. Once the diamonds had been sold or mailed to a trusted address in Europe, the smuggler would return the same way, collect his

car and drive back to his shop. Many smugglers made arrangements with compatriots in Liberia to facilitate and shorten future trips to Monrovia, so that soon the pioneering problems were overcome and the Monrovia route was greatly preferred to the Freetown route. This diversion of the illicit trade happened in or before 1954. It was an unintended result of the decision of the Government to concentrate on the suppression of IDB rather than IDM. As supplies increased in 1954, some diamond buyers from Europe considered it worth-while to set up an office in Monrovia. It was later estimated that diamonds worth £ 12 million had been smuggled out of Sierra Leone in 1955.¹² Most of these had probably gone via Monrovia. African smugglers, mainly Mandingos, used the same route.¹³

We have still to note some aspects of this period which had great influence on the legitimate trade after 1956. Nearly all the traffickers who made diamonds their main business bought a car, a fast one if they could afford it. They discovered that speed mattered, in carrying diamonds as well as in meeting customers and partners. There was also the beginning of a selection process, especially among the Lebanese. The diamonds attracted the poor who had nothing to lose and men who loved gambling more than trading. Many young men engaged in IDB, too: they could endure the physical and nervous strain better. Moreover, if they had been born in Sierra Leone, as most of them had, they could not be deported (see p. 274). So this period favoured the young, the poor and the gamblers among the Lebanese. The selection process among African traffickers has not been studied, but appears to have been different.

IDB's bad odour began to disappear in 1954. The African miners who began to dig in the Bo and Kenema Districts far from the SLST mine did not feel that they encroached on somebody else's rights. They felt that there was nothing morally wrong in their actions, and consequently, they could not condemn the Lebanese who bought from them. While Creole opinion about the Lebanese traffickers remained negative, the Mende became more friendly, which in turn influenced the Lebanese in Mende country. Those who had stayed clear of diamonds before, became prepared to buy diamonds illicitly. Thus the number of illicit buyers increased during 1954 and 1955.

When a diamond trafficker or smuggler was caught, the Police prepared a case for the prosecution. After some time it became clear that it was difficult to present a cast-iron case for diamond offences. It was very frustrating for the Police to be convinced of the guilt of a man and then to see him acquitted because the case for the prosecution was not complete in the eyes of the judge. It appears that the Police then proposed deporta-

tion as a punishment. I would like to call such deportations 'executive deportations', because they were not based on the recommendation of a judge. The Governor agreed to this controversial course of action in 1954 and some Lebanese aliens were deported as a result in 1955. The Lebanese feared the arbitrary element in this new policy. Doubts lurked in their minds. Had the Governor enough evidence to punish a man in this way? Could equal punishment of offenders be guaranteed? What had become of the rule of law? There is no doubt that this new policy further alienated the Lebanese community from the British authorities.

9.3 The marketing design of 1955

As soon as the Government had decided in principle on the legalization of African mining, it had to consider the marketing aspect. Since the diamond trade was a collecting trade, the Government turned for inspiration to the cases of collecting trade which already existed: the produce trade and the gold trade under the Alluvial Gold Mining Scheme. Some elements of these can be recognized in the diamond trade, the licensed diamond dealers, for instance, resemble gold buyers and produce middlemen. However, the fixed producers' price, the cornerstone of the SLPMB and also a feature of the gold trade, has been absent in the diamond trade. This is due to the enormous variety of the diamond crystals in size, colour, shape, and purity. Price fixation for diamonds is therefore extremely difficult, and of value to a few people only. Since each crystal has to be examined separately at each transaction, no bulking can take place and the term 'wholesale' cannot be used in its normal sense. Diamond buying takes a lot of time and each trader needs long experience. It was therefore both too difficult and too risky for the Government to establish its own buying organization on the lines of the SLPMB. We shall see below whom the Government issued licences to, and how satisfied or dissatisfied the Government was with their performance.

In the absence of a fixed producers' price, the Government had no means of protecting the African miner in his transactions with the dealers. Judging by the objectives of the SLPMB the Government would have liked to have done so. An independent check was arranged on prices, but this concerned the prices paid by exporter to dealer and not the prices paid by dealers to miners.¹⁴ It is significant that this deficiency was discussed only in the early years but failed to arouse interest afterwards. Presumably the African miner was able to fend for himself and soon

obtained prices close to those paid by the exporter. As in the other collecting trades, the tax was levied at the export stage in the form of an export duty, and the exporter was given the responsibility of collecting the tax by deducting it from the prices he paid out.

The marketing design of 1955 proved suitable. This was mainly due to the vagueness of the clauses about dealers. Nothing was said about capital, transport, working hours, or records. In 1957 two minor alterations proved necessary: dealers were required to keep records of all their transactions. At the same time they were given the right to sell to other dealers instead of only to the exporters.¹⁵ This was an advantage for dealers without a car.

9.4 *The Diamond Corporation*

When the Government began its search for diamond exporters, it looked first for suitable candidates in Sierra Leone. It considered the commercial banks which had handled the export of gold for some twenty years, but it was realized that the competence of the banks in the field of diamonds was limited. SLST was also considered, in spite of the conflict with this company.¹⁶ Unwilling and unable to undertake this additional task SLST introduced the Government to the Diamond Corporation in London, which company formed part of the Central Selling Organization that had been set up by the De Beers group in the 1930s and has controlled and stabilized the world diamond market ever since. The CSO had grown worried about the diamond rush in Sierra Leone, because it brought large quantities of good diamonds onto the outside market — the market not controlled by the CSO. It was in the interest of the CSO that the supplies which were going to come from Sierra Leone after the legalization of the diamond rush, should be channelled into the CSO market, and this could only be done by a buying organization on the spot. The Diamond Corporation was therefore interested in coming to Sierra Leone at the same moment that the Government became worried about finding a good exporter. The two parties were able to come to an agreement easily in August 1955. Co-operation has continued for nearly twenty years, although the terms have been changed on several occasions.

The Diamond Corporation possessed qualities which were important for the Government: it was competent, and trustworthy. It combined a thorough knowledge of diamond prices with large financial resources, a combination nowhere matched in the world. The Government could

expect an effective buying organization and thorough — but not disinterested — advice on diamond problems. The Government wanted a trustworthy exporter who would keep its books properly, declare its exports, collect the export duty and pay satisfactory prices to the miners. All reports indicated that the Diamond Corporation could be trusted so the Government adopted it as the main exporter. It was not expedient to make the Diamond Corporation the sole exporter, because the word 'monopoly' had very bad implications at the time. The banks were therefore also granted an exporter's licence in 1956. But in August 1959 the Government Diamond Office (GDO) was established as the sole exporter of the diamonds mined under the Alluvial Diamond Mining Scheme, and the licences of the banks were cancelled.¹⁷ Thus the Diamond Corporation which has managed the GDO since its inception, has been in practice the sole legal exporter since 1959.

The Diamond Corporation uses a classification of diamond crystals which has been worked out in the course of many years. All supplies of the CSO are classified according to this system and prices are fixed for each class of diamonds. These prices are entered in a book, the 'price book'. The sorters whom the Diamond Corporation employs are trained on the basis of this classification, while the buyers whom the Diamond Corporation has sent to Sierra Leone have all been sorters before or have taken a sorting course. The success of the operations of the Diamond Corporation in Sierra Leone should be explained by the number and experience of the buyers. The Diamond Corporation established several subsidiaries in Sierra Leone, two of which we should mention here: the Diamond Corporation Sierra Leone (DCSL or Dicosil, 1956) and the Diamond Corporation West Africa (DCWA or Dircorwaf, 1961). As far as buying operations are concerned, it must be remembered that the buyers were freely transferred between these subsidiaries and the GDO. In the eyes of the dealers there was no difference between them. I shall therefore speak of the 'Diamond Corporation' without specifying which subsidiary fulfilled a particular task.

The first personnel of the Diamond Corporation came to Sierra Leone in October 1955. They succeeded in creating an organization which was ready to commence buying in February 1956. The main office was in Bo, but others were established in Kono and Kenema. Apart from the office buyers, there were travelling buyers who trekked through the bush to buy directly from the miners. The buyers were guided by a price book which had been prepared by the Diamond Corporation and approved by the Government. This book resembled the price book in London except that

prices were lower. The difference consisted of the export duty for the Government and the gross profit margin of the company. The buyers were instructed to pay the prices shown in the book — prices which were higher than most miners and dealers had been used to in the illicit period. Information about the prices gradually seeped through and improved the bargaining position of the miners. This was a major benefit for Sierra Leone, the credit for which must go to the Diamond Corporation.

Some deficiencies of the price book came to light in the second year of buying; it was too rigid for instance. A new price book was therefore adopted in August 1959 when the GDO was established, in which many prices were higher than before. This was achieved by two concessions: the Government agreed to a lower export duty and the Diamond Corporation to a lower profit margin. The procedure for revising the price book was simplified in 1959 and many revisions — all upward ones — have since been made.

9.5 *The dealers*

It seems that the Government gave less thought to the selection of the dealers after it had found satisfactory exporters. Section 12 of the Ordinance gave the Chief Inspector of Mines the authority to grant a dealer's licence 'to any person'. The absence of any restriction deserves comment, because two kinds of restriction have, almost certainly, been considered at some time: a nationalistic one to 'natives of Sierra Leone', and a moral one to 'bona fide dealers'. Why did the nationalism, which restricted mining to 'natives of Sierra Leone', not insist on a similar restriction in the field of dealing? The politicians knew that the absence of such a restriction would benefit the Lebanese in particular. We have speculated about possible reasons: the politicians may have felt that the Sierra Leoneans were not able to conduct the trade, because of lack of capital, for instance. Or they may have felt that the Lebanese should be allowed to trade in this field as well. Perhaps they expected that the profits of dealing would be small compared with those of mining.

As to the moral restriction, many people wanted to exclude former traffickers and smugglers, but a clause disqualifying people who had been convicted for unlawful possession for a dealer's licence could hardly have been inserted. For one thing it would lead to the question of why a similar disqualification for a miner's licence was absent. Moreover, the number of convictions was only a fraction of the number of traffickers and smug-

glers. The following solution was therefore chosen: 'The Chief Inspector of Mines may, in his absolute discretion, refuse [a licence]'. He also received the right to revoke licences 'for good cause'. But it was asking for trouble to insert these clauses. Was the Chief Inspector supposed to refuse every applicant who had been suspected of diamond trafficking, or only those who had been convicted? And if the Police suspected all Lebanese, was this a reason to refuse all Lebanese applicants?¹⁸ These questions were never answered in the 1950s because there was never complete unanimity in the Government about them. As a routine precaution against abuse, a right of appeal was granted to people who felt aggrieved by a decision of the Chief Inspector, which had to be decided by the Minister of Mines. At the time the Chief Inspector was a British official and the Minister a Sierra Leonean politician. It soon turned out that the Minister and the official had different views about the granting of dealer's licences.

There are no records available about the people who applied for a licence unsuccessfully, but the names of those who received a dealer's licence were published in the Gazette. Our conclusions and figures below are based on the licences that were granted. The participation of Europeans at the dealer level has been remarkably small: their number have never exceeded two in a year. All these men came to Sierra Leone because of the diamonds and had no prior connection with the country. Some sought an African or Lebanese partner to pave their way. None of them stayed long: only one held out for four years. The illicit past of the diamond trade deterred many Europeans. They knew that they would be watched by the Police and suspected by their friends, if they took out a dealer's licence.

The absence of strong European participation led, as one would have expected, to a dominant position for the Lebanese. This is only partly borne out by Table XIII, which shows the numbers but not the turnover of the dealers. I estimate that the Lebanese have handled three quarters of the total turnover on average over the years. The Table has been simplified by the omission of the European and Indian dealers, as they have been very few.¹⁹

The distinction between Lebanese and Africans has never been used by the Mines Department and our figures were arrived at by reading all the names of the dealers in the Gazette and classifying them as Lebanese, Africans, Europeans, or Indians. In 1958 the Mines Department introduced the category 'Native of Sierra Leone'; and all others were 'non-natives'. Europeans and Lebanese were classified as non-natives. More-

Table XIII. *Lebanese and African licensed diamond dealers, by official categories, 1956 - 1972*

	Lebanese		African	
1956	171		107	
1957	237		162	
1957	161		81	
	Non-native	Native	Native	Non-native
1958	32	14	124	0
1959	83	23	152	0
1960	108	28	180	0
1961	96	27	164	1
1962	71	17	78	0
	Non-citizen	Citizen	Citizen	Non-citizen
1963	100	—	65	0
1964	118	—	72	2
1965	130	2	68	0
1966	107	3	57	2
1967	91	4	54	1
1968	104	7	60	1
1969	110	7	73	3
1970	119	8	39	6
1971	124	15	43	5
1972	113	14	44	2

Notes:

- a. Employees of the Diamond Corporation and the Government Diamond Office are excluded from the table.
- b. The second row for 1957 shows the situation after 1 October.

Sources:

Government Notices in the *Sierra Leone Gazette* and files of the Mines Department

over, foreign Africans were non-natives, and although the Table shows only one foreign African, it is most likely that there were many foreign Africans among the dealers. In 1956 fifty of them had been issued with a licence by the Mines Department,²⁰ but many of these men claimed birth in Sierra Leone when the Mines Department wanted to classify them as non-natives. As the fees for non-natives were higher, their desire to be classified as natives is understandable. Afro-Lebanese born in Sierra Leone were classified as natives: the second column shows Afro-Lebanese for the period 1958-62 while the first column for the same period consists of full Lebanese.

After new citizenship legislation had been passed in 1962, the term 'native of Sierra Leone' had to be removed from the existing legislation, and the terms 'citizen' and 'non-citizen' were introduced. The Afro-Lebanese lost their status as 'natives' and became 'non-citizens'. This meant that they had to pay higher fees. We counted eight Afro-Lebanese dealers who held a licence in 1962 but not in 1963. Apparently they had given up because of the higher licence costs. After May 1965 Afro-Lebanese dealers qualified again for citizen's licences (see Chapter 16). In 1966 full Lebanese began to appear on the lists of citizen dealers. These were men who had been naturalized.²¹ It has been suggested that many Lebanese applied for naturalization because of the lower fee, but I do not think that a difference of 600 Leones (£ 300) per year would have been a major consideration for a dealer.

At first the fees were very low: £ 25 per year, and the number of applicants was, not surprisingly, quite high. They were raised in 1959: natives had to pay £ 100 per year and non-natives £ 250. In April 1961 the fees were raised again: £ 200 for natives and £ 1000 for non-natives. The effect of this was not felt until 1962, as most 1961 licences had been issued before the fees were raised. The Table shows clearly that many dealers gave up in 1962. When in 1963 the fees had to be reconsidered because of the new non-citizen category, the fee was fixed on £ 500 for non-citizens. The fees have remained on this level ever since, although the currency change-over in 1964 brought a nominal change: Le 400 for citizens and Le 1000 for non-citizens. In the light of these figures the fee of 1956-8 seems

Table XIV. *Half-yearly diamond dealer's licences, by official categories, 1963 - 1972*

	Total	Citizen	Non-citizen
1963	23	9	14
1964	45	20	25
1965	33	12	21
1966	25	10	15
1967	22	13	9
1968	42	16	26
1969	16	16	0
1970	18	7	11
1971	30	8	22
1972	4	0	4

Source:

Government Notices in the *Sierra Leone Gazette*

very low, but we must remember that the Government at that time was more interested in the legalization of the trade than in raising revenue. In 1963 the Mines Department introduced the half-yearly dealer's licence, which runs from 1 July to 31 December of a year and costs only half the price of a whole year's licence. It seems to have suited some dealers and proved quite popular with citizens as well as non-citizens, as Table XIV shows.

The half-yearly licences form 10 to 25 per cent of the total. This means there is a fringe of poorer or more cautious dealers, who can enter the trade when prospects improve, as in 1964 and 1968. They guarantee more competition, although lack of competition has never been a feature of the diamond trade, as we shall see.

9.6 *The Lebanese dealers, 1956-1960*

Probably all the Lebanese who had trafficked in diamonds before applied for a dealer's licence in 1956, but they were not the only ones to do so. Many rich and law-abiding Lebanese who had avoided diamonds in the past decided to apply for a licence, too. Among them were several important men from Freetown. Since they could not leave their businesses there, they appointed agents to buy for them in the diamond areas. The records of the Mines Department for 1956 had a special column indicating whether a dealer operated on his own account or as agent of somebody else. As virtually all dealers in the first category employed agents, I shall call them 'principals'. There were 45 Lebanese principals and 126 Lebanese agents in 1956. The principals had three agents on average and about half of them lived in Freetown. (There are some indications that several agents had problems in finding a principal.²²) Among the principals were many established, wealthy Lebanese. Many observers at the time may have thought that they would quickly gain control of diamond buying. The opposite happened: 32 withdrew within the first five years.²³ Only nine of the remaining thirteen men could be considered as successful, and of those only three were Freetown Lebanese. Even these three had to transfer to the diamond areas in order to achieve success.

This high failure rate was partly caused by a change in Government policy. Until April 1957 dealer's licences were granted liberally, but the new Minister of Mines — there had been elections in May 1957 — adopted a different policy. As a first step he revoked 159 licences in Sep-

tember out of a total of 400, mostly because the dealers involved had sold very little to the licenced exporters. Some of these dealers were smugglers but others had done little business because they lived in the wrong place, such as the 52 dealers in Freetown. Nearly half the revoked licences belonged to Lebanese. The second step concerned the licences for 1958. A distinction was introduced between native and non-native dealers — we must remember that virtually all non-natives were Lebanese. Each non-native dealer had to make a security deposit of £ 3000 in cash after his application had been approved, which would be confiscated if he was convicted for a diamond offence. Also the number of non-native dealers was to be limited to between 50 and 70 in 1958.²⁴ Such drastic discrimination against 'non-natives' was very favourable to 'natives of Sierra Leone' as is illustrated in Table XIII. Legally the distinction was nationalistic, in practice it became racial in character. This was not surprising as the word 'native' had often been used in a racial sense in Sierra Leone. The distinction favoured Africans, including foreigners who claimed birth in Sierra Leone, and discriminated against the Lebanese. At least, that is how it was seen in Sierra Leone — and, we think, that in fact was what it meant. The rule that dealers had to 'present themselves personally, bringing their licence fee and two photographs with them' when collecting their licence was significant.²⁵

Applications for licences for 1958 and following years had to be made well in advance so that the Mines Department could check on 'past performance' and on the 'regular place of business'. Applicants who could not 'prove to the satisfaction of the Chief Inspector of Mines' that they had a 'regular place of business' in the diamond areas were not considered. Officials of the Department made inspection visits for this purpose. The names of the men whose applications had been approved were then published in the *Gazette*.

It soon turned out that the deposit of £ 3000 was far too high for the Lebanese. Those who had relied on a principal for capital found that no principal was willing to put up a deposit for them. Some applied in optimism but could not scrape the money together when their application had been approved. The approval was subsequently withdrawn.²⁶ Only 32 full Lebanese received a licence²⁷ — an enormous reduction because at the end of 1957 161 Lebanese (including Afro-Lebanese) had held a licence. It seems that many Lebanese combined to make the most of the few licences; some brothers did so for instance. Other Lebanese looked for Afro-Lebanese partners, or only used them as a front. I have the impression that one effect of the discrimination against the Lebanese was a pres-

sure on the Afro-Lebanese to enter the diamond trade (see Table XIII).

The deposit was lowered to £ 1000 at the end of 1958. This was no longer prohibitive and the number of Lebanese dealers rose to 83 in 1959, higher than the limit decided upon in September 1957. I think that the Government had become less hostile to the Lebanese. One explanation must be sought in the Kono difficulties of the second half of 1958 (see Section 11).

Although Government policy was unfavourable to the Lebanese, especially in 1957 and 1958, the early years of legitimate trade were crucial for the Lebanese. It was then that they gained experience, learned about prices, and accumulated capital. It was also a hard time when many failed and lost their starting capital. Many young and poor men tried their luck as dealers in 1956. They had to borrow money from their fathers, or find a principal who was willing to accept them as agents, and provided them with working capital. Most of them were travelling dealers, who could give their undivided attention to the diamonds. Since at that time there were no opportunities for a young man except in diamonds the young Lebanese went after the big money, but it would be wrong to depict them only as men who wanted 'to get rich quick', to use a popular expression of those days. The Lebanese community had always admired the pioneer and the diamond trade was a new field in which pioneers could prove their mettle. There was also a desire for excitement, and for daring actions which would arouse admiration among Lebanese and African friends. I guess that there was a strong desire to outwit the Europeans as well. Many of the young Lebanese came from the Northern Province where prospects in produce and general merchandise trade were bad. Most of them had friends in the diamond areas who could help with accomodation: 47 per cent of the Lebanese dealers in 1957 gave an address in either Bo, Blama, Boajibu, or Kenema; in Bo alone 22 per cent. The Lebanese in Bo and Blama had been building modern houses and the influx of dealers further stimulated their construction.²⁸

With so many men throwing themselves into the trade, it is not surprising that competition grew fierce. We gather that no miner, however remote, was neglected by the dealers. The Lebanese could have repeated the pattern of the produce trade by settling in villages near the diggings, but in fact, they rarely did so. Only in the upper Sewa area, where Boajibu had been the farthest point of Lebanese settlement, did Lebanese dealers move north and rent houses in Moindu, Barma, Konta, and Formaya. On the whole they preferred to live in relative comfort in a nearby town and to travel every day to the diggings. There was a psychological element in

this. It would impress the miner more if the Lebanese dashed around in a big, fast car than if he lived rather primitively in a village.

Another group of Lebanese dealers were the shopkeepers in Mende country. They found that diamond buying could be profitably combined with selling general merchandise. As many miners did not keep the money which they received for their diamonds, but spent it at once in the shops, a lot of Lebanese shopkeepers, including older men, applied for a licence. I shall call them 'shopkeepers-cum-dealers'. Their business expanded when the African miners turned to mining projects which required more organization, notably to the dam-building projects in the Sewa River. Such projects involved a sequence of operations (dam building, draining, gravel removal and washing, diamond recovery) which tied the miners to their project which they would not abandon once they had worked on it for a few weeks. When these miners needed equipment and food, they asked a local shopkeeper-cum-dealer to supply these on credit. As in the produce trade, they promised to sell their production to him and to repay the credit with the proceeds of the diamonds. Many Lebanese shopkeepers agreed to give credit on these terms. Such credits were highly speculative: if the project yielded no diamonds, they would lose all or most of their money; on the other hand if the project was successful, they would benefit a great deal.²⁹ A Lebanese would only take this risk if he trusted the licence holder as an honest, competent, and vigilant man; only thus would he be sure that all diamonds to be recovered from the project would end up with him. The shopkeepers-cum-dealers who financed mining projects lived mainly in the villages along the Sewa: Yamandu, Baoma, Boajibu, Barma, Konta, etc. We have already seen that some dealers settled in villages north of Boajibu. We gather that most of them opened shops as well.

9.7 The Lebanese dealers after 1960

The diamond trade settled down to a regular pattern in the 1960s, at least in the Bo and Kenema Districts. The Mines Department abandoned its restrictive policy towards the Lebanese. Although every application was still scrutinized and checked by the Police, an applicant could be reasonably certain to get a licence after 1960. Two considerations had influenced the Mines Department. It had become a costly decision to refuse a Lebanese application since the fees had been raised in 1959 and 1961. Also it

seemed fairer to punish a real offence afterwards than to start off by refusing a licence, and the Government had various punishments at its disposal. If a diamond dealer committed an offence against the Alluvial Diamond Mining Ordinance, and it could be proved in court, he would be charged in the normal way. If, however, the Police and the Mines Department were unable to marshal enough evidence to be sure of a conviction, they would approach the Governor (and later the Prime Minister) and recommend a deportation order in the case of an alien. No such measure was available to punish Lebanese who were born in Sierra Leone until the Diamond Industry Protection Ordinance was amended in February 1959. The Governor was then given the right to expel a man from the diamond areas if this was considered 'expedient for the peace, order or good government' of the area. Such expulsions did not require a prior conviction in a court and were used against Sierra Leoneans, Lebanese born in Sierra Leone, and Africans from the Gambia and Nigeria, that is people who could not be deported.³⁰

Several of the Lebanese who had been refused a licence in 1958 and 1959 had bought secretly. Buying without a licence came to an end in the 1960s, mainly because it was not tolerated by the other dealers. They would inform the Police and get rid of a rival who was distorting competition by not paying his fee. This is not generally known among Sierra Leoneans who believe that every Lebanese will buy diamonds if he gets the chance. The association between diamond buying and the Lebanese is deep-rooted.

The Lebanese remained the dominant dealers in the Bo and Kenema Districts in the 1960s. One of their advantages was that they or their parents had lived and traded in Mende country for many years, so they knew the people and the area well. And this knowledge of local affairs was extremely important. Moreover, the Mende knew them and were used to their way of doing business.

In about 1960 the Lebanese office dealers made their appearance. These dealers sit in their offices and wait for their customers. Their terms are so good that miners and other dealers take the trouble to come to them. Most of the office dealers were travelling dealers before, and it was a major decision for them to give up visiting the miners. They were probably influenced by the decision of the Diamond Corporation to withdraw its travelling buyers and to operate with office buyers only. Most of the office dealers are a kind of wholesaler, buying mainly from other dealers, Lebanese and African, and selling to the GDO. I shall call these wholesalers the 'big dealers' as they achieve a considerable concentration of

supplies. The eighteen biggest dealers sold as much as Le 5 million in 1963.³¹

The natural location for wholesalers is Kenema, and most of them live there; others have lived in Bo, Koidu, and Blama. Their offices are upstairs, which provides more security and reduces the noise from the street. They are well-designed and tidy, and provided with modern apparatus: Mettler scales, air conditioners, refrigerators for drinks, a big desk, and sumptuous furniture. If a customer has to wait, he can admire these things at leisure and in comfort, for they are meant to demonstrate the efficiency and knowledge of the dealer. As a show of wealth is necessary to impress the customers, all successful office dealers have big houses and big new cars. They convey the message that this dealer has always been able to get high prices (through the proper channels or not) and that he can afford to be generous when paying his customers. Some dealers make sure that information about their sales to the GDO become the subject of gossip. A civil servant told me that a Kenema dealer had once sold a parcel of diamonds with a value of Le 600,000. A successful dealer is supposed to be generous when gifts are collected and Lebanese dealers have contributed big sums to medical projects in Kenema and Koidu.³² Dealers who want to maintain their position and reputation have to spend heavily and ostentatiously.

The commercial reputation of a dealer is personal: if regular customers find that he has gone out, they do not go to another dealer, but wait for him. (There is usually a younger brother who acts as host and tells them when the dealer is supposed to be back.) A successful dealer cannot delegate his buying to a partner or a relief (who stands in for the dealer when he is on leave) unless customers approve of him. As the big dealers live under great strain because of fierce rivalry and animosity, it is not surprising that there are few older men among them. Some men have lessened the strain by forming partnerships, always with contemporaries — brothers, cousins, and occasionally friends. The dealer must take care in his choice of a partner, because the partnership will fail if customers have no confidence in the partner. Partnerships permit the big dealers to go on leave each year, a break which they consider very necessary for their health. Some dealers have formed themselves into a ring — another way of lessening the strain for all except the leading dealer after whom the ring is named.

The office dealers have developed their own code of honour. They often hand over parcels of diamonds to another dealer or to a GDO buyer for valuation or safekeeping without asking for a receipt. Such a show of

trust is unusual in commerce in Sierra Leone. This action saves the dealers some time — they do not have to be present during the valuation — but its main purpose is to boost their image — to demonstrate that they are not potential law-breakers as the Government imagines. There is no legal sanction, but a dealer who tried to abuse this trust would be ostracized.

The relations between the Lebanese shopkeepers-cum-dealers and the African miners acquired an element of trust and friendship in the 1960s. Diamonds are no longer bought in the shop, but in the house, which means that the transaction loses its impersonal character, as it takes place in comfortable chairs in the parlour, with drinks being served. Dealers with a two-storey building ask the miners to come upstairs. Normally the first floor of a Lebanese building contains the living quarters which provide the family with a large degree of privacy so an African miner who is welcomed on the first floor recognizes this as a privilege and a sign of friendship. It is not surprising that the dealer cultivates his relationship with the miner, for he is tied to his shop and has to wait for customers. It is more difficult to explain why the miner remains faithful to a particular dealer. There must be some real benefit for him to make him do this. I imagine that the explanation lies with the big or unusual stones. The miner who does not know the value of such stones, not even approximately, knows that he is at the mercy of a dealer and that there are many unscrupulous dealers. He expects that his own dealer will not cheat him, and will at least pay a price with which both are content. The Lebanese dealer on the other hand may pay a fair price for common diamonds because he hopes that the miners who sell to him will one day find one or more large diamonds and bring these to him. It is in the big stones that the 'big money' is.

But there are also many unsuccessful dealers. Most of them are new entrants who start full of optimism and expect to reach the top because of their shrewdness or because of some stroke of luck — a big diamond offered by an ignorant miner. And since stories about dealers who have earned a fortune on one diamond continue to be told, their optimism is not completely unrealistic. Among the new entrants are young men, fresh from school in Lebanon, who, after an apprenticeship with a relative, launch out on their own. It is remarkable how many new and unfamiliar names can be found on the gazetted lists of dealers of the 1960s. A new entrant may start as a travelling dealer, but this is less effective now than it was in the 1950s. Alternatively, he may settle in a remote village or, if he has more confidence, in a town where other dealers operate who have

an advantage over him because of their experience. Unless he is helped by a relative a new entrant's chances are poor; the failure rate in the 1960s has been very high.³³

In theory all dealers can go to the GDO to sell their diamonds, but in practice mainly the big dealers go and the others — the inexperienced, the unsuccessful, and the shopkeepers — sell to the big dealers. We have heard various explanations why this is so. Some dealers seem to be tied to a big dealer because of financial assistance or family ties. It has also been rumoured that some big dealers have intimidated small dealers who wanted to leave them. We cannot assess how much truth there is in these explanations but they certainly do not give the full picture. There are quite a number of prosperous dealers who would be free to ignore the big dealers and yet make use of them. I have come to the conclusion that they do so because they expect better prices from the big dealers than from the GDO buyers. There are two possible explanations for this: the big dealers smuggle and get better prices abroad; or the big dealers get better prices from the GDO than the other dealers because they can bargain with more success. We shall examine these two explanations in section 9.

The position of the big dealers was badly shaken in June 1967, when the military government imposed a levy totalling Le 520,000 on the dealers.³⁴ (It was not surprising that the austerity-minded government put a tax on people who were known to spend ostentatiously.) The amount to be paid by each dealer was based on his sales to the GDO, which meant that the big dealers had to pay the lion's share. After they had carefully built up their position as a wholesaler, they were taxed on their turnover, while the other dealers had to pay much less because their business did not figure in the GDO books. The Diamond Corporation seems to have advised against the levy and was reluctant to hand over its figures to the Government to serve as a basis for assessment. The levy was described as a 'once-and-for-all tax', but the big dealers considered changing their operations to avoid similar tax measures in the future. The civilian government that came to power ten months later saw the undesirable aspects of the levy and reduced and adjusted the individual assessments. This took time and some dealers paid their last instalment as late as 1969.

The deposits in Mende country began to show signs of depletion in the late 1960s. About half the dealers in this area decided to give up and did not apply for a renewal of their licences, reverting to the role of shopkeeper and accepting the inevitable fall in income. A few older Lebanese decided that the right time had come to retire. I believe this group was the realistic and sensible one. The other half of the Lebanese dealers in

Mende country could not bear to give up the diamond trade: the lure of the profits and the excitement were too great. They could only succeed if they transferred to Kono or to Kenema town. The exodus of Lebanese dealers from the Kenema West area started in 1966: five left in that year, seven in 1967, four in 1968 and six in 1969, a total of 22. Out of these 19 transferred to Kenema town.³⁵ The exodus was particularly noticeable in Blama which had been the buying centre for Kenema West. The same thing started in Bo District in 1968: four Lebanese left in that year, five in 1969 and three in 1970. Nine out of these twelve went to Kenema town. The inhabitants of Blama and Bo were disheartened by the departure of the Lebanese dealers. It seemed the writing on the wall: the good years were over. But Bo and Blama's loss was Kenema's gain. The dealers who transferred needed offices and residences, and good ones at that. Rents went up and construction boomed. Most of the new buildings arose along Hangha Road because a location on the East side of Kenema was preferred; the farther East, the better, for dealers hoped that uninformed miners and dealers from Kono would stop at the first dealer's office they could see. We might call this 'locational competition'. It is evident that the Kono diamonds have become extremely important to the Kenema dealers. A few even live in Hangha, Ngelehun, and Mano Junction, villages which are closer to Kono but have fewer comforts. There is little local production (from mining in the Kenema East area) now, and the dealers depend on supplies from far away, mainly from Kono. Many of the dealers who transferred to Kenema town saw this only as a stepping stone on the way to Kono. They used their time in Kenema to learn more about Kono and to get to know dealers and miners from that area. They also applied early for a Kono permit, because they knew that it was difficult to get one.

As production declined, it became more difficult for many dealers to refuse advances to African miners. These advances are given by small dealers and by shopkeepers-cum-dealers, who in turn ask the big dealers for loans. In this way trading capital is used to finance mining. Many big dealers are worried about this, for they know that mining projects are no longer promising, but they are afraid that their supplies of diamonds will dry up if they refuse to have a stake in mining. For the time being the Kono supplies provide a compensation, but when mining in Kono comes to an end, the big dealers will find it very hard to liquidate their operations.

9.8 *Smuggling, 1956-1959*

Neither the Government nor the Diamond Corporation expected in 1956 that smuggling would disappear overnight. The most they hoped for was that dealers would gradually abandon smuggling. The Diamond Corporation allowed dealers to take their diamonds away if they were not satisfied with the price offered. In theory the dealer would then go to the banks, but in practice he went to the smugglers to see whether he could get a better price. This policy of the Diamond Corporation seemed an unpardonable way of condoning smuggling, but any other policy might have kept the dealers out of its offices altogether. Some dealers were quick to see the advantages of this situation, and they took their diamonds to the buying office in Bo, asked for a valuation, then went to Monrovia where they were able to drive a better bargain because of their knowledge of the Diamond Corporation prices.³⁶ I was told that one Lebanese managed to get hold of a price book and had extra copies printed for which he found ready customers. The eagerness of the dealers to learn about the new prices definitely helped the Diamond Corporation. It learnt in an indirect way about prices in Monrovia and caused the prices in that market to go up, thereby lowering its attraction for buyers from Europe. The success was not noticeable in Sierra Leone, however: the amount purchased by the Diamond Corporation was still small. Naturally the Government was disappointed, and in a statement of September 1956 it warned dealers against smuggling and threatened that their licences would not be renewed, unless their 'past performance' in selling to the licensed exporters was good.³⁷ The Police stepped up their patrols along the Liberian border, but they were handicapped by the fact that dealers could no longer be charged with unlawful possession. They felt that many smugglers had applied for a dealer's licence to facilitate their smuggling operations.³⁸ It was only when a dealer crossed the boundary with diamonds in his possession that he could be charged with contravening the Customs Ordinance. The Police pressed for further measures but no action was taken until after the elections of 1957.³⁹

In September 1957 the Minister of Mines declared all chiefdoms in which no diamond mining took place to be 'non-dealing areas'. Possession of diamonds in these areas became unlawful, even for licensed dealers. The non-dealing areas formed a cordon around the diamond areas, a measure which simplified the work of the Police, as they could now patrol at strategic points to catch would-be smugglers. Other measures were taken at the same time. Record Books were issued to dealers in which they

had to record all their transactions. The books had to be kept up-to-date and had to indicate the caratage in stock. Police officers were allowed to inspect the books and to compare the actual stock with the figure shown in the book. It was hoped that dealers would not make false entries in the book, or that, if they did, the false entries could be detected easily. This has proved to be a delusion; the Record Books have not reduced smuggling. The Government also decided to express its disapproval of the dealers forcefully. It revoked 159 licences (see above) and deported five Lebanese dealers without a prior conviction. It was implied that they had been involved in diamond smuggling. Since they were all men of importance, the deportations were in fact an undisguised warning for the Lebanese dealers: it made it clear that the Government sought the main smugglers among the Lebanese. This was further borne out by its measures concerning non-native dealers, as we have already seen.

The measures of September 1957 had a definite effect. For the Police this was a successful year: 20,962 diamonds were recovered with a value of £ 126,270. This deterred many people from smuggling, but not all. The gamblers who felt that smuggling was worth the risk still attracted large numbers of diamonds, and possibly improved their position at the expense of the more cautious and law-abiding dealers. Moreover some Lebanese smugglers bought fire arms and used them in an encounter with a Police patrol.⁴⁰ Both the Diamond Corporation and the Government wondered why the smugglers continued their dangerous game in spite of the risk of imprisonment and the forfeiture of the diamonds. They collected information about the Monrovia prices and concluded that these had risen to a level above the prices paid by the Diamond Corporation in Sierra Leone, at least for a good many classes of the price book. The Diamond Corporation was prepared to raise its prices to a competitive level, provided the Government would share the burden of the additional expense by lowering its export duty. The discussions eventually led to the agreement to establish the GDO, a solution which was in some ways an admission that smuggling could not be stopped by Police controls.

9.9 *Smuggling after 1959*

The GDO was announced as a major reorganization of the diamond trade. It had official status and the Government had a majority on the Executive Board. The Governor himself came to Kenema in August 1959 to perform the official opening ceremony. The main difference which the

Table XV. *Diamond purchases by licensed exporters under the Alluvial Diamond Mining Scheme, including parcels for tender, 1956 - 1973 (in thousand Leones)*

1956	3,322	1965	22,780
1957	10,583	1966	19,149
1958	9,242	1967	21,842
1959	11,645	1968	25,435
1960	21,891	1969	34,771
1961	22,755	1970	26,951
1962	13,152	1971	25,273
1963	13,543	1972	21,422
1964	23,610	1973	30,821

Source:

Reports of the Government Diamond Office

dealers noted was that prices were now higher. They compared the new prices with those in Monrovia and decided to sell to the GDO. The purchases of the GDO jumped up (see Table XV), and many observers thought that the problem had finally been solved. This was not correct, though. Smuggling continued throughout the 1960s, but on a much reduced scale.

The smuggling of the 1960s was price-induced, that is prompted by the price margin between prices abroad — in Monrovia and elsewhere — and GDO prices. (It was not caused by a desire to evade income tax for dealers' diamond trading profits have been exempt from income tax.) One element of the price margin is the export duty. Successive governments have accepted the unpalatable fact that the export duty cannot be raised without causing a new smuggling wave. The military government of 1967/8 was unwilling to believe it at first and raised the duty to 10 per cent in July 1967, but four months later it was lowered again to its previous level of 7½ per cent.⁴¹ Because of the low level of the export duty the Government has drawn very little revenue from diamond mining under the Scheme.⁴² The Diamond Corporation is in a similar position. If it wants to strangle smuggling, it has to accept a low profit margin or even losses. It seems to have gained very little in the way of profits on its operations in Sierra Leone, but it is difficult to establish accurately what the net profit or loss has been, because of both the complexity of diamond prices and heavy spending on public relations.⁴³

There has never been an attempt to publish periodic information about

the Monrovia diamond prices, but their fluctuations are well known. It must be remembered that the diamonds which are smuggled to Monrovia are sold to the diamond cutting centres in Europe, Israel, etc. An upward or downward movement of prices in the cutting centres is reflected without much delay in the Monrovia market. Again, not all prices in the cutting centres move in the same direction or at the same rate. This also is reflected in Monrovia. The Diamond Corporation is well informed about the price movements in the cutting centres, because the clients of the CSO are mainly cutters. In fact, the London office can tell the GDO buyers in Sierra Leone whether the pull of the Monrovia prices will become stronger or weaker in the near future, and has also taken the initiative in the occasional revisions of the GDO price book.⁴⁴

The big dealers have a thorough knowledge of the GDO as well as the Monrovia prices. They use the classification of the Diamond Corporation as their frame of reference and remember in which classes a Monrovia 'premium' always or frequently occurs. Generally speaking the premium is a feature of the big and unusual stones. When the big dealers offer such stones to the GDO they try to bargain. This bargaining does not concern the price, but the class. After the GDO buyer has said that a particular stone belongs to class X, the dealer will claim that it belongs to class Y, because he knows that the price for class Y diamonds is higher. Sometimes the GDO buyer gives in, if he is convinced that the dealer will take the stone back if he, the GDO buyer, sticks to his original classification. There is considerable room for this kind of bargaining, because the sorting of many diamonds is ambiguous: the colour or the shape are such that the stone might be allocated to different classes with equal justification. The bargaining is real because there is an alternative; selling in Monrovia. This consideration prompted the Diamond Corporation to introduce the tender arrangement under which the dealers can offer a parcel of diamonds via the CSO to bidders in the cutting centres. This was a further safeguard for dealers who felt that the GDO buyers paid too little. Some 25 parcels have been tendered since 1959. A comparison of the value and the caratage suggests that the parcels contained high quality, big diamonds.⁴⁵

When the pull of Monrovia prices is strong, the bargaining position of the dealer improves; it weakens when there is little demand in Monrovia. I was told by two Lebanese dealers that the GDO buyers are stricter about classification when Monrovia prices are low. The bargaining position of a dealer also depends on his contacts with smugglers. The more contacts he has — or pretends to have — the better it is for him, so the journeys of

dealers and their relatives to Europe and Lebanon do not pass unnoticed. Friendships between dealers and holders of diplomatic passports and airline officials arouse interest at the GDO, too. (For a time some dealers had the privilege of having their parcels valued by the Chief Buyer, which caused resentment among smaller dealers who felt that they were treated with less care and feared that they received lower prices.⁴⁶) It should not be thought that all big dealers are smugglers. Many of them abide by the law and sell most of their diamonds to the GDO. It seems, however, that they offer diamonds, which they expect to fetch a higher price in Monrovia, to other dealers, among whom are the runners, the men who are prepared to organize the illegal export.

Estimates about smuggling after 1959 are scarce, but it seems that in some years the value of the smuggled diamonds amounted to several million Leones. There is a certain hesitation in Sierra Leone to discuss this topic, for any views expressed on this point imply that the dealers are guilty of co-operation with the smugglers, and that the Government and the Police are unable to stop the smuggling. I found also that the attitude of many Sierra Leoneans towards smuggling is ambiguous: on the one hand they condemn it because it is illegal and deprives the Government of revenue, but on the other hand they are aware that smuggling compels the Diamond Corporation to pay high prices, and this is a good thing, indeed. Of course it is a pity that the public sector receives so little, but the whole economy receives the maximum for its diamond production. Admittedly, this money is received in the first instance by the big dealers who are mainly Lebanese, that is foreigners, but they are forced by competition to pass most of the money on to the miners, either directly or via other dealers. We could not conceive of a different marketing structure which would guarantee greater benefits for the miners. Against this background it can be understood that few people consider smuggling as totally wrong.

9.10 *Buying from illicit miners*

Despite the fact that it is an offence for a licenced dealer to buy from an illicit miner, it appears that many dealers, in particular in Kono, do so. It is tempting because the illicit miner is in a poor bargaining position. Since he is in danger of arrest for unlawful possession, he wants to part with the incriminating stones as quickly as possible. He has no time to drive a hard bargain; and his desire to do so is further weakened because

he has usually acquired the stones easily. There is therefore every reason to assume that illicit diamonds (including stolen ones) are sold at lower prices than the legitimately mined ones, so that a dealer will make a bigger profit on them.

After the purchase the dealer has to choose between two actions: either he enters the purchase in his Record Book or he does not. In the first case he makes a false entry in his book, which, if discovered, may lead to imprisonment and the loss of his licence. In the second case he is in possession of more diamonds than his Record Book shows, and he may be charged with the unlawful possession of the excess if the Police weigh the caratage of his stock. It seems that dealers, especially Lebanese, have come to prefer the first action. On one occasion the Police tried to obtain a conviction for such a false entry, but, after an appeal, the dealer was acquitted.⁴⁷ Since 1963 no dealer has been charged with this offence.

The Government, while disapproving of both actions, prefers the first one for economic reasons. Diamonds which have been illegally entered in the Record Books end up with the GDO in the normal course of events. They strengthen the legitimate trade and yield export duty. A dealer, however, who is unwilling or unable to enter diamonds in his book presumably sells to a smuggler, so that the Government makes nothing from it.

The offence of buying illicit diamonds is mainly a feature of the Kono District (see below). It occurs on a much smaller scale near the Tongo lease and is sporadic in the Bo and Kenema Districts where it depends on diamonds stolen from African miners.

9.11 *The diamond trade in Kono*

At first there may have been dealers in Kono who bought only from licence holders, but as deposits outside the SLST lease became depleted, dealers had to choose between giving up altogether or buying illicit supplies as well. We assume in the remainder of this section that nearly all dealers in Kono buy illicit diamonds and that the success of their operations depends on the illicit rather than on the legitimate supplies. This cannot be admitted publicly, but the fiction that dealers buy only legitimate diamonds and that all illicit diamonds pass through the hands of illicit traders is only half-heartedly maintained. For instance dealers are allowed to have their offices in Koidu, in the centre of the SLST lease. Officially, this is a non-dealing area in which diamond buying is for-

bidden. On two occasions the Government announced that the law would be enforced again and dealers were warned to transfer their buying offices to places outside the SLST lease.⁴⁸ Furthermore even the purchases of the GDO apparently include supplies from illicit miners because they decline after every stranger-drive.⁴⁹

Table XVI shows that there were few or no Lebanese diamond dealers in Kono in the early years. This was due not to lack of interest on the part of the Lebanese, but to the determination of the Government to keep the Lebanese out of Kono. Until November 1956 the District Commissioner was in a position to do so by refusing them a permit under the Diamond Industry Protection Ordinance. These same rules still applied afterwards to the older, alien Lebanese, but the younger ones could enter Kono freely after November 1956, provided they had been born in Sierra Leone. Afterwards it was the job of the Mines Department to keep the young Lebanese out of Kono. In principle they refused a dealer's licence to a Lebanese who wanted to operate in Kono or was seen buying there. But five Leba-

Table XVI. *Licensed diamond dealers in the Kono and Tonkolili Districts, by groups, 1956 - 1972*

	Kono District			Tonkolili District		
	Total	African	Lebanese	Total	African	Lebanese
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)
1956	16	16	—	9	—	9
1957	38	33	5	13	—	13
1958	17	17	—	1	—	1
1959	44	43	1	2	—	2
1960	50	49	1	12	4	8
1961	12	—	12	13	3	10
1962	36	22	14	3	—	3
1963	32	12	20	2	—	2
1964	40	17	23	—	—	—
1965	27	12	15	—	—	—
1966	40	21	19	—	—	—
1967	40	21	19	—	—	—
1968	55	31	24	—	—	—
1969	84	45	39	1	1	—
1970	64	23	41	1	—	1
1971	79	31	48	3	—	3
1972	79	25	54	3	—	3

Sources:

Government Notices in the *Sierra Leone Gazette* and files of the Mines Department.

nese, whose address was described as Jaiama Nimi Koro, outside the lease, were operating in Kono in 1957 (see column 3). Two of them had their licences revoked in September. It is likely that many others who had given an address outside Kono made frequent trips into Kono to buy diamonds, thus jeopardizing their licences. The young Lebanese had to apply to the Chieftdom authorities after the introduction of the permits which had to be carried at all times. This seemed anomalous to many people and a number of parliamentarians asked the Government in November 1958 to treat these Lebanese in the same way as alien Lebanese. An amendment of the Diamond Industry Protection Ordinance brought them back under the control of the District Commissioners in February 1959. As this control was stricter than that of the Chiefs the parliamentarians were satisfied. At about the same time the Government became less hostile towards the Lebanese and increasingly critical of the African diamond dealers, especially the foreign ones, presumably because of the troubles in Kono in late 1958, in which the Lebanese had not taken part.⁵⁰

A number of British officials and African politicians began to wonder in 1958 whether the Lebanese were as bad as they had been made out to be. Africans and Lebanese were compared on three points: the way they made illicit diamonds 'white', the restraint they showed in matters of violence and obstructing the Police, and the proportion of their profits they kept in Sierra Leone. On all these points the Lebanese were presumed to come out better than the foreign African dealers. The first point requires explanation. The Lebanese were more familiar with administrative regulations, and could better assess the risks of making false entries in their Record Books than the foreign Africans. In the event of official queries they had to have friends among the licensed miners in Kono who would be prepared to corroborate the false entries. Apparently this was no great problem. On the other hand, African dealers from Guinea, Mali, and so on may have found it easier to smuggle diamonds than to enter them in the Record Books. If they had to make use of a clerk, they were even more reluctant to make false entries. The majority of the foreign African dealers in Kono claimed that they had been born in Sierra Leone, which was difficult to disprove. Only in 1960 was the Government inclined and able to act against them. There were no African dealers with Kono addresses in 1961.

The Lebanese who wanted to operate in Kono but did not get permission to live there tried to share in the Kono trade by buying at towns in adjacent districts: Segbwema in Kailahun District, Mano Junction in Kenema District and Masingbi in Tonkolili District. Column 6 of the

table shows the Lebanese dealers who gave an address in Tonkolili. As deposits there are negligible, we have no hesitation in saying that these dealers depended on Kono supplies. Kono diggers crossed the Sewa River by canoe and walked to Masingbi to sell their diamonds to Tonkolili dealers who sold them afterwards in Bo. Until May 1961 they had to apply for a permit to carry the diamonds through the non-dealing area at Mongheri, then the road was declared a dealing area to remove this inconvenience. Tonkolili lost its attraction in 1963, partly because the chances of a Lebanese getting a Kono permit improved and partly because Formaya on the Northern boundary of the Kenema West area became more suitable for buying Kono supplies. From 1962 to 1967 there were always one or two Lebanese dealers who gave Formaya as their address; they depended on Kono and local supplies. But when the Tonkolili-Kono road neared completion Tonkolili became again attractive for dealers.

Table XVI shows that twelve Lebanese dealers operated in Kono in 1961. Six of them had been allowed to operate in Kono earlier, probably as early as 1959. I have been told that the Diamond Corporation was in favour of having Lebanese dealers in Kono, presumably as a rival force to African dealers. The number of Lebanese dealers was allowed to increase afterwards, and so was the number of Lebanese shopkeepers. (Their come-back was marred by a conflict between the two biggest dealers which erupted in 1963, see below.)

When the whole permit system was overhauled in late 1964, eleven Lebanese dealers had to leave Kono. The twelve who were allowed to remain were joined by three Lebanese shopkeepers who applied for and received a dealer's licence in 1965. The new system operated through Permit Boards which were presided over by the Provincial Secretary. Any appeals could be sent to the Prime Minister who also had the right to revoke permits. The influence of the Prime Minister quickly increased in matters of residence permits. It was the topic of a debate in the House of Representatives in 1966,⁵¹ after rumours had begun to circulate that some Lebanese had sent money to the Prime Minister in order to get a permit.

Kono seemed the promised land to many Lebanese in the 1960s. The diamond trade as well as the general merchandise trade was more profitable there than elsewhere. They were therefore very anxious to get a residence permit. Such a permit was worth hundreds of Leones for them because of the profits they expected to make in Kono. It was a disaster for a man who was well established in Kono to see his application for the

renewal of his permit rejected, so he would do almost anything to prevent this. The Lebanese in Kono became utterly dependent on the men who made the decisions about the permits. It is widely believed in Sierra Leone that the Prime Minister called the leaders of the Lebanese in Kono together in 1966 and required them to raise Le 50,000 which he needed to finance his election campaign. The men, so the story goes, collected the money using some kind of assessment of ability to pay, and most of the Lebanese in Kono complied out of fear of losing their residence permits. Three of these leading men were questioned in September 1967 by a Commission of Enquiry, but they denied the story.⁵²

By the middle of 1968 there were 125 Lebanese men in Kono.⁵³ Since there were 22 Lebanese diamond dealers at that time, about one hundred must have been shopkeepers. It was generally easier for a shopkeeper to get a residence permit than for a dealer. Many of the Lebanese who applied for a residence permit for 1969 were rejected. Some appealed and stayed in Kono while their appeal was being considered. The decision was made in May and 24 heads of families were told to leave the District within twenty-four hours.⁵⁴ An enlarged Permit Board was established in August 1969. It did not achieve a reduction in the size of the Lebanese community in Kono, and the following year the Prime Minister personally checked and approved a list of Lebanese who had to be ejected from Kono. This happened during a visit he paid to Koidu in June 1970. About 85 Lebanese were affected.⁵⁵ Then in January 1971 the Government appointed ten tribal headmen in Kono to control the 'strangers' in the District indirectly. Each headman is the representative of the strangers who belong to his tribe. He is responsible to the Prime Minister and has to report any members of his tribe who do not observe the permit regulations to him. One Lebanese was appointed as headman of the Lebanese community.⁵⁶ In November 1971 there were 175 male adult Lebanese in Kono,⁵⁷ of which at least 150 lived in Koidu with their dependents. Koidu has become a big Lebanese centre, only surpassed by Freetown, Kenema, and possibly Bo and Makeni.

The permit issue remains a cause of strong emotions. There is no issue on which I have heard stronger opinions expressed. The officials and politicians are disgusted with the Lebanese who make money out of the dreadful Kono situation, and the Lebanese are tired of the demands of politicians, officials, and go-betweens. The Lebanese in Kono are accused of greed but they feel that their accusers are equally greedy and ready to fleece them whenever possible. There is no direct evidence of corruption concerning residence permits, but it is significant that the responsibility

for the issue of the permits has been transferred on several occasions to other officials. Moreover, a Commission of Enquiry was set up in 1971 in connection with charges that employees of the Government Printing Department had printed permit cards without authorization.⁵⁸

The obstacles which strangers who wanted to go to Kono found in their path reduced the influx into Kono, but also worked as a kind of filter: the more cautious, the more law-abiding, the steadier and the older men came to the conclusion that Kono would not suit them. The effect of the filter can be seen among the Lebanese in Kono, especially among the dealers. Daring, ostentatious young men dominate and most of them, we guess, have no scruples when it comes to making illicit diamonds white or to illegally obtaining a residence permit.

We have already said that Lebanese dealers want to impress their customers. This desire has manifested itself very strongly in Koidu. When it seemed that no further perfection of his buying office was possible, one dealer hit on the idea of installing a closed circuit television set so that he could watch the people who were coming up the stairs to his office. Ostensibly this was for security reasons, but the real object was to impress his customers. His chief rival quickly followed his example. The dealers have also used cars to impress their customers, favouring Mercedes-Benz cars. The cars of the Kono dealers can be recognized outside the District, both by their size and their registration marks, for in the late 1960s there was a rage for special numbers. Owners could request a special number from the Police, if they paid a fee in addition to the normal registration fee. I believe that many Lebanese dealers hankered after admiration, notably the admiration of the African strangers and illicit diggers. This fitted in with their role as dealers.

With the establishment of the Casino in Kono gambling became a favourite pastime. The reputation of a dealer was measured by the height of his stakes. Some dealers have also boasted about their political influence in a way that has embarrassed the ministers. When in about 1969 the Government allowed diamond dealers to carry revolvers for self-protection, two Lebanese dealers in Kono began to carry these revolvers visibly. This was hardly in keeping with the policy of the Government, but quite effective in impressing people.

From about that time Lebanese dealers began to be mentioned in connection with crimes of violence. Before that time the worst crime that they were suspected of was instigating the employees of SLST to steal diamonds. Theft could occur in the installations, notably the washing plants and the separator house, but also during transport and at the

mining sites. Diamondiferous gravel became the object of theft in the 1960s. Security guards of the mining company sold bags of gravel to illicit diggers,⁵⁹ and its drivers who transported gravel were also approached with the proposal that they should stop at a pre-arranged point on their route where the miners would remove their load and replace it with similar gravel from which the diamonds had already been removed. SLST suspected the Lebanese as the brains behind these thefts. The greatest worry of SLST was that a Lebanese dealer would come into contact with European employees in responsible positions who were prepared to steal diamonds. In 1965 Mr. C., a British engineer of SLST, was charged with stealing diamondiferous gravel from one of the washing plants.⁶⁰ Mr. C. was acquitted by the court, but dismissed by SLST. No Lebanese was charged with buying diamonds from Mr. C., but two Lebanese were charged with attempts to bribe prosecution witnesses in the case.⁶¹ It has been an unwritten rule of the company that its personnel should have no contact with Lebanese, for no Lebanese is considered as beyond suspicion. In 1972 the company dismissed four European employees. The reason was indirectly revealed in a speech by the Minister of Mines to the diamond dealers in Koidu when he told them that he had information that some diamond dealers had persuaded DIMINCO staff to steal stones from the separator house.⁶²

It has always been difficult to maintain Government services in Kono because there is a rapid turnover of personnel, due to the high cost of living. The telephone service has been affected, too: in 1971 there were only six lines in working order. It is interesting to note that all these belonged to Lebanese subscribers.⁶³

There are two groups among the Lebanese in Kono: the South Lebanon group and the Rahbe group, the first Muslim and the second Christian (see further Chapter 12). Each has a different origin in Sierra Leone: the former comes from the Northern Province, the latter from the Kailahun and Kenema Districts. Since the Kono District was until recently closely connected with the Kailahun District, the Rahbe group has still certain advantages in Kono in the field of personal relations with the Kono people. The man who was appointed as tribal headman in 1971 belongs to the Rahbe group.

The Lebanese in Kono have usually been organized into an Association, but this organization has been weak and without economic or political power. This is due to the great individualism of the Lebanese which expressed itself in internal rivalries and feuds. I want to close this chapter by describing two of these feuds. In 1963 two Lebanese, Mr. Hassan D.

Fawaz and Mr. Ali Sururr, both of the South Lebanon group, vied for the honour of being the 'biggest' dealer of Kono. Fawaz had been Sururr's agent in 1956, but was well on the way to being as successful as his former principal. Sururr was therefore greatly relieved when Fawaz was arrested in March 1963, and subsequently sentenced to six months' imprisonment because of a number of diamond offences.⁶⁴ Both Fawaz and the Attorney General appealed. When the appeal was heard in May the judge told the court that some Lebanese had offered him money to influence his decision and that he had reported the matter to the Police. In his judgment he confirmed Fawaz' prison term. One week later Sururr was expelled from Kono⁶⁵ and soon afterwards he was deported from Sierra Leone. Fawaz had meanwhile appealed to the Court of Appeal. When his case came up in August, he was acquitted and discharged. Within a few days, however, the Government ordered his deportation and he had to leave Sierra Leone, too.⁶⁶

Mr. Jamil S. Mohamed rose to the top in 1965. He safeguarded his place for the next two years by actively supporting the Government. This earned him the wrath of the opposition leader⁶⁷ and almost led to his arrest after the elections of 1967. Henneh Shamel, his rival, and also a member of the South Lebanon group, had decided to throw in his lot with the opposition and this paid off after April 1968. Shamel became the undisputed leader among the dealers in Kono, more flamboyant and ostentatious than any predecessor and boastful about his political influence. His career came to a sudden end when he was charged with organizing the diamond robbery at Hastings Airfield of November 1969 involving 3 million Leones. He was acquitted in January 1970, but the judge complained that the prosecution had failed to present the evidence well.⁶⁸ He left the country immediately. Doubts about his innocence were created by the decision of the Government that he should not be allowed to return to Sierra Leone.⁶⁹ Jamil Mohamed was ready to benefit from Shamel's eclipse and regained his former position.

These two conflicts were born in the Lebanese community in Kono but had their repercussions on the national life of Sierra Leone. The men in Kono were so absorbed in their feuds that they did not hesitate to draw in politicians and civil servants. They paid little attention to the bad effects which their feuds had on the good name of the Lebanese community in Sierra Leone.

Miscellaneous activities

In this chapter we have to complete our survey of the activities in which the Lebanese have participated. These remaining activities have one thing in common: they lie outside trade, but further grouping according to normal classifications has proved difficult. It did not seem justified either, because the number of Lebanese that has been involved is quite small.

We have therefore chosen a chronological approach and distinguish three periods: before 1938, between 1938 and 1955, and after 1955. Each period is characterized by a different source of inspiration for new ventures.

10.1 *Before 1938*

Very little can be found in the way of miscellaneous activities in the early decades. There was one Lebanese hotel, and some Lebanese barbers and seamstresses.¹ Even if we take the Lebanese lorry owners and holders of gold mining rights into account, there was only a narrow range of activities, with trade dominating. We may draw some conclusions from this fact. In the first place, the people whose example the Lebanese followed — the managers of the European Companies and the Creoles — must have given the Lebanese the impression that only trade mattered. Secondly, the Lebanese were very dependent on other people, because they produced only a few services themselves. They had to buy their food from Africans, in the market, in shops and in bakeries. They had to live in African houses and most of them had to deal with African landlords. They needed African artisans for the repair and improvement of these houses.

They had to consult Creole and European doctors and had to rely on African nurses and midwives. In the course of their trading they had to deal with the Creole-staffed railway and the European banks. This dependence was unpleasant, but it brought them many new personal contacts.

The Lebanese were rarely considered indispensable by either Europeans or Africans. Their main occupation, trade, was one that was provided by many people in many locations. We saw in Chapter 6 how the Lebanese lorry owners became indispensable in the Protectorate in the 1930s because of their role in transport. They were also important in mechanical repairs. Europeans whose car or motor cycle had broken down turned to the Lebanese for help, which was always given, usually free of charge. The Lebanese and Afro-Lebanese gained the reputation among the Europeans of being good 'bush mechanics'. In the 1930s it was, however, impossible for the Lebanese to set up a garage and to charge commercial rates to compatriots and Europeans. Repairs were seen as personal favours and not as commercial transactions. Yet the goodwill earned in the 1930s was a major factor when the Lebanese established commercial garages in the 1950s (see below). Lebanese barbers were also indispensable in a way. Many Europeans believed that Lebanese barbers were more familiar with European hair than African barbers and could cut it better. One Lebanese barber in Freetown, Philip George, earned a position of trust among European civil servants.

10.2 *The period 1938-1955*

The year 1938 witnessed two new developments within the Lebanese community. First, Christo Courban established a banana plantation at Songho, 30 miles east of Freetown, in direct response to the fruit growing experiments which the Agricultural Department had conducted at Newton and Njala in order to get African farmers interested in new crops and new farming techniques. Although Lebanese interest had not been anticipated, the Government was pleased with this new venture.² By 1938 the Lebanese were no longer looking only to the Companies for inspiration, but were also prepared to try out the ideas of Government officials. The banana plantation aimed at exportation, but when the war came all supplies could be sold in Freetown: to the Army, as ship's stores, and in the markets. After the war the export plans were taken up again and seemed close to success for several years. But by 1954 it became clear that the problems of shipping were too great.³

Mr. Courban followed the experiments of the Agricultural Department carefully and began to keep pigs, selling the pork and bacon in Freetown.⁴ He also started a poultry farm. Although not many Lebanese followed Mr. Courban's example, his ventures established a new relationship between the Lebanese and the Government (or rather between one Lebanese and some Government officials). The agricultural officers, and later, officials in the Departments of Supplies and Commerce had to deal with Mr. Courban, and to assess his competence and his chances of success.⁵ As long as the banana exportation scheme was considered with optimism, there was cordial co-operation, but when it failed, relations became strained, and the parties did not agree on the cause of the failure.⁶

Courban's initiative made it easier for his compatriots to take note of other Government activities in later years (see below). His plantation and farm were also indirectly useful; for many Africans they were proof that it was worth-while to follow Government advice. Poultry farming in particular became popular among Sierra Leoneans.

1938 was an important year for yet another reason. A young Lebanese, Dr. John Blell, returned to Sierra Leone after having completed his medical studies in the United Kingdom. Dr. Blell established his own surgery in Freetown and practiced for the next thirty years. At first his patients were Lebanese and Africans, but later Europeans also consulted him. It had been a Creole doctor, Dr. E. Jenner Wright, who had advised the young man's father, Michael A. Blell, to send his son abroad to become a doctor. Creole advice and examples were important in the growing preference for further education among the Lebanese. When university education was considered, the professions were preferred: medicine, law, and later accountancy. No other Lebanese born in Sierra Leone graduated before the war, and the war itself retarded the educational plans of several families.

In 1939 a Lebanese dentist, Dr. Attia, came to Freetown to practice. He left after a few years, but another one, Dr. Fuad El-Rassi, came and practiced until 1946, and later still Dr. Ismail Abess. None of them was born in Sierra Leone, but the Lebanese community made them welcome because of their work and their role as educated men.

10.3 *The period after 1955*

A certain diversification of the economy took place in the 1950's. For observers from industrialised countries it did not amount to much, but for

Sierra Leone it was a major change. The main cause was the diamond boom. The resulting prosperity made all kinds of ventures possible which until then would have been doomed to failure for lack of a market. Among the new opportunities we must single out manufacturing (see the next section), repair services, entertainment, and construction with its accompanying production of building materials and furniture.

As the population of Sierra Leone could afford more machines and appliances, the need for maintenance and repair services increased. In the field of motor vehicles these services are largely in the hands of the Lebanese. They had the advantage of twenty years' experience, and the importing agencies (see p. 116) brought them extra clients. When their work shops were modernized into proper garages, they had to recruit motor mechanics from Lebanon. These men are typical of what I called the new immigrants on p. 8. They were recruited to do specialized work, and were selected because of their skills and not because of family ties. Some of the garage owners were appointed as Agents of British insurance companies.⁷ The Lebanese have played only a minor role in electrical repairs, however, smaller than for instance the Indians.

In the field of entertainment, cinemas have been the main investment. Freetown Cold Storage Company (FCSC), a Swiss enterprise, established a cinema, the Odeon, in Freetown during World War II. In 1951 it opened a smaller cinema in Bo under the same name. By 1957 the number of commercial cinemas had risen to three, all European owned. Then in 1959 the first Lebanese cinemas were opened, one in Bo and one in Makeni. The Lebanese-owned Roxy Cinema, a modern building with one thousand seats, was opened in Freetown in 1961, while other Lebanese cinemas were later opened in Kenema, Koidu and Freetown.⁸ FCSC withdrew from the field in 1964 and the Odeon cinema passed into Lebanese hands; the other one in Bo was sold to an Indian firm. Since 1964 only Lebanese and Indians have owned and operated cinemas, with the Lebanese far ahead of the Indians.

The Lebanese also opened some night clubs in the 1960s, but with little success. At least three failed. The night clubs attract European, African, and Lebanese customers and when quarrels develop, they tend to be interpreted as expressions of racial prejudice.⁹ There are also some expensive Lebanese restaurants in Freetown and near the beach, which have become very popular in recent years.

Construction boomed in the 1950s because everybody who could afford it wanted to live in a modern, concrete house (see Chapter 13). Most of these houses, including the Lebanese ones, were built by African con-

tractors, though there were also some European contractors and one Lebanese. Substantial Lebanese participation came rather late. Eventually, in 1959 two Lebanese builders, born in Lebanon, came from Liberia to Sierra Leone. They had the experience necessary to build larger projects which until then had been built by European contractors only. Their first contracts were given out by Lebanese: the Children's Hospital (see p. 260) and the Roxy Cinema building. One of them founded the Sierra Leone Construction Company (SLCC) in 1961. (Two of the directors belong to the Yanni family which has been in Sierra Leone for over fifty years.) SLCC is now a large company which competes effectively with European contractors, even for high-quality projects. It concentrates on large projects, mainly for the public sector. After some years, several SLCC employees left the company and set up for themselves, so that by 1970 there were some ten Lebanese contractors who tendered for residential and other buildings in the environment of Freetown. The Lebanese also benefited indirectly from the building boom. They sold imported building materials (see Chapter 5) and opened some workshops where building materials were made, notably metal doors and windows. Again, the modern houses were not complete without new furniture. Consequently the demand for good and expensive furniture was high after 1955. The Government-owned Forest Industries Department in Kenema expanded its furniture section to meet the new demand, but several of its employees felt that they could do better for themselves by establishing their own workshops or by coming to terms with a man who could provide the capital. Several Lebanese embarked on furniture production in this way. Mainly wooden furniture is produced, but there is also some made of metal. Thus the furniture industry has developed into an interesting combination of African know-how and Lebanese capital.

The building boom also meant that higher standards were set for office accommodation, and the construction of modern office buildings became an urgent task in the late 1950s. Some European companies were the first to tackle this problem. They put up new buildings for themselves which contained far more accommodation than they needed — a good investment because the number of potential tenants was increasing fast. New foreign companies came to Sierra Leone attracted by opportunities in manufacturing and trade. After independence many new embassies were established in Freetown which also needed good offices.¹⁰ The successful investment of the European companies was bound to be imitated, and indeed, some Lebanese and some public corporations followed their lead. Freetown owes some imposing and beautiful buildings to Lebanese invest-

ors, the best example being the Leone House. Lebanese capital also played a part in the construction of the American Embassy, one of the most expensive buildings in Freetown. The need for offices in Freetown was paralleled by the need for first-class residences on the Western outskirts of the town. Creoles and Lebanese saw the opportunities in time and built bungalows to be let to embassy personnel and the managers of newly established companies. Some thirty bungalows now belong to Lebanese landlords. Lebanese investment in this type of real estate was further stimulated by developments in Beirut where it had become a favourite long-run investment with the additional advantage that it required little supervision. It was only after 1960 that some Lebanese in Sierra Leone had grown rich enough to be interested in investment opportunities which did not require continuous supervision. Investment of this kind came to a halt in 1966 when the supply of office accommodation caught up with demand.

The Lebanese established two hotels in Freetown in the 1960s. Their customers are mainly Lebanese and Europeans who live in the Provinces and come to Freetown for business. The Lebanese have also opened a bakery, a printing press, and a dry-cleaning shop. The number of Lebanese barbers has increased and there are also hairdressers and one tailor. The number of Lebanese in the professions increased, too. The first accountant returned from his studies in Britain in the late 1950s, and the first lawyer in 1962. There were four Lebanese lawyers and five doctors by 1970.

Government research and extension work continued to inspire the Lebanese. Poultry farming spread to the Provinces in the wake of the diamond boom and some Lebanese started poultry farms in the vicinity of the bigger towns. The supply of eggs increased so quickly that by 1962 it was possible to stop the importation of eggs from abroad.¹¹ In 1951 the Government had appointed a horticulturist and his work revived Lebanese interest in fresh vegetables. Some traders established market gardens to supply themselves and their friends, growing water-melons and so on. They also made use of the advice of the Chinese experts who came to Sierra Leone under a technical assistance programme for rice and vegetable cultivation.

Another field of Government research was deep-sea fishing. It was found that there were good fishing grounds off the coast but that they could only be exploited by trawlers. This investment was unattractive to the Lebanese; I know of only one who invested money in fishing.¹² One more Government initiative must be mentioned. When delivery times for

buses were very long after the war, the Road Transport Department decided in 1947 to build its own buses by constructing wooden bodies on imported chassis.¹³ The artisans were later to make use of their know-how in the private sector by making truck bodies for lorries. Virtually all lorries that are imported into Sierra Leone are now provided with a wooden body to protect passengers and cargo. Most of the African artisans in this field work on their own but some have been employed by Lebanese garage owners.

Finally, we must mention the travel agencies. Many of these agencies were set up in the 1960s. Their business is mainly concerned with air travel since sea travel has dwindled to a fraction of what it used to be. Lebanese customers are interesting to all the travel agencies. The structure of fares, as laid down by the IATA, allows for various itineraries which combine business in Europe with holidays in Lebanon, so the agencies compete with each other to find the cheapest or best itinerary. I have been told that unofficial reductions make competition even livelier. Partial confirmation of this rumour may be found in the fact that the airlines have established their own offices in Freetown in order to deal directly with travellers.

10.4 *Manufacturing*

As prosperity increased, the demand for certain manufactured products reached a level which made local production possible and financially attractive. The first products to be produced in a local factory were soft drinks, when Freetown Cold Storage Company established a bottling factory in Freetown in 1957. A mainstay of this factory has been the contract to bottle and distribute Coca-Cola in Sierra Leone. Then came cigarettes which were first produced in 1959 after the Aureol Tobacco Company (ATC) established a factory on the Industrial Estate at Wellington. The ATC is typical of the new range of foreign companies that were established in Sierra Leone in the 1960s, subsidiaries of manufacturing companies in Europe and North America. They were incorporated in Sierra Leone to allow participation by shareholders there, such as the Government and the Companies. When the Companies participated, they provided distribution channels for the new factory, a service which the parent manufacturing company greatly appreciated, because, as a rule, it had little knowledge of the situation in Sierra Leone. Participation was also attractive for the Companies, because it enabled them to employ per-

sonnel and capital in manufacturing (the so-called 'redeployment', see p. 21) and to maintain their overall position in the country.

The vigour which European enterprise displayed in the field of manufacturing was infectious. The Lebanese began to establish factories, too, the first one being a soft drink bottling factory in 1961. Then followed factories for paints, nails and screws, metal beds, suitcases, metal buckets, paper and cardboard, salt, cosmetics, and mirrors, about twelve factories in all. (Some Lebanese also participated for a number of years in the factories for matches and plastic sandals.) Two items on this list, suitcases and bottling, show that the Lebanese were interested in cutting down on transport costs. They were not interested in processing local produce apart from roasting local coffee which is done on a small scale for the use of the Lebanese community.

Expectations about the national benefits of manufacturing were high in the years around independence. The Lebanese were carried along by the general optimism, being aware that their standing in the country improved when they started a factory. Some Lebanese manufacturers were granted a development certificate which entitled them to tax holidays and other benefits.¹⁴ The Government was also able to help the Lebanese manufacturers by granting employment permits quickly for the skilled personnel which they had to recruit in Lebanon to run their factories. Finally, the Government helped the Lebanese manufacturers by providing sites and buildings, though it was reluctant to issue sites on the Industrial Estate at Wellington to Lebanese manufacturers, because it had reserved this estate for overseas companies which had no prior experience in Sierra Leone. Only one Lebanese factory therefore operates on the estate. The other factories were accommodated in Cline Town, Kissy Dockyard and Kissy Mess Mess — sites with inferior facilities, but closer to Freetown. The area of Kissy Dockyard was particularly suitable for industrialization, because the buildings which the British Army had constructed in this area during World War II could be used for factories; at least six factories started in this way getting permission to rent the buildings from the Government. Some old buildings were later replaced by new ones.

It must be remembered that manufacturing was in vogue everywhere in West Africa. Governments compared notes and copied successful ideas from each other, as did the Companies, which had the further advantage that they could transfer personnel and know-how from one country to another. The Lebanese also copied from their compatriots in other West African countries, which was beneficial for Sierra Leone, for it meant

that projects that had succeeded in Nigeria, Ghana, Ivory Coast, or Senegal were tried out at home. West African examples have always been more important than those from Lebanon.

Manufacturing meant a further significant change for the Lebanese. It meant a transfer of Lebanese man-power and capital from one activity to another. At first the capital was withdrawn from the produce and general merchandise trades, but in the late 1960s from the diamond trade as well. The sums needed for most factories were too large for most Lebanese, but if a project was beyond the means of his family, the sponsor would invite another family to join. For big projects several families had to come together. (The capital of the bottling factory in Freetown was brought together by thirty subscribers belonging to at least twenty-eight different families.¹⁵) The sponsors had to establish joint stock companies to attract capital from other families, but as the legal form of the joint stock company was foreign to the Lebanese, they continued to see their companies as partnerships of two or more families with the head of each family acting as a senior partner.

Manufacturing also meant a technical change. The purchase and use of machinery required technical insight; the appropriate size of a factory was another problem. Most factories were too large to be accommodated in central Freetown and sites outside Freetown had to be selected and acquired. At least one Lebanese manufacturer received expert advice about the layout of his factory.¹⁶

The Lebanese had set great store by experience, but they found that manufacturing was not simply a matter of trial and error. It required managers and engineers with formal technical training. The biggest obstacle for many sponsors was to find a good manager. They had to look for one among the new immigrants or in Lebanon. Thus, two factories were run by German managers initially,¹⁷ while in one case a member of the family was sent abroad to learn about the production process.¹⁸ The Lebanese encountered the same problems as traders in other times and places who embarked on manufacturing.

A change in outlook was also demanded. Instead of waiting for customers like a shopkeeper, a manufacturer has to plan his production and stimulate his sales. Some chose the easy way out and asked the Government to prohibit competing imported supplies. Others, however, had to start advertising their products. Again, the relationship a manufacturer has with his personnel is different from any a trader has. The latter is used to personal relations with trust as a primary condition, but in the factories skills matter more and relations are more impersonal.

Manufacturing may well be seen as a symbol of the modernization of the Lebanese community. Although only a small percentage of Lebanese man-power and capital is engaged in it, the psychological impact is great. It was for instance hard (but healthy) for the Lebanese traders in Sierra Leone to admit that certain activities could not be undertaken without the co-operation of new immigrants. It explains also the prestige of some new immigrants nowadays, when formerly long residence in Sierra Leone had been a major condition for prestige.

10.5 *Lebanese companies with overseas headquarters*

We have still to discuss three Lebanese companies with overseas headquarters which established branches in Sierra Leone in the 1960s. Intra Bank, founded in Beirut in 1951 by a Palestinian refugee, grew rapidly and established branches in many parts of the world. In about 1960 it turned its attention to West Africa, expecting new opportunities of expansion through the Lebanese communities there. It started operations in Sierra Leone in February 1963, and two further branches were established in the Provinces: in Bo (1964) and in Koidu (1966). The main activity of Intra Bank has been the financing of the import trade. In this respect it started with an advantage over the British banks, because it was prepared to accept assets in Lebanon as security for advances in Sierra Leone. This meant that some Lebanese in Sierra Leone could mobilize more capital, either on the basis of their own assets in Lebanon or on those of relatives or partners. The more ties a man had in Lebanon, the more likely he was to benefit from an account with Intra Bank. (Lebanese importers who had established a good reputation with one of the British banks did not consider it worth-while to change over to Intra Bank.) The provincial branches advanced money only for the general merchandise trade and not for the diamond and produce trades. Intra Bank attracted many Sierra Leonean clients because it had the reputation of being more liberal with unsecured loans than the British banks. It recruited all its personnel from Lebanon — further evidence that it was an outside element in the Lebanese community. It was a foreign company in the sense that it had not sprung up in Sierra Leone.

Then in October 1966 the head offices of Intra Bank closed their doors because of a liquidity crisis. The branches in Sierra Leone were closed on 21st October. Many clients were inconvenienced but the Bank of Sierra Leone assured them that the assets of Intra Bank in Sierra Leone were

greater than its liabilities. Every depositor would get his money back if the bank was to be liquidated.¹⁹ The employees of Intra Bank remained in Sierra Leone to be on the spot as soon as the bank reopened, and as the months passed some opened a business of their own. After a lengthy reorganization Intra Bank reopened in Beirut in December 1967, and the branches in Sierra Leone were reopened in March 1968. The bank was reasonably successful in the next two years, but faced new problems in 1970 as a result of new legislation which required all commercial banks to deposit Le 800,000 with the Bank of Sierra Leone (or Le 400,000 if they were registered in Sierra Leone).²⁰ Intra Bank considered this deposit to be too heavy a strain on its liquidity and decided to withdraw. It ceased operations in November 1971.

Middle East Airlines (MEA) of Beirut included Sierra Leone in its flight network in April 1967. It offers a direct connection with Lebanon, a special advantage for certain groups of Lebanese such as school children and old and sick people. MEA's advertisements are partly in Arabic and seem to be mainly addressed to the Lebanese in Sierra Leone. The Lebanese staff of MEA's office in Freetown is recruited in Lebanon.

The Edward Nassar Company of Ghana established a shipping line between Beirut and West Africa in 1966. The ships bring fresh fruit and some provisions from Lebanon. Edward Nassar (Sierra Leone) Ltd was established in Freetown in December 1967 to take care of the distribution of consignments of Lebanese fruit and confectionery landed by the ships of the parent company.

10.6 *Economic restrictions*

The SLPP Acts of 1965/6 (see p. 118) barred non-citizens from the manufacture of cement building blocks, from supplying granite, stone, and sand, and from operating bakeries and soft drinks bottling factories, but non-citizens who already owned bakeries and bottling factories were allowed to continue their operations provided they did not expand. It could be argued that the measure was fair both to the Lebanese — it barred only new-comers — and to the Creoles who had always played an important role in baking and bottling and felt threatened by Lebanese and European competition.

The APC Acts of 1969 confirmed the items of 1965 but added several others: printing, dry cleaning, truck body building, the manufacture of wooden doors, windows and furniture, the manufacture of metal doors

and windows, steel furniture, steel bodies for lorries, water tanks and oil tanks, commercial market gardening, small garages, new insurance agencies and travel agencies. Some items (printing, wooden furniture, and truck bodies) could be justified on the basis that they had been in African hands for many years. Nearly all activities on the list require special technical and managerial qualities, and few Sierra Leoneans were in a position to provide them. In fact, the potential beneficiaries of the restrictions were a small group of educated Sierra Leoneans with some capital, so small that in many cases they could be counted on the fingers of one hand and were known by name to the Parliamentarians. It was this point which worried the Lebanese. Moreover, the list in the Act differed from the list in the Bill because Parliament made extensive use of its amending rights. This course of action was unexpected and seemed to preclude a thorough examination of the merits and faults of restrictions in each case. Again, pig and poultry farming which had been proposed in the Bill was left out in the Act, in spite of the fact that the market for eggs had been spoilt by over-supply.²¹ The action of Parliament has added to the feeling of insecurity among the Lebanese and may deter them from pioneering new ventures.

Some Lebanese adapted to the new situation by trying to attract Sierra Leonean shareholders. It must be borne in mind that if 51 per cent of the share capital is held by Sierra Leoneans, the company is classified as a citizen enterprise. The sponsors therefore set out to find Sierra Leoneans who were rich enough to be able to buy a substantial number of shares, but were willing to leave the management to the sponsors. A relation of mutual trust between Lebanese sponsors and Sierra Leonean shareholders was of course indispensable.

A new possibility arose with the establishment of the National Development Bank in 1968, whose task is to promote new enterprises by providing loan or share capital. Some Lebanese have submitted their projects and have asked the NDB to take up some of the shares, which were counted as citizen shares, reducing the task of finding citizen shareholders. The Lebanese also reasoned that an enterprise in which the NDB participated was in less danger of being affected by restrictions because the Bank would plead its cause with the Government. Finally NDB participation was accompanied by technical advice which the Lebanese usually needed. By the end of 1972 twenty-six projects had been approved by the NDB for support. At least five were partly owned by Lebanese.

I expect that Government policy towards Lebanese enterprise outside trade will continue to waver. On the one hand the Government wants

modern enterprises and in particular factories. It also wants increased employment. On the other hand it wants to reduce the influence of foreigners in the economy. Lebanese who want to start a new enterprise now will emphasize the additional employment, the new techniques and the effect on the balance of payments,²² while worrying privately about the restrictions which may be demanded by Parliament.

The Lebanese entrepreneur

This chapter, being the last of the economic ones, serves to sum up and draw conclusions from the material presented so far: How should we characterize the Lebanese entrepreneur in Sierra Leone? What has been his role, and how useful has he been for the economy? What qualities has he shown, and how did they prepare him for the economic opportunities which occurred in Sierra Leone? Was his response different from that of the European and African entrepreneurs who operated in the same economy? Was his success due to his qualities or to the opportunities?

These questions cannot be answered in isolation, but must take into account the fact that there is also the wider group of Lebanese throughout West Africa. Although little has been written on this group, some economists and historians have paid some attention to them in general works about West Africa. We shall discuss their comments in the first two sections, and afterwards I shall attempt to give my own answers to the questions raised above.

11.1 *The common characterization as middleman*

Nearly everything written by Europeans about the Lebanese has been influenced by the concept of the two-way trade which we discussed in Chapter 2. The Lebanese were seen as middlemen or intermediaries between on the one hand the large European export-import companies and on the other hand the 'peasant producer'¹ or the 'African traders'.² They supplemented the European companies which 'tend to confine themselves to particular stages of marketing and distribution where they can operate on

a large scale³ and were, as I prefer to put it, auxiliaries of the Companies in the two-way trade, acting as middlemen in the produce trade and as shopkeepers in the general merchandise trade (see p. 27). This view of the Lebanese as being in an intermediate position caught on because it suggested an economic division into large-scale enterprise which was 'fully-fledged western', medium-scale enterprise which was 'semi-western' and small-scale enterprise which was 'primitive native'.⁴ The first category was European, the second largely Lebanese, and the third one African.⁵ This was tied up with a particular view of colonial society as a three-storied one with the Europeans at the top, the Asiatics in the middle, and the Africans in the lowest position.⁶ This view of society was very strong in East Africa, and it was assumed that the situation in West Africa could be described in the same way, but the Sierra Leone Creoles in particular have objected strongly to this interpretation, firmly believing that their culture stood higher than that of the Lebanese.⁷

The word 'middleman' appears to have had three different meanings in West Africa. The narrowest was a trader who bought from agricultural producers. This was extended to mean a trader in an intermediate, medium-scale position. The widest meaning has been a trader in a culturally and economically intermediate position. The fluidity in meaning may explain why the word has been used so much and for so long.

While Africans sometimes lumped Europeans and Lebanese together, the Europeans rarely, if ever, did so, emphasizing the differences, in particular the cultural ones. They were even willing to credit the Lebanese with qualities which they themselves did not possess, or at least not to the same degree. It was often said that the Lebanese were good at learning the African languages, that they were prepared to bargain with the African customers, and that they gave credit more easily because they could judge the risks better.⁸ These points were true. Yet it is necessary to point out that it was unusual for Europeans to admit that other people did certain things better than they themselves did — let alone publish the fact. It was quite out of line with colonial society where, at least in the early years, European superiority was taken for granted.

The growth of the two-way trade was the yard-stick of development throughout most of the colonial period. As the Lebanese stimulated and created trade, it was inevitable that the Europeans considered them useful. '... their role in opening up West Africa to increased international trade cannot be exaggerated.'⁹ It was also inevitable that European praise was focused on the Lebanese pioneer trader in the bush who persuaded African farmers to change over from subsistence to exchange production.

The other Lebanese were rarely mentioned because their contribution could not be explained so easily.

The concept of the two-way trade largely explains European acceptance and approval of the Lebanese, and has also influenced African thinking. Many Africans accepted the need for a middleman as described above, but they argued that Africans could equally well have fulfilled this function. Europeans took this view seriously only after World War II. Some agreed and came to the conclusion that the arrival of the Lebanese robbed the African traders of an opportunity to advance,¹⁰ but others held the view that not enough African manpower and skill was available in the crucial decades and that development would have been much slower without the Lebanese.¹¹

11.2 *The middleman: some doubts*

There is enough truth in the description just given to satisfy many people with the word 'middleman'. Yet it concealed certain elements of the role of the Lebanese and led to misunderstandings about them. The situation in Sierra Leone is instructive, because the word 'middleman' may have been less appropriate there than anywhere else in West Africa.

It was often forgotten by the Europeans that not all trade forms part of the two-way trade. The kola and rice trades for instance do not belong to the two-way trade, and the Lebanese who traded in these products could not be considered as middlemen between Africans and Europeans.

Secondly, the Lebanese middleman was not part of the original commercial design of the Europeans but an expedient which was later incorporated into it. There seemed to be no place for middlemen (who at the time were Africans) in the design which guided European decisions in the early period until 1914. When the Companies discovered that this design was too ambitious, they tacitly accepted Lebanese and African co-operation. The desire to conceal the contribution of the Lebanese weakened in the 1920s, however, and the Companies began to speak openly about the Lebanese as middlemen.¹²

Thirdly, when mines were established in Sierra Leone in the 1930s, the structure of foreign trade changed. Exports and imports remained in step, but the two-way trade began to falter, because the general merchandise trade was growing while the produce trade was not. Shopkeeping became more important than produce buying and there was ample justification for describing the Lebanese primarily as shopkeepers.¹³ Government

spending during World War II and the diamond boom of the 1950s increased the relative significance of shopkeeping for the Lebanese, yet the word 'shopkeeper' is rarely used for them in Sierra Leone.¹⁴ The main reason seems to be that it suggests to many Sierra Leoneans and Lebanese a dependent position analogous to 'storekeeper'.¹⁵

Many Lebanese have not considered themselves as middlemen. They began to object against this designation in the 1930s because it implied a position of dependence: a middleman could not become an exporter or importer — superior positions which were reserved for the Europeans who had organized the two-way trade. The Lebanese preferred to call themselves 'merchants', to assert their right to become importers or exporters.¹⁶

Fifthly, if the Lebanese are seen as middlemen, their success must be explained on the basis of their middlemen profits. Since, on the whole, their success has been considerable, it might be concluded that these profits were large, but this is unlikely when we remember that the Companies used to dominate the two-way trade. It is inconceivable that they allowed their auxiliaries a large share of the total profits. Indeed, the success of the Lebanese is a strong indication that they were not merely middlemen, for though as middlemen they might have earned plain bread, it was in other roles that they earned the butter.

Finally, the two-way trade lost much of its appeal after World War II. Commercial development was no longer seen as the cornerstone of progress and words which were reminders of the old concept became less fashionable, including the word 'middleman'.

Because of the problems listed above, I have avoided the word 'middleman' except in its narrowest meaning, as in the chapter on the produce trade. When deciding on the title of this book I chose 'trader' as the best word to describe the Lebanese. It underlines the fact that they operated in their own right, and at times in conflict with other traders.¹⁷ Admittedly 'trader' does not cover some miscellaneous activities (see Chapter 10), but this disadvantage did not seem strong enough to exchange the informative 'trader' for the vaguer 'businessman'.

11.3 *A form of local enterprise*

Lebanese enterprise is sometimes described as foreign and sometimes as local enterprise. It is necessary to clarify this point here. Foreign enterprise can be defined in two ways: as enterprise directed by foreigners and

as enterprise directed from abroad. The European companies have been 'foreign enterprise' according to both definitions, but Lebanese enterprise is not directed from abroad.¹⁸ There are often good reasons for classifying Lebanese enterprise as 'local enterprise'. Its resources of capital and manpower have been inside Sierra Leone, it has perceived only the opportunities which existed in Sierra Leone, its horizons have been limited to the country or an even smaller area, and its decisions have been taken locally.

Local enterprise, including Lebanese enterprise, has shown more constancy than enterprise directed from abroad. How ever big and strong the European companies seemed, their energies were sapped by the diseases of Europe. The European trading and mining companies in Sierra Leone experienced adverse effects from the World Wars when capital and manpower were withdrawn to support the war effort, while local enterprise, whether African or Lebanese, did not undergo such a withdrawal.¹⁹ The depression of the 1930s also affected the European companies and the Lebanese in different ways. While European capital and personnel was withdrawn (see Chapter 2), Lebanese manpower remained constant in Sierra Leone and no capital was repatriated.

11.4 *The continuity of Lebanese enterprise*

The primary quality of Lebanese enterprise has been its continuity. For many Sierra Leoneans the typical Lebanese is the man who has run a particular shop for as long as they can remember. In terms of operations, location, and environment, his continuity is taken for granted.

The Lebanese trader has shown endurance and tenacity, and his optimism has carried him through bad years. These qualities of character were backed up by certain features of the family and the group which we shall discuss below and in Chapter 12. But the continuity was not all a result of virtue. A Lebanese — and his family — normally had no alternative to sticking it out. He could not return to Lebanon, either because he had no money or because he was loath to admit his failure.²⁰

However, his continuity was of benefit to Sierra Leone. In the process of development many new economic activities are necessary; and though most of them are only just viable, if they are not supplied, no development will take place. If they are supplied, their reward will depend on the pace of development; that is, rapid development will make them prosper, but slow development will cause them losses. The Lebanese were willing to move into such areas of marginal profit, sticking to them even when they

were discouraged. It was fortunate that development in Sierra Leone has been rapid enough to bring prosperity to the majority of the Lebanese. The fate of those who struggled for many years in the wrong field or an unsuitable location must not, however, be overlooked.

The continuity of the Lebanese was in one sense superior to that of the Europeans. As organizations the European companies were of course more stable and reliable than the Lebanese, but they did not offer continuity of personnel in their Buying Stations.²¹ The African farmer could not count on seeing the same man in the European store, but he was sure of seeing the same face in the Lebanese shop.

Continuity meant creditworthiness. The Lebanese qualified for credit from the Companies because of their continuity, for a Company manager would reason that a man who had run a shop for several years and had bought supplies regularly could be relied upon to go on doing so. Virtually all European capital that was passed on in the form of trade and bank credit has been given on a personal basis, that is on the basis of past performance. Mortgages and other collateral have been rare. It seems to me that the Europeans were not always aware why they extended credit to the Lebanese. Sometimes they said that they trusted a Lebanese because they knew him, implying a knowledge extending over several years. Another argument was that the Lebanese were not able to abscond in the bush²² but they failed to say that only irregular traders may benefit from such an action; no settled trader would consider giving up his shop in order to escape a debt.

Their continuity was also the reason why they were expected to give credit. An itinerant trader has to be paid in cash because he moves on, but a shopkeeper will be there on the next day to receive his payment. The Lebanese were probably reluctant at first to sell on credit, but they were drawn into it, after they had settled somewhere. Thus a Lebanese trader's continuity made him a channel through which European capital reached the African consumer.

There is no more solid evidence of Lebanese continuity than the buildings in which they live and operate. Some of their buildings date from the inter-war period but most of them were built in the 1950s. In these newer houses concrete has been used extensively. We shall say more about buildings in Chapter 13. Here we emphasize that the investment in buildings was a token of continuity, and that the permanence of concrete underlined this.

11.5 *The opportunities*

We have discussed the constancy and continuity of the Lebanese traders, but these qualities would have been useless if there had been no economic opportunities. We will list here the significant opportunities in chronological order. The first one was the railway.²³ It meant extra purchasing power in the country from which the Lebanese hawkers benefited. The railway also introduced the two-way trade into the Interior, though the chief beneficiaries were the European companies. The Lebanese benefited from the railway mainly through being able to buy kola nuts and rice in the Interior, products in which the Europeans had little interest. Later when the Europeans accepted them as middlemen, the Lebanese also benefited from the two-way trade, and their role in it grew rapidly when the Government constructed more feeder roads in the late 1920s. The Lebanese benefited from these roads because they operated lorries on them.

Gold mining in the 1930s gave many good opportunities to Lebanese who worked with tributors, while the recovery of produce prices in the period 1935-1937 was favourable for a much larger group of the Lebanese. Many benefited from the increased Government spending during World War II, then in the 1950s came the withdrawal of the Companies from many of their Buying Stations, and the diamond boom. The 1960s saw various smaller opportunities, but the diamond industry remained the dominant factor.

Normally only a minority of the Lebanese could profit from a new opportunity: those who saw it in time, or happened to operate in the right location. Nevertheless, each one encouraged the whole community to persevere and to be alert.²⁴ It was only when there was a long spell without any new chances that the Lebanese community became despondent, which seems to have happened in the late 1940s when many lost heart and wondered whether it was worth staying.

It must also be pointed out that many of the opportunities were unexpected and unplanned. Lebanese success in Sierra Leone must be largely explained as windfalls rather than as the result of regular middleman margins (see Section 2 above). For the Europeans who planned their investments and operations, the unplanned profits seemed a side-line, undeserved and unreliable, but Africans and Lebanese to whom the idea of planning was foreign did not disdain them, rather considering them a piece of good luck to offset the poor years. This is expressed very well in Sierra Leone in the saying: The patient dog eats the fat bone. The trader hopes

that his patience (his continuity) will be rewarded one day when an unexpected opportunity occurs. It is my impression that Africans who were not in business themselves did not begrudge the Lebanese their fat bones.

We still have to ask why Europeans and Africans did not exploit these opportunities, especially in the early years when the Lebanese were still uninformed and financially weak. After all, they operated in the same economy with the same chances. It seems to me that the Europeans, in particular the Companies, were precluded from using the opportunities by their rigid concept of the two-way trade, though a few individual Europeans were able to abandon this concept (see Chapters 4 and 6). Why did not the Africans use the new opportunities? (We refer here to the Coastal Africans, especially the Creoles.) It seems to me that the Lebanese hawkers had an advantage over the Creole shopkeepers when the number of unsophisticated consumers rose as a result of the construction of the railway, because it was unattractive for the Creoles to start hawking or to employ hawkers. More serious was the fact that the Creoles, probably because of negligence, captured so little of the kola and rice trades which developed in the Interior in the wake of the railway. Perhaps they were also blinded by the two-way trade concept and concentrated on trans-ocean produce. Or else they saw the opportunities but lacked the drive or the trusted partners in Freetown to make use of them. It is significant that the grievances which the Creoles expressed before and after the riots of 1919 always pointed to the Lebanese advance in the kola and rice trades and in 'petty trading', areas in which the Creoles had lost out. The Creoles in the railway towns who confined themselves to the middleman function of the two-way trade never acquired the financial strength to start new ventures. When lorry transport became profitable in the Interior in the late 1920s for example, Creole traders took little or no part in it. No doubt, there was also a psychological factor. The Lebanese were encouraged by a series of successes; the Creoles were discouraged by a series of failures. It was in 1919 that they analyzed their failures. Then the mood of despondency was at its deepest, robbing them of the desire to look for new opportunities.

11.6 *Family enterprise*

Continuity as described above cannot be provided, and certainly not guaranteed, by a single person. Behind each Lebanese trader stood his wife and his sons.²⁵ It was taken for granted that they would help and if neces-

sary replace and succeed the trader. There was safety in numbers; protection against illness and death. Family ties meant that outsiders (without really understanding them) could count on the continuity of the business. A son would honour the debts of his father and would expect the repayment of credits extended by his father. The coherence of the family was the social factor which was the backbone of the economic success of the Lebanese traders: the authority of a man over his wife and children meant that the business was run as resolutely as by a single person and yet was as strong as a group. It combined the strengths of individualism and of co-operation. A further safeguard was that a family who met with disaster could count on the help of other relatives and compatriots — the repatriation of widows, for instance, was financed by other Lebanese. This second line of defence must have given some extra protection and confidence, but by and large the nuclear family had to cope with its problems on its own.

The business was seen as a joint effort. Children began to share the responsibility when they were young: watching the stocks, helping in the shop, and so on. Close supervision has become a basic feature of the Lebanese businessman. In the early days some Lebanese slept in their shop primarily to save rent for a bedroom, but at the same time they were their own watchmen. Even today many husbands and wives seldom eat breakfast or lunch together, because they take turns at being in the shop. Supervision has come to mean personal inspection. Running a business without daily inspection seems foreign — almost impossible — to them, which has limited the size of their enterprises. They do not want branches in several towns,²⁶ preferring to have their interests confined to a few buildings in close proximity to each other.

The family enterprise has not been a good school for delegating tasks, for even grown-up sons received little freedom of action if they were in charge of a separate shop. When the diamond boom brought extra work and opportunities to the Lebanese community, tension developed in many families between fathers who stuck to the old pattern and sons who wanted to invest and to branch out. In many cases sons could only have their way by disobeying their father and leaving his business. This emphasis on close supervision, and the inability to delegate explain why most Lebanese enterprises are small. Only three or four family enterprises can be classified as large organizations with modern management and an impersonal structure.²⁷ Since the trend towards large-scale business began to reverse in Sierra Leone after about 1950 (see Chapter 2), the managerial weakness of the Lebanese is no longer a serious drawback.

The desire to supervise personally has been an advantage for the eco-

nomies of Sierra Leone, for because of it many Lebanese who grew prosperous during the diamond boom were reluctant to invest their newly acquired capital in enterprises in Lebanon, preferring to invest in Sierra Leone. Only real estate in Lebanon appeared safe enough to them (see Section 10.3).

11.7 *Improvisation*

Like other foreigners the Lebanese had to adapt themselves to the environment and customs of Sierra Leone; but since they were involved in several of the great changes which the country, and especially the Interior, experienced in the 20th century, improvisation was also demanded from them. Of the three main fields of change: colonial rule, mechanical transport, and trade, the last one concerned them most. Trade brought numerous new transactions (including the use of British and colonial currency) into new areas. While most were straightforward, there were also some, which were unusual, and these had to be approached with care. The produce farmer and the Lebanese trader had to work out what was fair if produce contained dirt or was not quite dry, or if the trader gave credit, whether a debt could be claimed from the relatives if the debtor died, and so on. A whole new area of law sprang up, which could be described as 'customary law' because it was unwritten, but it should be realized that foreigners had great influence in shaping it. I believe that the Lebanese had a special knack for legal improvisation, and also realized that the rules which they brought into practice would be doomed if they did not appeal to a sense of fairness and justice in the Africans. Their efforts in this matter compare favourably with those of the British traders and the Paramount Chiefs. British and other European traders were close enough to the colonial administration to know whether their views were going to be acceptable or not. If their view agreed with the official one, it was no longer necessary to ascertain what the African farmer or customer considered fair. The Chiefs had to face new questions as well when trade and money became important in their chiefdoms. Many of them demanded a bigger share of the money than their subjects considered fair, and indignation about a greedy Chief sparked off trouble in many chiefdoms.²⁸

Activities such as renting a house, applying for a lease, and carrying passengers in a lorry or bus, created new legal arrangements. Apparently, the Lebanese succeeded in working out mutually agreeable arrange-

ments, which testifies both to their skill in psychology and to the emphasis on the moral aspect of life in their own culture.

The Lebanese had to live in two worlds, each with its own set of rules. In the African world moral and political considerations restricted, and at times overruled, economic ones. There were for instance areas of trade which the Africans considered as their own and jealously guarded against intruders from overseas. It is significant that the Lebanese have hardly ever traded in perishable foodstuffs,²⁹ and not at all in dried fish,³⁰ firewood and handicrafts. They have never sold in the urban markets nor employed market traders to sell for them. The markets have remained African preserves. In the rice and kola trades they moved into the collecting and wholesale or export stages, but stayed clear of the distributing stage. Later, when they had more capital, the Lebanese avoided becoming landlords to African tenants, or money lenders to African wage earners.³¹ The Lebanese were aware of a rigid framework of custom which reserved these and some other activities for Africans, and they were wise enough to respect African economic rights.³²

Other rules pertained to the European world. When the Lebanese dealt with Europeans, hard economics overruled social and political considerations. Neither friendship, nor loyalty, nor tradition could have the last word if a man wanted to survive. This may explain why some Europeans considered the Lebanese traders restive and potentially disloyal.

The Lebanese had two further advantages: a man could decide and act quickly because he was his own boss, and being in a strange land he did not feel embarrassed at doing something unusual. In this respect he had an advantage over both the Europeans who were inhibited by their background, especially by the desire to maintain the 'dignity of the white man',³³ and the Creoles, although the latter were less bound by tradition than is sometimes believed. This advantage for immigrant trading communities is often overlooked.

11.8 *Pioneers and imitators*

When the Lebanese arrived in Sierra Leone, they were too inexperienced to experiment with new ideas. They had to imitate others and copy their methods. Since the political and economic power of the Europeans was unchallenged in the period from 1900 to 1930 the best thing for them to do was to imitate the Europeans and to co-operate with them. Doing so conferred prestige on the Lebanese in African eyes, for they were seen

either as Europeans or as people who had the same power and knowledge.³⁴ It is not surprising that the European traders resented the Lebanese imitation. They felt that it robbed them of some of the profits which they deserved for their initiative. The Europeans have continued to consider the Lebanese as lacking in originality ever since, in techniques as well as tastes.³⁵

The presence of the Europeans cannot be overrated as a factor in Lebanese behaviour and success. They provided an example and a clear goal of economic advancement. Without their presence the Lebanese might have grown demoralized. This was in fact the problem of the European community whose standard of reference was abroad so that they were often paralyzed by nostalgia. In the same way the Lebanese traders may have stimulated the emergence of African traders by being a realistic, easily observable goal of advancement.³⁶

The Lebanese also copied from the Creole businessmen, at least at first. The best examples are in the rice and kola trades, but there must have been many other instances. This indicates how high the status of the Creoles was at the time, not only in their own eyes, but also in the eyes of unbiased foreigners.³⁷ Like the Europeans the Creoles resented this copying because it encroached on their profits.

It was only when the Lebanese settled in villages in which neither Europeans nor Coastal Africans were willing to live that they became pioneers in their own right. It was indeed this contribution which the Europeans singled out for praise. For most of the period until 1950, however, they continued as imitators of other traders, mainly of Europeans. It was only when the diamond boom brought numerous new opportunities, first in general merchandise trading and later in services and manufacturing, that resourceful pioneers were able to try new ventures. Since then the Lebanese community has had within its own ranks pioneers as well as imitators. Every pioneer was soon followed by his compatriots, so that his initial advantage quickly disappeared; it has surprised me that the Lebanese pioneers accept this fact with so much equanimity. It also seems that no Lebanese has any scruples about emulating a compatriot who comes up with a new idea. The idea of the official protection of copyrights and patents seems foreign to the Lebanese and presumably to most African businessmen. While this is bad for the pioneer, it is a good thing for the consumer, at least at the present stage of development. Competition among the Lebanese is a normal feature and has done more to protect the consumer than any Government measures.

The statement that the Lebanese have been more imitators than

initiators should not be seen as negative. I believe that a great deal of economic development depends on the imitation of techniques, practices, and forms of organization which have proved successful elsewhere. Imitation pays. Naturally, slavish imitation is undesirable and even dangerous, but this does not mean that it should be deprecated in a man who knows how to improvise. In fact, the unselfconscious way in which the Lebanese have copied, adapted, and improvised may serve as an example to African businessmen.

11.9 *Conclusions*

The Lebanese entrepreneur in Sierra Leone has been primarily a trader. He has succeeded because of the rapid economic development which took place during the colonial period. He deserves credit for his tenacity and optimism which enabled him to make full use of the economic opportunities which arose. Tenacity was as much a virtue of the Lebanese family as of the individual trader, and provided Lebanese enterprise with more continuity than either European or African enterprise. The opportunities of the environment and this continuity have determined the role of the Lebanese, so that economic analysis is able to explain, almost completely, their role and success.

Social aspects of the Lebanese community: internal

We now turn to the social life of the Lebanese. We had to neglect this in the preceding chapters because we were concentrating on economic aspects. We shall discuss the geographical, historical, and cultural background of the Lebanese, their family life, their interests, and their social problems. Until now we have been able to portray the Lebanese as a homogeneous group. This is both possible and useful, as far as economic analysis is concerned, but a sociological study reveals great differences within the Lebanese community. In fact, the idea of a closely knit, united community which Europeans and Africans assume to exist, is convenient, but unrealistic.

This chapter deals with the social relationships which the Lebanese have among themselves; the next one describes relations with the rest of the population of Sierra Leone.

12.1 *Five groups*

There are five distinct groups among the Lebanese in Sierra Leone which I shall call after the areas in Lebanon from which they come. Map VII roughly indicates these areas:

- 1) Rahbe and neighbouring villages
- 2) the El-Metn district
- 3) Tleill and neighbouring villages
- 4) South Lebanon, or Tyre and hinterland
- 5) Tripoli and some villages to the north of it.

It is almost certain that the first Lebanese immigrant in Sierra Leone belonged to one of the first three groups, but I could not discover to which

Map VII. *Lebanon, areas of emigration to Sierra Leone*

one because nobody could tell me his name. The first member of the South Lebanon group arrived in Sierra Leone around 1910 and the Tripoli group after World War I. Each group has grown over the years as children were born and as relatives from Lebanon came to Sierra Leone. The first three groups were properly established before World War I, but the other two groups reached that stage only in the inter-war period.

The South Lebanon group is the largest, numbering over four thousand people (and accounting for half the Lebanese community), the Rahbe group follows with well over a thousand, the El-Metn group has never exceeded one thousand, and the Tleill and Tripoli groups number a few hundred people each. (The Basma, Morowah, Halloway, Hashim, Jaward, and Mourtada families, or clans, belong to the South Lebanon group, while the Blell and Koussa families come from Rahbe, and the Milhem, Yazbeck, and Zaidan families belong to the El-Metn group. The Aboud family accounts for about one third of the Tleill group, and we mention the Hallaby and Hamawe families as representatives of the Tripoli group.)

There may be up to a thousand people who cannot be allocated to one of the five groups above. A few come from Beirut and there are a number of Druze families who came before World War I, but more important are the new immigrants of the post-war period. Some ninety per cent of all Lebanese immigrants have come from villages where they used to be peasants or did other simple work.

12.2 *Immigration as a family movement*

As soon as the early immigrants had succeeded in a small way, some sent money to their wives and told them to travel to Freetown, while others who were not married arranged with their relatives to find a bride for them. The wives and brides travelled under the protection of relatives or friends who also emigrated to West Africa. While the Europeans were still doubtful about the wisdom of bringing out their wives and rearing their children in West Africa, there were already many Lebanese wives in Sierra Leone; the first Lebanese children were born before 1910. Thus the nuclear family was transplanted to Sierra Leone. Soon more distant members of the family followed, because a successful immigrant felt obliged to sponsor young relatives of his own or his wife to come to Sierra Leone. Lebanese immigration in Sierra Leone was therefore based on the family. This had important implications. In the first place there was a tendency

to recreate the relationships of their old home and to preserve its customs in the offshoot of the family or clan that was established in Sierra Leone. Secondly, as most families or clans had lived in only one valley — or even one village — of Lebanon, emigration to Sierra Leone has long been confined to very specific areas. It has had a narrow geographical basis; the five areas shown on the map have been the main sources of emigration to Sierra Leone from the beginning.

The people of these areas differed from each other in important respects. The Republic of Lebanon derives its name from the Lebanon mountains. The valleys of this mountain range offered shelter to minorities in past centuries, and few countries in the world display such a variety, in both religion and culture, within a limited area. Each group was isolated, and cherished and at times defended, its isolation. To mix with people of other groups was exceptional, and was frowned upon. (In some ways these groups could be compared with tribes in Africa.) Until at least 1950 a Lebanese coming to Sierra Leone depended on the loyalty of his group and brought the old divisions with him to Africa. The new immigrants of the post-war period reflect the breaking down of isolation in Lebanon; especially those who have lived in Beirut tend to mix with fellow Lebanese, regardless of their religious background or geographical origin. The Lebanese nation or Arab solidarity mean more to them than the old groups.

12.3 *Religion and history*

The El-Metn and the Tleill groups are Maronites, a Christian group, whose Church goes back to pre-Islam days. As in the 17th century the Maronite Church united with the Roman Catholic Church, many Maronites in Sierra Leone describe themselves simply as Catholics.

The Rahbe group is also Christian, belonging to the Greek Orthodox Church. Relations between the Roman Catholic Church and the Orthodox Church have not been good in Lebanon. Many Orthodox Lebanese avoided Catholic schools, and preferred Protestant Churches to the Catholic Church when they emigrated to a country where there was no Orthodox Church. Although these differences have become less important in recent years, it is useful to consider the Orthodox and the Maronites in Sierra Leone as two distinct groups until the 1950s. The Orthodox had better relations with the Muslims than the Maronites had. Some even gave their sons Muslim names.

The South Lebanon group is Shi'ite, that is they are Muslims of the Shi'a sect. This sect is a minority in Lebanon as well as in West Africa. Their history and dogmas have taught them not to emphasize public worship or to proselytize. While they are not very strict, private worship has been retained by them, mainly in the form of fasting and pilgrimage. The Shi'ites have long been one of the poorest groups in Lebanon.

The Tripoli group is Sunnite Muslim. Since the Sunnites were never a suppressed minority, few of them have emigrated.

The majority of the Lebanese in Sierra Leone are Muslims as they have probably been for the last forty years¹ although in the early decades there were more Christians than Muslims. (It is possible to attach religious rather than geographical labels to the five groups which we have distinguished. For readers who are not familiar with the history of the Middle East the geographical label may be simpler.)

We will now give a brief survey of the recent history of Lebanon. Lebanon formed part of the Turkish Empire until 1918, though part of what is now Lebanon had already acquired a certain autonomy in the Turkish Empire in 1861. All the Maronites of El-Metn lived in the autonomous district (shown in Map VII), but the other groups lived outside it, in the Province of Syria. The Maronites from Tleill and the Greek Orthodox from Rahbe who left before World War I had little confidence in the Turkish rulers. They were emigrants who wanted to settle abroad, so those who came to Sierra Leone could be considered settlers, who hoped to find freedom and a new life under the British flag. A few applied for naturalization even before 1914. The Maronites of El-Metn had the same attitudes, although their area enjoyed autonomy. After the Young Turks came to power in 1909 they felt that the autonomy of their district was endangered, and in fact, it was abolished in 1915. The few Shi'ites who came before 1914 were greatly influenced by the fear of conscription into the Turkish army. All families that came to Sierra Leone before 1914 had considered a complete break with their home country, and aimed at building up a new life abroad, an attitude which also influenced their children.

When the French established the Republic of Lebanon under their Mandate in 1920, a new category of Lebanese citizens came into being. The Tleill, Rahbe, and Tripoli groups — sometimes summarized as the Akar group after the plain of Akar — and the South Lebanon group were reluctant to use the name Lebanese. They felt that the extended boundaries of the Republic of Lebanon were a French creation, and that their home villages might possibly be reallocated to the Republic of Syria. This was one reason why the name 'Syrian' continued after 1920.

The Lebanese who came to Sierra Leone in the inter-war period may have had their doubts about the policy of France, but most of them looked forward to a fully independent Lebanese state. They hoped to retire in Lebanon after they had earned enough in West Africa. The Muslims especially, who could not easily feel at home under British rule, saw a return to their home country as their ideal, but unfortunately for them, many did not earn enough to be able to retire in their home country. The new immigrants of the 1950s and 1960s have the closest ties to Lebanon, for they have seen the prosperity and independence of Lebanon with their own eyes and want to live in Sierra Leone only as long as their business ambitions require. One could make a distinction between the 'local Lebanese' (the old immigrants) and the 'expatriate Lebanese' (the new immigrants). The former would have in general fewer ties with Lebanon than the latter. The distinction may be useful but it is not clear-cut, for some of the local Lebanese married girls born and educated in Lebanon, while some new immigrants married into established families. Moreover some new immigrants have become fully involved in Sierra Leone because of their business and cannot break away from it.

The five groups have remained distinct in Sierra Leone. Very few conversions have taken place, moreover Muslims and Christians rarely intermarry (I have heard of two such cases in Sierra Leone, both of them without the approval of the parents) neither did Orthodox and Maronite for many years. The first case dates from 1941. Since that time many more intermarriages have taken place, especially after many Orthodox joined the Catholic Church in Sierra Leone. It is interesting that the Maronites from Tleill have accounted for more intermarriages with the Orthodox than the Maronites of El-Metn, which indicates that the groups from the North had more mutual contacts. It is also interesting that the Maronites from Tleill and from El-Metn did not often intermarry.

It is not surprising that groups which were so distinct at home, settled in different areas of Sierra Leone. All groups were represented in Freetown, but the differences could be seen in the Provinces until about 1950. The Maronites from El-Metn spread out along the railway with strong concentrations in Moyamba, Kangahun, Mano, and Bo. They did not move beyond Gerihun. The Maronites from Tleill settled mainly in Freetown, but branched out to the North: Magbeli, Lunsar, Robat, and other places in Kambia. The Orthodox settled in Freetown, the Sherbro area, and in all railway towns from Blama to Pendembu. The Shi'ites, coming later, settled on the branch line of the railway from Bauya to Makeni, and in the Port Loko and Kambia Districts. They also joined Maronites

traders on the railway between Waterloo and Bo. The Sunnites from Tripoli stayed mainly in Freetown. The Orthodox have played a major role in the produce trade of the South, the Shi'ites in the North, where palm kernel was the main produce. The El-Metn Maronites were engaged in the rice trade as they bought surpluses between Moyamba and Bo for the Freetown market. The rise of Bo and the decline of Bonthe favoured the Maronites but was bad for the Orthodox.

12.4 Education, retirement, and contacts with Lebanon

The Christian Lebanese have always been anxious to give their children a good education. The Maronites sent their children to the Catholic schools, and so did most of the Orthodox although with some misgivings. St. Edward's School for boys and the St. Joseph's Convent for Girls were both popular, which is one reason why so many Orthodox were later prepared to join the Catholic Church.

The Muslims followed, though very slowly. They were loath to send their children to school, because most of the schools in Sierra Leone were Mission schools. However, they seem to have preferred Mission schools with African teachers to those with European teachers. This meant that their children often attended Protestant schools (EUB and Anglican). The Muslims also felt more strongly about sending their children to Lebanon for their education, though few Lebanese could afford this before 1950. Generally speaking the Muslim Lebanese of the second generation have less education than their Christian counterparts; among the new Muslim immigrants, however, there are many better educated men.

Again, the Christian Lebanese were more inclined to adopt English customs while the Muslim Lebanese kept longer to their own traditions: until the early 1950s most Muslim Lebanese women wore a veil. We are under the impression that the open-mindedness of the Christian Lebanese was not confined to English or Western customs, but applied also to Creole and African customs. More differences appear when we investigate where the older Lebanese retired. More than half of those who left Sierra Leone to retire went to Lebanon: these were mainly Muslims. Many Muslims ended their career with a pilgrimage to Mecca and then returned to Lebanon. Pilgrimage and retirement are firmly associated in the minds of the Muslim Lebanese. As a consequence there are not many Alhaji's in Sierra Leone, but a high proportion of the Lebanese who have retired in Lebanon have made the pilgrimage. Retirement rarely means

idleness, and retired fathers frequently return to Sierra Leone to see how their sons are running the family business, and to visit old friends.

We do not know of any Muslim Lebanese who retired in Europe, but there are several Maronites and Greek Orthodox who have retired in UK, Ireland, and the Canary Islands.² Those who retired in Ireland are all Maronites. The contacts with Ireland run via the Irish priests who worked in Sierra Leone. These countries have always been popular with the Lebanese when they go on holiday. But since about 1950 all groups have increased their contacts with Lebanon at the expense of contacts with Europe. This is true even of the Maronites. Important in this connection was the retirement to Lebanon of the senior partner of the firm of Milhem in 1956. Since then several other Maronites have retired in Lebanon.

Occasionally visitors from Lebanon come to Sierra Leone to visit the Lebanese community. Religious leaders, for example, have come to visit people of their own group in Sierra Leone.³ These visits strengthen the ties with Lebanon. Usually the visitor collects money for projects at home: churches, schools, etc. The Lebanese have given generously ever since their economic position improved in the 1950s. (Anonymous gifts are the exception, and there is strong pressure to outdo others in generosity.) The Shi'ites in particular feel the solidarity with their own people in Lebanon.

Another category of visitors has been journalists who report about the Lebanese communities abroad to their compatriots at home in the form of articles and books.⁴ Whether these books were in fact written because of commercial motives — as many Lebanese in Sierra Leone think — rather than for genuine patriotic reasons, they are a useful comment on the Lebanese community in Sierra Leone.

12.5 *Cohesion in the family*

As has already been said, the Lebanese family shows great cohesion and solidarity. Wives help in the shop and seem to be able to replace their husbands when they are away. Yet it is rare for a woman to run her own shop; the few who do so are widowed or divorced. Lebanese wives have worked hard in the family business. This meant, however, that they could spend less time on their children who are normally left in the care of nannies.

Sons and daughters also help in the business. Rather than seeing themselves as individuals who join the business as partners, they see the business as belonging to the family, in particular the father. Until very re-

cently the authority of the father in the family and in the business was unquestioned and even well-educated sons in their thirties or forties would submit to him. Many of the bigger Lebanese enterprises in Sierra Leone are run under the name of a father who has retired or died, which underlines the continuity and strength of Lebanese business: a family survives, even if individuals are ill or die, and all members work together. It also explains a conservative tendency in Lebanese business. Young men are sometimes kept back in villages or in branches which are doomed to decline, and only in recent years have they been able to go their own way without being ostracized by the community. Thus the Lebanese have founded 'commercial dynasties', in contrast to the Europeans and the Creoles.⁵

An established Lebanese trader also feels obligations to relatives, in particular to the sons of his brothers and his wife's brothers.⁶ If those boys grew up in Lebanon and could not find a satisfactory job or business, he would feel obliged to help them start a business in Sierra Leone, which might involve him in paying the fare from Lebanon to Sierra Leone and the deposit specified by the immigration authorities in Freetown. It would certainly mean that he would provide board and lodging for the new-comer and would take him on as an apprentice in his business for a period of six months to three years. Afterwards the trader would still help the new-comer with credit to set up on his own. This whole effort is known as 'sponsoring' or 'supporting'. Without it the Lebanese community could not have grown as fast as it did. Relations between sponsor and new-comer have sometimes been strained, for many established traders have painted too rosy a picture of life in West Africa, so that new-comers have started with a disappointment. Also, later the new-comer and the sponsor would perhaps become competitors, if the new-comer did not transfer to another town. Support was normally restricted to relatives. Only very rich men would feel obliged to sponsor sons of friends. Even then the new-comer virtually always belonged to the same village and religious group. Only in the 1950s, when the well-established Lebanese began to recruit skilled men from Lebanon, could a new immigrant belong to a different village and a different religion from his employer or sponsor.

Some new-comers married the daughters of their sponsors. A number of these marriages have been between first cousins, though this is more common among Muslims than among Christians. They strengthen the family business considerably. It used to be common in the past for marriages to be pre-arranged, in which case marriage and the sponsoring of a new immigrant were closely related. Thus Lebanese fathers in Sierra

Leone had little difficulty in finding suitable husbands for their daughters born in Sierra Leone, including Afro-Lebanese daughters. But when the Colonial Government decreed in 1954 that such marriages did not automatically give prospective husbands the right to immigrate into Sierra Leone, the Lebanese community was shocked (see Chapter 15). The measure was hardest on the Muslims, where marriages, perhaps arranged as much as ten years ahead, were endangered, but several Christian families were also affected.

Usually the new-comer considered himself lucky to join his relatives in Sierra Leone, but occasionally a family in Sierra Leone whom success had eluded for many years was happy to welcome a brother, cousin, or son-in-law who, because of energy, education, or capital, offered new hope. Some of these immigrants had shown their qualities in other countries such as the USA and the oil countries of the Middle East before coming to Sierra Leone.

Many Lebanese keep photos of their children in the shop to be reminded of them during their work, especially when the children are away in Lebanon, for the photos help them bear the separation. Since about 1950 many Lebanese parents have sent their children to school in Lebanon. Even the 'local' Lebanese have become increasingly inclined to do so. Some families in the Provinces have realized that the cheapest solution is that the wife and the children set up house in the home village in Lebanon while the husband stays behind in Sierra Leone to earn money. After three or four children are born in Sierra Leone husband and wife agree to separate for some years to finance the education of their children. Such lonely men make special room for photographs. Whoever visits the Lebanese at home is struck by the many family pictures: photos of the father and mother of the host are likely to take the place of honour. There is much genuine respect and love for the parents; the local Lebanese especially speak with pride of their parents, who suffered the deprivations of the early years to build up a better life for their children.

12.6 *Cohesion beyond the family*

In the past, when the five groups were small, the head of one family was usually accepted as the head of the group, and he provided cohesion between the members. When cases of hardship occurred, the family was first called upon to help. If there was not enough money, other members of the group felt obliged to assist, and in serious cases members of other

groups who lived in the same town or district in Sierra Leone would assist. When a man died, his widow would be helped, while in cases of illness, the money for treatment, and if necessary repatriation, would be collected. Similarly, a Lebanese who found himself stranded in the Provinces could count on hospitality of other Lebanese, regardless of religion or origin. Certain older men known for their wisdom were sometimes called upon to arbitrate in quarrels between people who did not belong to their family or group. These men or others who spoke English well might be asked to intervene with the colonial administration, for example, on behalf of people of a different family or group.

All the examples given show that, at times, solidarity was felt beyond the extended family but normally each family would fend for itself. This situation puzzled the colonial officials, and was inconvenient to them as far as policy was concerned. Some officials tried to find some subdivisions of the Lebanese community hoping that this would be the key to a better understanding. Europeans have been prone to trace divisions to religious differences, notably between Muslims and Christians, a division which they knew and could understand. We shall see that this was only one of many divisions that mattered and that quarrels could result from many other causes.

With the modernization of the 1950s the picture changed. The Lebanese grew more liberal and tolerant, but also more individualistic. The community continued to lack unity, but certain projects had a better chance to succeed. In 1952 the Lebanese School was founded.⁷ It was modernized over the years, now possessing a big modern building in West Freetown; a school bus is used to transport the children to and from school. The Lebanese School is a primary school with Arabic as the language of instruction. It has relieved many parents from the financial burden of educating their children in Lebanon. The school fees are not enough to pay for the school and many leading Lebanese have supported the school with annual contributions. The South Lebanon group which is strong in Freetown, and has also shown more cohesion than the other groups, was mainly responsible for the establishment of the school. Since 1968 the Lebanese School has had Christian teachers as well as Muslim and attracted children from the Orthodox and Maronite families. Another scheme initiated by the South Lebanon group was the Young Sportsmen's Club which has fine sport fields and a sport hall to the west of Freetown.

12.7 *Internal quarrels*

The Lebanese community has been afflicted by numerous internal quarrels, some of which can be traced to feuds which existed in the home villages in Lebanon. Many others have resulted from commercial rivalry in Sierra Leone when there was competition for a licence, an agency, or some other privilege. When two heads of families fell foul of each other, the families would have to take sides. Other Lebanese had to support one or other of the parties, if they belonged to the same group. This support made it more difficult to settle a conflict, so that it might continue for years. Sometimes the parties agreed to ask a wise and respected Lebanese to come and arbitrate between them as has already been mentioned, but the decision of the arbiter was not always accepted. The Maronites told the Catholic priests about the quarrels within the El-Metn and Tleill groups, but the priests found it difficult to settle these conflicts. One of the main tasks of the Lebanese diplomatic representatives after 1960 has been to arbitrate internal conflicts.

Some conflicts escalated so far that one of the parties decided to go to court. Civil cases among Lebanese have frequently appeared on the agendas of the courts and the judges have seen many Lebanese before them as plaintiffs and defendants, often in complicated cases, frequently about property. The Lebanese have spent a great deal of money on litigation; I was told that at least one civil case went up to the Privy Council in London. Occasionally officials got involved in the quarrels, for instance during World War II (see p. 308) and in Kono in the 1960s (see p. 207). British officials considered the internal quarrels incomprehensible and were loath to be drawn in, but it is possible that the Police sometimes benefited from these quarrels by being able to get information about suspects.⁸ Most African civil servants have been just as wary of Lebanese quarrels as the British.

Many Lebanese realized that these quarrels did the community much harm and the parties were often exhorted to end their conflict amicably or to ask a wise man to arbitrate. Some visitors from Lebanon were shocked when they heard of the 'jealousy . . . slander . . . and . . . exaggerated spirit of competition'.⁹ But I am inclined to think that these quarrels and rivalries had a positive effect, too. They created excitement and left no time for nostalgia and brooding. They forced the Lebanese to concentrate their attention on their affairs in Africa and not to think too much of their home country. After 1930 the community was large enough to allow factions and quarrels without being destroyed by them.

12.8 *The rich and the poor*

Great economic differentiation has taken place within the Lebanese community. Some families have grown rich, many are well-to-do, some are poor, and a few desperately poor. Visible poverty is confined to a few declining towns and villages, such as Port Loko and Sembehun. The Lebanese in these places could have left when trade declined, but they preferred to stay in the place and the house they knew well. Many of these poor Lebanese are older men, but not all. There is also concealed poverty, often connected with disappointment, frustration, drink, and gambling. Shopkeeping can be very dull when trade is bad, and many Lebanese cannot face the fact that one day they will return to Lebanon without the riches they had dreamt of. Gambling attracts these men because of its excitement and because it promises the riches which have eluded them in business. Gambling has been the bane of the community.¹⁰ While the community as a whole did not grow richer or poorer, the effect on individual Lebanese was great. I was told of men who had been respected clients of the Companies, but had lost their capital — and credit standing — because of their gambling losses. (On the other hand, for some Lebanese gambling must have been a valuable addition to capital.)

These poor men are written off by the community. It is no good giving them money because 'they eat the money' rather than use it productively.¹¹ Even relatives restrict their gifts to small, regular payments. The poor resent this deeply and complain that their rich compatriots are indifferent to them. The intensity of the resentment can be understood only if one remembers that the Lebanese have always felt that generosity is a great virtue.

Many rich Lebanese have become leaders within their group or even for the whole Lebanese community. Wealth, honour, and responsibility towards fellow Lebanese are still closely associated. Even those who aspire only to wealth and social honours cannot escape social obligations. If they try to shirk these duties, they lose goodwill among their compatriots. (The sense of responsibility seems to me strongest with the South Lebanon group.) The new immigrants and the diamond dealers have not been called to leadership as yet. Most of the present leaders live in Freetown and the heart of the Lebanese community continues to be there.

Social aspects of the Lebanese community: external

What have been the relations between Sierra Leoneans and Lebanese? How have the Sierra Leoneans reacted to the Lebanese? And how have the Lebanese adjusted to the African environment? In trying to find answers to these questions we must distinguish the early period in which the relations between Lebanese and Africans were of local significance only, and which ended in 1946 as a result of the attempts of the colonial government to integrate the country politically, from the period since then, when the relations between Lebanese and Sierra Leoneans acquired a national significance as well.

13.1 *The early period in the Protectorate*

Most Lebanese lived in a rural environment in the early period. Even the commercial and administrative centres of the Protectorate were small communities in which a Lebanese trader was conspicuous and known to all. His appearance and business methods were freely commented on, and virtually all Lebanese acquired a nickname in the vernacular language — many of which reveal careful observation and psychological ingenuity — which were marks of acceptance and even goodwill. Many Africans did not take the trouble to learn the real names of the Lebanese: the nickname was enough.¹

It took most Lebanese much longer to become acquainted with the African population. They soon learnt the names of the Chief and the elders, but most people they only got to know as customers. As few Lebanese parents could afford to send their children abroad in the early period, many Lebanese children grew up with African children, playing together

and going to the same school. They learnt the local language and customs very well, and many second-generation Lebanese are proud of their proficiency in this.

When a Lebanese began to trade, he would live in a rented African house. If he found the house too simple, he could alter or extend it, but he remained a tenant. When the African community had approved of him, the Lebanese could ask for land on which to build his own house. Some tribes were more willing to approve of the Lebanese than others and even within one tribe there were differences. Although the Mende tribe was quite hospitable to the Lebanese, some chiefdoms, for instance Bumpe, never allowed a Lebanese to set up his business in their area.

A request for land had to be addressed to the Paramount Chief. This rule of customary law was codified in the Protectorate Lands Ordinance of 1922, which regulated the presence of the 'non-natives', like Europeans, Lebanese, and Creoles, in the Chiefdoms, and the conditions on which they could acquire land. It was as much an 'immigration' ordinance as a land acquisition ordinance, though as they were never refused entry, Europeans were apt to forget the immigration aspect. Lebanese and Creoles were in a less favourable position. They were sometimes refused when they wanted to set up business in a Chiefdom, and, what was worse, they were occasionally thrown out after living there for some time.

The Ordinance distinguished three forms of settlement: 'tenancy at will', 'a term of years', and 'a lease'. The first provided virtually no safeguards for the settlers, while the last one included an official document supported by a sketch plan. It provided the necessary safeguards for a man who wanted to build a substantial house. It appears that not many of such houses were built in the Protectorate before 1950. I saw some Lebanese houses in Rotifunk, Kangahun, Mano, and Bo which had been built in the inter-war period. They were two-storey buildings resembling Creole houses, but built with more corrugated iron sheets and less wood. It is probable that all these houses are leasehold, but we cannot estimate the total number of leases, because there may have been Lebanese traders who held a lease but had no money to erect a building. It is reasonably certain that most of the Lebanese leases were located in the railway towns. The majority of the Lebanese traders in the Protectorate were tenants at will in the early period, so they had no great stake in the town or village where they operated and were free to move elsewhere if they wanted to.

13.2 *The early period in Freetown*

The situation in Freetown was completely different.² The Creoles looked down on the Lebanese because they were uneducated and poor. With racial prejudices growing stronger around 1900 the Creoles saw the Lebanese immigrants as unmistakable evidence that the white race was not culturally superior. Their contempt forbade marriages between Creole girls and Lebanese men, so that as far as I know there were no such unions until after World War II. Contempt turned into dislike and even hatred when the Lebanese were successful in business. This led to the anti-Syrian riots of 1919 which we described in Chapter 1.

An undercurrent of anti-Lebanese feelings has remained among the Creoles,³ but personal contacts have helped to counteract this. School, mainly the St. Edward's School and the Prince of Wales School, was the environment in which Lebanese and Creole boys met.⁴ Here the pattern was established that Creoles and Lebanese speak Krio together. Some contacts have led to life-long friendships. As many Creoles were civil servants, the Lebanese traders had to deal with them on many occasions and were anxious to establish good relations.

13.3 *Religious background and affiliation in Sierra Leone*

Many contacts which the Lebanese established in Sierra Leone were determined by their religious background. As has already been mentioned, the Maronites joined the Roman Catholic Church in Sierra Leone; this required only a minor adjustment. They were used to a richer liturgy and still appreciate the special services organized in the Sacred Heart Cathedral when a visiting Maronite priest officiates. But they have had good contacts with the Irish priests who worked as missionaries in Sierra Leone, and supported their work financially. The priests baptized the Maronite children, taught them at school, and advised parents about further education. Although no Maronite became a priest, many boys were helped to go to Ireland for further studies, mostly at Blackrock College in Dublin. Church and school gave the Maronites a lead over the other Lebanese in identifying themselves with Sierra Leone: some of the early Sierra Leonean politicians were supported by Maronites.⁵ After independence several Maronites applied for citizenship of Sierra Leone, and most of these applications were genuine and not inspired by the economic restrictions on foreigners.

The early Greek Orthodox immigrants joined the Anglican Church. In Freetown their children were baptized in St. George's Cathedral and Holy Trinity Church by Creole clergymen. The Orthodox in the Sherbro area also joined the Anglican Church. Where there were no Anglican churches, the Orthodox turned to other denominations: in Kailahun District they joined the Methodist Mission and in Blama the Roman Catholic Church. It was most unfortunate for the Orthodox that the Anglican Church never became a real home for them because of the animosity between the Creoles and the Lebanese. Very few Lebanese have remained members in Freetown and even fewer attend the services. The Orthodox parents were also reluctant to send their children to schools with Creole staff. They preferred the Catholic schools with their mainly Irish staff. This paved the way for better relations with the Catholic Church. Since World War II most Orthodox have become members of the Catholic Church, but they attend services only occasionally. I am convinced that these problems of affiliation have greatly handicapped the Orthodox in Sierra Leone in social, political, and economic respects.

The Muslim Lebanese faced even greater problems. Initially it seemed that the Muslim communities in Freetown would form a bridge between them and the African population, but after some time it became clear that Islam did not forge strong ties, possibly because of differences in religious observance. In general the African families who have been Muslims for two or three generations are stricter than the Lebanese. Perhaps there was a lack of determination to find recognition among their fellow Muslims, in particular on the side of the Shi'ite Lebanese. Very few Lebanese attend the communal prayers on Eid-el-Fitri and Eid-el-Adha.⁶ Joint public worship is further discouraged by the absence of central mosques in most towns. Only one Lebanese has been invited by African Muslims to act as Imam in one of their mosques, and even he is in fact a Sunnite refugee from Palestine. Pilgrimage does not unite Lebanese and African Muslims either. The Lebanese feel that their motives for going on pilgrimage are more devout than those of most African pilgrims. The few who have made the pilgrimage and returned to Sierra Leone rarely use the title 'Alhaji' and do not want to be addressed with it except by friends. Both Lebanese and African Muslims have long been suspicious of Western education and did not send their sons to school. This meant that an important meeting point was entirely missing before World War II. The Ahmadiyya Mission has tried to overcome the Muslim fears by establishing their own primary and secondary schools, but only a few Lebanese boys attend these.⁷

One aspect of the schools must still be mentioned. In keeping with the English pattern the schools in Sierra Leone have devoted much time to sports. Many Lebanese boys have played football and other games side by side with Sierra Leoneans and some of them have continued as active sportsmen after their schooldays, while others have felt an obligation to serve a sport club as an organizer, spending a lot of time and money in this way. Sports are an area in which the relations between Africans and Lebanese have been close and good.

13.4 *Mixed marriages*

There was a serious shortage of women in the Lebanese community during the first four or five decades of this century. Many Lebanese who had come as bachelors to Sierra Leone were too poor to return to Lebanon to find a bride, or even to pay the fare for a bride whom relatives had found for them. Many lonely traders, despondent about their business, decided to take an African wife. Mixed marriages were more common among the poorer traders, so this is a reason for their preponderance in the Northern Province. Altogether there must have been several hundreds of mixed marriages in Sierra Leone. Normally they were proper marriages according to African customary law, approved by the parents of the bride and by the elders of the community where the trader had settled. A different pattern could hardly be expected in the rural environment of the Protectorate. No doubt there were illicit relationships of various kinds but these were mainly a feature of Freetown and, more recently, of the larger towns in the Provinces.

Many mixed marriages succeeded. The wives were proud of their position, and tried to adjust to the ways of their Lebanese husbands, while the husbands could not afford to antagonize their wives and their in-laws. When children were born, both husband and wife took great pains to look after them. Some Afro-Lebanese children received more care than full Lebanese ones — for example, many parents considered education even more important for Afro-Lebanese children than for others. A happy marriage meant that the Lebanese strongly identified himself with the tribe into which he had married. If he managed to learn the language well, he could feel at home, and would settle down, giving up his plans to retire in Lebanon. He would also accept the obligations of an extended family.

Some mixed marriages failed; two causes for this stand out. If a Leba-

nese moved away, his wife and children might refuse to go with him. In the 1950s when the Lebanese withdrew from many villages a great number of marriages broke up, especially if the husbands moved to Freetown, where mixed marriages were frowned upon. A number of Lebanese fathers also disowned their Afro-Lebanese children. A second cause to wreck mixed marriages was the arrival of a Lebanese wife. Sometimes the trader in Sierra Leone, but more often his relatives in Lebanon, would decide that he should get married to a girl from Lebanon. Some marriages had been pre-arranged long before. When the bride arrived in Sierra Leone, the difficulties started. If the bridegroom was a Christian, he would have to send his African wife away. As few mixed marriages had been consecrated in a church, the African wife was unable to prevent the divorce. A Muslim in contrast could marry his second wife and hope that his first (African) and his second (Lebanese) wife would get on together. This was a vain hope, and most Muslims agreed after some time to send their African wives away. I suspect that the intolerance of the Lebanese wives arose from the fact that they had not been told about the first marriage and felt cheated. There are a number of Muslim families where Lebanese and Afro-Lebanese children remained together as one family, occasionally even as one business. In a few cases the eldest Afro-Lebanese son became the head of the family after the death of the father.⁸

The majority of the Afro-Lebanese in Sierra Leone have Temne mothers. This is due to the fact that there were more mixed marriages in the Northern Province where the Temne are the largest tribe, but there seems to have been a cultural reason as well: the Temne had fewer objections to foreign sons-in-law than other tribes. Some parents were even proud to give their daughter in marriage to a Lebanese.

Most of what we have written here refers to the early immigrants. We must now turn to the next generation. The young Lebanese of the second generation were controlled by their parents in matters of marriage, and most Lebanese parents objected to mixed marriages, especially for their daughters. I estimate that less than ten Lebanese girls got married to African husbands.⁹ Sons were in a better position to defy their parents, but few of them were willing to upset family ties in order to marry the African girl of their choice. Nowadays these marriages are mainly a feature of the smaller towns. In the bigger towns, especially those in which the new immigrants have influence, the obstacles for a mixed marriage have become very great.

13.5 *The Afro-Lebanese*

The term Afro-Lebanese came into use in the 1950s.¹⁰ Before that time the word 'mulatto' was the official term¹¹, a word which did not distinguish the children of European fathers from those of Lebanese fathers. This distinction seemed important enough in Sierra Leone in the 1960s to lead to the rapid adoption of the word 'Afro-Lebanese', which emphasizes the Lebanese element at the expense of the African, and obscures the tribe and nationality of the African parent. This is inevitable in Sierra Leone, where Europeans, Lebanese, and many Africans consider the father as the key figure of the family, and where surnames derived from the fathers have become quite common. The Afro-Lebanese (with a Lebanese father) may be divided into three groups:

a) those who are fully recognized by the father and his relatives. Socially and economically they should be grouped with the full Lebanese. Most of them are traders and run shops side by side with the full Lebanese. There are about one thousand individuals in this category.

b) those who have been disowned by the father. This happened more frequently to sons than to daughters. Again, there may be one thousand individuals in this category. Most of them still bear the name of their father, and prefer trade to wage employment.

c) those who were born out of wedlock, and have always stayed with their mothers. Apart from their appearance, they would be considered Africans. There is no way of knowing their number. (I shall exclude them when I speak of the Afro-Lebanese in this book.)

The mothers of many Afro-Lebanese were anxious to see their children trained in a good school. They felt that this would remove any insecurity from their status. The fathers agreed and found the necessary money, which explains why a fair number of Afro-Lebanese are well-educated. After completing their studies a few have accepted employment with the Government and the European companies. In this respect they have differed from the full Lebanese who have preferred to work on their own account. The position of Afro-Lebanese civil servants became a political issue in 1971, as we shall see in Chapter 16.

A major decision had to be taken when the Afro-Lebanese children grew up. Were they going to join the tribal societies or not? No father would allow his daughter to join the Bundu society for girls, and only few sons joined the Poro societies. Education and Christian influence held many back. My impression is that it was more common among Muslim Afro-Lebanese, and then especially in the Northern Province. The

decision about marriage was related. Lebanese fathers felt obliged to find full Lebanese husbands for their Afro-Lebanese daughters, which was easy in the years that few Lebanese girls came to Sierra Leone. A few Afro-Lebanese girls married African men, usually men whose education promised a secure home for the girl. The position of Afro-Lebanese sons was different. The efforts of many well-established Lebanese to find full Lebanese wives for them have been remarkable. There may be some fifty of these marriages, but most Afro-Lebanese boys have married African girls, thus choosing to identify themselves with the country of their mother. Such a marriage implies the wish to settle in Sierra Leone.

All Afro-Lebanese have to choose between Lebanon and Sierra Leone. They may vacillate for many years, but marriage usually shows for which country they have decided. Their children pose a new problem of terminology and classification. There are those with one African grandparent — usually a grandmother. Virtually all of them are socially accepted as full Lebanese. The name Afro-Lebanese could be applied to them but this is rarely done. We can ignore the insignificant number of children with two African grandparents, but there are a few thousand children with three. Their appearance and social position may not reveal their Lebanese grandparent, but their name often does, as they are usually the children of an Afro-Lebanese man.

13.6 *Social relations in the early period*

Neither Africans nor Lebanese have ever underestimated their differences because it has never been possible to overlook the racial difference. Neither group wanted integration, at least not for its own sake.¹² It must have come as a surprise to both groups that contacts developed so rapidly. In spite of mutual suspicion, trust and friendship grew up, and without a desire for integration Lebanese and Africans discovered common concerns, values, and interests. They also learned a great deal about each other. The Lebanese learned local languages such as Mende, Temne, and Krio, as well as the customs of the various tribes in Sierra Leone.¹³ In particular they were quick to discover which Africans commanded respect in their own community and how respect was shown. They followed local custom on this point, at least in the Protectorate, and aspired themselves to positions of respect in the African society. All coveted the title of 'Pa'. Many middle-aged and elderly Lebanese earned this title of honour and respect and some even possessed the influence that normally accompanies

the title. There were also things which the Africans learned from the Lebanese. They noticed the way in which the Lebanese managed their businesses, and they were prepared to copy anything which they considered sensible. Africans who were close to the Lebanese also observed their family life. They noticed the authority of the father over his children and the joint efforts of a family to run their business. They were further intrigued by the way in which a Lebanese trader supported his brothers and cousins.

Relationships in Freetown and those in the Protectorate have always been different. Relations between the Creoles and the Lebanese in Freetown were Western in character, which was natural as they often originated in schools. It was also due to the cosmopolitan outlook of the harbour and Creole culture. The relations in the Protectorate, on the other hand, were largely African in character. Life in many villages was monotonous and the arrival of a Lebanese stranger brought a welcome change, so if he could provide excitement by being daring, he could easily win admiration. Many Lebanese were aware of this and it spurred them on to greater exuberance and flamboyance, especially the young men. Daring could be shown in sports, in driving lorries and cars, in trade, and in smuggling. Courage shown in disasters such as floods and fires were also remembered for many years.

Shrewdness was another quality appreciated by Africans. If a Lebanese could outwit another Lebanese or a European, there would be unrestrained admiration for him. Prolonged conflicts in business or in the courts were a welcome source of gossip and clever tricks were not condemned if they were successful. There are stories about Chiefs who tried to outwit a Lebanese trader, but I never heard the reverse: this was apparently too dangerous for a Lebanese.

Many Africans expected that a prosperous, respected Lebanese trader would be generous like their own big men and several Lebanese lived up to these expectations. One of them was called Wuramoneh, which means 'the generous one' in Temne.¹⁴ In prosperous areas it was possible for a trader to be generous and yet to grow richer. At least one of these qualities — generosity, daring, or shrewdness — was usually present when a Lebanese trader was looked upon with considerable goodwill by the local people.¹⁵

13.7 *The period after 1946*

In 1946 the colonial government made an important move towards the political integration of the Protectorate by establishing the Protectorate Assembly and the District Councils. Men of importance whose ambitions had been confined to their chiefdoms until then, began to aspire to membership of these bodies and made efforts to find support outside their own chiefdoms. The Lebanese in the Protectorate felt the pull of integration, too. Some of them were well-informed about the affairs of the District in which they lived. A trader in a central town with a busy shop met many people, inhabitants of the town as well as traders and farmers from villages in the surrounding area, and African customers talked freely in the shop which was considered neutral ground. Thus a Lebanese trader might learn a great deal from his customers about what was going on in the District. If he made an effort to exchange any news with fellow Lebanese, he might easily become one of the best informed men in the District. It is natural for a trader to collect information avidly and I am not certain that the Lebanese were driven by political ambitions at the time. If they were, there was no public office at first to which they could aspire.

The urbanization of the 1950s brought another change. Some towns in the Protectorate became so big that they could no longer be governed as part of a chiefdom. A separate municipal government was clearly required. In response to the new situation the Government created the Bo Town Council in 1955. The Lebanese in Bo could not be ignored politically because they had put up most of the new buildings which made the growth and prosperity of the town so conspicuous.¹⁶ Moreover, the rates which the Town Council would have to levy to obtain revenue would be largely paid by the owners of these buildings. Lebanese representation on the Town Council was obviously desirable, so Khalil Garnem was nominated and elected in the first elections for the Bo Town Council and again in those held in 1957. Mr. Garnem was born in Sierra Leone and belonged to the Maronites of El-Metn. He was the first Lebanese to hold a public office in Sierra Leone.

The Lebanese were at the cross-roads; they could now consider having a political career besides or instead of a life in business, but they were not given much time to consider these alternatives because the Legislative Council made it clear in 1955 that they did not want the Lebanese in politics (see Chapter 15). Thus, although locally born Lebanese could stand for the District Council elections of 1956 I heard of only one man who was

interested, and he withdrew before nomination day. It is a pity that the Lebanese were barred from local politics in the 1950s. They could have made a useful contribution because they were well-informed about economic matters. Moreover, their strength lies in personal contacts and these matter a great deal in local government.

13.8 *Modern houses*

The Lebanese put up many modern houses in the 1950s and early 1960s. Most of these consist of a concrete frame with walls of concrete bricks and windows with steel frames. They usually have two storeys and may have cost some Le 20,000 each on average over the years. We would do well to examine the considerations of a trader who invested such a large sum. Although the new buildings provided some economic benefits,¹⁷ the decision to build them was primarily a social one. The Lebanese felt at home in Sierra Leone and decided to provide themselves with a comfortable house. (The same desire for comfort could be observed among the Europeans after World War II.) The majority of modern Lebanese houses have piped water, electricity, and sanitary facilities. The living quarters upstairs provide the family with increased privacy which became a high priority when the shopping streets grew very busy in the 1950s. Moreover, the laterite dust swirled up by the many lorries made living on the ground floor most uncomfortable.¹⁸ Increased comfort could be combined with the old maxim that the trader should be close to his shop at night.

The new buildings were a long term investment, so it was a decision of great importance to put one's capital in such a building. Apparently the Lebanese were optimistic about their economic future. They were probably influenced by the colonial government which also spent a great deal of money on new concrete buildings in the 1950s.

The modern buildings were also a status symbol. The Lebanese had come to consider their social status in Sierra Leone as rather high and they felt that they should have modern upper-class houses as befitted this status.¹⁹ The Lebanese were greatly influenced by the Europeans, whose status was higher than their own, so they copied many of the amenities which the Government and the Companies installed in the houses for their European personnel. Of course, the two-storey building itself was a foreign element in the Interior because it used to be impossible to construct a high building with local materials.²⁰ Two-storey buildings were therefore much admired and several Chiefs of the early colonial

period invited carpenters from the coastal towns to build such houses for them.²¹ For many decades it was unthinkable that a man who was not a Chief could erect a two-storey building, but the Lebanese in the Protectorate seem to have felt in the 1950s that they could do so without earning the wrath of the Chiefs. Their buildings suggested that their status was now comparable to that of the Chiefs.

Prestige was also important in the Colony. No asset could better show the success of a businessman than a residence on the hills west of Freetown. The British civil servants had been living there at Hill Station since the beginning of the century, but there was still room near Wilberforce village, a mile to the north. The first Lebanese established residences in this area just before World War II.²² Others followed, including some who built at Signal Hill. How ever attractive Wilberforce was, however, the majority of the Lebanese preferred to live above their shops in Freetown.

The colonial government appreciated the Lebanese building endeavours. They noticed that the appearance of Freetown was changing for the better. Formerly the town had looked drab and brown because of the rusty corrugated iron sheets on the roofs, and the concrete buildings with their light, fresh colours gave a much brighter picture. The Lebanese also co-operated reasonably well with the Town Planning Officers who had arrived in the late 1940s. Concrete symbolized the modernization which the colonial government wanted to achieve and which was so long overdue.²³

More important was the appreciation which many Sierra Leoneans felt. They reasoned that a Lebanese who built a modern house had made his home among them, showing by his action that he liked the people of the area and that he trusted and respected them. The people also understood the economic significance of the building; if a Lebanese invested in a modern house, he apparently assessed the economic future of the town as favourable, so Lebanese houses have often been a source of pride for the African inhabitants of a town.²⁴ On the national level this is recognized when Sierra Leoneans say that the Lebanese have 'a stake in the country'.

It is not generally known that some well-to-do Sierra Leoneans are financially interested in many Lebanese buildings. In the Provinces the buildings stand on land that is leased for a specified period, and the Lebanese lease holder pays rent to the land owner and the Chief. In the Western area some buildings are the freehold property of the Lebanese, but many others — probably over half — are leased for a period of (nor-

mally) thirty years. A typical situation is one in which a Lebanese trader started by renting a house from a Creole landlord on an annual basis. When he had enough money to put up a concrete building, he would first try to buy the Creole house. If the owner was unwilling,²⁵ he asked permission to pull down the old house and to erect a new one. To safeguard his investment he proposed a leasing arrangement under which he could occupy the new building for thirty or forty years. He has to pay an annual rent for such a lease. Finally there are modern buildings owned by Sierra Leoneans and occupied by Lebanese tenants. The payments which the Lebanese regularly make in connection with property are a valuable and steady source of income to the Sierra Leonean receivers.

The Lebanese lost interest in putting up new buildings because of the economic restrictions which the Government imposed on foreigners in the 1960s. The Land Development (Protection) Act of 1962 forbade the sale of land and buildings to non-citizens.²⁶ This meant that Lebanese owners could no longer sell their buildings to compatriots, as they had done in the past, for instance when they decided to retire abroad. Since 1962 the Lebanese have had to look for African buyers when they wanted to sell their house, and prices have fallen below the levels of the 1950s.

Social relations between Africans and Lebanese have weakened as a result of the modern houses, because the comfort which they offered was partly responsible for the withdrawal of the Lebanese from the villages and their concentration in the towns. Since social relations in towns are more superficial and distant than in villages, the contacts which the Lebanese now have with Africans are more impersonal than in the past. Also, the privacy which the modern houses provide have created a kind of social barrier. It has become more difficult to pay a casual visit to a Lebanese since he moved to the upper floor of a two-storey building. This was not intentional, but it has contributed to a weakening of social relations.

13.9 Social relations after the mid-1950s

After the political ambitions of the Lebanese had been nipped in the bud in the mid-1950s, social relationships changed. The Lebanese began to see themselves as a minority group that would have to make constant efforts to safeguard its position. It seems to me that the new immigrants accept this more easily than the members of the long-established families who feel that their contribution in the past is ignored without justifica-

tion. One form of effort has been the public donation and I will mention some examples here. A Lebanese Muslim leader from the USA, Sheikh Mohamed Al Cherri, visited Freetown in 1958 and challenged the Lebanese community to bring money together for either a school, a mosque, or a hospital. The Lebanese chose the hospital and fixed a target of £20,000 for voluntary contributions. In consultation with the Government a plan was made for a children's hospital in Freetown. This was built by a Lebanese contractor and handed over to the Medical Department in 1960.²⁷ The Lebanese community also collected £10,000 for a new Arts and Crafts Centre in Freetown as an independence gift from the community.²⁸ The Lebanese in Bo established a Cheshire Home in 1965.²⁹ The hospitals in Koidu and Kenema have also benefited from Lebanese initiatives and gifts.³⁰ Scholarships are another favoured form of making a public donation. In 1969 the Lebanese community collected Le 13,000 for 25 scholarships tenable at the University of Sierra Leone.³¹ The subscriber lists are always published because the individual Lebanese feels that he ought to share in the goodwill that the public donation creates. Lebanese businessmen are often asked as patrons for parties, dances, contests, processions, building projects, church festivities, lantern parades, and so on. When they agree, they are expected to make a generous donation.

Apart from such donations the Lebanese remain in the background. They shun the limelight and do not seek social honours or public positions. A list of Lebanese whose merits have been publicly recognized is remarkably short, much shorter than their economic position warrants.³² Europeans, misled by the paucity of public recognition, have often mistakenly concluded that the Lebanese have neither influence nor goodwill, when in fact, through long years of personal contacts, both are still great.

Political aspects I: before 1951

In Chapters 14-16 we shall discuss the political status of the Lebanese, their contacts with the authorities, and actions of the Government that have affected the Lebanese. Sierra Leone consisted of a British Colony and Protectorate until 27 April 1961, when it became an independent African state. We must discuss systematically the attitude and actions of, first, the British colonial government and, secondly, the Sierra Leonean government after independence. It is also necessary to distinguish an intermediary period of decolonization which began in November 1951.¹ Chapter 14 will cover the period until 1951. Chapter 15 will deal with the decolonization period (from November 1951 till April 1961) and Chapter 16 will discuss the developments since independence. In the present chapter three periods are distinguished: a) before 1930, b) from 1930 till the end of World War II, and c) from 1945 to 1951.

14.1 *The years before 1930*

No Government measures concerning the Lebanese as a group seem to have been taken before 1910. In that year an outbreak of yellow fever occurred in Freetown and some people expressed the view that the overcrowded conditions under which the Lebanese lived were a contributory factor in the epidemic. The Sanitary Department then conducted a census among the Lebanese in Freetown and concluded that the Lebanese were no threat to public health.² In 1913 a similar census was conducted, which showed that the Lebanese in Freetown had increased from 72 to 212 in three years.³

When World War I broke out and Turkey declared war on Britain, the Lebanese were in danger of being interned, because they were Turkish subjects. The Governor decided against this measure (see p. 306), but he restricted their travelling for the duration of the war. In July 1919 the anti-Syrian riots broke out (see p. 4 and p. 79). They revealed among other things that the Government had underrated feelings against the Lebanese and had failed to collect information about this group of immigrants. Afterwards no Governor took the risk of being badly informed about them, but this knowledge was rarely publicized. The successive Governors had good reasons to refrain from comments about the Lebanese, for they knew that their comments would be scrutinized by the Creoles and by the Colonial Office in London. If they said something favourable about the Lebanese, the Creole press would take them to task, while an unfavourable comment might earn them a bad mark at the Colonial Office which remained favourably inclined towards the Lebanese at least until the end of the 1920s.

The simplest way to collect information about the Lebanese was to watch the ships calling at Freetown and Bonthe, and to count the Lebanese passengers that arrived and left.⁴ These figures stood the Governor in good stead when the Secretary for the Colonies asked him in 1924 to report on the Lebanese in Sierra Leone. The Governor asked the three Provincial Commissioners to report on the Lebanese in the Protectorate and the Commissioner of Police on those in the Colony. The final report gave figures on immigration and stated that there were 729 Lebanese in the country. It also contained the views of ten officials about the Lebanese.⁵ The general conclusion of the report was favourable but it struck me that the Commissioner of Police, whose report was the most detailed, was more guarded in his comments than the other officials. I am inclined to think that the Protectorate Lebanese made a better impression on officials than the Freetown Lebanese. This would agree with the analysis of Chapter 2 and would also account for many Creole complaints. The Creoles saw some competent and successful men in Freetown, but the majority of the Lebanese there were poor and ignorant. They lacked both the courage to open a business in the Interior and the capital to succeed in Freetown. They were prepared to sail for another country if that seemed more promising. Such a floating population was a discouraging factor for the African traders in Freetown.⁶

The report which the Governor despatched early in 1925 confirmed the Colonial Office in its views concerning the Lebanese. The Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies reiterated these views in 1926:

'The Syrian traders coming from Syria itself and North Palestine are, as a rule, energetic and enterprising; they are quite content to begin in a small way, and by degrees to build up a business which in the end may reach considerable dimensions. They are full of energy, and their competition with the native of Freetown is severe, so much so that attempts are frequently made to exclude them ostensibly on various reasons, the last of which was that they were not medically examined on arrival, but the real reason in all cases is simply to prevent competition. I need hardly say that I see no reason whatever for the exclusion or restriction of this useful and energetic community.'⁷

No Governor could ignore such a direct statement.

From 1 August 1924 all disembarking passengers had to possess passports⁸ and the Police officers who checked the passports had the right to refuse undesirable elements permission to land.⁹ A Register of Aliens was also set up and the Aliens Registration Ordinance (which required aliens to register with the Police or with the District Commissioner) came into operation on 1 January 1925.¹⁰ Table XVII shows how many Lebanese registered for the first time between 1925 and 1951. Most of the men who registered in 1925 had been in the country for some years, but we may assume that all those who registered afterwards were new immigrants. It must be noted that wives and children under 16 were not obliged to register. Aliens were not required to renew their registration periodically, and the names of those who died or left the country remained in the Register. For some years the number of aliens was given in the Police Reports, but this practice was stopped in 1935, by which time the total in the Register greatly overstated the number of aliens.

The Police were responsible for checking the passports of travellers and for keeping the Register of Aliens. These Police officers were for many years the officials who knew most about the Lebanese. They also were the first to face the problem of writing Arabic names in Latin characters. Apparently they wrote many names down as they heard them pronounced. This may be the reason why there are so many English-looking names among the Lebanese.¹¹

14.2 *From 1930 to 1945*

The Immigration Restriction Ordinance of 1930 required a prospective immigrant to pay a deposit of £60 or to have a guarantor who signed a bond for this amount on his behalf.¹² The Police refunded the deposit

Table XVII. *Initial registrations of Lebanese immigrants in the Register of Aliens, 1925 - 1951*

1925	465	1939	35
1926	105	1940	n.a.
1927	n.a.	1941	n.a.
1928	82	1942	n.a.
1929	150	1943	n.a.
1930	51	1944	n.a.
1931	32	1945	n.a.
1932	45	1946	n.a.
1933	24	1947	108
1934	25	1948	46
1935	45	1949	26
1936	67	1950	18
1937	198	1951	17
1938	114		

n.a. = not available

Source:

Reports of the Sierra Leone Police Force

either when the immigrant left the country or after he had been in Sierra Leone for eighteen months, for it was reckoned that if a man held out for so long he was likely to succeed. The Police had the right to use the money for paying the repatriation fare of a man who became destitute.¹³ The deposit requirement barred poor immigrants, who were prevented from landing.¹⁴ The turning away of poor immigrants was a benefit both for the African traders and for the Lebanese who were already in the country. Free immigration in the depression years would have worsened the plight of all businessmen in Sierra Leone. From an economic point of view the restriction of immigration was desirable, but there was a political drawback. Since the restrictions applied to non-Africans only, a racial element was introduced in the legislation.

The depression brought a serious drop in Government revenue and many plans to raise more money were considered. An income tax was proposed but the new Governor rejected this idea, and opted instead for a poll tax to be paid by non-native, i.e. non-African, residents. He felt that non-natives were 'best able to bear it'.¹⁵ At first the tax amounted to £2 per year, but it was raised to £4 in 1935. Wives and children under

eighteen were exempted. For some Lebanese this sum was too high — they must have been very poor — and they applied for exemption, which in some cases was granted.¹⁶ The Non-native Poll Tax of 1931¹⁷ introduced yet another racial element in the legislation.

More serious for the Lebanese was a change in policy concerning naturalization. The Government ceased to support applications of Lebanese residents for naturalization in about 1930. This meant that the applications of Lebanese who wanted to become British Subjects were rejected at the first stage.¹⁸ This was particularly hard on people who wanted to make Sierra Leone their home, for they had to remain foreigners, running the risk of deportation and internment in unusual circumstances. It is true that the British rarely deported an alien trader unless he was convicted before a court, but it remained a risk. The new policy of the Government was also illogical in view of the *jus soli* principle that governed the nationality legislation. The law provided that children of aliens automatically received British status at birth if they were born in Sierra Leone. Lebanese children born in the Protectorate became British protected persons and those born in the Colony became British Subjects. It was only natural that a Lebanese immigrant whose children were British Subjects wanted to become a British Subject himself. The drastic change in policy was an indication that the Lebanese were less welcome than before.

In the late 1930s Lebanese immigration increased rapidly in response to the economic recovery (see Table XVII). This created concern among the Creoles and in Government circles.¹⁹ Measures to restrict Lebanese immigration even further were seriously considered but the need to introduce them disappeared when the war broke out. However, the prospect of renewed Lebanese immigration after the war continued to worry the Creoles. When the matter was brought up in the Legislative Council in November 1943 the Colonial Secretary replied that the Government was not prepared to make a statement at that time about the post-war policy concerning the immigration of aliens.²⁰ Governor Stevenson considered the matter sufficiently important to discuss it with the Secretary for the Colonies.²¹

The war brought some extra taxation for the Lebanese²² but their greatest problem was the suspicion of the British (see Chapter 17), for it seemed to the Lebanese that the British had now become hostile to them.

14.3 *The years 1945 - 1951*

A new Immigration Restriction Ordinance was passed in 1946.²³ It did not bring great changes for the Lebanese. The deposit was abolished but the Principal Immigration Officer was given the right to specify certain conditions in an entry permit, which might concern duration of stay, place of residence, occupation, and so on. More important was the fact that prospective immigrants from Lebanon had to apply for a visa with the British Embassy in Beirut, before travelling to Sierra Leone. There is no indication that many applications were refused. Table XVII shows that there was a short-lived upsurge of immigration in 1947 and 1948. The immigrants of those years were probably men who had made their plans before or during the war, and were now at last able to join their relatives in Sierra Leone. The decline that followed was not due to restrictions but to pessimism about prospects in Sierra Leone.

During this period two areas of friction developed between the Lebanese and the Government. The first concerned income tax which had been introduced during the war, with the first year of assessment starting in April 1944. The Income Tax Department distinguished three categories of tax payer: the companies, salaried people, and traders. The assessment of the first two categories presented few problems because basic figures were available in the companies or with the employers. Assessing the traders was more difficult. The majority of them were Lebanese (see Table XVIII), and very few of them kept proper accounts, as the law did not require them to do so and they did not consider it necessary for the efficient running of their businesses. They kept the invoices and receipts which the Companies and the Government made out and a number of them had cash books, some of which were kept in Arabic by the trader himself, often supplemented by a cash book in English, kept by a Creole clerk. Lebanese with bank accounts had bank statements and many shopkeepers kept records of their debtors; for most Lebanese traders these papers were enough. It is not surprising that they were unable to record losses.²⁴

The Income Tax Department had to try to assess the Lebanese because they were a valuable potential source of revenue — they did not have to search for them, because their names and addresses were available in the registers for the Poll Tax. The Department was, however, aware of the problems. They consulted a Committee that the Lebanese in Freetown had appointed as being representative of their community which acted as a kind of local assessors, advising the Commissioner of Income Tax on

Table XVIII. *Annual incomes of Lebanese and others in 1949/50, as assessed by the Income Tax Department*

Income in £	Lebanese :	Africans	Europeans	Indians
500 - 1000	384	111	4	4
1001 - 1500	131	11	8	2
1501 - 2000	15	4	—	—
2001 - 3000	1	2	1	—
3001 - 4000	—	—	—	—
4001 - 5000	—	—	—	—
5001 - 10000	—	—	1	—
Total	531	128	14	6

Note:

These data apply only to traders and professional men, and not to companies and employees. They cover nearly all Lebanese, but only a fraction of the other groups.

Source:

Annual Report of the Income Tax Department for the year ended 31st March 1950, p. 10.

the amounts of profits which they thought were being made by various members.²⁵ This was far from ideal and in 1945 the Commissioner sent notices to a limited number of the larger Lebanese traders requiring them to keep complete records of their transactions. The Committee still had to advise the Commissioner about the traders who did not keep books, but after only one or two meetings with him it broke up. Afterwards there was a gap between the individual trader and the Department, which was filled by one or more men described as interpreters who accompanied a trader to the Department to translate and to explain his affairs.²⁶

It was the policy of the Commissioner to assess the Lebanese who did not keep proper accounts on a much higher income than he had evidence of. This system of over-assessing led to appeals which in many instances succeeded.²⁷ The traders who appealed went to the Income Tax Department and explained their affairs, often helped by an interpreter. Such an oral explanation usually provided enough information to the Commissioner to decide on the reduction. Again, this system was not ideal and after accountants offices had been opened in Freetown, the Commissioner decided to require all Lebanese to keep detailed accounts. Notices to this effect were sent out in June 1947.²⁸

The Lebanese were greatly upset because the demand seemed unreasonable to them, and in the following weeks they submitted two petitions asking for the withdrawal of the notices, signed by 187 Lebanese traders. It has been relatively rare for the Lebanese to present petitions and even rarer that the petitions are signed by many members of the community. Obviously this matter was important to the Lebanese. It appears that they objected far more to the keeping of detailed accounts than to the paying of tax. Their reaction may be explained on two grounds: very few were able to set up a system of accounts and keep it going; and the change-over from management based largely on memory to management based on books was a major one. Equally serious was their fear that outsiders would be able to inspect their books. They disliked the idea that their own accounts clerk, a clerk in the Income Tax Department, or a professional accountant would be able to see the figures and might pass them on to their rivals. Relations between the Lebanese and the Income Tax Department which had been good deteriorated in a very short time. An atmosphere of hostility and suspicion was generated, which was taken up by the editor of one of the Creole newspapers who hinted that some Lebanese traders had bribed the Commissioner to get their assessments reduced. The Acting Governor considered the allegations sufficiently serious to ask the Colonial Office to send a Commissioner out to hold an inquiry. Sir Percy McElwaine conducted the inquiry in January 1948. He concluded that the allegations were false and that there had been no corruption. He considered the method of assessment 'rough and ready but reasonably efficient'.²⁹ This incident showed that the absence of trading records was dangerous, because it led to an arbitrary element in the decisions of the Income Tax Department, which in turn led to allegations of corruption.³⁰

The second area of friction between the Lebanese and the Government concerned the payment of wages. An amendment to the Wages Board Ordinance was passed in 1947,³¹ stipulating that all employers should observe the wage rates laid down by the Wages Boards and the Joint Industrial Councils. The Labour Department commenced a programme of inspections in July 1948 which revealed a serious situation: the majority of employers was paying less than the minimum wage rates. Most of them agreed to pay the arrears when the inspectors pointed out that they had contravened the law, but those who were unwilling to pay were threatened with legal proceedings. One employer, a Lebanese, was indeed taken to court and convicted.³² For many years the Department made frequent inspections with Lebanese employers, particularly in the Protectorate.³³

The Lebanese considered these inspections to be interference and evidence of official distrust.

These two areas of friction were not too important in themselves but they prevented the distrust, which had arisen during the war, from dying out. The attitude of the colonial administration in Nigeria and the Gold Coast seems to have been very similar in this period; a scholar who visited these countries in 1950 was amazed at the distrust the British authorities showed towards the Lebanese.³⁴

14.4 The District Commissioners and the judges

The District Commissioners came into contact with the Lebanese in various ways. They were responsible for issuing licences, for shops for example. They also saw some Lebanese appear before them in Court. There were criminal cases (offences concerning produce or price control) and also civil cases concerning debts, land leases, damages caused by lorries, and so on. The DCs and all other authorities in the field of justice — judges, magistrates, and the Police — often had problems with the language, the reasoning and the legal and moral concepts of the Lebanese. In Freetown a Lebanese interpreter was appointed, Mr. I. D. Salamah, but elsewhere the language was a great barrier.³⁵ Among the DCs and judges the Lebanese acquired a reputation of inscrutability.³⁶ If it had depended on the judges' opinion, the colonial administration might have tried to treat the Lebanese as a separate group, but the great majority of the colonial officials who had no personal contact with the Lebanese felt differently. They did not want to make exceptions for the Lebanese because they were only a small group.³⁷ To avoid complications they did not mention the word 'Lebanese' in printed reports that would be read in Britain; the attempts to avoid the word were unnatural at times.³⁸ The Lebanese were rarely consulted by the administration concerning economic or local problems. Whatever insight they had, reached the administration via the European businessmen, if at all.

14.5 Relations with the Chiefs

The Lebanese came into contact with the Chiefs when they penetrated the Interior in the wake of the railway. The Chiefs had great power over their subjects and over 'strangers' at that time, and the colonial administration

did not change this. A stranger, whether African or non-African, could not settle in a chiefdom unless the Chief approved, and the Chief could expel him at any time. Thus he had complete authority on immigration into and deportation from his chiefdom.

If a Chief allowed a Lebanese trader to settle in his chiefdom, it could be assumed that the relationship between them was good. They had a common economic interest — money — in particular money earned with produce. Many Chiefs encouraged the cultivation of produce in their chiefdoms, partly because they were interested in money as a new form of power and partly because it earned them the praise of the District Commissioner.³⁹ Some Chiefs established plantations of their own, but this was a troublesome procedure, because it created discontent and they knew that the District Commissioner frowned on anything resembling forced labour. More important, the main cash product, palm kernels, was not a plantation crop. As a result most Chiefs could not organize the cultivation or processing of produce and turned to the trading stage to obtain a share of the produce money. They looked for traders who were able to earn good trading profits and were prepared to pass part of this on to them in the form of rents and various gifts — traders, who were, in fact, collectors of an indirect tax on produce.⁴⁰ Most Chiefs did not trust local traders in this role, because, if they were successful, they might aspire to political power. Generally the Chiefs preferred 'stranger traders', among whom the Lebanese seemed most agreeable to do the job — more than the Creoles who were too independent in outlook and too much accustomed to the rule of law.

For his part the Chief helped the trader by urging his subjects to sell their produce to this man only and to repay any debts punctually. An Ordinance of 1926 contained a clause which suggested that the Administration suspected collusion between Chiefs and traders when forcing poverty-stricken debtors to pay arrears.⁴¹ It was important for a Chief who wanted his share to know how much business the Lebanese trader did, which may explain why most Lebanese had their shops in the Chiefdom headquarters. It may also explain why the fortunes of businessmen are public secrets in Sierra Leone, even today.

Both Chief and trader tried to get a bigger share of the money earned with the produce of the chiefdom. Where this became a game, the partners learned to admire each other's cunning. In many cases, however, a conflict developed between the Lebanese trader and the Chief. Some conflicts ended with the trader taking the Chief to court for unpaid debts, usually payments which the trader saw as loans and the Chief as gifts.

Other conflicts ended with the expulsion of the Lebanese. In theory the trader could protect himself against expulsion by asking for a lease of land from the Chief and registering this with the District Commissioner who would then intervene if the Chief expelled the trader. In practice, the lease did not help because a really infuriated Chief would order his people to boycott the trader, and he would be obeyed.

The Lebanese traders in the Interior thus needed great psychological insight to remain on good terms with the Chiefs. They were anxious to show their respect at the right time and with the appropriate presents. The practice of giving presents was so deep-rooted that some Lebanese also felt obliged to offer gifts and hospitality to District Commissioners on trek. Since independence many Lebanese have felt that it was appropriate to show their respect for the new African ministers by giving presents to them.

Political aspects II: the decolonization period

The process of decolonization began with three decisions taken by the British authorities:

- a. Sierra Leone (Colony and Protectorate) would become an independent state after a preparatory period
- b. British protected persons of the Protectorate and British Subjects of the Colony would be merged on an equal basis into a new category of 'citizens of Sierra Leone' which would come into being on independence day
- c. African politicians would form part of the Government during the preparatory period.

This last point meant that the Government of Sierra Leone became dualistic in character. In theory the British officials were responsible in the last instance for all measures that were taken, but the views of Sierra Leonean politicians mattered a great deal, because it was known that they would take over the Government at independence. When there was disagreement between British officials and Sierra Leonean politicians, an attempt was made to conceal this. We can only guess which group bore most of the responsibility for some measures discussed below, though generally speaking British views prevailed in the first three or four years and African views carried more weight afterwards.

15.1 *The future of the non-African residents*

The British Government had to consider the position of the non-African residents of their colonies in West Africa, after they had decided in principle to grant them independence. It seems that they saw no place, or

only a minor one, for non-Africans. This may be concluded from a statement issued in 1949 by the Government of the Gold Coast, the most advanced of the West African colonies:

'It has long been the policy of the Gold Coast Government to prevent non-African settlement in the Gold Coast. The purpose of this is to ensure that the indigenous population should be allowed to progress without the eventual complications of pressure from powerful and strongly entrenched non-African interests, not only in the political sphere but also in the commercial and economic spheres'.¹

The Gold Coast Government rejected a multi-racial society, because it was afraid that non-Africans would use their economic strength at the expense of the African population. The statement showed a genuine concern for the well-being of the Africans and an intense distrust of some non-Africans. In Britain it was assumed that the distrust was also directed against British businessmen, and the statement was severely criticized,² but in reality the Gold Coast Government was thinking mainly of the Lebanese and Indians but was unable to mention these groups by name. It must be realized that there was no sudden economic change in 1949; it was the prospect of independence that compelled the British to take action. For many years the colonial Government had seen itself in the role of impartial referee between Africans and non-African businessmen. Independence meant that this role would come to an end.

A similar statement was made concerning Sierra Leone: 'No provision exists for permanent settlement by non-natives in the Protectorate.' This appeared for the first time in the Colonial Report for 1952.³ Both statements referred to 'settlement', that is the intention and right of permanent residence. It is necessary to note that this aspect dominated the discussion around 1950, and that citizenship and voting rights were not at issue yet.⁴

Were the non-Africans in Sierra Leone temporary immigrants or settlers? This question became important because of decolonization. Virtually all Europeans were temporary immigrants, and so were the Indians. The question therefore focused on the Lebanese. Nobody had ever called them settlers,⁵ and there was evidence that they were not true settlers.⁶ Some sent their children to school in Lebanon and many retired there; on the other hand some families had been in Sierra Leone for three generations and had built their own houses. No categorical answer could therefore be given for the whole community; and the British turned to the law for guidance.

We have already seen that the *jus soli* principle operated in Sierra

Leone. For countries which receive many immigrants this is an excellent principle because it facilitates the absorption of the immigrant communities. Although Sierra Leone has absorbed many African immigrants with a minimum of trouble because of this principle, it is doubtful whether it was ever appropriate for non-African immigrants. Most British officials believed that the Lebanese with British status could be absorbed neither in the African nor in British society. The theoretical absorption effected by the *jus soli* principle seemed a legal fiction to them. They had no choice, however, but to adhere to the law. They had to accept that the Lebanese community consisted of two categories: the aliens and those with British status. The difference was not apparent, although older people were normally aliens, and children normally British Lebanese.

In 1948 there were 1202 alien Lebanese and some 750 British Lebanese.⁷ There were only 47 children among the alien Lebanese, but we estimate that there were between 400 and 500 children among the British Lebanese, for all second-generation immigrants were British Lebanese, being either British protected persons or 'Citizens of the United Kingdom and Colonies'. The latter term was introduced in 1949 as a substitute for 'British Subjects'. The British Government had the legal and moral obligation to see that the position of the British Lebanese would not deteriorate before or at independence, but as no such obligation existed towards the alien Lebanese, it was inevitable that the distinction between British and alien Lebanese grew in significance for the British during the decolonization period.

The majority of the Lebanese never understood the distinction between British and alien Lebanese. Being used to strong family ties, they considered it absurd that members of the same family could have a different political status. Most Sierra Leoneans also considered the distinction artificial — a serious drawback for the enforcement of all measures that were based on it, as we shall see below. Even if the Lebanese did not understand the legal principles, they were quick to realize the value of certificates of birth or baptism which showed that a person was born in Sierra Leone. These papers were put with the other documents in the strong-room.

15.2 *A new policy on immigration*

The Government sent the following directive to the Principal Immigration Officer in March 1952:

'The policy of Government is that there would be no further economic penetration by non-natives in competition with natives of Sierra Leone. A non-native may enter Sierra Leone under section 18 of the Immigration Restriction Ordinance, 1946, and be issued with employment and occupation permit if his activities will be beneficial to the country and if he will supply a need which will not otherwise be supplied.'⁸

The last line meant that a non-native had to prove to the satisfaction of the Principal Immigration Officer that he could do a job which could not be done by a 'native of Sierra Leone'. Since most new immigrants from Lebanon had no special skill or experience, their applications could be rejected out of hand — as, in fact, did happen. The directive was issued under secret cover and it took some time before the Lebanese realized that the immigration policy had changed.

The first problem that arose was a social one. The Lebanese community in Sierra Leone was not self-contained, for many brides and bridegrooms used to come from Lebanon to marry partners in Sierra Leone.⁹ As has already been said, Lebanese fathers had had no difficulties finding husbands in Lebanon for their daughters, and had usually undertaken to sponsor the prospective son-in-law when he came to Sierra Leone, and set him up in business. The Government made a new rule in August 1954: brides would be allowed to enter Sierra Leone to marry a Lebanese man in Sierra Leone, but bridegrooms would no longer be allowed to come and marry Lebanese girls born in the country and still living there.¹⁰ The administration expected that there would be an outflow of brides from Sierra Leone as a result of this measure which would compensate for the inflow of brides.¹¹ The measure caused great consternation among the Lebanese. The immediate problem was that a number of marriages had been contracted, but the date — or even the year — of the wedding had not yet been fixed. People in this position explained their problem to the authorities who, seeing the reasonableness of the requests, granted a grace period of two years to people whose marriages had been prearranged before August 1954, and some bridegrooms were allowed to immigrate into Sierra Leone during this period.¹²

The rule concerning Lebanese bridegrooms was not kept secret and the Lebanese community realized with a shock that recent refusals were not isolated cases, but that the British had decided to cut off all further immigration. Soon afterwards the Government resorted to what I have called 'executive deportations' (see p. 179), and some Lebanese who were suspected of diamond trafficking were served with deportation orders.

The coincidence of the measures frightened the Lebanese and they drafted a petition which was presented to the Governor in March 1956, asking for the removal of the 'immigration embargo'. The restriction on 'the entry of the relatives of Lebanese now resident in Sierra Leone' in particular had been a shock. The petition also mentioned 'arbitrary deportation', which had driven many Lebanese into 'despair and insecurity'.¹³

The petition of 1956 marked a climax in the feelings of frustration and insecurity of the Lebanese in Sierra Leone. The frustration was the result of two conflicting trends. On the one hand the Immigration Officers were growing tougher when considering applications,¹⁴ while on the other the Lebanese were sending more applications than ever because they were particularly anxious to bring new immigrants into the country. There was strong economic pressure to do so: the diamond boom had brought prosperity, but also extra work for the Lebanese shopkeepers. They needed assistance and were looking for young relatives to help them. There was also strong social pressure. We saw in Chapter 12 that the Lebanese recognized the obligation to sponsor young relatives, in particular nephews. As news of the diamond boom spread among the relatives in Lebanon, hundreds of nephews wrote to uncles in Sierra Leone asking them to act as a sponsor.¹⁵ Acting as a sponsor and serving one's own interests often went together. As the Lebanese in Sierra Leone had more money, they could afford a longer education for their sons and had planned to employ a nephew during the absence of the sons. Others were able to visit Lebanon for the first time and were anxious to bring out a trusted relative to replace them temporarily. It should be emphasized that none of these plans to bring out relatives were bad in themselves, but they happened to run counter to the policy of the British authorities.

Some plans to employ a nephew temporarily were foiled by the immigration authorities, because the nephew was an alien. So a number of fathers had no alternative but to ask their sons to break off their studies and return to Sierra Leone.¹⁶ The sons, being British Lebanese, could re-enter Sierra Leone without problems. This distinction between nephews and sons seemed an unreasonable form of discrimination and the Lebanese did not feel morally guilty if they tried to get round it. I do not claim to know all the back-doors tried by the Lebanese sponsors, but the following three methods were certainly used.

Some sponsors falsely claimed that the person they wanted to bring into the country was born in Sierra Leone. Sometimes a false document was made, sometimes close or complete resemblance between the name of

a prospective immigrant and the name of a child entered in the Register of Births some twenty years ago was used to convince the immigration officers. Since Lebanese relatives often have names which are nearly the same, this trick could be applied often without great risk of discovery.

The second method was called 'place selling'. Some Lebanese had applied for entry permits for relatives on the grounds that these men would succeed them when they retired. The immigration officers considered this reasonable and ruled that such permits could be given on the condition that the proprietor promised to go abroad for good. This concession led to undesirable transactions: some Lebanese sponsors in Sierra Leone who were anxious to bring out a relative approached old or poor compatriots and asked them whether they wanted to sell out and retire to Lebanon. If the man agreed, the sale was arranged in such a way that the relative in Lebanon became the buyer: nominally he bought a business, but in reality he also 'bought' an entry permit. The transaction was called 'place selling'. I have been told that sums of £1000 were paid for a 'place'. For many unsuccessful Lebanese it was an unexpected chance to spend their old age in Lebanon.

The third method was based on the 'quota system'. The immigration officers had ruled that companies that needed expatriate personnel could apply for a quota. If the application was successful the Principal Immigration Officer wrote to the company to say that they could bring in a certain stipulated number — the 'quota' — of non-African employees. Most companies started to recruit only after the quota had been approved and an employee so recruited received an entry permit more or less automatically, saving trouble to the employer and to the immigration officers. Under this system the terms 'quota holder' and 'employer' were synonymous, and also 'quota immigrant' and 'employee'. An applicant for a quota had to submit information about the capital of his company or the amount of income tax paid. On the basis of these figures an appropriate quota was calculated.¹⁷

A few Lebanese enterprises were big enough to qualify for a quota. When they began to recruit personnel the quota holders were approached by other Lebanese in Sierra Leone with the request to recruit their nephew. If the quota holder agreed, the nephew who had despaired of ever getting to Sierra Leone, could enter the country without any problem. All parties concerned were aware that he came as an employee and was not allowed to set up in business on his own, but, preoccupied with the entry permit problem, they did not worry about this future complication. It is safe to assume that eighty per cent of the Lebanese quota immigrants

intended to set up their own business in Sierra Leone after an initial period as an employee. Their residence in Sierra Leone became illegal as soon as they ceased to be employees, but it was difficult for immigration officers to check on this; and in case of trouble the quota immigrants asked the quota holder to confirm that he was still the employer.¹⁸ The quota holder acquired a strong position over the 'employee' and his sponsors. There are even rumours that he exacted payment, the so-called 'selling of the quota'.¹⁹ Quotas were soon considered valuable assets and the bigger Lebanese tried to get one even if they did not need it. The high profits of the 1950s increased the number of Lebanese that qualified. The abuse of the quota system was finally discovered by the authorities in 1958.²⁰ They then felt the need to supplement the existing arrangements with more frequent checks on immigrants who did not comply with the terms of their entry permit after they had been in Sierra Leone for some time. A committee made some recommendations to this effect in 1959.²¹

Table XIX. *Initial registrations of Lebanese immigrants in the Register of Aliens, 1952 - 1959*

1952	27	1956	116
1953	50	1957	191
1954	26	1958	119
1955	68	1959	116

Note:

No annual reports have been published since 1959

Source:

Reports of the Sierra Leone Police Force

Table XIX shows that many alien Lebanese were registered for the first time during the 1950s. The figures may create the impression that the restrictions on immigration were not very effective, but this conclusion is premature as long as we do not know how many alien Lebanese left the country during the period. We are thinking in particular of older men who 'sold' their place and retired, and of younger men who after a few years' employment decided to go back to Lebanon.

15.3 *Electoral reform*

One concern of the authorities was the introduction of a democratic system of local and national elections. A commission consisting of five Sierra Leoneans and a British Chairman, Mr. B. Keith-Lucas, was appointed in 1954 to make recommendations on this matter. The commission distinguished between British Subjects and British protected persons on the one hand and aliens on the other. It recommended (with the usual exceptions and conditions) that the former should receive the right to vote and to stand as candidates in elections. Although no reference was made to the British Lebanese, there was no doubt about their position. The recommendations concerning aliens were as follows:

'We would advise the exclusion of all those who are aliens . . . from the franchise for the central government, but not from the local government franchise since they contribute a large proportion of the revenues of many local authorities.'²²

The commission were thinking of the Lebanese, who, as owners of buildings, paid rates to the Freetown City Council and the Bo Town Council. It is surprising that no additional requirement concerning length of residence was suggested. Another recommendation was that aliens should not be allowed to stand as candidates in any elections.²³

The Government accepted the report with minor qualifications²⁴ and brought it before the Legislative Council in July 1955. In the debate, the member for Kono moved that aliens should not be allowed to vote at all. He was not alone and the Government changed its stand and accepted an amendment which excluded aliens from all elections.²⁵ Most members of the Legislative Council seem to have assumed that they had excluded all Lebanese. When the District Council Ordinance was amended in April 1956 to alter the provisions concerning elections, they noted, with obvious surprise, that some Lebanese would still receive the right to vote and to seek election. They protested and the leader of the opposition moved the exclusion of the British Lebanese with the device of the 'Asiatic origin clause' (see the next section). The Chief Minister, Dr. Milton Margai, rejected this motion and the Legislative Council accepted the Bill as it stood. The Sierra Leone People's Party was dissatisfied and discussed the issue at a meeting in Freetown after the Bill had been passed. It was mistakenly described as the 'alien issue'.²⁶ The dissidents dropped the matter, but if they had pursued it, the British officials would have been forced into an open defence of the political rights of the British Lebanese.

15.4 *The Asiatic origin clause*

In February 1956 a legal definition of a native of Sierra Leone was accepted by the Legislative Council. It read:

“Native of Sierra Leone” means a person who

- (a) is a British subject or a British protected person; and
- (b) is a member of a race, tribe, or community settled in Sierra Leone, other than a race, tribe or community which is of European or Asiatic origin’.²⁷

We saw in Chapter 8 that this definition was proposed to prevent Lebanese participation in diamond mining. It used two criteria: a) relation to the British Commonwealth, and b) continent of origin. The first was long established and a cornerstone of colonial legislation, but the second was a new element and an important deviation because it allowed for the exclusion of some people who belonged to the Commonwealth. The geographical reference concealed a racial distinction, between Africans of the continent of Africa, and non-natives from other continents. As there were no non-natives from Australia and the Americas only Europe and Asia had to be mentioned; and since few Europeans were involved, the new criterion was mainly used against the Asiatics, which is why I call it the Asiatic origin clause. It brought the Alluvial Diamond Mining Ordinance in line with the directive to the Principal Immigration Officer, because it prevented the ‘penetration by non-natives in competition with natives of Sierra Leone’ into diamond mining. The circumstance that these non-natives had British status was not taken into account. The Asiatic origin clause counteracted the *jus soli* principle and could wipe out all advantages which this principle had conferred on the second-generation Lebanese. Naturally, there was great concern about this clause within the Lebanese community.

We saw in the previous section how the leader of the opposition wanted to insert the clause in the District Councils Ordinance two months later. If he had succeeded, it might have become a regular feature of legislation. In fact, as far as I know it was used only once more. In February 1959 it was accepted as part of an amendment to the Diamond Industry Protection Ordinance (see p. 202), but on that occasion the British Lebanese were not deprived of a right, but were told to address their applications for a Kono Permit to another arm of Government.

15.5 *The Africanization of commerce*

Several measures to promote African enterprise may be grouped under this heading. We saw in Chapter 3 how the SLPMB accepted more African than Lebanese Buying Agents. In Chapter 4 we noticed that licences to import rice were mainly given to African importers. Africans were also given preference when taxi licences were issued.²⁸ The British officials and Sierra Leonean politicians could easily agree on policies of this kind. Official interest may be traced back to 1948 when the Department of Commerce and Industry was established. One of its duties was 'the encouragement of Africans to undertake a larger part in commerce'.²⁹ African political interest came much later, certainly as far as the politicians from the Protectorate were concerned, coming as a result of the diamond boom which had made commerce and transport far more profitable than before. In 1956 an independent economist, Dr. N.A. Cox-George, was commissioned to prepare a report on 'the part taken by Africans in the Commerce of Sierra Leone'.³⁰

The report showed in great detail how large the role of Europeans, Lebanese, and Indians was in the economy of Sierra Leone, and how small the participation by Africans. While this was no surprise to insiders, it strengthened the hands of the Government in intensifying its positive policy of assisting Sierra Leoneans in commerce. This was a special duty of the Minister of Trade and Industry, who, incidentally, had also become nominally responsible for immigration.

15.6 *Discrimination and fair play*

The previous sections have shown that there was economic discrimination against the Lebanese and that there were moves to alter their political position. We had to discuss these at length, because of their significance in developments to be discussed in the next chapter. It should not be thought, however, that the Government had abandoned all standards of fair play with regard to the Lebanese. In many matters both British officials and African politicians were scrupulously fair to the Lebanese, so we must mention some instances of this. The Government had the damage caused by the riots in February 1955 quickly assessed. Compensation was paid out in August.³¹ Since many Lebanese had suffered losses this speed was a great help to them. Again, the British-Arab conflict, culminating in the Suez crisis of 1956, was not accompanied by hostile feelings of British

officials against the Lebanese in Sierra Leone.³² The Commissioners of Income Tax acted fairly and wisely so that no other conflict developed. Also the Lebanese were allowed to play a role in the diamond trade (see Chapter 9).

It is relevant to mention the position of the Afro-Lebanese separately. The Government treated them as 'natives', on an equal footing with the full African inhabitants. This could be observed in the Mines Department in the field of dealer's licences,³³ and in the Education Department when it was considering candidates for scholarships.

15.7 *Lebanese residential construction*

We have mentioned on several occasions that many Lebanese put up a modern concrete building during the 1950s, that is during the decolonization period. As these houses could last several decades, we may assume that the Lebanese felt confident about their future in Sierra Leone. They were building not only for themselves but for their children too. With some exaggeration it might be said that every Lebanese — alien or British — who put up a concrete building for himself changed from an immigrant into a settler. The construction boom of the 1950s was a Lebanese action which ran counter to the declared policy of the Government concerning settlement by non-Africans. As such it was a remarkable sign of confidence and political optimism.³⁴

It seems to me that there were two trends in the political position of the Lebanese in the 1950s. On the national level their position deteriorated, but on the local level it improved, especially in the Protectorate. The second trend was due to the weakening of the power of the Chiefs.³⁵ At a certain stage the Lebanese realized that the Chiefs could no longer order a boycott to ruin an unwanted trader, and at that moment it became worth while to apply for a lease and to make plans for a concrete house. It would be very interesting to find out when exactly this occurred in different parts of the country. An upsurge in the applications for leases took place before 1949, but was possibly limited to Mende country. I have concluded this from the fact that one member of the Protectorate Assembly proposed a motion in October 1949 that all leases to aliens exceeding 21 years should come before the Protectorate Assembly to be approved or rejected.³⁶ The Chiefs in the Assembly could not possibly agree to such loss of power and the motion was withdrawn. Most Lebanese had to accept an interval of several years between the signing of the lease and the

construction of their house; and developments at the national level during this interval did not alter their plans.

15.8 *The independence constitution*

A constitutional conference was held in London in April and May 1960 to discuss the last issues on which agreement had to be reached before the date of independence could be fixed. On citizenship the conference agreed that 'the main qualifications for citizenship of Sierra Leone should be embodied in the constitution for independence'.³⁷ The details were later worked out and laid down in Chapter I of the constitution.³⁸ They may be considered to be the joint responsibility of the United Kingdom and Sierra Leone. We shall discuss only the effect of the provisions on the Lebanese. They distinguished five groups within the Lebanese community:

- 1) full Lebanese who were aliens
- 2) full Lebanese who had acquired British status by naturalization
- 3) full Lebanese who were second-generation immigrants
- 4) full Lebanese who were third-generation immigrants
- 5) Afro-Lebanese who were born in Sierra Leone.

Groups 3, 4 and 5 possessed British status because of birth in Sierra Leone. The distinction between group 3 and 4 had never been made before: we do not know whether the legal draftsmen simply copied the phrasing from similar legislation elsewhere or whether they were aware of the existence of group 4 in Sierra Leone and therefore separated this group on purpose.

We do not know how many Lebanese there were in each group. If we assume that there were 3200 full Lebanese in Sierra Leone on the eve of independence — see Table XX on p. 301 — we may estimate that there were 1700 alien Lebanese and 1500 British Lebanese, including 800 and 450 male adults respectively. In addition there may have been 2000 Afro-Lebanese, including 700 male adults. Group 2 was small, because no Lebanese had been naturalized after 1930. The size of group 4 is unknown, but it is certain that it consisted mainly of children.

The constitution had nothing to say about group 1 — as far as Sierra Leone was concerned they were non-citizens. Groups 2 and 3 were given an option: they had the right to choose between citizenship of Sierra Leone and the continuation of their British status. Groups 4 and 5 automatically became citizens of Sierra Leone on independence day. The British Government withdrew their British status at the same moment.

The option was not peculiar to Sierra Leone. It has been used in many

new states. When neither the colonial Government nor the Government of the new state could say with absolute certainty to whom a particular group of people should be allocated as citizens, giving these options was the appropriate solution. The individual was given the right — and the obligation — to opt for one of the two nationalities because he was supposed to know best where he belonged. For the two Governments that had to wait till he had made up his mind, the option meant administrative inconvenience, so it ran for a limited period only. This 'grace period' lasted two years in Sierra Leone and expired therefore on 27 April 1963.

The independence constitution was very satisfactory for the Lebanese. Not a single person could complain that his position had deteriorated. This was also satisfactory for the British authorities who had felt a special responsibility towards the British Lebanese. We have still to note that the *jus soli* principle was retained in the new constitution. This was a benefit to the Lebanese who wanted to stay in Sierra Leone. They could count on citizenship for any children and grandchildren born after independence. The Lebanese valued citizenship of Sierra Leone, because it guaranteed their right to permanent residence.

When Sierra Leone became independent it had some white, non-African citizens. Nearly all of these, perhaps 400, were Lebanese children. It was envisaged that some of their parents would exercise their option and would become citizens, too. There were also provisions for the naturalization of non-citizens³⁹ which divided non-citizens into Commonwealth Citizens and others, but did not refer to race or origin. Sierra Leone could thus be described as a multi-racial nation, although the non-African component was negligible.

Political aspects III: after independence

Sierra Leone has had four governments since independence: 1) an SLPP-government under Sir Milton Margai, from independence till 28 April 1964, when he died; 2) an SLPP-government under Mr. (later Sir) Albert Margai, from May 1964 till the elections of March 1967; 3) a military government under Colonel (later Brigadier) A. T. Juxon-Smith, from March 1967 till April 1968; and 4) an APC-government under Mr. (later Dr.) Siaka Stevens, since April 1968.

All through this period the powers of the Government and of Parliament have been under discussion. Were there limits to these powers, and if so, where did they lie? Were these limits enforced by the constitution or imposed by the conscience of the individual in authority? No consensus of opinion has developed yet, and the variations in the answers to these questions have affected the Lebanese, as we shall see below.

We shall say little about civil servants in this chapter, although individual Lebanese often had to deal with them. Nearly all these civil servants were Sierra Leoneans, because only a few British officials stayed on after independence. In one respect the Sierra Leonean politicians and civil servants could not follow the example of the British officials: they could not maintain a social gulf between themselves and the Lebanese. They had known the older Lebanese as traders, and had been to school with some of the younger ones. It would have been an offence against local custom to deny these relationships or to cut them off.

16.1 *Acts No. 11 and No. 12 of 1962*

Chapter 15 ended on a note of optimism, but nine months after independence the Lebanese community was deeply disillusioned and many of its

members were deprived of their political rights. This was the result of Acts No. 11 and No. 12 which Parliament accepted in January 1962. We shall discuss the history of these Acts in some detail, because without them neither the suddenness of the change nor the extent of Lebanese disillusionment can be understood.

Soon after independence some sitting members of Parliament began to worry about their prospects in the next general elections which were due to be held before 1 July 1962. These worries were temporarily pushed aside by the bustle which accompanied the Royal Visit in November 1961, but afterwards election fever gripped the politicians. Some members were afraid of Afro-Lebanese opposition candidates, and felt that half-white people should not stand as candidates for Parliament in a black African state. They argued that the Afro-Lebanese candidates had an unfair advantage because they could borrow large sums of money from their full Lebanese relatives to finance their election campaign.¹ These men approached Sir Milton Margai and asked him to bar the Afro-Lebanese as candidates. Sir Milton at first refused,² but the fear of rival candidates, which obsessed so many sitting members, seems to have infected him in the end, too.

Not even the most determined advocates of the idea to bar the Afro-Lebanese would have suggested writing the word 'Afro-Lebanese', or the broader term 'mulatto', in an Act. The only acceptable description was 'sons (or children) of immigrants'. The orders which the legal draftsmen received probably spoke of this category of people. This broader description lumped African and non-African immigrants together, and also their children. This was the first deviation from the original idea.

It proved impossible to bar the sons of immigrants without altering the constitution. One can imagine how reluctant Sir Milton was to do this, for the constitution had been agreed upon only a year ago. The alterations amounted to an admission that he had overlooked some important points during the negotiations. Moreover, would not the British Government, who had been the other party in the negotiations, consider it a breach of faith? Sir Milton cannot have been unaware of the fact that he was jeopardizing the considerable goodwill which he possessed in Britain.

We may put here a purely speculative question. If the Sierra Leonean negotiators had insisted in 1960 on a clause in the constitution which disqualified the children of immigrants from membership of Parliament, would the British Government have refused? We think not. In that case the Sierra Leonean politicians might have got what they wanted without trouble, if only they had thought of it in time.

After Sir Milton had agreed to amending the constitution, the legal draftsmen worked out two proposals:

- A. to withdraw the option which had been given to some second-generation immigrants and to some people who had been naturalized during the colonial period (see Section 15.8);
- B. to insert a new qualification for a candidate for Parliament: his father and his father's father had to be born in Sierra Leone.

Proposal B formed the essence of the constitutional amendments. We note that it excluded not only the children, but also the grandchildren of immigrants, and the latter only if the paternal grandfather was an immigrant.³

We note that proposal A was not strictly necessary, because when the people concerned had exercised their option they would still not qualify as a candidate because of proposal B. I have therefore sought for another explanation and believe that Sir Milton wanted to limit the number of non-African citizens. (It has been suggested that Sir Milton had come to this view during his visit to Tanganyika in early December 1961.⁴) Two further proposals which had no bearing on the forthcoming elections also pointed to a desire to limit the number of non-African citizens:

- C. a racial qualification for citizenship, in order 'to prevent persons who have no element of negro blood from attaining automatic citizenship of Sierra Leone';⁵
- D. a modification of the *jus soli* principle so as to prevent automatic citizenship of non-African children born in Sierra Leone after independence.

Proposals C and D were drafted after the proposals A and B had been laid down in a Bill, and a second Bill was necessary to accommodate them. The two Bills were, however, published on the same day; 21 December 1961.⁶ Sir Milton had signed both Bills and some of his views became clear in the 'Objects and Reasons' attached to the second Bill:

'In order to ensure that no person can be rendered stateless by the operation of these provisions (and it is not anticipated that many persons (if any) will be so affected) such persons will be given the right to register as Sierra Leone protected persons and as such will enjoy all the benefits of citizenship at home and abroad except that they will not be entitled to be elected to the House of Representatives or any local authority.'

I feel that proposal C was a mistake. There was no moral justification for depriving some citizens of their citizenship. Sir Milton was acting against his better judgment, and he rationalized his decision by saying that few

people if any would be affected, and that they would not suffer any loss, except that they could not go into politics. These two points deserve comment. First, an important legal change should not be judged by the number of people affected, but on its significance as a precedent. Proposal C embarked on a dangerous course as we shall see later. Secondly, although proposal C meant no practical change for most of the people affected, it degraded non-African citizens into what was later called 'second-class citizenship'.

Proposal D may well have been justified, because it is doubtful whether the *jus soli* principle was ever appropriate for non-Africans.

The Bills were severely criticized. A lawyer and a medical doctor rejected the proposals in articles in the *Daily Mail*,⁷ while the APC, an opposition party, objected against them in a resolution.⁸ The Lebanese did not express their views in public, but some of their influential men went to see Sir Milton personally. The conversation was free and friendly, but they left with the feeling that full citizenship for the Lebanese was out of the question and that Sir Milton's decision was final.⁹

The severest criticism came from John Akar, the popular director of the broadcasting service. He was an Afro-Lebanese with a Temne mother, and the Temne tribe had accepted him as one of their own number. After his return from the USA where he had studied, he had joined the broadcasting service and had quickly risen to the top. He had acquired some fame as a playwright and as the composer of the national anthem. He was interested in African culture and had founded the National Dance Troupe.¹⁰ The politicians knew that he had plans to stand as a candidate in the Moyamba District and were afraid that he might wield great power if he were elected, so proposal B seemed to be directed against him in particular. John Akar was indignant about the Bills, especially about a provision which permitted sitting Members of Parliament to stand as candidates, regardless of their background. (Sir Milton had inserted this provision to keep Mahmoud Ahmed, an Afro-Lebanese from Kambia who had been elected in 1957, in politics. Sir Milton trusted him, appointing him in 1961 as Resident Minister of the Northern Province.) John Akar felt that he was treated unfairly, and he pointed out that discrimination among citizens was forbidden by section 23 of the constitution. He probably said that he would challenge the validity of the Acts in the Supreme Court, as soon as they had been passed in Parliament. This worried the advocates of the Bills a great deal.

When Parliament assembled in mid-January, a great majority was in favour of Proposal B, and wanted to push it through in one way or

another. When some members expressed the fear that the courts might declare an Act which embodied proposal B invalid, they were prepared to support another solution. In the end an amendment was proposed to extend proposal C so as to cover most people of mixed descent. This meant that the Afro-Lebanese would be deprived of their citizenship, and would lose the right to seek election. Some members were apparently aware of the injustice involved. They proposed that the people who were to be deprived of their citizenship would be given an option to become a citizen. Others objected that the Afro-Lebanese would exercise this option and seek election, if not in 1962, then in the next elections. This was taken care of by the provision that people who became citizens through an option could not seek election for the next 25 years. Thus amended, proposal C was accepted. About the other proposals we can be brief: A was accepted, B was dropped having become superfluous, and D was accepted after a minor change. Little was left of the original Bills, except that there were now two Acts for what was really one subject.¹¹

The members of Parliament had achieved their objective: there would be no Afro-Lebanese candidates in the foreseeable future. They were uneasy, however. Many men later regretted their vote and felt that they had exceeded the powers of Parliament. Sir Milton was most unhappy about the way in which Parliament had amended his Bills. I was told that he promised John Akar later that he would get the Act repealed, but he died before he could fulfil his promise.

John Akar has been portrayed as the victim of the Acts. This is correct, but he should also be seen as their cause. I believe that he acted unwisely in this matter. He assumed that he could ignore the opposition against Afro-Lebanese candidates because the law was on his side. He was not prepared to compromise, or to wait for the next elections. In the end his obstinacy endangered the whole Lebanese community. It must be remembered that the great majority of the Lebanese and Afro-Lebanese valued citizenship because it gave them the right of permanent residence without discrimination. They did not care about the right to stand for Parliament. It was because of the political ambitions of a few men that the whole community had to suffer.

What were the effects of the two Acts on the Lebanese community? It is convenient to refer back to the five groups which we distinguished in Section 15.8:

group 1 experienced no change;

groups 2 and 3 lost their option to become a citizen of Sierra Leone but retained their British status;

group 4 lost their Sierra Leone citizenship with retrospective effect;
 group 5 lost their Sierra Leone citizenship with retrospective effect,
 but were given an option to become a citizen of Sierra Leone.

The option of group 5 should not be confused with the one that was withdrawn from groups 2 and 3. The new option was granted to a different category of people and was inferior to the old one: if a person did not exercise his option, he could not fall back on British status, but became stateless.

Public interest focused on group 5, the Afro-Lebanese.¹² They lost most and they lost it unexpectedly. Most of them had considered themselves Sierra Leoneans and had been treated as such by the Government and the people. The decision of Parliament to deprive them of their citizenship seemed a grave injustice to them and only twenty-two people did exercise their option to become a citizen.¹³ (John Akar was among them. He delayed his application for a long time because he hoped for a repeal of the Act, but was finally registered in January 1964.) The rest of the Afro-Lebanese, who disdained their option, became stateless and remained so for eleven years (see Section 6).

The full Lebanese, except group 1, were also adversely affected. The withdrawal of the option meant that groups 2 and 3 could not become citizens of Sierra Leone, except through a lengthy and uncertain naturalization procedure.¹⁴ Citizenship had, however, lost most of its attraction for them. This was partly because they were afraid about their future, after they had seen how little respect Parliament showed for the constitution, and partly because the third generation had lost their citizenship. Some of them realized that Lebanese children born in the future would no longer receive citizenship at birth. If it is seen as a family decision, settlement in Sierra Leone became far less attractive. As far as I know no Lebanese ever contemplated challenging Act No. 11 in the Supreme Court in order to get the option restored. The people of groups 2 and 3 accepted the inevitable and began to consider the British status, which they retained, as their anchor in an unsettled situation.

I suspect that the Lebanese did not realize the plight of group 4 in 1962. Lebanese parents who knew that their children belonged to group 4 seem to have assumed that the children possessed British status and that the loss of Sierra Leone citizenship was therefore less serious. They — and the children concerned — only discovered their error when they applied for a passport (see Section 5).

Act No. 12 gave the Afro-Lebanese and group 4 the status of 'Commonwealth Citizen'. This was only an empty shell, because it was not backed

up by citizenship of one of the member states of the Commonwealth, as it normally is. The term concealed the fact that these people had become stateless. In practice, they did have some unwritten rights. Sir Milton had proposed the creation of a new category of 'Sierra Leone protected persons' (see proposal C), and although this was rejected, he felt morally obliged to accord these Commonwealth Citizens the privileges which he had promised to the Sierra Leone protected persons.

16.2 *Further measures of Sir Milton*

Among the Bills introduced towards the end of 1962, there was one concerning land, the Land Development (Protection) Bill.¹⁵ It proposed to bar non-citizens from buying land. Since the British had decreed that land could not be bought or sold in the Protectorate, the Bill applied only to the Western Area (the former Colony). Here Europeans and Lebanese had put up many modern buildings, in the central business area of Freetown as well as on the western outskirts of the town. Lebanese construction continued vigorously after independence. Modern buildings had proved a good investment, because rents and sale prices had been going up for many years. The Bill was justified by the Government as a measure to prevent undesirable speculation. Put simply, the Government did not want the profits resulting from land speculation to go into the pockets of non-citizens. Many Creoles agreed with the measure because they envied the Lebanese for having bought land that had appreciated so quickly. It is quite possible that some Creoles had asked for this measure, but it was also the Creoles who regretted the measure most afterwards. Those who still possessed interesting sites or buildings discovered that the number of potential buyers had been more than halved by the Act, causing a serious fall in prices. The profits of land speculation became much smaller. The Creole community reaped little benefit from the Act.¹⁶

Many people have assumed that Sir Milton had his own reasons for the Bill; he wanted to prevent the emergence of a Lebanese-owned business district in the heart of Freetown. The Lebanese buildings seemed to signify that the Lebanese were settlers, and it seemed incongruous that the most modern and prosperous part of Freetown should be conspicuous evidence of Lebanese settlement. Sir Milton wanted to contain this development. The ban was not absolute, however, because licences could be granted to non-citizens for acquiring certain sites and constructing approved buildings. The Bill was passed in December 1962 without amend-

ment. In the following years several licences were granted to non-citizens, including Lebanese.¹⁷

The December session of Parliament included some lively debates, in which foreigners, in particular the Lebanese, were attacked.¹⁸ I believe that the land Bill sparked these off, because it showed that Sir Milton was prepared to act against non-citizens in certain fields. One member, a Temne, defended the Lebanese,¹⁹ but the general tone of the debate was hostile. In the end the 'rice motion' was accepted (see Chapter 4). It is significant that the 'rice motion' spoke of non-Africans, and not of non-citizens. The debate in Parliament was followed by sharp attacks on the Lebanese and Indian traders in the press. As these people grew worried, it became necessary for the Government to issue a statement to reassure them:

'Lebanese and other nationals need entertain no fears that they will be discriminated against in any way as long as they conduct themselves, while in Sierra Leone, in accordance with the laws of Sierra Leone.'²⁰

This has been a recurrent theme in speeches of ministers since then: Lebanese residents have nothing to fear, provided they are law-abiding.

In May 1963 the Government faced one of the legal implications of Act No. 12 of 1962. The Police had asked for a change in the legislation so as to make it possible to deport citizens from other Commonwealth countries (see p. 190). As the law stood, only aliens, people not belonging to the Commonwealth, could be deported. A Bill was drafted which proposed to replace the term 'alien' by the term 'non-citizen' in the existing Act, and was passed without amendment.²¹ It was reassuring for many Lebanese that the Act used a special definition of a 'non-citizen': people who had been deprived of their citizenship by Act No. 12 of 1962 would not be considered as non-citizens, which meant that they could not be deported.²² Only the Afro-Lebanese and group 4 benefited from this definition, but the whole community was reassured. They also considered it a good sign that Sir Milton agreed to the naturalization of several Lebanese of group 1. He did not forget Mahmoud Ahmed who had been defeated in the 1962 elections, but made him Ambassador to Guinea in June 1963.²³

We must finally mention the Local Courts Act of 1963,²⁴ which changed the legal position of the Lebanese in the Provinces. Before this Act non-Africans could only be brought before a District Commissioner or a Magistrate. Afterwards they could also be taken to the local or chieftdom courts, at least for certain offences and for some civil cases.

16.3 Act No. 14 of 1965

Before we deal with Sir Albert Margai's rule we must discuss one Act which was adopted when he was in office. In April 1965 a Bill was introduced which was later passed as Act No. 14, the Non-Citizens (Registration, Immigration and Expulsion) Act, 1965. The object of the Bill was to consolidate existing laws concerning non-citizens. The Bill was important for the Lebanese community because it proposed a uniform and basic definition of a non-citizen. Section 2 stated:

“‘citizen’ includes any person either of whose parents is a negro of African descent and who but for subsection (3) of section 1 of the Constitution would have been a citizen of Sierra Leone; and ‘non-citizen’ means any person who is not a citizen’.

Briefly, this meant that the Afro-Lebanese were to be considered citizens in matters of immigration and deportation. The Bill was passed on 13 May. On the same day an Act was adopted which imposed economic restrictions on non-citizens, using the same definition of non-citizen, which meant that the Afro-Lebanese were not affected at all.²⁵ One could say that 13 May 1965 marked a virtual return to the situation which existed immediately after independence, at least for the Afro-Lebanese. Both the Government and Parliament showed the moral courage to rectify an earlier mistake. There was no improvement in the position of the full Lebanese. The position of the people in group 4 even deteriorated: they were no longer shielded from deportation and the economic restrictions applied to them. The position of groups 2 and 3 remained the same; in fact, their status of non-citizen was confirmed.

The Afro-Lebanese were greatly relieved because they escaped the economic restrictions which were imposed on their full Lebanese relatives. Their political future seemed brighter, too. John Akar's hopes for a political comeback revived. His optimism grew after he had been awarded an MBE in June 1966, but he had underrated the opposition against him personally and against the Afro-Lebanese in general as potential candidates for Parliament. His hopes were shattered when the Republican Constitution Bill was published in December 1966. Section 21 stated that persons who had become citizens by registration or naturalization could not become members of Parliament or of any Local Authority until twenty-five years after the date of registration or naturalization. This retained the essence of Act No. 12 of 1962. John Akar decided to wait no longer and to challenge the validity of Act No. 12 in the Supreme Court.

We shall give an uninterrupted account of the Akar case, but the

reader must bear in mind that the case lasted more than three years, and that there were two changes of government in the meantime. The case was opened in Freetown in February 1967. Because of the military coup judgment was not delivered until October. The Chief Justice ruled in favour of Akar.²⁶ The Attorney General appealed, probably as a matter of course, and not because of being urged by Juxon-Smith. The three judges of the Appeal Court in Freetown reversed the decision of the Chief Justice in April 1968.²⁷ John Akar then decided to appeal to the Privy Council in London. He was optimistic about their judgment and thought that the political climate in Sierra Leone had changed in his favour because the APC had come to power just then. To finance the case he collected money among Lebanese and Afro-Lebanese in various towns. Apparently they responded warmly because he succeeded in getting the money together. The Judicial Committee of the Privy Council heard the case in April and gave judgment in June 1969. They ruled in favour of Mr. Akar and were highly critical of Act No. 12 of 1962²⁸ (see further Section 6).

16.4 *Sir Albert Margai's rule*

Soon after Albert Margai became Prime Minister he made a tour of the country. In several important towns he accepted invitations of the local Lebanese community to attend a buffet lunch. On these occasions he spoke favourably about the Lebanese, which reassured them.²⁹ Yet at the end of 1964 he announced that restrictions would be imposed on non-Sierra Leoneans in trade and some other areas.³⁰ This meant that he embarked on a policy of economic discrimination which conflicted with the Government statement of early 1963. Many overseas foreigners drew their own conclusions and began to think of winding up their businesses or of investing in short-term projects only. This was also the reaction of some Lebanese, but others felt that the restrictions did not matter as long as the Government was not hostile to them personally. It was their experience that individual ministers and civil servants were accessible and friendly when they approached them with requests and proposals; a few important Lebanese were even on good terms with the Prime Minister. To underline the friendly relations the Lebanese sent presents, and soon corruption flourished. It was, however, corruption in a peculiar form: the businessmen respected the right of the politicians to reject their request or proposal, which preserved mutual respect. Neither party was interested in ad-hoc corruption. Much better was a continuous friendly relationship,

which enabled the businessmen to reckon on Government co-operation, possibly in unofficial form, and which guaranteed extra income and benefits to the politicians and civil servants.

After the fall of the Albert Margai government several commissions of inquiry were instituted to investigate the extent of the corruption. Quite a number of shady deals came to light. There was for instance the 'coffee deal' in which a large shipment of coffee belonging to the SLPMB was sold at a fictitious price, the difference between the real and the fictitious price being shared by Sir Albert, a Lebanese trader, an Indian company, and some civil servants.³¹ While the coffee deal was conspicuous, there was also a succession of minor decisions which could be considered as contrary to the interests of the country. This happened in the field of immigration, where the Wales Commission concluded that the declared policy of Government 'had in many ways been flouted.'³² The Wales Report sheds much light on the way immigration restrictions were operated after independence, especially on the granting of quotas. At first the Principal Immigration Officer and the Immigration Control Committee, an advisory committee of civil servants, decided on all applications for quotas. Their responsibility increased after the formula had been abolished (see p. 277), for then each application had to be judged on its merits. In August 1962 the Immigration Control Committee was dissolved, and its task was taken over by the Commercial Immigration Quota Committee consisting of five Ministers with the Minister of Trade and Industry as Chairman.³³ Then in November 1965 Sir Albert Margai took over the responsibility for granting quotas.³⁴ It appears that he granted quotas quite liberally and that the Lebanese especially had few problems in getting a quota, so that a serious 'immigration leak' developed which was later stopped by the military government. Most of the blame for this leak must go to the Ministers involved, but it seems that the civil servants of the Immigration Department had been at fault, too.³⁵ It was commonly believed that a sponsor had to pay Le 1000 for a permit to get a quota immigrant into the country. The immigration leak lends credence to the rumours about Kono permits which we described in Chapter 9, for there is an obvious correspondence between the Kono permits and the entry permits of the Immigration Department.

Some people also suspected that there was a 'naturalization leak'. The number of applications for naturalization increased in 1965 as a result of the economic restrictions on non-citizens. Some of the applicants were people who would never have considered becoming citizens if there had been no restrictions. Others needed only a small extra push, for instance

the people who had considered exercising their option in 1961. Sir Albert Margai approved the naturalization of 87 applicants. This was revealed in 1970 by a Minister of the APC-government. He alluded to rumours that Lebanese and Indian businessmen had 'bought' their citizenship from Sir Albert Margai and declared himself in favour of revoking all doubtful naturalizations.³⁶ This was not done, however.³⁷ With the knowledge at our disposal we cannot say whether there was in fact a naturalization leak, or if so, whether it was large enough to undermine the policy of economic restrictions. The situation certainly underlined the necessity of publishing naturalization orders in the Gazette.³⁸ This is also in the interest of the people involved.

It is generally believed that the number of executive deportations increased during this period. Although the Governor General made the orders, the Prime Minister advised him and was responsible.³⁹ Sir Albert showed less restraint than Sir Milton in ordering executive deportations, and the feeling of insecurity increased among foreigners, including the Lebanese. Even those who had felt secure before — and a man who steered clear of diamonds had been secure — began to worry about their future and wondered whether they had enemies who could tell false stories about them to the Prime Minister. The reaction of the Lebanese took two forms: some tried to sink into anonymity, hoping to escape notice, while others tried to establish good relations with one or more influential Sierra Leoneans who would be prepared to intervene on their behalf with the Prime Minister before any order was signed.

The deportations indicate that relations between Lebanese and ministers were sometimes under strain; indeed, it seems to me that there was a general deterioration in relationships towards the end of Sir Albert's rule. At first the politicians had been content with the money and the presents which they received from the Lebanese, but later they felt that this form of income was too small and too difficult to collect. They then turned to projects financed by foreign contractors, which yielded more money for less trouble. Similar pre-finance projects were offered by some companies that had recently come to Sierra Leone. One or two Lebanese managed to act as go-betweens, but most had no chance to participate in them. The total of the debts incurred because of these projects was only calculated after Sir Albert's fall; the military and afterwards the APC government faced great problems finding all the details but an official assessment was finally published in 1969. It appeared that the projects proposed by one company were responsible for three quarters of the total debt.⁴⁰

The Lebanese came to be seen as a laborious and poor source of 'unrecorded income' towards the end of Sir Albert's rule. They noticed that the politicians were no longer content with the sort of presents which they had been thanked warmly for two years earlier. The mutual respect was gone. Some Lebanese shopkeepers dreaded the visits of ministers because they knew that they could not refuse to give them the presents they selected in the shop. The election campaign in early 1967 was the final hardship, because the SLPP candidates went to the Lebanese traders in their constituencies for financial support. All these experiences meant that the Lebanese welcomed the military government as a great improvement.

16.5 *The military government 1967/68*

The National Reformation Council, as the military government was called, considered the reformation of the political life of the country as its primary task. The NRC ordered several enquiries, some results of which have been discussed in the previous section. It also instituted several reforms. Only two of them will be discussed here, having been selected because they concerned the Lebanese. The economic restrictions on non-citizens were abolished in October 1967.⁴¹ Juxon-Smith, the Chairman of the NRC, considered that these restrictions offered so many opportunities for corruption that on balance they were a disadvantage for the country.

The second reform was the introduction of a system of residence control for non-citizens. Juxon-Smith took the rumours about the immigration leak seriously and wanted to ascertain its magnitude by registering all non-citizens. He considered this an urgent task.⁴²

The new registration scheme replaced the Aliens Registration Scheme, but was far more comprehensive. It covered all non-citizens, African as well as non-African, Commonwealth Citizens as well as aliens, children as well as adults. Each non-citizen had to submit a form, his passport, three photographs, and a fee (for adults only). After registration he received a registration certificate with his photo attached. This certificate had to be presented annually for renewal, thus guaranteeing that the register would remain up-to-date. The Police were given the right to ask non-citizens for this certificate, and in this way illegal residence of foreigners could be controlled. Unfortunately, the administration of the scheme took a great deal of time and the total number of non-citizens only became available

after Juxon-Smith had been overthrown.

Before we discuss the results of the scheme we must investigate the passport situation of the Lebanese community, because the registration was based on the passports which were submitted. There were five types of passport in circulation among the Lebanese at the time:

- A. Lebanese passports, mainly issued by the Embassy in Freetown
- B. British passports for 'Citizens of the U.K. and Colonies', mainly issued by the British High Commission in Freetown
- C. British passports for 'British protected persons', also mainly issued by the British High Commission
- D. Sierra Leone passports issued by the Ministry of External Affairs in Freetown and Diplomatic Representatives abroad
- E. Commonwealth Citizen passports also issued by the Sierra Leone authorities.

We must relate this to the five groups within the Lebanese community which we distinguished before. Group 1 possessed Lebanese passports, group 2 British passports of type B, while group 3 owned British passports of either type B or type C. It was estimated in 1970 that there were about a thousand British passports in the hands of groups 2 and 3, over 700 of type B and almost 300 of type C. The passports of type C that were issued after 1962 bore an endorsement to the effect that the holder was subject to the restrictions imposed by the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of U.K.; a similar endorsement has been made in passports of type B issued after 1968.⁴³ Many people in group 3 also possessed a Lebanese passport. It has been the policy of the Lebanese Government to issue passports to the children and further descendants of emigrants, even if they have no other connection with Lebanon; the Embassy in Freetown issues passports to them provided they are registered with the Embassy. Both British and Lebanese law have permitted the possession and use of two passports.⁴⁴

Members of group 4 had lost their British status at independence and were deprived of Sierra Leone citizenship by Act No. 12 of 1962. At first their problem was not noticed. They continued to travel on the passports which had been issued before independence, mainly British ones. This was illegal, but they did it in good faith. When these passports expired they applied to the British High Commission for a renewal. Minors who had travelled on the British passport of one of their parents also applied to the British High Commission for a separate passport. It was the Passport Officer of the British High Commission who discovered that many Lebanese applicants belonged to group 4 and were not entitled to a

British passport. The number of applications which he has refused is, as yet, the only indication of the size of group 4. (Our estimate of 400, see p. 284, has not been checked against the records of the British High Commission.)

When the Lebanese community learned about the refused applications, it realized that group 4 was far greater than everybody had assumed. Although all people in group 4 can be described as third-generation immigrants, they can be divided into: those whose father and mother were born in Sierra Leone; those whose father only was born in Sierra Leone; and those whose mother only was born in Sierra Leone. Since in most Lebanese marriages contracted before 1950 the husband was considerably older than the wife, this third subgroup is the most numerous. Many Lebanese were second-generation immigrants on the father's side, but third-generation on the mother's. Since patrilineal descent dominated Lebanese thinking, they were very surprised — and annoyed — when they heard that their application for a British passport was refused. A practical problem was that they needed an alternative travel document. At first they had no alternative but to apply for a Lebanese passport, but later, in December 1964, the Sierra Leone Government made provision for the issue of Commonwealth Citizen passports,⁴⁵ which were given to the people who had been affected by Act No. 12 of 1962. Lebanese who hoped for a repeal of this Act preferred the Commonwealth Citizen passport, but others took the easy way out and applied for a Lebanese passport.

The Afro-Lebanese of group 5 were in a position similar to group 4. They also continued to travel on their old passports, although this was illegal. When the passports expired, they discovered that the British High Commission was unable to issue them with new ones. They then turned to the Lebanese Embassy. Nearly all Afro-Lebanese could get a passport there; only those who had been born in a marriage that was not registered at the Embassy were not considered as Lebanese and could not obtain a passport. I think that fairly few Afro-Lebanese were affected by this restriction. Because of the disillusionment caused by Act No. 12 of 1962, I expect that many Afro-Lebanese applied for a Lebanese passport. Their attitude changed in May 1965, when Act No. 14 revived their hopes of regaining citizenship of Sierra Leone. It is likely that those who needed a new passport after May 1965, applied for a Commonwealth Citizen passport, although we do not know how many of these passports were in fact issued to persons of groups 4 and 5.

Some Lebanese possess a passport for citizens of Sierra Leone (type D), which they became entitled to after being naturalized or, in the case of the

Afro-Lebanese, after they had exercised their option and had been registered. These citizens are not allowed to possess a Lebanese or a British passport, because the constitution forbids dual citizenship.

All this shows that the passport situation is quite complicated. This must be borne in mind when we try to interpret Table XX which contains all the figures which we have been able to collect about the strength of the Lebanese community. We have added columns 3 and 4 because until a few years ago it could be assumed that practically all Asiatics in Sierra Leone were either Indians or Lebanese. The greatest surprise of the table is the enormous difference between the figures for 1963 and 1968; we have no reason to doubt the reliability of either figure. The census of 1963 was well conducted and the figure is in line with the special censuses of 1951 and 1955, while the 1968 figure does not deviate far from the number of 6500 Lebanese who are registered with the Lebanese Embassy.⁴⁶

Part of the explanation is that the Afro-Lebanese were largely excluded in 1963, but largely included in 1968. The registration scheme used a broad definition of a non-citizen: the people who had been deprived of their citizenship by Act No. 12 of 1962 were also required to register. They experienced this as a painful form of discrimination, but this was outweighed by the advantage that the Government could ascertain with little extra work how large this category of people was. The registration officers had to classify Afro-Lebanese who submitted a Lebanese passport as Lebanese. We do not know how they classified the Afro-Lebanese who had no passport or only a Commonwealth Citizen passport,⁴⁷ though it is conceivable that they classified them as Lebanese, too.

Even if we assume that the 1968 figure included 2000 Afro-Lebanese, we are still left with an increase of 2400 full Lebanese in five years. Some of this was due to the war between Israel and the Arab states in June 1967. Many Lebanese parents cabled their children who were in school in Lebanon telling them to fly at once to safe Sierra Leone. Although these children were temporary visitors, they had to register. A rough guess might put their number on 500. The remaining increase of 1900 full Lebanese would be a measure of the immigration leak during the Albert Margai period. It was a pity that Juxon-Smith was under arrest when the registration results were published for it meant that he was unable to interpret them and to act upon them. The new APC government, busy with other matters, showed little interest in the results.

It cannot be ruled out that even the 1968 figure underestimated the strength of the Lebanese community. Some Lebanese possessed Sierra Leone passports and it is certain that they were not registered. Secondly,

Table XX. *Lebanese, Indians, and Asiatics in Sierra Leone, for selected years, 1948 - 1968*

	All Lebanese	Alien Lebanese	Asiatics	Indians
1948	n.a.	1202 (a)	2074 (b)	90 (a)
1951	2770 (c)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1952	n.a.	1240 (d)	n.a.	117 (d)
1955	2900 (e)	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.
1961	n.a.	n.a.	1745 (f)	n.a.
1962	n.a.	1728 (g)	n.a.	n.a.
1963	3301 (h)	n.a.	3579 (h)	278 (h)
1965	n.a.	n.a.	2212 (f)	n.a.
1966	n.a.	1668 (i)	n.a.	306 (j)
1967	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	358 (j)
1968	7696 (k)	n.a.	8423 (k)	416 (k)

Notes:

1. The sources can be grouped as follows: a, d, f, g, i, and j are based on immigration records; b, c, e, and h are national or special censuses; k is based on records of residence.
2. Column 1 includes a small, unknown number of Syrians proper in the figures for 1951 and 1963.

Sources:

The letters behind the numbers are the key to the sources below.

- a. Legislative Council Minutes of 20 December 1948.
- b. Colonial Office, *Report on Sierra Leone for the year 1949*, p. 11.
- c. E.K. Saadé, *Le Liban dans le Monde*, p. 263.
- d. Legislative Council Minutes of 28 July 1952.
- e. Figure prepared by the Lebanese consul in Sierra Leone and published by the Lebanese Government, quoted by M. Hanna, 'The Lebanese in West Africa: 3', *West Africa*, May 3, 1958, p. 415.
- f. House of Representatives, Reply to Question 26 of 1966.
- g. House of Representatives, Reply to Question 205 of 1962, as quoted by R.G. Saylor, *The Economic System of Sierra Leone*, p. 19n.
- h. 1963 Population Census of Sierra Leone, *Volume 2*, p. 27.
- i. House of Representatives, Reply to Question 105 of 1966.
- j. House of Representatives, Reply to Question 293 of 1967.
- k. House of Representatives, Reply to Question 044 of 1968.

the Lebanese who possessed British passports may have submitted their British passport when they registered, in which case they were presumably counted as British and not as Lebanese. We have already seen that there were about 1000 people in this category.

Many of the Lebanese who had come to Sierra Leone during the rule of Sir Albert Margai, had reason to be afraid of Juxon-Smith. On the other

hand the long-established Lebanese families felt very secure under the military government. It was a relief for them that the members of the NRC were not corrupt,⁴⁸ and that they made serious efforts to curb corruption among the civil servants. I was told that the NRC approved the naturalization of several Lebanese. These naturalizations were not challenged later, because the applicants could not be suspected of purely commercial motives, which had disappeared after the abolition of the economic restrictions on non-citizens in October 1967.⁴⁹

16.6 *The APC government*

The APC had presented itself in the election campaign of 1967 as completely opposed to the SLPP, especially to Sir Albert. After the APC had come to power it still emphasized the differences from the SLPP government, discrediting it wherever possible. Lebanese who had been close to Sir Albert kept quiet under the new government, while others who had been in Sir Albert's bad books came to the fore. Some Lebanese who had been deported by Sir Albert pleaded with the new Prime Minister, Mr. Siaka Stevens, for permission to return and some deportation orders were revoked: we estimate that some thirty Lebanese were allowed to return.⁵⁰ We have seen that one APC minister also wanted to revoke the naturalizations which Sir Albert had approved, but it was decided that not all past measures could be cancelled.

In practice, the APC government followed the example of the SLPP government in several respects. The economic restrictions on non-citizens were re-introduced with no other difference than that they were broadened in scope. The allocation of immigration quota was entrusted to a new Immigration Quota Committee, which again consisted of Cabinet Ministers. The control of immigration was, however, improved when it was brought under the Police in June 1971, after having been a separate department for about eight years.⁵¹ It was also a good sign that the Central Statistics Office began to publish figures in 1970 which were based on immigration records.⁵²

The APC government made no effort to repeal Act No. 12. In view of their opposition in 1962 they might have been expected to do so, and John Akar continued to remind them of it. The case for repeal became very strong after the judgment of the Privy Council in June 1969, but a few days after this the Government offered Mr. Akar a diplomatic post as Ambassador to the USA which he accepted. This was a great honour for

him, but his efforts for a repeal became less effective because he was so far from the seat of Government. It seems that the matter was shelved again.

In March 1971 some soldiers attempted to take over the Government, but their coup failed. APC supporters then demanded a consolidation of the position of the APC government and the immediate proclamation of a Republic. This course was indeed followed and Sierra Leone became a Republic on 19 April 1971 with Dr. Siaka Stevens as its President. This political change required the adoption of a new (Republican) constitution, and we must study some of its provisions because of their effect on the Lebanese community.⁵³ Section 21, which dealt with the qualifications for membership of Parliament, barred people who had become citizens through an option (see p. 289) for 25 years, that is until 1989. Whatever hopes John Akar may have had for a political comeback, were now finally destroyed. But there was a further cause for concern. The chapter dealing with citizenship had been removed from the constitution and put in a separate Bill, the Citizenship (Consolidated Provisions) Bill.⁵⁴ Section 12 of this Bill proposed that people who had become citizens through an option could not hold diplomatic posts or high offices in the Army and the civil service.⁵⁵ This meant that John Akar would have to give up his post after the Bill was passed. This must have played a part in his decision to resign as Ambassador, and to give a press conference in Washington in which he denounced the APC government and the proclamation of the Republic. His language was so hostile that he could not return to Sierra Leone.⁵⁶

Dr. Akar was not the only person to be upset by the Citizenship Bill. There were many Afro-Lebanese who considered it a serious threat to their career. They conferred, drafted a petition, and sent a delegation to the Vice President to present it.⁵⁷ This had the desired effect: the Bill was taken back for further consideration.

In April 1973 Parliament passed the Sierra Leone Citizenship Act.⁵⁸ It was favourable for the Afro-Lebanese because section 6 read:

'Every person whose mother is or was a citizen of Sierra Leone by virtue of sections 2, 3, 4 and 5 and who does not or did not acquire the citizenship of another State shall be deemed to be a citizen of Sierra Leone by birth.'

This meant that Act No. 12 of 1962 was repealed as far as the Afro-Lebanese were concerned. There was also no reference to limitations concerning either membership of Parliament or civil service and other posts.⁵⁹ The whole concept of second-class citizenship was dropped, to the relief of the Afro-Lebanese.

For the full Lebanese, however, the Act was unfavourable. Group 4 lost the written or unwritten rights which they had possessed; and the avenue of naturalization was closed for them as well as for the Lebanese of groups 1, 2 and 3. Section 8 of the Act restricted naturalization to persons of 'negro African descent'.⁶⁰ Section 14 invited persons who had become citizens of Sierra Leone by naturalization or registration between 1961 and 1973 to apply for citizenship 'consistent with the provisions of this Act.' It is not clear yet whether earlier naturalizations and registrations will be confirmed automatically.⁶¹

Although not citizens, the Lebanese are long-term residents. The history of West Africa abounds with examples of foreigners ('strangers') who were accepted as long-term or permanent residents. The question is whether the Lebanese will be accepted in the same way. Some signs point in this direction. The Lebanese are now recognized as a separate ethnic group, and the Government has appointed headmen to represent the Lebanese communities in various towns, through whom it wants to channel its contacts with the Lebanese.⁶² They have a powerful but also difficult position in their own community. The policy of the immigration authorities concerning the re-entry of resident Lebanese reflects a tolerant attitude on the side of the Government. Holders of British and Commonwealth Citizen passports have no problems. Their passports show — in nearly all cases — that the holder was born in Sierra Leone. Holders of Lebanese passports need a re-entry visa, which in case of long residence is given as a matter of course.⁶³

'Strangers' have always made a point of showing their respect to the African rulers as proof of their loyalty, and the Lebanese observe this custom. Thus, when the President of Sierra Leone visits a provincial town, there is usually a delegation of Lebanese businessmen to welcome him.

The developments which we have described above have made the Lebanese very dependent on the goodwill of the Government. This has drawn them farther into politics than they wanted, and now their position resembles that of their fathers who had to use all their psychological talents to remain on good terms with the Chiefs.

Diplomatic protection from abroad

One factor in the political position of the Lebanese in Sierra Leone has been the diplomatic protection that they received from abroad, which has changed with the political status of the home country. Until the end of World War I Lebanon formed part of the Turkish Empire and Lebanese immigrants in West Africa could count on Turkish protection, at least in theory. Then after the war France became the Mandatory Power for Lebanon and assumed responsibility for its citizens, including those abroad. When Lebanon became independent in 1943, it was unable to appoint a diplomatic representative in Freetown and requested France to look after its interests in Sierra Leone. France agreed and there was no notable change for the Lebanese who lived in Sierra Leone. It was only in 1954 that Lebanon appointed its own consul there, who was succeeded by a Chargé d'Affaires in 1961.

17.1 *The period of Turkish protection*

There were no Turkish consuls in West Africa before World War I, but even if there had been I doubt whether the Lebanese immigrants would have asked them for any help. The majority was opposed to Turkish rule and had no intention of returning to Lebanon. Furthermore, there were many young men among the immigrants who had actually left Lebanon to escape conscription into the Turkish army.¹

Their Turkish citizenship almost ruined the immigrants in 1914. When World War I broke out in August the position of the Lebanese was still relatively safe, because Turkey remained neutral at first. They did not hesitate to show their sympathy for the British and collected £130 for the

relief of the distress in Europe. The money was offered to the Colonial Secretary who, however, felt that it was his duty to tell them that war with Turkey was imminent. The Lebanese replied that the attitude of the Turkish government did not modify their desire to make this donation. The Colonial Secretary then accepted the money, passing it on to the Red Cross.² The Lebanese also collected £114 for distressed Belgians. When in November 1914 Turkey declared war on Britain, the Lebanese in Sierra Leone were nearly interned as enemy subjects. The reasons why this was not done were explained in a letter from the Governor to the Secretary for the Colonies:

'It cannot be denied that the Syrians are, technically, Ottoman subjects, but I understand that a good many of those in Sierra Leone come from the district of Lebanon where the population is Christian and is ruled by a Christian Mutassarif or Governor. In any case the feelings towards the Turkish Government are the reverse of friendly and they have written to this Government strongly condemning the action of the Porte in making war on Russia and her allies.'³

The colonial administration did not change its view during the war, so the Lebanese did not experience any serious handicap because of their Turkish citizenship.

17.2 *The period of French protection*

France assumed responsibility for the Lebanese in West Africa in early 1919. The French government instructed its honorary consul in Freetown to look after the Lebanese in Sierra Leone, but before he had had time to orientate himself the Syrian riots broke out in July 1919. He showed his concern by sending pocket money and food to the Lebanese kept in protective custody, which reminded the British of the fact that the French government was one of the parties in this conflict.

It was the custom of the French government to appoint the general manager of the French company, CFAO, as its honorary consul. As a result the Lebanese in Sierra Leone had more contacts with CFAO than with the other companies. Moreover, CFAO ran a smaller risk of default when it extended credit to Lebanese traders who were registered at the French consulate. The French consul was responsible for emigrants from Syria as well as Lebanon, and distinguished these two nationalities in his official records. It seems that he made no effort to explain the distinction

to the British authorities, who continued to treat the immigrants as one category, officially called 'Syrians'.

World War II caused great confusion among the Lebanese in British West Africa, although not immediately. When the war broke out France and Britain were allies and the Lebanese resolutely supported the Allied cause because their home country and their country of residence were on the same side. As they had done 25 years before they brought money together for the British Red Cross.⁴ The situation changed, however, when France was overrun by the German army in June 1940. The new French government, the so-called Vichy government, signed an armistice and adopted a policy of neutrality which was completely rejected by one French general, Charles de Gaulle, who went to London and appealed from there to the French people to continue the war against the Germans. He was recognized by the British as the leader of the Free French and supplied with arms and other facilities. The Free French and the Vichy French pursued opposing policies and there was a grave risk that their soldiers would have to fight each other in battle. The French abroad, beyond the reach of the Germans, faced an awful dilemma; and so did the Lebanese.

While the French and the Lebanese in other parts of British West Africa could postpone their decision for some time, those in Sierra Leone were unable to do so because General de Gaulle himself came to Sierra Leone in order to assemble a fleet to sail for Dakar.⁵ The Governor of French West Africa — unlike his opposite number in Equatorial Africa — had declared for Vichy, but de Gaulle hoped that the population of Dakar did not support the Governor and would rise to welcome the Free French. While making his military preparations de Gaulle addressed the French in Freetown. He also appointed his own consul, Mr. Marcel Jourdan.

Unfortunately, the expedition to Dakar in September 1940 failed and de Gaulle returned to Freetown without having gained a foothold in French West Africa. Faced with this new situation the majority of the French and Lebanese in Sierra Leone was unwilling to break with Vichy. This was a serious disappointment for the British authorities who feared an attack from the Vichy troops in French Guinea and had to classify the French and the Lebanese as potential helpers. Only the Free French and the Lebanese who had been naturalized as British Subjects escaped the general feeling of distrust. It also worried the British that the Lebanese in Sierra Leone and French Guinea were connected by a common language, and in some cases by family ties.⁶ For several months the majority of the

Lebanese adopted a 'wait-and-see' attitude and refrained from giving financial support to either the British or the Free French. It is easy to accuse them of cowardice or opportunism, but it should be remembered that the French High Commissioner in Beirut, who governed Lebanon and Syria, had also declared for Vichy. The Lebanese hoped that contacts with their home country could be maintained if they remained loyal to the Vichy government.

It was the Germans themselves who brought the twilight of neutrality to an end. In early May 1941 their military planes began to use the airfields in Lebanon and Syria. The Free French in Freetown informed the Lebanese at once and asked them to express their indignation at this action of the Germans.⁷ In response the Lebanese began to collect money for de Gaulle, bringing together £323 before the end of May.⁸ On 8 June 1941 British troops, supported by Free French units, invaded Lebanon and Syria. This action caused — or revived — a division among the Lebanese. One section of the Lebanese community — presumably consisting of supporters of the action — presented the Governor with £317 for the War Charities Fund on 12 June. Another section came two weeks later with £834 for the same purpose.⁹ This section had probably condemned the invasion at first, but came round when the British troops were successful. However, not all Lebanese were prepared to change their minds and to support the British; some were stubborn, and others had a genuine sympathy for Hitler. The pent-up tension of the community unloaded itself against these die-hards who refused to express their loyalty to the Allied cause. All kinds of rumours circulated about them. Some were so serious that the Governor decided to intern eight Lebanese in July 1941, and they were taken to the camp at Mabang, where German prisoners of war were also held.¹⁰

The Vichy French in Lebanon and Syria surrendered on 14 July 1941 and Lebanon remained in Allied hands for the remainder of the war. This was the decisive factor for the Lebanese in Sierra Leone. When French West Africa declared for the Free French in early 1943,¹¹ the military threat from French Guinea disappeared and the Lebanese were no longer seen as a security risk, although the British continued to refuse them permission to travel to Lebanon.¹² The eight Lebanese who had been interned were later charged with treason but the Chief Justice acquitted and discharged them.¹³ As far as I know no other Lebanese community in West Africa experienced as much tension and division during World War II as the one in Sierra Leone.

The post-war government of France returned the consular duties to the

general manager of CFAO, who as French consul represented the interests of Lebanon and its citizens until 1954. This seems to have been only a routine task without any serious problems.

17.3 The period of Lebanese protection

The Government of Lebanon began to pay increasing attention to its citizens in West Africa in the 1950s. As the prosperity of these Lebanese increased, their ties with Lebanon became stronger. They could afford to visit their home country and send their children to schools there. They also transferred funds to enable them to retire in Lebanon, which the Government appreciated as a welcome item on the balance of payments.¹⁴ The emigrants were also valued as a foothold in West Africa: they were able to stimulate Lebanese exports and support Lebanese airlines and banks with international operations. These economic considerations recommended an active policy of protection for the emigrants in West Africa. Lebanese personnel seemed more appropriate for such a policy than the French consuls who had looked after Lebanese interests until then.

It was in 1954 that Lebanon appointed a Lebanese as consul in Sierra Leone. For reasons of economy it opted for an honorary consul from among the traders living in Sierra Leone. The choice fell on Mr. Assad Daher Yazbeck, a partner in the well-established firm of J. Milhem & Sons. One result of his appointment was that the authorities and the newspapers had to come to grips with the distinction between Lebanese and Syrians. Since the Lebanese representative in Sierra Leone has never been responsible for the Syrians proper, the distinction between them and the Lebanese has had practical consequences.¹⁵ One of Yazbeck's early tasks was the enumeration of all Lebanese in Sierra Leone.¹⁶ He arrived at a figure of 2900 for 1955; Lebanese who possessed British passports were probably included in this figure. The Government of Lebanon continued to use this estimate for several years.¹⁷

In 1960 the Government of Lebanon sent a career diplomat, Mr. Jean Hazou, to take over the consulate and to make preparations for an Embassy. When Sierra Leone attained independence the Lebanese Ambassador to Liberia was also appointed Ambassador to Sierra Leone. The consulate was changed into an Embassy and Mr. Hazou became Chargé d'Affaires. This upgrading of the representation was part of the Lebanese policy to establish good relations with the independent coun-

tries in West Africa. Lebanon is not only intent on the protection of its citizens abroad, but is also afraid of a possible large-scale exodus of Lebanese from West Africa, because it could not cope with thousands of returning emigrants. Such an exodus could be sparked off not only by political measures, like deportations, but also by economic discrimination, so it is the task of the diplomatic representatives to prevent such measures, if at all possible. The occasional visits of Lebanese Ministers to West Africa have served the same purpose.¹⁸

Lebanon has also given technical aid including scholarships for Sierra Leonean students. It has also arranged visits of Sierra Leonean dignitaries to Lebanon. Such visitors have been received with great hospitality and honour.¹⁹

The community itself caused a great deal of work, too. As the Lebanese travelled more, more passports had to be issued. Moreover, the community was growing and the chances of getting other passports decreased. We noted in Chapter 16 that some Lebanese and Afro-Lebanese applied in vain for a British passport: most of these people turned to the Lebanese Embassy afterwards. Incidentally, this strengthened the hold of the Embassy over the community, and the *Chargé d'Affaires* is increasingly seen as the spokesman and representative of the whole Lebanese community, for he has assumed a kind of leadership. He has constantly exhorted the Lebanese to steer clear of politics and to support the 'Government of the day' — which has been much appreciated by the successive Sierra Leonean governments. Both Mr. Hazou and his successor, Mr. Salloukh, who came in 1964, have tried to settle disputes within the Lebanese community so as to preserve a façade of unity towards Sierra Leonean politicians.

It was not necessary for Sierra Leone to have a representative of the same rank in Lebanon. In 1963 the Sierra Leone Government appointed Mr. Anis Milhem as Honorary Consul in Beirut. Mr. Milhem had lived in Sierra Leone for many years, but had gone back to Lebanon in 1956.²⁰ There is a fair amount of work because the Consulate in Beirut issues visa to Lebanese who want to travel to Sierra Leone.

17.4 *The Middle East conflict*

The conflict between Israel and the Arab countries has had two effects on the Lebanese in Sierra Leone. Firstly, it has forced them to take sides. Being immigrants they were reluctant to lose goodwill by speaking out

politically. The conflict also precluded contacts with Israeli businessmen.²¹ After the 1967 war the bitterness against Israel increased and expressed itself in pro-Nasser feelings. (It must be pointed out that only Lebanon and Egypt of the Arab countries have an Embassy in Sierra Leone.) When President Nasser died in September 1970, the Lebanese community mourned him publicly and unanimously.²²

The second effect of the conflict is that it undermines the plans of the Lebanese. How safe a home is Lebanon? they wonder. Plans to retire in Lebanon remain uncertain and plans to send the children to school there are postponed. During the 1967 war some fathers in Sierra Leone hurriedly called their children back from Lebanon and sent them to school in Sierra Leone. The anxiety has been greatest among the Lebanese of the South Lebanon group, because their home villages lie close to the Israeli border. It may even be that the South Lebanese are disproportionately numerous among recent immigrants. It is strange to realize that the size of the community in Sierra Leone depends on the degree of tension in the Middle East. Peace in the Middle East may reduce the community in Sierra Leone.

As the Lebanese waver in their determination to return, the flow of money to Lebanon decreases. The Lebanese Government knows that increased tension scares the emigrants and their money away. This is one reason why they adopt a cautious foreign policy in the Middle East.

Concluding observations

There are three tasks which we have to undertake in this final chapter. First, we have to supplement the picture of the Lebanese entrepreneur as provisionally presented in Chapter 11 taking into account the social and political factors discussed in Chapters 12-17. Secondly, we must discuss the success of the Lebanese as a group and the contribution which they have made to Sierra Leone. Here again we can fall back on some of the conclusions drawn in Chapter 11. Finally, we have to indicate how we see the future of the Lebanese in Sierra Leone.

18.1 *The Lebanese entrepreneur, a further dimension*

The primary quality of Lebanese enterprise has been continuity, and the dominant form the family business. These conclusions of Chapter 11 acquired a new perspective when we discussed the quality of Lebanese family life in Chapter 12: the strong cohesion of the 'nuclear' family and the mutual obligations among members of the extended family. Apparently, family cohesion is a firm foundation for small-scale, unincorporated enterprise. Many Sierra Leoneans have noticed the way in which the Lebanese support each other, but it is often wrongly interpreted as national solidarity, when in fact it is family solidarity. This ingredient would be valuable for Sierra Leonean businessmen, too.

Success in business has always been a strongly desired goal in the Lebanese community, not only because of the money, but also because of the social status it brought. In a community of traders with few alternative opportunities commercial success becomes the unquestioned aspiration of everyone, and indeed, social and economic pressures

combined to spur the Lebanese on to extra efforts and new initiatives. There was also social pressure from relatives and friends back in Lebanon. The desire to make good, or to be as successful as compatriot X, explains the strong motivation of the Lebanese. The small European and the large African community did not experience this pressure to the same degree.

Commerce in Sierra Leone is not impersonal and purely economic, for most customers expect a personal element in their relations with a trader. This element is declining, especially in the towns, but it has been very important. The Lebanese traders have lived up to the expectations of their African customers, in most cases quite naturally because they were used to it in Lebanon. Indeed, they have been very open-minded towards the African society in which they lived. One can belittle this and say that they could not afford to be indifferent, but I would rather credit them with a tolerant attitude and a willingness to see the qualities of other people. In this respect they have been more receptive than most Europeans. The Lebanese still possess this advantage: they are better informed about Sierra Leonean customs and behaviour than any other group of foreigners.

The political situation of colonial Sierra Leone was favourable for the Lebanese. Some Sierra Leoneans believe that the British actively supported the Lebanese and so promoted their success,¹ but the real situation is more subtle. An early Lebanese who had lived under Turkish rule thought that success was only possible if he was on good terms with the head of the local government. If a man in Lebanon had built up a business without official support, he was sure to be envied and fleeced by the authorities. (This background was an advantage for the Lebanese in the Protectorate who had to deal with the Chiefs. No Chief tolerated an independent and successful trader in his chieftom, because this would mean a powerful man on whose loyalty the Chief could not rely.) The British authorities were different because they firmly believed in a separation of politics and economics. They also practiced it, intervening only when traders broke the law. The Lebanese quickly realized the advantages of this system; it was possible to aim at success in business without first befriending the authorities. The only maxim in relations with the authorities was: know the law and obey it. This was, of course, a much cheaper way to do business; it cut out all presents, loans, and free services which the authorities at home had demanded. They first learnt how to stay clear of the law; then they discovered when it was advantageous to take a quarrel to the courts for a decision. The Lebanese community has always appreciated and admired the rule of law which the British guaranteed in Sierra Leone.

For them it meant protection against avaricious and oppressive officials, and the possibility of invoking the verdict of an impartial judge in a long-drawn-out conflict.

18.2 *The success of the Lebanese*

There is no doubt that the prosperity of the Lebanese community has increased greatly since 1895. As most immigrants arrived with little money this affluence is for the greater part based on what they have earned in Sierra Leone. We have explained these earnings and profits primarily by the opportunities which arose when the colonial period started with the rapid introduction of European planning, technology, organization, and capital.² A special quality of the Lebanese was that they were willing to do work of marginal profitability and had the patience to persevere; their endurance was rewarded. The importance of the economic factor is indirectly confirmed by the marked fluctuations over time in the prosperity of the Lebanese, and also by the great variations from one area to another. The social factor, as summarized in the previous section, has also played a role, but in fact comes far behind the economic factor. The political factor has been important only in that stability and security always promote trade.

18.3 *The alleged causes of success*

All observers who have paused to consider the success of the Lebanese have tried to find an explanation for it. Virtually all these observers have looked for an answer in the Lebanese character rather than in their circumstances. Naturally, they have advanced suggestions such as superior intelligence, a long commercial tradition, a knack for learning foreign languages, and great psychological talents. I think that most of these suggestions exaggerate the facts.

It is interesting that those who were hostile to the Lebanese, the Creoles for instance,³ accepted the hypothesis of superior intelligence, but were convinced that it was used in the wrong way. According to them their shrewd intelligence verged on dishonesty, but I believe that this trait has been exaggerated as a cause of Lebanese success. Since this point has not yet been discussed systematically in this book, it should receive special attention here. It is not difficult to draw up a list of the objectionable

practices of which the Lebanese have been accused:

- a) cheating individual consumers or producers by using false weights, by misleading them about the quality or grade, or by making faulty calculations which the other party cannot check.
- b) contravening Government orders. We note in passing that this complaint became more frequent as Government intervened further in economic affairs.
- c) instigating Government officials to act knowingly against the public interest; the evil of corruption.
- d) exploiting consumers collectively by raising the price of a scarce commodity, and even by engineering a shortage
- e) instigating employees of European companies to act against their instructions.

The first three practices are legally wrong, and some Lebanese have been convicted of them in court. The last two were often considered wrong, too, but were not illegal. Moral standards, it seems, used to be stricter than legal standards. It should not be assumed, however, that moral standards were equally high in all parts of Sierra Leone. For many years British and Creole standards were very strict, stricter than those of the other Africans. In that period it was possible for the Lebanese to be accused of dishonesty by the Creoles and some Europeans, while at the same time being appreciated as giving a fair deal in the Interior. It must be remembered that several cultures and moral systems were forcibly merged when the Protectorate was declared, with a resulting elasticity concerning questions of right and wrong. Moreover, new elements were introduced into large parts of Sierra Leone: modern transport, foreign money, new crops, and mineral production. It would have been surprising indeed, if everybody had agreed on the borderline between honest and dishonest trading, and on the desirability of complying with Government measures. We note further that everybody tends to apply stricter standards to his rival than to himself; this was a factor in the criticisms of the Creole traders and some European businessmen.

The unification of moral standards has proceeded fast in the post-war period, but agreed standards have become laxer. Many of the practices listed above occur today and fail to arouse the indignation of the press and public.

There have always been generalizations about the Lebanese. When some of them were found guilty of dishonesty, it was often argued that all were dishonest. This was plain prejudice. Virtually all Europeans and Africans with extensive first-hand knowledge of the Lebanese told me that

standards of honesty varied greatly within the Lebanese community: there were the men who could be trusted and the dubious characters. Normally the former were the more successful.

It is easier to analyse the nature and forms of dishonesty than its extent. It would be possible to prepare statistics of court convictions of Lebanese as a measure of dishonesty, but we have not done so, partly because of the problems of compilation and partly because the number of offences may well be higher — possibly much higher — than the number of convictions. During our interviews we have been alert to stories about Lebanese who owed their prosperity to dishonesty. It was said about several men that a particular shady deal had been important in his career, but no one was described as having made his entire fortune in this way. This is significant because the Lebanese criticize compatriots of a different group or family mercilessly, and tend to exaggerate when they describe the sins of their rivals. I am therefore inclined to think that dishonesty has accounted for only a small proportion of the prosperity of the Lebanese community. This is also plausible, because dishonesty is a two-edged sword. When a man committed any of the practices listed above, the party that suffered usually noticed or suspected it.⁴ He told others of his experience and the news went round quickly. Information travels fast in Sierra Leone, although most of it is passed on by word of mouth, which tends to surprise Europeans who are used to newspaper and radio as the main channels of information. This feature of Sierra Leone society has acted as a powerful brake on dishonesty, for after doubts had arisen about the honesty of a trader, he was unable to do the same thing again.⁵

Two other qualities of the Lebanese have been mentioned as causes of their success: their industry and their frugality. As long as the Lebanese were itinerant traders, their industry was conspicuous. After they had settled as shopkeepers however, the basis for this reputation disappeared. My own observations indicate that slack and busy spells alternate for Lebanese shopkeepers and that they adjust their work accordingly. Most of them could not be called busy or hard-working men. There is, however, a minority of very active men, mostly middle-aged, who spend a great deal of time in managerial work, inspection, travelling, negotiating, and personal relations. The word 'busy' is more appropriate for them than 'industrious'. Frugality is a virtue of the past. The early Lebanese lived very frugally and saved as much as they could; the capital thus accumulated consolidated their position in the 1910s and 1920s. Today there is little evidence of frugality, except among a few older people. We gather that

the change-over occurred in the 1950s, when the Lebanese began to build modern houses which led to a new style of life.

18.4 *The contribution of the Lebanese*

The economic contribution of the Lebanese has been that they took on marginal roles in the process of development which did not attract other entrepreneurs. The development of Sierra Leone, especially of the Interior, would have proceeded at a much slower pace in the period 1900 to 1950, if the Lebanese had not been there. The nature of their economic contribution has shifted with the emancipation of the Africans of the Interior and the withdrawal of the Europeans. At present their main contribution lies in the importing and retailing of textiles and fancy goods; in the motor trade; in diamond buying; and in miscellaneous activities. The textile trade, for instance, would be completely disorganized if Lebanese capital, experience, and initiative were to be withdrawn.

It appears that nobody has ever credited the Lebanese for making a social contribution in Sierra Leone. Yet it seems likely that they have been important in this respect. Acting as middlemen between Europe and the African village, they were well-placed to be cultural intermediaries as well. The Europeans could have asked the Lebanese about African customs and problems. This was rarely, if ever, done by British officials, though European company managers sometimes did, especially when they sensed African dissatisfaction. We have heard of some missionaries who were close enough to the Lebanese to ask for and consider their comments about the tribe among whom they worked. As to European scholars, not one of them has used the Lebanese as a significant source of information about Africans.

There is no reason to assume that the flow of information in the opposite direction was equally meagre, however. It seems very likely that conversations in the shops between Africans and Lebanese often settled on the Europeans: officials, traders, and missionaries. The Africans appreciated the fact that the Lebanese were not in the pay of the Europeans and were free to criticize them. Freetown and also the outside world had a great fascination for the Africans of the Interior, especially in the years when travelling was expensive and therefore the privilege of only a few. Those Lebanese who learned the local languages were well qualified to be cultural intermediaries, as it was in keeping with their general position to impress their African customers with the outside world. It is not far-

fetched to assume that they were pleased to talk about it and about their own travels.

The Lebanese also acted as a channel of information between the various tribes of Sierra Leone. Each tribe has different customs, views and institutions, and the Lebanese compared notes with each other about them. This was a form of intelligence work which benefited the whole community. A great deal of information was also discussed with customers and Chiefs — a valuable contribution in the years when contacts between the tribes were minimal. It is therefore a great pity that the colonial government did not make use of the Lebanese when they embarked on their policy of integrating the Protectorate politically.

18.5 Benefits reaped and benefits bestowed

Casual remarks of Sierra Leonean friends have shown me that they expect me to conclude with an assessment of the Lebanese in terms of the benefits they have reaped in Sierra Leone, that is their profits and success, and of the benefits which they have bestowed on the country, that is their contribution to development (economic, social, political, and moral). This wish is neither naïve nor unusual, for historians have often been asked for a similar assessment of the benefits reaped and bestowed by the Europeans in the colonial period. Some tentative assessments have been made, only to show that opinions can vary greatly. Until a more comprehensive and balanced assessment of the role of the Europeans has been produced,⁶ it is impossible and pretentious to even suggest an answer for the Lebanese. After all, the operations of the Lebanese largely fell in the colonial period.

Nevertheless, we have done a great deal of the spadework for such an assessment. We have shown in which activities and in which periods the Lebanese did well for themselves, but we have no quantitative information about their incomes, except for the figures on p. 267. I doubt whether other researchers, more patient than I, would gain very much more.⁷ As to the contribution of the Lebanese we have presented a qualitative description, and have indicated that the economic one was more important than the social one. Again, I doubt whether a quantitative study would be possible or worth-while.

One last point we must make. If the different periods are considered separately, success and contribution do not necessarily go hand in hand. The contribution of the Lebanese was greatest in the period 1905-1950,

especially from about 1925 to 1950,⁸ but their income in that period was low on the whole, particularly in the slump of the 1930s. On the other hand, their profits were very high in the 1950s when the purchasing power of their customers trebled as a result of the diamond boom. In that period their contribution to development was relatively low. This leads to the conclusion that an assessment has to cover a long period so as to include several phases of the trade cycle.

18.6 The political price of economic success

The economic position of the Lebanese improved enormously in the 1950s, but their political position deteriorated greatly in that same period. This was not just a coincidence. The Sierra Leonean politicians watched the growing economic strength of the Lebanese with misgivings. They feared that the Lebanese traders would use their economic influence to encroach on the political power which the African politicians were taking over just then, so it would seem that the measures which have been taken against the Lebanese were prompted not by hostility or jealousy, but by fear. A situation in which foreigners, as individuals or as companies, possess great economic influence is difficult for new politicians who have not yet consolidated their position to accept. They did not expect that the British legacy of separation of political and economic spheres could be preserved after Independence,⁹ and reckoned with greater political pressure from businessmen.

We must guard against one misunderstanding: the fear of the politicians was caused not by the foreign character of Lebanese enterprise, but by its economic strength. It must be remembered that an African Government has more power over a private sector dominated by foreigners than over one of the same size dominated by national businessmen. This is largely due to the threat of deportation. Foreign businessmen may meekly accept measures which would infuriate local businessmen and lead to serious agitation.¹⁰ Also, local businessmen can use commercial success as a stepping stone to a political career, while foreigners cannot. Again, foreigners will comply more readily with Government measures, including taxation, than local businessmen. An interesting parallel may be drawn with the attitude of the Chiefs before 1945 who preferred stranger traders to local traders in their chiefdoms.

If fear of competitive power is taken as the hidden motive behind the restrictive measures against the Lebanese, the order and the nature of

these measures is seen to be completely logical: before independence, only economic restrictions were introduced, because the British did not permit a deterioration in the political position of the Lebanese who possessed British status. After independence the rights of the Lebanese and Afro-Lebanese who possessed or had possessed British status were reduced so as to deny them a political career. Then in the mid-1960s an attempt was made to directly curb the economic power of the Lebanese. The approach chosen was to restrict the opportunities for the Lebanese, for it was felt that this would reduce their profits and weaken their position. The administrative burden was, however, badly underestimated. Firstly, drafting and revising the legislation was difficult, but more important was the fact that individual cases of hardship were created. It proved necessary to give ministers or civil servants some freedom of decision in such cases. Whenever they made a decision in favour of a Lebanese, they were accused — in public or privately — of corruption. I believe that in many cases they were moved by a long acquaintance, if not friendship, with a Lebanese, or by a feeling that the law was not being fair on that particular individual. Finally, the restrictions caused a wave of applications for naturalization which could neither be rejected nor accepted without devising new criteria. The Albert Margai government was later criticized for the way it had handled all these matters, and I have no desire to clear them from blame, but it should be realized that even a high-principled Government would have encountered more problems with a programme of economic restrictions than it could cope with.

The military government of 1967/8 chose a different solution. The power of the Lebanese community was to be kept within limits by keeping the number of Lebanese down through a water-tight system of immigration and residence control. This would also bring hardships, but the individual who suffered was far away in Lebanon. The administrative burden was considerably smaller, and the risk of corruption — and of allegations of corruption — was smaller, too. There is no doubt that effective control of immigration is superior to economic restrictions, although of course the two can be combined. The APC government has in fact aimed at a combination, in which the economic restrictions have received more attention.

18.7 *The future*

What will be the future of the Lebanese in Sierra Leone? For most people this is a political question. Will the Government of Sierra Leone impose further restrictions on Lebanese and other foreigners? If so, how effective will these restrictions be and how harshly will they be applied? Moreover, how effective will the control of immigration and residence be? Ineffective restrictions may seem an advantage for the Lebanese, but in the long run they are not, because they will strengthen the case for taking radical measures against them. It is therefore in the interest of the Lebanese community that control on immigration and residence should succeed.

The radical measure which we have in mind is the wholesale expulsion of the Lebanese community. Many Lebanese have considered this risk but the chances of such an occurrence are considered smaller by the people who live in West Africa — Africans as well as Lebanese — than by those in Europe. There are indeed some people in Sierra Leone who would like to expel all the Lebanese, but the great majority of the Sierra Leoneans (influenced by their acquaintance with one or more Lebanese whom they like and respect) would consider this an act of injustice and a democratic Parliament would probably reject any proposals in this direction. The Lebanese would only be in real danger if a Government emerged that was cut off from the people and acted on their presumed rather than their real wishes. The issue was drawn into publicity in August 1972, when President Amin of Uganda expelled the Asian residents from that country. Many people wondered whether any West African country would follow this example and expel its Lebanese residents. The Lebanese in Sierra Leone were also forced to reflect upon their future but they were reassured by a statement of President Stevens.¹¹ An important index — or barometer — of the feelings of the Sierra Leonean politicians appears to be the position of the Afro-Lebanese who have close connections with their full Lebanese relatives and are willing to plead their cause.¹² When the political position of the Afro-Lebanese is weak, their pleas have little effect, but when it improves, their pleas begin to matter again.

The future also depends on purely economic factors. I expect that these will be more important in the end than the political ones. It is now almost certain that diamond production will come to an end in the next five years.¹³ This will mean the end of the diamond trade, so that some thirty big dealers and another fifty smaller ones will lose the basis of their existence. Will they turn to other forms of business or will they leave Sierra Leone?

The end of the diamond industry will have repercussions on the Lebanese in the general merchandise trade as well. The shopkeepers will sell less because no money will be earned any more in the diamond industry. This fall in turnover will be most noticeable in Kono, but the shopkeepers in Freetown and other towns will be affected, too. As the shopkeepers order less from them, the importers will order less from abroad so that the volume of imports — and the profits on importing — decline. I expect that the Lebanese importers will suffer more than the others because of some organizational changes. At present importing is relatively free because of the liberal policy concerning foreign exchange. The Government has always felt that exchange control would stimulate — and would be defeated by — diamond smuggling, but as soon as diamond production has come to an end this consideration will lose its force and import controls will be introduced. A strict licensing system will be unfavourable for the Lebanese importers. First, many of them will be considered too 'small' to qualify for an importer's licence and will have to revert to the role of shopkeeper. Secondly, the importation of many semi-luxuries and other non-staples will be prohibited and since many Lebanese importers have specialized in these products they will be more affected than the other importers. Finally, the interest in the trade in staples will probably increase — import restrictions always had this effect in the past — and many traders will apply for licences to import them. It is not difficult to predict that the Government will favour citizens at the expense of foreign importers when there are too many applications.

The contraction of the general merchandise trade and the disappearance of the diamond trade will cause many Lebanese to lose heart. Already in 1970 I heard some of them talking wistfully about Ivory Coast and Zaïre. I expect therefore that a voluntary exodus of Lebanese will take place in the next five years and that the size of the community (considering full Lebanese only) will be considerably reduced by 1980. It is certainly desirable for the Government to consult the figures of the non-citizen registration scheme regularly to see whether the Lebanese community is growing or declining.

A voluntary exodus of the Lebanese could also be caused by another development. If the rule of law loses its power to protect businessmen, trading will become less attractive for Sierra Leoneans as well as foreigners. There is the problem of the courts, which are overburdened and provide too many legal safeguards so that simple cases take too much time.¹⁴ Consequently, there is a growing tendency in the business world to accept a loss rather than to go to court in an attempt to recover the money. The

other problem is that of arbitrary action by officials against traders, which may range from refusing licences to deportations. This is a source of anxiety for many Lebanese. If a further deterioration occurs in this field it will certainly prompt many foreigners to leave, but this will not lead to greater participation in trade by Sierra Leoneans, because they will face the same problem. Moreover, there is a vicious circle between the moral standards of businessmen and those of officials. Arbitrary action demoralizes the business world. Unscrupulous businessmen tend to gain at the expense of the law-abiding ones, and the image of the businessmen deteriorates. When the average businessman is described as a crook, an official cannot be expected to treat him with respect and fairness.

We have still to ask which Lebanese are likely to stay if a voluntary exodus takes place. Many older people will stay because for them Sierra Leone has become the only country they know. Also people with investments in buildings will stay, because they cannot sell without great losses. Finally, the less successful ones will stay, because they lack the imagination and the drive to start somewhere else. If our forecast is correct, not only the number of Lebanese will decline, but also the quality of their commercial participation: it will be less optimistic and less determined. Indeed, if this development occurs, the economic power of the Lebanese community in Sierra Leone will decline a great deal. From the political point of view this is an advantage. Those that stay behind will no longer be feared by politicians as a political danger and may tacitly receive the right to permanent residence.

Notes

Notes to Chapter 1: A historical introduction

1. Marwan Hanna, 'The Lebanese in West Africa: 2, How and When They Came'. *West Africa*, 26 April, 1958, p. 393.
2. *Sierra Leone Times*, February 25, 1895. Referred to by R. Bayley Winder, 'The Lebanese in West Africa', in *Immigrants and Associations*, ed. by L.S. Fallers (The Hague/Paris, 1967), p. 106n.
3. In a petition to the Governor, *Daily Mail*, 13 March, 1956.
4. Interview with the Hon. Mr. Mana Kpaka who had consulted P.C. Jaia Kai Kai on this point.
5. Some of the Lebanese who left French Guinea during the first decade of this century may have come in this way. The census report of 1911 stated that many Lebanese had 'been driven here from French Guinea owing to a prohibitive tax imposed upon them in that country'. Quoted by R.R. Kuczynski, *Demographic Survey of the British Colonial Empire*, Vol. 1 (London, 1948), p. 191.
6. The British Government considered the boundary between Lebanon and Syria a provisional one. Many of the immigrants in Sierra Leone came from villages which might have been reallocated to Syria if the boundary was changed again. Cf. H.L. van der Laan, 'Syrians or Lebanese: Which Name is correct?', *Kroniek van Afrika*, Vol. IX, No. 2 (1969), p. 142-3.
7. *Ibid.*, p. 143-4. M. Banton, *West African City* (London, 1957) p. 99, wrote that there were twelve Syrians in 1953. Damascus Store in Freetown belongs to a Syrian proper. Syria appointed Mr. Hussein Jaward, a Lebanese businessman, as its Honorary Consul in 1971, see *Daily Mail*, 4 January, 1971.
8. File Mu 16 of 1914 of the Sierra Leone Archives. I am indebted to Dr. A.M. Howard for drawing my attention to this file.
9. Martin H.Y. Kaniki, 'Attitudes and Reactions towards the Lebanese in Sierra Leone during the Colonial Period', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 7 (1973), p. 97-113. The account which we give here is largely based on Kaniki's article. See also a letter from Governor R.J. Wilkinson to the Secretary for the Colonies which was reprinted in the *Sierra Leone Royal Gazette*, 16 October, 1920, p. 818-25.

10. Kaniki, p. 110, writes: '... the Colonial Office was primarily interested in crushing any disturbances and maintaining law and order . . .'. The Colonial Office was further influenced by a suspicion that the Creoles were 'troublemakers' and by the desire to remove any obstacles for the negotiations with France about the future of the Middle East. See also Chapter 17.
11. Kaniki, p. 111.
12. Kaniki, p. 111n. He mentions only eleven of these 24 by name: five in the Coastal Belt (Freetown, Bonthe, Sumbuya, Waterloo, and Port Loko) and six on the railway (Moyamba, Kangahun, Mano, Bo, Makump, and Makeni).
13. The number of independent Lebanese traders in 1919 must have been between 300 and 400, so that the average compensation paid out to the Lebanese traders must have been some £ 200.
14. *Annual Report of the Department of Income Tax for 1949/50*, p. 2.
15. *Annual Report on the Medical Department for the Year ended 31st December, 1913*, p. 75.
16. The census report of 1921 spoke of a 'considerable exodus of Syrians after the Riots'. Quoted by Kuczynski, p. 191.
17. Kuczynski, p. 192, reports 308 Asiatic children under 16. Nearly all of these were Lebanese.
18. The attitude of the British towards the Africans changed, too. In 1919 they ignored the African traders' wishes; in 1949 they promoted the interests of the African farmers. Admittedly, the traders of 1919 were a minority, and the farmers of 1949 the majority of the population.
19. Cf. F.J. Pedler, *West Africa* (London, 1951) p. 52: 'There are, of course, poor Syrians, keeping a tiny tumble-down shop. They are most numerous in Sierra Leone. The Syrian when he is poor looks very wretched'. This passage was deleted in the revised edition of 1959. Edmond K. Saadé, *Le Liban dans le Monde* (Beirut, 1952) p. 262, wrote: 'Sierra Leone is, in comparison to other British Colonies, very poor.' Since he had visited all West African countries in 1950 and 1951, his opinion is significant. No doubt it reflected the views of the Lebanese in West Africa. M. Banton, p. 99, wrote: '... there are still many poor Lebanese in Sierra Leone'. This statement was based on fieldwork done in 1953.
20. Cf. John McKay, 'Commercial Life in Freetown' in *Freetown, a Symposium*, ed. by C. Fyfe and E. Jones (Freetown, 1968), p. 71-2.
21. Cf. M.E. Harvey, 'Urban Land Use' in *Sierra Leone in Maps*, ed. by J.I. Clarke (London, 1966), p. 54.
22. See Vernon R. Dorjahn, 'Tailors, Carpenters, and Leather Workers in Magburaka'. *Sierra Leone Studies: New Series*, No. 20 (January, 1967), p. 163-4.

Notes to Chapter 2: Some aspects of the economic history of Sierra Leone

1. Towards the end of the 19th century the increasing use of money allowed monetary comparisons. We suggest that portage cost at least twenty times as much as water transport. This estimate is based on a calculation cited by Lugard to the effect that a train would do the same work 'at one-twentieth the cost', and our view that water transport in Sierra Leone has always been cheaper than rail transport, see further Chapter

6. See F.D. Lugard, *The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa* (Edinburgh and London, 1926) p. 463.
2. This region is sometimes described as 'riverain Sierra Leone'. 'Tidal Sierra Leone' may also be considered as a name for it.
3. For instance the Taia and the Rokel River. For accounts about trade along the Rokel River, see P.K. Mitchell, 'Trade Routes of the Early Sierra Leone Protectorate', *Sierra Leone Studies*, N.S. No 16, June 1962, p. 212-6; and E.A. Ijagbemi, 'The Rokel River and the Development of Inland Trade in Sierra Leone', *Odu*, N.S. No. 3, April 1970, p. 45-70.
4. The boundary coincides more or less with the road which Governor Hay (1888-1891) proposed to cut and police. This road was to run about thirty miles inland and parallel with the coastline from Kambia to the Mano River. See C.H. Fyfe, 'European and Creole Influence in the Hinterland of Sierra Leone before 1896', *Sierra Leone Studies*, N.S. No. 6, June 1956, p. 122.
5. Allen Howard, 'The Role of Freetown in the Commercial Life of Sierra Leone', in *Freetown, a Symposium*, ed. by C. Fyfe and E. Jones (Freetown, 1968), p. 58. It is probable that yet more cargo had to be carried by Bulom boats on the stretches abandoned by the ocean-going ships. This may have led to higher profits and the building of more Bulom boats.
6. The relative importance of Sierra Leone in British colonial policy towards West Africa was greater in the 19th than in the 20th century. Besides the cultural explanation — the establishment of Freetown and the emergence of the Creoles — we point to this geographical factor.
7. It is not clear when the word 'up-country' changed its meaning, possibly after the construction of the road from Freetown to Port Loko (1940). Alldridge still considered the Kailahun area as part of the hinterland of Bonthe (*The Sherbro and its Hinterland*, London, 1901) but 10 years later it had become the hinterland of Freetown, indicating that the railway had a negative influence on the prospects of Bonthe.
8. The palm kernels which came from the Interior were the products of 'forest gathering'.
9. For references to the long distance trade in Sierra Leone, see Mitchell, p. 204-10, and Howard, p. 40.
10. The railway in French Guinea attracted many products which had formerly been carried to Freetown.
11. Mainly concerning malaria. The European traders continued to live in Freetown, unlike the Government officials, but protected themselves with mosquito nets.
12. Howard, p. 50.
13. T.J. Alldridge, *A Transformed Colony* (London, 1910), p. 73-4.
14. See for instance the speech of the Chairman of the African and Eastern Trade Corporation, as reported in *West Africa*, 20 December 1930, pp. 1812-8. For the saving of 'men and material', see p. 1814. The merger of the African and Eastern Trade Corporation with the Niger Company in March 1929 had only a limited effect in Sierra Leone: it brought only the firm of P. Ratcliffe & Co in the same hands as the African and Eastern Trade Corporation. We hope to undertake a study of the effect of the 1930 crisis on European commercial enterprise in Sierra Leone at a later date.
15. Cf. A.G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa* (London, 1973), p. 258: 'The main aim of the [Companies during the period 1930-1945] was self-preservation'. This term also implies a mixture of weakness and strength.

16. Cf. W.K. Hancock, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs*, II, part 2 (London, 1942), p. 154-298, who described the process of development in West Africa as the inland advance of the *Traders' Frontier*.
17. *Statistical and Economic Review* (The United Africa Company Limited), issue 28 of April 1963, p. 6. The decision about the transfer of resources is shown there to have been guided by profitability and political considerations. Cf. Charles Wilson, *Unilever, 1945-1965* (London, 1968), p. 214-6.
18. The number of so-called Produce Buying Points of UAC in Sierra Leone for 1939 and 1946-1952 may be found in *Statistical and Economic Review*, issue 12 of September 1953. The figures show no clear trend. More recent information has not been published in this periodical.
19. *Directory of Business and Industry for Western Area and Multi-Unit Firms*, Central Statistics Office (Freetown, 1968), p. 42-67.
20. These categories suffer from the tentative nature of the boundary which we have drawn. Another complication is that, after 1920, the people of the railway chiefdoms were better off than the other Interior Africans.
21. Cf. Hopkins, p. 125-6. He argues that 'Producing and selling palm oil and groundnuts' was profitable for numerous 'small-scale farmers and traders' in the 19th century. He adds that the farmers in the interior of West Africa could not yet participate in it at that time.
22. Howard, p. 45, speaks of a 'close integration of food and export trade'.
23. C.H. Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone* (Oxford, 1962); A.T. Porter, *Creoledom* (London, 1963); J. Peterson, *Province of Freedom* (London, 1969).
24. Admittedly there was the long distance trade in Northern Sierra Leone, but this was largely transit trade, if present boundaries are considered. Furthermore, there were some indications of trade in connexion with Kissi and Upper Mende territory and the Mandingo traders.
25. F.J. Pedler, *West Africa* (London, 1951) wrote about trade: 'The Mende and Temne peoples, of Sierra Leone, do not seem to be interested. They have few markets and leave shopkeeping to strangers', p. 110 of 1959 edition. R. Lewis, *Sierra Leone, A Modern Portrait* (London, 1954) wrote: 'In the Protectorate, the tribal African is taking to trade upon the profits of high prices for cash crops', p. 222. Lewis visited Sierra Leone in May and June 1952 and his observation refers to the Korea boom.
26. *Report of Census for the Year 1931*, p. 166.
27. F.J. Pedler, *Economic Geography of West Africa* (London, 1955), p. 151.
28. Hancock, p. 162, spoke of 'the larger commercial pattern which we have fashioned'.
29. Hancock, p. 171. The response was largely, but not completely, free. The House Tax, occasionally justified as 'inculcating habits of industry', indirectly forced the farmer to produce. The possibility that the Chiefs used forced labour on their farms cannot be ruled out.
30. Cf. Hopkins, p. 210-214, on the plantation debate for the whole of West Africa. Sierra Leone possessed only one European plantation before World War II. It was an experimental oil palm plantation at Masanki, established by UAC and later taken over by the Government.
31. Cf. Hopkins, p. 206.
32. Note the frequent references to general merchandise as an *incentive* to cultivate more 'produce'.

33. There was a general cocoa hold-up in the Gold Coast and Nigeria in 1937/8 because the farmers were not content with prices.
34. This term was probably coined by J. Mars in his contribution on 'Extra-Territorial Enterprises' in *Mining, Commerce, and Finance in Nigeria*, ed. by M. Perham (London, 1948).
35. Cf. Hopkins, p. 277-8.
36. Some of my informants felt that World War II was responsible for this moral decline. One mentioned the wild behaviour of European soldiers and sailors in Freetown as an important cause. Other informants saw the diamond rush as the main cause.
37. Racial (but also tribal) generalizations about dishonesty are common in Sierra Leone. They aggravate distrust and discourage honesty so that there is a vicious circle of distrust and dishonesty which mars interracial and intertribal relations. These matters figure large in private conversations, but are shunned in printed comments. This is regrettable, for without the correcting influence of considered printed views, people often drift into serious exaggeration.
38. Civil servants abuse their position if they sacrifice the financial interest of the Government to their own gain. The opportunities are more numerous for them than for the employees of the companies. Every licence, every contract, every receipt may in fact offer an opportunity of corruption.
39. We shall mention some independent European entrepreneurs in the following chapters. Since their position and opportunities resembled those of the Lebanese, they offered an unexpected chance to us to verify our conclusions about the Lebanese.

Notes to Chapter 3: The produce trade

1. The Native Produce Ordinance of 1928 mentioned palm nuts, rubber, gum copal, and cotton as well. Only rubber has ever been important, and that was before the arrival of the Lebanese. Copra and tobacco should be included in any comprehensive lists. Animal products like hides and beeswax are sometimes slipped into broad produce classifications, but nobody would defend this inclusion.
2. 'Trans-ocean' explicitly recognizes the distances. Incidentally, the European consumer does the same thing when he speaks of 'tropical' produce.
3. Agricultural officers reported the problems in connexion with the fermentation of cocoa pods and the retting of piassava. Palm oil also has to be prepared and boiled as soon as possible to keep down the acidity, a form of deterioration.
4. Some problems of scale occurred in the palm oil trade where metal storage tanks were required. Not all Companies invested in these installations. In the 1950s only three Companies (UAC, PZ, and CFAO) participated in the palm oil trade.
5. Professor Bauer advocated participation by the Companies in the 'trading (including warehousing) in local produce'. He expected that this would reduce 'the wide intra-seasonal price fluctuations'. Obviously, this proposal applied only to durable products. P.T. Bauer, 'Problems of African Trade: 3', *West Africa*, 1 September, 1962, p. 965. See also P.T. Bauer, *West African Trade* (Cambridge, 1954), p. 392.
6. The trade in cassava was undertaken by the Government during World War II. It was soon abandoned, and large stocks were left to spoil. A Lebanese trader in Mano told me where the stocks in Mano had been dumped, to the surprise and annoyance (be-

- cause of the stench) of the people of that town. The trade in maize became important in 1971 in Sierra Leone when Feed Mill Products (Sierra Leone) Ltd set up a buying scheme, with agents in several towns in the Provinces. *Daily Mail*, 4 December, 1971.
7. The oil palm fruit contains many berries consisting of a pericarp with a nut inside. The red palm oil is extracted from the pericarp by pulping and heating. The kernels, which have always been exported to Europe, come free when the nuts are cracked. A factory has recently been established near Freetown which will buy palm kernels and extract a white oil from them.
 8. T.N. Goddard, *The Handbook of Sierra Leone* (London, 1925), p. 193-9. The four biggest Companies were SCOA, CFAO, PZ, and the African & Eastern Trade Corporation.
 9. After the crisis and the war the Companies confined themselves to repairs and an occasional replacement.
 10. Batkanu and Kailahun were District Headquarters to which lorry roads were built in the late 1920s. The Station in Kono was mainly a shop to serve the mine workers of SLST.
 11. The term was borrowed from the Coastal Belt where African and European agents represented the Companies in the factories.
 12. W.K. Hancock, *Survey of British Commonwealth Affairs*, Vol. II, part 2 (London, 1942), p. 204.
 13. The Station at Port Loko was closed during or just after World War I, because the railway at Makeni captured supplies which had formerly gone to Port Loko.
 14. European staff was expensive because of 'housing and recreation and leave', see Hancock, p. 203. This was a general problem in West Africa. Periods of prosperity in Europe tended to raise the cost of European staff.
 15. Information from Mr. R.G. Fleming who was a Factory Agent of the African & Eastern Trade Corporation in Sierra Leone in the 1920s. This happened in the early 1920s, possibly as the result of the 1921/2 crisis. It is not clear whether PZ adopted the same policy elsewhere in West Africa.
 16. *Ibid.* In the UAC group in Sierra Leone more than two thirds of the European staff were sent back to UK between 1929 and 1932.
 17. Of course, when the farmers needed cash or some items of merchandise badly, they would carry produce over larger distances.
 18. W. Addison, 'The Syrian in British West Africa', *The African World*, 27 June, 1925, p. 5 of supplement. Apparently, Europeans and Africans did not venture out as pioneer traders and did not like to operate as itinerant traders. The Europeans were very particular about accommodation as is evidenced by the establishment of many rest-houses. Coastal Africans from Bonthe and Freetown were wary to accept hospitality in the Interior for many years after the Hut Tax War.
 19. W.G.A. Ormsby-Gore, *Visit to West Africa* (London, 1926), p. 58.
 20. *Annual Report of the Lands and Forests Department for the Year 1926*, p. 57.
 21. Such as Hertling, Bachmann, Frey, Flageolet, Robin, Peala, and Roustan, the first four Swiss, and the others French.
 22. Only four Out-Stations were established after 1925, see section 3.3.
 23. Credit based on tree crops was very small. There was no credit at all on oil and raphia palm trees and very little on kola trees. Cocoa plantations, whose owners had incurred heavy debts in the Gold Coast, hardly existed in Sierra Leone before World War II.
 24. The Money-Lending and Standing Crop Transactions (Protectorate) Ordinance, No. 12 of 1926.

25. F.W.H. Migeod, *A View of Sierra Leone* (London, 1926), p. 157-8. The Company concerned was Pickering & Berthoud in Pujehun/Yonni. One explanation for the small quantities offered by the farmers may be experimental selling. It is not far-fetched to assume that the shrewder farmers divided their produce into several smaller parcels and offered these to different Factory Agents to find out where they could get the best terms.
26. This happened some time after World War I. The word 'middleman' was also used in Nigeria and the Gold Coast, but there it applied to African traders.
27. Information from R.G. Fleming. There were Factory Agents who had given credit to some Lebanese before, at their own risk and without the approval of the Freetown Manager.
28. When PZ withdrew its Factory Agents (see note 15), it tried other means to improve its competitive position.
29. Debts of £ 50 or less could be sued for in the DC's Court, but higher ones had to go to the Circuit Court.
30. Cf. Hancock, p. 231, about money advanced by exporting firms in Nigeria. Advances seem to have been given less frequently in Sierra Leone than in the Gold Coast and Nigeria. They are rarely mentioned. Perhaps settled traders received more trade credit and itinerant traders more advances. The palm kernel trade was in the hands of settled traders, while the light, valuable cocoa could be bought by itinerant traders.
31. *Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture for the Year 1934*, p. 14. The report speaks of 'petty traders', these were mainly Lebanese.
32. Cf. Hancock, p. 220-1.
33. The Factory Agents had had more freedom and had used it in several ways to increase the volume of produce at their Stations.
34. When Company A closed its Buying Station in town X, it asked Company B to collect the credits which it had extended to Lebanese traders in X and nearby outposts. This led to general discussions about Lebanese debtors.
35. F.A. Stockdale reported in 1936 that indebtedness did 'not exist to any great extent.' *Sessional Paper No. 2 of 1936*, p. 9. C.Y. Shephard wrote in 1935: 'The problem of indebtedness . . . is becoming important.' He mentioned rice and ginger as crops against which the farmers borrowed. *Sessional Paper No. 4 of 1935*, p. 5.
36. Ordinance No. 15 of 1941. The maximum rate on unsecured loans was 48 per cent per year.
37. Interview with Mr. J.M. Minall, former General Manager of UAC, in November 1972.
38. I was told that the German steel industry used piassava and that the Sulima quality was as good as the Sherbro one for this.
39. Empire Marketing Board, *Production and Trade of Sierra Leone* (London, 1931), p. 10.
40. L.A. Massaquoi established the Sulima Trading Company which was later taken over by J. Nat Harris. The latter bought a launch for taking piassava to the ships. Interview with Miss D. Massaquoi in December 1970.
41. *Annual Report of the Agricultural Department for the Year 1929*, p. 25. Inspection helped to protect the good name of Sierra Leone produce in the world market. These efforts made the piassava boom of the 1930s possible.
42. Another Lebanese, Mohamed Raffa, of Zimmi, also exported piassava from Sulima in the early 1930s.

43. One informant told me that D.N. Yanni owed £ 10,000 to UAC. Another said that it was over £ 50,000. Even the lower figure suggests a certain degree of imprudence on the side of UAC and of Yanni (see also our remarks at the end of section 5).
44. Most of our information stems from interviews, but the date of incorporation of the companies was traced in the files of UAC. The ATC was incorporated on 31 October 1932 and the LTC on 5 November 1932.
45. German importers seem to have had a better opinion of Lebanese exporters, and the risk was small as most products were officially examined and sealed before exportation.
46. The delay caused by cabling the head office in Europe is explicitly mentioned by Hancock, p. 217.
47. Cf. J. Mars, 'Extra-Territorial Enterprises' in *Mining, Commerce, and Finance in Nigeria*, ed. by M. Perham (London, 1948), p. 102.
48. Government Notice No. 713 of 18 September 1942 clearly illustrates the pre-war evacuation pattern. This was the first time that the WAPCB published its buying prices for palm kernels. These prices were geographically differentiated: the notice shows twenty separate localities.
49. Government Notice No. 352 of 1943. After the war the Lebanese resumed the exportation of piassava.
50. See Ordinance No. 1 of 1949. The immediate cause for the establishment of the SLPMB was the liquidation of the West African Produce Control Board which had been responsible for the buying and exporting of most produce since 1942. The two Boards operated in much the same way but it must be pointed out that the SLPMB is a permanent organization intended to benefit Sierra Leone, while the WAPCB was temporary, an emergency solution to the problems of strengthening the British Empire during the World War.
51. Bauer, p. 300ff, was the first to express doubts about the benefits of the Marketing Boards for the farmers. D.T. Jack, *Economic Survey of Sierra Leone* (Freetown, 1958), p. 64-5, and R.G. Saylor, *The Economic System of Sierra Leone* (Durham, N.C., 1967), p. 121-6, felt that Bauer's doubts applied also to Sierra Leone. The situation may have been better in recent years.
52. It is the policy of the Board to publish the producers' price well in advance of the harvest. Unfortunately, there have been delays in recent years, and we have observed free trading in coffee in the early weeks of the season before the price was announced.
53. Coffee was on the schedule in 1949, was descheduled in March 1953 and rescheduled in August 1961. It will remain on the schedule now because of Sierra Leone's membership of the International Coffee Agreement. Ginger was scheduled in August 1961, descheduled in 1964, rescheduled in 1966, descheduled in 1967, rescheduled in 1968 and descheduled in 1970. The world ginger price had fluctuated greatly and the Board has tended to keep ginger on the schedule when the market was good and to throw it out when the price was low.
54. It was only in 1953 that the Board began to publish figures about the purchases of individual Agents. There was no point in using data of 1957 and later because of the withdrawal of UAC. The Table conceals the fact that the share of UAC fell between 1953 and 1956. Various problems made the calculation of percentages for palm oil, coffee, and ground-nuts impossible or useless.
55. Dishonest Agents could also cheat the Board by shipping valuable produce, e.g. coffee, in bags marked as palm kernels. This risk disappeared largely after the Board began to export.

56. An exception was made for cocoa from the Pujehun District. The Board preferred to route this valuable crop via the railway.
57. The Companies expressed this view to the Adviser on Inland Transport whom the Colonial Office sent to Sierra Leone in May 1949. H. Childs, *A Plan of Economic Development for Sierra Leone*, (Freetown, 1949), p. 38.
58. Presumably in 1952 because river freight paid out by the SLPMB dropped from over £ 5000 in 1952 to under £ 2000 in 1953. No further evidence can be extracted from the SLPMB Reports because the Produce Trading Accounts combined rail and river freight from 1949 to 1951, and rail and road freight from 1954 to 1963. It is further relevant that two Lebanese traders in Matru told me that they had transferred from Bonthe to Matru in 1952. The new evacuation pattern reversed the produce flows in the inland ports of Matru, Sumbuya, and Pujehun. Formerly produce travelled coastwards and was transferred from lorries into launches in these towns. After 1952 produce travelled eastwards to Bo, being transferred from launches into lorries in the same towns.
59. *Annual Report on the Sierra Leone Protectorate for the Year 1951*, p. 22.
60. *Annual Report on the Provincial Administration for the Year 1952*, p. 3. *SLPMB Report for 1952*, p. 6.
61. *SLPMB Report for 1951*, p. 5: '... if necessary the Board will erect stores in the main centres to ensure that producers are guaranteed a buyer for their kernels at all times when they wish to sell'.
62. PZ and CFAO acted as such in 1970. The Board also allowed some Agents to ship palm kernels from the so-called Sufferance Wharves in Freetown.
63. *SLPMB Report for 1953*, p. 5.
64. Formerly the Agents had to finance the stocks until the moment that they received the Bill of Lading from the captain of the ship which took the produce to Europe. This is still the procedure in Bonthe.
65. In the case of palm kernels the Agents had an additional reason to prefer quick evacuation. Palm kernels slowly lose weight during storage due to drying out. The Agents evacuated the palm kernels quickly so that the drying out occurred 'to a greater extent' in the stores of the Board. *SLPMB Report for 1957*, p. 5. Thus they shifted the loss in weight to the Board. In 1958 the Board negotiated with the principal Buying Agents who agreed to a reduction of one-half per cent in the 'loss in weight allowance'. Even this small margin mattered.
66. *SLPMB Report for 1956*, p. 6.
67. *SLPMB Report for 1959*, p. 5.
68. *SLPMB Report for 1960*, p. 6. This effected a 'considerable saving', the figures on p. 16 of the same report suggest a cut of about 50 per cent.
69. The existing produce stores in Freetown lost much of their value after the opening of the Queen Elizabeth II Quay in 1954, because their location was inconvenient. New stores to the East of Freetown could compete effectively with the old ones. Investment was guided by a geographical reorientation, as much as by the desire to increase total capacity.
70. The excess capacity in Sherbro and Sulima areas is largely compensated for and explained by the capacity of the new stores in Bo en Kenema. But it is not only a geographical reorientation. Some new stores, especially in Kenema, were built to provide high quality storage space for the valuable crops: cocoa and coffee.
71. The produce operations of the Agents became less profitable as overhead costs rose

and the commission remained constant. Some Companies may have argued that the lower profits were acceptable because less capital was needed for the produce operations.

72. The unsuccessful Pioneer Oil Mill scheme of the 1950s was an attempt to increase the role of the Board in the processing of oil palm fruits. There were also the Produce Receiving Centres of 1967, which represented an attempt by the Board to take over part of the work of its Buying Agents. The Board bought and rented produce stores (mainly Buying Stations) in Makeni, Bo, Pujehun, Moyamba, Bonthe, Kenema, Segbwema, and Pendembu in 1966. These were opened in early 1967 (see *Daily Mail*, 6 March, 1967), and the Buying Agents were told to deliver their produce to the nearest Centre. The Board organized the transport to Freetown in its own lorries or in chartered ones, which promised a profit on transportation but required considerably more working capital. It worsened the liquidity position of the Board, so it is not surprising that the whole project was abandoned in the reorganization of May 1967.
73. This deal was investigated and condemned by a commission of enquiry. See *Report of the Beoku-Betts Commission of Inquiry on the Special Coffee Deal of the Sierra Leone Produce Marketing Board, 1967*, (Freetown, 1967).
74. These figures appeared in the *Sierra Leone Trade Journal*, Vol. 7 (1967) No. 3, p. 70 and 81.
75. R.J. Bhatia, et al., 'Stabilization Program in Sierra Leone', *International Monetary Fund Staff Papers*, XVI No. 3 (Nov. 1969), 505. We were further told that the Board owed Le 500,000 to PZ alone.
76. *Ibid.*
77. It is significant that Siaka Stevens, the leader of the APC government (after April 1968) often referred to those useless pieces of paper when he spoke in the produce areas in 1968 and 1969. They were a useful means of discrediting the SLPP government.
78. *West Africa*, 9 September, 1967. Repayment was due in August 1970 and was made on time. We note that SBWA was more involved in the financing of the produce trade than Barclays Bank. We assume that a great deal of the loan flowed back to the Bank via Agents who finally received payment from the Board and could subsequently pay their own debts to SBWA.
79. The Marketing Boards in Africa have indeed acted as 'umbrellas' for African enterprise, private and co-operative.
80. Transport competition became more important after the SLPMB had ended the price competition. The same thing was observed in Northern Nigeria by Bauer, p. 236-8. Only one co-operative in Sierra Leone seems to have bought a lorry.
81. It was difficult to get information about the extent of, and the motives behind, the actions of the Chief. The files of Kenema District show that Elias Abdallah was ejected from Hangha in late 1946. All other information which I got was oral, for instance about the ejection of George John and his brother from Komende. The Chief was not hostile to all Lebanese. He agreed for instance to new leases for Lebanese in Kenema provided they erected modern buildings.
82. *Annual Report of the Registrar of Co-operative Societies for the Years 1948-49 and 1949-50*, p. 1 and 7. The agricultural officers were annoyed about this Lebanese practice because it thwarted their efforts to improve the quality of cocoa and piassava.
83. *Ibid.*, p. 7.
84. *Ibid.*, p. 8.

85. *Ibid.*, p. 7. The Lebanese are not mentioned by name; all references in this report are to 'traders'.
86. *Ibid.*, p. 4.: 'The acuter forms of indebtedness do not seem very common in Sierra Leone ... partly because the rises in the prices of agricultural products have rendered old debts relatively less burdensome'.
87. Bauer, p. 219n: 'In Sierra Leone the licensing [sic] system is being used frankly for political purposes to discriminate against Lebanese traders'.
88. Bauer observed similar overpayments in Nigeria, p. 235-41.
89. N.A. Cox-George, *Report on African Participation in the Commerce of Sierra Leone* (Freetown, 1960), p. 34.
90. The transaction could be more accurately described as the assigning of the lease by the Company to the Lebanese, with the approval of the Chief.
91. These appointments were probably made soon after Independence and showed that the African Ministers had more sympathy for a number of Lebanese candidates than The British officials had had. On the other hand, the appointment of three Lebanese Agents may have no such significance. They were major ginger traders and had to be appointed after ginger had been added to the schedule. I offer no calculation of Lebanese shares after 1961, because no figures have been published for the years after 30 June 1963.
92. *West Africa*, 2 June 1962, p. 609.
93. *Beoku-Betts Report*, see note 73.
94. *Ibid.*, p. 10.
95. I witnessed an interesting scene in Kenema in 1971. A woman was greatly disappointed when she heard how much her parcel weighed. She insisted that it was more because it had been enough to fill a certain number of 'heaped bowls' at home. (Rice, coffee beans, etc. can be heaped on a standard bowl until any additional grain or bean will slide down and fall off. When this quantity has been reached, one has a heaped bowl. It requires skill to get the maximum into a bowl.) The Lebanese sub-agent agreed to measure in the same way, and arrived at a lower number. The woman — partly influenced by the spectators standing around in a circle on the pavement — agreed that she had been wrong. The Lebanese and his weighing machine were vindicated.
96. Cox-George, p. 12.
97. *Ibid.*
98. SLPMB Reports of 1961/62 and 1962/63, p. 9.
99. *Daily Mail*, 27 December 1969. The international ginger price probably was very high at the time of export.
100. SLPMB Reports of 1961/62 and 1962/63, p. 9.
101. A. Macmillan, *The Red Book of West Africa* (London, 1968), p. 243-4.
102. *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, April 11, 1914, as quoted by N.A. Cox-George, *Finance and Development in West Africa* (London, 1961), p. 203.
103. Macmillan, p. 244. The riots of 1919 had revealed the significance of the Lebanese in this field. Exports fell while they were in protective custody.
104. T.N. Goddard, p. 201. Among them was D.N. Yanni, see section 6.
105. *Ibid.*, p. 193-9. Only SCOA and Guiraud Frères mentioned kola by name among the products they exported. Others may have included kola when they stated that they exported African produce. The leading Company, the African and Eastern Trade Corporation, stated that it handled all 'varieties of native produce, except kola nuts'. Euro-

pean indifference may be also demonstrated in the omission of kola nuts in the list of products in the Native Produce Ordinance of 1928.

106. Cf. Bauer, p. 386. The baskets in Nigeria are called 'bly', which is probably derived from the Limba word.
107. *Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture for the Year 1931*, p. 4.
108. Colonial Office, *Annual Report on Sierra Leone for the Year 1948*, p. 22.
109. Cox-George, p. 12.

Notes to chapter 4: The rice trade

1. The date of the first rain varies from year to year and from area to area. This unpredictable element is responsible for great variations in the upland rice crop.
2. B.F. Johnston, *The Staple Food Economies of Western Tropical Africa* (Stanford, Calif. 1958), p. 62. He states that this technique had been developed in the coastal areas north of Sierra Leone.
3. This is well documented in *Soil Conservation and Land Use in Sierra Leone* (Freetown, 1951), pp. 19-28 and 87-94.
4. This term is used by W.O. Jones, *Marketing Staple Food Crops in Tropical Africa* (Ithaca, 1972), p. 80.
5. *Annual Report of the Department of Agriculture for the Year 1936*, pp. 16-17. *Agricultural Report for 1937*, p. 24.
6. Howard Kumin, *Report on the Revision of the Consumer Price Index — Freetown* (Geneva, 1962), p. 21. The quantity of rice measured by such a cup is not constant — Kumin found a weight variation of 25 per cent — because the market women can manipulate the cup. This has made price control in the markets very difficult.
7. The tree crops ripen in the dry season and provide some food for the unproductive season.
8. Rice is durable like trans-ocean produce (see Chapter 3). A better, but less familiar word is 'storable', see Jones, p. 77.
9. This was still observed in remote chiefdoms in 1949. See *Soil Conservation* (report), p. 123.
10. Jones, p. 67.
11. This is taken into account by the Rice Corporation whose financial year runs from 1 March to the end of February.
12. For details see Jones, pp. 182-5.
13. Estimates of the numbers of Lebanese in the various countries of West Africa may be found in note 17 of Chapter 17.
14. P.F. Prevett, *An Investigation into Storage Problems of Rice in Sierra Leone* (London, 1959). Since 1954 the storage of imported rice has caused great problems, too.
15. Before the introduction of milling in 1936 the choice was between cleaning in the villages or in Freetown. It seems that most cleaning was done in the villages, possibly because it was cheaper and possibly because the farmers' wives appreciated this opportunity to earn money.
16. There has been a similar hesitation among rice wholesalers to export rice. See *Agricultural Report for 1937*, p. 4.

17. The word 'hoarding' was not used in connection with consumers and farmers, but to describe an activity of traders. When used in a negative sense it does not mean that the traders hold stock (this would be normal) but that they pretend to have no rice and refuse to sell.
18. *Agricultural Report for 1938*, pp. 14 and 16.
19. The Director of Agriculture wrote in 1937: '... a set of traders who can hold up a reasonable proportion of the rice available for the Freetown and mining markets can create a temporary scarcity in the market and are able to command a higher price for their rice. This buying and holding up of rice has often been successful in the past with certain traders, especially Syrians, who gamble largely on the rice market ... this gambling ... is thoroughly undesirable'. *Agricultural Report for 1937*, p. 2.
20. Jones, p. 183, indicates that 'fufu' had become an important substitute in the 1960s.
21. This capital may be called 'shortage chasing' capital. It is switched from rice to sugar, cement, and so on.
22. I suspect that the annual movement of the rice price had a different pattern in the days before the railway. The peak probably fell in November after a gradual rise since February. A trader who sold upland rice benefited from a price close to the peak price which represented a reward for storage. He received this reward without having stored his rice.
23. A. Macmillan, *The Red Book of West Africa* (London, 1968, originally published in 1920), p. 241.
24. *Ibid.*
25. Correspondence with Dr. A.M. Howard.
26. Interview with Lebanese informant.
27. M.H.Y. Kaniki, 'Attitudes and Reactions towards the Lebanese in Sierra Leone during the Colonial Period', *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, Vol. VII, No. 1 (1973), p. 98. Kaniki hints at the influenza epidemic of 1918 as a cause. Allan McPhee, *The Economic Revolution in British West Africa* (London, 1971, originally published in 1926), p. 64, saw it as the most obvious example of famines that had occurred in British West Africa.
28. *Weekly News*, 31 May 1919, as quoted by Kaniki, p. 99.
29. Kaniki, p. 102.
30. *Ibid.*, p. 103.
31. *Ibid.*
32. Three were convicted for this, Kaniki, p. 102. The Companies were convinced that all Lebanese rice traders sold above the controlled price and offered to furnish the Governor 'with positive proofs', *West Africa*, 27 November 1920, p. 1511.
33. Kaniki, p. 111.
34. *Sierra Leone Royal Gazette*, 16 October 1920, p. 821. The value of this point is limited because there may have been sixty Lebanese traders in Freetown who did not trade in rice.
35. *West Africa*, 27 November 1920, p. 1511.
36. Kaniki, p. 99. Since only 143 tons had been imported between 1 January and 31 July (*West Africa*, 27 November 1920, p. 1511) we must conclude that about one hundred tons of local rice had been railed to the Protectorate.
37. *West Africa*, 27 November 1920, p. 1511. It may be that this consignment had been earmarked for Government labourers and could not be sold to the general public.

38. It is also surprising that the Government did not impose price control in the Protectorate. Another obvious measure was the prohibition of rice traffic on the railway in an 'upward' direction. The legal basis for this measure may not have been available and it certainly conflicted with the economic views of that time.
39. The Companies could not be denounced on humanitarian grounds because there was widespread famine in various areas of the Protectorate. Cf. the 'Famine Report' mentioned by Kaniki, p. 99n.
40. *West Africa*, 27 November 1920, p. 1511.
41. Holding stocks in the railway towns was also cheaper. The Companies followed this policy in 1926, see *Report of the Rice Commission on its Enquiry into the Position of the Rice Industry* (Freetown, 1927), p. 2. The Lebanese probably also followed this policy which required a great deal of co-operation between the rice traders in the Protectorate and the wholesalers in Freetown, but this happened to be a strong point of Lebanese enterprise. Needless to say, dispersed stocks made the forecasting of a shortage more difficult.
42. The post-war boom in the world markets made importing more risky so that the Companies were anxious to receive Government assurances. It was also important for them to know how much local rice was held in Freetown; towards the end of April 1919 they asked the Government to conduct a survey to find this out. *West Africa*, 27 November 1920, p. 1511.
43. Colonial Office, *Annual Report on Sierra Leone for 1920*, as quoted by McPhee, p. 64n.
44. *Rice Commission*, p. 3.
45. This decision was taken in 1927. It was also in that year that the reclamation of mangrove swamps in the southern part of the Coastal Belt began.
46. They handled 'no more than 6000 tons', *Rice Commission*, p. 2.
47. *Ibid.*
48. *Annual Report of the Provincial Administration for the Year 1928*, p. 19, as quoted by J.B. Riddell, *The Spatial Dynamics of Modernization in Sierra Leone*, (Evanston, 1970), p. 30.
49. *Rice Commission*, p. 4. The trader did not run a great risk because the debtor could not cheat him as long as the rice was growing.
50. Pledging was regulated in 1926 by the Money-Lending and Standing Crop Transactions (Protectorate) Ordinance, No. 12 of 1926.
51. *Annual Address to the Legislative Council*, delivered on 9 November 1931.
52. They realized their error in 1936. See *Agricultural Report for 1935*, p. 1, and *Agricultural Report for 1936*, p. 3.
53. The years in which rice was imported were often years of prosperity. One could say that rice — and other switch produce — functions as a shock absorber in the balance of trade.
54. Mr. R.R. Glanville, an agricultural officer stationed at Rokupr, helped the farmers to set up these societies and to deal with the mill. Apparently the mill paid them an advance at the time of delivery and a final payment when the milled rice was sold. See *Report on Co-operation in Sierra Leone* (Freetown, 1949), p. 4.
55. *Agricultural Report for 1936*, p. 16.
56. *Agricultural Report for 1937*, pp. 2-5. *Agricultural Report for 1938*, pp. 14-17 and Map 1, which showed the areas from which upland rice was railed to the consumers.
57. SLDC gave a ration of 1 lb a day.

58. *Agricultural Report for 1940*, p. 1, stated that the demand for rice had risen from 10,000 to 20,000 tons of rice in 'a very short time'.
59. *Agricultural Report for 1941*, p. 6: 'It was very evident from the success of this hurriedly improvised buying scheme that the normal marketing of rice in the Protectorate is in need of assistance and control by Government if the producer is to get a fair deal.' This sentence was printed in italics for emphasis.
60. *Agricultural Report for 1942*, p. 2.
61. *Annual Report on the Sierra Leone Protectorate for the Year 1947*, p. 1. 'The system, which was open to abuses in its administration, had become increasingly unpopular among farmers . . .'. It was discontinued after the 1946/7 season. A good description of the system is hard to find and I had to piece my information together from a few brief references and from remarks made by my informants. The quota system was also responsible for the black market in rice which operated occasionally during the war.
62. *Protectorate Assembly, Proceedings of the Fifth Meeting at Bo* (Freetown, 1949), pp. 54-5. A.M. Margai, the proposer of the motion, was prompted by the rice shortage which just then began to show in Freetown. In fact, his motion wanted a fixed selling price as well. If there was a conflict of interests at all, he saw it as one between traders on the one hand and farmers and consumers on the other hand.
63. There was great bitterness between the Colony and the Protectorate at the time and the British were afraid that a rice buying scheme would increase this. Fortunately, the growth of the Protectorate towns meant that there was a growing number of rice buyers there whose interests coincided with those in the Colony.
64. *Report of the Commission appointed to enquire into and report on the matters contained in the Director of Audit's Report on the Accounts of Sierra Leone for the Year 1960/61 and the Government Statement thereon* (Freetown, 1963, quoted below as Cole Report), p. 122.
65. *Soil Conservation*, p. 13.
66. *Ibid.*
67. *Ibid.*, p. 14.
68. Colonial Office, *Report on Sierra Leone for the Year 1950*, p. 21.
69. *Cole Report*, p. 123.
70. There was no proposal to put rice on the schedule of the SLPMB so that it would come under the aegis of the Board. Apparently the differences between rice and trans-ocean produce were clearly realized.
71. *Overseas Review* (Barclays Bank) August 1952, p. 35.
72. *Ibid.* The prices were 24s per bushel of 84 lbs of native cleaned upland rice and 12s 6d per bushel of 60 lbs of swamp husk rice. It requires care to fix the margin between husk and native cleaned rice. If the price for husk rice is too high the Government will receive more rice than its mills can handle. This happened in 1957, but this risk became smaller after the milling capacity of the Rice Department had been increased in about 1960. If, however, the price for native cleaned rice is too high, there is a danger that the Rice Department will have large stocks of it which it cannot sell quickly enough to prevent deterioration due to pests.
73. When the 'rice crisis' was debated in the Legislative Council in June 1954 one of the Chiefs from the Scarcies area said that the illicit diamond miners offered £ 6.10.— for a bag of clean rice. *Legislative Council Debates*, Vol. III, Session 1953-54, June 1954 (Freetown, 1954), pp. 62-80. The launch owners in the north must have suffered losses

because of the diversion of rice. This may have been the first instance of the decline of water transport (see Chapters 2 and 6).

74. Public Notice No. 41 of 17 May 1954.
75. *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Strike and Riots in Freetown, Sierra Leone during February 1955* (Freetown, 1955), p. 31.
76. M. Banton, *West African City* (London, 1957), p. 102.
77. This may be concluded from the compensation list published as Government Notice No. 732 in the *Sierra Leone Royal Gazette*, 12 August 1955.
78. Jones, p. 67.
79. Cf. R.G. Saylor, *The Economic System of Sierra Leone* (Durham, N.C., 1967), p. 85.
80. Government Notices No. 1083-93 of 1969. See also *Sierra Leone Gazette* No. 41 of 1970.
81. This may be calculated from Public Notices No. 47 and 48 of 1967.
82. *Cole Report*, p. 116.
83. *Ibid.*
84. *Ibid.*, pp. 124-5.
85. Government Notice No. 649 of 14 June 1963.
86. *House of Representatives Debates*, Session 1963/4, Vol. IV (Freetown, 1964), p. 143. The statement was made on November 21, 1963. See also Saylor, p. 97n.
87. Saylor, p. 97.
88. *Daily Mail*, 18 November and 16 December 1967.

Notes to Chapter 5: The general merchandise trade

1. Imports across the land boundaries, e.g. cattle from Guinea, are not considered general merchandise. The traders are different, too. But if textiles or fancy goods are smuggled from Liberia into Sierra Leone, as was done in the years 1969-1971, these goods are seen as general merchandise because they came from overseas before they were imported into Liberia. They have to enter the normal general merchandise trade in order to be sold.
2. See *Statistical and Economic Review, UAC*, No. 5 of 1950, p. 3, which uses merchandise. I prefer the addition of the adjective 'general'. It underlines the wide range of goods and corresponds better with the term 'general merchant' which is popular in Sierra Leone.
3. Agricultural imports from overseas, which are not preserved, do not seem to qualify as general merchandise. Onions and potatoes, the two major examples, are not sold in the shops but in the markets, as are salted pigs' feet and ears.
4. Factories were established in Sierra Leone in the 1960s. The distribution of their products runs partly through the general merchandise channels. We expect that locally manufactured products will gradually be accepted as general merchandise. This would be an interesting extension of the meaning of the term.
5. I estimate that the number of shops in 1970 which had European and Lebanese consumers in mind when ordering and displaying their stock was about thirty, and these were mainly located in Freetown. I noticed a few Lebanese shopkeepers who were interested in European customers.
6. Cf. P.T. Bauer, *West African Trade*, (Cambridge, 1954), p. 62ff, and P.T. Bauer and

B.S. Yamey, *The Economics of Under-developed Countries* (Chicago, 1957), p. 94. Their comments date from the post-war period when restrictions kept the assortment of goods narrow. The consumer was not confused by a whole range of new products then, as he was later.

7. There are some air-borne imports of vegetables, fruit, spare parts, the latest fashions, etc. Their quantity increased during the 1960s but is still small.
8. Imports of frozen goods became possible only after the erection of freezing installations in Freetown. I was told that the freezing installations of a ship sunk in Freetown harbour during World War I were salvaged afterwards and installed on shore. It was only in the 1960s that deep-freeze installations were established in other towns. An interesting exception is the importation of fresh vegetables and fruits from the Canary Islands, shipped to Freetown on the mail boat. The Lebanese shop which specialized in this trade, is called Las Palmas Store.
9. Important post-war publications are: P.T. Bauer, *West African Trade*, (Cambridge, 1954); F.J. Pedler, *Economic Geography of West Africa*, (London, 1955); J. Mars, 'The Extra-Territorial Companies' in *Mining, Commerce, and Finance in Nigeria*, edited by Margery Perham (London, 1948); and the bi-annual review of the United Africa Company, *Statistical and Economic Review*, London.
10. Many Southbound ships call at Freetown harbour, but Northbound ships often pass by.
11. Cf. Bauer, p. 104ff.
12. The oil companies are the important exceptions, but they are not manufacturers in the true sense of the word.
13. Registration in the United Kingdom, with consequent protection in West Africa, was discussed in 1930. Registration in Sierra Leone started in 1949. When legislation came in 1955, it led to a remarkable flood of registrations.
14. *Statistical and Economic Review*, UAC, no. 5 (March 1950), p. 10.
15. *Ibid*, p. 7-8. The division is also visible in the shops.
16. Cf. Bauer, p. 70. He speaks of 'standardized' products.
17. Pedler, p. 131-3.
18. Cf. Bauer, p. 70 and 77. There was a Staple Lines Agreement.
19. The National Trading Company which was established in Freetown in 1971 is a good example. It received the exclusive right to import certain stipulated products, all of them foodstuffs, most of which may be classified as staples. The list of reserved products is given in Government Notice No. 728 of 29 July 1971.
20. This was in marked contrast with many other countries in West Africa which began to regulate and restrict their imports in the 1960s to improve their balance of payments. The Government of Sierra Leone could not introduce similar measures because they would have increased large-scale smuggling of diamonds.
21. The internal classification of general merchandise of the Companies corresponded with the Customs classification. The Companies were able to advise the Government about which classes could bear higher import duties and which ones could not. The Association of West African Merchants which was formed in Britain before World War II was often consulted by the administration.
22. Radio and cinema advertising became important in the 1960s and is reaching growing numbers of consumers.
23. The trader opens cigarette tins to sell cigarettes 'by the stick', tins of Maggi cubes to sell individual cubes, bottles of patent medicines to sell individual tablets, sacks of sugar to

sell cups of sugar, and so on. Cf. Bauer, p. 54, who gives examples which are less familiar in Sierra Leone, and argues that this form of retail trade is a service to the poorest consumers. I noticed that some articles are now wrapped up in very small quantities, for instance four biscuits. Apparently, the manufacturers are prepared to adjust to the West African market. There are probably not more than thirty examples of goods with sub-retail sales in Sierra Leone. No trader could curvise if he sold only on this level. The trader takes a risk when dealing in products which deteriorate after the removal of the retail packing, for if he does not sell the contents quickly, part of it will not find a buyer. This risk is smaller in the towns.

24. The distinction between major and minor centres followed the growth of lorry transport in the 1950s. In the railway era there were some thirty centres which all had the same function, even though the volume of the stocks differed from place to place.
25. Such a class had existed in the Coastal Belt before 1895. Descendants of this class benefited when the Companies withdrew from retailing after 1950.
26. *Stat. and Econ. Review UAC*, No. 6 (Sept. 1950), p. 14, indicates that withdrawal from retail trade began 'ten years' earlier. The exact date remains vague, partly because ad-hoc measures taken in the war were later incorporated in official policy.
27. T.J. Alldridge, *A Transformed Colony*, 1910 as reprinted in C. Fyfe, *Sierra Leone Inheritance* (London, 1964), p. 298.
28. *Ibid.*
29. In the Sherbro area a vernacular word was used with the same meaning.
30. W.E. Riebel, 'The African Barrie', *Woman's Evangel*, XXIV, No. 5 (April, 1905), p. 68. I owe this reference to Dr. Darrell Reeck.
31. The Europeans avoided the sun at that time as much as possible. It is probable that the Lebanese also believed that being in the sun was not good for them. As they experienced a lot of ill health, they may have turned to shopkeeping mostly for health reasons.
32. The house at 2 East Street was then sold to Michael A. Blell. As far as we know there was no earlier land ownership by Lebanese in the Colony. In the Protectorate the Lebanese had become lease holders much earlier.
33. F.J. Pedler, *West Africa* (London, 1951), p. 53.
34. The immigration deposit made it unattractive for recent immigrants to flee the country after 1930, see Chapter 14.
35. Joseph Milhem, a prominent trader from Mano, had to be nursed through the depression by G.B. Ollivant, his main supplier. See further Chapter 3, section 6.
36. See Chapter 3, section 5.
37. Cf. Mars, p. 100.
38. This overlooks the payment of taxes, which in poor areas might absorb all cash earned with produce.
39. Pedler, *Geography*, p. 151.
40. See Chapter 3, section 6.
41. One Lebanese told me that his father had never grumbled when he was woken at night to provide shirting for a shroud.
42. SLST prevented the Lebanese from opening shops at Yengema. We note that Government and Mission compounds in the Protectorate never seem to have attracted Lebanese shopkeepers.
43. It rose from £ 582,000 at the end of 1940 to £ 2,327,600 at the end of 1943. See Ida Greaves, *Colonial Monetary Conditions* (London, 1953), p. 94. Her figures also show a decrease of 20 per cent between 1945 and 1948.

44. The military effort was concentrated in these towns.
45. Colonial Office, *Annual Reports on Sierra Leone*, Chapter 4. The currency circulation rose from £ 3,560,498 at the end of 1953 to £ 13,448,737 at the end of 1957.
46. The Financial Secretary used this term in the Legislative council in his Budget Speech of 2 December 1955.
47. There were stories about new cars being crashed on the first journey and of electric refrigerators being taken to villages without electricity supply.
48. Until 1955 there were branches of banks in Freetown and Bo only.
49. There were at least two Lebanese import firms in 1920: A.J. Bamin & Sons, and Abdo & Chebli. See A. Macmillan, *The Red Book of West Africa* (London, 1968), p. 263 and 269. We were also told that M.K. Bahsali imported textiles in the inter-war period and I.D. Salamah and Solomon Sargie toys.
50. 'Maru' (= Japanese) goods had a bad reputation with the Creoles in the inter-war period.
51. N.A. Cox-George, *Report on African Participation in the Commerce of Sierra Leone* (Freetown, 1958), p. 7.
52. It must be remembered that Lebanese diamond smugglers usually received payment in dollars, which could be used to pay for shipments of general merchandise from countries like Britain. The dollars provided both an incentive to import and a source of finance.
53. M.I. Hanna, *Lebanese Emigrants in West Africa* (Oxford, 1959 unpublished) p. 193. It is interesting that E.K. Saadé, *Le Liban dans le Monde* (Beirut, 1952) recommended this type of co-operation between rich and poor Lebanese in Sierra Leone, p. 271-2.
54. N.A. Cox-George, *Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Price Structure of Motor Vehicles and their Spare Parts* (Freetown, 1962).
55. Earlier statements also mentioned retail trade. Parliament adopted two motions in December 1962 which asked for economic restrictions on foreigners. One concerned rice (see Chapter 4), and the other retail trade. A Government statement of 1963 mentioned the retail trade as an area of possible restrictions, see *West Africa*, April 27, 1963.
56. This term never included the retail distribution of local foodstuffs. Since it had always been in African hands, there was no need to ask for restrictions.
57. There was a flood of new registrations in the Business Names Register in 1965, including many from Lebanese traders. Some established Lebanese wanted to have the existence of their shop recorded in the Government files, and many young ones registered a hurriedly set-up shop.
58. Public Notice No. 67 of 1 October, 1965.
59. Public Notice No. 18 of 28 May, 1970.
60. Public Notice No. 67 of 1 October, 1965.
61. *1963 Population Census of Sierra Leone* (Freetown, 1965), Volume 3, p. 62.
62. The number of 2000 is almost certainly too high, because there were only 3301 Lebanese (and Syrians) and 278 Indians at the time. *1963 Population Census of Sierra Leone* (Freetown, 1965), Volume 2, p. 27. There were hardly any independent European retailers.
63. There were 5191 towns and villages with 100 or more inhabitants in 1963. See *1963 Population Census of Sierra Leone* (Freetown, 1965) Volume 1, p. 39.
64. This general statement may not be true for poor and thinly populated areas where one would expect village shops to be viable.

65. Shop rents in Freetown are highest in the vicinity of Garrison Street Market.
66. The Minister of Trade gave these figures in Parliament in May 1965, describing them as 'mere estimates'. The figures were given as a total and broken down by District. *Daily Mail*, 21 May, 1965. If the Minister had included African foreigners, the figures would have been much higher.
67. Public Notice No. 80 of 2 December, 1965. The towns were Rokupr, Kaseri, Baoma, Gerihun, Mandu, Koribundu, Yonni, Hanga, Ngelehun, and Mano Junction.
68. The citizen shopkeepers were less active in 1969, possibly because they were sure that the APC restrictions would be at least as far-reaching as the SLPP ones.
69. *Daily Mail*, 1 March, 1970.
70. There were 66 petrol stations in the Protectorate in 1955, and 63 were in the hands of UAC, PZ, CFAO, SCOA, and GBO. *Protectorate Handbook 1955* (Bo, 1955), p. 67-8.
71. In a speech to the Chamber of Commerce on 17 December, 1964. This was repeated in March 1965 by the Minister of Trade. *Daily Mail*, 25 March, 1965.
72. Agip especially had a large amount of credit outstanding, for since this firm had come later than the other oil companies (in 1962) it had to use more credit to break into the market.
73. The urban shopkeepers give less credit to their customers than the rural shopkeepers did, but the total amount of credit is still considerable.

Notes to Chapter 6: Lorry and launch transport

1. J.B. Riddell, *The Spatial Dynamics of Modernization in Sierra Leone*, (Evanston, 1970), p. 24.
2. T.N. Goddard, *The Handbook of Sierra Leone* (London, 1925), p. 183. 'Government ferries, consisting of timber rafts, . . . have been constructed on the Bo-Pujehun road'. Elsewhere, there were only canoes, suitable for pedestrians and cyclists, in 1925.
3. *Sessional Paper No. 5 of 1927*. Governor Slater proposed these on p. 1.
4. I prefer this term to 'water feeder road', mainly because it corresponds better to 'River and Line Stations' used in Chapter 3.
5. H. Childs, *A plan of Economic Development for Sierra Leone* (Freetown, 1949), p. 35-6.
6. *Ibid.*, p. 35 for a contemporary comment.
7. Riddell, p. 26n. This lorry had to be railed from Freetown to Bo.
8. *Ibid.* The inflation which occurred during World War I may well have raised the cost of head-loading and hastened the introduction of the lorry.
9. Or a total of eleven lorries in the whole of the Protectorate. Riddell, p. 26n. There is no information about the owners.
10. Some Lebanese traders employed carriers. See *Report by The Hon. W.G.A. Ormsby-Gore, M.P. (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies), on his Visit to West Africa during the Year 1926* (London, 1926), p. 58.
11. See summary by the Governor as quoted by Riddell, p. 27.
12. *Sessional Paper No. 5 of 1927*, p. 2.
13. Cf. J. Mars, 'Extra-Territorial Enterprises' in *Mining, Commerce, and Finance in Nigeria*, ed. by M. Perham (London, 1948), p. 102 and 121.
14. The Ford lorry preceded the Bedford, see A. McPhee, *The Economic Revolution in British West Africa* (London, 1926), p. 118.

15. Under the Public Transport Services Ordinance, No. 29 of 1928.
16. European lorry drivers were rare. Apparently, the British disdained driving lorries, and we have heard only of Frenchmen who drove lorries. Herling kept the contract until the 1950s when a Lebanese from Segbwema, Nohmi Anthony, became the transport contractor of SLST.
17. The term 'contractor' is widely used in Sierra Leone. It refers to businessmen who have secured a contract with either the Government or a big company. There are contractors in building, transport, petrol distribution, etc.
18. *Sessional Paper No. 5 of 1927*, p. 2.
19. Riddell, p. 31.
20. *Ibid.*
21. See the comments of the District Commissioner as quoted in Riddell, p. 31-2. Port Loko had declined after the opening of the branch line of the railway but was regaining some of its former strength because of the motor roads.
22. *Annual Report of the Railway Department for the Year 1930*, p. 5. It was then that the Government decided on a compensation of £ 20,000 per annum. The farmers in Kene-ma and Kailahun Districts benefited a great deal from the flat rates.
23. *Annual Report of the Railway Department for the Year 1932*, p. 7.
24. The Governor appointed Dimitri N. Yanni of Freetown. He owned a chain of trading stations, see p. 49.
25. *Legislative Council Debates* of 9 and 18 November 1931. It is significant that the Railway Conference did not propose tolls on produce.
26. The necessary amendment of the Ferries Ordinance was passed on 4 May 1932, Ordinance No. 15 of 1932. The servicing of the ferries was also taken over by UAC; the engineers were stationed at Bandajuma.
27. I was told that UAC had based its calculations on the east-to-west flow of produce by lorry which existed before October 1931, as it had not been informed about the plan to introduce flat rates beyond Bo.
28. The enabling Ordinance had been passed in 1932, No. 16 of 1932. The Order in Council to make it effective was published in January 1935. The toll was only demanded from vehicles that carried general merchandise eastwards. Cf. Riddell, p. 32.
29. The Carriage of Goods by Road Ordinance, No. 6 of 1937. This became effective on 1 August 1937 and the tolls were abolished at the same time. Only empty lorries passed along the connecting road afterwards. The ordinance was also applied in the south in 1938 on the new road between Mano Station and Bumpé.
30. Governor Slater had implied that they were more active and enthusiastic than the Companies. *Sessional Paper No. 5 of 1927*, p. 2. I have found no other references in which praise was expressed, but this is understandable: the administration did not want to offend the Creoles.
31. They seem to have loathed head-loading and may have known that it could be injurious. Governor Byrne emphasized the injury to health caused by head-loading in an address on improved communications. J. Byrne, 'Sierra Leone: Trade and Communications' in *Journal of the African Society*, Vol. XXIX, No. CXIII, October 1929, p. 3.
32. For instance the Pendembu — Kailahun road, cf. Riddell, p. 30.
33. *Annual Report of the Provincial Administration for the Year 1928*, p. 19 as quoted by Riddell, p. 30.
34. Governor Hodson certainly felt that way. His views are summarized by Riddell, p. 32. .

35. We argued on p. 10 that the railway was a centralized organization. It was in favour of a central approach for the whole territory, with Freetown as the central harbour and the railway as the backbone of development. In about 1930 it had to argue its case more vigorously than ever before. The Companies agreed with it to a large extent, but made an exception for Sherbro. The Lebanese and Africans, on the other hand, represented the local or regional approach. It is interesting that the Government resisted the centralizing policy of the railway to such a large extent.
36. The French in Guinea were no longer Allies after June 1940. The main defence forces were stationed near Waterloo, with a battalion at Port Loko and an advance company at Kambia. The Army also improved the road from Port Loko to Kambia.
37. This type of lorry had the space to carry 5 tons while only 3 tons were allowed in the Protectorate because of the bridges. The Public Works Department suspected that excess freight was carried to the detriment of the roads, see 1946 Report.
38. Colonial Office. *Sierra Leone 1948*, p. 13. A statutory board, the Colony Transport Board, was established to control the licensing of transport vehicles. The original intention was to regulate the industry better; later the Board used its powers to promote African enterprise.
39. *Legislative Council Minutes* of 2 December 1949, p. 7. Information about the tonnage was given on the same occasion. There were:
 - 80 lorries of 4 and 5 tons
 - 404 lorries of 3 tons
 - 283 lorries of 2½ tons or less.The preponderance of the 3-ton lorries was due to the regulation that heavier lorries were not allowed in the Protectorate. 73 out of the 80 heavy lorries were licensed in the Colony.
40. D.T. Jack, *Economic Survey of Sierra Leone* (Freetown, 1958), p. 49. There are conflicting figures about lorry registrations. These figures for instance are considerably lower than the total given in 1949, see note 39.
41. This trend might be read off from the figures in N.A. Cox-George, *Report on African Participation in the Commerce of Sierra Leone* (Freetown, 1958), p. 33. Unfortunately, these figures are so much lower than those in other publications, that we hesitate to base firm conclusions on them.
42. *Ibid.*, p. 31 and 32. Those figures suggest that the Africans overtook the Lebanese in 1956.
43. S.M. Sesay, 'Drivers in the Transport Industry: a Case Study of Road Transport in Sierra Leone', *Sierra Leone Studies*, No. 19 (July 1966), p. 86-97.
44. Interest never flagged when I interviewed the Lebanese about drivers. Those who had found a reliable man, either as an employee or as a regular independent operator, considered themselves lucky and were generous with their praise.
45. Cox-George, p. 37.
46. *Ibid.* p. 35. Apparently there was a drop of 20 per cent in charter rates in December 1956. The opening of the Taiama bridge in December 1956 also played a role, we guess.
47. *West Africa*, November 16, 1957, p. 1088. Mahmoud Ahmed would not have moved a motion on this topic if there had been strong feelings against Lebanese lorry owners at the time.
48. Act No. 5 of 1970.
49. *The Probe*, 30 September 1970. A representative of the drivers was quoted as saying

that the Indian 'Companies should kindly grant the lorries to drivers who have served more than five years on credit terms . . . the gratuities of these drivers could be withheld as first payment for the lorries'.

50. Government Notice No. 88 of 28 September 1970.
51. This was one factor in the decline of Bonthe, perhaps the major one. Other changes have been the dredging of the channel from Pepel to the sea and the blasting of rocks in the Bumpe River below Rotifunk.
52. *Annual Report of the Provincial Administration for the Year 1929*, p. 4, as quoted by Riddell, p. 32.
53. The business was started by Mr. Galizia and later run by the brothers, Ugo and Plinio Galfetti.
54. *Governor's Address* of 22 December 1952, p. 20 and Colonial Office, *Sierra Leone 1953*, p. 46.
55. Cox-George, p. 40. We have assumed that the figures refer to 1956. The capacity of the Lebanese launches amounted to nearly 10 per cent of the total.
56. Edmond K. Saadé, *Le Liban Dans Le Monde*, (Beirut, 1952), p. 282. Saadé mentions three launches which belonged to Abdallah Yazbeck and one of Mohamed Akar (= Ahmed Mohamed). In the Business Names Register we found that Mohamed Allie Sabbagh of Mapotolon operated a launch in 1956.
57. Cox-George may refer to them in his remark about 'motor engines fitted on wooden frames', p. 41.
58. *Ibid.* As early as 1956 the industry did not seem to be flourishing.

Notes to Chapter 7: The gold mining industry

1. This was a modification of the European concept of development which we described in Chapter 2, section 5. Apparently the Government was no longer willing to rely on commercial development only.
2. J.D. Pollett, 'Our Mining Story', *The Sierra Leone Trade Journal*, Vol. I, No. 1 (May 1961), p. 10.
3. Ordinance No. 36 of 1927.
4. Platinum production was too small to justify discussion. There was one mining company (UAC) and several Creole miners. There was one Lebanese miner in 1937.
5. Although the mines were only ten miles apart, Baomahun was in Valunia Chiefdom in Mende country and Makong in Kunike Barina Chiefdom in Temne country.
6. One of Maroc's prospectors was an American geologist, Dr. K. Fowler-Lunn. She worked in Sierra Leone from 1930 to 1933 and wrote a book about her experiences: *The Gold Missus* (London, 1938).
7. A subsidiary of the Diamond Corporation carried out a drilling programme for gold in 1961 and 1962. This was more in the nature of a service to the Government than a normal prospecting venture. No mining followed.
8. Creole interest was stimulated by the nearby platinum deposits. It is also possible that the gold mining industry in Nigeria sparked off interest in Sierra Leone. Gold mining had started there a few years earlier and small miners (both African and Lebanese) were allowed to participate.
9. See Orders in Council No. 15 and No. 19 of 1934, and No. 2 of 1935.
10. By that time the prospectors of the mining companies had located the better alluvial de-

- posits and we suppose that they did not object to the entry of small miners. The Government may also have been influenced by the need for additional revenue.
11. The details are as follows: in the second quarter of 1934 only one syndicate operated, the Sierra Leone Enterprise Syndicate, a successful African partnership. In the third quarter there were six small miners: 5 Africans and 1 Lebanese. In the fourth quarter twelve small miners produced some gold: 9 Africans and 3 Lebanese.
 12. *Mines Report 1936*, p. 9, and *Mines Report 1937*, p. 3. See also *Mines Report 1938*, p. 2.
 13. *Mines Report 1935*, p. 6, and *Mines Report 1937*, p. 3.
 14. *Mines Report 1938*, p. 2.
 15. Some may have lived in the Interior before, as employees of the Companies for instance. Unfortunately, not much produce was grown in the gold areas and life was quite different from that in the produce areas.
 16. The Shamel Brothers may also have been the first Lebanese to use tributors. This is likely because they worked in the same area as Gold and Base Metal Mines of Nigeria in 1935 and were able to observe the tributing arrangements at close quarters. The individual miner with the highest production was M.K. Bahsali, a prominent textile trader from Freetown. He produced 15,118 ozs. in eight years.
 17. The names Baabda Mining Company and Yemen Company reflected their Arab background and their high hopes.
 18. The title holders had partners or assistants, so that the number of Lebanese engaged in gold mining was higher than the number shown in Table VII. In 1940 when the number of title holders was 32, the number of Lebanese engaged in gold mining was 48. The war was responsible for an increase of Lebanese effort by causing the gold price to rise and by restricting other trading opportunities. The influx of immigrants between 1936 and 1939 may also have brought new miners.
 19. Cf. R.R. Kuczynski, *Demographic Survey of the British Colonial Empire*, Vol. I (London, 1948), p. 196.
 20. Woehrling had been in charge for several years, see E. Huxley, *Four Guineas* (London, 1954), p. 60. Such liquidations of companies (whereby the most optimistic shareholder bought the assets) have been quite common among local companies, whether European, Creole, or Lebanese. Woehring surrendered his mining leases in 1957 and advertised the dredge for sale. The dredge was later exported to Suriname.
 21. These men were Najib Abdallah of Magburaka, Ibrahim Fahour of Magburaka, Mershid Kazzan of Makeni, Sahid Mohamed of Makeni, Abdallah Morowah of Magburaka, Hassan Sabah of Waterloo, Allie Salim Sabrah of Freetown, Joseph Allie Shamel of Magburaka, Muslim Shamel of Magburaka, and Joseph Zine Shami of Bumbuna. All of them belonged to the South Lebanon group.
 22. *Annual Report of the Labour Department Sierra Leone for the Year 1950*, p. 7.
 23. *Mines Report 1945*, p. 3; *Mines Report 1946*, p. 4; *Mines Report 1951*, p. 6.
 24. Ordinance No. 34 of 1946.
 25. *Mines Report 1948*, p. 4.
 26. None of the Lebanese gold buyers had held a mining right before, as far as we were able to judge, but there were similar family names in the table suggesting that sons or relatives of the miners had gone into gold buying. The European gold buyer in the table was Georg Hertling of Gandorhun, Kono.
 27. Another reason may have been that the Mines Department refused the applications of Lebanese.

28. Smuggling was less profitable after the devaluation of the pound sterling in 1949, which was followed by an increase in the gazetted gold price from £ 6 to £ 8.10.— per ounce troy. In 1951 a better check on the gold buyers was instituted: they had to send the duplicate pages of their Record Books to the Mines Department every three months.
29. *Mines Report 1956*, p. 7.

Notes to Chapter 8: The diamond mining industry

1. H.L. van der Laan, *The Sierra Leone Diamonds* (London, 1965) and K. Swindell, 'Diamond Mining in Sierra Leone' *Tijdschrift voor Economische en Sociale Geografie*, 57 (1966), p. 96-104.
2. Ordinance No. 22 of 1935.
3. Ordinance No. 9 of 1936.
4. *Mines Report 1950*, p. 5. The opening of these two chiefdoms to gold mining was a serious risk, if not an error.
5. Two articles in the *Daily Mail* of 10 and 11 November 1955 contain an account given by an anonymous illicit miner who said that he had started to mine diamonds in 1947. As it could not be verified, I have discarded this information.
6. We saw this information in an internal report of SLST.
7. I take this opportunity to correct the statement which I made on p. 62 of my book (1965) to the effect that African mining started in 1952.
8. The administration feared that this unexpected trouble would widen the Colony-Protectorate rift which held up constitutional progress. They were also afraid that it would reduce Sierra Leone's chances of attracting capital from abroad. Last but not least they feared embarrassing enquiries from London.
9. Elspeth Huxley, *Four Guineas*, (London, 1954) wrote: 'losses both from theft and from illicit mining are already heavy and are growing quickly', p. 64. She gathered this information while visiting Sierra Leone in February 1952. A detachment of Police was sent to Kono and stationed there in September 1952. Since hardly any Police had been stationed in the Protectorate before, the reason for sending this detachment could not be concealed. It was also significant that SLST talked freely to Roy Lewis during his visit in May or June 1952. Mr. Lewis had been commissioned by the Colonial Office to write a book on Sierra Leone: *Sierra Leone, A Modern Portrait* (London, 1954), p. 198ff.
10. *Daily Mail*, 30 March 1954. '... stated that Government had allowed Gold Mining Licences to be bought by individuals but had received no benefit from these'.
11. Legislative Council Debates as quoted in *Daily Mail*, 18 December, 1954.
12. House of Commons Debates as quoted in *Daily Mail*, 11 March 1955.
13. *Daily Mail*, 29 April 1955.
14. Van der Laan, p. 10ff.
15. *Daily Mail*, 8 June 1955.
16. *Daily Mail*, 2 May 1956. The boundaries are laid down in Ordinance No. 36 of 1956.
17. Ordinance No. 2 of 1956.
18. See table VIII in Chapter 7. The efforts of the Coastal Africans in the mid-1930s may have been deliberately forgotten.
19. Political development seemed an illusion to them if it was not accompanied by economic advance. See further Chapter 15.
20. The jewellers of the 18th Century worked with the rule that the price of diamonds increased with the square of their weight.

21. Van der Laan, p. 27-8.
22. Ordinance No. 28 of 1956.
23. Act. no. 37 of 1964.
24. Those who wanted to avoid a distinction on racial grounds had to find other terms, like 'small-scale versus large-scale mining', or 'licensed mining versus mining under a lease', or 'digging (on a claim) versus mining'. The statistics distinguish 'alluvial diamonds' as opposed to 'other diamonds', the latter being SLST diamonds. This is a complete fallacy because the SLST diamonds are also alluvial.
25. *A report on the evaluation of a portion of the partially abandoned swamp Sembehun 14*. (Freetown, no date, 1961 (?)).
26. The number of native firms was 11 in 1959, 22 in 1960, 57 in 1961, and 44 in 1962. The numbers for 1963 and 1964 are not given in the Mines Reports for those years. We guess that somewhat over half of the native firms had one or more Lebanese partners.

Notes to Chapter 9: The diamond trade

1. Ordinance No. 36 of 1927, section 61.
2. *Report of Census for the Year 1931*, p. 182.
3. B. Nealon, 'Ambush — War on the Diamond Smugglers', *West African Review*, March 1960, p. 41-64; B. Nealon, 'The Watchers in Beirut', *West African Review*, May 1960, p. 49-56. Bernard Nealon was in charge of the Criminal Investigation Department in Sierra Leone in the 1950s.
4. *Daily Mail*, 25 February 1958.
5. Graham Greene, *The Heart of the Matter* (London, 1948). The arrest of a diamond trafficker was reported in the *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, 10 May 1941.
6. Roy Lewis, *Sierra Leone, A Modern Portrait* (London, 1954), p. 198-200. 'An efficient organization exists to transmit smuggled diamonds to Freetown . . . a syndicate of IDB merchants in Freetown.'
7. Evidence of this assumption could be found in the SLPMB system, in the restriction of Lebanese immigration, and in the pleas for Africanization in commerce.
8. Elspeth Huxley, *Four Guineas* (London, 1954) p. 47: 'The British distrust [their commercial skill and sharpness], nursing a vague feeling that no Syrian is really honest'. Mrs. Huxley visited Sierra Leone in February 1952.
9. *Daily Mail*, 1 December 1952.
10. *Daily Mail*, 18 September 1953.
11. Nealon, p. 43.
12. Governor's Speech of 11 February 1960, *Sessional Paper No. 1 of 1960*, p. 9.
13. Ian Fleming, *The Diamond Smugglers* (London, 1957), p. 107.
14. A London company, Triefus & Co., was appointed in 1956 to check the value of the consignments regularly sent from Sierra Leone.
15. Ordinance No. 33 of 1957.
16. *Daily Mail*, 11 January, 8 March, 11 April, and 27 June 1955.
17. Barclays Bank decided to withdraw, but the Bank of British West Africa applied for a dealer's licence to continue in the trade. Buying on this licence was done by its Segbwena manager until 1966, and by the Kenema manager from 1966-1969. Since then the bank has confined its activities to making advances to diamond dealers.
18. Some Lebanese in Freetown for instance were under suspicion, because information had

leaked out from one of the banks that they had received large sums from abroad, presumably as payment for diamonds they had smuggled out of the country. See Fleming's account of this matter on p. 135, which we were able to confirm.

19. I counted two Indians in 1956, one in 1957 and one in 1961.
20. Legislative Council Debates, 25th January 1957, as quoted in *Daily Mail* of 29 January 1957.
21. This is one of the rare sources of information about naturalizations. We counted one full Lebanese among the citizen dealers in 1966, two in 1967, four in 1968, three in 1969, four in 1970, and nine in 1971 and 1972.
22. Twelve Lebanese worked for an African principal, others found a principal in a different 'social group' as defined in Chapter 12.
23. 28 withdrew within the first two years. Among them were the five dealers who were deported in October 1957, see p. 196.
24. *Mines Report 1957*, p. 5.
25. See Government Notice No. 1304 in Gazette of 31 December 1957, p. 845. Some names on the lists of 1958 and 1959 made us wonder whether this method was foolproof.
26. Government Notice No. 185 of 1958 reminded 28 applicants, including 26 Lebanese, that they had to make the deposit of £ 3000. A month later the approval of 19, including 18 Lebanese, was withdrawn, in Government Notice No. 313.
27. The *Mines Report 1958* lists 37 non-natives on page 9. After subtracting two European non-natives we are still faced with a discrepancy of three Lebanese. The internal list which we consulted was probably incomplete.
28. We were puzzled by a great number of changes of address on successive dealers' lists, especially by changes within one town. We guess that some were due to the demolition of old houses in preparation for the construction of new ones. It is also conceivable that some dealers preferred to rent from a landlord rather than staying with a relative who would act as a kind of guardian.
29. *Mines Report 1962*, p. 8; *Mines Report 1963*, p. 7; *Mines Report 1964*, p. 5.
30. Ordinance No. 1 of 1959. 13 Lebanese and 41 Africans were thus expelled from the diamond areas between 1959 and 1963, see Public Notices 184 and 185 of 1959, No. 91-108, 128 and 150 of 1960, No. 6-36 and 76 of 1963. The legal authority to expel from the diamond areas ceased in September 1964. The Government does not publish its deportation orders and no totals can be calculated. In May 1963 the right of deportation was extended so as to include all non-citizens, Act No. 11 of 1963. The first people deported under this Act were two Gambian diamond dealers, *Daily Mail*, 12 May 1963.
31. *GDO Report for 1963*, p. 2. Most, possibly all, of these 18 men were Lebanese. Such figures do not appear in later reports, because they might conflict with the policy of the Diamond Corporation to treat the sales of individual dealers as confidential. See also a remark of a Dicorwaf Director, as quoted in *Daily Mail*, 27 May 1967.
32. *Daily Mail*, 27 October 1967 (gifts for Koidu Hospital), *Daily Mail*, 13 July 1968 (gift of a blood bank for Kenema Hospital), *Unity*, 20 February 1969 (gifts for Kenema Hospital).
33. In the 10-year period, 1961-1970. 124 Lebanese received a dealer's licence for the first time. Of these 57 gave up within the first two years. It is also significant that of the 334 Lebanese who held a dealer's licence in the period 1958-1972, the operations of nearly half (158) lasted less than three years.
34. *Daily Mail*, 9 June 1967.
35. I found these figures by comparing the addresses of all Lebanese dealers for successive

- years, and by concluding from a new address that a man had transferred in the course of the preceding year. The figures for Bo District were obtained in the same way.
36. This abuse of the DCSL went so far that the company refused to make an offer unless the dealer stated first which price he wanted. If that price was lower than the price in the price book, the DCSL buyer was allowed to deviate from his instructions. *West Africa*, 23 March, 1957, p. 268.
 37. *Daily Mail*, 3 September 1956.
 38. *Police Report for 1956*, p. 9.
 39. The new Cabinet differed substantially from the former one: among others, the Minister of Mines was replaced. The critical comments expressed in *The Economist* of 20 July 1957 may have hastened the measures.
 40. *Daily Mail*, 13 February 1957. An amendment to the Alluvial Diamond Mining Ordinance (No. 33 of 1957) allowed for heavier punishments if unlawful possession was accompanied by the possession of firearms.
 41. *GDO Report for 1967*, p. 13 and 14. The raising of the export duty and the levy on the dealers had been errors in the eyes of the Diamond Corporation: 'Once again the sensitivity and volatility of the diamond business was clearly demonstrated and the dangers of altering well-established practice underlined. The confidence of the local diamond trade in the GDO has been upset and it will take time to reverse the present pattern of events'.
 42. *Sessional Paper No: 1 of 1960*, p. 9 estimated it as one-thirtieth of the value of the diamonds.
 43. Not only in Sierra Leone, but also in London, where hospitality was often extended to Sierra Leonean politicians and civil servants, *Daily Mail*, 20 May 1967.
 44. The revisions ensure that GDO prices 'correspond closely to trends in the outside markets. This is the basic reason for the GDO's success'. *GDO Report for 1961*, p. 6.
 45. *GDO Reports*, 1960-71.
 46. Reply in Parliament as reported in *Daily Mail*, August 14, 1970.
 47. *Daily Mail*, 13 August 1963. See also p. 207.
 48. *Daily Mail*, 19 April 1967, and 1 February 1972.
 49. In some years illicit supplies may have reached 90 per cent of the Kono supplies (excluding SLST supplies). The *GDO Report of 1970* stated on p. 3: 'A further contributory factor to the decrease in purchases at the end of the year was the reported improvement in security within the Diminco Lease...'
 50. The Minister of Mines attributed the troubles to 'African diamond operators, most of whom are not Sierra Leoneans'. These 'wealthy men' instigated the diggers to invade the SLST lease and paid their fines when they were arrested. *Daily Mail*, 3 November 1958. These men also posted armed men to protect the illicit diggers against the security guards of SLST and the Police. *Mines Report 1958*, p. 7.
 51. *Daily Mail*, 4 August 1966. On this occasion the Prime Minister also said that 'the danger in Kono did not emanate from the Lebanese but other foreigners'.
 52. *Daily Mail*, 22 September 1967. See also the allegations in the *Daily Mail*, 26 July 1967.
 53. *Daily Mail*, 24 July 1968. These 125 men included an unspecified number of Afro-Lebanese. In total there were 427 Lebanese and Afro-Lebanese in Kono: 125 male adults, 130 female adults and 172 children. *Daily Mail*, 10 July 1968. Wives and children do not receive a separate Residence Permit.
 54. *Daily Mail*, 29 May 1969.
 55. *Daily Mail*, 17 June 1970. The Editor of an opposition newspaper felt that the Lebanese

had not been treated properly. In an editorial on 'The much cheated Lebanese' he wrote: 'Unfortunately, these Lebanese cannot bring up the courage to expose those who incessantly try to exploit their good fortunes. We have warned them that their best bet lies in the formation of a loose union'. *The Probe*, 17 June 1970.

56. *Daily Mail*, 7 January 1971.
57. *Daily Mail*, 23 November 1971. There was also a Community Association with the tribal headman as chairman.
58. Government Notice No. 1248 in *Sierra Leone Gazette*, 31 December 1971.
59. *Daily Mail*, 19 May 1964. They demanded a price of £ 5 for a bag.
60. *Daily Mail*, 22, 27, and 28 May 1965.
61. *Daily Mail*, 28 December 1965.
62. *West Africa*, 15 September 1972, p. 1239.
63. *Daily Mail*, 3 June 1971. The reporter did not think that this was accidental.
64. *Daily Mail*, 13 August 1963. We referred to this case on p. 200; the Magistrate found that he 'did deal in diamonds with persons whom he should not deal with under the Act' but this finding was set aside by the Court of Appeal in August. Since this judgment the Police did not see any point in charging a dealer with what we have called 'making illicit stones white'.
65. Public Notice No. 76 of 1963.
66. *Daily Mail*, 3 and 9 May, 31 July, 13 and 20 August 1963 and 25 September 1967.
67. *Daily Mail*, 4 August 1966. He had been arrested for a diamond offence in 1959. After he had been convicted and sentenced to six months' imprisonment, he was expelled from Kono (Public Notice No. 150 of 1960).
68. *Daily Mail*, 24 January 1970.
69. Shamel left two days after the acquittal and tried to do so inconspicuously. He had always travelled on a British passport for a British protected person, but on this occasion he used a Lebanese passport which had been hurriedly issued. His preference for a Lebanese passport was due to the fact that the spelling of his name when correctly transliterated from the Arabic differed considerably from the name under which he was generally known in Sierra Leone. The Lebanese passport did not prevent Shamel from being recognized at the airport, but after a delay, he was allowed to leave the country. Two days later he was declared a prohibited immigrant. The Government suspected three employees of SLST of having conspired with Shamel. They were also declared prohibited immigrants. *Daily Mail*, 28 January 1970.

Notes to Chapter 10: Miscellaneous activities

1. *Report of the Census for the Year 1931*, p. 61 and 182. The Census also mentioned one Lebanese baker in Port Loko District (p. 181) and two or three Lebanese butchers, one in Bo District, (p. 182) one in Port Loko District (p. 181) and possibly one in Kambia District (p. 181). The Lebanese whom I interviewed never spoke about the occupations of baking and butchering.
2. Colonial Office, *Annual Report on Sierra Leone for 1938*, p. 24: '... a Syrian planter started a banana plantation which already shows great promise'.
3. The set-back came in 1953 when the British Ministry of Food ceased to be the importer for bananas into the UK. See statement of the Minister of Trade and Industry as summarized in *West Africa*, January 5, 1963, p. 9.

4. Colonial Office, *Annual Report on Sierra Leone for the Year 1947*, p. 29.
5. The officials who organized the programmes for Mrs. Huxley and Mr. Lewis in 1952 were pleased with the plantation. E. Huxley, *Four Guineas* (London, 1954), p. 47. R. Lewis, *Sierra Leone, A Modern Portrait* (London, 1954), p. 208. Courban was the only Lebanese to get a 'Portrait' in *West Africa*, 11 June, 1955, p. 535 and 537.
6. The official explanation (see note 3) emphasized that the conditions laid down by the private importers in UK had been too stringent. One Lebanese suggested to me that large banana cultivating companies elsewhere had persuaded the importers to impose difficult conditions. D.T. Jack, *Economic Survey of Sierra Leone* (Freetown, 1958), p. 22, put some blame on the Department of Commerce and Industry which combined the parcels of various growers without regard to differences in quality.
7. The Caledonian Insurance Company and the Yorkshire Insurance Company had Lebanese Agents for several years. These agents had been appointed when the insurance business started growing in 1951, the year that third party insurance for motor vehicles became compulsory.
8. There are two in Koidu (Opera and Hollywood) and three recent ones in Freetown (Byblos, Strand, and Sarula).
9. *Daily Mail*, 2 June, 1971.
10. The landlord of a foreign embassy had the further advantage that he was exempted from paying rates for this building, as laid down in Ordinance No. 8 of 1950.
11. *West Africa*, 17 March, 1962, p. 289.
12. The Freetown Fishing Company, which was registered in the Company Register under number 15/57, had one Lebanese and two Swiss directors.
13. *Annual Report of the Road Transport Department for the Year 1947*, p. 3 and 4.
14. Cf. R.G. Saylor, *The Economic System of Sierra Leone*, (Durham, N.C., 1967), p. 148-155.
15. The annual return of July 1963 showed that Sierra Leone Enterprises Ltd — registered under number 12/60 — had 33 shareholders, all belonging to the South Lebanon group (see Chapter 12). The launching of this company resembled that of the Yemen Company (see Chapter 7).
16. The Directors of the Metal Beds Factory were helped by an ILO adviser, *Daily Mail*, 13 June 1968.
17. *Daily Mail*, 15 April 1967 and 17 June 1966.
18. *Daily Mail*, 15 January 1969.
19. *Daily Mail*, 22 October 1966.
20. Act No. 11 of 1970.
21. *Daily Mail*, 12 August, 1970 reported a reply in Parliament to the effect that there were 36 poultry farms in the country. One Sierra Leonean poultry farmer wrote a letter to the newspapers to say that the deletion of poultry farming had not occurred because of his request, see *Daily Mail*, January 12, 1970 and *Unity*, 12 January, 1970.
22. For instance in *Daily Mail*, 23 January 1970.

Notes to Chapter 11: The Lebanese entrepreneur

1. M. Crowder, *West Africa under Colonial Rule* (London, 1968), p. 286.
2. H.W. Ord & I. Livingstone, *An Introduction to West African Economics* (London, 1969), p. 145.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 146.
4. J. Mars, 'Extra-Territorial Enterprises', in *Mining, Commerce, and Finance in Nigeria*, ed. by M. Perham (London, 1948), p. 98.
5. *Ibid.* Mars notes that there are exceptions and that some Levantines, Indians and Africans had western enterprises in Nigeria in the 1940s.
6. W.A. Lewis, *Some Aspects of Economic Development* (London, 1969), p. 44.
7. Given the European concept of civilization current before World War I there could be no doubt that the Creoles were more civilized than the Lebanese immigrants.
8. Crowder, p. 295.
9. *Ibid.*, p. 297. It is conceivable that authors such as Crowder who are critical of the 'commercial regime' of the two-way trade may come to the conclusion that 'opening up West Africa to increased international trade' was the greatest disservice which the Lebanese did to the African people.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 286.
11. F.J. Pedler, *Economic Geography of West Africa* (London, 1955), p. 154.
12. In Nigeria and the Gold Coast there were African middlemen about whom the Companies spoke openly, too. A study of European opinions about middlemen may help to discover when European commercial determination began to waver.
13. So they appeared to Marteroy in 1938: 'the Syrians have to-day neat shops'. P.H. Marteroy, 'Freetown 1899-1938', *Sierra Leone Studies* XXI (1939), p. 85.
14. The word 'shop' is uncommon, too. See H.L. van der Laan, 'Lebanese Enterprise in Sierra Leone: a Partial Analysis', *Sierra Leone Geographical Journal*, No. 13 (1969), p. 46.
15. One informant told me that the word 'shopkeeper' suggested to him a shop assistant.
16. Bauer who observed them in Nigeria and the Gold Coast in about 1950 hoped that the Lebanese and Indians would emerge as powerful rivals of the Companies in the import trade. This would be their main economic contribution. P.T. Bauer, *West African Trade* (Cambridge, 1954), Ch. 12.
17. The Creoles in the 1910s and the Companies in the 1930s considered them a threat to the existing pattern of trade.
18. With the exception of Intra Bank and other companies discussed in section 10.5.
19. Not even remittances could be sent during World War II.
20. M. Hanna, 'The Lebanese in West Africa: 2', *West Africa*, no. 2141 (April 26, 1958), p. 393.
21. European managers who stayed in Sierra Leone for a long time also built up a personal reputation, which, we assume, was a commercial advantage for the Company that employed them. This was also the strength of independent European traders.
22. Mars, p. 101. See also V.R. Dorjahn, 'African Traders in Central Sierra Leone', in *Markets in Africa*, ed. by P. Bohannon & G. Dalton (Evanston, 1962) p. 76: 'it was difficult for them to hide or flee the country'.
23. Lewis, p. 44, mentions the railway as one of three major factors causing the arrival and success of immigrant traders in the tropics.
24. Bauer, p. 164, describes them as 'resourceful, . . . and exceptionally gifted in the perception of economic opportunity'.
25. Most African wives also stood loyally behind their Lebanese husbands. They realized what was expected of them when they married a Lebanese trader. I was told that some African wives continued the shop after the death of their Lebanese husbands. Also,

Afro-Lebanese children were brought up with the same links with the shop as full Lebanese children.

26. Some information on branches is given by van der Laan, p. 46. These figures may be inflated because of the quota system (see section 15.2).
27. This number excludes companies like Intra Bank. Compare also N.A. Cox-George, *Report on African Participation in the Commerce of Sierra Leone* (Freetown, 1958), p. 45: 'There are many things which Syrian/Lebanese businesses here have to teach the Africans, but management does not appear to be one of them'.
28. M. Kilson, *Political Change in a West African State* (Cambridge, Mass. 1966) is very critical of the Chiefs, see for instance p. 180-2. The Lebanese were the only important people in the Provinces who sometimes had to talk in a persuasive tone of voice to the Africans. When they did so, it struck the Europeans as strange and they suspected them of cheating.
29. Some of their wives did, see note 37 below.
30. Mr. Joseph Akar of Rotifunk was involved, but only as a transporter. See Chapter 6, section 7.
31. Those Lebanese who built residences outside Freetown (and Bo) had to find tenants for the living quarters above their shop. A few of these tenants are Africans. We also heard of one Lebanese pawnbroker in Freetown who operated in the 1940s and had African clients.
32. Perhaps they ignored these rights at first (i.e. before the riots of 1919), but it may well be that the Lebanese paid more attention to them afterwards.
33. Later — possibly only in the 1960s — the Lebanese also grew concerned about 'the dignity of the white man'. One of them complained to me in 1970 that a particular group of expatriates had 'destroyed the dignity of the white man'.
34. W. Conton, *The African* (London, 1960), p. 16.
35. A European who had worked for one of the Companies told me that some Lebanese textile traders used to buy a few yards of a new pattern of cotton print as soon as his Company began to sell it. They then cut up these yards and realigned the pieces till they had a satisfactory pattern. This they glued onto a piece of paper and sent to a textile factory ordering 10.000 square yards of it. The story was told to show the lack of originality of the Lebanese and the near-infringement of copyright.
36. If this is true it would be the wrong policy to give the African traders economic domination 'on a plate' by barring the Lebanese from certain activities.
37. Many Lebanese lived in Creole houses. They sent their children to Creole teachers and read Creole newspapers. The Christians joined Creole churches. They learnt about the courts, the law, and the Government departments from Creole lawyers and civil servants. Some Lebanese wives sold perishable foodstuffs in their shops in Freetown following Creole custom. All these instances show the significance of the Creole example, in the early period. This matter deserves further study because it may shed new light on the Creoles of that time, and also because it shows how eager the Lebanese were to make their home in Sierra Leone.

Notes to Chapter 12: Social aspects of the Lebanese community: internal

1. The Muslims accounted for between 56 and 58 per cent of the total 'Syrian' population in 1931. This can be calculated from the *Report of Census for the Year 1931* (Freetown, 1931), p. 62 and p. 183-4.
2. The Canary Islands meant a great deal to the Lebanese because they were the nearest place away from tropical Africa. They went there to have operations and medical treatment and also to convalesce. Some Lebanese married women from the Islands, who are always described as Spanish in Sierra Leone. In 1931 there were '5 Spanish women who were natives of the Canary Islands' in Sierra Leone. See R.R. Kuczynski, *Demographic Survey of the British Colonial Empire*, Vol. I (London, 1948), p. 190n, quoting the census.
3. The newspapers reported the visit of Rev. P. Massad in 1954, of the Maronite Bishop Khoury in 1964, of Sheikh Mohammed Al-Cherri in 1958 and of Imam Assayed Moussa Assadr in 1967. From interviews I learnt that clergymen from the home villages have also visited the Lebanese in Sierra Leone.
4. Four of them have written books: Kamil Muruwah, *Nahnu fi Ifriqiyah* (Beirut, 1938); Ahmed Hassan Mattar, *Social and Commercial Guide of the Lebanese and Syrians in West Africa* (New York, 1950); E.K. Saadé, *Le Liban dans le Monde* (Beirut, 1952); Abdul-Hafiz Mahmassani, *Independent Sierra Leone* (Beirut, 1961).
5. N.A. Cox-George, *Report on African Participation in the Commerce of Sierra Leone* (Freetown, 1958), p. 56.
6. F.I. Khuri, 'Kinship, emigration and trade partnership among the Lebanese of West Africa', *Africa* 35 (1965) No. 4, pp. 385-95.
7. M. Banton, *West African City* (London, 1957), p. 100: 'In 1953 the Lebanese and Syrians subscribed over £ 8,000 for the building of a Lebanese school in Freetown'.
8. Graham Greene, *The Heart of the Matter* (London, 1948) and B. Nealon, 'Ambush — War on the Diamond Smugglers', *West African Review*, March 1960, point in this direction. On the whole it seems that Africans and Europeans rarely used the internal quarrels of the Lebanese to their own advantage.
9. Saadé, p. 268.
10. Saadé in discussing the social diseases of the Lebanese communities in West Africa spoke of gambling as 'a deadly illness', p. 270.
11. This seems to be a Creole expression which the Lebanese have taken over.

Notes to Chapter 13: Social aspects of the Lebanese community: external

1. The Lebanese did not understand this. They thought that their family names were too difficult to pronounce or remember. Some anglicized their family names, others dropped them and used the given name of their father as surname, e.g. Mohamed, Hassan, Michael, Mustafa, etc. These names are now passed on as surnames to the next generation both in their families and among the Afro-Lebanese.
2. The Lebanese did not settle in any of the Colony villages except Waterloo. Relations there resembled those in the Provinces, partly because the produce brought into Waterloo was grown mainly by tribal people.
3. There was a revival of anti-Lebanese feelings during World War II. I was told that the Editor of a Creole newspaper published many attacks on the Lebanese until he was ta-

ken to court by George Yanni, a leading Lebanese trader. The court ordered the Editor to stop his attacks on the Lebanese.

4. See Abioseh Nicol, 'As the night, the day' in *The Truly Married Woman and other Stories* (London, 1965), p. 70-84.
5. Elias Bamin advanced money to Mr. I.T.A. Wallace-Johnson so that he could retain the building in which he printed the *African Standard* (*McElwaine Report*, p. 43). The Milhems helped Dr. Milton Margai to open his own clinic in Bo. The Colony-Protectorate rift divided these Maronites in the early 1950s.
6. The Lebanese Chargé d'Affaires has regularly attended since 1965. Some leading Muslim Lebanese have followed his example in recent years.
7. Humphrey Fisher, *Ahmadiyyah, a Study in Contemporary Islam on the West African Coast* (London, 1963), p. 122. Fisher was told that a Lebanese had invited an Ahmadiyyah missionary to come to Baomahun.
8. The Afro-Lebanese children are normally mentioned in obituaries.
9. The best-known husband is Kandeh Bureh, a former SLPP minister.
10. M. Banton, *West African City* (London, 1957), p. 101 speaks of 'an increasing number of Afro-Lebanese children'.
11. See for instance *Report of Census for the Year 1931*, p. 46. There were 115 'African - Asiatics (Syrian)' in the Protectorate in 1931, and 3 Syrian - Africans in the Colony.
12. This is often forgotten by outsiders who ask in how far the Lebanese have integrated in the African society. Often the question then focuses on the frequency of mixed marriages and the attitude of both groups towards such marriages.
13. No other group of non-Africans can boast so many members who are able to speak Sierra Leonean languages. Cf. R. Bayley Winder, 'The Lebanese in West Africa', in *Immigrants and Associations*, ed. by L.A. Fallers (The Hague - Paris, 1967), p. 139.
14. This was Ahmed Yassin of Kassiri. See his obituary in *Daily Mail*, December 10, 1968. Mohamed Raffa of Zimmi had a Mende name which meant 'he scatters wealth'.
15. Banton, p. 101, concluded: 'The relations of the Lebanese with the mass of the native population are good,' J. Dawson, 'Race and Inter-group Relations in Sierra Leone, Part 2', *Race* VI, 3 (January, 1965), p. 218, found 'favourable attitudes towards Syrians and Lebanese'.
16. Note the veiled remark in the *Report on the Sierra Leone Protectorate for the Years 1949 and 1950*, p. 19: 'the Kakua Tribal Authority can only to a limited extent now be held to be representative of the many elements engaged in building up the modern town of Bo and which ought to have an opportunity to share in its administration'.
17. Such as better storage conditions for cocoa and coffee (see p. 54), and improved surroundings and greater nocturnal protection for general merchandise (see p. 113).
18. The dust was a terrible problem for the people living in the towns; it was not only uncomfortable but also unhygienic. Note the many questions in the Legislative Council about this problem. The Public Works Department tarred many shopping streets in the 1950s to solve this problem.
19. Class is not a very meaningful concept in Sierra Leone, but in as far as it can be determined, the quality of residential housing is probably the best way of ascertaining it.
20. Most vernacular languages had to adopt a loan word for a two-storey building. The Temne speak of 'n-garret'. We note that the word 'garret' is quite common in Freetown.
21. I saw a few of these houses, now in dilapidated condition. Dr. A. Abraham told me that the Chief of Taiama invited a Creole carpenter in 1879 to build a two-storey house for him.

22. The first one was M.K. Bahsali.
23. We saw in Chapter 3 that the Companies built their Buying Stations early in the century. This might indicate that rather little was invested in buildings in the inter-war period. In that case replacement was very necessary. We also suspect that maintenance was so much neglected by European and African property owners during the 1930s and World War II that it was often cheaper to rebuild than to repair.
24. Cf. Dawson, p. 218. Many African informants told me that the Lebanese have been much better than the Indians in this respect. The latter rely largely on rented buildings.
25. The reluctance of the Creoles to sell or lease to the Lebanese lessened after World War II. Some of their buildings were beyond repair and were therefore sold. Moreover, a new alternative arose for the Creoles. They were able to buy land on the outskirts of Freetown and build a new house there. If they were lucky, they received enough money from their old house in central Freetown to finance the construction of the new one on the outskirts of the town. As more Creoles could afford a car, the disadvantage of living outside the town diminished. Creoles who felt strongly attached to the place where their family had always lived agreed to lease the site.
26. Act No. 61 of 1962.
27. *Daily Mail*, 25 September, 1958.
28. *Daily Mail*, 7 August, 1963.
29. *Daily Mail*, 16 November, 1965.
30. *Daily Mail*, 27 October, 1967, and *Unity*, 20 February, 1969.
31. *Daily Mail*, 30 December, 1969.
32. We mention Isaac Williams who was appointed a member of a committee to advise on local revenue (1957); Edmond Moukarzel who was a member of the Economic Advisory Committee (1964); Edmond Aboud who was Second Vice President of the Chamber of Commerce in 1967 and was given the MBE in that year. Both he and Khalil Garnem have been Justices of the Peace. Sheriff Hashim was a Director of the National Development Bank in 1969-70. Some prominent Lebanese were also invited to join the Dinner Clubs and the Lodges.

Notes to Chapter 14: Political aspects I: before 1951

1. A Proclamation of 19 November 1951 may be taken as the beginning of decolonization. Cf. M. Kilson, *Political Change in a West African State* (Cambridge, Mass. 1966), p. 170.
2. *Annual Report on the Medical Department for the Year ended 31st December, 1913*, p. 75. Similar complaints were later made in Liberia and many Lebanese were expelled in 1928.
3. *Ibid.*
4. Despatch of 11 January 1925 from Governor Slater, Public Record Office, C.O. 267/607, shows that these counts were started in 1921. The number of Lebanese immigrants was 184 in 1921, 362 in 1922, 391 in 1923 and 297 in 1924. The number of Lebanese emigrants for those years were 139, 232, 236, and 189. We calculated a net immigration of 45 in 1921, 130 in 1922, 155 in 1923, and 108 in 1924, i.e. a total of 438 in four years.
5. *Ibid.*

6. The passenger movements (see note 4), suggest considerable passing to and fro between territories in West Africa.
7. Great Britain, *Report by the Hon. W.G.A. Ormsby-Gore, M.P. (Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for the Colonies), on his Visit to West Africa during the Year 1926*, p. 158. Note the reference to immigrants from Palestine, which was a British mandated territory. This was based on one Palestinian who was mentioned in the despatch of note 4.
8. The Passport Ordinance, No. 9 of 1924.
9. The Undesirable Persons (Prevention of Immigration) Ordinance, No. 17 of 1925.
10. Ordinance No. 20 of 1924.
11. Several Lebanese names end with '-way' and a long 'a' was often transcribed as 'ar'. Some Lebanese deliberately anglicized their names. Registration names, however awkward, were retained for administrative convenience.
12. Ordinance No. 11 of 1930, which came into effect on 26 June 1930.
13. The refunded deposits provided the Police with information about the outflow of immigrants. Liberia again accepted Lebanese immigrants in the 1930s and was considered more promising than Sierra Leone. The Lebanese who did not succeed in Sierra Leone did not risk repatriation but asked for their deposit and used it to pay their fare to Monrovia.
14. The Police Reports show that 55 people were prevented from landing in 1930, 12 in 1933, 34 in 1934, 22 in 1935, 12 in 1937 and 3 in 1938. There were not many Lebanese among them.
15. *Annual Address* delivered by Governor Hodson on 9 November, 1931, p. 2.
16. Executive Council Minutes, Public Record Office, *C.O. 270/74*, ad passim.
17. Ordinance No. 28 of 1931. The Sierra Leone Branch of the National Congress of British West Africa presented a petition on this Ordinance.
18. *C.O. 270/74*, Minutes of Meetings of 6 December 1932 and 21 August 1934.
19. *Legislative Council Minutes*, 10 May 1938: 'Government is aware that the recent influx of Syrians has caused uneasiness . . . this question is engaging the consideration of the Government'. *West Africa*, 30 January 1938, p. 55, reported that one ship had brought 95 Lebanese to Freetown in December 1937.
20. *Legislative Council Minutes*, 29 November 1943.
21. The discussions took place on July 16, 1943. Public Record Office, *C.O. 267/683*, file 32375.
22. The fee for a store licence was raised from £ 1 to £ 5, but a proposal to raise the Poll Tax to £ 10 for non-natives who were not British Subjects (*Sessional Paper No. 10 of 1939*, p. 5) was rejected as being discriminatory in character.
23. Ordinance No. 24 of 1946.
24. *Report on the Administration of the Income Tax Department Sierra Leone* (Freetown, 1948), p. 30 and 58. Further referred to as the McElwaine Report. For the sake of brevity we shall use the title 'Commissioner' for the Head of the Income Tax Department in Sierra Leone, although his actual title was 'Deputy Commissioner'.
25. *Ibid.*, p. 54; 60 and 62. The names of the members of the Committee were not published because the Committee had no legal standing.
26. One of them, Mr. I.D. Salamah, built up a good reputation with both traders and the Department. The Commissioner regarded him as an Income Tax Consultant. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

27. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
28. *Ibid.*, p. 62.
29. *Ibid.*, p. 11.
30. The problem was never satisfactorily solved. A new Commissioner worked using another way of assessing the incomes of Lebanese traders. Evidence of new investment in buildings, stocks, vehicles, and so on was used as a measure of income. This was acceptable to the Lebanese because it did not compel them to keep books. Even today the assessment of Lebanese incomes is largely an arbitrary procedure.
31. Ordinance No. 15 of 1947.
32. *Annual Report of the Labour Department for 1948*, p. 9.
33. All through the period from 1948 to 1960 more than half of the employers inspected were Lebanese. See Tables on Wage Inspections in the Annual Reports of the Labour Department.
34. P.T. Bauer, *West African Trade* (Cambridge, 1954), p. 148-9.
35. It was often easier for a Lebanese to advance a simple explanation which was partly true, than the full and true explanation, which required a superior command of the English language. In this respect they faced the same problem as many Africans.
36. See *Mr. Khoury* by Joe Bingley, in which a DC describes the dishonesty of a particular Lebanese and his own frustration as a judge. The author would not have admitted his frustration if he had not been sure that other DCs had had the same experience. *The Heart of the Matter*, a war-time novel by Graham Greene, also echoes the reputation of inscrutability. My research has not included a study of judgments concerning the Lebanese, although this would certainly be worth-while from the point of social and economic history.
37. Many policies were based on the typical or average African, and were unfavourable for groups that were different, such as the Creoles and the Lebanese.
38. *Annual Report on the Sierra Leone Protectorate for the year 1948*, p. 10, spoke of '... local non-African children'.
39. For the desire for money, see Kilson, p. 53-9. The coveted description 'a progressive Chief' acquired an economic connotation after World War I, in the sense of 'having an interest in production for export'.
40. The trader had to make presents of general merchandise, to lend money, and to provide transport, if he had a lorry.
41. Ordinance No. 12 of 1926. If the farmer did not sell his pledged crop to the trader, the latter could take him to the Magistrate's Court. The Chief was explicitly forbidden to deal with such a case.

Notes to Chapter 15: Political aspects II: the decolonization period

1. *Gold Coast Gazette*, February 1949, as quoted by P.T. Bauer, *West African Trade* (Cambridge, 1954), p. 158-9n.
2. Cf. Bauer, p. 158.
3. Colonial Office, *Report on Sierra Leone for 1952*, p. 32.
4. Bauer, p. 171n, distinguished these matters carefully.
5. Historians use the term for the first inhabitants of Freetown. Some Creole organizations of the 1950s were called 'Settlers' Descendants Unions'.

6. A. Hazlewood, *The Economy of Africa* (London, 1961) p. 37: 'They are also not true settlers, though they often stay in West Africa longer than Europeans'.
7. See Table XX on p. 301. We have assumed that the Census figure of 2074 Asiatics consisted of 1202 alien Lebanese, 750 British Lebanese, and 122 Indians of whom 90 were registered with the Immigration Authorities.
8. *Report of the Wales Commission of Inquiry into the Conduct of the Immigration Quota Committee from 1st January, 1961 to 23rd March, 1967 and Government Statement thereon* (Freetown, no date, 1970 (?) quoted below as *Wales Report*). The directive is reprinted on p. 2. Wales suggests that the African Ministers were responsible for the new directive. This suggestion is almost certainly incorrect.
9. An answer in Parliament on 4 July 1966 revealed that 142 Lebanese nationals had entered and stayed in Sierra Leone since 1950 for the purpose of marrying locally born Lebanese. No distinction was made between either the sex of the immigrants or the periods before and after 1954.
10. The rule was contained in a letter from the Colonial Secretary to the Lebanese consul. See *Daily Mail*, 28 August 1954.
11. Lebanese fathers did not share this expectation. They feared that it would make it more difficult to find husbands for their daughters. This may have induced them to spend more on their daughters' education in Sierra Leone, U.K., or Lebanon.
12. Some Lebanese in this position told me that their requests had been sent to the Queen for a decision. This seems unlikely but suggests how important the measure of 1954 appeared to them. After September 1956 'no male Lebanese' was 'allowed to enter and remain in Sierra Leone merely on account of marriage'. See the reply in Parliament as quoted in *Daily Mail*, 18 September 1964.
13. *Daily Mail*, 13 March 1956. A year later the immigration restrictions were still a major topic of conversation in the Lebanese community, according to M.I. Hanna, 'The Lebanese in West Africa' in *West Africa*, of 19 and 26 April, and of 3, 17, and 24 May, 1958.
14. Diamond smuggling made the Police suspicious of all Lebanese who wanted to come to Sierra Leone.
15. An uncle could excuse himself by saying that he had no money, but such an excuse implied an admission of economic failure, the last thing a Lebanese would say. On the contrary there was a tendency among the Lebanese to boast about their success in letters to Lebanon.
16. Hanna feared that this would keep the educational level of the community in Sierra Leone down. See his article in *West Africa*, May 3, 1958.
17. A formula was used which allowed the immigration officers little freedom to fix the quota according to the needs of the applicant. It was proposed in 1960 that the formula should no longer be applied (*Wales Report*, p. 32). Some large companies were exempted from the quota system (*ibid.* p. 33-5).
18. Some shops of quota immigrants were nominally branches of the quota holder.
19. *Wales Report*, p. 13-4 and 32. In 1963 regular payments from quota immigrants to quota holders were also suspected *ibid.*, p. 42. Some quota holders may have been content with promises of the employee and his sponsors that they would buy their supplies from the quota holder.
20. It was at least reported to the Government in 'the beginning of 1959'. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
21. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
22. *Report of the Electoral Reform Commission* (Freetown, 1954), p. 16. Prior to 1954 aliens in Bonthe and Bo had the right to vote, but not those in Freetown.

23. *Ibid.*, p. 22.
24. *Sessional Paper No. 2 of 1955*. The recommendations concerning aliens were accepted without any change.
25. *Daily Mail*, 26 July, 1955.
26. *Daily Mail*, 9 April 1956.
27. Ordinance No. 2 of 1956, section 2.
28. See note 38 of Chapter 6.
29. Colonial Office, *Annual Report on Sierra Leone for the year 1948*, p. 5. One reason for the interest of the officials was that they considered the Creole clamour for the Africanization of the civil service to be one-sided. The Africanization of the private sector was equally important, they felt.
30. N.A. Cox-George, *Report on African Participation in the Commerce of Sierra Leone*, (Freetown, 1958), p. 1. One of the virtues of this report has been generally overlooked. The author, a Creole, broke away from reiterating the Creole grievances and studied all African businessmen in the country. As such the report is one of the earliest surveys of the achievements of African businessmen in the Protectorate. This approach was extremely valuable at the time, but the author may have gone too far in his efforts to gloss over cultural differences; compare our analysis in Chapter 2.
31. *Sierra Leone Royal Gazette*, 12 August 1955, Government Notice No. 732.
32. M.I. Hanna, *Lebanese Emigrants in West Africa*, unpublished, p. 169.
33. Government Notice No. 1170 of 1957 contained an amended version of the Asiatic origin clause. This version made it clear that Afro-Lebanese were not affected by the Asiatic origin clause.
34. Most Europeans could not understand this. They thought that the Lebanese were ignorant about the law, or over-optimistic, but such explanations underestimate the insight of the Lebanese.
35. Kilson, p. 179f. The emergence of local traders (see Chapter 2), was another sign of the decline of the power of the Chiefs. They had preferred stranger traders in the past and had opposed local traders.
36. *Protectorate Assembly, Proceedings*, Volume V, p. 89. The Registrar General of Sierra Leone has records of all leases. We hope to undertake an analysis of these records at a later date. The moves of P.C. Kai Samba (see p. 59), may also have influenced the number of applications for leases.
37. Colonial Office, *Report of the Sierra Leone Constitutional Conference*, Cmnd. 1029, p. 7.
38. Public Notice No. 78 of 1961 contains the text of the independence constitution.
39. The detailed provisions can be found in Act No. 10 of 1962. It should be noted that the naturalization of Commonwealth Citizens is described as 'registration'. We shall not follow this terminology, but use 'naturalization' for all non-citizens.

Notes to Chapter 16: Political aspects III: after independence

1. They had also noticed that many Afro-Lebanese sons obeyed their Lebanese fathers unconditionally and had great respect for them.
2. He was reported to have said that anyone could stand if he or she was born in Sierra Leone and had Negro blood. *West Africa*, 23 December, 1961, p. 1413.

3. Patrilineal descent was a new element in the law, but one that became increasingly important in subsequent amendments. There is no doubt that it is accepted in Sierra Leone not only as a principle but also in practice. Proposal B was justified with the argument that membership of Parliament should be limited to people who have a long standing connection with Sierra Leone.
4. Tanganyika became independent on 9 December 1961 and Sir Milton attended the independence celebrations. The suggestion was made in an interview.
5. From the 'Objects and Reasons' of the second Bill.
6. They were published as supplements to the *Sierra Leone Gazette*, 21 December, 1961. Bill A was called: An Act to Provide for the Amendment of the Constitution, and Bill B: An Act to Provide for the Amendment of Certain Sections of the Constitution. We shall speak of them as Bills A and B. Not more than ten Europeans were entitled to the option.
7. *Daily Mail*, of 5, 8, and 9 January 1962.
8. *Daily Mail*, 11 January 1962. Cf. *Daily Mail*, 22 January, 1962.
9. I interviewed one of the Lebanese who was present. He did not remember the date of the interview. We should guess that it took place between the publication of the Bills and the debate in Parliament.
10. J. Jahn, *Who's Who in African Literature*, Tuebingen, 1972, p. 28-9. *West Africa*, 2 October, 1965, p. 1097, and 23 July, 1966, p. 820.
11. No record of the debate is available, because Parliamentary debates were not printed at the time.
12. Patrilineal descent was used in the definition of Act No. 12, so that only Afro-Lebanese with a Lebanese father were affected then, while the independence constitution also included those with a Lebanese mother. As we saw in Chapter 13 there are very few Afro-Lebanese in the second category and group 5 remained practically the same.
13. According to a reply in Parliament, *Daily Mail*, 16 December 1969.
14. We do not know how many Lebanese had considered exercising their option, or how many had decided in principle to do so. It seems that the Government never printed application forms for this purpose.
15. The Bill was published on 1 November 1962.
16. Act No. 61 of 1962. Estate Agents in Freetown have often complained about its disadvantages. *Daily Mail*, 24 August 1964.
17. See for instance Government Notice No. 864 in *Sierra Leone Gazette*, 22 September 1966.
18. *House of Representatives, Debates, Session 1962/63*, vol. II, p. 630-54.
19. *Ibid.*, p. 645-6.
20. As quoted in *West Africa*, February 16, 1963, p. 179.
21. An Act to Amend the Aliens (Expulsion) Act, Act No. 11 of 1963.
22. The constitutional conference in London had agreed in 1960 that 'the constitution for independence should provide that no Sierra Leone citizen should be deported from Sierra Leone'. Cmdn. 1029, p. 7. This undertaking presumably influenced Sir Milton.
23. *Daily Mail*, 6 June 1963. Mr. Ahmed kept this office until 1968 when he was recalled by Juxon-Smith. Since then he has not taken any part in politics.
24. Act No. 20 of 1963.
25. Act No. 9 of 1965, see Table II on p. 10.
26. *Daily Mail*, 27, 28, 30, and 31 October 1967.
27. *Journal of African Law*, Vol. 12, No. 2, p. 89-109. This gives the full judgment of the

- Court of Appeal, and extracts of the Chief Justice's judgment, together with a note by Mr. J.P.W.B. McAuslan.
28. *Weekly Law Reports*, 1969, Volume 3, p. 970-84. For the critical comments, see p. 977: 'In their Lordships' view Act No. 12 offends against the letter and flouts the spirit of the Constitution'.
 29. *Daily Mail*, 23 May and 20 October, 1964.
 30. In a speech to the Chamber of Commerce. The text can be found in *Sierra Leone Trade Journal*, Vol. 5, No. 1, (1965), p. 18-19. Sir Albert Margai was strongly influenced by comparable restrictions on foreigners which had been imposed, or were under consideration, in other African countries. He also counted on approval for this policy from the British press. See *The Times*, 6 May 1964, p. 13.
 31. *Report of the Beoku-Betts Commission of Inquiry on the Special Coffee Deal of the Sierra Leone Produce Marketing Board, 1967* (Freetown, 1967), p. 23. See also p. 63).
 32. *Report of the Wales Commission of Inquiry into the Conduct of the Immigration Quota Committee*, p. 17.
 33. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
 34. *Ibid.*, p. 8.
 35. *Ibid.*, p. 5 and 23.
 36. *Daily Mail*, 28 February 1970. Apparently, a file had been discovered of which the APC government had had no knowledge in December 1969. See the reply in Parliament as reported in *Daily Mail*, 16 December 1969.
 37. Since the legal requirements for naturalization had been observed, the Government could not lightly revoke the orders.
 38. The publication of naturalization orders in the Gazette had been compulsory before independence.
 39. Act No. 14 of 1965, section 21.
 40. *Daily Mail*, 29 March 1969. I believe that the Israeli firm of Dizengoff was meant. A commission of inquiry to investigate the pre-finance projects was appointed in February 1969 but was dissolved eight months later without having been successful. *Unity*, 6 October 1969.
 41. NRC Decree No. 53 of 1967, see Table II on p. 10.
 42. Public Notice No. 46 of 1967, which ordered the registration, was dated 19 May, 1967.
 43. The status of these Lebanese is anomalous as both the Colony and Protectorate of Sierra Leone in which they had acquired their British status have ceased to exist. Nor can they claim to have resided in the United Kingdom or one of the remaining colonies and Protectorates of the UK. This affects their right to settle in the UK. The holders of type C passports saw this right restricted in 1962 and the holders of type B passports in 1968. The restrictions have, as yet, caused few hardships and have not prevented individuals from retiring in Britain. The children of these Lebanese who were born after independence received the same status as their fathers.
 44. This could be abused. Returning Lebanese showed their British passport at the airport. This might show only a visit to Britain, while a visit to the Continent or to Lebanon was made on the Lebanese passport.
 45. The Passports Act, No. 49 of 1964. They were no longer issued after 1968.
 46. Interview of 6 March 1971. A margin of Lebanese who fail to register is not unusual.
 47. It is quite likely that the Afro-Lebanese who had no passport did not register, probably in good faith.
 48. No charge of corruption was ever brought against them, although they were under ar-

rest on a charge of treason for a long time.

49. The NRC did not repeal the Land Development (Protection) Act, nor were the restrictions in the rice trade repealed although their abolition was considered (see Chapter 4).
50. These included men who were deported by Sir Milton and Juxon-Smith. The revocation orders were rarely publicized; the exceptions concerned an Englishman and a Liberian. *Unity*, 1 December 1968.
51. *Daily Mail*, 1 June 1971. The Acting President of the Chamber of Commerce referred to an improvement in his Annual Speech. *Daily Mail*, 22 December 1971.
52. See *Quarterly Statistical Bulletins*. These data had been formerly published in the annual reports of the Police Force, the last of which was for 1959.
53. Act No. 6 of 1971, which, apart from some amendments, had the same text as the Bill published in December 1966 (see section 16.3).
54. Published as supplement to the *Sierra Leone Gazette*, 19 April 1971.
55. *Unity*, 22 April, 1971, described the Bill under the head-line: 'Afro-Lebanese to lose citizenship'. It is not clear whether this Bill was drafted in 1966 or in 1971.
56. *Unity*, 23 April, 1971. *Daily Mail*, April 23, 1971.
57. *Daily Mail*, 7 May, 1971. Later the 'Coloured Brotherhood of Sierra Leone' was formed. *Daily Mail*, 15 January, 1972.
58. Act No. 4 of 1973.
59. The constitution was not changed in 1973, and it could be argued that the disqualification for Parliament was not repealed.
60. Naturalization of women married to Sierra Leoneans was of course allowed, too. See section 7.
61. A press release of August 1973 invited all 'second-class citizens' to make an application. *Daily Mail*, 25 August 1973. We gather that several files dating from Sir Albert's rule were destroyed or hidden in March 1967. It was therefore necessary to invite new applications.
62. There are Lebanese headmen in Koidu, Bonthe, Bo, Kenema, etc. The first one represents the Lebanese community of the whole Kono District, see *Daily Mail*, 7 January, 1971.
63. For many years foreign residents applied for a re-entry visa while they were abroad, and the diplomatic representatives of Sierra Leone gave these without delay. In 1969 it was announced that foreign residents should apply for a re-entry visa before they left the country, sending their applications to the Immigration Department in Freetown. Initially the measure brought delays. *Daily Mail*, 22 September 1969.

Notes tot Chapter 17: Diplomatic protection from abroad

1. Conscription was introduced in the district of Lebanon in 1909.
2. Archives of Sierra Leone, file IM 360 of 1914. I am indebted to Dr. A.M. Howard for drawing my attention to this file and the one mentioned in the next note.
3. Archives of Sierra Leone, file Mu 16 of 1914. See also Chapter 1. This episode probably increased the desire for naturalization among the Lebanese. The opportunity had been given by an Ordinance of 1906.
4. *The Times* (London) of 13 January 1940 reported that the Governor of Sierra Leone had received a cheque of £ 759 from 126 persons representing small Lebano-Syrian Communities in Sierra Leone. The term 'Lebano-Syrian', until then unknown in Sierra Leone,

was also used in the local newspapers, see notes 7-10 below.

5. His headquarters were on board a Dutch troopship 'Westerland' which was anchored in the Sierra Leone River off Hastings. See *Daily Mail*, 11 November 1970.
6. The novel *Mr. Khoury* by J. Bingley is full of espionage rumours, which reflect this period. It must be remembered that Graham Greene, the author of *The Heart of the Matter*, was also engaged in security work. The Aliens Registration Ordinance was used to limit the freedom of movement of the Lebanese. See P.N. No. 117 of 1940.
7. *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, 25 May 1941.
8. *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, 7 June 1941.
9. *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, 5 July 1941.
10. *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, 19 July 1941.
11. The change of position came about gradually, having begun in November 1942 when Admiral Darlan in French North Africa joined the Allies.
12. The Lebano-Syrian community of Sierra Leone presented a petition on this matter to the Secretary for the Colonies during his West African tour in 1943. Probably due to the importance of Freetown, the Secretary for the Colonies refused this request, even though the Lebanese in Nigeria and Gambia were allowed to travel to Lebanon and return (Public Record Office, C.O. 267/679, file 32118/38). After the war there was a strong desire to visit Lebanon because of the long separation. An unexpected opportunity for many occurred when the ships that had repatriated the Sierra Leonean troops from Burma took Lebanese passengers from Freetown to Port Said.
13. This information is based on an interview, during which I was also told that the Chief Justice, Mr. Graham Paul, was aware of the tensions within the Lebanese community.
14. The money flow had almost stopped during the war and was restricted by exchange control until well into the 1950s. The gradual relaxation of this control helped to restore contact between the Lebanese in West Africa and their home country.
15. We were told that there was a Syrian consul in Sierra Leone in the 1950s. For some time in the 1960s the Syrians proper depended on the Syrian Embassy in Conakry. There has been a consulate of the Republic of Syria in Freetown since 1971, see Chapter 1 note 7.
16. Apparently the records of the French consul were incomplete. Yazbeck had notices stuck up in post offices all over Sierra Leone asking the Lebanese to register. His figure of 2900 corresponds closely to that calculated by Saadé in 1951 (see E.K. Saadé, *Le Liban dans le Monde* (Beirut, 1952) p. 263.)
17. See a list published by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Beirut and reproduced in *West Africa*, 7 April, 1962, p. 375. According to this list there were 10,070 Lebanese in Senegal; 6,150 in Nigeria; 3,008 in Guinea; 2,697 in Liberia; 2,200 in Ghana; 1,854 in Ivory Coast; 1,050 in Portuguese Guinea; 650 in Gambia, and 95 in Dahomey.
18. The Lebanese Minister of Justice, Mr. A. Ossairan, paid a visit to Sierra Leone in 1970 (see *Daily Mail*, 8, 10, and 14 April, 1970). He seems to have asked the Prime Minister to grant citizenship to Lebanese who had lived all their lives in Sierra Leone. *West Africa*, (25 April, 1970, p. 475) interpreted his visit as an effort to protect the Lebanese against the economic restrictions on non-citizens.
19. In 1959 Mr. D.L. Sumner led a ministerial delegation to Lebanon; in 1960 the Mayor of Freetown and the Director of Broadcasting visited Lebanon. Dr. J. Karefa-Smart paid a six-day visit to Lebanon as a guest of the Lebanese Government in November 1962, while Mr. C.B. Rogers-Wright, also in the capacity of Minister of External Affairs, visited Lebanon in July 1964.

20. Some members of Parliament did not agree and asked for the appointment of a Sierra Leonean. See *Daily Mail*, 2 September, 1963, and 15 May, 1964.
21. Three Lebanese in Liberia who had co-operated with an Israeli firm had their passports withdrawn in 1962 by the Lebanese Embassy in Monrovia. The Liberian Government, unhappy about this extension of the conflict to West Africa, gave the men political asylum.
22. *Daily Mail*, 1 and 2 October, 1970, and *Unity*, 1 October, 1970.

Notes to Chapter 18: Concluding observations

1. Sierra Leone, *House of Representatives, Debates, Session 1962/63 Vol. II.*, p. 633.
2. See Chapter 11 and cf. W.A. Lewis, *Some Aspects of Economic Development*, (London, 1969) p. 44.
3. The small French traders in French West Africa reacted in much the same way. See Rita Cruise O'Brien, *White Society in Black Africa, The French of Senegal*, (London, 1972) p. 74-78.
4. As the second and third practices did not injure a person but only the public interest, a reaction prompted by self-interest was not always forthcoming.
5. Dishonesty is profitable when a man can make a lot out of one dubious deal. Recently there have been cases of Lebanese absconding to Lebanon without having paid their debts to the Companies. *Daily Mail*, 16 November 1970. This incidentally indicates that the voluntary exodus which we mention in section 18.7 may well have undesirable features.
6. A.G. Hopkins, *An Economic History of West Africa* (London, 1973) has reassessed the European and the African contribution to the process of development. If, as he suggests, the European contribution has been overestimated until now, the same may be true of the Lebanese.
7. We looked at the Probate Register and the Company Register but found no point of departure for estimates of Lebanese capital. We did not look at the Valuation lists of the Freetown City Council, which give the value of buildings on which rates are assessed.
8. If only their contribution in trade is considered, the period 1930-1950 is appropriate, but their role in lorry transport makes it desirable to add the years 1925-1930.
9. The British did not expect this either. That was the reason why they introduced immigration restrictions against the Lebanese in 1952.
10. Cf. P.C. Garlick, *African Traders and Economic Development in Ghana*, (Oxford, 1971), p. 125-6.
11. *Daily Mail*, 27 November 1972. *West Africa*, 25 December 1972, p. 1717.
12. One of the great differences between the Asians in East Africa and the Lebanese in West Africa is the circumstance that the Afro-Lebanese group in West Africa is far more numerous and influential than the Afro-Asian group in East Africa.
13. If illicit mining in the DIMINCO lease can be suppressed, the life of the company may be prolonged. There is therefore an element of uncertainty in this forecast.
14. See Speech of Chief Justice C.O.E. Cole as reported in the *Daily Mail*, 14 October, 1969. Cf. *Daily Mail*, 30 September, 1970.

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Samenvatting

In de wetenschappelijke literatuur over West-Afrika is opvallend weinig geschreven over de Libanese immigranten. De verklaring hiervoor is niet moeilijk te vinden. Zowel de onderzoekers die gedreven werden door belangstelling voor de Afrikanen als de auteurs die de Europese activiteiten in dit deel van de wereld wilden beschrijven en rechtvaardigen, beschouwden de Libanezen als een marginale groep. Toch is iedereen het erover eens dat hun economische betekenis groot was, en nog steeds is. De regeringen moeten rekening met hen houden, niet alleen in hun dagelijks beleid, maar ook in veel sectoren van het ontwikkelingsbeleid. Het ontbreken van een systematische analyse van hun activiteiten is daarom een handicap voor de economische ontwikkeling geweest.

Dit boek reconstrueert de problemen en lotgevallen van de Libanese handelaren in Sierra Leone. Het analyseert hun economische betekenis en vergelijkt die met de betekenis van de Europeanen en Afrikanen. Het is belangrijk dat de concurrentie tussen deze groepen zich in de loop van de tijd op allerlei terreinen geuit heeft. De successen die de Libanezen behaalden en de nederlagen die zij leden hebben een ingewikkelde economische achtergrond die hier niet samengevat kan worden. Ik beperk mij daarom hieronder tot het weergeven van de belangrijkste punten.

De aankomst en de eerste successen van de Libanezen hingen ten nauwste samen met de economische opbloei, die begon toen Frankrijk en Groot Brittannië tegen het einde van de negentiende eeuw besloten om het binnenland van Afrika onder koloniaal bestuur te brengen en te ontsluiten met spoorwegen. Zo werd ook in Sierra Leone in 1895 aangevangen met de bouw van een spoorlijn die de uitvoer van agrarische producten uit het binnenland moest mogelijk maken. Zowel de aanleg van de spoorlijn als de snel groeiende uitvoer deed de geldcirculatie toenemen, waarvan niet alleen gevestigde, maar ook nieuwe handelaren profiteerden.

De handel die de Europeanen wilden stimuleren, bestond uit twee componenten: een naar Europa gerichte stroom van tropische producten en een stroom in de tegenovergestelde richting bestaande uit fabrieksproducten, zoals textiel, gereedschappen en keukengerei. Deze handel breidde zich snel uit na 1900 maar er bleef harde concurrentie bestaan, zodat de Libanezen niet dan met grote inspanning zich een plaats konden veroveren. Dit lukte hun het eerst in de havensteden waar ze kleine ingevoer-

de artikelen verkochten, waaronder de snuisterijen het meest opvielen. In het binnenland trokken ze rond als marskramers en verkochten soortgelijke artikelen. Spoedig bleek dat hun kans op succes het grootst was in dorpen waar de Europeanen geen handelsposten bouwden; daar begonnen ze hun winkeltjes. De belangstelling van de Europese zakenlieden beperkte zich in het algemeen tot producten die gevraagd werden in Europa. De Libanezen waren echter soepeler: zij waren bereid om ook kolanoten en rijst op te kopen. Sommige Libanezen in Freetown organiseerden de export van deze kolanoten naar Senegal en de Gambia en anderen regelde de opslag en verkoop van de rijst, die de groeiende bevolking van de hoofdstad nodig had als dagelijks voedsel.

Zodra de Libanezen zagen dat ze een redelijk inkomen konden verwerven in de havensteden en langs de spoorlijn, besloten ze hun vrouwen te laten overkomen uit Libanon. Reeds voor 1910 werden de eerste Libanese kinderen geboren in Sierra Leone. Het was verder kenmerkend dat de meeste nieuwe immigranten verwant waren met vroegere immigranten zodat er veel familiebanden waren binnen de Libanese gemeenschap. Dit was een basis voor hechte samenwerking en onderlinge hulp. Verder droegen hard werken en zuinigheid er het hunne toe bij om de Libanese handelaren vaste grond onder de voeten te geven. Hun succes leidde tot nijd, niet van de zijde van de Europese handelsmaatschappijen wier omzet sterk toenam door de ontsluiting van het binnenland, maar van de kant van de Afrikaanse handelaren in de kuststreken. Deze commerciële nijd speelde een grote rol in de anti-Libanese relletjes die in 1919 in Freetown en andere steden uitbraken. De Britse autoriteiten beschermde de Libanezen en vergoedden de schade die zij geleden hadden. Dit werd door Afrikanen en Libanezen gezien als een teken dat de Britten de Libanezen goedgezind waren. Nadien kenmerkte hun houding zich door een mengsel van voorzichtigheid en zelfvertrouwen en hun aantal nam toe door verdere immigratie. Het was gunstig voor hen dat het elan van de Europese handelsmaatschappijen afnam na de eerste wereldoorlog. Daardoor bleef een conflict uit en ontwikkelde zich een samenwerking, waarbij de maatschappijen zich concentreerden op de in- en uitvoer en de Libanezen op de tussenhandel, d.w.z. het opkopen van agrarische producten en de detailverkoop van ingevoerde goederen. De maatschappijen waren zelfs bereid om op krediet te leveren aan de Libanezen zodat dezen een redelijk assortiment in hun winkels konden uitstallen.

Omstreeks 1925 vertoonde de handel een opleving ten gevolge van de aanleg van nieuwe wegen en de introductie van een groot aantal vrachtauto's. De boeren in afgelegen streken kregen daardoor de gelegenheid

om palmpitten en andere gewassen te verkopen en zo ingevoerde goederen te verwerven; velen grepen deze gelegenheid met beide handen aan. De Libanezen in het binnenland waren nauw betrokken bij deze ervaring omdat het merendeel van de vrachtauto's hun toebehoorde. De handel werd verder gestimuleerd door een aantal Libanezen die zich in afgelegen dorpen langs de nieuwe wegen vestigden. Ondanks veel moeilijkheden en ontberingen bouwden deze pioniers hun zaken op. Zij leerden veel van en over de Afrikanen. In die dorpen werd de basis gelegd voor het feit dat de Libanezen, meer dan enige andere groep van overzeese vreemdelingen, zich inburgerden in Sierra Leone. Een praktisch gevolg was dat de Libanezen, wanneer ze krediet gaven aan de boeren, minder risico liepen dan Europese handelaren.

De waardering van de Europeanen voor de Libanezen bereikte zijn hoogtepunt tegen het einde van de jaren twintig: de pioniers in de afgelegen dorpen werden geprezen omdat ze het volume van de uit- en invoerhandel deden toenemen, waardoor de handelsmaatschappijen hun omzet en winst zagen groeien en het gouvernement zijn inkomsten uit douanerechten; de kolahandelaren werden op prijs gesteld omdat kolanoten een grote post vormden op de handelsbalans en de eigenaars van de vrachtauto's werden gewaardeerd omdat ze modern vervoer verschaften. Het is tekenend dat de meeste mijnbouwmaatschappijen die omstreeks 1930 naar Sierra Leone kwamen, besloten hun vervoer toe te vertrouwen aan Libanese vrachtautobezitters.

De crisis van 1929, die grote verliezen bracht voor de handelaren en armoede voor de boeren, vertroebelde de verhoudingen tussen de bevolkingsgroepen. Vriendschappelijke samenwerking maakte in veel gevallen plaats voor bittere rivaliteit en de Europese waardering voor de Libanezen verdween als sneeuw voor de zon. Het gouvernement was ongerust over het feit dat de Libanese vrachtauto's de spoorwegen concurrentie aandeden en verliezen berokkenden. De handelsmaatschappijen maakten zich zorgen over de kredieten die de Libanese winkeliers niet konden of niet wilden terugbetalen. Rapporten uit die tijd beschrijven de tussenhandelaar — Libanees of Afrikaan — niet langer als nuttig, maar als iemand die overbodig was en veelal misbruik maakte van de armoede van de boeren. Toen een korte economische ervaring plaatsvond in 1935-37 waarvan de Libanezen sterk profiteerden, openbaarde zich jalouzie onder de Europeanen en er werden discriminerende maatregelen overwogen, b.v. om de immigratie van Libanezen aan banden te leggen. Het was ook veelbetekend dat de ambtenaren van de afdeling mijnbouw de Libanezen als minder gewenste ondernemers zagen in de goudindustrie, wier successen zij

niet goed konden verklaren. Ook werden de Libanese rijsthandelaars ervan verdacht en beschuldigd dat ze de rijstprijzen manipuleerden ten koste van de Afrikaanse consumenten.

De Europese afkeer van de Libanezen nam nog toe tijdens de tweede wereldoorlog. Gedurende enkele jaren beschouwden de Britse autoriteiten hen als vijanden van de geallieerde zaak en als potentiële verraders. Dit wantrouwen werkte door in de periode na de oorlog. Bij de reorganisatie van de handel in agrarische producten — het best bekend door de oprichting van de Produce Marketing Boards — werd geen rekening gehouden met hun belangen, zodat hun positie op het platteland afbrokkelde. Bovendien begonnen de Britten de immigratie van Libanezen tot een minimum te beperken met maatregelen die diep ingrepen in het economische en sociale leven van de Libanese gemeenschap.

Er kwam echter een keer ten goede dankzij de diamant-rush, die, na een illegaal begin, in 1956 door het gouvernement officieel werd toegestaan. Tienduizenden Afrikanen begaven zich naar de diamantvelden om hun geluk te beproeven en velen ontvingen ongekend hoge bedragen voor de edelstenen die zij opgroeven. Dit geld werd in de winkels besteed om ingevoerde goederen te kopen. Aangezien de Libanezen de detailhandel domineerden, waren de jaren 1954-57 de beste die de Libanese winkeliers ooit beleefden in Sierra Leone. Het grootste deel van de winsten die zij maakten, werd gebruikt om nieuwe winkels en woningen te bouwen. Verder hielpen deze winsten hen om nieuwe activiteiten te financieren zoals het opzetten van bioscopen, fabrieken, garages en bovenal importzaken. Tenslotte wordt algemeen aangenomen dat een deel van deze winsten overgemaakt werd naar Libanon, b.v. als een reserve voor de oude dag.

Sommige Libanezen verdienden ook rechtstreeks aan de diamanten, voornamelijk als opkopers. Op sommige diamanten maakten ze zelfs aanzienlijke winsten. Een aantal opkopers oriënteerden zich omtrent de internationale prijzen voor diamanten en smokkelden de duurder stenen het land uit wanneer zij niet tevreden waren met de prijzen van het semi-officiële inkoopsbureau. Het smokkelen van diamanten bezorgde de Libanezen een slechte naam bij de Britse ambtenaren die veronderstelden — ten onrechte overigens — dat ieder lid van de Libanese gemeenschap zich hieraan schuldig zou maken, als hij de kans kreeg.

De Sierra Leonese politici, die vanaf 1953 mede verantwoordelijk waren voor het regeringsbeleid, stonden ook wantrouwend jegens de Libanezen en begonnen reeds vroeg hun rechten te beperken. Na de onafhankelijkheid in 1961 nam de wens om hun invloed en aantal te verminderen nog toe. (Er waren toen ongeveer drieduizend Libanezen in het land.) In

1965 werden buitenlanders (dus ook Libanezen) uitgesloten van de handel in rijst en bepaalde ingevoerde artikelen, en van het vervoer van goederen voor derden. Hun positie in belangrijke sectoren van de detailhandel, met name in textiel, bleef echter onaangetast. In 1969 werden de beperkende bepalingen voor buitenlandse ondernemers sterk uitgebreid. Ook de groei van de Afrikaanse middenstand droeg bij tot een duidelijke achteruitgang in de economische positie van de Libanezen in de jaren zestig. Een klein aantal Libanezen ontplooiden nieuwe initiatieven of namen activiteiten over die voorheen door de Europese handelsmaatschappijen verricht waren, maar deze successen konden het proces van achteruitgang niet tot stilstand brengen. Het is waarschijnlijk dat de economische achteruitgang — die nog sterker zal worden na de uitputting van de diamantvelden — zal leiden tot het vertrek van de meer ambitieuze Libanezen en tot een sterke vermindering van de economische betekenis en invloed van de Libanese gemeenschap in Sierra Leone.

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