



CORI Analysis

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How are traditional practices and customs used to pressure people to enter the Poro secret society in Freetown?

History of Poro society in Sierra Leone

The Poro society is a long established cultural institution in Sierra Leone¹ it is present throughout the country and in Liberia and Ivory Coast.² Membership is restricted to men,³ in Sierra Leone members come from several ethnic groups including the Mende (Southern and Eastern Provinces) and Temne (Northern Province), each comprising 30% of the total population. Poro is also common among Kono, (3.1%), who originate from the Kono district in the East of the country.⁴

¹Fanthorpe, R. (2007) *Sierra Leone: The Influence of the Secret Societies, with Special Reference to Female Genital Mutilation*. Writenet, Report commissioned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/46cee3152.html> (accessed 6 March 2009).

² United States Department of State (2006) US Department of State Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2005 – Sierra Leone. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61591.htm> (accessed 6 March 2009); Jean Sybil La Fontaine, (1986) *Initiation*, Manchester University Press ND, p. 93.

³ Fanthorpe, R. (2007) *Sierra Leone: The Influence of the Secret Societies, with Special Reference to Female Genital Mutilation*. Writenet, Report commissioned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/46cee3152.html> (accessed 6 March 2009).

⁴ Ibid; Minority Rights Group International, World Directory of Minorities and Indigenous Peoples; Sierra Leone Overview, <http://www.minorityrights.org/4807/sierra-leone/sierra-leone-overview.html>.

The society is known by a variety of names, the Mende, Kpelle and Temne refer to the society as Poro.⁵

The Poro society does not have a formal central organization and operates through independent local groups,⁶

“the Poro should be considered a diversity of associations that differentially share some ritual practices. These associations differ from other societies in that they have the capacity to establish communicative and political allegiances with each other that transcend ethnic and linguistic boundaries.”⁷

The Poro society forms a network of connections over a wide reaching area.⁸ This network may be useful for trade, sharing information and for political support.⁹

The first historical reference to the Poro society in Sierra Leone is in the accounts of the coronation of the first king of the Temne people between 1680 and 1719¹⁰. A 1929 study of West African Secret Societies reported that Poro “had influenced nearly all of Sierra Leone with its branches, especially those of Bundu, Ampora, Kufong and Mannekeh being acknowledged by the Tenne, Mende, Sherbro, Vai, Kafu-Bullom, Koranko, Lokko, Limba and Sanda-Temne peoples as well as by paganised Fula, Susu and Mandingo settlers.”¹¹

Functioning of Poro society in Sierra Leone

Secret Societies are an integral part of Sierra Leonean culture,¹² their primary purposes are to regulate sexual identity and social conduct and to mediate relations with the spirit world.¹³ The societies have a religious, judicial, educational and military function.¹⁴ The Poro society educates boys, passing on spiritual secrets and powers of witchcraft.¹⁵

One source reports that membership of a secret society is a prerequisite to full tribal membership and is necessary to be considered an adult ready to marry, “as a result, nearly everyone living in Sierra Leone’s provinces, particularly the rural parts, belongs to a secret society.”¹⁶

⁵ Jean Sybil La Fontaine, (1986) *Initiation*, Manchester University Press ND.

⁶ Fanthorpe, R. (2007) *Sierra Leone: The Influence of the Secret Societies, with Special Reference to Female Genital Mutilation*. Writenet, Report commissioned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/46cee3152.html> (accessed 6 March 2009).

⁷ Beryl Bellman, *The Language of Secrecy: Symbols and Metaphors in Poro Ritual*, New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1984 quoted in Fanthorpe, R. (2007) *Sierra Leone: The Influence of the Secret Societies, with Special Reference to Female Genital Mutilation*. Writenet, Report commissioned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/46cee3152.html> (accessed 6 March 2009).

⁸ Jean Sybil La Fontaine, (1986) *Initiation*, Manchester University Press ND, p. 93.

⁹ *Ibid*, p. 95.

¹⁰ Butt-Thompson, F.W. (2003) *West African Secret Societies (1929)*, Kessinger Publishing, LLC.

¹¹ Butt-Thompson, F.W. (2003) *West African Secret Societies (1929)*, Kessinger Publishing, LLC.

¹² Lavenda, R.H. and Schultz, E.A. (2007) *Anthropology: what does it mean to be human?*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

¹³ Fanthorpe, R. (2007) *Sierra Leone: The Influence of the Secret Societies, with Special Reference to Female Genital Mutilation*. Writenet, Report commissioned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/46cee3152.html> (accessed 6 March 2009).

¹⁴ Centre for Country of Origin and Asylum Research and Documentation (ACCORD) (2001) *Sierra Leone: 6th European Country of Origin Information Seminar, Vienna, 13-14 November 2000, Final Report*. Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/4129a6a34.html> (accessed 6 March 2009).

¹⁵ Jean Sybil La Fontaine, (1986) *Initiation*, Manchester University Press ND.

¹⁶ Alterman, O., Binienda, A., Rodella, S. and Varzi, K. (2002) *The Law People See: The Status of Dispute Resolution in the Provinces of Sierra Leone in 2002*, A National Forum for Human Rights Publications. Available from http://www.daco-sl.org/encyclopedia/8_lib/8_3/research/lawpeoplesee.pdf (accessed 6 March 2009).

According to Anthropologist Dr. Fanthorpe, secret societies play a major role in maintaining law and order in rural areas.¹⁷

“The secret society operates under its own, isolated legal system. The societies define their own laws, procedures, and punishments. They possess their own jurisdiction, and any conflicts or crimes arising “out of the bush” stay within the secret society purview. It is unclear, however, whether secret society jurisdiction remains within secret society matters, or whether its borders span beyond into conflicts between secret society members, or even between members and nonmembers. The secret society world is religiously kept apart from the open community sphere in that it is a punishable crime to divulge any information about it to non-members. Furthermore, betraying one’s secret society invites curses on the individual and his or her close ones.¹⁸

Poro believe that violations of their laws are adjudicated by a masked spirit in the society bush, those found guilty of the most serious violations may be sacrificed to assuage the spirit.¹⁹

According to Dr Fanthorpe traditional secret societies were brought to Freetown many generations ago by immigrants from the interior.²⁰ There has been an increase in the number of secret associations operating in Freetown, according to one source they are “competitive and aggressive, operating at times like inner city gangs.”²¹ Dr Fanthorpe states that aggressive use of secret society rituals in urban areas has also seen members clash with non initiates, especially in the capital district (Western Area).²² For instance in March 2003 Poro members carried out a masquerade to celebrate initiation on the streets of Waterloo in the capital district without prior warning, causing public outrage²³. Many residents felt intimidated and fled the area, traders abandoned their goods. Residents expressed the view that Poro initiations belong in the provinces and should not be brought to the Western area.²⁴

Political influence

A human rights forum publication reports that to become a leader in regular society, a person must first achieve a position of leadership within a secret society,²⁵

“The interconnectedness of secret society hierarchy and the structure of leadership in the open communities are particularly clear in districts like Kailahun, where anyone hoping to become chief must first have membership and prestige within the Poro society.”²⁶

¹⁷ Fanthorpe, R. (2007) *Sierra Leone: The Influence of the Secret Societies, with Special Reference to Female Genital Mutilation*. Writenet, Report commissioned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/46cee3152.html> (accessed 6 March 2009).

¹⁸ Alterman, O., Binienda, A., Rodella, S. and Varzi, K. (2002) *The Law People See: The Status of Dispute Resolution in the Provinces of Sierra Leone in 2002*, A National Forum for Human Rights Publications. Available from http://www.daco-sl.org/encyclopedia/8_lib/8_3/research/lawpeoplesee.pdf (accessed 6 March 2009).

¹⁹ Fanthorpe, R. (2007) *Sierra Leone: The Influence of the Secret Societies, with Special Reference to Female Genital Mutilation*. Writenet, Report commissioned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/46cee3152.html> (accessed 6 March 2009).

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ David M. Rosen, *Armies of the Young*, Rutgers University Press, 2005, p. 69.

²² Fanthorpe, R. (2007) *Sierra Leone: The Influence of the Secret Societies, with Special Reference to Female Genital Mutilation*. Writenet, Report commissioned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/46cee3152.html> (accessed 6 March 2009).

²³ Standard Times (Freetown), “Abuse of secret society in Waterloo”, 20 March 2003. Available from http://www.accessmylibrary.com/coms2/summary_0286-22756220_ITM (accessed 6 March 2009).

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Alterman, O., Binienda, A., Rodella, S. and Varzi, K. (2002) *The Law People See: The Status of Dispute Resolution in the Provinces of Sierra Leone in 2002*, A National Forum for Human Rights Publications. Available from http://www.daco-sl.org/encyclopedia/8_lib/8_3/research/lawpeoplesee.pdf (accessed 6 March 2009).

²⁶ Ibid.

Dr Fanthorpe states that “men and women winning seats in parliament and jobs in government are expected to stay loyal to their home communities and direct state resources towards these communities. The secret societies remain a fundamental, albeit unspoken, factor in these informal political pacts. Few politicians that were not initiated in the localities they wish to represent can expect to win elections and once in office they are expected to provide job opportunities for fellow initiates.”²⁷

Dr Fanthorpe reports that secret societies have become more ‘secret’ as a result of these tensions between civic governance and local loyalties.²⁸

In rural areas Paramount Chiefs are leading political figures, they authorize all initiation rites in their chieftdom and are expected to serve as patrons, attending the rites and contributing to their costs. According to Dr Fanthorpe senior politicians and bureaucrats often play a similar role. Alliances with village chiefs and society leaders allows the politically ambitious to secure command over local youth.²⁹ Fanthorpe further notes that “both of the major political parties have used this strategy for recruiting and disciplining political followers”. The prominent politician Aiah Abu Koroma from Kono was publicly honored in 2007 because he had paid for the initiation of boys and girls into the Poro and Sande since the 1970s. According to Sierra Leonian newspaper, the Awareness Times, a local chief described Koroma’s acts as having “helped in preserving Kono tradition and culture, which he noted are under “serious threat” from both western civilization and religious evangelism³⁰”.

In 2003 Dr Fanthorpe interviewed a Paramount Chief in central Sierra Leone who had used Poro society to recruit and train a loyal local defence force.³¹

During the civil war both pro government Kamajors and RUF rebel forces attempted to utilize the Poro society for military and political ends.³² Dr Fanthorpe also reports that threats have been made to use the Poro society membership to influence the outcome of post war elections.³³

Initiation rituals

Dr. Fanthorpe reports that secret society members are inducted through initiation, they are required to observe a range of laws and protocols, to assure the cooperation of spirit powers. Initiates must not speak about the society to non initiates and non initiates must not witness any society rituals.³⁴ Rituals take place in secluded clearings in the forest or on farmland. Some societies have the power to impose a curfew on a settlement whilst rituals take place demanding that all non initiatives remain indoors and shutter windows.³⁵

²⁷ Fanthorpe, R. (2007) *Sierra Leone: The Influence of the Secret Societies, with Special Reference to Female Genital Mutilation*. Writenet, Report commissioned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/46cee3152.html> (accessed 6 March 2009).

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid, p. 10.

³⁰ Awareness Times (Freetown) “Konos remember Aiah Abu Koroma in Sierra Leone”, 4 April 2007. Available from http://www.news.sl/drwebsite/publish/article_20055160.shtml (accessed 6 March 2009).

³¹ Fanthorpe, R. (2007) *Sierra Leone: The Influence of the Secret Societies, with Special Reference to Female Genital Mutilation*. Writenet, Report commissioned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), p11. Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/46cee3152.html> (accessed 6 March 2009).

³² Ibid, p. 11-12.

³³ Ibid, p. 12-13.

³⁴ Fanthorpe, R. (2007) *Sierra Leone: The Influence of the Secret Societies, with Special Reference to Female Genital Mutilation*. Writenet, Report commissioned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/46cee3152.html> (accessed 6 March 2009).

³⁵ Ibid,

Each local Poro group has a sacred place in the bush where initiation rituals take place. Initiation usually happens at puberty and marks not only admission into the society in itself, but also a rite of passage to adulthood.³⁶ In some cases initiation involves the payment of a fee by the family of the initiate or an external sponsor³⁷.

Boys are taught to become men learning traditional laws, customs, crafts, farming and spiritual knowledge. They undergo competitive tests of physical prowess and endurance.³⁸ A special emphasis is put on the initiate's ability to keep secrets³⁹. The young men are symbolically "killed" and eaten by the spirits, and then reborn as adults, prepared for life in society. The rituals involve the scarification of the body of the initiates.⁴⁰ The ordeal of initiation is severe, occasionally an initiate may die.⁴¹ Village chiefs and male elders usually organize the initiations, because initiation guarantees community membership families may feel beholden to the organizers. According to Dr Fanthorpe "elders may use that moral indebtedness to secure compliance with their decision making or claim resources from lower status families."⁴²

Methods of intimidation

Societies can place a taboo (i.e. curse or condemn) on any person or anything, including crops or livestock, which can exert a controlling effect on the entire community⁴³. The Poro Society has used symbols of witchcraft to intimidate community members⁴⁴ and has vandalized property and attacked families who refuse to participate in Poro society.⁴⁵ The Poro often abduct people that they intend to forcibly initiate.⁴⁶

Groups and individuals at risk of forced initiation in Freetown

In 2008 the US State Department (USSD) reported that men were forcibly initiated into secret societies. According to the USSD, the forced initiation of men usually includes circumcision.⁴⁷

³⁶ Jean Sybil La Fontaine, (1986) *Initiation*, Manchester University Press ND; Fanthorpe, R. (2007) *Sierra Leone: The Influence of the Secret Societies, with Special Reference to Female Genital Mutilation*. Writenet, Report commissioned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR). Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/46cee3152.html> (accessed 6 March 2009).

³⁷ Lavenda, R.H. and Schultz, E.A. (2007) *Anthropology: what does it mean to be human?*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

³⁸ Fanthorpe, R. (2007) *Sierra Leone: The Influence of the Secret Societies, with Special Reference to Female Genital Mutilation*. Writenet, Report commissioned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/46cee3152.html> (accessed 6 March 2009).

³⁹ Lavenda, R.H. and Schultz, E.A. (2007) *Anthropology: what does it mean to be human?*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁴⁰ Fanthorpe, R. (2007) *Sierra Leone: The Influence of the Secret Societies, with Special Reference to Female Genital Mutilation*. Writenet, Report commissioned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), p4. Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/46cee3152.html> (accessed 6 March 2009).

⁴¹ Jean Sybil La Fontaine, (1986) *Initiation*, Manchester University Press ND, p. 98.

⁴² Fanthorpe, R. (2007) *Sierra Leone: The Influence of the Secret Societies, with Special Reference to Female Genital Mutilation*. Writenet, Report commissioned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), p10, Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/46cee3152.html> (accessed 6 March 2009).

⁴³ Lavenda, R.H. and Schultz, E.A. (2007) *Anthropology: what does it mean to be human?*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

⁴⁴ Awareness Times, APC MP Tells 'Poro' to Manhandle Makeni Carpenter :Elected Lawmaker Exhibits Sheer Lawlessness in Sierra Leone, 21 April 2008, http://news.sl/drwebsite/publish/printer_20058300.shtml.

⁴⁵ Awoko, Poro men hunt activist son, 15 August 2007, <http://awoko.org/index.php?mact=News,cntnt01,detail,0&cntnt01articleid=2741&cntnt01returnid=15>.

⁴⁶ Awareness Times (Freetown), "Muslims clashes with Poro Society in Kailahun, Sierra Leone", 29 January 2007. Available from http://www.news.sl/drwebsite/publish/article_20054619.shtml (accessed 6 March 2009); United States Department of State (2006/2007/2008) US Department of State Country Reports on Human Rights Practices.

⁴⁷ United States Department of State (2006) US Department of State Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2005 – Sierra Leone. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61591.htm> (accessed 6 March 2009).

Members of different religions (young people and religious leaders, especially when open critics of Poro)⁴⁸, teachers⁴⁹, public servants and politicians⁵⁰ are amongst those reported to have been forcibly initiated into Poro society. According to Dr Fanthorpe, trans-local religionists (e.g. 'stranger' groups, Muslims and Christians), socially marginalized youth and western area urban poor in Freetown are at risk of enforced membership of secret societies.⁵¹ He also states that government workers including school teachers, police, NGO workers and treasury clerks posted to rural areas may be at risk of forced initiation.⁵²

Dr Fanthorpe states that "people who speak out against the societies risk violent confrontation and forced initiation."⁵³ A news source reports that in some areas Poro society has adopted a policy of forced initiation of non members.⁵⁴

Due to the civil war and displacement, a large number of young people have not been initiated at the time they would traditionally required to be. According to Dr Fanthorpe "social pressure on young people to submit to initiation is considerable".⁵⁵

Some members of other religions, largely Christians and Muslims, are publicly opposed to the secret societies and openly criticize them.⁵⁶ There are several reports of Imams being abducted and forcibly initiated in Freetown and other major cities in the country,⁵⁷ according to Dr Fanthorpe these "are overtly political acts designed to intimidate and punish rather than convert".⁵⁸

Dr Fanthorpe states that in the countryside, teachers and public servants who are not born in the region are targeted to be initiated because secret societies' members want to ensure that their children receive "traditional" education and for their communities to receive support in the struggle for job opportunities⁵⁹. In March 2006, a teacher of the Makeni Comprehensive

⁴⁸ Awareness Times (Freetown), "Muslims clashes with Poro Society in Kailahun, Sierra Leone", 29 January 2007. Available from http://www.news.sl/drwebsite/publish/article_20054619.shtml (accessed 6 March 2009).

⁴⁹ Fanthorpe, R. (2007) *Sierra Leone: The Influence of the Secret Societies, with Special Reference to Female Genital Mutilation*. Writenet, Report commissioned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/46cee3152.html> (accessed 6 March 2009).

⁵⁰ Awareness Times (Freetown) "Former Makeni Town Council Chairman under death threat in Sierra Leone", 3 April 2006. Available from: http://www.news.sl/drwebsite/publish/article_20052087.shtml (accessed 6 March 2009); Standard Times (Freetown) "Defying State authority... Poro devil threatens Government workers", 20 September 2002. Cited on Fanthorpe, R., (2007) *Sierra Leone: The Influence of the Secret Societies, with Special Reference to Female Genital Mutilation*. Writenet, Report commissioned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

⁵¹ Fanthorpe, R. (2007) *Sierra Leone: The Influence of the Secret Societies, with Special Reference to Female Genital Mutilation*. Writenet, Report commissioned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), p14-15 Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/46cee3152.html> (accessed 6 March 2009).

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid; Awoko, Poro men hunt activist son, 15 August 2007. Available from: <http://awoko.org/index.php?mact=News,cntnt01,detail,0&cntnt01articleid=2741&cntnt01returnid=15> (accessed 6 March 2009).

⁵⁴ Awareness Times (Freetown), "Muslims clashes with Poro Society in Kailahun, Sierra Leone", 29 January 2007. Available from http://www.news.sl/drwebsite/publish/article_20054619.shtml (accessed 6 March 2009).

⁵⁵ Fanthorpe, R. (2007) *Sierra Leone: The Influence of the Secret Societies, with Special Reference to Female Genital Mutilation*. Writenet, Report commissioned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), p14 Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/46cee3152.html> (accessed 6 March 2009).

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ United States Department of State (2006) US Department of State Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2005 – Sierra Leone. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61591.htm> (accessed 6 March 2009); Awareness Times (Freetown), "Muslims clashes with Poro Society in Kailahun, Sierra Leone", 29 January 2007. Available from http://www.news.sl/drwebsite/publish/article_20054619.shtml (accessed 6 March 2009).

⁵⁸ Fanthorpe, R. (2007) *Sierra Leone: The Influence of the Secret Societies, with Special Reference to Female Genital Mutilation*. Writenet, Report commissioned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), p. 18. Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/46cee3152.html> (accessed 6 March 2009).

⁵⁹ Ibid, p. 19.

Academy was abducted and forcibly initiated into Poro at the behest of the locally born school bursar.⁶⁰

There are several reported cases where the police have been informed about abductions but have been unable to prevent the forced initiation of those held captive, in some instances the police response has been to refer the matter to local chiefs.⁶¹

In 2006 the USSD reported a case of forced initiation despite police intervention “in March and April the Poro Society in Manowa Kailahun District attempted to forcefully initiate a man into the society. The man ran away and reported the matter to the police, who deferred to the local paramount chief. The paramount chief then allowed Poro members to drag the man out of his home, beat him, and initiate him into their secret society.”⁶²

There have been several reports of Muslims being targeted by the Poro for forced initiation. In 2005 there were reports that Poro society in Kailahun town in eastern Sierra Leone restricted the movement of Muslim traders and forced some to undergo initiation.⁶³ In 2005 it was reported that an Imam, near Bo, protested the forced initiation of a local Muslim man. The USSD reports that the Imam was abducted, when called to investigate the Sierra Leone Police referred the case to chieftom authorities. The Imam reappeared after several weeks and had been forcefully initiated into Poro society. The Freetown-based Council of the Imams registered a complaint about the issue, the chiefs apologized about the incident but the matter was not referred to court.⁶⁴

In January 2007 the Awareness Times reported increased tension between Muslims and Poro members in Pendembu town in Kailahun District. Several Imams, Sheiks and Muslim youths were abducted and forcibly initiated into Poro society. The Awareness Times reports that this was a response to Islamic preaching against the society’s practices and that the Poro society have consequently adopted a policy of forced initiation of non members, including religious leaders.⁶⁵

Government attitudes to Poro society and forced initiations

According to the CRI Project, the government has taken little action to curb Poro activities in relation to forced initiation.⁶⁶ CRI state that abduction and forced initiation affects freedom of movement across the country. In its analysis of safety concerns for returned Sierra Leoneans the CRI Project states that,

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ United States Department of State (2007) *U.S. Department of State Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2006 – Sierra Leone*. Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/45f0567c2f.html> (accessed 6 March 2009); United States Department of State (2006) *US Department of State Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2005– Sierra Leone*. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61591.htm> (accessed 6 March 2009); Awareness Times (Freetown), “Muslims clashes with Poro Society in Kailahun, Sierra Leone”, 29 January 2007. Available from http://www.news.sl/drwebsite/publish/article_20054619.shtml (accessed 6 March 2009).

⁶² United States Department of State (2007) *U.S. Department of State Country Report on Human Rights Practices 2006 – Sierra Leone*. Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/45f0567c2f.html> (accessed 6 March 2009).

⁶³ Fanthorpe, R. (2007) *Sierra Leone: The Influence of the Secret Societies, with Special Reference to Female Genital Mutilation*. Writenet, Report commissioned by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), p17 Available from: <http://www.unhcr.org/refworld/docid/46cee3152.html> (accessed 6 March 2009).

⁶⁴ United States Department of State (2006) *US Department of State Country Reports on Human Rights Practices 2005– Sierra Leone*. Available from: <http://www.state.gov/g/drl/rls/hrrpt/2005/61591.htm> (accessed 6 March 2009).

⁶⁵ Awareness Times (Freetown), “Muslims clashes with Poro Society in Kailahun, Sierra Leone”, 29 January 2007. Available from: http://www.news.sl/drwebsite/publish/article_20054619.shtml (accessed 6 March 2009).

⁶⁶ Country of Return Information Project, Country Sheet: Sierra Leone, Bo and Kono District, 2007, p. 7. Available from: <http://www.cri-project.eu/cs/cs-sierra-leone-en.pdf> (accessed 6 March 2009).

“Another obstacle to internal travel comes from the *poro* society (secret society) during the initiation season, when members are not allowed to move freely upon risk to be captured and forcefully initiated. Successive governments have made little effort to change this picture either because the practice is so deeply embedded in the culture of the people or because politicians fear losing the votes of the people if they attempt to ban it, or both. Caution has to be taken during this season if you are a non-initiate.”⁶⁷ [An initiation season may last for 6 months].⁶⁸

According to the Awareness Times, an MP ordered Poro society members to intimidate a tradesman in Makeni City and a police officer who intervened in the case.⁶⁹

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Jean Sybil La Fontaine, (1986) *Initiation*, Manchester University Press ND, p. 97.

⁶⁹ Awareness Times, APC MP Tells ‘Poro’ to Manhandle Makeni Carpenter :Elected Lawmaker Exhibits Sheer Lawlessness in Sierra Leone, 21 April 2008. Available from: http://news.sl/drwebsite/publish/printer_20058300.shtml (accessed 6 March 2009).

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