

Among the Mende in Sierra Leone

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The letters from Sjoerd Hofstra (1934-36)

Edited and translated by

Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra

ASC Occasional Publication 19

Published by:

Afrika-Studiecentrum

P.O. Box 9555

2300 RB Leiden

asc@ascleiden.nl

www.ascleiden.nl

Cover photo: Masqueraders, Panguma 1936

Copyright photos: Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra

Printed by Ipskamp Drukkers, Enschede

ISBN: 978-90-5448-138-6

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Acknowledgements

This book came about with the help of colleagues, friends and family. I wish to thank them all. Peter Geschiere (University of Amsterdam) gave me valuable advice with respect to publicizing Sjoerd Hofstra's – my father's – Sierra Leone letters. Paul Richards (Wageningen University) and his Mende wife Esther Yei Mokuwa were wonderful hosts, offering me a lovely Mende meal. Paul informed me, moreover, about anthropological Mende research and research on the history of the International Institute for African Languages and Cultures (the present IAI) in London. Both Paul and Esther assisted me in solving Mende language problems and tracing the meaning of some of my father's fieldwork photographs. I received similar and equally welcome help from respectively Mariane C. Ferme (University of California at Berkeley) for Mende language problems and Paul Basu (University College London) for the photographs.

Michael W. Young (biographer of Malinowski, Australian National University), Sue Donnelly (archivist London School of Economics) and Linda Blackwood (Senior Helpdesk Assistant, New College Library, Edinburgh) provided me with information about respectively the Malinowski papers, the archives of the IALC (IAI) and the Oldham Manuscripts collection.

When I was still considering the publication of an article on my father's Sierra Leone letters in the journal *Africa*, I received useful comments by two external readers and by David Pratten (Oxford University), editor of this journal. Substantial parts of the revised version of this article have been included in this book.

I am also grateful for the intellectual feedback of the study group '(Auto)biography' of the Huizinga Institute for Cultural History, chaired by Rudolf Dekker (formerly Erasmus University Rotterdam). Dick Foeken (African Studies Centre, Leiden), Publication Manager of the African Studies Centre, has been very helpful in making the publication of this book possible. I also wish to thank Nel de Vink for drawing the maps and Mieke Zwart for the layout.

My friends Linda Hunt, Robbert Wetselaar and Edward Coales did a formidable and indispensable job with the correction of my English. My daughter-in-law, Melanie Imming, was a great help to me when it came to fixing the correct layout format and processing the photographs. The contribution of my sons Joost and Thomas Gijswijt was twofold: not only did they give welcome comments on my unpublished article but, still more importantly, they also encouraged me to overcome my reticence to publish my father's letters.

Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra

Foreword

Sjoerd Hofstra was one of three anthropologists sent to British West Africa in the 1930s by the International African Institute, to implement a programme of “deep immersion” fieldwork, mentored by Bronislaw Malinowski. Hofstra's residence in Panguma, Lower Bambara chiefdom, in eastern Sierra Leone (amounting to 21 months in all) was cut short by Blackwater Fever. Monographs by his peers, Frederick Nadel and Meyer Fortes, appeared in the 1940s. Isolated in The Netherlands by the German war-time occupation, and inhibited by what he felt to be the incompleteness of his field exposure, Hofstra never completed an intended book-length study of the Mende. What we have instead is perhaps more interesting and valuable. A student of the Berlin phenomenologist Alfred Vierkant, Hofstra was already doubtful about Malinowskian functionalism. Frequent and extensive letters from the field to his adoptive mother richly document his unfolding responses to Mende life-worlds, in anticipation of later phenomenological perspectives on ethnography. Events are recounted in ways that preserve their local contextual coherence. Hofstra is as interested in the commonalities of the two life worlds linked by his letters (Dutch and Mende domesticity) as in differences, and is scathing about those who write consciously dramatic accounts of “primitive” culture. The findings are often striking. He explains to his mother how ideas about sin, sickness and purification are subtly inter-related in Mende thought, as the voice of conscience, outside the confines of the law as administered in chiefdom courts. Some observations are unique. Only Hofstra documents a belief that human illness can result from wanton cruelty to animals, even though Mende attachment to their domestic animals (not least their dogs) is an observable fact. No one has quite so clearly described chiefly aristocracy among the Mende, especially in regard to freedom enjoyed by the sisters of chiefs, or the graded and intercalated nature of power exercised through secret societies. Hofstra was inducted into the highest grade of the Poro society, but makes no fuss about this (and reveals no secrets, even to his mother). Poro membership seems to have come as a natural consequence of the high level of acceptance and respect he was accorded by Panguma's inhabitants. This, then, is more than a footnote to the history of anthropology. Hofstra's letters from the field are his ethnography incarnate. The letters have been edited, translated and contextualized by Hofstra's daughter, a distinguished social historian, and their value further enhanced by the inclusion of Hofstra's four published papers on the Mende, three of which are otherwise hard to find. The book will be read with pleasure and profit by those with an interest in Sierra Leone and African societies more generally, including by Mende people themselves. It deserves also to become a key reference in debates in anthropology about the nature and purpose of ethnographic writing. Here is the anthropologist unadorned - frank, straightforward, subtle and humane.

Paul Richards

Map 1 Sierra Leone and the Mende area¹



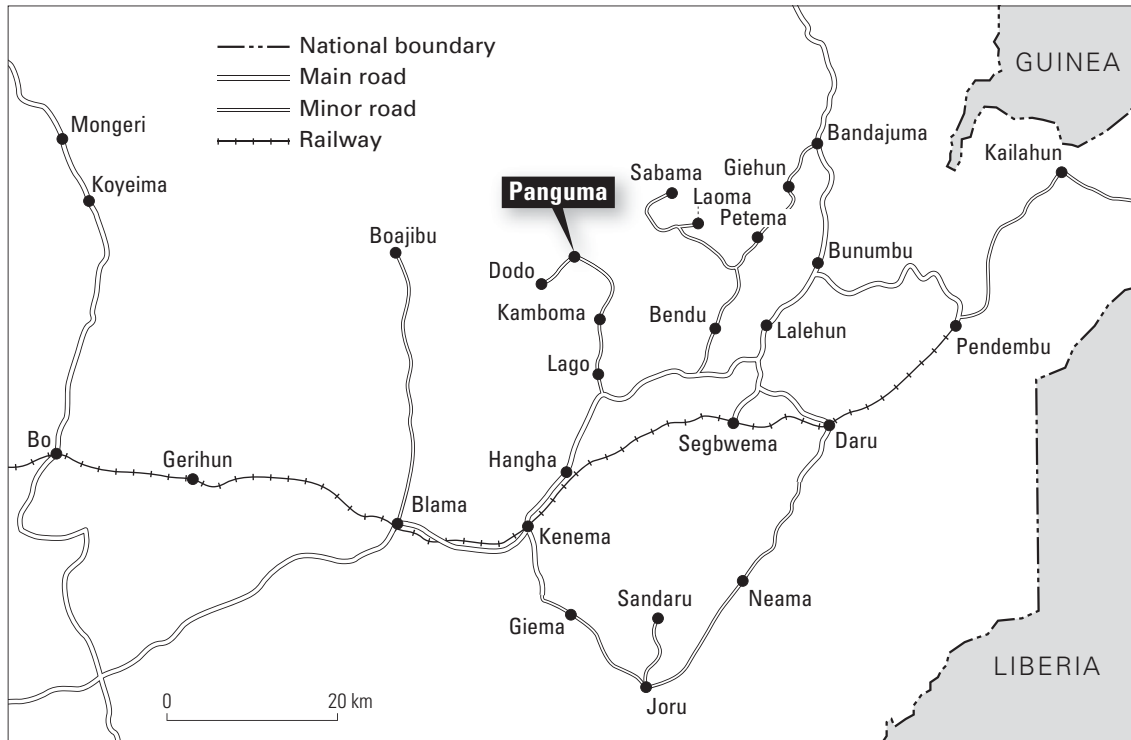
¹ From Harris & Sawyerr (1968).

Map 1 Sierra Leone and the Mende area¹



¹ From Harris & Sawyerr (1968).

Map 2 The north-eastern part of the Mende area



PROLOGUE

Introduction

Prelude to Africa

'Now the journey has finally begun. It is strange that, after having thought of it for about three years, it suddenly confronts you.' When he wrote these words in early January 1934, Sjoerd Hofstra was on his way to Sierra Leone where he was going to carry out anthropological fieldwork among the Mende. Where he would stay and how he would further proceed were matters he would decide after his arrival.



Photo 1.1 Sjoerd Hofstra, c.1932

Sjoerd Hofstra (1898-1983), a Dutch anthropologist and sociologist who had studied with Sebald R. Steinmetz in Amsterdam, and subsequently with Diedrich H. Westermann (African languages) and Alfred Vierkandt (sociology) in Berlin, was appointed Fellow of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures (IILAC) in London

with a one year stipend from the Rockefeller Foundation, starting in October 1932. He attended Bronislaw K. Malinowski's and Charles G. Seligman's seminars and submitted an initial plan of research in West Africa (December 1932) while completing his doctoral dissertation on differentiation and personality in some African groups under the supervision of Steinmetz (Hofstra 1933). While staying in Oberbozen, Italy, in 1933 together with Guenter Wagner, he assisted Malinowski in preparing the manuscript of *Coral Gardens* (Malinowski 1935). He also co-authored a joint memorandum (October 1933) on anthropological fieldwork in West Africa with the South-African Meyer Fortes (1906-1983) and the Austrian S. Frederick Nadel (1903-1956). 'The Mandarins', as Malinowski called them collectively (Stocking 1995: 422; Kuper 1995: 71), were awarded a research grant by the Rockefeller Foundation and thus became Rockefeller research fellows of the IIALC when they left for Africa in late 1933 or early 1934. Fortes did his research amongst the Tallensi in the Gold Coast (Fortes 1945 and 1949), Nadel amongst the Nupe in Northern Nigeria (Nadel 1942), while Hofstra went to the Mende in Sierra Leone, thereby being the first Dutch anthropologist to do fieldwork in Africa.

Hofstra's first stay in Sierra Leone lasted from January 1934 until March 1935, three months longer than originally planned, due to a severe illness – blackwater fever, a complication of malaria tropica – and the subsequent process of recovery from early May to late July 1934. During his second stay with the Mende, from May to September 1936, accompanied this time by his newly-wedded Dutch wife, he again developed symptoms of blackwater fever and was advised to return to Europe. Because of his health problems in the tropics and subsequent appointments in the Dutch museum and academic sector his research remained unfinished.¹ He therefore never got round to publishing the planned treatise on the Mende, although he did publish four articles on the Mende in English (Hofstra 1937a, 1937b, 1940a, 1942a).

In addition to Hofstra's initial plan of research, the joint memorandum of Fortes, Nadel and Hofstra, a few Reports on Fieldwork by Hofstra for the IIALC and his published articles, the present editor – his daughter – possesses a rather special collection of long, bi-weekly letters to his adoptive mother, Maria Frederica Overdiep-Ham (1878-1968).² These contain valuable first-hand information about his fieldwork amongst the Mende. Being the childless widow of a bank director and by profession a district nurse and, later, director of a convalescent home for nurses, Mrs Overdiep had paid for Hofstra's studies and was deeply interested in his personal welfare and professional experiences. Hofstra's letters to Mrs Overdiep – Moeteke as he called her – provide us with a unique look behind the scenes of anthropological fieldwork at the time, including the ways in which anthropological knowledge was 'produced'. They also demonstrate the extent to which the fieldwork was directed by or deviated from the original research plans.³

What follows in this introductory chapter is a brief discussion of the 'take-off' of professional anthropological fieldwork in Africa and short accounts of the research

¹ See chapter 9.

² These letters were among my father's belongings and came into my possession in 2004, when his second wife moved to an old people's home.

³ See chapter 8.

plans of Fortes, Nadel and Hofstra and of Hofstra's further preparations in London for his fieldwork in Sierra Leone. The chapter concludes with a few remarks about the nature of Hofstra's letters, the way in which they have been edited, and the contents of this volume.

Anthropological fieldwork in colonial Africa: A British based international enterprise

From the 1980s onwards, the history of social anthropology in general and British social anthropology in particular has enjoyed an increasing popularity among anthropologists (see, for example, Kuper 1983 (revised edition 1995), Kuklick 1991, Moore 1994, Goody 1995, Stocking 1995, Shumaker 2001, Young 2004, Mills 2008). The interwar period, and especially the 1930s, represents an important phase in the development of social anthropology. It was during this period that British based anthropologists began to carry out anthropological fieldwork in colonial Africa. The International Institute of African Languages and Cultures (later the IAI) in London, founded in 1926, was instrumental in initiating and funding anthropological fieldwork in Africa (Kuper 1983/1995, Kuklick 1991, Goody 1995, Stocking 1995, Mills 2008). Frederick, Lord Lugard, the British advocate of indirect rule, was chairman of the IALC's international Executive Council. When Hofstra was appointed Fellow of the IALC, the French ethnologist Henri Labouret and the German linguist and ethnologist Westermann formed the directorate along with Joseph H. Oldham (the administrative director) in London. As Secretary of the International Missionary Council (1921-1938), Oldham, together with the missionary Edwin W. Smith, had promoted the founding of the IALC through his fund raising efforts. The American Rockefeller Foundation became the IALC's main sponsor. Malinowski (London School of Economics) also played a crucial role in this process: his plea for practical applications of anthropology fell on to fertile soil. The underlying assumption was that fieldwork in Africa would and should produce useful knowledge: useful to colonial authorities and other interested parties, including missionaries. Knowledge about the effects of culture contact between African and European civilizations in a colonial context was considered to be especially useful. While Malinowski *cum suis* had considerable success with this strategy – the Rockefeller Foundation funded a substantial five-year programme of research at the IALC – it remains to be seen to what extent anthropological knowledge of this particular kind was indeed produced and if so, how and by whom it was applied in actual practice. However, there are sufficient indications that the programmatic intentions and aims of 'practical anthropology' were at best only partly realized (Kuper 1995: 107, Stocking 1995: 368, 419-420, Mills 2008: 53-54).⁴

British anthropology in the inter-war period was, much more than the adjective British suggests, a fairly international enterprise as far as anthropological research in Africa was concerned. Malinowski came from Poland, though he became a British subject in 1931, two decades after his arrival in England. The IALC, an institute with the adjective international in its title, not only had Council members from abroad, a French

⁴ Hofstra's letters and articles on the Mende contain only sporadic information on this subject.

and a German co-director and American funding, but also attracted quite a few foreign (research) fellows of whom Malinowski's 'Mandarins' Fortes, Nadel and Hofstra were by no means the only ones (Goody 1995: 27). In Hofstra's case it was co-director Westermann who recommended his former student to Malinowski and the IIALC.

Malinowski may well have had strategic reasons for emphasizing the value of 'practical anthropology' in colonial administration. Moreover, in his LSE seminars on methods of fieldwork he advocated 'functionalism', as opposed to evolutionism or diffusionism as the most fruitful approach to study and understand societies, cultures and the impact of external contact. The basic assumption of functionalism consisted of the idea that the various parts of a culture serve particular needs and thereby fulfil a positive function for the culture as a whole (Hofstra 1946, Firth 1957, Kuper 1983/1995, Kuklick 1991, Goody 1995, Stocking 1995, Shumaker 2001). Indeed, according to Malinowski, the functionalist method was a *sine qua non* for 'practical anthropology'. It is therefore hardly surprising that Fortes, Nadel and Hofstra, the first group of Rockefeller IIALC research fellows, presented themselves in their research plans as adherents of this approach.

The research plans of Fortes, Nadel and Hofstra

Fortes, Nadel and Hofstra submitted individual research plans in the course of 1932 – Fortes in March, Nadel and Hofstra in December (Goody 1995: 159-173). In October 1933, a few months before they left for West Africa, they produced a joint memorandum on methodological problems which included appendices with diagrammatic schemes for the study of particular subjects (Goody 1995: 173-190). Their individual research plans of 1932 are, according to present standards, relatively brief and fairly general, especially the one by Hofstra, who joined the IIALC last. As the title of Fortes' research plan set out, he intended to focus on 'A psychological approach to the study of African society: the social development of the African child'. He suggested the Northern Territories of the Gold Coast as the most suitable area for his research (Goody 1995: 161-165). Nadel proposed research in the Territory of Northern Nigeria, either in Nupe country or amongst the Bauchi hill tribes. He planned to concentrate on cultural contact between different tribes, cultural change and the impact of colonisation. He also wanted to investigate native music and dance (Goody 1995: 166-171).

Hofstra opened his plan of research with the firm statement that his approach to the problems he would like to investigate would be the functional method, 'as presented by Professor Malinowski'. Hofstra considered this method to be the most fertile one for fieldwork. 'It will therefore be my aim', he continued, 'to study in the most concrete way possible the functional relationship between the different social phenomena connected with the subject.' Hofstra submitted three problems in which he was especially interested. Firstly 'the influence of Mohammedanism on primitive communities, especially in West Africa'. Under this heading he proposed to deal with the effect of Mohammedanism on family life, economics, law, religion, morals and knowledge. He suggested French West Africa, but Nigeria, Sierra Leone, the Ivory Coast or the Gold Coast would be suitable as well. The second problem submitted by Hofstra concerned the social conditions prevalent in Sierra Leone. This line of research would

include a comparison of 'certain social conditions among various groups, taking first Freetown and the Coast population; second, the primitive tribes in the Central and Southern Provinces (Mendis, Veis and so on) and third, the Mandingo in the Northern Province.' The third problem in which Hofstra was interested was 'The place of individuality among primitive peoples', to be investigated among one of the Mandingo speaking peoples (Goody 1995: 171-173). Similarly to Nadel, who suggested research in either Nupe country or amongst the Bauchi hill tribes, Hofstra submitted three possible lines of research. Apparently it was up to the officers of the IIALC to decide which one was to be chosen. Moreover, in the case of Hofstra it is interesting to note that the Mende only figured in his second line of research, and in addition only as one of several groups or tribes.

The joint memorandum of October 1933 was the result of discussions on matters of common interest between Fortes, Nadel and Hofstra and issues raised in the Seminars of Malinowski and Seligman during the previous year. In the accompanying letter to Oldham (IIALC), the authors of the memorandum further indicate that the 'areas we have chosen for our field work have many sociological features in common' – by that time the researchers themselves were apparently allowed and/or able to make this choice! They explained that the three chosen (but in the letter and the memorandum unnamed) areas had linguistic affinities, similar forms and functions of the family, a largely uniform type of political organisation, and a similar history of contact with foreign cultures. They continued to say that their main efforts had been directed towards working out a methodological approach which would eventually enable them to compare the results of their fieldwork. They had focussed on three broad methodological problems: 1. the classification of social facts, 2. the problem of establishing the functions and interrelations of social institutions and their 'powers of resistance' to foreign influences, and 3. the problem of investigating the psychological and biological factors in social institutions and social relations (Goody 1995: 174). These methodological problems were further discussed in the joint memorandum (Goody 1995: 175-178). The appendices with diagrammatic schemes – 'as suggested by Professor Malinowski in his seminar' – concerned the study of the African family, the investigation of religious institutions, and the study of secret societies. They were written by Fortes, Nadel and Hofstra respectively (Goody 1995: 179-190).

Compared with the initial research plans, the joint memorandum bears witness to common aims and methods, although on a fairly abstract level. The authors of the memorandum emphasized the aim of comparative research in West Africa in a British colonial setting. For that purpose they had selected peoples with a common linguistic and cultural background. They intended to study both language and culture in all its aspects, while paying special attention to the effects of culture contact, especially between African and European civilizations. They moreover advocated the functional method à la Malinowski, and they also followed in Malinowski's footsteps in that they made an effort to present schemes of factors which they deemed relevant for specific cultural phenomena and their interrelations. While they all planned to make comprehensive studies of the people in 'their' regions, each of them also claimed his own special field of interest, as may partly be deduced from their individual research plans and

their diagrammatic schemes. It is, however, interesting to note that no formal updates of the individual research plans seem to have been required or at any rate produced. The further development of these initial research plans took place in a more informal way, undocumented for future generations.⁵

Further preparations for fieldwork in Sierra Leone

In London, Hofstra made a start with learning the Mende language with the help of C.M. Alleney, a Mende man. Apparently, the idea was that their co-operation would be continued in Sierra Leone, but Alleney failed to show up there.⁶ In addition to getting instructions and information from Alleney, it goes without saying that Hofstra will also have consulted the then available literature on Sierra Leone and the Mende, or Mendi as they were called at the time.

Publications on Sierra Leone and the Mende were still scarce.⁷ But they did contain some basic information about the history and the actual state of the country. As a British colony Sierra Leone owed its origin and Freetown its name to philanthropic efforts in 1787-88 to find a home for freed African slaves and the black poor from Britain. In 1808, Sierra Leone was made a Crown Colony, consisting of the Sierra Leone peninsula and some islands along the coast. In this same year the British abolished the slave trade. The abolition of all slavery in the British Empire followed in 1834. Freetown also attracted ex-slaves from the United States and the Caribbean and, after 1808, West and Central Africans who were freed from slave ships – some 70,000 altogether. Those born in the Colony were called Creoles or Krio. From the early nineteenth century onwards, missionaries were increasingly active in Sierra Leone, spreading Christianity and providing education. In 1827, Fourah Bay College was founded by the Church Missionary Society, for the purpose of training Africans as schoolmasters, catechists and clergymen.

In 1896, the British brought the outlying territories of Sierra Leone under British protection with indirect rule. They divided the Protectorate into five administrative districts, of which three were wholly or largely inhabited by Mende. Each district came under the jurisdiction of a District Commissioner. The Protectorate Ordinance of 1896 'also enacted that slave-dealing was unlawful and that slaves might purchase their freedom for a fixed sum' (Little 1967: 46). It would, however, take another thirty-one years before domestic slavery in the Protectorate was formally banned (Ferme 2001:

⁵ Neither the archives of the IALC (IAI) nor the Malinowski Papers in the Archives and Rare Books Library of the London School of Economics seem to contain further information on this matter. Accounts of the papers presented at Malinowski's seminars have not been made or kept. With thanks to Sue Donnelly, archivist LSE, and Michael W. Young, biographer of Malinowski. The Index of the Oldham Manuscripts collection has no entry for Sjoerd Hofstra. With thanks to Linda Blackwood, Senior Helpdesk Assistant, New College Library, Edinburgh.

⁶ Letter Hofstra to Overdiep, 18-3-1934.

⁷ See, for example, official publications like Goddard 1925, the annual reports on the social and economic progress of the people of Sierra Leone, published by the Colonial Office from 1931 onwards, and issues of *Sierra Leone Studies*, dating from the 1920s and printed and published by the Government of Sierra Leone. And further: Alldridge 1910, Newland 1916, Thomas 1916, Sumner 1917, Migeod 1926 and Utting 1931.

81). Soon after the foundation of the Protectorate, in 1898, the Mende Rising took place, also called the Hut or House Tax War because of the British imposition of taxes which sparked off the insurrection (Little 1967: 43-59). In 1895 the government had started building a railway line, running eastward from Freetown, and reaching Pendembu, close to the Liberian frontier in 1908 (Hofstra 1937b: 106). It would be finally dismantled in 1974 (Ferme 2001: 33-35), thirteen years after Sierra Leone gained its independence in 1961.

In the mid-1930s, the Mende, living in the central and eastern part of Sierra Leone, numbered some 600,000 people. They constituted the largest 'tribal' group in the Protectorate. Their main economic activities were the cultivation of rice, their staple crop and food, and gathering the fruits of the oil-palm, to provide oil for food and kernels for export. The Mende lived in small towns and villages. The country was divided into chiefdoms with political and juridical functions. The family system was a mixture of patrilineal and matrilineal traits; it was patrilocal and polygyny was widely practised. Secret societies played 'an important part in education, political life, and magic' (Hofstra 1937a: 437-438).

More about the letters and this volume

The letters from Sjoerd Hofstra to his adoptive mother, M.F. Overdiep-Ham (Moeteke), can be described as informal, often intimate conversations, devoid of literary pretensions. In addition to his professional experiences as an anthropologist, both his own health and that of his adoptive mother and the weather conditions are ever recurring topics. Details about the mail service also figure prominently, which isn't surprising given the fact that the regular mail service was bi-weekly and that the mail to and from Europe took about ten days. The distance, which could only partly be bridged by writing letters to each other, was considered to be a serious problem by Sjoerd Hofstra and his adoptive mother.⁸

Sjoerd and Moeteke – as I'll call them here to save space – first met in 1922 or early 1923, when Sjoerd was ill and Moeteke came to see him in her role of district nurse. At that time Sjoerd worked as a journalist for a Friesian newspaper. Moeteke, who had lost her husband in early 1921 and didn't have children of her own, soon realized that it would be worthwhile for Sjoerd, who was then in his mid-twenties and twenty years younger than herself, to study at a university. She was in a position to pay for this, beginning with a stay by Sjoerd in Paris (1923-24) and thereafter at the University of Amsterdam, where he graduated in 1930. Together, they also made short trips to Switzerland, Germany and England. Both of them were vegetarian, teetotal and practised natural healing. Moeteke supported pacifism. Whether Sjoerd, like his elder brother Douwe, would have become a conscientious objector if he hadn't been declared unfit for military service, is something I don't know. Anyway, Moeteke and Sjoerd became deeply attached to each other, a relationship which they themselves declared as one between a mother and her son, but which had also the characteristics of a very close

⁸ The letters from Mrs Overdiep to Sjoerd Hofstra are also in my possession.

friendship. Sjoerd's own mother died in 1930; his father, a Friesian carpenter and a small building contractor, would live until 1941.

After his studies in Amsterdam, Sjoerd spent a year in Berlin for his PhD research. Moeteke joined him there after she had resigned as director of a convalescent home for nurses near Utrecht in late 1930, a job which she had had since 1925. They continued living together after their return to The Netherlands: first in Aerdenhout, then in Driehuis where Moeteke bought a house next to close friends of hers. By that time, in October 1932, Sjoerd had moved to London and become a Fellow of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures.

This short explanation of the relationship between Sjoerd and Moeteke may be helpful when reading Sjoerd's letters to Moeteke. By the time that Sjoerd went to Sierra Leone, they had spent much time together and when they weren't together, for example when Sjoerd stayed in London, they wrote letters to each other on an almost daily basis or at least three times a week. This was no longer possible when Sjoerd was in Sierra Leone; bi-weekly letters was their ration from then on. However, Sjoerd did



Photo 1.2 Sjoerd Hofstra and M.F. Overdiep-Ham, Zandvoort 1926

his utmost to share his experiences with Moeteke. This makes the letters interesting reading, at least from an historical and anthropological point of view. For the Mende themselves the letters reveal a part of their own history.

The editing process of Sjoerd Hofstra's letters passed through three stages. To begin with, I typed out the original letters, which are, of course, in Dutch. I then selected passages to be removed for the English edition of the letters. These passages mostly concern the Dutch home front: questions and remarks regarding Moeteke herself and reactions to her news about family and friends. This resulted in a reduction from more than 135,000 words originally to nearly 119,000 words. The final stage of the editing process consisted of translating the letters in English, and annotating them where I thought this to be useful. The correction of the English was done by friends of mine. They are mentioned in the Acknowledgements. Photographs of Sjoerd's stay with the Mende, the majority of which were taken by himself, have been added to the text of the letters.

In addition to Sjoerd Hofstra's letters, which are to be found in Part I (chapters 2-5) and Part II (chapter 7), photocopies of his four articles on the Mende in English have been included in this volume. The introduction (chapter 1), an interlude about Sjoerd Hofstra's period in Europe in between his first and second journey to Sierra Leone (chapter 6), and an epilogue with information about the further course of the Mende project and reflections about the original research plans as compared to the outcomes (chapter 8) and Sjoerd Hofstra's later career (chapter 9) were written by myself.

PART I

The letters from Sjoerd Hofstra:
The first journey (January 1934 – March 1935)

To Freetown and on to Panguma (January 1934 – March 1935)

Tuesday evening [9 January 1934, last letter from London before leaving for Sierra Leone]

Dear Moeteke, [...]

Now I am nearly ready to leave. I have to take two suitcases after all; these are just about packed. These last few days have been fairly busy with all sorts of small purchases. At Shearns I bought some rather nice teas and also some aconite at the chemist's, etc. [...]

Yesterday evening I was a bit down and tonight too. I was really sad and was longing to be with you for a while. When one is very tired everything piles up, doesn't it? Now it is better again and one faces the inevitable, which will probably come good, but even so it is very difficult for us both.

This is the last letter from this house. This has been a good period, Moeteke. Often difficult, especially in the beginning, yet something to be grateful for. I will miss the room, I think. Indeed, there is of course so much to miss but one will also get much in return. [...]

It will be very difficult at first to have to be without regular messages from each other. Perhaps I will still be able to send you something tomorrow from Liverpool, Moeteke, but I am not sure. Or otherwise from Madeira. Today I have sent you as printed matter a guide about Africa. On the last visit at home¹ they asked me for something about Sierra Leone. There is nothing in German, but this guide at least contains a piece that gives an impression. Would you please send it on to Makkum. But I thought, perhaps you would like to have a look at it, especially the section about Madeira and Las Palmas. Today I had bad luck with the maps of Sierra Leone which I had ordered and collected. On the way I left them behind somewhere and I called at so many places after that. However, when I arrived home this evening, there was a telephone message from the firm where I had been for the camera, to tell me that they

¹ Home refers to Sjoerd Hofstra's father, brother and sister in Makkum.

were lying there. I'll write to them now; perhaps somebody can come to the railway station or otherwise they can post them. I'll then send you one too, Moeteke.

Bye bye dear, dear Moeteke, do be aware that I am with you, even if there won't be a letter for you for some time. [...]

Your own Child

Wednesday morning on the train [postmarked Liverpool, 10 January 1934]

My dear Moeteke,

Now the journey has finally begun. It is strange that, after having thought about it for some three years, it still comes upon you fairly suddenly. Of course I had only a short sleep last night. Still a bit late with packing. There are so many small things after all. Perhaps there is too much stuff but one has to experience it first in order to really know that.

How are you, dear Moeteke, and how is your cold? It is rotten that it won't be possible to hear from you for some time. [...]

The landscape on the route to Liverpool is rather ordinary, a bit hilly, but it is without colour on this sunless day. How I hope that there will soon be some sun in Holland. That makes all the difference. Wagner² came to see me off. That was friendly of him. For the rest everything was straightforward. The farewell at Mercury House³ was pleasant and warm. At the railway station you already get the feeling of making a big journey; all those suitcases with Destination Africa. And on the adjoining platform were all the suitcases that had been brought for Bombay. I am a bit nervous about the journey and the passengers. But it will all move along quickly. After ten days one will be there and the year there will also pass quickly. Now I'll close the letter, Moeteke, I don't know whether I can add a line in Liverpool later.

Your faithful Child

Wednesday afternoon on board [postmarked Liverpool, 11 January 1934]

My very dear Moeteke,

Now we are already some distance out at sea. What a wonderful experience. I was so pleased, Moeteke, that there was a letter from you. It was so reassuring to hear something from you. I am writing you another short letter. Soon the mail will depart from the ship. The letter will go with it. The ship looks very good. I have managed to get a cabin to myself, a very nice single cabin. I'll soon write more about it. Without additional payment. This is a very friendly arrangement by the officer concerned, for in fact the official rule is that one has to pay extra. I have also talked with the Chief Steward

² Guenter Wagner, a colleague anthropologist.

³ Mercury House, 43 Lancaster Road, NW3 London was Hofstra's London address.

about the food.⁴ He has promised me full co-operation. I can just say each time what I want to have. We'll see how it goes. The people here appear to be fairly friendly. At breakfast there are some twelve types of fruit, so the Steward said by way of reassurance.

From Zuske⁵ there was also a letter; wasn't that nice? And a telegram from Mrs English and the others at Mercury House and a card from Frau Nadel.⁶

I have sent the letter which I wrote to you on the train with the representative of Griffith Mcallister, with whom I bought my things, and who was briefly on board to give me my papers.

Now I am on the ship and not yet so far from the coast; it is as if I am not going so far away from you, Moeteke. But of course the distance is growing all the time. Will it also feel like this in a few days' time?

[...] Bye bye dear Moeteke [...]

Your Child.

Sunday morning [postmarked Plymouth, 20 January 1934]

Dear Moeteke,

Now it is already Sunday. I should so much like to be with you for a while, Moeteke. It already seems so long ago since we had our last Sunday together. And yet that's only two weeks ago. You'll be thinking [...] that we are in Madeira today. However, we'll arrive there early tomorrow. The ship has been slowed down by the wind. The sea has been very rough, especially on the first two days, Thursday and Friday. How the ship was rolling! I had thought that I would be a fairly good sailor, but this was too much for me. On Thursday I had to stay in bed. Just like almost everybody else. Today, most people are showing up again. Yesterday we passed through the Gulf of Biscay, where it was rather turbulent. It could have been worse, but the crew also found it pretty bad. Now we are in calm waters. Fortunately the portholes can be opened again and that instantly makes the air much more tolerable.

It is a strange feeling to be already almost sailing along the African coast, or at any rate to have left Europe. One can certainly feel that the temperature is improving. This morning for the first time the deck was bathed in sunshine. There was such a summery feeling. I am really looking forward to seeing Madeira tomorrow.

How are you, Moeteke? If only I could look in on you for a short while. You may be at Van den Bergh van Eysinga's⁷ sermon just now and you may have the Kossens⁸ in for

⁴ Sjoerd Hofstra was a vegetarian.

⁵ A niece of Mrs Overdiep.

⁶ S.F. Nadel's wife.

⁷ G.A. van den Bergh van Eysinga, a liberal parson of the Dutch Reformed Church at Santpoort. Hofstra met and married his youngest daughter Woutera Hendrika (Woutje) in 1935, after his first journey to Sierra Leone.

⁸ The Kossen family were great friends and neighbours of Mrs Overdiep.

coffee. How is your cold now, Moeteke? It feels rotten to have no message from you at this moment, but yet I feel confident that things are OK. [...]

One already begins to get to know the company here on board. Mr Vischer⁹ had provided me with an introduction to one of the passengers who is from the Education Department in Freetown, a Mr Lipscoomb [Lipscombe],¹⁰ a rather pleasant young man. However, because he was seasick for quite some time it was only yesterday that I could talk some more with him. I believe that he can be of use to me. Furthermore, the bishop¹¹ has done me the honour of visiting me in my cabin. A nice old man, who told me several interesting things. He'll leave us tomorrow in Madeira from where he'll first visit his parishioners in North Africa. He has a wide area of responsibility, but it does seem to me that it must be enjoyable to be a bishop in such a warm continent. In addition I have had a few talks with some passengers with whom I happened to sit at the tea table; everybody tends to read or to be in small groups. Anyway the weather has not yet been suitable for much getting together. I sit at a table with Mr Lipscombe, his wife, a few ladies whom he knows and a young missionary from the Gold Coast and his wife. This missionary is a very pleasant young man with whom I have already had several conversations. On Thursday, when I was in bed, he also came along a few times. He really is one of the better type of missionaries. He is an Irishman. Both Mr Lipscombe and he have just married and are bringing their wives with them. These ladies will both be in for a somewhat unusual life. So far they have been seasick for most of the time.

A few days on board like these is pleasant, especially when the sun is shining. Yet, I don't think I would much like to make a long sea voyage. One feels somewhat locked up with everyone. And the meals would then become somewhat monotonous, of course. In a hotel there is always a bit more variety. The steward for our table is very pleasant to me with respect to the food. He is really "charming". For the time being there is plenty of salad, fruit, etc., so it is going well. They all meet my wishes as much as possible. One has to depart from the menu a bit, for otherwise it is nearly all meat and fish, as you'll understand. Now there is a sermon. I'll go and have a look there.

In the afternoon. Such a sermon is very different from the ones Van den Bergh van Eysinga gives, as you'll understand. [...] Anyway, you know the English churches. The service was in the dining room. Everything is so well-meant, but intellectually very simple.

The sun is shining beautifully again. How wonderful it will be in a few days from now. Oh, if only you could also experience the sun, Moeteke, and be with me at this time.

Is there news in the world? [...] Here we do get daily radio messages, but mostly about rugby, football and the market. I read something about France and America. Has

⁹ Mr. Vischer, Secretary General of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures.

¹⁰ This should, and will hereafter, be spelled as Lipscombe.

¹¹ Hofstra does not mention the name of this bishop.

there been any more news about Dimitroff and the other Bulgarians in the newspapers?¹² Have they already been released?

A while ago I walked on the deck with Mr Lipscombe. He gave me some good practical advice about boys,¹³ the food, etc. He introduced me to another civil servant who works in the topographical office in Freetown and who knows the country very well. I'll have another talk with him.

I am very curious as to what Madeira will look like tomorrow. And next Sunday in Freetown. How strange that will be. I cannot imagine it yet. Wasn't it very empty, Moeteke, when no letter arrived yesterday evening? I am already thinking about how wonderful it will be to travel back to you in a year's time.

Tonight or early tomorrow morning mail will leave this ship and will be transferred to a returning ship from the shipping line, so I hope that you'll receive this letter by the end of this week.

Now it is Sunday evening and if I am to catch the mail I have to close the letter soon. I am very much longing for a message from you, [...] and where shall I find it? Perhaps in Las Palmas or otherwise in Bathurst?¹⁴ Everything is going well on board. [...] I am now writing to you in a writing-smoking salon. Around me people are reading and playing cards. And a sort of radio or gramophone is playing; a somewhat disturbing intrusion on the part of "civilization". Apart from that it is very quiet here on board. The ship is also too small for many activities. One truly is in touch with the sea here. By now the temperature is also very pleasant in the evening. How warm it will begin to be in a few days' time. Strange, that it is cold now in Holland. The distance is not all that great [...]

Bye bye dear Moeteke [...] Don't be worried [...] Everything will turn out well, however difficult the separation is. [...]

Your Child

Thursday, 18 January 1934

My dear Moeteke,

It is two weeks ago today that we took leave of each other, and suddenly I think that already two weeks of the year are over. By now we have already bobbed up and down on the water for more than a week. Now this life also seems almost normal. Just now I thought, Moeteke, how strange it is. We have thought about Africa for about three years and during the last months the departure has come closer and closer. In fact, at the end it came along very suddenly. One had always thought what a wonderful experience it would be to arrive in Africa, and also to make the journey there. Now it is upon us. One can't yet imagine what it will be like. Early tomorrow, I believe, we'll be in

¹² The Bulgarian communist Georgi Dimitroff was, together with the Dutch communist Marinus van der Lubbe, accused of setting the Reichstag building on fire in 1933.

¹³ Hofstra used in his letters the then current term boys, meaning servants.

¹⁴ Bathurst was the former name of Banjul, the capital of Gambia.

Bathurst. Then for the first time comes what is called in English “the thrill”, the sensation. One reaches it in stages. First there was the bad weather, en route to Madeira. Therefore contact with the fellow passengers only came gradually. Many of them remained in bed for two or three days.

Madeira brought for the first time a real southern feeling. It was romantic, Moeteke. Madeira is Portuguese. The people have brown faces, women with headscarves, here and there negroes.¹⁵ And the sun shone beautifully, like on one of our early summer days, with a blue sky. We had a few hours there and were transported on boats to the island. Many passengers went for a trip by car into the mountains just behind the coastal town. I wandered on my own through the streets, wrote postcards and enjoyed the people and the sun. Just as I embarked on one of the small boats which brought us to the island and back to the ship, a rain of fireworks started on the pier. A salute to the new governor of the island, who had just arrived on a Portuguese ship. In the little boat people said that because of the political changes in Portugal a new governor arrives nearly every month. It is a beautiful island. I only wish, Moeteke, that you could see it. I think, that there may yet be an opportunity. Perhaps too many English and Americans are living there to want to be there long, but I think that it must be lovely in winter. Alongside the ship we had the bustle of all sorts of small boats from which people tried to sell all kinds of rugs and cloths, and people dived. A strange business, but it is interesting to see the faces of these people, the brown, optimistic heads. In Las Palmas it was the same. After Madeira the sun disappeared. On early Tuesday morning we were in Las Palmas. The time was too short to go ashore. Las Palmas is flatter than Madeira, but still pleasantly hilly. I think that the Canaries are beautiful if one really has time to stroll around there.

Later on Tuesday morning the sun emerged. That was wonderful. One had the feeling of already being so much more to the south. It was possible to sit on the deck comfortably, without an overcoat. How different from Holland. And since then it has become ever milder. Yesterday, Wednesday, it was lovely. Today too, at first. This afternoon it is cloudy and the wind is now rather cool. There is a strong wind, the Harmattan, which is now blowing into West Africa, a dry wind, laden with sand. The water is deep blue and very calm. What a difference when one compares Liverpool with Madeira. Back there it was really rough, Moeteke, and I was astonished that anyone would ever make a sea journey for pleasure, but here I understand it better. A few nights were so radiantly bright with many stars. The sunset is also beautiful. The beams stream down almost straight, Moeteke. Oh, I would wish that you could take part in all this. And yet, time and again I think – now you are going along Africa, you see the sun, feel the warmth, but it still remains a bit far away, due to the English environment, the ship, the water. We are approaching Dakar, the place where I would have landed if I had been going to the French region.¹⁶ Today we should have been in Bathurst, but I believe that it will now be early tomorrow. And on Saturday afternoon at about six o'clock we'll probably be in Freetown. We'll soon be near the Cape Verde Islands. From Las Palmas to Dakar the ship sails in a straight line, that is the shortest distance; this

¹⁵ Hofstra used in his letters the then current term negroes.

¹⁶ See Hofstra's research plan of December 1932 in chapter 1 of this book.

way the ship doesn't travel along the coast. From Dakar onwards it follows the coast more closely. If it is clear tonight we'll perhaps be able to see the coast near Dakar. During recent days I now and then thought about the first Portuguese seafarers, their troubles when they sailed along the Sahara, where we are now, detecting no more green, until they discovered the Cape Verde Islands, where vegetation started again and which they called the "green islands" for that reason. What courage was needed then, Moeteke.

What are you doing now, Moeteke? It is Thursday afternoon. Oh, it is hard not to be able to get a message from you. It was nice that your letter was there in Madeira. But one already felt the difficulty that distance brings, because your letter to Madeira was written before the one sent to Liverpool.

Life on board soon follows a certain rhythm, Moeteke. A ship like this is quite an institution. There are more than 150 personnel and about 200 passengers. I'll tell you in a few words how the schedule for the day goes. In the morning at about quarter to seven one already gets tea in bed. My bath is at ten past seven. That may last ten minutes, so this is quick for me! At eight o'clock the first bell goes for breakfast, which is at half past eight. There is a pleasant dining-room, with a few big tables for about eight persons. We have a table, i.e. the family Lipscombe with the missionary Cullins and his wife, another lady who is going to Freetown and who is the wife of a district commissioner whose name I don't know yet. The table conversations are OK. Mr Lipscombe and I have of course a few interests in common and the missionary is a pleasant man. Moreover, everyone goes upstairs again as soon as possible once he has finished eating. Now that the weather is fine one immediately goes on deck after breakfast, takes a stroll, sits reading in a chair. People also stand talking in small groups or play deck tennis, which I have also taken part in a few times. At one o'clock there is lunch, at four o'clock tea and at half past seven dinner. Tea is served on deck; everybody gets his own things. All goes well with the food, Moeteke. There is a very nice, firm chief steward, who is in charge of food and the second steward, who ranks next, has the same qualities. The second steward has supervision over out of the ordinary requirements, such as mine,¹⁷ and he does this in a pleasant and tactful way. Well, I don't have to depart from the menu much, as there tends to be a fairly rich choice. Every day salad, fruit, etc. Personally I therefore don't share the often heard opinion that the food on the English ships is not so good. Moreover, there is a steward for each table, for the service. On the whole the service is very good. Furthermore there is a special steward for a group of cabins, the bedroom steward, who keeps your cabin in order, brushes your clothes and is ready to attend to other useful and trivial matters. That is a somewhat unnecessary and not such a pleasant luxury, I find. Then there is another steward for the bathroom in our compartment and a whole army of functionaries who I don't know so well. There are also all sorts of people whom one doesn't get to see, like the people from the kitchen, the baker, technical personnel, etc.

Yesterday I have asked the captain if I could see a bit more of the ship. He agreed to it and this morning I have been with him on the upper deck, where he and the officers have their cabins and where the steering is done. He showed me all sorts of instru-

¹⁷ Hofstra refers to his being a vegetarian.

ments and his cabin. He told me all kinds of things, showed me the charts which they use, etc. and we also talked about the route of the first Portuguese seafarers. It was very interesting. The captain is an already somewhat elderly man, short, a bit corpulent and red-haired. Dark complexion, but with almost the shyness and kind friendliness of a small boy in him. He has been on this ship for only two years, he told me. Before that he was always on cargo ships of the same line. He liked that better, although this ship is a promotion. On a cargo ship you feel yourself much more a real captain, he said and you didn't need to concern yourself with people and in the harbours you didn't have to be in such a big hurry. A strange life, always at sea like this. Yet I begin to understand how one can like it.

I have spent my time here talking to a few people, furthermore reading a couple of books about Sierra Leone which I brought with me, also some novels from the library here. And further, en route to Madeira I wrote a memorandum about secret societies for the Institute.¹⁸ I told you that Fortes, Nadel¹⁹ and I have prepared something together, oh yes, you actually saw it, Moeteke, when I was at home. Each of us was going to add a sort of scheme for a specific subject, me about secret societies. I had already drafted this scheme, but I found it better to add a sort of introduction to it, which I have done. I posted it with the mail leaving the ship at Madeira. Moreover, I have written the review of the book on Christian Science, which Ter Veen²⁰ had asked me to do. And also I am making notes of the things that I am told here on board. On the one hand life aboard such a ship makes one somewhat lazy; one is inclined to bask in the sun. On the other hand one still reads a lot. It is all a bit clumsy, with writing in a chair, etc.

Mr Lipscombe is a nice young man, with whom I have had several talks. He has introduced me to the other English civil servants on board for Freetown. One is a Major Dare, who is head of the Survey Department, where the maps are made. With him I had a somewhat longer conversation this morning. He knows the country through and through, has travelled around in it a lot and can give good hints. A nice, gentle, sympathetic man. The other two civil servants with whom L. brought me into contact, are less interesting for my purpose. One of them is head of the customs area and I don't know much about the other one. They seem to be more like the ordinary type of civil servant. There are some other people travelling to Freetown, but I believe that they are trading people. Mr L. doesn't know them. It is peculiar, how meticulously cut off such an English civil servants' world is. He can only bring me into contact with other civil servants. Above or below that the convention doesn't go. I don't know if he is interested in it. Yet he is not one of the most narrow-minded; he has modern ideas and has studied chemistry. I know more about the passengers than he does. This afternoon he saw me talking to a passenger. Later he asked me who that was. But he doesn't venture further himself. The missionaries like Mr Cullins are different, more open, less caste like. I already know some of the missionaries. They are bound for the Gold Coast

¹⁸ The International Institute of African Languages and Cultures.

¹⁹ Hofstra's colleagues Meyer Fortes and S.F. Nadel.

²⁰ H.N. ter Veen, in 1933 successor of S.R. Steinmetz as professor of social geography and cultural anthropology at the University of Amsterdam.

and Nigeria. When you have been introduced to a senior civil servant, and you have been officially classified, it is also useful of course, and they'll be good contacts for me in Sierra Leone. But of course missionaries are a bit more emotional.

Mr Lipscombe has already told me several interesting things about the field of education in Sierra Leone and I believe that this field can become important for a study of "cultural contact problems". Mr L. will also be useful to me in this respect and, moreover, I'll probably have much opportunity to see schools. We'll see. This is in any case one of the most important problems concerning the contact between Europe and Africa. In Fourah Bay College, with Mr Horstead, I'll find myself right into the middle of it, of course.²¹

Educational matters are difficult for government and missionaries. Until a few years ago, like in Europe too, people have proceeded with a certain courage and optimism, they thought to know the goal well. Now doubts about the goal begin to emerge. In any case there is a question about where the goals of education should lie. Initially the model was, of course too European. One of the missionaries here, from Nigeria, told me for example that until a few years ago Fourah Bay College was organized as one of the older English Colleges, i.e. it offered a classical education. That was very peculiar, of course, for when the young Africans who had been educated there, returned to their region, for missionary purposes generally, as missionary or teacher, they knew Greek and Latin, but not much more. Now this has changed and education has been made much more modern.

Moreover, government and mission have, of course, somewhat different goals for education. Gradually it has also become difficult for Africans who have completed a secondary school. One gets the impression that Sierra Leone is in many respects still so much at the beginning of outside contact. I might also find all sorts of interesting issues about making contact there, given the original, relatively uninfluenced life style. We'll see what will come of it. I am very curious about everything.

Now and then I cross to the second class deck. Amongst the passengers there is a missionary and a few businessmen. Lively people indeed. One of them is heading for Nigeria, a relatively young man. Previously when he worked for a company, he travelled first class, he told me. Now he wants to start for himself, in tin mining, so he has to economize and therefore travels second class. A man with humour.

About some first class people he said, "I know them very well, they hardly own a penny and perhaps they'll come and borrow money from me tomorrow and yet they walk like gods on the deck." This man speaks about the negroes with sympathy. The same goes for another second class passenger, an electrician, a very sensible man, it seems to me. He said however, and I think he is right, how difficult it is really to get to know the people. You knew somebody for years and then suddenly discovered, that you had to start from the beginning. That may be the case, but I think time and again, hearing or reading about Africa, that all these things also apply to Europe.

Friday afternoon. [...] Now we have already left Bathurst. This morning we were there between about 6 and 8. We didn't go on shore, because the time was so limited.

²¹ Rev. J.L.W. Horstead M.A. was head of Fourah Bay College and later Bishop of Sierra Leone and Archbishop of West Africa. See about Fourah Bay College: chapter 1 of this book.

The ship had to stay some distance offshore. For a while, it was really emotional, this first contact with Africa. One didn't see much of it. Only in a few boats, which came alongside the ship for goods and passengers and which were already full of black people. I have already got a bit used to their faces, but here it is yet more natural, especially the boys, who were in the cargo boat, with few clothes on. Those in the passengers boat were dressed rather too neatly in European style; partly Christian, I think, as they took off missionaries. And yet, why shouldn't they also wear helmets, even if they have done without them for so long that it doesn't seem all that necessary. Secondly it doesn't really suit their faces. There was one negro with a beautiful yellow cloak, probably a Muslim. Bathurst itself didn't seem so big, some European buildings, some ugly and some good, for factories and government, I think, and – already some palm trees. They provided the tropical atmosphere. It was fairly cool this morning at first; one would have expected that it already would have been much more tropical, but this seems to be usual around this time, when the Harmattan, the dry wind from the north, is blowing. However, by around ten o'clock it was already pretty warm. "And wait until you come to Freetown", people tell me. Oh, how strange it is, Moeteke, to be here now, at last near to Freetown, in the warmth. But also ever further away from you. But no, it can't get that much further anymore. Yet perhaps this is what you feel. For me at least it is almost nostalgic to have to leave the ship, tomorrow. Here I am yet closer to you, still in a world, that reminds me so much of Europe, of England, almost of Holland too. My little bed is still here, on which I was so happy to find a letter from you on Monday. From now on things will all be much more unfamiliar. I'll perhaps have to wait a long time for a letter from you. You shouldn't ever be worried [...], even when a letter takes rather a long time. We shouldn't trust airmail too much. From Holland to Dakar it takes three days. Then the letter has to wait in Dakar for a ship that is going to Freetown. At best, it is of course faster, but it is hard to find out when a ship is going. Perhaps it is best, Moeteke, to send a letter once a week by ordinary mail. [...] This letter I'll hand in at the ship tomorrow. Next Wednesday a ship will sail back. The mail from this ship will then be delivered to the other mail. This ship is, I believe, in Freetown on Wednesday, so I can hand in to the same ship another letter from Freetown, with the latest impressions. So you'll get both letters at the same time.

Moeteke, dear Moeteke, if only I could be with you for a while. It is hard to be so far away from you. Now it is Friday evening. Now one really feels that one is in a warm climate, Moeteke. We are gradually coming out of the trade-wind, the still somewhat cool wind. Tomorrow in Freetown it will already be very warm. Many passengers and all personnel are already in white clothing.

How beautifully the moon shines on the calm sea, Moeteke. I wish you could see it. People say that in Africa the moon is so beautiful, very light. What a strange planet this world is after all. And that one drifts about on it just like that. It is now past nine o'clock. What are you doing now, Moeteke? If only I could enter your room for a while. Will you be good and careful [...]? Have a long life for me.

My work will begin very soon now. What it will all be like? It will turn out all right, I think. Now you are surely thinking, Moeteke – one more night, then Poetie²² is already there. [...] Don't worry. [...]

Saturday morning. Oh my, it is suddenly so very warm, Moeteke. I have perspired this morning, as it almost never happened to me after my illness in Aerdenhout.²³ Everybody is in light clothing now. It is unbelievable that it is only ten days on from the winter weather. [...] In well over two hours we'll be in Freetown. I have just packed my things. There is quite a bit to put in order, for the thick overcoat, the plaid, hat and the thicker suit also had to be tucked away.

[...] Now I close this letter. I'll write again soon from Freetown. How beautiful the starry sky tonight was. One of these enclosed cards is from Madeira. Bye bye very dear Moeteke, I send you sun and warmth,

Your Child

Sunday afternoon [21 January 1934]

My dear Moeteke,

Now at last I am in Freetown! How amazing. And right on my birthday. This morning I was with Mr and Mrs Horstead in church and then I suddenly thought – it is my birthday today; it hadn't occurred to me earlier. There are so many impressions, it is all so new still and although one often read and heard about it, it is still quite a different thing to experience it oneself.

I'll tell about it in a more orderly way, Moeteke. We landed yesterday afternoon at about 3 o'clock. That is to say, the ship stays at a distance from the shore and little boats come to take the passengers to and fro. The view from the boat approaching Freetown is beautiful, Moeteke. It is so beautifully situated in a bay and behind it are the hills. It is the first really tropical point on the West Coast of Africa. At Bathurst you are still somewhat to the north.

Wednesday afternoon. [...] Now it is already Wednesday, before I can continue the letter. So much has been happening. It is now a bit quieter, but the mail leaves early tomorrow morning. In my next letter I'll tell you everything in more detail. I mean the impressions. I haven't yet received a letter from you, dear Moeteke. It is best to send them by ordinary mail, dear. Perhaps you have already sent one or two by airmail? That route via Dakar to here seems to result in quite some delay.

On Saturday, Mr Horstead, the head of Fourah Bay College, collected me from the boat. That was very helpful, for there are all sorts of formalities with the customs, etc. Here in Fourah Bay College I have a large, bright room. The College is near the sea, truly beautifully situated. At night in bed I hear the sea. But oh, Moeteke, I am over-

²² Poetie or Poet was Mrs Overdiep's (Moeteke's) name for Sjoerd Hofstra.

²³ Mrs Overdiep and Hofstra had been living in Aerdenhout, near Haarlem, from October 1931 onwards until they moved to their newly built house in Driehuis in late 1932.



Photo 2.1 Freetown Lighthouse, postcard early 1930s

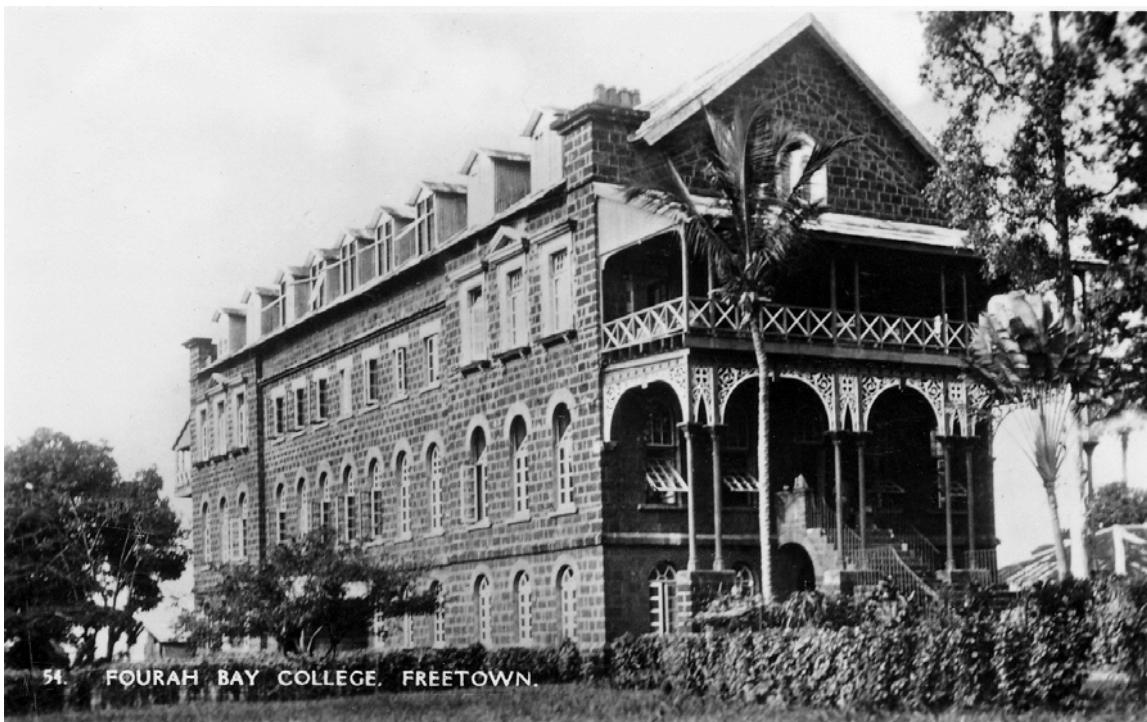


Photo 2.2 Fourah Bay College, Freetown, postcard early 1930s

whelmed by all the different experiences here. I can't yet digest it calmly. Tomorrow and the day after tomorrow I'll have more time to write it down.

On Sunday, with the Horstead family, I visited a few small churches, one for negroes and one for Europeans. Especially in the first church I looked around a great deal of course. For the rest nothing much special happened that day. On Monday Mr Horstead and I first went to the customs again, where I had yet to provide several declarations and to show papers. We have also been to the Bank, to which the Institute has sent my money. In the afternoon Dr Sumner came here, the negro, you'll remember, for whom I had an introduction. We had a long and pleasant talk about all sorts of things concerning Africa, and he told me about the advantages and disadvantages of the places north of Bo, which he knows well. And yesterday afternoon we had another talk, especially about education and the school for agricultural education in Koyeima, to which Dr Sumner has been attached. It was very interesting for me to meet him. He is a man of about 60 I think, with a beautiful soft voice and extremely gentle. I certainly think that we'll keep in touch. Both talks lasted over three hours. He lives right in the south of Sierra Leone, so we won't be able to meet each other often, but we'll probably meet in Bo some time.

On Monday evening the Horsteads invited a few missionaries who are working in the east among the Mendi. Some very bright young men who have told me about their area. And last night they invited two other missionaries, one was from the same station, Bunumbu, and the other was Mr Clark from Kailahun, who had earlier written to me. Both are very sympathetic and young. I was lucky to be able to see them here, because there was just then a meeting here of the Wesleyan missionaries, which the missionaries belonging to this group are attending. We have in addition made a courtesy visit to the Governor, and to a few senior civil servants in the Colonial Office. Things which have to be done, but which are a bit tedious. Fortunately, Mr Horstead accompanied me, which made everything fairly easy. This evening the Governor has invited the Horsteads and me for dinner. So now I'll use your handkerchief, Moeteke!

And amidst all of this, there is, of course, already contact with the negroes. Besides the boys there are also the students, who are now returning from the January holiday. I'll write more about the College, Moeteke. The Horstead family are very thoughtful, bringing me in touch with all sorts of people and doing technical things. I still have to decide which part of the country I'll go to. I have to choose between the area north of Bo or the east near Bunumbu and Kailahun. Both are attractive, but the point is, one can hardly determine things in advance, as one doesn't know what one will find there. Therefore one has to give it a try first. I'll probably decide tomorrow or the day after tomorrow and I think that I'll leave here on Wednesday in a week's time. Through Dr Sumner I have almost certainly got a boy from Mano.

And now I haven't yet told you about the nature, climate, etc., dear Moeteke. I'll describe that also in more detail. Palm trees, cotton trees, mango trees one sees in abundance. It is beautiful here. Also warm, always between 70 and 80 degrees, but nearer to 80. On the whole I rather like it, or will get to like it, I believe. It is often somewhat clammy, particularly in this extra warm time of the year, during the Harmattan period. Today it was very oppressive, just like a very warm summer afternoon be-

fore a thunderstorm at home. The missionaries from the east of the country were looking fine. The air seems to be still better there. Oh, how much I still have to write you, Moeteke. But how I long to be with you for a while. [...] And to have a letter from you. Distance is certainly difficult. [...] You should send one each week, Moeteke, first by ordinary mail. Gradually we will find out which route is fastest. I would like you to date your letters, please. With the bank I have arranged that they forward the letters until I have been able to give a permanent address to the ones concerned.

Thursday morning. Dear Moeteke, now the dinner with the governor is also over. It was fairly pleasant. There were about 20 guests. The most important official things are over now and I'll go through the library here in College, which has quite a bit about education in Africa. And I'll systematize and write down all my impressions, etc.

Bye bye, very dear Moeteke. Is all well with you, with me it is OK, don't be worried, I'll manage here, although it is very warm indeed. [...]

Your Child

Monday afternoon, 29 January 1934

My dear Moeteke,

How quickly the days pass here. And how I am longing for a letter from you, Moeteke. There is so much to do here getting started, that one doesn't get round to writing regularly. Of course every day I have to note down what I have heard and observed. But one can't work a long day here as in Europe. One needs a bit more rest, at least for the time being. At about six o'clock in the morning life begins here and at about half past nine one goes to bed. Then one takes a rest for an hour in the afternoon between 12 and 1 o'clock. It is already a very warm time of the year, Moeteke, and until May it seems to get even warmer. At least in Freetown it is very warm, every day between 80 and 90 degrees. Further inland people say it is cooler. Yet I already like it on the whole. I find it not too warm. It is a pleasant dry heat now that the Harmattan is blowing. Sometimes you feel as if you are passing a hot oven, such a strange warm wind, Moeteke. [...] You should certainly come here once, Moeteke. Here in Fourah Bay College you could easily stay for a few days. How I hope for a letter from you. I just hope, that you have sent the letter by ordinary mail, so that it will arrive on Saturday with the English boat. There is an English mail every fortnight. What exactly the possibilities would be in between, I don't know. Yet I believe, that the German boat takes mail, but I don't think the Dutch one from Holland does, though I am not sure. I'll probably go and enquire at the post office tomorrow. Airmail doesn't seem to work. Weren't you going to send a letter to Bathurst, Moeteke? It hasn't arrived here yet. Sometimes I suddenly think – oh, something could be wrong with Moeteke. But no, on the whole I am easy [...] The Kossen family²⁴ surely do know my address. But do be careful [...].

Sometimes I find it strange to think, Moeteke, that it is now still winter with you, that it is perhaps raining today and that it is cloudy. It is half past five. Now you'll al-

²⁴ Mrs Overdiep's neighbours and friends in Driehuis.

ready have lamplight of course. Here it is light until six o'clock and then it is fairly dark, but there is now such a beautiful view of the moon each evening. Viewed from our house the environment can best be compared to a German mountain view, perhaps. Very green of course. Behind Freetown there are high hills or rather small mountains. In one area of them are the houses of the Europeans. The lights from there twinkle so prettily in the evening. Our house stands closer to the actual town, right at the edge of it, on a large plot. Not far from us is the small palace of the bishop and next to this the hospital for the natives. The bishop isn't there, as you know. His house is now used by some missionaries from Bunumbu, who I met here in the house and who I visited in their quarters on Saturday. I had dinner there. Mr Horstead also has to be in the hospital fairly frequently. In this way I get to know these places. This side of Freetown is nice and airy, near the sea. The town is fairly narrow, crowded, dusty and warm at this time of the year. And so colourful, Moeteke. One sees here types from all over West Africa. Creoles, the true inhabitants of Freetown, the freed slaves of former times from the West Indies; and then the actual natives, various tribes from Sierra Leone and more from the north, the Mandingo, etc. There is much trade; all sorts of shops, and pretty things can also be bought here. There are about three European stores, mostly for food, etc. For clothes one goes to the Creole shops. Thus I have recently ordered an extra palm beach suit. The jacket with the spots has become a bit monotonous now that I have to deal with Europeans for the time being. All these shops are open. I don't yet know the evening closing times. But one also finds countless smaller shops for all sorts of things, for example shoes, mats, household utilities, people who sew with their sewing machines in front of the house, silversmiths, leatherworkers, everything jutting out halfway onto the street. And what a lot of different types. The natives from the south and the Mendi [...] one soon recognizes by their somewhat broader, flat faces, but there are so many types more from the north. Fula, Mandingo, etc. With somewhat Arabian features. And there is such a difference in clothing, from the long white gowns of the northern people until practically nothing or rags of many non-Mohammedans and the European clothes of the Creoles.

Now I am going to town, Moeteke. I saw in the newspaper that a Dutch boat will leave today. I'll ask if it will take mail. Friday I'll go from here to Bo and there I'll probably stay the weekend and then travel further. Bye dear, dear Moeteke, all is well with me. I'll write to you more from here. This is just a little letter to fill the gap.

Your own Child

Tuesday afternoon, 30 January 1934

My dear Moeteke,

I have received your first letter here this afternoon, which you sent by airmail. Oh, how glad I was to get a letter from you. But yet at the same time I had to cry a bit, because of the feeling associated with really having a letter and hearing your voice and also because you wrote the letter at a time when it was very difficult, with storm and wind around you and no message from me yet. [...] It is also somewhat strange each time to

realize what the weather is like with you now. Here there is plenty of sun every day and that will continue until May. Oh, I thought, if only Moeteke could be here. If only the journey wasn't so expensive, you could perhaps come at the beginning of the next dry season, I thought, once I've got to know the region better. Alternatively you could come for a part of the second journey, Moeteke. We should save for that. I believe that it would often make my work easier if I could talk about it with you. Of course, I don't yet know how everything will be "up country", in the Protectorate, but the missionaries of Bunumbu and their wives like it there very much. One of them even has a small child there.

Now I'll leave here on Friday, Moeteke, first to Bo. On that day the train will run that far. There I'll see the Provincial Commissioner and consult with him about a good place to settle. It is also wise to get to know this official. Through providing good rest houses and assistance he can of course be of value. Below him there are the so-called District Commissioners. Later on I'll have to see the District Commissioner of the region where I'll settle down. I don't know yet where I'll sleep in Bo; probably in the rest house, the authorities will certainly see to this. So far the officials have been fairly helpful and pleasant. I have received free travel to there from the Government. That makes quite a difference, for travelling is expensive here. This morning I met Mr Blackmore, Director of Education. A nice man. With him and others I'll certainly have longer talks later on when I know the situation and have formed an opinion of my own. This morning I have also met Mr Diamond, head of the Methodist Missions in Sierra Leone, the same missionary movement that works in Bunumbu. This man also was very sympathetic. Everybody is pleased to help here. In such a region perhaps people are quicker to help each other. Perhaps my position as Fellow of our Institute makes a difference and makes it easier in many respects. In other respects this position may also make it more difficult for me, i.e. towards the negroes who have heard of the Institute and perhaps don't fully trust it. Here in the College I have already met a few nice, interesting students. They are struggling very much with problems. Most of them are Creoles from Freetown or Yoruba from Nigeria. Of course political matters also crop up. They have asked me to give a talk here tomorrow night. Each week they have a discussion evening. I'll tell something about "the study of African languages and cultures and its aim". They want to know what I am going to do and what my ideals are. It is, of course, also a bit strange for them that a European is here and isn't going to work here for any thus far classified aim. Some of them may have heard about the Institute, but with the name of Lord Lugard at its head, they will perhaps still have silent fears that it works for the Government. And that is understandable. There are also the language questions. And the culture questions. When people like Westermann and others with good intentions towards Africa, say that Africa should preserve the good things in its own culture and its own tribal structure and should study its own languages, then many fear, as also expressed by Dr Sumner for instance, that Europe will keep Africa in a somewhat inferior position, apart from European civilization. And with some that will perhaps be the case. These are very complicated problems, Moeteke. Mrs Horstead rightly said to me this afternoon, "It is after all the negroes themselves who must find their way. We shouldn't force upon them our own, however well meant, ideals." Yes-

terday I had a talk with a student. He told me, "It is difficult for us. Formerly there was a type of missionary and educational man who said: 'we are all one, all brothers', but who found our culture not good, and wanted as far as possible to present us with the European culture and language as the ideal. Now there is a new type of missionary and educational man who says – 'you should keep what is good in your culture.' So what is true? Where should we ourselves in Africa put the emphasis?" There are very intelligent, nice boys among them, Moeteke.

And what's more, there is among the Mendi also such a completely simple, uncomplicated type, like my boy. Yes, I already have a boy. He was recommended by Dr Sumner and through mediation of a relative of Sumner he has travelled here, from Mano, a place along the line to Bo. He was first employed by a Mr Michell [sic], head of the school in Koyeima. This gentleman is now in England and Sandi, as the boy is called, was out of work. I believe that he is very good. For the time being, there won't be much for him to do here. He keeps my room in order and I have been practising some Mendi with him. Just now I wrote a note to Sumner's family, asking them to tell Sandi's wife to come to the station on Friday afternoon. Neither he himself nor his wife can read or write. When I had read the letter to him, he slapped his hands against his temples and said in broken English – "everything that I thought, is in such a small letter!" He found it, I believe, a miracle. On the way, we'll probably try to engage a friend of his, who was a cook working with him. Sandi just said to me – "cook and I give master good food and good water, master never sick, master never sick belly" and he made the movement of a swollen stomach. The English of the uneducated negroes, the so-called Pidgin-English is a strange mixture, Moeteke, and with such a boy it is of course extra simplified. How touching and at the same time surprisingly simple and primitive such a boy is, Moeteke, or rather man, for he is my age, has a wife and two children. One daughter is already married.

Yesterday evening I had dinner with the Lipscombe family, in their bungalow in Hill Station. It was pleasant. They are nice people. Such a bungalow is a good home, Moeteke, open and spacious.

I could write at much greater length to you, but time goes by quickly here and in any case talking would be so much better. I often think – if only Moeteke could be here also and if only we could discuss it together. However I'll write to you each time about the most important things [...] In this way it will be of some use to you, won't it? [...] You'll get some idea of my life here. Would you please tell me each time you write which letters you have received from me and the date when you got them. Don't worry [...] if they arrive somewhat irregularly.

Some 300 to 400 Europeans live here in Freetown at present. Quite a lot, don't you think? Civil servants, missionaries and quite a few businessmen. The Governor invites them in groups now and then for dinner. When I was there, there were about twenty. That dinner was not unpleasant, not too boring at least. We sat at table from about 8-9 and afterwards spent about an hour in the garden. The Governor is not unsympathetic, a sportsman, amazingly brown. Not a great politician, I think, and someone who dislikes much ceremonial. When he is travelling in the country, he wears shorts, I heard, and so at first many tribal heads find it difficult to believe that he is really the Gover-

nor. It seems to me a difficult job. On the one hand he has autocratic power, on the other it seems to me a very confined community in such a small town. It is interesting when you are walking through it for a short time in my position as an onlooker, but to be here as a civil servant seems to me fairly restricted.

At the same time as your letter there was also one from Makkum²⁵ and one from Kloe²⁶, all of them also by airmail. – Moeteke, how are you now? If only I could enter your room for a short time or you could come here. Here in Freetown I am still partly in the civilised world with electric light and running water. Soon these will also be lacking.

The thing that has constantly attracted me on this journey and with which I shall soon be confronted even more, Moeteke, is that one gets the opportunity to think about the meaning of civilization and its absence. I would very much like to find out how the simple negroes live without electricity, books, churches, etc., what it means to them, and which values civilization has and which dangers, for us and for them.

I was pleased with the newspaper cuttings you sent me. That Austrian researcher is going to do quite something in Liberia.²⁷ The book by Westendorp Boerma²⁸ looks very interesting to me. I would very much like to read it. Could you please send it to me, Moeteke, once I have settled “in the bush”? It seems so refreshing to have something to read in spare moments. Perhaps I haven’t brought enough theoretical literature from outside my field. I do have a book “Die Einheit der Sinne” from Plessner, that I find very stimulating when I am tired.²⁹ Sometimes I would like to begin with Kant. One sometimes needs something intellectually demanding as a counterbalance, I think. My work requires this of course and that will gradually organize itself around certain subjects. For the time being it is still trial and error here and there, the collected data still have a somewhat journalistic quality of course. It will probably be like that for the first two or three months. I am very curious as to what subjects will yield the best material in the end.

[...] Have you got the letters which I wrote to you before Madeira, one from Liverpool and one from at sea, after leaving Liverpool? The letter from Madeira you’ll certainly have received on Saturday night or Monday morning? It already seems such a long time ago. [...] You should write often to me, Moeteke, also about small things. I feel for you, [...] even if it takes 14 days before I read it. Otherwise everything remains in rather too broad outlines. Be sure not to worry. [...] It will all turn out well here. [...]

Tomorrow I’ll go into town again. I’ll try to get the letter sent off by airmail. But then there should also be a boat leaving here for Dakar soon. I’ll ask about it. [...]

Bye bye, Your true Child.

²⁵ Sjoerd Hofstra’s father and his older brother and sister in Makkum.

²⁶ Sjoerd Hofstra’s youngest sister, a psychiatric nurse at the Psychiatric and Neurological Clinic of the City and University Hospital of Utrecht.

²⁷ Hofstra doesn’t mention his name.

²⁸ This may have been N. Westendorp Boerma, *Realistische ethiek: Omzwervingen op het terrein van moraal en zedelijk oordeel* [Realistic ethics: Wanderings in the field of morals and moral judgment]. Amsterdam: H.J. Paris 1933.

²⁹ Helmuth Plessner, *Die Einheit der Sinne: Grundlinien einer Aesthesiologie des Geistes*. Bonn: Cohen 1923.

Thursday morning. Yesterday it didn't work out sending the letter by airmail. There is no boat to Dakar during the coming few days. Now I'd better send the letter today by ordinary mail. When I am in Bo I hope to write to you again. Tomorrow morning (2 Feb.) I'll go to Bo, where I think I will stay until Tuesday and then I'll travel further to Segbema (Segbwema).³⁰ It will be strange at first to leave Freetown. I have already gained many impressions here. The Horsteads have been very nice to me. They are energetic people, with goodwill and yet also much insight, and who have good intentions for Africa. They are not southern English soft types, more of the outwardly somewhat stiff type from northern England; on the whole we like each other well, I believe. They are steady. I'll probably come back here for a somewhat longer period at the end of the wet season or in January next year in order to get acquainted with the students and with educational problems in Freetown. Yesterday evening I gave a talk about anthropology for the students here in the College. It went well and there were interesting questions. I hadn't done much preparation, but I still talked for an hour and then there was an hour's discussion. I'll be happy to continue this contact. But first I have to become more familiar with the interior. Of course, much of Africa's future depends on these young Africans.

On Saturday the mail will arrive here. There'll be a letter with it from you, Moeteke. I'll ask for the letters to be forwarded to Bo. Then I'll get them on Monday morning. In Bo I'll sleep in a rest house for the first time. Now this morning I have the happy thought that you will get a telegram from me and so hear something from me. Yesterday I thought that I should do this and repeatedly had the nice thought that there would soon be a message on its way to you. I sent it yesterday morning at about half past ten. Bye bye [... Moeteke ...].

Your Child

Monday evening, 5 February 1934

My dear Moeteke,

Now it is Monday again. How are you? [...] I am so much longing for a letter from you – it will probably come tomorrow evening. The mail arrives here then. But this letter has to be posted tomorrow morning. Again so much has happened in my life here since I left Freetown on Friday morning, Moeteke. The journey from Freetown to Bo was of course interesting. When one has read about it and has been looking forward to it, it is all interesting. People, who make this journey more often, find this stretch dreary. It's not varied, you only see trees, very dense with many palms towering above them. One also sees flowers, especially in the wet season. In one of the books about Sierra Leone it said with much humour about the train in S.L., you'll remember, Moeteke, that in the wet season you should put up your umbrella while in it. Well, that wasn't necessary now of course. The first class compartment was practically empty. For the first stage of the journey I travelled with an American lady-missionary, who

³⁰ This should, and will hereafter, be spelled as Segbwema.

was interesting from a psychological point of view. She was going to Bonthe, right in the south. On the whole these American missionaries seem very simple-minded. Later on a trader got in, who told me about the bad trade conditions. The journey was interesting for me because I saw all types of natives at the stations on the way. Women and girls come with baskets of bananas and oranges. The journey had been made very comfortable for me. Mr Drummond, the assistant colonial secretary in Freetown, had ordered a special goods carriage for me, in which all my luggage was placed. I kept this carriage as far as Segbwema, so I was free from all sorts of worries about supervision and transferring. We arrived at about 5 o'clock in Bo. The District Commissioner and his Assistant were at the station. The Provincial Commissioner had asked them to welcome me and he in turn had received the instructions from the Government in Freetown. That whole machine functions perfectly. Sierra Leone is divided into a northern and a southern province. I had to see the Commissioner (what we would call a Resident in the Dutch Indies) of the southern province. The District Commissioner ranks below him. In Bo I slept in the railway rest house, a nice, small rest house with three rooms. I was the only one there that night. One still finds there some of the conveniences of civilization, like a bathtub, a mirror and a bed. Further on in Sierra Leone that ends. In the evening I had supper with the D.C., a nice young man, and his assistant and the local doctor. On Saturday morning I left Bo again. First, I had thought to stay there over the weekend and then see the Provincial Commissioner, but Mr Drummond had on Thursday received a telegram from him, saying that he would be in Kenema on Saturday. So it was better for me to travel on. At 9 o'clock I left Bo and at 12 o'clock I was in Kenema. There was Mr Stocks, the Provincial Commissioner, at the train.

Oh yes, I forgot to tell you about Bo, Moeteke. I got a Court Messenger, that is a policeman at the disposal of the Government for the night, for surveillance (for the civil servants are in a certain sense responsible for my well-being and in Bo there is much thieving; the Court Messenger was on guard that night on my veranda). With this Court Messenger I made a short trip through the village in the evening. There I saw for the first time a real native town, the round huts with the clay, whitewashed walls and thatched roofs. It was quite a sensation for me. Now, after three or four days I am already used to it. We also passed the open place, where local people have their court sessions. There was a case going on just then. There was a big collection of colourful traditional costumes of the dignitaries. When the Court Messenger and I approached, they stopped, watched, and the tribal chief (from now on I'll call them "chief", Moeteke, the English word) came forward to me and introduced himself. He spoke English well, showed me his house that was nearby. A nice house, somewhat in the European style, with a big, spacious veranda. He also showed me the courtyard of his block of buildings, where some of his wives were. Then he said, "Now I have to return to the court session, but the Court Messenger will let you see my prison". I don't know what his reason was for this particular offer. Perhaps he was proud to have a small prison building. Then we went there. It was a small building, with about six or seven relatively young men in front of it, chained, sitting or standing. A guard was with them. It was very unpleasant to see it, but probably it is all in all more open, more friendly than the prison system in Europe. The people didn't seem very unhappy, but it was of

course impossible to get to understand the whole system in such a short time. I'll have to try to find out more about the mentality of the population with respect to these matters.

In Kenema I had the rest house of the Government at my disposal. In every place where a chief is, there is a rest house for Europeans travelling through and especially for the District Commissioners when they travel through. Civil servants have to pay nothing for it, other Europeans have to pay two shillings a night to the chief. It was very nicely situated, Moeteke, a bit up against a hill, within a block of a few Government buildings. Luckily there was also good water. Such a rest house usually consists of a middle room and a few side rooms. A kitchen stands some distance apart. One finds a table there, a few chairs and a washbasin. One has to provide other furnishings oneself. I had my meals with Mr Stocks, so I was relieved of those worries. He was very kind to me; a somewhat elderly man, unmarried, with plenty of common sense, broad interests and loving the bush life. On Saturday evening he showed me around the town. That was extremely interesting. He knows everything, of course, and has access everywhere. I'll write to you more about it, Moeteke. Now it is already late, there is so much to tell each time and I would love to write in more detail about everything. This morning I left Kenema again and travelled to Segbwema, which is situated a bit further east along the railway. Mr Stocks has a friend here, a trader, with whom I am staying the first two days. He'll drive me around the surrounding area and then I can calmly choose a place. I think that I'll stay in Segbwema for one or two weeks. There is much of interest to see here because it is a trade centre. Tomorrow or the day after I'll move to the rest house here and start my own household. A missionary, whom I had already met in Freetown, is also living here. He came to see me today and he'll also show me various things. The people here are very pleasant to me. From Mr Stocks I even got three blank tickets for the railway. If I want to travel, I just have to fill them in myself. Nice and friendly, isn't it? Now I have to stop, [...] more about everything later on. It is already late and very early tomorrow I'll go to see Pendembu with Mr Gallagher, the gentleman with whom I am staying now. And then the wonderful idea of finding a letter from you tomorrow evening. How are you, dear Moeteke? Mind you don't be worried! Will you give my regards to the Kossen family? The chief here has already sent me a basket of oranges and eggs as a present! You can go on sending the letters to Barclays Bank, Moeteke. I'll pass on my changes of address to them until I have a definite place. [...]

Panguma, 10 February 1934

My dear Moeteke,

This time a very short letter. How are you doing [...]? With me all is well!

Yesterday morning I went to Kenema for a talk with a civil servant of forestry. On our way with my car we twice passed an enormously dense and big swarm of locusts. It was just like driving through a snowstorm, but with another colour of course.

Bye bye my dear Moeteke, so many cheerful greetings. [...]

Your own Child.

Segbwema, Sunday morning, 18 February 1934

My dear Moeteke,

How quickly the days are passing by again. Now I have already been here one month and it already feels as if I have been here much longer. It is a quiet Sunday morning. Apparently the town experiences the influence of Sunday. The European shops are closed and the Europeans don't let people work. That makes a difference to noise levels. Many natives won't otherwise take notice of Sunday or a rest day. They now work on the land, are busy with preparations for the rice field. And the natives who have another religion are mostly Mohammedan and the Mohammedans have their rest day on Friday.

I have just drunk a cup of coffee. This tradition on Sunday morning I want to stick to as much as possible if the circumstances allow it. This morning I felt cheerful. I don't know if it is because of the Sunday and the rest. Or because of writing to you, I think, but perhaps all together. I can't easily manage to write every day, Moeteke. It then becomes a bit incoherent. And it seems strange, but the days are passing by quickly here. You observe, have to arrange things with your boys, have talks with people, but then comes the writing down and that takes almost the most time. And yet one should systematically carry on, otherwise one loses too many impressions. I have my notes right from the beginning. But I wanted to tell you each time as much as possible about it. However, if I repeat this later on, it loses some of its freshness. But now I have made a lucky discovery this week. One of the European shops here sells duplicate books. This week I have started to write down my notes in these. I am sending you now the first pages of it [...], exactly as I have started with them in that book. In this letter I'll tell you something about my experiences in between my last letter and the beginning of the notes. As far as possible I have written the notes in English and there will sometimes appear words in it which are a bit technical. But I find it such a nice idea, Moeteke, that in this way I can share my work with you on a daily basis. And I would appreciate it very much if you write to me questions and remarks about it. The atmosphere around it all I'll further describe as much as possible in the letters.

I received your letter of 23 Jan. here [...]. That was very nice. I now know again all kinds of things. It is mainly the fact that one receives something, a sign, and hears the other's voice from it, that is the most important each time, I believe. So often one thinks, 'How would it be with Moeteke?' In the end one knows, that one has to give it up and that one should trust, that it will be all right. But distance is very difficult. You should always write to me about everything, Moeteke, even about small things. Now that I am here, I also feel the distance, but yet somewhat less perhaps than on the boat and in Freetown. On the boat it was a bit boring of course and one went ever further away. Freetown is interesting, but a bit restless and urban. Here one is in the countryside and the atmosphere therefore reminds one more of our rural atmosphere.

Right now, for example, I hear a cock crowing and a moment ago songs from a small church drifted in. This is all international. When one sees the people, their black colour, then one notices the difference, the unfamiliar.

I have now been here in Segbwema for nearly two weeks. During the first two days I was the guest of an English trader, Mr Gallagher, who is a friend of Mr Stocks, the Provincial Commissioner of Kenema, whom I met two weeks ago. He is a pleasant man, but one doesn't feel at ease with such traders, at least the colonial types, for long. There is a small group of them here. Quite a lot of whiskey is drunk, of course. Yet they are pretty friendly, jovial people. Anyway, I was pleased to get a glimpse of their life. Two days later I was able to move to the rest house here, which earlier had been temporarily occupied by a civil servant. And I am settled there now, more or less. My first actual experience with a rest house [...] I had in Kenema. The night in Bo I also slept in a rest house, but that was still somewhat in European style, it is the property of the railways, there is a bath and an overseer who takes care of water. In Kenema I was completely left to my own devices, but I still unpacked as little as possible because it was only for two nights and I had my meals with Mr Stocks. He advised me to stay a few days in Segbwema, and to look around from there for a suitable place and at the same time to think about my own household, so that I could see what I perhaps still needed, which I can then buy here. In Segbwema, one of the most important places along the railway, there actually happens to be some trade. Thus I have unpacked most of my things here. It isn't all well-ordered yet, that'll have to wait until I have a small house for a longer period. This is still too provisional. Such a rest house is, like the houses of the natives, made of clay with a roof of palm leaves, Moeteke. The floor is also made of clay; a few mats lie on it. You'd perhaps best compare it with a cottage on the Veluwe or in Drenthe,³¹ but then much more spacious. There is a "sitting room" here, which is bigger than our front room in Driehuis; also a bedroom and leading out from the sitting room a small corridor, where one can put away all sorts of things. [...]

Such rest houses are not unpleasant. Due to the clay walls they are fairly cool. One has to get somewhat used to the atmosphere of it. It isn't much furnished. There is one table and one chair, and that is perhaps still a luxury for a rest house. This rest house is still new. The chief has to keep it in order. There is a roof of palm leaves, but there is also an attic, made from matting. People use a specially big mat for this. There are wooden doors and open windows that can be closed at night with a shutter. The days are sunny here; the mornings are especially nice around the house. The evenings are pretty warm and the first part of the night also, which is not so pleasant. However, one also gets used to it. Such clay always smells a bit peculiar and underneath the mosquito net it is somewhat close and at night innumerable insects are frolicking about. They already begin flying around the lamp in the evening of course and continue well into the night. Moreover, one has to get used to all sorts of sounds. Insects are buzzing, but one is safe under the net. Such a net is indeed necessary, even though there are few mosquitoes during the night, all sorts of things can fall on your bed. Big beetles and particularly lizards are numerous around the house, sometimes a frog and there are various types of midges, of course.

³¹ Rural areas in the Netherlands.

It is a bit difficult to work by lamp light in the evening. Such a lamp rustles strongly and is also warm. We have been a bit spoiled with electrical light. It is best to go to bed early here and to get up early in the morning. People go to bed at about 10 o'clock and get up at 6 o'clock.

The daytime is filled with all sorts of natural sounds, Moeteke. Various sounds from insects in the grass and of birds. There are beautifully coloured small birds, Moeteke. So far I can bear the climate well. In the beginning I found it quite hot here in Segbwema, oppressive. Sometimes it can be so humidly oppressive so that all your clothes are clammy in the morning. And during the day you sweat all the time. It is constantly over 90 degrees, but one gets used to it and I like the sun very much. This week it got a bit cooler. For three nights there were thunderstorms and one night it rained quite heavily. After that it has been more pleasant for a while. It is much warmer than on our summer days. This week I had a cold; one sometimes experiences considerable fluctuations in temperature, but one has the luck that the sun is shining each day and that one can be warmed up again. It is a strange idea, that each day it is again equally sunny and warm. This will continue until April. Then the rain really begins. From May until November one then has the rainy season. That must also be odd, that continuous rain. Almost every day it is such a bright blue sky here. Sometimes in the morning it is a bit cloudy or misty, but it soon clears up.

With the food it also goes well. There is rice of course. In addition one can get potatoes in the European shops here. Now and then there is a supply of onions from England. I have stocked up a bit. I also drink milk. It won't be as good as fresh European milk, but it will still have nutrient value and in any case it is good as a liquid. For fruits at this time of year I have oranges and bananas. Then there is also pawpaw. It resembles melon, but it is less juicy, somewhat tasteless. The oranges here are delicious and cheap: 10 for a penny. Rice is also cheap. From all this experience I'll gradually make a better "report", also for my work. Also how it is come by, who sells it, what people can do with their money, etc. Women often have a small trade in fruit, etc. as a side-line. One misses fresh vegetables here. I am employing three people, two "boys" and an interpreter-informant. I thought it better to have an extra boy. They can collaborate with each other, so everything goes more smoothly and the Mendi like talking. A boy on his own feels lonely. The Timni [Temne] seem to be different. The most recent employee I had through Mr Sanders, who is the missionary here. He and his wife, young people still, are pleasant people. I have also acquired the interpreter through him. He has been employed by the Mission, but was dismissed because he likes to mingle in all sorts of village affairs, but he is friendly, intelligent and co-operative. I believe that he can be of much help to me, in terms of the language and providing information. He knows a lot about the life here. He has already written a long history about burial ceremonies for me and he is now working on a description of the cultivation of rice. This serves as an initial guideline for me. Later on I can check the data better. In addition I find it psychologically interesting to understand how he himself thinks about his own culture.

My two boys are characters. Sandi, the first one, is trained in European ways, feels himself something of a master in kitchen matters and likes to direct the other one. He

is very amenable. The other one I don't know so well yet. He is a huge beanpole aged about 20, a son of the chief of Bunumbu. Also co-operative, but a typical mixture of the civilization. He is Christian. That means mostly (perhaps mainly) a certain change in clothing. Thus he, Selu, wears short pants with a shirt around the house here, but when he goes into town, he puts on long trousers and a cap. Just now I have given him a dressing down. To help with collecting the water from the well close by, the chief often sends a couple of little boys. They then often hang around here. If one doesn't keep it strictly under control, one has all sorts of lanky youths, friends of the boys and other interested persons hanging around the kitchen. One just has to stop it because of the talking and the noise. A few minutes ago Selu went out in town dress and I heard that he fetched the boys to carry the water. Half an hour later he came back with them. I told him then that he should do this himself and that I don't want boys hanging around. The difficulty is, that each boy likes to have another boy below him and rule over him, and walk around smartly dressed himself. However, my household is too small for this. Two boys have it easy already. Both are married, but Sandi's wife is still in Njala while Selu has his wife here. They have a house in town. From 12-4 pm the boys are free when they go to town for their rice meal. The matter of money, "copper" as it is called here, also plays a certain role, of course. Thus Sandi came to me today for an advance of 2 sh. "no humbug more", he said. He meant that he wouldn't ask again before 1 March. Pidgin-English is a peculiar language and especially here it has become more simple with a poorer vocabulary, as you'll understand. The further one moves away from Freetown, the more this is the case.

From last Friday till Monday I have been on the move, Moeteke, with the missionaries from Bunumbu. I had already met them in Freetown, where they attended a meeting. On Friday, I made a long "trek" along bush trails to Giehun with one of them, Mr Robert. That was very interesting and instructive for me. We came through several villages. Mr Robert provides medical assistance there. In this way I came somewhat nearer to the life here. We entered several huts. In Bandajuma and Giehun I introduced myself to the chiefs. That is always a big official thing and I have by now become used to the ceremony. First there are the greetings. Then the chief asks what the aim of the visit is and you explain this to him. He asks if you come for yourself or for someone else (Government or mission for example). And finally he says, that he will be pleased if you choose to live in his town. Because I couldn't yet do this in Mendi, I said it in English. Nowadays, nearly every chief has a "clerk", a sort of interpreter cum secretary at the same time, who assists him with the contacts with government officials. This "clerk" translates everything. Usually, when everything is said in Mendi, this is done by the "speaker". Every chief has a "speaker". The chief doesn't speak directly to you or his people, but to the speaker who then communicates his words. There is always a whole group of official people, a sort of civil service for him and for "the elders of the community" around him. They all sit on chairs, on the ground or rocking in hammocks in the courtyard of the chief or in the small open building, the barri, where the whole community comes together. The people around the chief and he himself are usually looking fairly dignified, fine faces, somewhat older people, in long cloaks, made of native cotton or imported cotton.

On Sunday, Mr Harris and I (Mr H. is another missionary from Bunumbu³²) made a similar trip to Petema. This was also very instructive. On both trips we had to cross a river. The little bridges, hanging bridges made from branches, were not very safe, so the boys carried us across the water. The water was still low enough for this. In the wet season the level is fairly high.

And on Saturday Mr Robert and I travelled in his car to Panguma. I had wanted to see this town at some point. Panguma makes a very attractive impression, surrounded by substantial hills. Formerly it was "a district headquarters". There is therefore a good water supply and a good rest house, a sort of bungalow, very different from the usual rest houses made from clay. After a comparison of several places, I think that I can best settle there at first. The chief seems to be a good man, well-disposed towards Europeans, which is useful in the beginning. Panguma is not on the railway, but is not that far off, at the end of a motor road from Hangha (somewhat further than Kenema) to Panguma. There is a daily lorry service to Hangha. The letters go to Hangha and have to be collected and taken there (one arranges this with the lorry driver). There are no other Europeans in Panguma, but I can now and then visit the mission in Bunumbu, and it is only one-and-a-half to two-and-a-half hours by car from Panguma to Kenema, Hangha and Segbwema.

On Sunday evening I attended the evening service in the small church in Bunumbu. Mr Robert asked me to speak for about 10 minutes about the purpose of my visit, which I did. An interpreter translated. The Methodists are nice people, broad minded. In Holland they would be called liberal, I think. They do much to promote education in Mendi.

Last week I also told a group of young people in the mission house about my work and about Holland. Mr Sanders, the missionary here, encouraged them to supply me with as much information as possible. I therefore get regular visits from Daniel and Samuel and Mr Ganna.

Now I have already told you a lot about my life here, Moeteke. But I know, that you like to hear as much detail as possible. Oh, you know, there are so many small things in daily life which one forgets or doesn't write down and about which one would talk if we were together. That's just the disadvantage of writing. I really hope that my daily notes will give you the feel of it, Moeteke. Of course I have more, sometimes more interesting notes, but I have no duplicate of these. At this early stage I am writing down as much as possible. Apparently insignificant things can prove to have value later on. Gradually some subjects begin to crystallize out, of course. For example for me peoples' occupations already seem significant, but one shouldn't for that reason neglect the other things. I would very much like you to help me a bit with it, Moeteke, through questions and your comments. There are some words in them [the notes], that are a bit unclear at first. Thus "chop" means in Pidgin-English "to eat" and "dash" to give a present. "Copper" is money.

How are things with you now, Moeteke? Have you been to church in Santpoort this morning? What is the weather like [...]? Don't forget to write to me with all the details

³² The Mr Harris to which Hofstra refers is probably the Methodist Missionary Rev. W.T. Harris. See Harris and Sawyerr 1968.

about everything. You already have several letters from me, I think, Moeteke. It is best to send your letters by ordinary mail [...]. It would be good to send a letter each Sunday for example. Every fortnight a boat leaves Liverpool on Wednesday. If you post your letter by ordinary mail on Sunday evening, it should therefore be in time for Liverpool. Now and then there may be a Dutch or German boat which takes the mail. That is just luck. You'd best send my letters every fortnight. It is not so good by air mail. Sometimes it takes longer than ordinary mail and it is very irregular. Your letter from 23 Jan. for example reached me here on Thursday last week (8 Feb.). That was OK. But your last letter took longer. One can rely on ordinary mail; the letter is 10 days at sea. I don't always trust the air mail so well in the French territory. For example I have never received your letter to Bathurst. Tomorrow or the day after another post arrives here. It will probably contain a letter from you again [...]. Sometimes one can be lucky with the air mail, if there is a boat just leaving Dakar to Freetown, but that is luck. The ordinary mail seems to me more sure. Then one can really rely on 14 days and now and then there is a piece of luck in between.

Moeteke, are you already getting a bit used to it? It is still very strange, isn't it? But the year will quickly pass by [...]. Nice that you still celebrated my birthday a bit. For me it was rather strange; the first day in Freetown without anyone knowing it [...].

In my notes you'll find (and later on that'll be the case as well) things about "tax" and "palm kernels", Moeteke.³³ It is like this. Each household has to pay a yearly tax of 5 shillings to the Government. The people usually find this sum by selling palm kernels, of which oil and nuts, etc. are made for the European market. Shortly before and after the war,³⁴ there was a lot of trade in palm kernels and at high prices. At that time there was plenty of trade in many fields. The price of palm kernels is now extremely low on the European market and therefore here as well. This is a consequence of the crisis, perhaps also partly of trade politics. The supply of soya beans from Asia and the rich, scientifically directed production of palm kernels on Sumatra are also influences on the market. These are the interconnections of the world economy and thus the life of the simple native is influenced by world market prices. Because the prices are low now, people have to work longer to produce more kernels and can't do much else. In Juju-ma, to which one of my notes relates, people don't have many palms, so they have to sell rice. That makes it more complicated of course. It means that the gathering of the kernels is but a side business in addition to the cultivation of the actual staple food, rice. I'll try to gradually get more information about it. It is an interesting subject for "cultural contact". The Syrians are sharp traders. Next to the Creoles from Freetown they are the only non-European traders. However, they are more shrewd than the Creoles, speculate more; they are also small money lenders who appear to charge high interest rates.

Now it is Monday evening, Moeteke. I have been in contact with carpenters, who have made a few things for me and about which I'll write in my next letter, and Mr

³³ See also Hofstra 1937b.

³⁴ World War I.

Konde [Mr Conteh³⁵], my interpreter and informant, has visited me a few times. Yesterday he went to Daru to see his wife and now he has returned with all sorts of news. He is inexhaustible, and has at the same time a sense of humour and I believe he is honest. At times he has a strong belief in magic, but he is also somewhat sceptical. He has had his education at the Mission, but that doesn't go so deep. He knows a good deal about what is happening among the chiefs. I write everything down, Moeteke. It is already late and early tomorrow the letter has to be sent off. Tomorrow, Conteh and I go from here with the chief in his car to Kailahun, where he'll take the taxes to the District Commissioner and on the way there we'll attend a funeral ceremony in Pendembu. It so happens that the chief's mother has died.

The piece from "Westafrica", a weekly, is still about our London presentation, Moeteke.³⁶ [...] Please, be sure to keep the notes. And perhaps my letters. I find it a safe feeling, that you have a duplicate of the notes, for mine here may of course get lost through theft or a fire. All is well with me, Moeteke. But I am longing for your letter. If only I could enter your room for a moment. Or better, if you could come here, Moeteke, and see my life here. Moeteke, can you already imagine it a bit? [...] Spring is already gradually approaching. I am already copper coloured, Moeteke. Bye bye. I have bought an African hammock for you which I'll send you one of these days.

Panguma, Sunday, [early] March 1934

My own dear Moeteke,

Both your letters from 31 Jan. and 7 Feb. reached me when I moved from Segbwema to Panguma. It has certainly been a stressful time for you, my dear. The letters were on their way for quite a long time. We probably didn't tell each other carefully enough how long it takes and how frequently you can receive a message, Moeteke. But now you already have more letters from me and things will become more regular. [...]

Last Tuesday I moved to Panguma. It has taken longer than I'd first expected, because it was a bit difficult to engage a lorry. At this time of the year the lorries are very busy with the transport of palm kernels. The journey here went well. It took about 2 hours. Segbwema has been interesting for me, because it already gave me an impression of Mendi life while I could simultaneously keep myself a bit separate. Here in Panguma I am more in the middle of it. In Segbwema I got a glimpse of a Mendi trading town. Since my last letter to you I have made a few more trips from Segbwema. Together with the "chief" of Segbwema, who had to go for the "tax" to Kailahun, in the very east of Mendiland and I went too. That was interesting. At that time there were many chiefs from the east whom I met. And I met the D(istrict) C(ommissioner), Cap-

³⁵ This should be spelled as Conteh. His name was Thomas C. Conteh. Letter Conteh to Hofstra, 6-5-1935.

³⁶ See *West Africa*, December 23, 1933, p. 1307-1308. It concerned a lecture-recital on Mende Music under the auspices of the Friends' Service Council. Sjoerd Hofstra delivered an introductory address about the Mende people. Thereafter seven Mende musicians presented a programme of songs, dances and drum music.

tain Page, there. I also saw a performance of Bundu (the secret society of women) girls' dances, etc.

On the way I met the chief of Pendembu several times. He is an interesting, intelligent young man, who speaks good English. As you'll also see in my notes, Moeteke, he offered to give me a piece of land and build a few houses for me, if I wanted to come and live there and do medical work. The fact is that my doctor's title is a difficult thing. The people immediately think of a medical doctor. I had to disappoint him of course, hadn't thought of such a thing at all. In a more modest way I still come into contact with doctoring here, in Panguma, as I'll tell you later. I have explained to the chief of Pendembu, that I am mainly interested in the language and the customs and the life of the Mendi, and he understood that. He was very nice and said, that it stayed the same for him. He would have liked to have me there and from the remarks, which he made about Pendembu and surrounding places, I understood that he understood my work. Chiefs like those of Pendembu and of Panguma are somewhat more educated and distinguished people than, for example, the chief of Segbwema, who is a bit greedy, although we have parted as good friends. He actually has a difficult position in Segbwema. In trading places there is a very mixed population, and some tribes, Kissi for instance, are indifferent and don't do what he says and don't even go to court when he summons them. This is a serious offence here, but these Kissi and also others, for example Fula and Timni [Temne], people who have become a bit detached from their own tribe, are sometimes glad when they have a few days free food in jail. These trips to Kailahun, Pendembu, Daru were very interesting. It is hard to write about everything in detail. How often I wish that you were here. But perhaps you'll yet come here, my dear. You should see it some time.

And now I am already well-established in Panguma. The beginning has been very good, Moeteke. It is a pleasant town. It has, to begin with, good water. This is an immense advantage in this country. Years ago, Panguma was the district's capital and then a water pipe was installed; the water comes from the hills to the town and at several points in the town, in the streets, there are pumps from where people can get their water. I am living here in the house, which was built earlier for the D.C. It is a house in bungalow style, spacious and high, much better than most rest houses, with a zinc roof, which is a big advantage in the rainy season. I have running water here and a bath tub, even a shower! The house has four rooms. One of them I use for sleeping, one as a study and sitting room, one for eating and one for storing my chests. There also is a wide veranda. There is a big garden around it, which reminds me of "Vechtoever".³⁷ So I already have very good accommodation, Moeteke. Of course I have been very fortunate to find such a rest house. Usually they are much more basic. Panguma is nicely situated with high hills around it. I'll send you pictures of it soon. I still have to take them. Now and then there is also a pleasant wind. It is, of course, as warm here as everywhere. The nights especially are a bit unpleasant. Only towards the morning does it become cooler, but such is West Africa. Otherwise I enjoy the climate.

³⁷ Vechtoever was a convalescent home for nurses in Maarssen of which Mrs Overdiep (Moeteke) had been matron.



Photo 2.3 Panguma, postcard early 1930s



Photo 2.4 Rest house Panguma with Sjoerd Hofstra on staircase, taken by Mr Robert, missionary from Bunumbu, February 1934

It is of course very warm, but one is lightly dressed and soon gets used to it. And I so much love the sun. It is strange, Moeteke, how soon one gets used here to nature and the whole life, the people, the houses, the trees, the sounds, the chirping of the crickets, the sounds of the birds, the barking of a dog, the fruits of a tree falling on my roof, etc. And the unfamiliar in particular, the drumming often till well into the night with indefatigable musicians and dancers. I believe that, if I had my regular work here, I could easily live here for a long time. Perhaps we'll end up at some time in the Dutch Indies, Moeteke.

The people here are very nice to me. At the moment I am the only European here, so I am rather a novelty. When the people heard that a doctor was coming, everybody was glad, for they thought that it was a physician. The chief³⁸ has already told the people that there are several types of doctors in Europe and his most eminent people understand this, but the others don't. They find it interesting that I am here for the language and they help me. That is already an important thing for my work. However, the chief and the clerk and a few of the more important people, who completely understand my aim, have advised me to do a bit of medical work. They say, and rightly so, I think, that in the first place I can do some good with it, but that, in the second place, it makes my work much easier. The people then become more familiar with you, you get to know them better and you learn to speak the language quicker. And, what is also important to me, I learn about their own medicines and their illnesses, etc. I come into contact with things and situations which I could otherwise hardly come to know. And I feel at the same time that I am doing something for the people in exchange for what I get to know about them in general. For a few days Mr Ganna, a young nurse from Segbwema, was here. He also figures in my notes. I discussed the matter with him and we found it best that I contact the hospital in Segbwema in order to see what can be done in simple cases. I'll go there on Tuesday for a few days. Constipation is very common and I have already worked with Shearns herbs and advocated the eating of oranges. In addition, worms and insect bites; also pneumonia; foot wounds (people usually walk barefoot). It is quite possible that this Ganna will return with me for a few days or longer. I am then, at least if he is here for a longer time, somewhat ready for the leading role and he can do the practical work. He is a skilful, trained boy. We'll see what'll happen. I have to do something of this sort anyway and if I designate a fixed hour in the morning for it, it doesn't have to take so much time. All this brings me in a surprising way into better contact with the whole population issue. For I want to collect numbers for births and deaths. Little is available about this. In this way I make contact with mothers and now and then can ask questions. It is otherwise very difficult to get to know anything about women.

How I would love to have you here, Moeteke. In the dry season at least you could easily be comfortable here. I don't yet know what the wet season is like. You know so much more than I about all these practical things about ailments and ways of treating

³⁸ The chief's name was James Ynee. No other chief's name is mentioned in Hofstra's letters. James Ynee had the status of paramount chief. A paramount chief was responsible for a whole chiefdom. At a lower level there were section chiefs (for part of the chiefdom), town chiefs (for a whole town or village) and compound chiefs (for part of a town).

them. We should discuss what would be best. For example if you were to come here during the last part of my first journey or if it would be better to travel to here together with the second journey and that you then stay here with me. That is if it wouldn't be too tiring for you. Living here in this house would be no problem for you, I believe, Moeteke. Plenty of fresh air and little fuss and much of interest. The warmth would of course be more trying for you than for me. [...] I love this environment and think that you would do so too.

The people here are pleasant and helpful. Perhaps this will get less later on, when it is no longer new. But several people have already said, that they want to teach me proper Mendi. They are proud of it. Panguma and surroundings has the reputation of speaking the best Mendi, the oldest form of it. A trip through the town is good training for me. From different sides people call good-day to me and one should then have a chat and then the people try to teach me short sentences. When I go through the town now I am therefore always armed with my notebook to write down everything. They have already given me a Mendi name, namely Blama Panguma. Blama is an abbreviation of Abraham, Abraham, a Mendi name, that'll probably have been borrowed from the Arabic and arrived here through Mohammedan influence. Panguma is the name of the place added behind it. In general a greeting is like this:

- A. Buwa (have you got up? [have you come?])
- B. n, Buwa (a short a, then it is: are you coming?)
- A. Bisie (thank you)
- B. Bisie
- A. Bo bigahu (how is the strength of your body?)
- B. Kaye ii Ngewoma (thanks to God)
- A. O biga ma? (and with you?)
- B. Kaye ii Ngewoma.

And then one can continue with the conversation. It can also already begin after: Bisie (thank you). I already begin to understand a few things, but of course it is difficult in the beginning.

Yesterday – it is now Monday morning – I attended a ceremony at the courtyard of the chief. That was very interesting. On Wednesday, you see, a daughter of the chief died, a 14-year old girl. She was buried in the afternoon. I joined the funeral procession. A funeral here is connected with many ceremonies. So yesterday, the wife's family handed over a present to the chief, a mat and a cloth. Someone who loses his wife or child, receives presents as compensation for the loss. It is done very elaborately with speeches and people did it in the proper, unabridged way to give me an impression of it. Throughout the words were translated by Mr C. It was very nice of them to arrange it this way. And afterwards I was allowed to ask all sorts of questions. The people are also very friendly with respect to my food. The first day the chief brought me the usual present of rice, oranges, eggs and a chicken. I said right away that I don't eat meat, and the chief knew that such people exist in Europe. Now I am only offered presents of oranges, rice, sweet potatoes, bananas, pineapples, etc., not only from the chief and his "speaker" but sometimes also from others. Thus a carpenter came here this morning with a pineapple. I can't eat my way through it all. And in addition, an in-

telligent young man lives here, who has learned European gardening. He grows French beans, tomatoes and radish. Now and then he sells me some of his French beans. The tomatoes aren't ripe yet.

The housekeeping goes fairly well. It is nice to have a roomy house and to be able to unpack everything. Moreover, the running water is a big advantage. One has to shake hands so often, with each greeting, that one has to wash one's hands frequently. – I have sent one of my boys home. He, Sandi, tried to rob me of a ten shilling note and I can't tolerate that. I thought it would be best to put an end to it immediately. Apparently it is a weak point of Sandi's to take things away, but I need a boy whom I can trust. He did his work well, but it is better to have a boy in my household who is a bit less intelligent, as long as he is honest. From now on I make do with the other boy, Selu, and we also have a lad of 11 years old, for the small jobs. I also hadn't enough work for two adult boys. In a household of a civil servant it is different, but I am living too simply for it. They talk too much because of that.

You'll think, Moeteke, how does Poet pass his days? Yesterday morning, for instance, I attended the ceremony at the chief's. After that Conteh and I took a walk through the town. When I am at home in the afternoon, there is, of course, much to write down. Moreover, yesterday I helped three people with foot wounds, gave a chief from Lalehun something against constipation and I visited the houses of the negro clergyman, whose wife had a light bronchitis and of the schoolmaster, whose wife also suffers from headaches. This last woman has already lost a child twice and then had two miscarriages. She asked me what could have caused it. Do you know that, Moeteke? She is about 25 or 30, I think. In the evening I have again done some writing and reading. It will often be like this through the town, observing, talking to people, now and then dress a foot – today I have done it already three times and I have already made much use of Peru balsam, Moeteke! – and making notes, discuss it with Mr Conteh, etc. This morning we talked about labour relations. This is a very interesting subject, but it is difficult to get an idea of it. And I am feeling very well, Moeteke, and up till now without quinine. I would only like to know more about diseases. Luckily I have recently been reading fairly widely about health matters.

So far a few things about my life here, dear Moeteke. How are you doing now? When you wrote your letters – I received the one to Bathurst here – it was January, early February and you wrote that luckily the weather was becoming better. Now it is already March – in a year's time I will already be coming home, Moeteke! – time has already moved on. Now spring is already approaching in Holland. [...] Can you decipher my notes? At first it is fragmentary of course and I write down as much as possible. After a while more of a direction will surely develop in some subjects. I write directly in English. That is better for later use. Tomorrow the post will arrive. There'll be a letter from you with it. It so happens, that just before I receive the mail, I have to send off the mail from here. It is a pity I can't answer more quickly. [...]

It is evening now. The evenings are a bit lonely here. It is dark very early – from half past six already until half past five, six o'clock in the morning. In the evening one has to keep the windows shut against the many insects. That makes it fairly warm. The first part of the night is also always warm. In the morning it is cooler. The mornings are de-

lightful here. And during the daytime, in the full light the heat is fairly bearable, for me personally, even pleasant. I therefore go to bed quite early, between 9 and 10 and get up at half past five. Last week we had nights of beautiful moonlight, Moeteke. We have also had a few nights with a tornado, thunderstorm with rain. Once there was a real tropical rain. The rain then beats down from the sky in buckets.

There is so much of interest in the work here, Moeteke. I believe it will be best to approach the economic life first. I already have some ideas. From there one gets connections with the political, the religious, the married life, etc. The relations here are fairly pleasant because the head, the chief, is a well-meaning man. He is rich for a Mendi man and doesn't have to bother his subjects for money. One has therefore relatively normal, friendly relations. This also makes it more pleasant in the beginning for me. In a town like Segbwema the chief is more distrustful and more keen on money. Moreover, I find more of true Mendi life here less disturbed by trade than it is along the railway. You'll certainly find it pleasant, Moeteke, if you were to come here. [...]

Tuesday morning. Bye bye dear Moeteke!

Your own Child.

On the train from Segbwema to Hangha, 9 March 1934

My dear Moeteke,

Just now I am able to send you a letter in between the English mail. This letter is going with the German boat, which leaves once a month. I have been in Segbwema in the hospital for three days and I have learned quite a lot there, so I can now offer a few simple treatments. I was the guest of Mr Sanders of the Mission here. One gets in touch with awful problems in such a hospital, Moeteke, I mean things which don't even directly relate to the disease, but to the whole of life. It was very useful for me. Anyway, you know all about such problems. They mainly concern the whole of married life.

I got both your letters. [...] I was very pleased about that. Now there is a more regular connection again.

This evening I'll be at home in Panguma again and there we'll start again with all sorts of economic problems. You wrote to me so well and lovingly Moeteke. Don't be worried. Everything is going well here. Don't strain yourself too much, Moeteke. I'll write a longer letter with the next English mail and will also enclose some snapshots. So every 14 days you can expect a letter from me, Moeteke. [...]

Bye bye dear dear Moeteke, your Child.

Rest house Panguma (via Hangha). Wednesday morning, 14 March

My dear Moeteke

How are you? [...]

The sun is shining beautifully this morning. It is a bit cooler, 79 degrees. This is seen as fairly cool here. Yesterday evening it rained quite a bit and there was a thunderstorm. That cools things down somewhat. We have already had rain and thunderstorms several times this month. That is early. Usually these are in April, by way of introduction to the wet season. How is the weather in Holland now, Moeteke? How quickly the time has passed since early January, when I left you. You'll see that the year will fly by. [...]

I am now already quite settled in Panguma. The people are very friendly. They, that is some of the most important people, bring me fruit now and then and pay me a visit. At first we, the three fellows,³⁹ thought getting into contact with the population could pose somewhat of a problem. You can easily remain isolated for a while of course, while people find one a bit suspect at first. Luckily that isn't the case here, at least not among the officials. The chief and his people and a few others are pleasant to me all the time. If at all possible, I visit the chief once a day in his courtyard. The day before yesterday, he and his followers taught me the Mende names for the parts of the body. During each visit they tell me useful short sentences. So far they seem to enjoy doing it. Later on this will cool down of course, but in this early stage it is still pleasant. If I wanted it I could have visitors all the time. There are a few who visit me now and then when they return from the rice field. Today the tax is being collected here in Panguma. So this is a busy day for the "big people", the chief and his people. Just now the speaker came here (the speaker is the most important person below the chief, through him the chief makes his announcements to the people and he has to consult with him about "matters of state") with the message: "the chief sends you his regards", and he also told me that the chief would be busy with the tax. Apparently they wanted to save me from taking a useless walk.

I wrote you, Moeteke, that I received some instruction and simple medicines in the hospital in Segbwema. And also the help of a nurse, a nice boy, called Samuel Ndoko. When I was at the hospital, he had just been suspended because of an affair with one of the wives of Segbwema's chief. The head nurse was pleased that I could use him. Later on they'll take him back in the hospital. For a few weeks he can usefully help me with people who ask me for medicines. Our office hours are from 8-9 in the morning. People here get colds, worms, fever, toothache, etc. A general complaint is constipation. In the dry season, when there is still plenty of rice, people eat too much. In the wet season this is not a problem, but then people start coughing. I let the people pay something for the medicines. This prevents frivolous enquiries and at the same time they can show their appreciation for the help. I wish you could see me at it, Moeteke! It gets me in touch with all sorts of circumstances and family relations. I write down the names, age, etc. of the people who come here. If you help the people a bit like this, they are much more open with you than when you simply walk around asking them about their language and customs. Just as we returned here from Segbwema last Friday, I was instantly "called" for a difficult case. The assistant of the driver of the chief's lorry had been hit by the car. His whole leg round the ankle lay open or rather all his flesh had been pushed out. It looked very strange. The nurse cleaned and dressed it

³⁹ These were the three fellows of the IALC: Meyer Fortes, Sjoerd Hofstra and S.F. Nadel.

and in the meantime I had to negotiate with the chief. For I found it necessary to send the man by car to the hospital in Segbwema as soon as possible. The chief first wanted to wait for two or three days. I said, that I couldn't bear the responsibility for that and that that injury could only worsen. He was very nice and understood it when I insisted. He then had the man taken away immediately. It was just a "test" for my authority. I had indeed made the right judgement: the matter was serious, for the head sister of the hospital wrote to me (the doctor is on holiday) that she couldn't cope with it either. She had immediately referred the man to the hospital in Daru, where operations are carried out. It was an ankle fracture. It was a bit comical when the man, after he had been dressed and must still have had much pain, asked for food, for his "chop". I had to laugh for a moment and he himself too.

For the last few days I have been pre-occupied with learning the language. It's a difficult job, but it will come gradually. However, it will take quite some time before one can make oneself understood routinely. Over the last three days I have recorded Mende stories with the nurse, who is well educated. This is enlightening, and one gets accustomed to the sounds. Mr Conteh, my interpreter, is away for a few days. He has a "women palaver". His wife has had a relationship with a boy from Segbwema; someone who helps with the Mission, would you believe it. Mr Sanders, the missionary, also wanted to see the business settled. So I thought it best for Conteh to go there to see to it. Conteh's wife is still in their place of birth, somewhere below Daru. "Women palavers" (palaver is court case, dispute) are numerous in this country. Conteh will probably come back again with many tales to tell. He is very entertaining. But it is nice at the same time to have the nurse to help with the language. He has quite a different character and different tendencies.

Sunday 18 March. Now Sunday has come round again [...] How quickly the days pass by. It is a quiet Sunday and once again I am busy writing, working up my notes. I had to write a letter to Oldham,⁴⁰ who sent us a compliment about our memorandum,⁴¹ but asked us to think of the average reader when writing our book (he feared, that we would otherwise be too abstract), and now I am writing to you, Moeteke. Luckily the boys are away, so it is completely quiet and there are no visitors. Except that three schoolboys, who already understand a bit of English, came to visit me this morning: "we come to compliment you," as they then say here. I sent them away quickly, for I wanted to work undisturbed. Sunday is the only day that one can be completely on one's own. On workdays there are sometimes many visitors and one has to do all sorts of work of course. Moreover, one has to arrange matters with the boys, with a secretary and a nurse! A big household, Moeteke, of which one suddenly is the responsible head. And the life is so interesting that one could write down much more about it if one only could live three lives. The people are often very nice to me and they want to teach me all kinds of things. Only, one can't learn a language faster than I am already doing. It has to go slowly, of course. It is difficult in the beginning, Moeteke. Yesterday, for example, I got up at 6 o'clock. After breakfast, one first does some paperwork, working up one's notes from the previous day. If one doesn't do this consistently and

⁴⁰ J.H. Oldham, Administrative Director of the IIALC.

⁴¹ Memorandum of Fortes, Hofstra and Nadel, see chapter 1 of this book.

regularly, one forgets the finer details. At 8 o'clock the town chief came here, together with a few of the older men of the town. I had asked Conteh to record extensively for me in Mende language everything that had been said at the burial ceremony of the chief's daughter. There are general wordings for this. Conteh then consulted the chief and asked a few old men, who could be supposed to be most familiar with the matter, to help him. On Friday, C. and the few old men worked at it and yesterday he showed the results to the chief. However, the chief found that it wasn't done well, too short, and that a few things were mixed up. He therefore called in his uncle, who is town chief, and who came here yesterday morning with a few others who knew even more about it. Conteh and they worked at it here yesterday morning from 8-11. Meanwhile I was mostly in the surgery from 8-10. There one learns all sorts of things about the people, one also hears stories. It is really a good lead, Moeteke. I was at home after 10, and then the chief himself came to have a look. Another half hour is easily taken up with talking to him. At 11, I had a meal (yesterday I ate yams, these are indigenous turnips, the size of beetroots, with onions and pawpaw). From 12 until 1, I regularly take a rest. Then one feels better in the afternoon and moreover it is very hot. Thereafter I did some more paperwork. From 3 to about 5, a trip through the town. Then a bath. Dinner at 6. In the evening the Creole, Maccauley came for a talk. About half past nine one goes to bed, for one is fairly tired due to the heat and all the interesting things one experiences. Also the eyes soon hurt because of the bad light. I often read a bit in the evening and write, collecting ideas again for my work. Often one would like to drag it out, but in the evening the warmth is very oppressive. The mornings, on the other hand, are nice.

Yesterday, a brother of the chief told me, that the chief has ordered the people not to bother me with begging. He fears that it might cause me to leave again! I believe that we are good friends, the chief and I. He is now fairly busy with collecting the tax and because of the bad times this is not going so easily, of course.

This week we have had three days of rain, only for short periods, for about an hour. But each time it made the "bush", the rice land, wet again. The time for the "cutting of the bush" or "clearing" is now nearly over. Bush is used as rice land about every 8 to 9 years, Moeteke. When it gets used again, the undergrowth that has grown on it in the meantime, the "bush" has to be cut down. That is quite a job. It is now about over. They let it lie about two weeks for drying and then everything is set on fire. That is the "burning" of the land. This was about to happen each day this week, but from day to day it was postponed because of the rain. Perhaps it will happen this afternoon. One has to wait until the afternoon. For at about half past twelve some wind always rises and this is needed for the "burning". But I haven't yet heard about it and the chief has promised to warn me when it will happen. So I think that today it has been postponed as well. There will be quite some deliberation and talking going on about it in the houses before it really goes ahead.

[...] I was very pleased with the newspaper cuttings that you sent me. So I now know a few of the most important things. I get the "Observer", the English Sunday morning newspaper and in this I read a few things about France and Austria. There is quite a lot of tension in Europe, isn't there? How'll everything turn out? It is indeed a

very difficult position for our country too and for all who are keen on intellectual liberty. The world is going in a strange direction. I often think that it is a privilege for me in this region to be able to think about cultural values and to get to know the differences in life style. Still, I like to keep up to date about what is happening in Europe and, therefore, I have recently taken out a subscription to the “Times”. The “Observer” offers only a little once a week. It certainly is a stressful and grave time, isn’t it? I believe, that there will remain plenty for people like us to do, Moeteke. It is good to be able to bide one’s time here, I believe, and also to be able to see various things in a more comparative light.

[...] At first one has to get used to the houses here, Moeteke. The shape and colour is a bit monotonous, but then it is also rather attractive. Nature makes up so much for it and one misses here in Panguma the nasty things from our civilization such as many shops and butchers in particular. For the next letter I’ll take pictures of the surroundings. Are my notes useful for you, Moeteke? Some words will be somewhat unclear for you, perhaps? For example “palaver”, that is the word for “court case”. [...] “Dispensary” is a small, provisional hospital, so to say, a place where one provides simple treatment or refers to a hospital. “Compound” is a house with its surroundings. And so it includes the garden. Later there will be real Mende words, but then I’ll include the meaning each time. I haven’t heard anything from Alleney.⁴² On the boat I wrote him a letter and this came back marked undeliverable. So he appears to have moved. I don’t understand what has happened to him.

Things often were a bit strange and unexpected with him, but I would indeed like to know how he is doing. I can certainly do without his assistance here, for it all goes well here. I already have more help than I can cope with.

Sunday evening. Now Sunday is already over, Moeteke. I have written a lot today, a few letters and my notes, etc. I wrote from about 7 until 5, with only a break for the meal. But afterwards one feels even fitter than after a whole day of talking, as often is the case. Talking is very tiring, isn’t it? Only working at home is less tiring. You still know that well from Vechtoever. Although a change is also good. Always working at home alone is also a bit burdensome. – Afterwards I took a walk and I thought: When she reads my letters Moeteke will time and again ask: and how is this and how is that? I know so well, [...] how much there is to ask. The process of describing has to come gradually. There is so much suddenly, too much. This evening I saw a beautiful sunset, Moeteke, a real Sunday evening quiet reigned in the “bush”, and I felt already at home here, perhaps because one loves the countryside and I can imagine you best near to nature. Do you get my letters regularly, Moeteke? And the notes, do they arrive in good order? Could you please keep them book by book. This is now book 2. I am curious as to whether the parcel might sometimes be opened by the English secret police. But they won’t find anything special in it. Please write to me straight away [...] if something goes missing. I send you this letter and the notes separately, this may be easier to put in the post. You shouldn’t worry, Moeteke, if a letter fails to arrive. It could yet happen, that a letter goes missing in the post. [...]

⁴² Mr Alleney was Hofstra’s Mende language teacher in London.

I am also sending you three films, Moeteke. I would like it if you could have them developed at our photographers. All Europeans to whom I have so far spoken here about photography send their films home to have them developed. It appears to be very difficult work here and the photographer in Freetown doesn't make sharp enough images. You really need a good craftsman for it. Perhaps the Haarlem photographer can do it for me regularly and also provide new films and send them when I need them. I fear that these examples are still very amateurish, Moeteke, and it's stupid of me that I haven't noted down exactly what they are. I still know it more or less, namely on the big film you'll find the Mission house in Segbwema with Mr and Mrs Sanders and another missionary, Mr Tucker; then the two nurses Daniel and Samuel together and separately. They came to visit me there quite a few times. Further on is the speaker (the tallest man) and the chief's secretary. In addition an old man, who came here to pick lime (a sort of lemon). Then my boy Selu and the little boy Kokela. Selu with wife and also the two of them together with Mr Conteh and a lady friend of his. In the background is "my" house and further on also all the things I brought from Panguma in the garden here. Then comes a man with a group of children, who performed the so-called devil's dance here. (He is also to be found on the first film.) The small film no.1 is about: yes, that is stupid, I really don't know it anymore; it's already some time ago again and I believe that some are the same scenes as on the big film. On the small film no.2 are to be found respectively the town watchman (twice); Selu (sitting on my new chair); the carpenter who made the chair, behind the chair (in blue gown); Conteh and his wife; Mr Ndoko, my nurse; and then twice I have tried to let Ndoko take a picture of me, but I think that this has failed completely. I saw the camera move sharply. It was a too unfamiliar job for him. The next films will surely be better and I'll then note down exactly the exposure time as well. I would be pleased if the photographer could make some useful comments. I find it a very pleasant idea, Moeteke, that you are keeping the films and the negatives. The best pictures will be in the book later on! Could you please keep them a bit in their rank order? I would like to have two prints of the pictures which are good if there is one person on it, and three if there are two on it. From later pictures of nature I only need one; once I have the prints here I can already classify and briefly describe them. We can then give the same number to each parcel with prints as the parcel with negatives that you'll keep, Moeteke. What a lot of work you are doing for me. And then the deciphering of the notes. First I thought to send the films to England, but then I suddenly got the idea that it is great if Moeteke gets them. Then you also know exactly what I have taken and the negatives are kept safely. Now I am going to bed, Moeteke. It's half past eight. Tomorrow morning at 6 o'clock I have to take the letters, etc. to Hangha by lorry. It's about an hour's drive. At about 9 o'clock I hope to be back. Today the "bush" hasn't been burnt. So I think that will happen tomorrow afternoon. I think that will become an emotional element in the later book! Oh, how much longer I could go on talking to you, Moeteke! [...]

Your own true boy from the Panguma Bush

Photos 2.5-2.10



(2.5) Interpreter Conteh, Panguma
March 1934



(2.6) 'Boy' Selu on chair made by
carpenter (standing),
Panguma March 1934



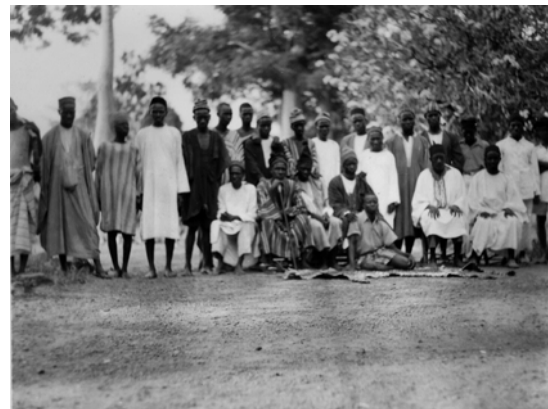
(2.7) Nurse Ndoko, Panguma
March 1934



(2.8) Town watchman Yengbeke,
Panguma March 1934



(2.9) Speaker Boakani (tallest man)
and the chief's secretary and
brother Rashid, Panguma
March 1934



(2.10) Chief James Ynee (with staff) and
Other important persons,
Panguma March 1934

Panguma, Friday morning 23 March 1934

My very dear Moeteke,

I have just read in the local Freetown newspaper that on the coming Monday a German boat will leave for Europe. I very much hope that this letter can go with it. Yesterday evening I received the mail here, including your letters from 21 Feb. and 5 March. [...] Yes, the distance is indeed great and timings are irregular. But gradually it will get better. [...]

Life here already has a certain regularity for me. I am busy with the economic activities, have already seen the burning of the bush land three times, etc. I'll write more about everything, Moeteke. The people here are kind to me and help me and answer my questions. I could write down perhaps twice as much, if the day was longer, but one shouldn't be too hasty at the beginning. I believe that I am lucky to be here and to be staying here. [...] Bye bye Moeteke,

your Child.

Panguma, Sunday 1 April 1934

My dear Moeteke,

It is already 1 April. Almost three months have passed since I left you and it's already two months since I arrived here. How far off it already seems, Moeteke. [...]

Today it is Easter. A strange day for both of us, isn't it? Not being together and actually such a day here doesn't mean anything to me now. Life goes on as usual. Today is a bit different of course because it's Sunday, but tomorrow life goes on as usual. There is a small church here and a school at the American Mission, the so-called United Brethren in Christ. A Creole parson from Freetown is here. I had been invited to attend the service this morning because the first anniversary of the chief's reign will be commemorated. The chief is a supporter of the school and no Mohammedan and also no longer a real heathen. He has had a lot of contact with Europeans. So naturally he has easily been integrated into the church group. He was elected just a year ago and in the church a few words were devoted to that this morning. I love the chief and his people, but I don't much like such Creole church business. The Creoles are a bit too anglicized; they have always relied on England and have imitated it in everything. Only they are always some 20 years behind. Such a church service, in English with a translation in Mendi, is therefore even more boring than an ordinary English church service. The only funny thing was, that two dogs walked in and began to play about and bark. That was natural at least. For this occasion I had put on a jacket and a pair of long trousers, but how one feels out of the habit of it. I always walk around here in a sports shirt and shorts. Afterwards we went in procession to the chief's compound and there I took pictures. I wish that you could see everything with your own eyes, Moeteke. To describe it still remains inadequate, doesn't it?

What are you doing today, Moeteke? Maybe you have been to church in Santpoort this morning? Today the sky here is dark. The day before yesterday, yesterday and last night it has rained heavily here and there have been thunderstorms. What a lot of rain was pouring down, Moeteke and what a heavy thunderstorm we had. Panguma is situated more or less in between mountains. These storms are the first signs of the rainy season. If it happens during day time I find it fairly pleasant for a change and for cooling off, but in the night it is a bit strange because I am here alone in this big house. Luckily I have a zinc roof on the house. Without that you have a lot of trouble with the heavy rains. In a heavy storm with rain a whole roof of palm leaves can be blown a few miles. I begin to love the country very much, Moeteke. It hasn't been too warm for me yet. I like all kinds of weather. It is such a boon to be able to wear as few clothes as possible and to move freely. Over the last two weeks I have plodded around through the fields and the woods, often in burning sunshine, but I love it. I am already very brown of course; really one becomes deep yellow, the legs especially. I have also been out several times this week without a helmet and that too goes well. Europeans are very superstitious in all those matters. Last Friday the D.C. (District Commissioner) passed by here, on his way to Dodo, for the tax collection. On the coming Wednesday he'll come here for the same purpose. I went to meet him without a helmet and the first thing he said after the greeting was: "Where is your helmet? I wish you wouldn't walk in the sun." Similarly the missionaries thought that I would soon become ill without quinine.

The medical work is going well. About ten people come each day. I have already worked a lot with eucalyptus oil, Moeteke, and with success. A few times a week a couple of old men with a nasty cough also come here. Neither of them can get better, I think. They have had this cough for years. But one of them is very fond of my lump of sugar with eucalyptus oil. He feels he is getting better and, of course, a success with an old man who walks about the town all day helps. I have also already rubbed a few people with it for various ailments. Tomorrow I'll get a medicine against worms. Worms is a difficult ailment here, Moeteke. Many people suffer from it. And of course people get it easily through impure drinking water. Through this work I come in touch with all sorts of people and conditions here.

I am very pleased with my stay here. There is so much of interest here, Moeteke. I receive a lot of support from Conteh, the interpreter. We understand each other well and he likes this work. I often have to urge him to write, but he has a natural talent for recounting stories, wandering around, talking to people. He is also valuable to me because he knows the country thoroughly and communicates easily with the people. He lives nearer to the centre of the town than I do and hears all the news. It is, by the way, fully according to Mendi custom that a "big man" has a speaker, whom one approaches in certain cases first, before one speaks to the person himself. So one doesn't speak to the chief directly when one has a problem, but first to his speaker. Anyway, I have enough contacts with the population and walk around a lot, but there is a limit, when one becomes physically incapable, and besides it is not pleasant for the people if I always wander around among them. It shouldn't be a hunt for material. Moreover, there are several things they won't yet tell me easily, while they will tell Conteh. It is a

pleasant working situation for us here, because the chief lets us get on with it. The chief calls me his friend and as soon as the population knows this, one has access to much. In Segbwema, for example, the chief was not against me, but neither did he cooperate, he wasn't at all interested in my work. Then one doesn't get co-operation from the population in the end.

We have been busy with seeing the burning of the bush on the future rice fields. The first time that I went there, the chief who had heard that I had gone there, quickly sent the speaker after me, who had to take care that I wouldn't come too near the fire! Later he trusted me. We have also attended a magical ceremony on a rice field, a ceremony to ward off evil witchcraft forces. In addition I was present at the tax collection during a few days. The people who hadn't yet paid had to come to the chief and pay. If they don't they are put in the stocks. This is the simplest sort of punishment here. There are two beams which have a close fit. In these there are holes at a certain distance from each other. A leg of the prisoner is put in one of these holes and then the beams are closed. In this way one can keep a whole row in custody in the open air for quite some time and in a provisional manner. It is tragic and at the same time good-natured. Last Monday I attended the tax collection the whole morning. It is a quite busy and chatty event. And everything is accompanied by accordion music and singing by the singer of the chief. The chief isn't afraid to place his own wives and family in the stocks as a means of setting an example. Last Monday a man was taken into custody, a real sturdy village character. Afterwards Conteh and I and a few brothers of the chief deliberated about whether we would lend him the money so that he could be set free.

The Mendi people, however, were afraid of him. He was known to take into the bush people who, having lent him money, later on asked him for that money back and then give them a thrashing there so that they wouldn't ask again. So we left the business and the man was placed in the stocks. He wasn't there the next day. Probably his family had raised the money for him.

This week we have also attended a real fetish (magical) ceremony, Moeteke. Again this was at one and the same time a tragic and an amusing story. There is here a night watchman, called Yengbeke. I already wrote to you about him, didn't I? He is already an old man but still swift-footed. If he happens upon someone without light in the street after 9 o'clock in the evening, he has to stop this person. He is allowed to fine him or her then and there. In the case of women it seems that Yengbeke sometimes makes improper use of his authority by, instead of the fine, securing sexual intercourse for that night. For instance, a few weeks ago, a man and his son were "stocked". In the evening the wife (mother) went to the place where the man and son were to bring them food. Yengbeke made use of this by arresting her and having sex with her. It was fairly unsavoury to see them both, for she is already an old woman. However that may be, the husband brought the case to the local court. There are first quite a few formalities involved in this and such a case drags on, especially because Yengbeke has a somewhat official position. Consequently people don't dare to face up to him. However, Conteh and I wanted to see one day how such a case would proceed, as a court

Photos 2.11-2.15



(2.11) Clearing and burning the bush from the rice fields, Panguma early 1934



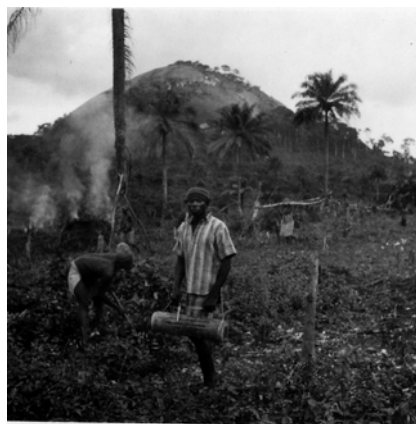
(2.12) Tilling the future rice fields, accompanied by a drummer, Panguma early 1934



(2.13) Tilling the future rice fields, accompanied by a drummer, Panguma early 1934



(2.14) Tilling the future rice fields, accompanied by a drummer, Panguma early 1934



(2.15) The drummer who accompanies the work on the rice fields, Panguma early 1934

case. We also wanted to teach Yengbeke a lesson and help the people concerned who are very poor and thus couldn't bring court cases as they always involve money. The case came before the chief and Yengbeke was fined. So the case was legally ended. Yengbeke and I haven't fallen out about it. However, he is now more cautious with me and says that I want to know the end of each case.

But there was still another aspect to this case. The old woman was a candidate for one of the highest ranks of the secret society of women, namely of the grade that is concerned with magic. The women who do this work are mostly already old and skilful in sorcery. They are not allowed to have sexual intercourse. Even touching a person who has had it, harms the magical power. When Conteh and I talked about this case with the leader, and Conteh wanted to shake hands with her, she hesitated to take his hand and asked beforehand if he had just had sexual intercourse. Because the woman had sinned, there had to be a washing of her by the leaders of the secret society. Due to her poverty – for she had to give a small present to the leaders – the case was postponed and she felt herself becoming ill and thought she was going to die now this blemish was on her. Without a ceremony she would probably have died soon. So strong was her belief in the purifying effect of the ceremony. Well, in order to spare her this further grief, I offered something – three tobacco leaves could be given as a present and so the ceremony could begin. We sat together in the women's house, where this old woman lives. Conteh and I were allowed to be there, because we were helping, interested persons. There were a few other women who live in the same house and also the old woman who is the leader of the secret society, with her pupil, also an elderly woman. The old woman whose sin had to be washed off had then to give her a present, namely some rice, salt and palm oil. It wasn't sumptuous, and the leader already murmured a bit about it. Then another difficulty cropped up. When one has been washed, one is no longer allowed to wear the garment that one had been wearing and which also contains the sin. One has to wear another garment. However, the old woman had only one garment, the waistcloth she was wearing. And her husband couldn't give her anything either. He also has but one garment. So once more there was a standstill. The leader had to insist of course that another garment was necessary. Otherwise she couldn't guarantee the result. Once again the old woman was in big trouble. In order to bring the case to a favourable conclusion, I then gave a garment. Conteh quickly bought a piece of cloth for one shilling, had it sewn together by our dressmaker and so that was also all right. Both parties were very pleased and the leader said we did much more than the family.

Then the remaining difficulty still had to be overcome. For according to the correct procedure, Yengbeke had to come also and, in order to make the ceremony completely valid, to give a small present. I arranged for Yengbeke to be called and then there was another palaver of course. Yengbeke had nothing with him and he finally gave his finger ring as security. Then the washing could take place. I didn't see the actual washing. That happened between the women, outside, on the bank of the river. The old woman was very happy when she returned. She took both my hands, spat on them, then brought them to my forehead and prayed for me, that I have a long life and that you may see me again in good health. It was emotional for a moment. A really good,

true religious heathen background was behind it, I felt. This case has brought me into the favour and trust with the sorcerer women, who are otherwise very tight lipped and we have already had an offer to attend another ceremony, namely of the leader of the secret society of twins. This morning at 6 o'clock, the old woman and her husband were already at my house to greet me before they went to their work.

This week I also attended the first lawsuit. It was an affair in which a man had insulted another man. I went there; everyone is free to attend a lawsuit here. I was then invited to sit on the jury. In this way one begins to take part in life here. Oh, Moeteke, you should indeed experience all this some time. It is also part of the rich and varied life and it teaches you to think about all kinds of cultural values. My health is excellent. I am very glad, Moeteke, that people say that you are looking well. That is very good. You were also able to write more cheerfully and you tell me all sorts of things. I very much like that, Moeteke. Yes, I got letters from Fortes and Nadel, but that was a few weeks ago. They are doing well. Frau Nadel wrote to me that she will embark on 4 April, so that's next Wednesday. So she will be in Freetown on 14 April and 4 days later in Nigeria, with her husband. I also got a letter from Pos.⁴³ He is also thinking of coming to Africa this summer, but to the north, to Algiers, as you know. You ask if there are also little songbirds here, Moeteke. Oh yes, dear little blue ones for example. You hear them sing quite a lot. Now for instance. By now it is already Sunday evening, about 8 o'clock. It's a moonlit evening, a bit cloudy after new rain this afternoon. In the garden many birds are singing, accompanied by crickets. In daytime I often see them jumping around in the trees. There are also big, screeching birds, but I mostly see small, richly coloured ones. There are also beautiful butterflies here, Moeteke. Lovely big blue and red and yellow ones. It is a beautiful country here. There may be more spectacular countries, but it is really beautiful here all the same, with the mountains on all sides. And I am living here so well. The only thing I don't like is night-time thunderstorms. Then I feel a bit lonely in this big house.

Monday morning. Now I am soon going to Hangha, Moeteke, to send off the letters. The sun is shining beautifully again. What would you be doing now, on the second day of Easter? [...] Bye bye [...], I send you so many good and sunny thoughts,

Your Boy, who really remains modest!

Panguma (via Hangha), Sunday 8-4-34

My dear Moeteke,

Now it is Sunday again. A quiet day, even here, where Christian customs haven't really penetrated. However, the few shops are closed and in places which have any link with the traffic, the influence of some European customs is visible. And at this warm time of the year "the natives" also like to take some extra rest. So, many don't go to their farms in the afternoon and I hear practically no sounds along the road. – This morning I

⁴³ H.J. Pos was professor of philosophy at the University of Amsterdam. During part of his studies Hofstra had rented a room in Pos's house.

helped a few people with coughing ailments and I went to see a field that was turned over for the cultivation of cocoa yam. The owner is a nice, fairly young man, who has picked up a bit of broken English. He has also taken on an English name, John Bull! And for the rest of the time I am quietly at home, going through my notes, reading a bit, etc. From time to time it's good to have a day when one doesn't come into touch with people too much. I also had a talk with the District Commissioner who has been here for the tax collection since Thursday. He will leave again on the coming Wednesday. Yesterday he had tea with me here. He is not staying in the same house and he didn't want to disturb me, but he is now using the other rest house, which was an office earlier on. He is a nice man, an Irishman, intelligent and humane. The natives, who have a keen sense of the character traits of Europeans, call him: D.C. "Sawei Kpango", i.e. D.C. "law under the arm". This is because he has a reputation for pursuing matters as far as possible, of exploring all the details. "He is just like you," Conteh said to me, "he likes to know all about it." There are several D.C.s who take things fairly easy, who often let palavers pass by generously and at other times suddenly interfere. Often, this might suit the natives, but in the long run they appreciate the observing and all-knowing type.

The native is a fairly shrewd man, often with a gift for accurately assessing a character. Thus Conteh has also told me what they personally think of the missionaries. People like Conteh, who have been educated by the mission and have had a job there, know all about it of course and there are almost always "women palavers" to be settled. The missionaries hold on rigidly to the requirement that people are allowed to have only one wife. Apparently, for the negroes this is such an unnatural thing that they deceive the missionaries in countless ways. I think that I already know more about this than the missionaries themselves. It would perhaps be better if the mission were to allow polygamy. At present all sorts of lies are being told. And I think it also has an impact on the spread of Christianity. For the natives who listen to a native preacher, a young man who has been trained in the mission for this purpose and who is called a "catechist", know that he is regularly a sinner. Because of this therefore time and again you get issues arising between the missionaries and their paid followers, and people like Conteh with brains and a sense of humour soon know how the different missionaries go about things. They like it and are even inclined to be honest, when they really respect a missionary. Thus there are a few of the missionaries who are recognised as good, just and open-minded. Mendi people don't like it when a European requests them in an authoritarian way to tell this or that immediately and directly, and meanwhile tries to play off one person against another. They then protect each other and lie. A missionary should be able to let things run a bit and not be too legalistic. It seems to me to be a very difficult job. Every method to convert using great enthusiasm or some dramatic spiritual violence meets resistance and scepticism, just as in the quieter parts of Europe. It is just the same in my work. I actually make little effort to entice people to come to me, I am only fairly friendly, give now and then some tobacco as a present when somebody has really done something for me, but refuse when someone just asks for it. Anyway, the people don't get the impression that I am immediately intruding on everything. However, when I go through the town, I am greeted from many

sides and so many people want to have a chat that I very soon come to the end of my Mendi words. Of course it takes a long time, to have the full trust of the people, but it is already worth something, that people receive you well here and aren't distrustful. And I believe you have that when you are not too pushy. Moreover, by calmly observing and looking, one often gets more than by asking. It is very interesting work, Moeteke. As with every contact with people it just requires a little tact. I'll also make many mistakes, of course, but gradually one will find the right path. Sometimes one does feel a bit isolated, having to do this all alone. [...]

Thursday. Dear Moeteke, I had reached this point on Sunday and now several days have gone by [...] I send you this unfinished letter now because I read in the Freetown newspaper that a German boat will depart on 15 April. I am hoping that it carries mail and that you'll get this extra letter. On Sunday I'll answer your letter in more detail, Moeteke. Then I'll be writing for the ordinary mail again.

I enclose a few pictures which I have just received from Mr Robert, the missionary at Bunumbu, with whom I made the first trip to here, when I was still in Segbwema. Perhaps you'd like to send them for a few days to Makkum? I am afraid that my own pictures may not be turning out very well yet.

Now I am going to see the stamping and preparing of the palm oil somewhere some distance outside Panguma. It is still early. I'll be back at 8 o'clock. The "patients" come until about half past nine. From 10 to half past twelve I note down details which Conteh – and nowadays Safa, another nice native, who also is frequently with us – tell me about all kinds of subjects. By means of these talks I am gradually getting a good idea about the social life here. Of course it emerges somewhat fragmentary at first. Gradually it will come to form a more complete picture. I think that it will all become fairly interesting. First one still has to rely much on information. After a certain time my own observations will come more to the foreground, I think. The D.C. is leaving tomorrow. I am well, Moeteke. Are you too? I very much hope that this letter arrives in the interval between the usual postings. Bye dear Moeteke, don't be worried. [...]

Your true Child

During these past three nights it has rained heavily and there were thunderstorms. We are gradually approaching the rainy season. Less than a month to go, then it begins.

Panguma, 15 April 1934, Sunday evening

My dear Moeteke,

Now it is Sunday evening once more. It is about half past eight. What will you be doing now? Perhaps you have just had supper with the Kossen family? [...] It was a quiet day here for me. I worked at home until about 3 o'clock, on notes and a bit of reading, thereafter I took a walk and then I had to get my lamp in order, which was quite a job. [...] The mornings are beautiful here, especially the quiet Sunday mornings. [...] It was nice weather today, a bright sky and yet fresh outside, following a few showers this week. We have already had a few tornados at night. These bring terrible rains and

thunderstorms, Moeteke. That is especially so this month serving as an introduction to the rainy season. When such a tornado comes at night I don't like it much. Rain is nothing, but I don't like thunderstorms. Luckily my roof is rain-proof. In an ordinary rest house with a roof of palm leaves it often leaks. The D.C. who was here this week and who stayed in the other rest house, hadn't been able to sleep all night because of the leaks. – I can't yet easily imagine what the rainy season will be like. Now I am still enjoying the sun each day, although it also becomes sometimes a bit tiring. In the morning the sun shines on one side of my house and in the afternoon on the other. I take advantage of that on Sundays and also at other times fairly frequently in the afternoon, when I am on my own and can bask in the sun completely naked. Nobody sees me because my house is rather high. In the afternoon, after the meal, I often rest for an hour like that. – Because of the rains the bush already begins to get a somewhat fresher colour. It was already fragrant this afternoon. I hear that in the rainy season there are many flowers there. It is a rather beautiful country here, Moeteke. I wish that you could see it sometime. From the photos you already get some idea of course.

Yesterday afternoon Conteh and I walked to a village half an hour from here, called Selehun, meaning "in the bananas". The village is surrounded by banana trees. Such a village stands scattered picturesquely in the bush, Moeteke. Before one comes into the village one first has to cross a small river. That isn't so easy, for there is only a tree trunk over it. By balancing carefully one can walk across, but luckily there is always a native at hand, who is willing to walk through the water besides you and on whom you can lean. The natives, almost none of whom wear shoes, mostly walk through the water. When one has crossed the river, one soon arrives through some trees at an open place where a few older women sit around cooking pots on wood fires. In the afternoon the sauce for the evening rice is cooked. The sauce consists of big beans and several kinds of vegetables, greens which one finds in the bush, sometimes some meat in it if one can get it and plenty of palm oil over everything. Most pots are of iron, imported, with lids; the single old pot is covered with a broad piece of banana leaf. The village smith is sitting near one of the fires. Yesterday he wasn't working in his smithy. Apparently he takes a day off for other work and sews woven pieces of cotton together for a rug. Still a relatively young man he is, muscular, completely naked except for the cover of his penis. His torn shirt or garment lies next to him on the ground.

Further on there are a few little houses, so small, Moeteke, much smaller than in the town here and just what is absolutely essential for a human person. There are pillows and a mattress in such a cottage, which is just as wide as the bed and a little longer. Over the bed lies a mat. There is a small loft where the rice is kept and from the loft, wrapped in leaves, hang the seeds for the next harvest. There is next to nothing else in the cottage. The man and woman were not there. Apparently they were working on the land.

Straightaway a little old woman came towards us. She is the owner of the village and is known as a sorceress. She had a friendly old face, she had a small stone pipe in her mouth. Hanging from one of her hips were magical objects, horns, which contain one or the other type of medicine. We also visited her house. It is somewhat bigger and round. Above the entry hang again all kinds of magical things and means to pro-

tect against evil spirits. One of them represents a gun; it kills all evil influences. The old woman smiled contentedly at us. Close to her was a young man who is her "speaker". Because in spite of all her simplicity for that matter, as village head she has to have her speaker. Apparently the other men were in the field.

Just when we were there, a man returned to the village. He too was almost naked. He is blind and finds his cottage feeling with a stick. Conteh opened his mat door for him and he entered. It is very dark in his hut and the contents are strangely muddled up. An old bed, some tools, a bucket, seeds, etc. Conteh asked for his name etc. He wasn't very talkative, saying that he is a twin (twins have a special magical power in the Mendi belief) and that he possesses a strong magical power. Clearly, he was tired and didn't want to talk much. A little further on a few women were threshing rice. And there the village ends, fading into "bush". The village has at most ten huts. In the middle stands an orange tree laden with green oranges. They will be ripe in the rainy season. Conteh tells them that I am a big orange eater. We will certainly visit here more often. We distributed a few tobacco leaves among them. English tobacco is a great luxury for them. Generally in such a small village they smoke leaves from the forest. Three pineapples, collected for me from the forest and four eggs were given me. Two of them were already rotten, but this is a gift and we took them with us for now and left the village again. On our way home several women ask us for a pineapple. Giving and taking in an informal way is one of the rules of the economic life here, but we take them with us and near to my house we were even given a few more [pineapples] by women returning from the woodland. They usually cut off a few as they pass. Such village people have a peculiarly simple life, Moeteke, but they have what they need; and perhaps a human being doesn't need more: rice, bananas, oranges, chickens, cotton for clothing. People live like that without real contact with the world outside. Even in a country like this one can notice big differences between town and village, in clothing, in manners, in simplicity, in the sound of their voices, in rules of behaviour, etc. Gradually I get to know more about this. In anthropological books so little has been written about such differences, the whole life has always been described as one whole, without cultural differences.

Are you already busy working in the gardens? It is already a bit difficult for me to imagine what the weather would be like in Holland, now that the temperature is so high. For example yesterday evening it was 85 degrees in my room, so that is 20 higher than Dutch room temperature. Now, in the early morning, it is somewhat cooler, namely 76 degrees. The mornings are always lovely. You write about my money, Moeteke. Do you remember I already wrote that I had the Geldersche [a bank] send something over 100 guilders. I can have some of this sent now and then to Makkum. In this way I hope that I can regularly have some money left over. These won't be big sums, perhaps about 40 to 50 guilders a month at most. In any case it is good not to spend everything if it isn't necessary. In the first place in case of illness here and then for small bills, such as the photographer, the bookseller and journals. And perhaps allowing for these things something will be left over. It is difficult to say in advance how much the stay here will cost all in all. As long as I live here in this way, I have few extra costs for transport, etc. This can of course change later on and in the second year. The

home grown food doesn't cost me much. I use quite a bit of milk, costing about 40 to 50 cents a day. That is perhaps a lot, but it is the sole form of protein that I get and moreover one then has something to drink. There are also things like kerosene, a sort of paraffin, which is the liquid for my lamps, cornflakes and other foodstuffs which one needs. These all take some money, of course. It's similar to Holland: potatoes, bread, etc. don't make it expensive, but the non-staple foodstuffs do. In addition I have the costs for "personnel", about 40 guilders a month and you have to give some presents now and then. Tobacco is highly valued here.

It's quite a change for me, Moeteke, to be fully the head of a household now. And, moreover, one has the concern that one constantly has to determine one's attitude towards the natives. This too is all very instructive. One learns to imagine oneself in other situations, for example what heads of all sorts of businesses have to do. The "medical" work in particular also teaches me a lot about the people. Natives are just like the rest of us; they like to avoid their obligations. In Europe, because of the role of the economy in our lives, we often are already accustomed to more punctuality, but here the rules are more relaxed. Several people, for instance, will keep trying to get free medicines, saying that they haven't brought money, etc., or that they don't have enough. This is often not true. It takes quite a few palavers to obtain the money. The sums are very modest of course, from 4 to 30 cents for example, but if one lets things slide, then the people soon start to take advantage of it. Moreover, they value medicine more if they have to pay something for it. If someone really can't pay, then of course I don't mind giving it for free but it is often very difficult to discriminate between the cases. In addition my aim is to treat everybody equally. "The big men" for instance, the aristocracy so to say, often think that they can get it for free. They ask it as a "favour". Last week several of them, including some from surrounding places, were here for the tax collection. For example brothers of the chief and the speaker tried it. But I sent them back. A brother of the chief, for instance, said: "Oh, I thought you would give it me as a favour because I am the brother of your friend." I said, "No friend, if the big men don't pay, then I should also make it free for the poor and then I'll have to stop the whole business within a month". Several other paying patients agreed, "Tamia" (that is correct). So it was a bit shaming for him. He said that he didn't have a penny on him, couldn't he bring it tomorrow, his second attempt thus; this is a general excuse, "I'll bring the money tomorrow." I said, "No, you'd better fetch the money now". He then moved away for a short while and returned half a minute later with a penny. I smiled and said nothing. He then had to smile also. Of course he had the money in his pocket and had just removed it, hiding behind the corner of the house. But in the afternoon in the town, some of these "big men", to whom I had refused to give medicines, were still very friendly to me. I was glad that they had understood me anyway.

You have to understand Moeteke, that for these "big men", the economic rulers, it is also hard to imagine, that they and their inferiors have equal rights. I learn much from all of this and the nice thing is, that at the same time it gives me a sort of position in the town. People can't say that they would wish that this man would leave again as they need me and because of this I can go into their houses. It quickly spreads through

the country that there is a "doctor". When Conteh and I were in Selehun on Saturday, people had already heard about me and that I had cured a snake bite. As it happened last week a little boy was bitten by an adder on his foot. Someone brought him here and we took care of it as far as possible. It's now all right.

One really nice brother of the chief here has had a good school education. He is very sensible, knows something about Christianity and Islam, looks with a smile at many old "superstitious" customs, but has still remained a good Mendi man. He has organized almost the whole tax collection in this chieftom this year and is now the "secretary" of the chief. Apart from that he has his own rice field, of course. Yesterday evening he came here for a while and he especially wished to have a newspaper and I gave him the "Observer". His name is Rashid. He is a good observer and senses the peculiarities of Europeans well. Sometimes he says to me, when we (Conteh and I) set out and we have planned something special, "Ah, that is good, this way you get to know our people". He is, what we would call in Europe, progressive. He would like to become paramount chief later on if his brother were to die. I have already discovered big differences between the people, Moeteke. I examine them as much as possible. Gradually I get good material, mainly about all sorts of economic and political matters. I think that in some respects this will be somewhat better (especially the economics) than is usually presented in books on Africa. But I want to remain modest about it. It's all still very much at the beginning and I'll have to wait and see. However, it still makes a difference, that one has an eye for certain problems, I think. In the course of time I want to be able to include descriptions of characters, work them out and sometimes paint a situation, in words. It seems to me that alongside the description of the general events it is sometimes good to report the temporary, the momentary happening, almost as is done in a novel.

Moeteke, I have stopped copying my notes in a duplicate book. I came to the conclusion that to keep a better overview at this early stage it is better to sort out the notes as much as possible according to subjects. I am writing them down now every day, but on quarto sheets. That way I can more easily know what I already have than when it is arranged by date. At first I thought of doing this sorting out only later, after my return, but I believe that after a few months the material will become too much to keep it in good order. I do also write down everything, as it comes to me during the day, but I already put it more into context. What's more, I am working on several subjects with Conteh and with Safa, the nice native who helps us in the morning and who knows a lot about Panguma. One adds continuously, crosses out, rewrites a bit, etc. This makes them too confusing for my correcting and also for you to read, Moeteke. I am sorry that I am no longer sending you my notes in the original form, but I am still including for you the main and characteristic things all the time, Moeteke. And you have already tuned into the African negro life so well yourself, haven't you, so you can also follow everything easily from letters (without the notes). This time I have no photos. I was a bit busy with other matters, what with the D.C. being here. I think that I'll have photos next time and perhaps I'll then also send you the hammock. But I am actually looking for a nice native cloth that can fit into it. However, Rashid rightly warned me last night to be patient over buying native textiles. If one waits, after a while one

gets to see the best. If one presses, one gets to see everyday things of course, and fairly expensive at that. I am waiting also a bit with the photos because I would first like to see how the others have turned out.

Before long the election of a town chief of Panguma will take place here. There are from low to high compound chiefs (for part of a town), town chiefs (for a whole town or village), section chiefs (for part of the chiefdom) and a paramount chief for a whole chiefdom. When I write chief I usually mean the last of these. There are two candidates. It is interesting to witness this. I think that it will take place in the next week or so. One candidate is an uncle of the chief; a nice, already somewhat elderly man. The other is an older man, named Momakanu, from the previous ruling house, family of the last chief. He himself has been regent chief for a while. A highly untrustworthy type. He will surely not be appointed, but he derives pleasure from bringing some disorder into the affair. He has many debts, but he doesn't seem at all troubled about them. He has identified himself with this role, I think. He has a funny, clever, almost boyish, roguish face with a small beard; still highly lively, who gets mixed up with everything, freely gives his opinion, is avoided, but whom one can't very well entirely put aside either. Thus the life here has many differences. I would gradually like to describe these interacting forces. One would like to be scientist and artist at the same time, Moeteke.

While I am writing you this – it is now Monday evening – a very heavy rainstorm has blown in. Suddenly, enormous, strong gusts of wind sweeping in, Moeteke. You ask where the money for the tax ends up. Each household has to pay 5 shillings a year. This brings in about 60,000 pounds a year for the whole colony, which is about one eighth of all that is needed for administration, etc. The rest comes from export and import taxes. From this the salaries of the civil servants are deducted, of course, and in addition the government does much in the way of building roads, sanitary measures, improvement of agriculture, etc. It isn't a heavy tax, but for many it was hard to get it together this year because the price of the palm kernels is so very low. In the palm trees there are bunches of fruit. The outer part is very rich in fat and contains the palm oil. The natives use this for food and they smear it on their skin. It is also exported. The inside is harder. These are the actual palm kernels. The natives can't easily process them so well here. They are sent to England where oil is milled from them. In the past years, however, there has been ever more competition of other oils on the English market; whale oil, also more scientifically prepared oil from Sumatra and from Japan. Because of this there has been a continuous drop in prices.

This afternoon, Moeteke, I saw how the natives make their own soap. Pieces of the stem of a banana tree are dried in the sun, burnt, mixed with water and then cooked in a pot. Later oil is mixed with it. This soap contains quite a lot of potash. Cassava is a kind of root, Moeteke, with a white colour. This week I have had lettuce for the first time for ages. There is a progressive gardener here, who brought me his first crop. He also had radishes and tomatoes. Unfortunately he had plucked the tomatoes too unripe. I have told him, that they should be red when harvested.

Moeteke, I have found out a number of times that sometimes there is a boat leaving in between the routine departures. So I want to try to write you a letter every

week. I'll number each one, so that we know if you get them all. – No, the West Afrika line doesn't take along letters, but it does take along passengers! There is a monthly connection for passengers. I can understand so easily how difficult it all has been for you, Moeteke, and that you weren't able to write to me so cheerfully. [...] Do you get my letters regularly, Moeteke? I am so glad that you write that you can picture my situation here quite well. And I am sure you can still picture me, your boy, clearly, don't you Moeteke? You won't find me changed that much, Moeteke. A bit browner. Take good care with your health, Moeteke, and don't neglect your diet. Now another letter from you will reach me tomorrow. That's nice. And tomorrow I will take this letter to Hangha, so it can catch the train. These letters will pass one another. At 10 o'clock the train to Freetown departs with this letter and every fortnight at 12.25 the train from Freetown arrives with the mail. So I can't answer your letters straight away, Moeteke. I am very far away indeed, but yet for me it is not all that far, Moeteke, when I am writing to you. Perhaps the idea that there are also familiar things, like the paper, the pen you gave me, the colour of the ink, some books, etc. does help. You shouldn't think of me as being too far away, Moeteke. Everything will be fine although the distance is great. There should be a short break, shouldn't there in which one could see each other? Nice that you are still playing the piano. [...] Just as long as I am healthy and have my interests here, everything will go well. If one was ill, one would indeed become homesick. But this is something one shouldn't think about. I am very curious about the books you sent me They will probably arrive tomorrow. There is a thunderstorm now. I don't like thunderstorms, but they are inevitable here this month.

Bye bye dear Moeteke, your own Boy.

[in the margin] *Tuesday morning*. Now I am going to Hangha to collect the mail. That makes me as happy as a schoolboy.

Panguma (via Hangha), 21-4-34

My own dear Moeteke,

I hope that I can send you this letter as a surprise. For I read in the Freetown newspaper, that a German boat, which calls at Freetown on the coming Wednesday goes via Dakar. Now I want to try airmail for a change. I got your letter of 23 March, Moeteke. So you have been a bit unwell? How rotten. Is it now over completely? It's also been cold near to you for such a long time. – Surely you'll now gradually get better weather? It is strange that here it will gradually just become colder. During the day it is still very hot all the time. In the evening there is often rain and a thunderstorm. It can then suddenly rain extremely heavily. Today, with my friends, the personnel: Conteh, Ndoko and Selu, I made a trip to Giehun; a walk of about two hours from here. Such a trip is very interesting, Moeteke. You see all kinds of new things. In Giehun there is an expert in basketry, Moeteke. He will make a bag and a mat for me, or rather for you! The bag will in any case be good, I think. I can't yet give guarantees for the mat so easily because it will have to be in three parts and it is extremely difficult for a Mendi man to

make two things exactly the same. So the patterns can differ a bit. We'll see how it will turn out. One does very little here in the way of exact measuring, my dearest. Carpenters also guess more than they really measure. In a house you'll seldom see two similar windows.

We also saw a woman making pottery. I have made a description of it. In addition we saw traders there, who had arrived from the Koranko region, in the north of Sierra Leone. They bring indigo, which is used for dyeing locally made cloths. Good indigo is found in the north. When these traders have sold their goods here, they buy salt at a trade centre. They sell this on in the north, where salt is scarce. So they make a profit twice. But such a profit will be small. At most some 10 shillings for three men. And they take up many days travelling with it. I am gradually getting to know interesting things about the use of native medicines, Moeteke. For instance about their purgatives. They use the roots of several trees and bushes for them, boiling these and drinking the liquid. Almost every decent household has it in stock. I have already seen its preparation a few times, and this morning we saw a man on the way with a jug from a neighbouring village. He was going to town to sell his liquid there. Such things are also interesting for understanding native trade. On the way you see all sorts of people coming and going, men with palm kernels, or going to town for another purpose, carrying in their hand a little bag of palm leaves with kola nuts. Kola nuts have a bitter taste. The natives chew them when they are taking a long trip without food or drink. It has the same effect as coffee. Or one sees women with a basket on their head, who have collected vegetables in the forest. Sometimes one also gets an insight into customs. So a father and mother were sitting at the roadside with their child. The horn of an antelope was stuck in the ground near to the child. We asked the father about it and he explained to us that this horn is a magical means of protection for the child. A horn like that is bought from a sorcerer and is always kept near to the child. You might say that the child is under the protection of the sorcerer until it is older. He lives in a small village near Panguma. I have already seen him once, a nice old little man. We will go and see him some time.

I have attended two interesting ceremonies here this week, Moeteke. They are too elaborate to describe here. The issue concerned the fact that a person has sinned against the ancestors, for example by committing adultery. This sin has to be washed away and a ceremony is required for this. All sorts of prayers, the offering of rice, oil, a chicken, salt, etc. accompany it. Sometimes it is not without humour. At the one ceremony the main work had to be done by the uncle of the girl, who had committed an offence. The uncle, the mother's brother, plays an important role in each household. It goes without saying that such an uncle is not necessarily an expert. In any case this one wasn't and he changed or missed out several details. Consequently the family kept correcting him. Mendi people are quite noisy and so there was a lot of shouting in between the prayers. Onlookers intervened and described how things should go. For me this is, of course, just as interesting as when everything goes smoothly. It shows that magic is not such an integrated part of "everyday-life" as general descriptions of rites often suggest.

You write, Moeteke, that you'd thought, that I would settle in a more rural environment. Well, love, you shouldn't have a too high expectation of an African town. There are at most about 2000 inhabitants here. We would probably call it a large village. Panguma has a few advantages. A good connecting road to Hangha and piped water because it was formerly an administrative centre. If it hadn't been that, it would be different, of course. Here there are some influences from "civilization", but much carries on in the real Mendi way. An advantage of the life here is that I can have my "headquarters" here and travel back and forth to other places. Gradually I'll be going to do that for somewhat longer periods, for instance for two or three days. In September I'll probably travel around the country with the chief for almost the whole month. Elections for lower chiefs will be taking place then, all sorts of festivities, etc. Moreover Panguma has the advantage that the chief lives here. The most important 'political' and legal matters are being arranged here for the whole chiefdom. If one lived mainly in a small village, one would learn little of this. And in a small village one also soon bumps into the same people all the time. On the photos which I sent you this week, Moeteke, you'll also see that Panguma is very rurally situated.

[...] Today is Dirk's⁴⁴ birthday and you'll certainly spend this evening with them. If only I could just be there with you. Everything is very interesting here, Moeteke, but I believe that after a while I'll still have a strong longing to come home to see the more familiar, and you. Something over a year is just right, I think. Sometimes Catholic missionaries are here some 30 years uninterruptedly. They have also cut off all emotional ties, of course.

I received the books, Moeteke, that is the one by Westendorp Boerma and the one on masks. [...] I find them very interesting. I have already read a great deal of Westendorp Boerma's book, and I feel much affinity with it.⁴⁵ There are beautiful photos in the book on masks.

I have become so very brown, Moeteke. It gradually develops over the whole body. I love to walk in shorts. I think that I'll hate long trousers later. Moeteke, it's really very good for me to be here because I can view all sorts of European values comparatively. When I observe and try to trace things back here, I question in what form do we have that. One comes to see something universally human, a universal human scheme of motives underneath everything, notwithstanding the differences in 'civilization' and in customs. I don't feel the negroes to be more different from me than most people in our own country. You would certainly appreciate a man like Conteh, so intelligent, lively and always in good humour, Moeteke. For instance I think the Indian society would see personalities like yours and mine more as kindred spirits. But just because of the outer differences here, I really find it a problem and notwithstanding this I am time and again discovering similarities with Europe. I am, therefore, glad to get to know this country better. Gradually I am getting somewhat better material, of course.

I meant this to be a short letter, Moeteke. But it has expanded through the telling. Oh, what a lot I have to tell you [...] But a pen is too slow for all my thoughts. [...]

⁴⁴ Dirk Kossen, the neighbour of Mrs Overdiep.

⁴⁵ See note 28 in this chapter.

Saturday morning. Moeteke, you'll be able to get a list of the German shipping connections from the agency in Amsterdam, Voigt en Geber's transport Mij, Amstel 20-22. I'll respond better to some things in your letter later [...] Bye dear, dear Moeteke. I send so many good and strong thoughts,
your own Child

Sunday evening. Dear Moeteke, I had expected to be able to get this letter off to you quickly by airmail, but that failed for two reasons. Yesterday Conteh went with the letter to Hangha, but the stationmaster, who is also postmaster, hadn't ever heard of airmail! But Conteh got a timetable from him in which I read something about airmail, namely that a mail from Dakar to Europe leaves every Friday. However, that would have been just too late for this week. So I'll send this letter by ordinary mail and I very much hope that you'll receive it in between the others.

I had a calm Sunday. At first it was a bit cloudy here, after heavy rain yesterday evening. In the afternoon I made a short walk, saw what a few people were doing on the land. And on the way a few friendly people taught me the names of several plants which are used for medicines. Mendi people know a lot about the medicinal power of plants, Moeteke. And it's so nice that this knowledge seems to be general.

Now it is evening. The moon is shining. It is a light, still evening with many stars. I can see them through the windows and also the tree in full blossom in the garden and in the evening there often are miraculous, luminescent insects in the air, Moeteke. It's as if small sparks are falling. The sound of drumming is coming from the town. During the evening I was a bit tired of all the anthropology and so I read a novel. There are some yellowing novels here, left among the belongings of a former D.C.. It's good to be in a totally different atmosphere with one's mind for a while. – It's now 10 o'clock. I think you'll probably also be about to go to bed now, won't you Moeteke, and you'll be thinking of me before you fall asleep and asking yourself – where would Poetie be now? Dear, dear Moeteke, don't worry about me, everything is going well for me. [...]

Your Child

Panguma, Sunday 30 April 1934

My dear Moeteke,

It will already be past mid-May when you receive this letter and by then you'll probably be having plenty of pleasant weather, although May can still be fairly cool. Isn't it strange that time goes on like this forever, season after season? It is especially strange to live here where the seasonal changes are so different from the way I realise they are now with you. Of course I can imagine it well and yet it is to some degree a matter of imagination; here one is used to life in a different climate. Sometimes I long for our climate which has more variation, with some coolness, for example. Last night a thunderstorm suddenly came up here. After that happens it cools down and I think that I am very grateful for the sun, but this is very nice for a change. There is not much varia-

tion in the dry season, Moeteke. It may be slightly warmer in one month than in another. January and December, for example, are relatively cool, but there are no big differences. As a consequence one seldom hears people here talk about the weather. Sometimes someone says – it's warm today, or if it's a cloudy, somewhat chilly day – it's cool today. But so far as I have gathered one hears very little about it. On the other hand, when people meet each other, or when strangers meet each other on the fields, they often ask – where are you going, or – where do you come from? I think that this custom is closely connected with conditions of the past, when it was much more important to know where somebody came from and where he was going to. In those days everything to do with travelling was more unfamiliar and dangerous.

Moeteke, I have been given a little kitten by the Sanders family in Segbwema. They had promised it a while ago and yesterday a nurse from Segbwema brought it to me. It's rather nice to have such a small animal at home; moreover, it keeps the mice out of the house; they have been pestering me during the night recently. It's still a very playful kitten. It's amazing how soon such an animal gets used to a new environment, isn't it? After a few hours it seemed quite at home here.

Sunday evening. Today I have made a long trip, Moeteke. With my people, Conteh, Selu and Ndoko and also with the nurse who brought me the kitten, I have been to Giehun and after having spent some time there we went to Lalehun and from there we returned by another route. It was a long trip. We left home at half past seven and returned at half past six. Often the road is very narrow along small forest-paths, sometimes across a stream and often up and down; the landscape is hilly. We went to Giehun because we had promised the chief there that we would visit. He told us (we also went there ten days ago) that today he would show us interesting things. However, it was disappointing. The place was practically deserted; most men and women were busy in the rice fields. We therefore left after an hour, after receiving a big dish of rice and eggs from the chief. Lalehun was more interesting. There was a court session going on just then. A man was charged because he had failed to register the death of his mother. It is obligatory according to Mendi law, that the chief (of the village, the section or the whole chiefdom, or the paramount chief, depending on whether it happens in the place where the chief lives) is notified of every death. This rule has been confirmed by the English government. In this case the young village chief didn't dare to settle the matter himself, but took it to the section chief in Lalehun. However, just when we were there, the case was considerably delayed because a man, who is supposedly "in charge" of the village, intervened. (Villages are still mostly owned by "big men" who live in bigger places. This situation still dates from the old, unfree times, when the big men among the negroes could order their slaves in the villages to till their land. There still exists a kind of dependency relationship, although slavery has been abolished, of course.⁴⁶ I want to find out gradually exactly how this relationship works.) This man said that the village chief should have brought the charge through his intermediary. A long discussion started about that. The section chief finally decided that the village chief was not to be blamed at all. Because the village chief was only represented by his "speaker" the case was postponed until tomorrow in order to hear

⁴⁶ Domestic slavery in the Protectorate was formally banned in 1928. See chapter 1 of this book.

the chief himself. Such legal matters are very interesting, Moeteke, for getting to know how the rules work here, and what deviations there are, thus how the rules work in actual practice. In *general* a charge is brought by the village chief and this man is entitled to impose a fine. Because he is young and still without influence however, he didn't dare to impose a fine and he himself took the case to his immediate chief. Thus in fact a deviation from the rule. Further, the village chief did have the right to take the case to a higher authority. The *actual practice* often is, however, that the "owner" of the village does this. So here too legal matters tend to be complicated.

Last week Conteh and I also attended a few court sessions here in Panguma. These are starting again now the taxes have been paid. Through these sessions I gain a clearer understanding of all sorts of things and I make as many notes as possible about them. The chief here approves that I am there. His uncle, one of the oldest men here and a judge as well, has even promised to warn me when something important happens. And he is also willing to come to my house now and then and explain a case in more detail to us. Conteh is very useful to me in these matters. He knows much about legal matters and he is allowed now and then, to take part in the discussions. Every day you are confronted with new facts, Moeteke. This way a systemic picture of something gradually builds up. But it is quite something even to acquire from the outside just a more or less complete picture of such a culture.

The negroes are born orators. The people defend themselves. They release a stream of words, and it is so nice, because even if they are angry with each other, they listen to each other. The words are mostly accompanied by gestures, which produce a special effect through the gowns which the men mostly wear when they are dressed and which strongly remind one of the gown of our parsons and advocates.

Even so these court sessions are apparently no longer what they were in bygone days. Formerly, when everybody stood behind a "big man", when there were many slaves, everybody appeared in court with his following. Then it was still much more a display of rhetoric, sometimes lasting days. Now everything is more sober, one is more responsible for oneself. Arguments about the money that has been given for a woman play a big role in legal life. When a man marries a woman, the fact is that he has to pay the woman's family a certain amount of money. He gets back this money in certain cases, particularly when a divorce follows where the wife is guilty. But when as a result of this a lawsuit is started, it is often very difficult to establish how much really has been paid. The so-called "bride-price" often consists of various gifts, namely those which have been given before and after, often already beginning at the girl's birth. I'll write to you more about the marriage arrangements, Moeteke. It's a complicated story. Because of the fact that all these money matters aren't written down, but depend on the memory and on witnesses, there is often no consensus about it, of course. When it comes to deciding the sum, one of the parties wishing to stick to his claim has to swear on a strong charm. People have respect for this because they believe that if one tells a lie and swears, the charm will kill the person. There are several such charms in use. Often it is a special stone, or special plants or a magic medicine wrapped in a leopard skin. The Koran is used too and sometimes a person swears on everything at the same time, as I noticed this week. Women palavers, namely adultery, also play a

big role. It very often occurs that a man, especially unmarried men or men with just one wife, has sex with somebody else's wife. If the husband discovers it, he likes to take the matter to "court" and the man, who has had intercourse with his wife, has to pay about 30 shillings. The whole human game of money and sexual urge with all its comical and tragic aspects, plays a role here too, but it's as if everything here is played out in a much more technical way. A man knows that he has to pay 30 shillings for adultery and murders or fights about a woman don't occur.

The situation and inclinations of the women here are very different too, Moeteke. Some women don't marry at all and lead a fairly independent life. The daughters of a chief in particular do that. They have a completely distinct position. Several daughters of the previous chief, sisters of the present chief, are still living here. Some of them own villages which they have inherited from their father who was a great warrior and therefore a slave trader too. He also waged war against the English government in 1898⁴⁷ and was later banished to the Gold Coast where he died in exile. Those daughters are already quite old, but between 10 and 20 of them are still alive. They have children but are not properly married. For a chief's daughter is not "bought" like other girls but is free to leave the man if she gets bored. This means that a settled citizen isn't very keen on a chief's daughter. But she herself arranges for a man and so she has several in the course of her life. If she is old and also poor (women don't inherit in similar proportions, but according to the position and family of the mother and her emotional ties with the man), she often has a young man who is poor too and who works for her under the form of a marriage. – One is confronted with all kinds of surprises in human relations here, Moeteke, things which one usually doesn't find in descriptions of general relations. I want to include concrete examples to illustrate each one "in my book".

On a trip like the one we made today one sees all sorts of new things on the way. Small matters sometimes, but they will be valuable later on in a larger context and they will have to be filled out. On such trips one sees the life somewhat more freely too and I also study my people who are with me. They are very pleasant and cheerful on such a trip. Selu is very keen on food and luckily we got a rice meal from the chief today in Lalehun. I got my portion in a separate bowl. Negroes are very polite and sensitive in such matters. People appreciate it of course that I eat their food, but unasked-for they make it easier for me by giving me a separate portion. The same happened when Conteh and I had a meal this week with people in a rice field.

In Lalehun I also danced, Moeteke. Drummers from another place were just passing through and they came to a halt. The chief had already seen me dancing here in Panguma and he was very keen that I as his friend would also do it here. This means so much for them. Moreover, the people are very keen to let me become acquainted with all aspects of Mendi life. In Panguma I have done it a few times with the chief when he sometimes passes through the town with his followers, accompanied by drums. The chief then taught me a special dance which I do with him as a final glory number. You'll laugh about it, Moeteke, but it's all very simple and friendly and I find it rather nice to take part in it and to oblige the people at the same time. It is mainly a matter of letting

⁴⁷ See chapter 1 of this book.

your body and your arms and legs move together with the rhythm of the music. The chief is thoughtful towards me in this too and didn't want me to dance with others than himself for, so he said, some people may have diseases.

Dancing, Moeteke, is interesting here from various points of view. It is still closer to nature than with us, more rhythmic and intoxicating too sometimes. I should like you to be able to hear the music sometime. It goes on indefatigably. The chief in particular dances and in this manner passes through the town. The chief here is a good dancer and has a slim and lithe figure. Gradually through the music he gets excited and his body then moves very elastically. Such dances also have the function that the chief can say all sorts of things which he wouldn't say otherwise and leaves these things for such occasions. Sometimes, for example, he boasts about his land, about his qualities which caused him to be chosen rather than other candidates, he also says who is against him, who has debts with him, etc. Another peculiarity is that nobody, at least nobody who is in any way suspected, is allowed to approach the chief when he is dancing in a circle in between the people. This is for fear of magical power. Formerly it seemed to have occurred that enemies made use of the somewhat open position during the dancing to bewitch the chief, according to the belief of the negroes. A chief is surrounded by various precautions against this. Formerly poisoning played a big role. On Monday I got to know the details about this because the chief arrived at the court session very angry immediately after dancing. He had been approached by a man who had been against him during his election. Such matters linger on for a while and the rival party remains suspect for years.

I could continue to write a long time about all this, Moeteke. The life here has, as everywhere, so many serious and pleasant, day-to-day sides. On such a trip as today one sees how the negro too, like us, really takes delight in what happens around him. On the way back for example we heard a nightingale singing in the forest. Conteh said that it is the nightingale, for I don't recognize it so easily. The interesting thing was that Selu began to whistle Mendi songs in a special way and after about two minutes the bird repeated exactly what Selu had whistled. It was really amazing. Has the nightingale this power for imitation? Perhaps it could also have been another bird. What I particularly wanted to say is, that the whole company thoroughly enjoyed it and that Mendi people often have this speaking back and forth with this bird. We saw rice lying around which is for the bird as people believe that when the bird sings while you are passing, the spirit in the bird is well-disposed towards you. Otherwise he keeps silent.

We have busied ourselves this week with court sessions and ceremonies on the rice fields and further with other work on the land, now that the sowing gradually begins. Today, Moeteke, I felt even more strongly that it is good to live and to have domicile in a somewhat bigger place where the paramount chief lives. In smaller places people would be afraid to tell you things because they would be unsure about the attitude of the chief. People in smaller places are more close-mouthed. When I visit them now and then everything is well, especially now they know that the chief here stands behind me. If one continually lives with one and the same small group, one gets stuck, I believe. Moreover, from a smaller place one wouldn't be able to study a town like Panguma so well. Now I get to see all levels of the culture so much better.

This week I received the newspapers, *Moeteke*. I was pleased with them. They always offer some interesting and instructive things, and they are a change. Now and then one needs that too with the reading. Otherwise the thoughts become a bit monotone and one-sided. – I read about the death of the Queen Mother.⁴⁸ It has caused quite some commotion, hasn't it, although there will also be something artificial behind everything. But she was certainly loved by many. This week I have had a visitor here, an Englishman, a Dr Todd. Two years ago he was doctor at the hospital in Segbwema, but he has been ill and has had problems with the other missionaries for whom he worked. Now he has been transferred to Nigeria and on his way there he visited Sierra Leone for a few days. He had heard about me in London and from the missionaries here and wanted to meet me. From Freetown he had already sent me a selection of Mendi sayings which he had formerly collected here. He is a man who felt much for the people and who was found to be sympathetic. Due to his independent opinions and other things which I don't know much about, he couldn't manage it here. He is a man of my age. I had often heard about him from Conteh and Ndoko who adored him. It was really nice to meet him, someone who inwardly suffers a lot, but perhaps has a bit too much temperament and yet is typically English in adhering to a simple ideal. In England he had got to know the so-called Group Movement, which started years ago and has as its aim that people should live as openly and honest as possible towards each other and who attempt to realize in their own life what they, within their Christian belief, consider to be God's demands. They also make propaganda and try to influence other individual lives as much as possible. Anyway, this Dr Todd apparently still had some old issues with several missionaries here of which he wanted to clear his conscience and he had therefore come to Sierra Leone in order to expose himself mentally, according to the principles of this English movement. He was full of this and therefore a bit one-sided, as a result of which he fell into another, though by his group condemned, mistake of strong partiality with his principle and thus with himself. All the same he was an interesting and lively person who had all kinds of problems and didn't mince matters.

He has also had a talk with Conteh and Ndoko about adultery matters, the big stumbling block to missionary work here, but I fear that English Christians will always be condemned to misunderstand the negro spirit. It is a difficult problem, but with their stern demands the missionaries inadvertently cause many lies and (according to the missionaries) improper behaviour behind their backs. And I think that it remains to be seen whether English views of marriage can be put on a par with Christian requirements. In real Christianity there would perhaps be no marriage, that is, if one thinks of Christ. The negroes who study the New Testament reason in this way too and therefore they have more respect for the Catholic fathers than for the safety in marriage implanted by the missionaries. The demands on the part of the missionaries are perhaps too stern for the negroes. The result is the same behaviour, plus lies. It's a difficult problem for the mission. Because I now know a few of the people who have been educated by them and are partly working for them, I find out better what the actual practice is like. Conteh, for example, who has gone through a great deal and reflects –

⁴⁸ The Dutch Queen-Mother Emma (1858-1934).

“I find Christianity good, but I don’t believe that it frees you from magic power, you stand alone before God, but I don’t believe that your salvation depends on whether you have one or two wives.” This may well be true. When Dr Todd was here I was present at a conversation between him and Conteh. Todd advocated absolute purity, but that is a difficult notion, of course. Englishmen are often a bit simple in their thinking, but the negroes struggle with real life.

Last Friday I attended a service in the mosque here, Moeteke. That was allowed and it was even quite appreciated. It’s good to experience something like that too. The mosque has a special name here because a religious leader, coming direct from Mecca, died here and his grave is worshipped. As the story goes he himself had predicted the day and the hour of his death.

At this moment we are having a heavy thunderstorm. What is it like with you, dear Moeteke? It is half past ten. You may now be leaving the Kossen family and going to bed. Is it well with you, Moeteke? In a year’s time I’ll be with you again, “if God protects my life”, as the negroes say when they express a wish for the future. Moeteke, I’ll send you your hammock and mat and bag with the next post. The mat was already ready today in Giehun, the bag not yet quite. It will come this week. I am dying to hear what you think of such things from here. [...]

I haven’t heard again from Nadel and Fortes since their first letter when I was in Freetown. Frau Nadel sent me a postcard when she passed Freetown two weeks ago. She too is now really in Africa. From Alleney I haven’t ever heard again. I sent him a letter from the ship, but it was returned here as undeliverable. It seems that he moved house, but it’s a bit strange. He doesn’t seem to have been really serious after all about his plan to return to Sierra Leone. It’s difficult to make out the ins and outs here. – But as far as I am concerned, I have been lucky with Conteh as a helper even more because he has always lived here and at the same time belongs to a chief’s family and knows a lot about everything. Alleney would first have had to get used to everything, of course. Alleney was more fanciful, probably with more feeling for witchcraft, perhaps also somewhat emotional in his ideas due to his long absence. Conteh is more critical and systematic in his thinking. That is useful therefore for me. I have already gradually learnt from experience that there are great differences here between the people who tell you something, but they all contribute something in their own way of course.

Monday morning. Are you now completely well again, Moeteke? I very much hope that you’ll completely recover this summer. [...] I have to see my dear mother again in good health. So much love from your Boy.

Blackwater fever – Daru and Freetown (May – July 1934)

Daru, Sunday 14 May 1934

My dear Moeteke,

Unfortunately it will be a very short letter this time, for I am rather unwell. And I would so much have liked to say to you and to all of you so many things now, in this so difficult time. The mosquitos have been unfriendly to me, Moeteke, and I have had a real attack of malaria. It began on Tuesday with a severe headache and fever. *Enfin*, you know the symptoms, don't you ? On Thursday it became too much for me. I also didn't know how to treat it properly. The fever is fairly high. Conteh then went to the D.C. (District Commissioner) Shaw in Kenema and he arranged for me to move to the hospital in Daru. There isn't a section for Europeans, but just now an officer's house is free – the military barracks are around here – and I am in there, in the care of the doctor who is looking after me well. You shouldn't worry, Moeteke. The temperature is now already nearly normal and I'll be better by the end of next week.

What a difficult time you have had, my dear. This dear Rev. Kossen, so true and good, I see him clearly before me and our houses.¹ How could I have imagined not seeing him again? It is quite a blow for Jet,² isn't it, but I am so glad that both of you write about it so wisely, Moeteke. I trust that you'll manage well. I can only write a little, Moeteke. It tires me too much, after the fever and five days without food. But you know very well, don't you [...], that I am entirely with you with my best thoughts. Be sure not to worry. With the next mail I'll write in more detail. Would you please write to Makkum that I can't send a letter now?³ It has been very hot here each day. It's the hottest May. When you get this letter everything will already be over. [no signature]

¹ Mr Kossen was caught by a train at a railway crossing and died. He was an emeritus parson.

² Mr Kossen's wife. Their children, twins, were ten years old at the time.

³ Sjoerd Hofstra's father, brother and sister in Makkum.

In the meantime the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures in London kept Mrs Overdiep informed with telegrams and letters.

The Secretary wrote on 19 May 1934:

Dear Mrs. Overdiep,

It was with great distress that we received on Thursday the cable from the Governor of Sierra Leone to say that Dr. Hofstra is seriously ill with blackwater fever, and our Secretary General, Major Vischer, at once telegraphed on the news to you. Before your telegram came in yesterday we had already made further enquiries at the Colonial Office and we have asked again today, but so far no more information has been received. I need not, I think, assure you that we shall keep you in touch and shall let you know at the earliest possible opportunity any further details which we may receive. As we told you, the telegram came from the Governor himself and you can rest assured that Dr. Hofstra is having every possible care and that everything that can be done for him will be done.

In the hope that the next news which we send may be more reassuring.

Believe me,

*Yours very truly,
D.G. Brackett
Secretary*

[added hand-written] It is I think hopeful that no more news has come in, and we may regard "no news as good news" in this case.

The Secretary General wrote on 22 May 1934:

Dear Mrs. Overdiep,

I was extremely glad to be able to send you the telegram received from the Governor of Sierra Leone saying that Dr. Hofstra was out of danger and his condition improving daily. In reply to your telegram we are not yet in a position to say where Dr. Hofstra is being taken care of but from my personal knowledge of Sierra Leone I can tell you that if he is not actually in one of our very good hospitals he will be under the personal care of one of the European doctors distributed over the Colony and Protectorate. We should certainly let you know any further news received though we do not expect any more telegrams from Africa, since the wording of the message sent by the Governor indicates that Dr. Hofstra is definitely out of danger and on the way to recovery. If you wish to send a telegram to Dr. Hofstra you could address it to the Governor, Sierra Leone, beginning your message: 'following for Hofstra', and you will be able to obtain at your local post office all necessary directions regarding the different ways in which telegrams can be sent and the different rates. I have been asked by the Chairman and the members of the Executive Council here in London to express to you their sympathy and their deep feeling of relief on hearing that your son was out of danger. They join me in my best wishes for his speedy and complete recovery.

*Yours sincerely,
Hans Vischer*

Daru, Sunday 27 May 1934

My dear Moeteke,

I am already much better. I very much hope that you haven't been worried too much. It is already difficult enough for you, but I couldn't keep it from you in my last letter because I was then right in the middle of it. If I had written to you a week later, perhaps it would have been all right then, and have passed like a damp squib. But the doctor kept me here longer than I had at first expected. I have had a heavy attack of malaria and one feels a bit weak in the legs when one tries to get up. This coming Wednesday I am travelling to Freetown for a few weeks. The doctor thinks it is necessary that I get some sea air for a change and there I can get completely fit again. I'll be staying there with the Horsteads in Fourah Bay College.

Moeteke, last Wednesday I received your telegram. Quite unexpected and very nice of you indeed. What happened Moeteke, did you feel that I was rather ill or did you do it because of Whitsun? If you sent it before Whitsun, I think it arrived here slightly belated. It was forwarded to Daru. The doctor here has been very nice to me and the care is excellent here. Next to the hospital there are military barracks and officers' houses. One of those houses happened to be free. So I was lucky to move in there. I get my food from the officers' kitchen, which works well. There are four officers here, young fellows who now and then look in on me and give me popular novels, thinking I will enjoy reading them. Here again it's a small world on its own which has some interesting aspects. The doctor tells me now and then about his patients and their cases. He is my age and very ordinary and friendly and he first roamed the seas as a ship's doctor. D.C. Shaw of Kenema has also arranged a few things for me and there is a Court Messenger (the police of the Government) who guards my things in Panguma. It is on the one hand just as well that I am out of my house there for a while, for the carpenter is at work there as some walls were completely rotten and now there is a deafening noise there, I hear. In a country like Sierra Leone, where there are not so many white people, an illness is soon known about, of course. Thus, last week the doctor had already received a telegram from the Colonial Secretariat in Freetown, asking how I was. And in Panguma they are also continually interested. Yesterday the town chief of Panguma looked in on me. He had himself come for treatment in the hospital here. Meanwhile, after the initial feelings of dejection about being ill, I have thrown myself into learning the language. I have much more time for this now than in Panguma where so many other interesting things came along all the time. I am getting along quite well already, but Mendi is difficult. There are so very many sound shifts one has to be prepared for. For example, the word *guli* changes into *wuli* or *luli* depending on the word that precedes it. The word *mbumbu*, take, becomes *mumbu*, *bumbu*, etc.

If only I could be with you for a while and see how you are doing. Everything will be very difficult at first, won't it Moeteke. In the beginning you bear everything courageously, but then there comes a dip in your strength. [...]

When I was in the middle of this illness I accepted everything that happened to me well enough, but when I recovered a bit I first found everything so futile here and my work unimportant and I thought – Oh, why am I here, while Moeteke probably needs

me so much? But gradually you regain the energy for work and you understand that all these experiences are useful for deepening understanding. I hadn't thought that I would get malaria, so this "knock down" disappoints me a bit, but perhaps I am now immune.

In the meantime over recent days I have done quite a lot of work with Conteh. For example I got to know more about their God and spirit concepts.⁴ It is all a bit vague, but gradually you get more of a line on it. There is an old word for God, *livee* [*Leve*], which means cloud or in this more special meaning the maker behind the clouds. A kind of creator of everything. This word is still used by old people. The present word for God = *ngewo*, this comes from *ngele* = cloud [sky] and *wo* = a long time ago. So it means a long existing cloud. I have wondered if perhaps there is a kind of transition between the idea of a more personal creator and the impersonal cloud. However, God or the cloud are not thought of as entirely impersonal. In times of need one prays to God and people often say when offering wishes – may God help you, or may God preserve you on your way. Or – may God give you a good sleep. But proper prayers to a God aren't said otherwise. There is the conception that God, the cloud, marries his wife, the earth and that everything living on earth is the fruit of this marriage. The cloud shines on the earth and gives water which impregnates the earth. That's a rather nice symbolism, isn't it? But in addition the spirits play a much bigger role. There are two main groups: the spirits who were human beings, the ancestral spirits, and spirits who have not been human beings, who have always been a spirit. Both types can be good and evil. On the whole they cause more trouble than that they do good to people. A certain group of ancestors who were good when alive protect the living, and people pray and make offerings to them too. An offering mostly consists of some rice with palm oil, for people think that the ancestors still like to eat too. The ancestors who were medicine men and magicians are a special group who protect the rice fields. The other spirits who have never been living beings, live in the water or underneath trees. There are all kinds of stories about them. So Conteh told me this week the following story which he certainly also believed himself and which has made a deep impression on the people in this neighbourhood.

Not far from Kenema lived a beautiful, fairly well-to-do woman. She had been married several times, but the husbands always died shortly after the marriage. So she had had some 15 men all of whom died. She was therefore very unhappy and thought that she was possessed by an evil spirit. The family and the future 16th husband therefore went to consult a famous Mohammedan soothsayer and exorcist here in the neighbourhood. He first asked for 60 pounds for the consultation, but the family succeeded in raising half of it and they agreed on this amount. He consulted his soothsayer's medicines and said, "I see a water spirit, one foot is paralysed and he has a sheaf of arrows in each hand. He often follows the woman concerned and every night at about 12 o'clock he goes to her bed and drives the arrows in the bed on both sides of the woman. The husbands had been regularly killed because of this." The medicine man now gave the following prescription – he wrote something on a piece of paper, washed this in water and put the water in a bottle. (This is a much used element of Mohammedan

⁴ See Hofstra 1940a and 1942a.

medicine men here: they write something on a piece of paper, usually a part of the Koran, wash this in water and this water is then the medicine.) He also wrote a letter. He told the future husband that at about 10 o'clock in the morning the water spirits always have a meeting outside the town at the waterside. At around that time you should go to the waterside. First you spread medicine from the bottle on your face and then you watch everything that happens as you hold the letter in your hand. The man did this in the morning when he saw the meeting of the water spirits. He gave the letter to the chairman, the chief, of the spirits. This spirit read the letter and said that it was a grave matter. The spirit concerned was called to account but he excused himself by saying that, before the husbands came along, he had been friends with the woman. However, the chief of the water spirits found the matter too serious, and because the spirit concerned was poor and couldn't pay a fine, he was first put in the "stocks" and then killed. From that time on the woman had no more trouble. She married again, the husband still lives and they have three children. – It so happens, according to the belief of the natives, that such spirits who are poor and don't have enough money to "buy" a wife in a regular manner – for these spirits marry too – pester a human female. They don't have to pay anything for this. Such poor spirits also tend to rob people on the way. Strange stories.

This time of the year wouldn't be good for you here, Moeteke. The heat has become very oppressive. It persists between the dry and the wet season and the cloudy skies make it even warmer. Actually, I was glad that I had some company this week, for in the evening there have often been heavy thunderstorms, preceded by strong winds, the tornadoes. In the real wet season the thunderstorms disappear, while now is a sort of transition period. Of course, all kinds of belief are connected to thunderstorms. Thus, some magicians can by means of a special medicine direct the lightning and kill someone with it. There is also sometimes an amusing side to this belief. The thunder medicine is actually one of the strongest, most feared medicines on which one swears. (Swearing on a medicine – this often happens at court sessions – is done by beating with a stick on a medicine and then saying that if I lie, may the medicine kill me.) I have told you about Yengbeke, haven't I, how he sometimes assaulted women at night. By our action and because of other complaints this came more into the open and now the chief has made a new regulation for him. To seal this and a few other tribal matters a solemn meeting was held a few weeks ago in Panguma. Yengbeke had to promise there on the thunder medicine that he would stick to the regulation. Otherwise the thunder will kill him. But all the same, several people don't trust Yengbeke and when there is now a thunderstorm in Panguma and Yengbeke wanders about, nobody likes to have him on his veranda for shelter. People fear they will be killed too; so sometimes Yengbeke has to pay for his tricks.

I haven't yet been very lucky with taking pictures, have I? Most of them were also taken on a dark day. I received a nice letter from Nadel whose wife is already with him. He writes in good spirits, finds the work interesting, although there are theoretical problems. Roaming about in rest houses he too already finds a bit tiring, but in general he is doing well. He writes to me that he had a fairly pessimistic letter from Fortes. He doesn't say whether this is about his work or his health. I have already written to For-

tes quite some while ago, but haven't yet heard from him. Hopefully he is doing better now. Perhaps the climate has been trying for him or he can't find such a suitable area for his work.

It is evening now. This afternoon I have, together with the doctor, had a look at the terrain here. That was a good exercise for my legs. And afterwards he rowed me on the river, which flows through Daru, that was very nice for a change. He is a very pleasant man and this Sunday morning he gave the town chief of Panguma extra treatment and refused payment out of kindness towards me. Tomorrow afternoon we will go to Kenema in his car to the D.C. Shaw for a ticket for me. It will be strange to sit in a car again, being sound and well now, after the bumpy journey in a lorry, when I arrived here from Panguma. Today I am feeling much stronger and I'll probably be entirely my old self again soon. It is so strange with such a malaria that you are feeling quite well on the one day and then a physical wreck the next. It will probably be better to take quinine in the wet season, when the mosquitoes arrive. I had hoped to be able to do without it entirely, but I shouldn't risk a second malaria attack. I have also had butter again here, Moeteke. You'll laugh about this, but the whole time in Panguma I had to do without it, but here on the railway they regularly get it from Freetown. We already get the new oranges again which is very nice.

It is rather useful to be here, Moeteke, and to think about all kinds of cultural values. I make various notes about it. Each time the question arises before you – what does this culture here mean for the people themselves and for us? What does life mean for them and also for us? I can't find our civilization so much more advanced, Moeteke. The life here, in its great naturalness, has to have big advantages in the value of life. At the moment I can touch on it only briefly. I have ordered a book by the well-known psychologist Ludwig Klages, *Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele* [The spirit as opponent of the soul]. It is very interesting and it makes me think about all kinds of things, as well as in connection with the culture here. His viewpoint is, in short, that there is a fight between the human soul and what he calls the spirit, that is the single intellect that expresses itself in dynamism and conquers the world, spiritually and materially. The spirit shows itself also mainly in civilization. He sees the fall, the continuous erosion of the soul by the spirit, and thus the fall of mankind. He sees the spirit advancing in technology, in the slow destruction of the whole world by human dynamism. He also sees Christianity as a culprit because it is closely connected with the capitalistic pursuit in its urge for conquest and conversion, and its age-long suppression of the body. In the spirit he distinguishes the pure longing for knowledge, which is dying out because everything is becoming more and more centred on usefulness, and the knowledge which is solely a means towards an impure end like a great part of physics is doing not much else, after all, than creating a very abstract world view and moreover being helpful to the conscious or unconscious criminals, as destroyers of the soul, who are leading the world in politics and economics. His book, which is very remarkable and scientifically edifying, is also noteworthy because he opens up other sources of knowledge for primitive cultures in our mind, for example the miracle in the form of witchcraft. The book gives me much to think about because here I have already begun to become sceptical with respect to all kinds of values with which we live

“selbstverständlich” [as a matter of course] in Europe and because here I become confronted time and again with the question – what does it mean for the people here when their culture changes, for example as a consequence of more education? I think that I’ll often have to be sharply focussed, Moeteke, when I’ll write about culture later on. Only with a big, blazing attack which pierces through the minds, with all means of pure knowledge, one may perhaps save something of our culture. After the book about the Mendi I want to write something about cultural values, that is if there is still a place in Europe where freedom of the press exists and if radio and newspapers don’t entirely dominate our minds by then.

Monday morning. Now this letter has to be sent soon, Moeteke. Tonight there was such a beautiful moon, Moeteke. It didn’t rain either yesterday evening or Saturday night, so it was very beautiful with the full moon. It was nearly as bright as during the day. And this morning it is not cloudy, but the sun is shining. I have a busy morning in bed, writing and another visit from the town chief and various arrangements for the household. The town chief saw the washbasin here, a stone bowl with the jug and a chamber pot. He very much wanted to have something like that. At first I thought they were for washing himself. But it appeared that he wanted to have them for eating; the bowl for the rice, the jug for the water and the pot for the sauce over the rice. Conteh and I had to promise him that we would order these things for him in Freetown, but instead of the pot I’d better try to get something else for the sauce!

I am much reassured by your letters, Moeteke, and I so much hope that you’ll get through it all well. It was fairly difficult for me here at first, because I knew of your troubles and one then experiences the distance as being too great. [...] I fear [...] that I won’t be able to get a hat for you. Women don’t wear hats here, only a headscarf, so no hats are woven here. I am sorry that I am not yet able now to send you the hammock and mat. Something keeps getting in the way all the time. [...] Don’t worry about me at all. It’s already going quite well again, and I am again happy with life and the work. Would you please give my regards to Mrs Kossen and the children and wish her much strength from me? Bye dear, dear Moeteke, I am with you!

Your own Child

Freetown, Wednesday 6 June 1934

My dear Moeteke,

Now you get another letter from Freetown, just like when I was here first. But now I have already become an “Old-Coaster” and already feel myself much more at home in this country than a few months ago. Yesterday I arrived here. It’s quite a long way from “up-country”. On Monday morning I departed from Daru. In Bo one has to stay the night in the railway restaurant, but from Daru to Bo isn’t so far. One leaves at 11 and arrives at 3. From Bo to Freetown is a fairly long way and one sits in the train from half past seven till five. Here everything is as before; I have my old room; the Horsteads are nice for me; it’s nice to see the sea again and the sea air and the quiet life will soon restore all of my old strength. First I thought of going last week, but because the Hor-

steads were going away, it was better that I came this week. It was almost a bit strange to leave Daru. I was already settled there so well and the fact that I gradually got better there and that I was seeing the doctor a lot, made me feel somewhat attached to the place. Apart from the fact that I was there for my health, it was, when I got better, a pleasant change for me, after Panguma, to talk freely to a European again, not to have to care for your own food, etc. The doctor was exceptionally nice to me. He was the same age as me. Last week we made a few trips in his car. Once to Kenema where we visited the D.C. Shaw, once to Segbwema where he had to be in the hospital and where I saw the Sanders, an afternoon to Panguma where I sorted out my things a bit and took a few things, which I have to use here, with me and last Sunday first to Segbwema for lunch with a family Frazer, business people, and afterwards to Pendembu where a Syrian woman was ill. So in that week I have seen quite a bit of the world again. In the last week I have quickly become stronger again. The doctor was amazed about it. It probably makes a difference that my body was otherwise in good condition.

Just before all this I received the telegram from the Horsteads in which they told me that they were expecting me this week, I had written to my nurse and the chief in Panguma that I would leave on Wednesday last week. Afterwards I didn't have another opportunity anymore to write before Wednesday to tell the people that I would pass Hangha only later on. It was a pity, for the chief, the speaker and a few other people from Panguma have been at the railway station in Hangha on Wednesday to greet me, but I didn't come. I then explained it to him when we arrived in Panguma on Friday. They were all very kind. When we arrived a whole group of people had already gathered, some of them not quite unselfishly when they heard that the doctor from Daru was there. Of course ill people came then. What a difference there is between just living "in the bush" and living in Freetown, Moeteke. I have an idea that Europeans here know little about the life in the bush and the problems there. In Daru I also learned all kinds of things about the native life. In the end I often went to the hospital with the doctor. On one occasion I was going to attend an operation, but my legs weren't so steady and I had just spent some time at the bedside of a dying old chief of Lalehun and his family, so that, when the operation began, my stomach turned round and I said to the doctor that it would be better if I see it some other time. The old chief was in a pitiful state. He had been operated on for a venereal disease and that had been quite successful, but he was too weak to get over it. When on the day he died with the doctor, or rather I, translating for him, and we told the family that he was dying, the family took him out of the hospital as soon as possible. It is against the custom that a chief dies in the company of common people and people want to complete certain ceremonies before the moment of death. Thus they carried away the old, hawking man in a hammock, unconscious of all that happened. A few hours later, on the way, but before they reached Lalehun, he died. The old man was known to be a great magician. I had met him when I was first in Segbwema. When the doctor and I passed Lalehun on Sunday, the ceremonies were still going on. Dancers passed through the town. It was a pity that I couldn't be there when it began. Conteh had already got permission from the Paramount Chief that I could be there and he had already sent a message to the magicians who had to carry out the ceremonies, that they didn't have to be afraid of

me, but just when this was being arranged, I was out with the doctor. It would moreover have been a bit too tiring for me. Conteh then went alone and has taken notes. In three weeks' time there will again be ceremonies. I hope that I'll be able to attend these. So life goes on here, Moeteke, with all the small joys and all the small tragic things that go with life.

Last night Horstead said to me: You'll be glad to hear that a Dutch post leaves tomorrow. Of course, I was. So I hope that you'll get this letter as an interim, unexpected one.

I got your letter from 8 May, Moeteke. I was very pleased with it. You didn't then know that I'd been a bit ill and you write so well about everything. [...]

In Freetown there is quite a shortage of water. Here it has only rained a few times, which is very unusual. In the bush there have already been downpours throughout the whole of May. However, it isn't yet the real rainy season, Moeteke. That is to say, there is already rain, but the strong, regular rains are particularly in July and August. Also still in September, but then it already begins to get less until November or October. In the violent time it seems to rain every day, sometimes with some sun in between. I have to experience it first in order to know how it is. It's nice that I have now got to know the doctor from Daru. He'll probably come and look me up in Panguma.

I have another houseboy. I have kept on Selu for as long as possible, but in the long run I found him a bit too moody and lazy. Talking and smoking and pleasantly knocking about the town was his real life, probably due to the fact that he was from a chief's family and people frequently hang about there too. I therefore found it a bit of a shame to frequently have to bind him by rules. He wasn't a bad boy, but just not really at the right place and, which tipped the scales for me, not clean with washing pots and pans. We have parted in a good atmosphere. Now I have a nice, handy boy, again, also trained by the mission. I have him first for a trial period. Conteh, he and the nurse who wanted to see Freetown so much, are with me here. They haven't had a good night the first night in their lodgings, but today Conteh will probably find somewhere better. He is clever enough.

Bye dear, dear Moeteke, so much love from your Child.

Freetown, Sunday afternoon 9 June 1934

My dear Moeteke,

With yesterday's post I received both your letters and the postcard. At first I was surprised that you already knew about my illness. I hadn't expected that and each time I was afraid that my first letter about it would inform you too incompletely. You must have been scared out of your wits by the telegram, Moeteke, and have had a bad time after that.⁵ It came so suddenly, didn't it? If only I could have spared you that. The telegram was sent completely without my knowledge, Moeteke. I learned of it for the first time from your letters. The doctor in Daru did say to me a few times – I have just

⁵ The IALC had sent Mrs Overdiep-Ham a telegram to inform her about Sjoerd Hofstra's illness.

received a telegram from the Colonial Secretariat in Freetown asking how you are, and about my age and nationality – but as I was ill, I didn't pay much attention to it then, because I knew that people here soon become worried in such cases and have to reckon with every possibility. I have, moreover, a special relationship with the Government, and the D.C. had helped me to get this doctor, so everything was a bit official. Besides, my illness went a bit further than malaria and in these circumstances people are quick to make a report. In the train from Bo to Freetown I travelled with a Government doctor who does administrative medical work in Freetown. He said: I know everything about you, for I have just sent a report about you to England (to the medical department of colonial affairs). And here in Freetown Horstead told me that the Colonial Secretariat had asked him for the address of my family. Horstead didn't know that and had then given the address of the Institute. But I still hadn't thought that they would send a telegram immediately. I thought they need this information in case anything were to go wrong. However, it's considerate that the Government here has cabled and luckily Miss Brackett has passed it on immediately. What a difficult time it must have been for you then, Moeteke. You have acted very firmly and well by immediately sending a telegram here. What a relief it must have been for you when a favourable answer arrived. I haven't answered your telegram, Moeteke, because I, as I also wrote you, really thought that you had done it for Whitsun or may have thought that Poetie is perhaps feeling a bit lonely right now. For a moment I thought – would Moeteke know about it, but no, I thought that isn't possible. – Now I sent you a telegram yesterday afternoon. The employee said that it will be there within half an hour. So I very much hope that you still got it yesterday evening. And tomorrow or the day after tomorrow you'll get another letter from me with more detailed news.

I am fairly well already, Moeteke, and the sea breeze here does me good. It takes some time to get the blood at the old strength again. A part of your red blood cells gets lost in the battle. The doctor in Daru and the Horsteads are amazed that I've recovered so quickly. My body surely was really in a good condition. The doctor did worry when the fever was so high. "You are a hard and tough hunk", he said when I came through it.

Oh yes, Moeteke, a country like Sierra Leone won't ever become a place where you go for your health. I knew that in advance. But all the time I was feeling so well that I, like you, didn't think of illness. Now this faith is shaken for both of us. I feel it with you. You had a rough time for a moment, or rather for a few days. I haven't ever been so terribly ill, I believe. But we don't have to be daunted by that at all, Moeteke. Firstly, one can easily get something in Europe too. Secondly, I know the symptoms of malaria better now, know better how one can act immediately – I didn't know whether I had malaria or sunstroke – and perhaps one also becomes a bit immune. Moreover, May is very unfavourable, right before the rains start. The air is very oppressive – now too still – because there is already a high humidity in the air and the sun is blazing at the same time. I also had had a fairly tiring week before, with a few trips to Lalehun and Bundu ceremonies in Panguma.⁶ But I'll be really careful. [...] By way of precaution, at any rate until the next dry season, in addition I now take quinine. Life is a wondrous thing, isn't

⁶ The Bundu or Sande society is the secret society of Mende women.

it Moeteke. It all passes by you when you are very ill, in all its apparent futility and tragedy. But as soon as we are healthy again, we start again with courage, we can't help it. This week I looked for a long time at the industrious goings-on of ants on the road. There are very big red ants here. You finally think – are we also living like that, always busy, without really knowing for what – perhaps gods are also looking from above at our slaving away. Who knows and yet we have no other choice than to carry on. Nor can we say something with certainty about the non-existence of a higher goal.

Although I didn't know that you knew about my illness, I certainly knew you to be near, Moeteke, and I was calm. When your telegram arrived, I didn't find it strange, although I couldn't guess that you already knew about my illness. Therefore I couldn't answer it in the way you would have expected, Moeteke. I didn't dare to mention the illness in a telegram in order not to give you a shock, the more so because (from my point of view) a telegram, after the crisis was already a few days in the past, would have worried you needlessly and wasn't necessary any more.

Tuesday morning. For the last hour I have been busy mending underwear. That was urgently needed and today my boy is doing my laundry. I still have the same summer underwear that we bought in Berlin, Moeteke.⁷ Do you remember that reform shop in Steglitz, where we bought it and later some of it in a Jewish shop somewhere near the Kurfürstendamm? How much we have gone through there in Berlin and what a lovely time we had there too. In just one year one can experience quite a lot. I felt myself very much at home there. – That is the difficult thing now for you, Moeteke, isn't it, now that I am here, that you don't know the environment so well. For me everything here has already become so much more natural, no longer strange. Therefore I could cope with the illness more calmly than if it had happened at the beginning of my stay. But you shouldn't worry at all now, Moeteke. In general I am quite healthy. Often people go to Europe for a period of rest after such an attack, but the Daru doctor didn't find that necessary in my case. It must make a difference when your body isn't filled up with whisky, although drinkers in their turn claim, that alcohol provides resistance against malaria!

At the moment it's very busy here at the house, at any rate for the Horsteads. The archdeacon of the church here, a Creole, died yesterday and the burial takes place today. And because the bishop is "trekking", Horstead is, as the remaining "white man" of the church here, solely responsible for all sorts of arrangements. – This afternoon I am going to a dentist, Moeteke. For weeks already a filled tooth has been bothering me and I would certainly have had to travel to Freetown to deal with it at one time or another. The dentist is a Creole. He seems to be good. I wonder.

In the mornings I work with Conteh. We are preparing a detailed account of the division of labour between men, women + children throughout the year, especially during the work on the rice fields. That is very interesting. Yesterday evening, after

⁷ Sjoerd Hofstra and Mrs Overdiep lived in Berlin from October 1930 until late September 1931. Hofstra had a grant from the Alexander von Humboldt-Stiftung. He attended lectures of sociologist A. Vierkandt and ethnologist D. Westermann (African languages) at the Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität, and worked on his doctoral dissertation.

months without, I had really fresh salad, Moeteke. That was lovely. Here in Freetown one can of course get more things than in "the bush".

In the evening. The dentist was a nice man. He had travelled in Germany too and knew Hamburg well. For part of the year he now lives in Gambia for his work. Quite a nice way to live your life, isn't it? It's handy that there is a dentist here, though his equipment is not so elaborate as that of a European dentist.

Luckily it is raining now. In Freetown there is a water shortage. It has rained very little yet, while in "the bush" there have already been repeatedly downpours and storms.

Bye dear Moeteke, don't worry! I can manage quite well now. And I am with you. And I know you are with me. Just enjoy the summer weather.

Kind regards to Mrs Kossen and the children, Your own Boy

Freetown, Saturday 23 June 1934

My dear Moeteke,

Tomorrow a German ship is sailing, three days before the English mail. It only makes a small difference, for the German ship is taking two days more. Yet I hope that you'll get this short letter a bit sooner as a small surprise. This afternoon I'll receive another letter from you. That is the advantage of Freetown, that one is so near the mail ships. How are you, Moeteke? Is it the height of summer in Holland? Be sure to take advantage of it.

I am already becoming fairly strong again. The last stage is a bit slower than the beginning of getting better, isn't it. After an illness everything improves quickly at first, but the real recovery comes more slowly. I'll see a doctor early next week and he is likely to examine my blood then. I think that I'll be able to return to Panguma by the end of next week. My doctor from Daru was here this week too. He had an ear infection and had to be examined in the European hospital here. On Sunday afternoon I visited him and the day before yesterday he had tea with me here. Yesterday he returned to Daru. It was nice to see him again. He found my colour much better. In Daru I had no colour at all, he said. Now I am quite brown again. When I am back in Panguma he will be looking me up and will also examine the compound around my house looking for mosquito breeding places.

I have been able to do quite a lot of work here, Moeteke. With Conteh I am systematically going through all the local economic activities. That is very useful and here one comes more quietly to some points than is often the case in Panguma where all sorts of things distract one's attention. An old Mendi man, the speaker of the Mendi part of Freetown (the various tribes here have their own community) helps us.

Bye dear, dear Moeteke. I'll write you again soon, for the English mail. This is a short letter in between.

Your own Child

Freetown, Saturday 23-6-34

My dear Moeteke,

This afternoon I received both your letters. And by now you'll also already have two or three letters from me since you wrote these. And in these letters, Moeteke, there is a partial answer to some of your questions and a feeling for your thoughts. If only I could come to you for a short while and talk with you and tell you everything [...]. How it all was. But I believe that you will indeed find some things in my letters which you have now received. Yes, Moeteke, it was good that they sent you that telegram, for it was serious. Only, when you received the telegram, the worst was already over. I believe that all this has made me a bit older too and in general, life here affects you in a way that is different from our European life which is more protected and surrounds you with more care. I have had a strange time, Moeteke, it is almost a bit painful to talk about it. And yet I wasn't afraid or surprised. I was very close to death. I can write this to you now, because everything is over and done and it probably won't repeat itself. It wasn't just malaria, through exhaustion; it developed into "blackwater fever". The urine is then black (probably with destroyed red blood cells). That's why people cabled you. If it is just malaria it isn't taken so seriously. Luckily the body has coped and that is simultaneously a good test for my health. And it also didn't go beyond a mild form of blackwater fever. With a more serious form usually one should, if one overcomes it, return to Europe for a while.

Yes, if only you could have nursed me, Moeteke. It was rather strange here in the hospital in Daru and looking back it was comical. The doctor was, as I have already written to you, very nice to me and came to see me as often as his work allowed. But further than that I only had contact with the boys. For except for the doctor there were no European nursing personnel. There was a hospital just for negroes with negro nurses. With the food it was simple to start with, for during the first ten days I lived only on water and orange juice and thereafter the boys brought food from the officers' canteen. The doctor had a very good boy who looked after me very well. But it was far removed from European nursing, of course. And when I think of the time in Aerdenhout when I was ill and you were with me. How completely different that was.

One learns in the contact with boys, to take life as it is offered to you and even though one has to be firm sometimes, the smile remains dominant. Conteh has been very useful to me. When I was lying so ill in Panguma, he made a very tiring and demanding journey to Kenema, all the way on his bike. But the rest of the negroes don't recognize the gravity of such a European disease. They find it strange that one has to lie in bed such a long time, and that one doesn't eat. I still think about the visit of the chief and his brother, when I was already seriously ill in Panguma. They asked me – do you eat well? I said – I can't get anything through. They found this, I believe, the cause of everything. Negroes often have an unbelievable resistance, Moeteke. The doctor in Daru has told me powerful stories of his patients in this respect. I think that a vigorous selection process creating resistance has occurred over the course of time. Their life is relatively healthy; much fresh air and as good as no alcohol, tea or coffee etc. Their problem is mainly particular diseases, as I already wrote to you once before.

Moeteke, I had a fever of 106 degrees in Daru. That was on the day I arrived. Friday 11 May. 106 degrees Fahrenheit is 42 1/9 degrees Celsius. That seems to be very high, doesn't it? I asked the doctor if one could get higher, but the doctor, perhaps a bit stressed, only said – please! Perhaps it wasn't only that temperature which made it difficult, but for three days long he couldn't get the temperature below 104 degrees. When he was here with me this week (when I was very delirious), he said, "I was very afraid for your heart and on that Friday afternoon I listened to it for a long time", and Conteh and Selu each sat in a corner of the room with very dejected faces.

I am a bit uncertain if I should write all this to you Moeteke, but I also think that you do want to know as much as possible and everything is now over. – My biggest concern was you, Moeteke, when I was so ill in Panguma. I didn't really think that I would die, although I didn't fear it either. But it was so hard to lie there and to have nobody who would be able to convey a message to you. In Daru I felt myself so much safer. Your mental worries in such a case are almost worse than your bodily health. Time and again I thought – how can people here get to know Moeteke's address, if I die and will the Institute warn her in time? Etc. Yet in fact I was confident, Moeteke. Perhaps I was also too ill to know everything exactly. Life is so strange then. One is entirely on one's own. And that is just as well.

You write, Moeteke, that life is so strange, and that I am so far away for you. Much has passed now, [...] with Dirk's death⁸ and my illness. But before then you were still able to really share with me what I told you from here, weren't you? You once wrote to me – I know all your people there, it isn't at all unfamiliar to me. Surely that feeling will return, Moeteke. [...]

Monday evening. What will you be doing now, Moeteke? The sun has just gone down. I can still see the blue-red skies above the sea and a red reflection in the water. Two freighters lie in the harbour. When I only look at the sea, it brings back to me memories of IJmuiden and looking at the ships and the sea together. How much we have already done and seen together, Moeteke. Yet I don't feel far from all that and I know that we'll be doing the same in a few months' time. How nice that will be. When I look here simultaneously at the coast and the rising hills behind it and the houses on the slope, then it seems so un-Dutch again, much more southern European. In the hills here, on Hill Station, where most of the Europeans live, it is beautiful, Moeteke. Yesterday I met old acquaintances, from the mission in Bunumbu. One of them arrived here on Saturday, after a period of leave, the other goes on leave now. They had invited me to join them for a Methodist service somewhere in the town here. It was a very picturesque and narrow part of the town right by the water. What a peculiar life there. The church service was in a small, hastily built room, really an open bush house. The only protection was the zinc roof. And along the narrow roads or alleys, people were sitting in front of their houses, with some trade, bowls full of rice and pepper and tomatoes and dried fish. And going through it an old Creole preacher who said or sang something edifying, entirely on his own and on his own account, with almost closed eyes and in a monotonous voice. And nobody listened to him, perhaps because they were so used to his appearance or perhaps nobody in this Timni [Temne] part of the

⁸ Dirk refers to Mr Kossen.

town understood his Freetown English.⁹ There are several of such preachers on their own in Sierra Leone. And sects are also flourishing profusely among the Creoles.

Tuesday evening. It's nine o'clock now, Moeteke. I am just lying under my mosquito net. Later on in the evening the bed is the most pleasant place to sit or to rest here. A chair soon irritates in this climate, when you are tired. What are you doing now, Moeteke? Perhaps you are reading the newspaper with Mrs Kossen. [...] You shouldn't find everything too strange, Moeteke. Life itself is strange. I know it and feel it like that. And distance is very difficult, for me too here. But sometimes I don't feel the distance so much, when I am talking to you like this and in so many of my thoughts. The nearness of the sea, so completely different from the "bush", also helps of course. Both of us still manage better than might have been the case. You are delicate, but I am not such a tough cookie either. Therefore everything, my adaptation to the circumstances, partly exceeds my expectations. Of course there is my interest in the work, but I am not yet so enthusiastic either, that I can't see its relative value. And if one has been several days near death, one becomes even more perceptive to this relativity. Yet there is something which pushes through, to values. Though one doesn't understand it oneself.

[...] Tomorrow the English ship arrives. I'll accompany Horstead to the ship. One of the teachers has to take a few months' rest for his health. And other acquaintances go on board too, my D.C. Shaw and a businessman from Segbwema with whom I stayed at the beginning.

Isn't there much news emerging in Holland, Moeteke? Is Colijn still in charge?¹⁰

On the coming Thursday I'll visit a doctor who will examine me. I think that I'll probably be able to go back to Panguma next week. I feel myself to be much stronger. On Saturday afternoon I played tennis on the bishop's tennis court. It went well again and it was a good test for the heart.

Wednesday morning. Bye dear, dear Moeteke. [...]

Your own Boy.

Wednesday morning, 27-6-34

My dear Moeteke,

I enclose a copy of the report that I have sent to the Institute. You may keep it, Moeteke.

I now recall that you asked me if the illness had cost me much money. Well, not so much. [...] The incidental costs always make it more expensive. In Daru it didn't cost much. The doctor didn't want to accept more than ten guilders and the officers wouldn't take more than 3 shillings per day for the food. So that was about 38 guilders for the whole stay, doctor and food, in Daru. For the hospital I didn't have to pay anything because I was staying in an officer's home, as the actual hospital is only for ne-

⁹ The Temne are one of Sierra Leone's largest ethnic groups, living in the North and the West.

¹⁰ H. Colijn was Prime-Minister of the Netherlands from 1925 to 1926 and 1933 to 1939.

groes. Anyway, it's only a small room, one room for men and a small building for women. The spatial arrangements here are smaller and more primitive than in Europe, Moeteke. Nursing didn't cost me anything either, for my boy and the doctor's boy cared for me. There are no European nurses. However, for the journey with the lorry from Panguma to Daru (it had come the previous evening from Blama) I had to pay 35 guilders. So that was just as expensive as the whole stay of three weeks in Daru. Anyway, "it had to be done". I still have to consult a doctor here; he will probably be less modest with his fees than my friend in Daru.

Bye dear [...] Moeteke, Your Child

In the meantime the secretary of the International Institute of African Languages and Cultures in London wrote another letter to Mrs Overdiep, dated 25th June, 1934.

Dear Mrs. Overdiep,

Thank you for your letter of the 22nd giving me the latest news of Dr. Hofstra. I have this morning had a letter from him direct saying that he is staying for a time at Fourah Bay College to get quite strong again, but soon hopes to go back to his field. I am sure you must be most relieved that he has made such a satisfactory recovery. Evidently he had no intention of letting anyone over here know how ill he was and had no idea the Governor would have cabled.

Yours sincerely,

D.G. Brackett

Freetown, Sunday 8-7-34

My dear Moeteke,

Today I received your letter of 22 June and the postcard and the printed matter. Usually the post comes on Saturday, but the ship was delayed.

As you'll see from my "Freetown" at the top of this letter, Moeteke, I am still there. Friday a week ago I went to see a doctor who examined my blood. He found its condition good, but he still found some malaria parasites in the blood. He strongly advised me to take a cure of quinine and get rid of them before returning to Panguma. I did that last week, and have continued up till now. It is quite a job to swallow so much quinine, but if it helps one perseveres. People often become a bit feverish and unwell from much quinine, but I can bear it well. One has to stay in bed as much as possible. The doctor, a Dr Johnson, came to see me every day, even this morning. He thinks that I have recovered amazingly quickly after blackwater fever. In general my body seems to be in good order.

[at the bottom of the page] I am sending you also Nadel's report. Perhaps you would like to read it.

It was a bit strange to have to be in bed again, while I felt myself entirely well and the people who saw me also had to laugh for a moment, because I am really looking healthy again, but it was on doctor's orders. Such a cure is usually taken in cases of ma-

laria. I don't have any fever now. It therefore seemed a bit more nice and cosy. Tomorrow the doctor will examine the blood again and then it will probably be OK. Of course, in the rainy season there is always some risk of another malaria attack, but hopefully I'll now slip through like this. I also know better now to respond to it instantly. You shouldn't be worried about it, Moeteke, I mean about the chance of recurrence.

Monday morning. It was nice to get some newspaper cuttings from you again. Would you also please send me book reviews fairly regularly, Moeteke? The account of the meeting of the Society for Philosophy of Law was interesting for me. – So it's not so rosy in the world of social geography either, especially with regard to teaching possibilities. This present road is, also from a social point of view, much better for me, Moeteke. As a teacher one would have run the risk of getting sacked. – There is a big to-do and a lot of rumour about Dutch spelling, isn't there? Will it become the simplified spelling or something in between the old and the simplified? It will be difficult at first to adapt oneself, for me at least. You have already been that far for a long time. When I talk with you like this, I don't feel you are so far away, Moeteke. You should also try not to have that feeling towards me. Although it makes a big difference that you don't know my environment and I do know yours.

Have you received my second, long, letter from Daru, Moeteke? And did you get the photo from here, taken in Kailahun? You don't write about it. Perhaps it is better that you always let me know which letters you have received from me. Then I know if something has gone missing perhaps.

[...] People who have had blackwater fever are mostly sent back to Europe for a full recovery, but both doctors don't find this necessary in my case. And it is also better this way, because of the costs and the work and the matter of getting acclimatized again.

It is now the rainy season proper here. However, it doesn't yet rain every day. Sometimes nearly twenty-four hours on end. And then three or four times more than with us, at least so it looks to me. Today it's very warm and sunny weather. A slightly lower temperature when it rains is quite pleasant for that matter.

On Saturday it was a year ago, Moeteke, that we had the promotion.¹¹ How quickly everything passes. And how much has happened in that year. At that time Kossen was still there. I see him so clearly before me, even as he sat in the auditorium and afterwards in the evening, when we were together, and he talked with Douwe.¹² [...]

I am sending you a nice booklet about West African birds, Moeteke. I haven't had time yet to discuss with Mendi people in how far all birds which are described, are also found here, but I think that this will be about right. There are more nice booklets, but mainly about agriculture and that is perhaps too technical. This week Conteh and I focussed on spinning and pottery-making, both women's work and I got some good information about it. The richness of words for all kinds of parts of materials and tools and the stages of the work is very great. It takes some effort to find your way around it. I already have learnt more technical terms than I have come across so far in any

¹¹ Promotion here refers to taking one's doctoral degree by defending one's doctoral dissertation in public.

¹² Douwe was Sjoerd Hofstra's elder brother.

book on Africa. It is now a question of time and again rounding up the details, checking and, most of all, filling it with life when one sees the work actually being done and talks to the people. – Sometimes one thinks, oh what is this all worth, but I mostly think that there is something in it to provide as detailed a book as possible for interested people, and, moreover for me there is a certain satisfaction in it, approaching perhaps the satisfaction which an artist has when he gratifies his creative urge. I know that in me it isn't primarily an urge for data collection, but a need to make something into a coherent whole – to try to represent something of the life of the people, as it moves between the limits of customs, mores, rites, etc. and as it rises above these in the individual expressions of the people. I have also used these days here to read some English and also booklets about English style. I would like to learn to express myself as well and clearly as possible in English. I don't like English as much as German or French, but it is useful to master it and I believe that there are many possibilities for expressing myself in it. It just seems difficult to find good examples of style. On the whole English writers treat their language fairly carelessly. But there are good ones of course. For a beginner there is always the danger of being long-winded because one doesn't know the shortest expression. It is a bit of a pity that, as a Dutchman, one has to turn to other languages so much. It would be nice if one were able to improve one's style in one's own language, but for me there doesn't seem to be much future in it for the time being.



Photo 3.1 Seated company and military chapel standing behind, Kailahun May 1934. Front row from left to right: Sjoerd Hofstra, three chiefs, the assistant D.C., the band master, the D.C. of Kailahun, an old English trader, two chiefs and a civil servant.

It seems good to me, Moeteke, that you'll attend another course at Barchem, for a change.¹³ Otherwise one stays too long in the same atmosphere and with the things connected with it. And it sometimes confronts you with other problems and for a while brings you into contact with other people. I feel that it has been also useful for me to be away from Panguma, notwithstanding the unwished-for cause.

Tuesday morning. The doctor came this morning and told me that they haven't found any more malaria parasites in the blood. Nice, isn't it, Moeteke? Now I am rid of it for the time being, I hope. The doctor, a certain Dr Johnson, found my condition quite good on the whole; healthy and no anaemia. But in order to get even stronger and because I have just been in bed a week, it's better to stay here for another two weeks. I'll continue using quinine. It doesn't seem to harm me and perhaps it has a preventive value. And one wishes to do anything to prevent a recurrence.

I have moved from the main building of the college to a bungalow which also belongs to the college and in which two teachers live. The Horstead family have gone for a week's holiday to Leicester, a place in the mountains behind Freetown, where they have a bungalow. For me it was a bit too much climbing to join them and it just happened that the one part of the bungalow here became free because one of the teachers has had to take an early leave because of a weakness in his heart. So I moved to his part of the house and now I am still living there. The Horsteads are already back, but I'll stay on here because there is less going up and down stairs than in the main building and one is even closer to the sea too. The teacher who also lives here, is a friendly, interesting man, a Mr Prickett. (The name of the doctor in Daru is Dr Laird.) I meet quite a few different people in Sierra Leone, but it isn't tiring and one doesn't have to have a close contact with them. I have my own fields of interest and work atmosphere about which you can now and then talk to others, but the motive for which is seldom shared by others. Missionaries have a more strict, motivating aim, they *want* something specific. For me it's more a matter of taking what comes my way.

[...] You should rest easy about my condition here, Moeteke. It is really fine now. You should have confidence, Moeteke, that I'll try to protect myself as much as possible. The rainy season has so far turned out better than I'd expected. There are long, sharp showers, but also long sunny periods in between. It can rain for almost a whole day, but mostly only for short periods, several times a day, sometimes not at all. The skies are beautiful sometimes. I see the sunsets so clearly from this bungalow, Moeteke, and the lightning in the evening splitting the clouds. The thunderstorms are almost over anyway and there are no more tornadoes. They only occur at the beginning and at the end of the wet season.

I read in the English newspaper, the "Observer", that von Papen has given a daring speech against the suppression of the freedom of opinion and that there is a chance of a real change of regime.¹⁴ Has anything come of that? In the interval since I received the newspaper more may already have taken place.

¹³ A course of the Woodbrookers in Barchem, a village in the east of the Netherlands. The Woodbrookers were named after the country estate Woodbrooke near Birmingham where the Quakers had set up an educational centre.

¹⁴ Franz von Papen was vice chancellor under Hitler from January 1933 till early July 1934.

I received the enclosed letters from Oldham and Miss Brackett, which I would like to have back. Quite sympathetic, aren't they. It is nice that you have written to Miss Brackett. They have already received two letters from me in the interval. There seems to be a chance that they can get some extra money for me. Unfortunately I haven't got the letter in question; it will have gone missing. I have now asked Miss Brackett for a new form.

When I am hearing more about food and other parts of the life of the Mendi I am often amazed that they have conventional wisdom, acquired through experience, that we have lost and that we only get back by means of new theories. Thus they know, for example, that cooked oil on the food, the rice, isn't digested as easily as well as uncooked oil which has a favourable effect on the intestines. A large number of the women also object to frying food. And one day I learned about the use of rice water. One cooks rice, after having cleaned it well, and adds more water than usual. This water gets a milky colour after boiling for a certain time and apparently contains the best elements of the rice. This is especially so here, more than with the rice which is imported in Europe, for here it is unpolished and therefore one has more vitamins in the rice water. The Mendi give this rice water to babies and to sick people. If a sick person can't take this anymore, then his condition is considered to be hopeless. This milk water makes people strong, they say. I have just tried it and it tastes good. It reminded me, and therefore I write this, of what Hanish wrote in one of his booklets about the good effect of barley and other grain water.¹⁵ It is amazing that wisdom and experience always seem to have to follow a sort of cycle.

Wednesday morning. The mail has to be sent off now. It's dark here now and a bit stormy, after a rainy night. Such weather very much resembles our autumn weather, only it is less cold. One can almost always walk around here in a Schiller shirt and shorts. You should see it here sometime. Then everything would be less strange for you. For me it has already become almost too normal. And yet I keep being amazed time and again.

Bye dear, dear Moeteke, I am with you! Do you really know that? Bye Moeteke, your Boy.

Freetown, Thursday July [after the 8th]1934

My dear Moeteke,

The day before yesterday I received your letter of 1 July. That was a surprise, with an interim mail. I got the newspapers too.

I am still in Freetown, Moeteke. I sent you a telegram last Friday to let you know that I am still here, for you probably thought that I was already back in Panguma. Last Sunday the doctor was here for the last time. He found my health now good again and he said I could leave in a week's time. I could have gone back on Monday, but Wednesday is nicer because on Monday (after the ship arrives on Saturday) perhaps

¹⁵ O.Z. Hanish wrote about the Mazdaznan food theory.

quite a few people travel first class. The doctor didn't want to accept any payment. I had expected a fairly high bill because he has been to see me at least eight times. The doctors here are very friendly to me. Of course the English doctors have good salaries as government officials, but their attitude towards patients in their free time is different. Government doctors are actually to some extent free to practise on top of the governmental work in the hospitals.

I have been here in Freetown longer than I had thought. My condition is now pretty good, and without this period there would have been a danger of staying in a half-way state, as the doctor in Daru said. The sea air and the rest here and having no worries about food, etc. have done me so much good. And, apart from the illness, I believe it's good to get away for a while to digest your impressions.

Yesterday it rained all day here, and fierce, real tropical rain, Moeteke. It was also cooler, which is also nice for a change. Now today the sun is shining really brightly again. It is a strange and also a nice thing about this country, that you are never long without sun and warmth. Here one is without fear of the long, cold winter months. With weather such as yesterday and today you would be able to cope here quite well, Moeteke. Yesterday I sort of had the feeling of being in Holland, by the sea, in the rain. The bungalow where I am now, is situated near the sea. There is only a small bit of land between the house and the sea, and because the house is standing high, some seven meters above sea level, sitting in the bungalow, one has the feeling of being on a ship.

The newspapers you sent were interesting. So Mrs Roland Holst has been awarded a prize and has published a new volume.¹⁶ Though the last is more important than the first. I can easily understand why Den Doolaard has refused the prize.¹⁷ It's somewhat strange, this prize business, although it helps publishers to sell. Have you bought the new volume of Mrs R-H, Moeteke? Yes, in Germany there may well be much commotion underground. I have read only a little about it. I don't get the Times, I paid for that newspaper, but didn't receive it but, oh, I find this alright as the Times is fairly expensive. I get the Observer, but that gives only Sunday news. So, when you find important or interesting things in the newspaper with respect to foreign politics, I would like to have it. [...]

Sunday afternoon. Yesterday I received two letters from you, Moeteke, that is three in this week. Thus it was a rich week.

What will you be doing now, Moeteke? Perhaps you are taking a stroll with Jet or the children if the weather is fine. Here today it's a rather calm, rainy day. That makes the day a bit melancholic. Particularly because it is a Sunday. And you know that I don't like Sundays abroad. This morning I had my boy make me a cup of coffee in order to get a slightly homely feeling. In Panguma I used to drink coffee fairly frequently. But I must have got out of the habit now and it isn't proper coffee either. It didn't really give me much satisfaction, it only made me warm. It may indeed be better for the heart to take no coffee at all here.

¹⁶ The Dutch poet Henriette Roland Holst-van der Schalk.

¹⁷ The Dutch author A. den Doolaard.

Yesterday afternoon a group of Mendi people came here, a woman, an old man and two young men. Conteh knew them. They live in the Mendi part of Freetown and he has fairly frequently discussed particulars for our work on rice growing etc. with them. They were nice people. Without much hesitation they counted up for me 38 kinds of rice that they knew. They certainly must have a good memory. Of all crops rice is held in the highest regard. And after rice it is cassava. People eat cassava in the interim period (July, August, September) when the rice from the last harvest is finished and the new harvest isn't yet available. People very frequently express themselves in metaphors. Thus the other crops are called "the slaves" of the rice (the memory of slavery still plays a role, of course). Yesterday someone called cassava the wife of the rice. I asked – why the wife? Well, he said – the wife goes to bed first and then the husband. So it's the same on the field, the cassava is planted first and the rice after that. Rice and cassava were always the food of the free-born; co-called guinea-corn and millet (two kinds of corn) that of the slaves. It is still an insult to offer to a guest guinea-corn or millet. Curious, isn't it? In other parts of Africa, especially in drier parts, these crops are the main food. Perhaps people wanted to express a sort of social distinction by not giving rice to slaves. The leaves of cassava are used as a vegetable and this vegetable (sauce) stands at the head of the list of vegetable sauces which are mostly poured over the rice. This cassava sauce is called "God from the outset sauce".

Connected with different names for the types of rice are little tales. Thus in relation to one of the names I was given the following explanation (the name is *yei fenei* = mother gave it me). A woman had a rice field. She died and left the field in the care of her son. Unfortunately, she hadn't kept some rice back for planting the new crop. Therefore the son often cried. One night he dreamt that his mother asked him – why do you cry so often? The son – because there is no rice for planting. The mother then said – there and there on the field stands a palm tree. Go there and underneath the tree you will find rice. This he did and he found rice. When the people asked him from where he had this type of rice, he said – mother gave it me. This became the name of the rice. It's curious how people know the qualities of all these types of rice and know which are the best types. On the whole people keep the nicest (that is the sweetest and smallest) types for their own use and for gifts to the chief, and the coarser, bigger rice grains for trade (for sale in Freetown, etc.) when trade is necessary. Here in Freetown people do not seem to be so particular and mainly look for quantity.

Moeteke, yesterday morning I went to the office of the Colonial Secretary to see the gentleman (civil servant) who in January arranged everything for my journey and to get train tickets from him again. At his office I saw the complete exchange of telegrams about my illness and between letters and telegrams I suddenly saw a letter from you! That was emotional. It was a letter from you to the Institute and Mr Vischer, the Secretary General who had sent a letter with thanks to the Governor on behalf of the Institute, and had enclosed your letter for documentation. You were so near just then, Moeteke, and everything was not strange and far. – All the correspondence about me is already gradually filling a file here in the Secretariat.

I have received a postcard from Pos from Algiers.¹⁸ They are there for the summer vacation.

I am sending you a few booklets, Moeteke. One is a little history of Sierra Leone. It is mainly about the Colony (thus not about the Protectorate to which Mendi land belongs) and the Creoles in Freetown, but it's still interesting to leaf through sometimes. The other is quite a nice piece about weaving and spinning, about which I am already collecting a good bit of material too. I have already more than this booklet contains. And included in the parcel is the report of the Social Geography Society about which you also sent me a newspaper cutting a while ago.

Tuesday. Now I have English newspapers in which some more details about Germany are to be found. It's not very comforting news, is it? And not everything will be known yet either. Germany is going through hard times. Horrible things have happened and one would say that this tension should break sometime. It is, I think, rather as the "Observer" writes – Hitler and Goebbels and their crowd won't ever be able to face each other as before. Too much has happened. But world history is a strange business and one can't predict too much.

In Amsterdam it's been very turbulent too, hasn't it? I read a piece about it in the "Observer". It was reported that there were two deaths.¹⁹ Poor people. How is it now? How far from that I live at the moment. When such things happen in one's own country, one would wish to be closer to everything, although probably it isn't very edifying. Here everything is so much calmer, though nature is also wilder. The people are at any rate calmer.

You shouldn't worry about me, Moeteke. I trust that from now on it will go well. I have also got more experience now. And this is already a better period as there are less mosquitoes; they particularly roam about when there is little rain, as in May. Anyway, the rainy season, the real rainy season, isn't so bad as I'd thought. It doesn't rain continually. Yesterday and today, for example, it was dry. It turns out to be quite alright. I would have thought that there would be much more rain. When it rains a lot of rain falls, but luckily it doesn't rain continually. I would like to write much more, but I have to go to bed now. Tomorrow I have to get up early for the journey. The last two days were messy with shopping, some visits and packing. It's quite a palaver to leave for the Protectorate.

Bye my very dear Moeteke, your Boy

¹⁸ H.J. Pos was professor of philosophy at the University of Amsterdam and friend of Sjoerd Hofstra.

¹⁹ Hofstra refers to the so-called Jordaan revolt in Amsterdam.

Back in Panguma (July – November 1934)

Panguma, Sunday evening 29 July 1934

My dear Moeteke,

I am at last back in Panguma, after having been away from here for about ten weeks. The journey was fine, but it's rather long. It takes a day and a half to cover a relatively short distance. In particular the distance between Freetown and Bo takes a fairly long time. One leaves Freetown at a quarter to eight in the morning and one is in Bo at 5 o'clock. One has to stay the night there, in a railway rest house. The next day one starts again at 9 o'clock and reaches Hangha at half past twelve. When I arrived in Bo, I was a bit miserable, having a headache and stomach trouble, so I went to bed early. The next day I was fine again. In Hangha there was a lorry waiting for us. I had written to the chief about it beforehand. At about 2 o'clock we were in Panguma. I sent you a telegram from Hangha, Moeteke. I was craving to do this and I also wanted to try to test whether it will arrive safely from Hangha. Have you got it, Moeteke? I wrote only that I was almost back in Panguma again. You should know that Hangha is only a small station and the stationmaster has to do the postal work with it. He has only been trained as stationmaster, not as postmaster. Before cut-backs, small stations like Hangha had their separate postmasters too, but they are no longer there now, and the stationmaster has to do the postal work himself. The man in Hangha complained that the government does so little to encourage them in this work and they only get 5 shillings extra for it. Luckily he, and also his assistant, knew about telegrams (at least so they said), so I hope it will be all right.

It was nice to return to the "bush", Moeteke. I could already see the changes in the scenery from the train. The crops have grown in the interim. When I saw the landscape in May, the rice fields, everything was still bare; the rice had still to be sowed. Now the rice is already some 20 to 40 centimetres high in most fields and the cassava already nearly one metre. Now in the rainy season everything looks such a fresh green. The "bush", in so far it isn't a rice field, has become very dense. When one enters the fields, the grass stands high on all sides; some crops are already blooming, such as the

okra and pepper; they form a nice change, standing irregularly scattered between the rice or the cassava or the cocoa.

The link between the fieldwork and magic is now at a new stage; one doesn't have ceremonies now, such as the ones I attended after the burning of the bush. Now that the crop has grown, usually at the entrance of the field on which the crop stands, a kind of medicine has been laid on a stick or fixed to it. This "medicine" guards against theft. The idea is that if a thief comes, the medicine works against him and he gets certain pains or ailments which can only be removed with a counter medicine which only the owner of the crop possesses. So the thief is – and a strange irony lies in all of this – forced to go to the owner and tell him that he has stolen. He probably has to pay the owner a fine before he gets the counter medicine. This magic seems to be effective and to have a better preventative effect than our police. So justice is here, so to say, not in the hands of the community, but is left to the owners. It is, of course, difficult to verify how this all works in actual practice. Sometimes, I heard, people are ashamed to let on how they got a particular pain. Perhaps they have done something which they connect with the pain. That's perhaps why, when some people came to me with complaints, they were not always ready to tell me how they had got a pain.

Magic is a strange thing. People never stop talking about it in Africa. During the time I wasn't here, a few people were killed by lightning in a neighbouring village, four of them at one time. I knew one of these people; she was a woman from here and in April we attended a ceremony on her land. Before I left some people had been made to swear on the thunder medicine, to confirm a few new rules, laws, which had been made here. Thus Yengbeke, the night watchman, had to swear to accept a new regulation. Persons who swear on this medicine and nonetheless act against a regulation, are expected to be killed by lightning. It also does happen – I believe that I wrote you about this from Daru, Moeteke – that people who have a grudge towards someone, call in the lightning against them with the help of a special sorcerer. With all these cases of death by lightning, people became fearful of evil influences and a ceremony was held – in our absence – against the influence of the thunder medicine. I don't yet know the details, but it is interesting to find out how people visualize this.

I have had many visitors here over the first two days and people are nice to me and they say that they are glad that I am back again. The house has been done up well. In the interim carpenters have worked here and replaced the rotten wood on walls and floors. I have had it all thoroughly cleaned by the boys, so it looks bright again.

It is curious, Moeteke, how in a country like this one – and the same goes also to a certain degree for ordinary relationships in Europe – one comes to a strong appreciation of simple gifts of nature like water. In Europe one values water too, of course, especially in a dry summer, but even so it is easy to access, by just turning a tap. Now I can't complain here either, because Panguma has relatively favourable conditions. But I mean in general, for the natives, water is a very important thing, like rice, like the cotton for clothing and wood for the houses *and* the fire.

I bought a new lamp in Freetown, Moeteke, with which I am very pleased. I have struggled somewhat with lamps. I have two of them, like those generally used here by Europeans. But they are fairly complicated for the boys to fill, etc. (one has to pump

them now and then) and they are warm and make a loud noise. At the home of one of the missionaries of Bunumbu I once saw a nice lamp, which had the shape of an old-fashioned paraffin lamp, but a standing one. I was able to buy one like it in Freetown. You fill them with kerosene just like a paraffin lamp; they give a good, regular light and make no noise. The matter of lamps is very important here in the tropics during the evening.

The rainy season isn't so bad so far, Moeteke. And when it doesn't rain, as was the case today between 2 and 6, the sun often shines and a nice, cool wind blows. It's cooler here than in Freetown. Conteh even finds it cold here. When it is raining or is very cloudy, it can indeed be fairly cool. I travelled from Bo to Kenema with a young man from Oxford who is beginning his first "tour" as assistant D.C. He hadn't been to Africa before. He also said, "When I left England in July, there was a heat wave; when one goes to Africa one expects to arrive in an even warmer country, but at the moment it seems to me cooler here than in England." – The temperatures fluctuate between 74 and 84 degrees F on the thermometer at my window.

Monday morning. Bye dear Moeteke! I am sending this letter this morning, hoping that you'll get it between times. [...] It is now raining here, how would it be with you?

Bye dear Moeteke, your Boy.

Panguma, Saturday 3 August 1934

My dear Moeteke,

I have already been back in Panguma for a week. It is a completely different life compared to Freetown. Apart from the reason why I was in Freetown, it's nicer here too because my real work is situated here and I am my own boss here, have my own house, etc. In the long run, however good it is, it isn't so nice to stay with other people, as I recently had to. People like us get a bit spoilt with their own environment, managing their own things, don't they, even when it is to the moderate degree which comes with living in a rest house. Life is passing here once more with the continuous goings-on of every day. There is the work in the rice fields, when the rains permit. We have also had a court session here for two days, Monday and Tuesday. People come past, for a talk or medicine for a cough or constipation or back pain; the universal ailments. And we walk again between the people and their work, to see how everything is going. I have already gained a lot from all sorts of notes Conteh made for me in Freetown about the work of the people here. Now I have a better opportunity to check and consciously observe various things.

It is raining now, rather more calmly at the moment. It has poured today, so all windows had to be closed. What a lot of water was falling then, Moeteke. Yet, it is not unpleasant. For myself I often find it rather pleasant. Indoors one is better able to handle notes and to write things down. And when it's raining hard fewer people pass by for all sorts of small things.

This morning the chief and his following left for Lalehun. I think they met quite a downpour on the way. A new section chief, that is a chief for a section of a chiefdom,

has to be chosen in Lalehun. There is a provisional chief, an acting chief, but now his appointment has to be confirmed by the chief and the community or another person has to be chosen. There is, as you can imagine, much work behind the scenes connected to it. All sorts of deputations from the villages are sure to come to the chief with their wishes. Many are opposed to the interim acting section chief, who indeed isn't an exemplary chief. I am going there tomorrow with my small following, to have a look at everything. The chief is pleased that I am coming too and he has promised me that he will arrange a house for me. It will be simple and really "native", but interesting, I think. It is a walk of a few hours to get there.

It's just a bit difficult for me to go to Lalehun. When I was there the last time, during the Bundu ceremonies, I received the post, including your letter about Dirk Kossen's death. I still remember this all so well. It was very strange. I sat on a chair, next to the acting section chief and a few people, looking at all the activity, the colourful bustle of the people, there was noise and drumming; then Conteh came with the post he had collected in Hangha. I was so glad that I first wanted to keep the letters unopened for later, like a schoolboy with a piece of chocolate; but still I couldn't refrain from casting a quick glance at one of your letters. And then I read that. After that it was all very strange for the rest of the day. And it was soon afterwards, a week later, that I also became ill. [...]

It is now time for weeding in the rice fields. Yesterday Conteh and I made a trip out there. Weeding is women's work, although a few men do the heaviest work. In the field there is a shelter under which one can take cover and where a fire is burning all the time. People also cook there; for they are usually in the field a whole day. The time for weeding will soon be over, and then there'll be a few weeks of rest until the new crop is ripe in September, October and November. The men have it fairly easy now. It's also cold for them, with bare feet in the rain. Women very sensibly put on oil, but that seems to be contrary to male custom.

Lalehun, Sunday morning. My dear Moeteke, What are you doing now? It's about nine o'clock. Perhaps you are getting ready for church. Or you are in Barchem or Zeeland. Strange that I don't know exactly where you are now. But in any case I know more or less where you are. And you also know it about me, don't you?

Last night I slept in a real native house for the first time. There isn't a rest house here in Lalehun. People had fixed up for me another little house that had been vacated. It's just a small hut where the bed can stand, a table and where one can also move about a bit. It is a peculiar life, dear, interesting and I don't find it strange. It's always a big advantage that the warmth contributes so much.

Yesterday it was a long session and interesting. We sat in the barri, the open space for the court sessions. There was the paramount chief with many people from Panguma; there were also the three candidates for section chief with their helpers and following; and also there were of course a lot of interested people. It lasted from about 11 – 5. Each of the three candidates gave a speech to defend their candidacy. In such speeches there is much talk about family relations, old claims, etc.; a lot of power struggles and continuation of tradition are behind all this. This morning the chief will give a decision, and choose a section chief from the three candidates. Then this after-

noon the “coronation” will follow. And tomorrow we get the election of a speaker for the new section chief. It is all very informative for me to get to know the political side of the life here.¹ Conteh is allowed to join the discussion now and then. In this way we manage to find out quite a few things. And a brother of the chief who is his right hand for writing, helps me too and has sympathy for my work.

I do wish that you could experience this life here, Moeteke, seeing the life in the huts and between the huts. There are now many strangers in this small town (of about 200 houses). Yesterday evening, when I lay in my bed, I could still hear the drum music for a long time, and this morning at 4 o'clock already one of the chief's singers began to make noises on his instrument. Later on, we'll go to the barri again.

In the afternoon. Up to this point no chief has been elected. We haven't yet been in the barri. It all takes a long time. It is already definite how the roles will be divided, but the waiting is for one of the candidates who has gone back to his village to consult with his people. It takes some doing to bring everything satisfactorily to a solution. And walking around is also boring in the end. One runs across the same people all the time. And as a “white man” one soon has rather too many people around one. The people in the country here already begin to find it good that I am here and seem to be fully used to the goal for which I am here. I believe that there is only a little suspicion. And the chief is of course proud that I am travelling about with him like this. In the coming weeks there are still two more elections for section chiefs and I'll probably go along again.

Moeteke, I would be really pleased to get a good Dutch book from you sometime. Are there good novels? It's nice in the evening in bed to have something different to read. But it shouldn't be too expensive [...]. Perhaps there is a cheap edition of a good book. In Freetown I bought a collection of short stories by the English writer [Robert Louis] Stevenson. There were some very fine stories in it. In Freetown the mission has a “bookshop”, where one can also find a few novellas.

I send you herewith also the April edition of “Africa” in which Wagner has written a review of my doctoral dissertation.² He has done a rather good job although I knew roughly what he would make of it. Because of my illness it has been left so long in Panguma. I think more reviews should have appeared but I can't check that here, of course. Is the garden still beautiful, Moeteke? What will everything be like when I come home? I can imagine everything so well now, Moeteke. What is the garden plot you rented in front of the house like?

On Tuesday I'll get the post here again. It isn't as quick here as in Freetown where I was receiving the letters as early as Saturday.

Don't be sad, Moeteke. Time is getting on already, although the winter will also be long for you. You shouldn't worry about my health, Moeteke. I trust that it will now be all right. I won't overdo things and I will make sure to rest sufficiently. I am still regularly taking quinine, as prevention. Perhaps it doesn't have an effect, but one wants to leave nothing undone in order to prevent a recurrence.

¹ See Hofstra 1937a.

² The reviewer was Guenter Wagner. See Hofstra 1933.

In the small room in which I am, there is also a bed, relatively modern for here. I think that it will have come from Freetown. An attempt has also been made to attach a mosquito net. Sayings in Arabic which are sold by travelling Mohammedans are hanging on the bed. These are sayings against black magic. And there are some pictures on the wall, a few Christian, old-fashioned pictures, Jesus and the good Samaritan, next to a picture of a mosque and a few pictures with Arabic script on them. The owner of the small house has certainly travelled a bit. He is a brother of the speaker of Panguma. The speaker is a fine man, gentle and a friend of mine. He saw to it that this house was vacated for me. When there are foreigners in a place, people quickly put houses at their disposal. The people then pool together in the other houses. There is still plenty of hospitality in Africa and as there aren't many belongings in a house it is quickly vacated.

Just now I have a quiet hour, without interference. On the whole "privacy" doesn't exist much here. People come along, meet together, talk, people sometimes come for medicines or ask me to come to their house when someone is ill. I have brought with me a few medicines, simple things.

This morning, Yengbeke, the night watchman from Panguma, arrived here too. He is in disgrace with the chief. He recently visited a village without the chief's knowledge and behaved there as if he was a boss. And moreover he has threatened to write to the D.C. because the chief hasn't yet paid him his salary. That has got him into disgrace and the section chief in Panguma even wanted to place him in the stocks. So he escaped here. It's quite a fall for Yengbeke from his privileged position. It often happens like that with people who have a position involving confidentiality here. That is a dangerous privilege, because one can quickly fall out of favour. On the other hand it's courageous of him that he even dared to face the chief.

I am telling you stories about the life here all the time, Moeteke, but every day I am living amidst it here. In itself all this isn't important, but as parts of a whole that aims to give a description of the life here, it does have meaning and I know, Moeteke, that you feel for me here, also regarding these everyday tribal events.

Monday morning. It's still early, Moeteke, a little past five o'clock, but later a boy will go with the letters to Hangha. He has to walk, which is a good walk of about four hours, but people here aren't yet out of the habit of walking.

Yesterday evening at 6 o'clock a sub-chief was finally elected. I was given access throughout the deliberations, together with Conteh, making everything clearer for me. These deliberations go very much by rank. First there are the discussions in the barri, where everybody may be present. Afterwards the "tribal elders", the so-called tribal council (this is a group of 47 "members of the local council"), go outside, somewhere to a path in the forest in order to deliberate among themselves. At this stage a group of free-born people from Lalehun are also allowed to be present for voting. From there the tribal council goes into the forest a bit further, without the group from Lalehun. And finally the chief and his two speakers and an old section chief go still somewhat further for the final decision. When that is done, the decision is given to the tribal council, then people move back to the waiting group of Lalehun people and then one united group moves into the village, announced by the blasting of a horn. They then all

take their place in a big circle in the middle of the village, the elders and the chief on one side, the parties and the public on the other. The chief goes to the middle and announces the decision. Immediately thereafter a wild yelling bursts out from the women and relatives of the new section chief. Young men lift him up and carry him, first running round the graves of the ancestors, where he kneels on the grave and thanks the ancestors for their help. And then people move round further, dancing, singing and drumming all the time. Thus, there was plenty of noise in the village all night long, with drumming and the monotonous negro songs. People don't stop a moment, but all supporters, apart from the "big men", who sleep, constantly move around in groups. I admire their stamina, to be able to do this for about 12 hours without a break. And who knows how long it will still continue in the morning. This morning there is the "coronation" and then we will return to Panguma.

I very much long for a letter from you tomorrow, Moeteke.

Bye dear Moeteke of me, Your own Boy.

Panguma, Saturday 11 August 1934

My dear Moeteke,

I just see from the Freetown journal that this coming Wednesday a German ship will be passing through. I hope that it will take post and that you will get this letter between times. I'll try, as far as possible, to send a letter every week; I do know that it doesn't make much difference, but I think that it's a sort of guarantee at the same time in case a letter goes missing.

It's evening now. It has been raining all afternoon and evening. Rain is not too bad, Moeteke, when one is at home. It has the advantage that the temperature goes down a bit. I profit from my new lamp for writing and in the room where I usually sit I have put a slightly bigger table with a green cloth on it. It looks a bit more homely now and more like a study. I have spent the last two days arranging papers, putting letters in order, etc. This gives a tidy impression when it's done.

I have just received a letter from Nadel. He is doing well, but he has also had "bad luck", just like me. Their house has been struck by lightning and burned down. According to his report they only just escaped with their lives and they have had quite a nervous shock. They have been able to save their belongings. So everybody in turn gets his share of the ups and downs. Fortes doesn't seem to have suffered any misfortunes yet, but he was fairly pessimistic about his progress at the beginning. Have I already to written you, Moeteke, that I have got a new assistant for information, in fact a brother of the chief? I believe that he can give me good information. He is a nice, sceptical man who worked a while in Pendembu for a company. He also does the necessary paperwork for the chief and he has his own farm, but he has a fair amount of spare time.

Next Tuesday we go to Giehun where a section chief also has to be elected.

Monday morning. So now you are already in Zeeland, Moeteke. I so much hope that you'll have good weather and that you'll enjoy swimming in the sea and the sun after the swim. [...]

I was very pleased to receive the snapshot. You look sweet on it. To judge from this snapshot, you are looking well, Moeteke. [...] I also got the booklet on the S.D.A.P. [...] ³ I only glanced through the booklet so I haven't read it yet. [...]

This morning the sun is shining here and makes it all light and "bright". But one can be sure that it's a short joy. A day without rain is quite uncommon now.

Yesterday afternoon I had "white visitors", or "Pu-bla" as the Mendi say. Pu = European, bla = people. The doctor from Daru with a businessman and his wife, a Mr and Mrs Frazer from Segbwema, came to visit me. That was very nice. They drank tea here. They were quite pleased with my looks and my complexion. The doctor will soon be back, I think. I have been more or less included in his care.

A visit from white people always attracts some interest here. I am the only white person for miles around and the people here are now already so accustomed to me and consider me more or less as one of their own, so I am no longer a novelty. Afterwards, when they had left, a brother of the chief approached me and said: "Do you like to be often with white people? Yet, that wouldn't be good for your work. For white people invite each other very often for tennis and tea, etc. You had better remain among us." Negroes are sharp observers of all the peculiarities of Europeans. And, like us too, sensible about how one treats them. This brother of the chief admires the English for qualities like their sense of organization, fair play and time, but when we discuss these things and he sees in a paper or journal of mine an English name with the many titles behind it he often says that the English love themselves too much. They soon sense the somewhat protective and authoritative tone of many English civil servants and laugh a bit about it. But they prefer this rather than the rough tone of French civil servants about whom they hear from Mandingo traders who come here.

Now I have to stop, dear Moeteke. I hope that a lorry will leave soon and take the letter to Hangha. One is never sure at what time a lorry leaves or, for that matter, of time in general. [...]

Bye dear Moeteke, [...]

your Boy.

Panguma, Sunday 19 August 1934

My dear Moeteke,

It is still early in the morning, about seven o'clock. The rain has already been pouring down for a long time. It is now quiet in the surroundings and in the house. The Sunday morning is somewhat respected here, an adjustment due to the influence of the missionaries, I think. At any rate people seldom come to my house then. Although the Friday, the Mohammedan rest day, is more and more the general rest day. On Friday one finds but few people working in the fields.

Tomorrow, Monday, I'll set out on a trip again, Moeteke. We, that is the chief with his people and I, first wanted to go to Giehun, again for the election of a section chief.

³ The Dutch Social Democratic Labour Party.

But yesterday the District Commissioner came here with a request for the chief to go to another chiefdom tomorrow, the so-called Gaura chiefdom, and assist with the election of a paramount chief. This is being done by the Provincial Commissioner, Mr Stocks of Kenema, who, in January, was the first to help me out here. Because it is a rather difficult election with all kinds of candidates, he has asked for the assistance and the judgment of some other chiefs. This is often done with elections of paramount chiefs. I am going with the chief and a few people and so tomorrow we'll go in a different direction from what we'd first thought. We will first travel by lorry to Kenema. From there one can go "by motor road" to Giema, quite a way south-east of Kenema. From there we have to walk eastwards to Sandaru, where the election takes place. I think it will be interesting for me to witness this. It's one of the few opportunities when one can attend the election of a chief. And it will be an opportunity to see another part of the country, and, moreover, a part where there is still very little foreign influence. I don't know how long it will take. One never knows here for how long the natives will prolong things with all kinds of discussions. But the Provincial Commissioner is in charge and he is there, so we won't be there too long, about four days, I think.

I am beginning to get quite settled into the work again, Moeteke, and I like it. One gets to love the task that one has set oneself and one gradually finds one's way more quietly when one has first got to know the problems and the people to some extent. The people gradually become familiar to me and people get used to the idea that I am always there whenever I can be. It is not work of which I, for myself, shall estimate the result too highly. But this way one can get a certain complete whole, I believe, a more or less complete picture. And that, after all, is the satisfaction one gains by it oneself, to do it well, something like an artist must experience too, namely to give something in which he can express himself and in which he pursues the right thing to express.

Every day now I also spend some time, one or two hours, on the language. You don't learn this language "spontaneously". One has to do one's best, and, what's more, when writing down words and expressions I want to do this as accurately as possible, in the way Westermann has trained us. When a language, of which no written form exists, begins to be written down, many different attempts are made of course, especially by missionaries, to make booklets and translations of the Bible into the native language. The rendering of the sounds in letters is different and only seldom will a missionary be trained in hearing the sounds and, above all, in the scientific compilation of an alphabet and intonation, etc. In this field much remains to be done here.

The sphere of native medicine is interesting too. Yesterday afternoon Conteh and I saw a woman lying on the floor in a house, complaining about a headache, probably caused by protracted constipation. Another woman was sitting at her head. This second woman had laid a fairly heavy flat stone on the head of the woman with the headache, something like a paving stone behind our house and on top of that a round stone with a diameter of about 15 centimetres. Thus altogether quite a weight. This was done as a headache remedy. It is in fairly general use here. People say that the pressure by the weight makes one forget the headache and eases it. The new pressure which is applied for about one quarter of an hour, which, as it were, takes the place of the headache, is at least temporarily. Sometimes again a cloth is bound very tightly

around the head or another person sits on the head of the sufferer. – I gave the woman some Epsom salts for the constipation. Hopefully it helps.

I received a marriage announcement from Wagner – or have I already written about this perhaps? So he has been married fairly quickly and unexpectedly. Miss Brackett wrote to me that he will travel to East Africa this month. So the plan to stay another year with Malinowski hasn't come off.

The rain has now stopped. All sorts of little birds can be heard singing around the house, Moeteke. And a cock is crowing. It's really in the country here. – This week I have been given a native loom, Moeteke. The husband of the wife whom we once helped for her washing ceremony, has made it for me. I am going to learn weaving in order to have an idea about the movements. It is not very complicated.

Could I please have a few nice postcards from you sometime, Moeteke? I would like to decorate my wall with them. I have a few cards of Sierra Leone hanging up and a Chinese postcard from the British Museum. A few small things could still be added.

It has become warm today. The thermometer stands at 85 degrees. It will soon be hot again if it doesn't rain.

Now I have eaten. It's pouring again and the garden paths are flooded in no time. At about one o'clock these days there is a heavy storm with rain blowing up. Just now a nice negro lad of about ten years old, a son of the section chief of Panguma, came to see me. He has got an idea in his head, that he wants to be with me and wants to do all kinds of work for me. He doesn't need money for it. "I only want to stay with you", he said. He speaks a little English. You should know that this is a frequent thing here. The one who is without power or young, presents himself to a "big man", an employer, we would say. But it is a much more homely, almost family relationship. So a landowner gets all sorts of people around him who work under him, get land from him, perhaps succeed in capturing one of his women, and finally become independent. This young lad with a fine, smooth young face obviously wanted a bit more space for himself. Staying with his father wouldn't offer him much opportunity, he said. A father like that has so many children. If you want to you can gather quite a few people around you every day. A chief, for example, has tens or maybe hundreds of them who are "for him". A proper wage isn't paid, but land or work is provided and the "big man" takes all responsibility for their problems, for example, when they are involved in a court procedure. For that reason many artisans, for example, carpenters, smiths, etc. put themselves under the leadership of one of the "big men". They are always safe then. There is almost something fatherly in it. Nowadays, now there is no longer slavery, many relationships have become somewhat looser, but in former days the "big man" was a real head of a big group of people for which he was responsible. And the real disputes were not fought out over the heads of the poor, but between these "big men". A bit like in our Germanic times. The disadvantage was that the subordinates of the losing party easily became slaves of the winning party. Nowadays control is more difficult. Also, for example, towards women. A man with many wives actually tends to know very little about their movements. The chief here has, for example, between 40 and 70 wives. Perhaps he doesn't know the number himself. His father had 500 wives. That also has the disadvantage that innumerable people claim the privilege of being a

son of the dead chief when it comes to the election of a new chief. The chief hasn't much to do with the majority of his wives. They have a child, work on the land or do nothing. He (our chief) has sexual relations only with about ten of them. The others have "friends" everywhere. Although this isn't officially allowed, and friends can be fined thirty shillings, control is difficult and much is allowed if it doesn't go too far. So many things here are so different from in Europe, Moeteke, but one gets accustomed to it after some months. It is all more natural in many ways, often less refined, but also less neurotic than is often the case with us.

From a Freetown journal I learned that Hindenburg has died.⁴ If it's true I'll read more about it in the newspaper I get on Tuesday. Germany gets blow after blow, doesn't it. I read about the bad potato harvest there. The winter will indeed be difficult there.

Now I am going to end the letter, Moeteke. According to the latest news we will leave at 5 o'clock and so I have to get up at 4 o'clock and I still have to pack a few things. Travelling in this country is a bit laborious. One has to take the bed and a suitcase with some clothes, a box with food and the bath in which pots and pans are put as well. About forty people from here are going. It is all happening rather hurriedly and unexpectedly, but when a chief asks for assistance with the election of a chief for another chieftom, then the Commissioner notifies this only at the very last moment in order to prevent people from the chieftom approaching the assisting chief in order to influence him.

Bye my dear Moeteke, I am with you strongly in my thoughts. Your own Child.

Yeiama [Neama⁵], Sunday morning 27 August 1934

Dear Moeteke,

Now I am writing you a letter from an entirely different part of the country. I have been a whole week travelling. I wrote to you in my last letter that I would set off for the election of a chief. We left early on Monday morning. The chief and his people and I with my small group, in a lorry. The departure time had been fixed at 5 o'clock in the morning. But I thought – time is such an elastic notion here, surely it will be 6 o'clock at least. This time, however, it turned out differently. I woke up at half past one and soon after I heard a horn blasting. The boys were to come to me at 4 o'clock, but they had already arrived by 3 o'clock. They told me that the lorry would be leaving at 4 o'clock. So the packing had to be done quickly. It appeared that Yengbeke, the night watchman, had woken the people who were planning to go too early, so that everybody was already restless by 3 o'clock. Well, at 4 o'clock we departed. Of course stops had to be made here and there to greet other chiefs on the way, but anyway we arrived in Kenema at about 6 o'clock. The chief and the other people then set out first at about 9 o'clock and the Provincial Commissioner, Mr Stocks, and I followed at about 11

⁴ Paul von Hindenburg was president of Germany.

⁵ Yeiama should probably be Neama.

o'clock. On the first day we reached Giema. It wasn't a long journey, about an hour-and-a-half walking. But we didn't go further that day because otherwise the journey would have become too long. The Provincial Commissioner, whose guest I was for the rest of the week, and I slept that night in the rest house in Giema. On Tuesday morning at half past five we travelled on and we arrived after a pleasant, but considerable walk of about 4 hours, at about half past nine in Joru (not Sandaru where I first thought that the election would be). On Wednesday morning the "election speeches" began. There were six candidates and each one announced that he was most entitled to become chief. In the barri, among the tribal authorities and the interested public, they have to defend their cause. They refer to all kinds of old privileges. Usually their father or grandfather has been chief too. Generally a newcomer hasn't much chance. Often all sorts of family disputes have preceded the election. Usually there are one or two or three "reigning families" who get their chance in turn. If every family were to agree between themselves about the candidate, then there would be at most three candidates, but often the one considers himself more suitable than the other and so one gets several candidates from one family. The question of who becomes chief also depends very much on the support one has – the tribal authorities, a sort of council for the chiefdom of men who are consulted on important matters – give their decision. In that tribal council the votes are often divided, of course. Every candidate has his own following, so the trick is to get the most support. The person who has the majority for him, will become chief. That is to say, nominally it is the English Government, in this case the Provincial Commissioner, who appoints the chief, but he leaves the people entirely free in their choice, he only confirms that choice. Of course there is a difference by comparison with former times, when an election often wasn't held in a regulated way, but was often the result of a fight. The strong man usually had the right [to become chief] or else people put a weak man at the head and then went their own way.

On Thursday morning the tribal authorities deliberated and under the direction of our chief from Panguma they came to a decision and a conclusion. That wasn't easy for them. Twice before, last year, the Provincial Commissioner has been here for the elections, but both times people couldn't reach a majority. There is also a special reason why the losing party sticks to the point as long as possible and tries to stop the election of the other party. Once there is a new chief, the other candidates and their following have a very hard time at first. It's already getting better now through the influence of the government, but traditionally it was customary to have a fight afterwards. People tied up the losers who then often left the country. The more peaceful way is that they "apologize" and offer a certain sum to the new chief. This way losing is doubly hard. The Provincial Commissioner has strongly warned the new chief to treat the rival party well and for this reason has stayed on another day. I believe that all has gone well. – Also, in an almost comical way, is the fate of the diviners. Before or during the election each candidate usually has a diviner in his house, who regularly predicts his chances from bones and stones or drawings in the sand. Once the chief has been elected, his diviner has a good time of course, but the other diviners leave the town as soon and silently as possible. I think that in former times their lives were often in danger.

Early Saturday morning we left Joru again. The Panguma chief and his people went back via Giema, but the Provincial Governor still had to be in Yeiya [Neama] and Daru. I went with him because I wanted to see the doctor in Daru again. On Monday morning in Hangha, the Panguma people and I are meeting again and we will then travel back together to Panguma. It was a considerable walk yesterday morning. More than 5 hours on end. The Provincial Commissioner is a good walker and he is of course used to walking in the "bush". I managed quite well too, which exceeded my expectations. The scenery is on the way beautiful. Sometimes the paths are just like lanes through European woodland, which makes the landscape very enjoyable. I think that I'll certainly come back to this area some time. There is a variety of interesting things to be seen in the villages on the way and of course I didn't have much time with Mr Stocks to stand still. On many houses one sees all sorts of efforts to draw flowers, fish sometimes, also people. I hadn't seen things like this before and I would like to do some work on them later for my chapter on native art. Often in a village or small town like this, there is a boy or a man who has a feeling for it and who, without any training, can make drawings from pictures or from a newspaper that has ended up in the village. But sometimes it must have been drawn entirely from reality. On the walls of some houses one also sees Mendi writing. Near Bunumbu a man has, in fact, invented an alphabet of his own, without help from outside. It is too elaborate for actual use, I believe, but he has got a few disciples who in their turn teach it, not as a profession but for pleasure, as I understand. For instance in one of the places I saw a story on a wall. The man who had put it there, explained to us what it meant. It was something like – here lives the head of the Humui society and here one can get medicines. The Humui society is the group of people who wash away sexual offences, as you may remember from the case of that poor woman in Panguma. In this house lived the head of this group, and she had this text on her house. There is an element of personal inventiveness and originality in all this. Also there is much variation in the shape of the houses.

Here in Yeiya [Neama] we are using a few houses which belong to a recently built school group. Later we'll set off in a lorry to Daru.

Daru. I have received your three letters in Joru this week. I was very glad, Moeteke, that you could write more cheerfully again.

I'll settle the bill from Scheltema en Holkema.⁶ [...] I also received the booklets you sent me about spelling, about Barchem and the little book by Lawrence. Thank you so much, Moeteke. It's very nice to have something to read here. I have already glanced through Lawrence's book. There are interesting things in it, I think. The one about spelling was nice to read. I can now learn the rules. But such a change is always a bit half-hearted. It would only be radical if it is determined in accordance with the pronunciation. But then one would have to use characters which aren't yet used in other languages, but are only used in phonetics.

You ask about Nadel and Fortes, Moeteke. In the interim I have already written something about them in one of my last letters. You know that Nadel has been unfortunate too. Yes, I had soon become ill, and it's fairly unusual to get blackwater fever so

⁶ Scheltema en Holkema was a bookshop in Amsterdam.

soon. Perhaps it is connected with my former kidney ailment. But we'll hope that in future everything will go well. I have immediately had my share, so probably that will be it. My test to do without quinine has failed for the time being, but it is difficult to say something about causes in such cases. There may well be several factors. But all this is finished now and I feel very fit again. [...] In the Times which the Provincial Commissioner received, I have read about the murder of Dollfuss and about Hindenburg's death.⁷ It is a strange and murderous time. What will develop out of this? However, earlier times often haven't been so nice either. An advantage is that Austria's position seems to have become stronger, so that there are no direct dangers.

Monday morning. Now we are almost ready to leave again, Moeteke. Yesterday afternoon I tried to visit Dr Laird, but he had gone to the Kono land yesterday, to see a sick person. I'll try once more later, perhaps he will be back by then. It was a bit strange to see the neighbourhood and the house in which I have been lying again. But it didn't mean much to me anymore. Perhaps memories don't attach themselves so much in such a one-sided way to an environment.

Now I am going to close the letter, dear Moeteke. It will be on the same train that I am using. I very much hope that you get it this time between times. I'll address the other things in your letters, in my next letter Moeteke. Bye dear Moeteke, do think cheerfully of me and with confidence.

Your own Child.

Panguma, Friday 31 August 1934

My dear Moeteke,

Where are you now? Are you still in Zeeland? What is the weather like there? It's raining here, as you can expect. There has been very little sun for the last days. But gradually the rain will surely lessen. When we are a month further, the rainy season will be almost over.

Just now a couple of nice negro children who are friends of mine, shouted under my house, "Keke, mwa loo, hoe, daddy-dear, good-bye", after having strolled around a while. It's remarkable how little difference one gradually perceives between them and us. Most of the time I am, of course, aware of a difference in our complexion and the language is frequently a barrier too, but otherwise humanity is so universal. I seldom feel myself really foreign here.

I have been busy working up the material about the chief's election and all the while there are of course all sorts of other more or less interesting matters. In recent weeks I have been travelling a bit, Moeteke. In the coming weeks we will set out again for the election of a section chief in Giehun, a similar thing to that three weeks ago in Lalehun. Giehun isn't far from here and I think we'll go there on Monday. My health is fine, Moeteke. I am feeling very fit. Probably I eat a bit more than I did earlier on and I take somewhat more rest, namely an hour's rest in the afternoon. That is rather a

⁷ The Austrian chancellor Engelbert Dollfuss.

good thing in this country. Without it one isn't very capable of doing anything in the evening. I think that I'll manage quite well like this. – You should also take things calmly from now on, Moeteke. Yes, [...] with regard to your coming here, I think that we shouldn't risk that now, however nice it would be to have you here. But I think that the climate would be too trying for you. Sun, hot sun is pleasant for a few days, but day after day, and month after month nothing but bright sun and damp, warm air would probably be too much for you. If we do it, it is better, as you also write, to do it during the second journey, and then you could acclimatize in Freetown. What's more, I'll be travelling quite a lot in the coming weeks and in the next three months really. In addition to the election of the section chief next week there will be another one somewhere else. Moreover I think that I'll travel about with the chief for four to six weeks in this chiefdom to see more of life in the smaller places. The chief and his brother will travel about for the tax collection. In particular I would like to know more about the difficulties they will be faced with and what these can tell me about the economic circumstances of the population and at the same time it will be a good opportunity to see the country. [...]

It's now already late August and eight months of this year are over already. We are now already more than half-way through, Moeteke. When it is autumn and winter you can already look forward to the moment that I return. It's no longer so interminably long. I don't know how the Institute is going to fix it with the money from the insurance company, but I do think that it will agree to my staying on a few months longer than the one year, because I have lost time. I would also prefer to return in March-April because of the weather. In my case, with a predisposition to blackwater fever, it seems not to be wise to return in the middle of the winter, because sudden cold can have an unfavourable impact on latent malaria. Anyway, we'll wait and see what the Institute wishes.

Yesterday I walked with Conteh and another boy along the road. I saw a beautiful flower and we got talking about flowers. It appeared that the Mendi aren't much interested in flowers for their own sake. People are of course interested in plants for food and medicines, but not in plants as such as that is God's domain. They say, "God decorates the earth like we decorate a woman with a nice dress." God (the clouds) and the earth are perceived as man and wife. One sees flowers and says perhaps that God did it, and then one passes by. An actual flower cult like we have doesn't exist here, I mean decorating gardens or houses and tables with flowers. Flowers are God's private joy and people don't take a special interest in them here.

We have come into contact with a remarkable medicine man-sorcerer. He is a Gbandi. The Gbandi are a people in Liberia, in between the Mendi and the Kpelle (the Kpelle have been described by Westermann). Their language is strongly related to Mendi. There in Liberia the whole medicine and magic system is still quite intact and flourishing, not influenced by the white civilization which is absent there. This man we saw for the first time when we went to Joru last week where the chief had employed him. He went in front of the group to protect the chief against possible bad magic. These Gbandi people are supposed to have stronger "medicines" than the Mendi themselves. What is behind all this is, of course, hard to find out. The man will be

demonstrating his tricks here in the next few days. I would like you to see these things later on too, Moeteke. I am already getting almost too much used to the life here. – It is interesting, moreover, that here we, white people, are considered to be strong fetishists, with magical powers on whom native magical means have no effect. Therefore one is, aside from the political protection and the natural hospitality of the population, completely safe here as a white person. “Otherwise several D.C.’s wouldn’t be alive any more”, Conteh said. And yesterday the Gbandi medicine man said to me, “My medicine is very strong, only on God and a white person it has no effect.”

On Saturday I will send you a few films, Moeteke. I don’t know whether they are any good. Some were taken before I was ill and it is therefore possible that they have partially deteriorated already. Gradually, I want to take photographs a bit more systematically. I have read a booklet about it, the booklet we bought together in Haarlem, do you remember? One that gives good information. I like writing better than taking photographs, but that’s just all part of the game. I wish I could draw well, that would almost be even better. Anyway, I’ll not exert myself too much to take photographs this first year and I will learn better what to do between the first and the second year.

A man from Freetown and his wife have been here a few days. He works in the agricultural department, teaching the negroes about certain crops for export. He did quite a lot of travelling, so I didn’t see much of him. This morning they went away again. The chief and his people were quite disappointed that he didn’t give any gift (of money). For that is the custom. The chief gives a gift of rice, eggs and chickens and of course expects something in return when the person leaves. “All Europeans have done it so far”, the chief said. “Well”, I said, “among Europeans you have different characters too, just like among negroes.” It’s a bit foolish of such a man. With a few shillings he could leave behind a good impression.

In a while I am going to Daru, to the doctor, Moeteke, but this time not for illness fortunately. However, I must have a medical certificate from him for the Institute for an insurance company. I have already written to him a few times to ask him for it and he promised to send it to me when he was here, but he is a bit careless about letter writing. So it’s better that I go there myself. I have hired the lorry from here. Then the certificates (the one from the doctor in Freetown I already have) can be sent off on Monday. At the same time I can take this letter to the Hangha station.

Bye dear Moeteke. All is well with me and I do my work in good spirits. [...] Your own Child.

Panguma, Sunday evening 3 September 1934

My dear Moeteke,

A short letter to tell you that I had a good journey yesterday to Daru. I found the doctor at home and got the certificate from him. It was just as well that I went to collect it myself, for he is careless about answering letters. He found me looking well, having gained a bit of weight, which he deemed very necessary. He also cut my hair at the

same time. A few boys made the trip in the lorry with me. For them it was quite fun, of course.

Today it has already been warm again. It rained only in the evening. The rainy season is gradually nearing its end, at any rate it rains less. The time of the continuous rains is over. On the whole I haven't found the rainy season unpleasant, but, of course, I can't pass judgment over it properly because I spent a few weeks in Freetown.

I had thought that it would be quiet today, but that didn't turn out to be the case. The section chief from Lalehun arrived here in Panguma this morning with a big following and much music. He visited me and in addition a few other people dropped by. You sometimes have amusing things in the life here. This afternoon we saw a small group of women entering Panguma with a cooking pot in their hand and carrying a rolled up mat on their head. These were women from Laoma, a place in this chiefdom where one of the "big men", Vandi, has brought a case before the court against his section chief. This case was to be heard three weeks ago, but it was postponed time and again. However, Vandi persevered and now he has already sent his wives, with kitchen tools and their sleeping mats. He is bound to follow soon himself and one can be certain that they won't leave before their case has been heard. The one who has most endurance, gains much.

Now I'll soon get a letter from you again, Moeteke; I am looking forward to it. And what news will the newspapers bring? So much is happening nowadays in Europe.

Bye dear Moeteke, rest easy about me, Your Boy

The four cloths that I am including in the film parcel have been made from Mendi cotton in Mendiland. However, on the pattern you can see European influence. I believe that this type of work comes from a school that wants to bring to the fore the native art of weaving. I bought them from the man who had made them and travelled around with them.

[On a loose piece of paper] I am sending you a parcel with two films. The small one has all sorts of pictures of which at this moment I can only recall the chief's messengers (the boys in uniform). I should have kept a better record of it. On the big one everything is about the collection of rice, the harvesting of rice, in two different fields. I hope that this one is good. – In the parcel are also two Mendi necklaces which Lucie, Conteh's wife, gave me for you. Nice, isn't it? The small beads are called musukuli, the big ones folei. They are plant seeds as you'll see. Nowadays people often wear European beads too, but these real Mendi necklaces are also in use.

Photos 4.1-4.6



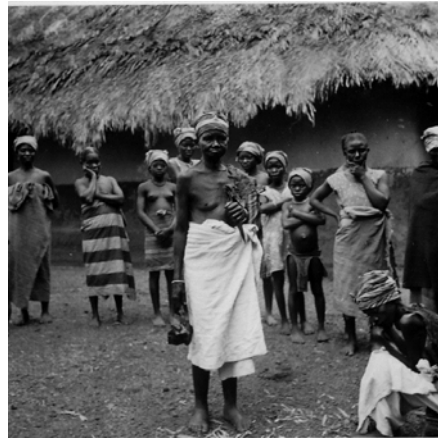
(4.1) Women returning from fishing and collecting fire wood, Panguma rainy season 1934



(4.2) Woman with child, Panguma 1934



(4.3) A group of women, Panguma 1934



(4.4) A group of women, Panguma 1934



(4.5) Women spinning, Panguma 1934



(4.6) Man weaving, Panguma 1934

Panguma, Sunday evening 9 September 1934

My dear Moeteke,

I received both letters which you wrote from Barchem and Zeeland. I was very pleased with them. I am always pleased with your letters, but it was nice for me to feel that you could write more cheerfully again.

Meanwhile I am sitting daily among my negroes. The life here is going normally every day and in the meantime time goes on steadily. I wrote to you, didn't I [...], that I was going to Giehun for the election of a section chief. That has happened. We were there from Wednesday till Friday. I slept those two nights in a real Mendi house again, a nice round hut, as there isn't a rest house in such places. It went quite well. A place like Giehun is still hardly touched by "civilization". It's still mainly "heathen", except for the Mohammedan influence, which has penetrated everywhere in the somewhat bigger villages. In the hut where I stayed there were several sorts of defensive medicines displayed next to each other. Above a bed, that still stood there, hung a Mendi medicine against magical power, together with 6 needles, surely for breaking that magical power, and there was also a Mohammedan paper for the same purpose. Also, with unintentional humour, a few pictures with Christ's head on them were stuck on another part of the wall. From where they had come, I don't know, probably from the mission. Here they could well also be meant against bad influences. It was an international mixture. Practically all houses in such places as Giehun have such Mendi or Mohammedan defence medicines. I also met there the teacher of the mission school of a nearby place, Lago. He said, "I once slept here, but I was brought to a house that was so full with such things, that I was afraid to sleep there!" And yet he is supposed to be a Christian.

I am already getting fairly used to the elections. All in all it went roughly the same way as in the other places, Lalehun and Joru, about which I wrote to you. There were six candidates, so it was difficult to satisfy them all. However, five of them got some kind of job. At such an occasion one hears quite a few stories about former times in the speeches of the candidates. There were two older men who delved deep into their recollections. One of the younger candidates had another old man to speak for him; his age was estimated at more than 100 years. Here you still come across a few such strong, venerable, old men, Moeteke, surviving from the rough times of war, but who aren't weakened by too many clothes. Every time I find it interesting to observe these things. Our chief is in Kenema for a few days. The Governor makes a round trip and a few chiefs have been asked to meet him in Kenema. He is leaving for the Gold Coast where he has been appointed to a post.

I received a letter from Fortes yesterday. All goes well with him, except for minor 'troubles' with his health, boys and mosquitoes. He finds it interesting to be there, but he writes about the difficult and complicated aspects of the work. It is indeed often somewhat depressing when one has arrived here with theoretical ideals, to see how relatively little one can achieve, record and describe with respect to the reality of everyday life in a fairly large area. One has gradually to find out to which area and to which problems one should confine oneself. The technical aspect of the work is in itself

already quite a challenge. I mean writing down in a readable form what one has seen and heard. If this weren't necessary, one would save a lot of time. But let's face it, one just has to put it on paper faithfully, every day as much as possible. Otherwise one loses it. If one could confine oneself to just observing and listening, one would be able to cover more. But that's the restriction of the work. Moreover, I don't want to get overworked here. The doctor has warned me about having too much strain. I would have to pay for it anyway, and I believe that this is true. For one's capacity here isn't as great as in Europe. In the evening, for example, when one has energy to write, the temperature in my room still doesn't come below 80 degrees. If I stay up too late in the evening – something that in Europe is perfectly possible – I wouldn't be fit the next day. In London I have worked several times till 2 o'clock in the morning, but that would hardly be possible here, where one has to be fit the next day for all sorts of work and for the heat. It would perhaps be possible if one only had to write, but I have to walk around so much and I find myself in all kinds of situations.

This morning, for example, I thought I would have a quiet morning in my room, but then Conteh came, as he had just tracked down a diviner. The diviner was going to work in two houses with ill people. Well, I hadn't yet experienced this and I couldn't miss it, of course. The man who did it was still a young man. He is a diviner and a medicine man at the same time. He said what the cause of the illness was, namely evil sorcery by other people and in the one case the woman had also acted against the rules of her secret society, the Bundu. He did the divination by throwing and grouping stones and with a small mirror in which, as he said, his guardian angel shows him everything. It is difficult to determine what is real in it and what are tricks, and also what part is based on his knowledge of the characters. The people whom it concerned and their family were much amazed that he knew so much about their past (the diviner is, moreover, not from Panguma, but from another place). I'll probably see this man at work more often and then I'll gradually be able to form a better opinion about it. Moeteke, so much of all this lives on, uninfluenced by other cultures.

The rains begin to reduce. We are again in the transition period, with frequent thunderstorms. But when you get this letter, in 2 or 3 weeks' time, that period will be almost over. I didn't find the rainy season unpleasant. Only the beginning (May) and the end of it (September) aren't so pleasant, just because of those thunderstorms which I don't like anyway. But luckily it's now less heavy than in May.

Tuesday morning [...] Now I end the letter. This morning I am going to Hangha to post the letter and to do a bit of shopping. I am fine, Moeteke.

Bye dear Moeteke of me, your Boy

Panguma 14-9-'34

My dear Moeteke,

On Tuesday I got your card with an interim mail. It is a beautiful landscape there, isn't it? It was nice to see something of Holland again and to know where you were. How different our country is compared to here. A lot more open. Here the view is immedi-

ately obstructed by the “bush”, by the monotonous, always dense, always green, low trees or, if one might call it, high thicket, here and there interrupted by rice fields, or rather hidden between it. I am very glad that you have had such a good time in Zeeland, Moeteke. You’ll have become re-energized for the autumn and the winter.

Not yet with this, but with the next mail I’ll send you a bag. I have got two of them from the teacher here, who lets his schoolchildren produce them. It will arrive just in time for your birthday. Last Monday I went to the small school here, where negro children plod away at learning to read and write and do sums. Is this good for them? It’s a difficult problem. In such a transition period each child that leaves school has the wish to earn something and to become a clerk or schoolmaster or something like that. It’s the same as we have had at home for a long time now. When one has learned something, one doesn’t very much want to go back to the rice field. Perhaps there will come a time when the “educated farmer” becomes an attractive and honourable occupation here too; it is to be hoped.

But, like everywhere else in the world, conditions are complicated here too. Practically everybody here is a rice grower, a farmer, one could say, but connected to it are more or less complicated labour relations. As women do some of the work on the land, such as weeding, etc., a self-supporting farmer has to have more than one wife. When he hasn’t yet got a wife, or has just one wife, a farmer usually places himself under the protection of a “big man” and works on his land. Such a farmer usually has a piece of land for himself at the same time. So he grows in the work and becomes, if it goes well, a “big man” in his turn. “Educated boys”, however, have sometimes been away from the land for some time and when they return and want to start rice work, they are ignorant of many things. That wouldn’t be so bad if a Mendi household were a unity. There are, however, two parties: the man and the women who always have their own economic domain. Everything doesn’t go into one big pot, like as in most European households. Here there is a brother of the chief, Rashid, about whom I once wrote you earlier, didn’t I? He has been a clerk with a European firm in Pendembu for a long time but a year ago he returned to Panguma to help the chief with the paperwork. He belongs to the better, idealistic type, who realizes that the future remains in the rice fields. So this year he has his rice fields too. Now it’s the time for weeding, the work for women. Usually the man doesn’t concern himself with this. He leaves the supervision to his main wife or a trusted workman, otherwise the women are a bit lazy. However, Rashid’s main wife is ill and now he has to go to his land himself to supervise. Otherwise the other women misuse his ignorance and don’t lift a finger. You’ll say – what is there against the man going to the land regularly now too? One has, however, to reckon with the customs of the country and a man like Rashid, who also loves reading, and does quite a lot of work for the chief, would be better off using his time differently.

The rainy season is already fading, Moeteke. Often already it’s dry for a whole day and it is beginning to get warmer again. This evening we had heavy rain and a thunderstorm too, but the thunderstorms are different now, from in May-June it’s more like sheet lightning.

How is the weather with you now, Moeteke? It’s already mid-September. Summer life is over again, isn’t it.

Nowadays I have company at night, that is to say for the last day or so. I found it nicer to have someone in the house at night. Otherwise one is a bit lonely here. Not that I have ever been afraid – no one would ever readily break into a white man's house – but it's a cosier feeling. One of my boys sleeps here in the house, with a friend, a nice schoolboy who also writes down Mendi stories for me. I have had a bed made for them. That cost 3 shillings and 6 pence. Although I get into contact with many people during daytime, it's sometimes nice to hear a voice in the evening. And the house is very spacious, so I can easily have these boys here. Two is better than one, for Mendi love company very much.

Yesterday the speaker here gave me a wicker basket that is made in this country. "That is for your mother", he said. I have promised him to send it to you. He must have heard that I had got a few bags in the school and I think I said there that I was looking for a bag for you. News spreads very quickly in this country, you should know. This speaker is a nice, kind man. Earlier, his main wife offered me a small child as my future wife. One occasionally receives such offers here. Children are often already married off soon after their birth, subject to the consent of the girl herself when she has grown up. There are various forms of marriage here. Marrying at an age when the girl is sexually mature is becoming more usual, but often the choice has already been made before then, by the mutual parents. Or by the man with her parents. With the marriage one then waits until they come out of the Bundu – the secret society of women where all girls are for some time trained in all sorts of virtues and where they are thoroughly informed about sexual matters – but the man, the future husband is responsible for all costs that the parents make for her until the marriage. Sometimes – but that is falling into disuse – the choice is already made before the birth of a child. When a man sees that a woman is pregnant and he finds her good or knows that her other daughters have good qualities, then he can say to her, "If the child that you are bearing inside you becomes a girl, then I ask it as a wife." If the mother consents, then the family relationship begins very soon after the birth of the child. You have to understand that such provisional marriages are only possible when a man already has an adult wife or wives.

When I write these things about the customs, Moeteke, I sometimes think that it must all seem a bit strange to you when you read it, although you have gradually heard a lot about it. It remained strange for me, although I had read about it, until I could see it here with my own eyes. And now one gets accustomed to so much. It will be almost strange to fully return to life in Europe again. But one will also soon get used to the transition, I think. I am curious about how many customs in Europe will strike me at first when I get back. Perhaps one doesn't notice them. Anyway, on the ship it's already European again. This week people said to me that I have grown since I came here. I am indeed feeling fit all the time.

Tomorrow, one of my boys goes to his house (parents) for a few days. He hasn't seen his mother for eight months. She lives in Jojoima, a fair distance below Daru. This week there have been a few deaths. That brings quite some ceremonial goings-on with it, even days after the death. The burial itself follows quickly on the day after the death, which is, of course, because of the climate. The dead person is wrapped entirely in native cloth, just like the Egyptian mummies. Around the dead body women are tak-

ing it in turn to wail their continuous ceremonial crying. The burial itself is simple; only among Mohammedans and Christians is some attention given to prayers, of course. Each time a relative arrives from another part of the country, the wailing starts again. It fills the place with a melancholy, monotonous sound. Sometimes it stops, but then it begins again and one knows that another relative has arrived. For days after the burial there are all kinds of ceremonies. Sacrifices are made, rice in the case of Mohammedans and sometimes a cow. The dead person is given food for his long journey to the other world. In the meantime the food is eaten by the family and other people. It is extremely difficult to determine what role genuine feelings play in all this. One can't expect that the ceremonial wailing always stems from the heart. And yet of course there is true grief. I discussed it with Conteh, who is fairly wise in such things. He said that the real feelings you can see only after a few weeks have passed. Some women are perhaps glad in their heart because they are now free and able to marry with their real friend, others truly loved the dead person and they are now without further protection. Their real fate and their attitude towards it, one sees after a month or so.

Saturday morning. My dear Moeteke, later on I'll send the letter to Hangha. I could wait till Monday, but one isn't always sure that a lorry goes every day. And, moreover, there is a new stationmaster/postmaster in Hangha, who, if I would send the letters on Monday, may become confused by this unusual sight of English mail here. And I can't take the risk that he leaves them until the following day. Anyway, I have already trained him a bit. The parcel with films, for example, I have myself sorted completely in his office. It was his first experience with that kind of parcel for Holland. Such negro employees, Creoles, are friendly and willing, but one has to allow them time and not speak rapidly, explain patiently. Bye dear Moeteke of me, now I wait for a letter from you on Tuesday.

Everything is good here! I am with you, your own Child.

Panguma, Sunday 23 September 1934

My dear Moeteke,

I am hoping that you will get this letter at least as an interim letter. For I read in the postal service regulation that a ship will leave on Wednesday. The shipping is a bit irregular in September. Occasionally there is an interim one. But now I don't know whether a ship will be going next week. If you don't get a letter one week after this letter, Moeteke, you shouldn't worry. It could take two weeks. I have had a similar problem here. For your card arrived with an interim mail, but I had expected a letter from you last Tuesday, with the ordinary connection as always. However, there was nothing, only the writing you forwarded from the Humboldt-Stiftung. This was a big disappointment. But now I read that a ship has arrived yesterday, so on Tuesday there will be a letter from you again. In September it seems to be somewhat out of the normal order. Next Monday the service will be normal again.

Life goes on steadily here, Moeteke. There is nothing special. The rainy season is already fading, although it can sometimes still rain heavily, like this morning for example.

Have I already written to you that I have got a kitten from the missionary in Segbwema? That was before I fell ill. Luckily the kitten was looked after during that period. It's a very sweet, affectionate little creature.

You should indeed see the life here some time, Moeteke. We have to try and arrange it with the second journey. How are things going now in Germany, according to the newspapers Moeteke? Are the letters from Germany in the N.R.Ct good?⁸ I would like to read something about it some time. From the "Observer", which appears only once a week, I get rather little news. Could you please also send me some newspaper cuttings [...], about the political news? One often feels the need here, especially in the evening and on Sunday when one is tired, to spend a while refreshing oneself with a different sphere of thinking. I fairly often read from Klages's book: "Der Geist als Widersacher der Seele" [The spirit as opponent of the soul], which contains many interesting things, much that is worth thinking about more than once.

Bye dear Moeteke of me,
Your own Child.

Panguma, Sunday 30 September 1934

My dear Moeteke,

On Tuesday two letters (one with the postcards) and the parcel with the writing by Mrs R.H. and the newspaper cuttings arrived from you.⁹ I was very happy to have your letter. I had earlier thought that I would have to wait till next Tuesday, but luckily your letter was there. You write on the letter with the postcards, that you sent it quickly. I got both letters at the same time. So it is possible to post a letter late, although of course I don't know if it will always go so smoothly.

I am so glad, Moeteke, that you can write more cheerfully again and that you enjoyed the stay in Zeeland so much. You tell me so much about all kinds of things.

What would you be doing now, Moeteke? I so often ask myself this. But I know everything in the house so well and I see you going from the kitchen to the dinette or the living-room. I see you going upstairs. I see you sitting at your desk. I see Jet entering by the staircase and calling, "Marie, are you there?", and I see the children playing outside. Yet although I now know so much here, many experiences are still unexpected and I do find that I cannot always know your inner thoughts about these. But most of your thoughts I do know, Moeteke, and I therefore know you are nearby. There is the sadness in our separation, there is the distance, which causes distress and uncertainty often, even more for you than for me because you don't know my surroundings as well as I know yours. But for me it isn't the same sadness as when I was in London. I feel myself more free here, with more pleasure in my work; more free because there isn't the dualism my work was divided into in London; more free also because nature, though sometimes with thunderstorms and much rain, is around me and not the op-

⁸ The Dutch newspaper Nieuwe Rotterdamsche Courant.

⁹ Mrs R.H.: the Dutch poet Henriette Roland Holst-van der Schalk.

pressive, grey dullness of the masses of houses, the filthy roofs, the ringing of telephones and the droning of buses on asphalt. Here there isn't the culture of books and museums and lively discussions of London, but neither are there all the ugly advertisements and clothes and houses, everything which depressed me so much during the first months in London. A city is perhaps necessary and I find it interesting to observe the people there and all the goings-on which our modern life produces, but it is as if it's closer to my heart to wander through the "bush" here than through the city streets. Moreover, the sun makes up for so much here.

You ask if I still have Conteh. Absolutely; he is still a valuable help for me. I wouldn't be able to do without him very well, even if I had full command of the language. Moreover, one has to have somebody here whom one can trust and who in cases of emergency, like at the time with my illness, can act. One can't yet rely entirely on a boy. He is also very good at intercepting initial contacts. Otherwise here I would get rather too many people with all sorts of requests and unnecessary conversations.

I don't know whether I have already written to you about the other changes in my "personnel". You know that I had a boy, Selu, whom you saw on a snapshot. I sent him home on one of the last days that I was still in Daru. Not because of dishonesty, but I found him too noisy in the long run and also not clean. Smoking and talking were his two big things. I put up with him for a fairly long time and he wasn't angry either, but I had to take him in hand rather too often. Probably he is also happier now. As a chief's son he gets sufficient food and he can wander about. Children of chiefs are often difficult characters because they are used to a free life, hanging about.

I then got two boys in his place. One of them I got to know here in Panguma, a boy of about 25 years old who had just finished the primary school here (some start learning fairly late). I found him attractive because of his love of books and his argumentative nature. So I asked him in order to give him the opportunity to earn something and to save, because he would like to become a schoolteacher or something like that later on. While I was in Freetown, he "guarded" the house, together with the Court Messenger. Simultaneously I got another boy who had already been trained by a missionary. He is called Mabo. He has had a good training, better than many boys because he has been trained by a woman. He does the work promptly and briskly, although he is still young (about 18). He has been with me in Freetown. The other boy, Fama, came to do housework when I returned here to this house. He is a nice boy, but it emerged that he was more suitable for reading books than for this work after all. His forgetfulness caused me all sorts of small troubles and the necessity of having to repeat things time and again. To a certain degree, I am pretty patient but not enough to keep myself occupied with such training matters, when things do not go smoothly. Moreover, the boys didn't get on well. Mabo is younger, but knows more and is quicker; Fama is older, but untrained. So there was a conflict in seniority with regard to age and knowledge. Therefore I have finally given Fama other work. I didn't want to fire him, but now I let him write about Mendi life for me. I let him do this in the Mendi language, which is instructive for me. We discuss his work in the afternoon. Conteh and others are often present and the people then develop a real passion regarding the question of what good Mendi is and what not. Fama's Mendi gets criticized quite a bit

then, which is a good learning experience for him and for me. It then appears that there are various possibilities in such a language and that different people also think differently sometimes about what is correct and what not. It is instructive for me to hear these differences.

Yesterday, I heard a nice saying, namely: *Mendei-mɔ ɛɛ Pu-mei wiei ba ha a ti gbolei meni lo*. This saying means: when a Mendi wants to do the same as, wants to imitate, a European, then he'll die for a lack of tea. This is said to persons who like to adopt the same customs as Europeans. The meaning of it is: you can imitate them with many things, but don't do it with everything, for then you come into conflict with our own customs. Of course people have observed that Europeans are great and regular tea drinkers. A Mendi wouldn't be able to do this so regularly, and thus he would die because of using tea, that is to say that everything would finally be rejected because of this. He would, moreover, never be able to get enough tea, because all kinds of friends and visitors bursting in, to join in Mendi meals. The tea would then be gone immediately and the European-like behaving negro would die because of a shortage of tea.

In the evening. It was fairly warm today. Now it is raining gently following an initial heavy downpour and the rain is already reducing now. The rain usually falls in the evening.

Tomorrow I'll go to the small school here. Two weeks ago I began to encourage a few pupils to write down Mendi histories, sayings, etc. I have offered a few small rewards for this. Tomorrow we'll continue.

Last Monday I went to Kenema with the Provincial Commissioner, Mr Stocks. Small-pox was going round here and in surrounding places a few people had already died. I wanted to take the matter in hand as soon as possible and I therefore just went to see Mr Stocks who immediately telegraphed the doctor in Bo. The doctor then sent a man to take measures and give vaccinations, if the people desire it. It is very difficult to keep the people somewhat isolated here in such cases. The chief and especially his brother etc. were very pleased that I took the matter in hand, for then of course the government would also take action quickly. It's peculiar, by the way, how much trust people have in your influence. In addition, the chief and his tribal authorities (not people like the brother of the chief and Conteh) are very lax and let matters take their own course as much as possible. But if it's necessary I tell the chief in such cases: "it should be done like this". For the rest I don't intervene at all of course when Mendi customs are concerned.

On the coming Wednesday we will probably (one can't rely too much on firm arrangements here) go to Kamboma, a place in this chiefdom where a new section chief has to be elected too. Kamboma is situated south of Panguma, a bit (from Panguma) westwards from the road to Hangha. We will probably stay there until Friday. You don't have to worry about my travels, Moeteke. I'll be careful and take it calmly.

When you get this letter, Moeteke, it'll be close to your birthday. I enclose here my best wishes, my dear, and so many beautiful thoughts. Last year at this time or a few days before I was with you, following the period in Bozen.¹⁰ What a lot has happened

¹⁰ Together with Guenter Wagner, Hofstra spent the summer months of 1933 in Oberbozen/Bolzano to assist Bronislaw Malinowski in preparing the manuscript of *Coral Gardens* (Malinowski 1935).

since! How I hope that next year at least we'll be together on your birthday. At any rate the moment when we'll see each other again isn't so interminable now.

Tomorrow I'll send you the bag, Moeteke. Or rather two bags. Actually I had intended the one with the short strap for you, but I'll also put in the other one in case you like it better. And otherwise you can give that one away some time, can't you? The green coloured raffia threads have been dyed here. The school where these bags have been made has the paint delivered from Freetown. Next time or the time after, I will send you the basket of the speaker about whom I wrote to you. I would have to go to Hangha myself to post it, because the size of it would present a new problem for the postmaster, which he probably wouldn't be able to handle. Therefore I have to help him with it and tomorrow I have to do all kinds of things here, so I can't go to Hangha. The parcel with the bags is light and simple. I can easily manage that from here and send it with the lorry.

I have just begun to attempt to collect material about the population, particularly about the number of births and deaths. If one could get every case reported, it could become valuable material. I have had forms printed for this in Freetown, two of which I enclose. As you'll understand, it took quite some doing to get this far. The chief is quite willing to help me, but most of it depends on the section chiefs to whom all data should be sent and even more so on the accuracy of their clerks, who have to fill in the papers. I have already given instructions to one of those clerks, and this morning I have written to two others who I am hoping will come here tomorrow. One has to explain to them in detail how it should be done. I do hope that people really will report everything. I just want to give it a try. The government has attempted it too in a few chief-

<u>BIRTHS.</u>	Section _____
<i>When Born</i>	_____
<i>Where Born</i>	_____
<i>Name</i>	_____
<i>Sex</i>	_____
<i>Single or Twin Birth</i>	_____
<i>Live or Still Born</i>	_____
<i>Tribe of Parents</i>	_____
<i>Name and Age of Father</i>	_____
<i>Name and Age of Mother</i>	_____
<i>Habitual Residence of the Mother</i>	_____
<i>Duration of Marriage</i>	_____
<i>Legal Marriage or Friendship</i>	_____
<i>First-born Child of the Mother, or Second, Third Child, &c.</i>	_____
<i>Signature (or mark) and Address of Informant</i>	_____
<i>Signature of Registrar</i>	_____
<i>Dated</i>	_____

Photo 4.7 Population form: Number of births

<u>DEATHS.</u>	Section _____
<i>Date of Death</i>	_____
<i>Place of Death</i>	_____
<i>Name</i>	_____
<i>Place of Habitual Residence of Deceased</i>	_____
<i>Sex</i>	_____
<i>Age</i>	_____
<i>Single, Married, Widowed or Divorced</i>	_____
<i>Occupation</i>	_____
<i>Cause of Death</i>	_____
<i>Duration of Illness</i>	_____
<i>Of what Tribe</i>	_____
<i>Place of Burial</i>	_____
<i>Signature (or mark) and Address of Informant</i>	_____
<i>Signature of Registrar</i>	_____
<i>Dated</i>	_____

Photo 4.8 Population form: Number of deaths

doms, but that ended in failure. However, the government made the mistake of asking nine pence for each registration, and so one can't expect that many people would present themselves.

I reread a few of your previous letters, Moeteke, and I saw there that you asked if you should return Nadel's report and the booklet on birds. I probably haven't answered you yet. No, I don't have to have the report returned, though I would like you to keep it, and the booklet on birds was for you.

I am having a new house made for Conteh. Where he lives now isn't so suitable and he'll also be nearer to me then. A house isn't expensive here. The main component, apart from wood, is earth. All in all I think it'll cost about 20 guilders. I pay 12 guilders and the chief, who'll get the house when I leave the country later on, gives the rest. There is also a piece of ground with it.

The newspaper articles about the negro question and about the book by Van Calcar were interesting.¹¹ So people in our country do begin to develop some interest in the negroes. I have been reading the booklet by Mrs Roland Holst this morning. I find many attractive and true thoughts in it.

Bye dear Moeteke of mine, don't worry about me, I don't make life too busy for myself now and I am feeling quite well, your Child.

Kamboma, 4 October 1934

My dear Moeteke,

Now I am again in a different place, in Kamboma, where, as I wrote to you, a section chief was going to be elected. That's all over now. The drums and the dancing are already in full swing. And the newly appointed are carried around the town in hammocks in a celebratory way, preceded and followed by singing, drumming and dancing people. Yesterday we arrived here and we first heard the usual statements and recommendations of the four candidates. And today the chief was elected. Luckily the other three candidates got jobs too. One of them became the speaker of the new chief; another became town chief (head of Kamboma itself) and the fourth one his speaker. So they are all more or less content, although their satisfaction will be diverse. The weather was good, only this afternoon it rained heavily. For the final discussion together we were in a little lane when the fierce rain came. That speeded up the discussion.

I am a bit afraid that my letter, which I posted on Monday, won't reach you before your birthday. For I have received the shipping timetable for the last quarter and there I saw that there will be no Elder Dempster ship leaving this week, but only next week. However, on 6 October a Dutch ship is sailing. I very much hope that this ship will take the letter and the parcel and that you'll get them before your birthday.

Sunday morning. I am already quietly at home now, Moeteke. The travelling around, for chief's elections at any rate, belongs to the past for the time being. Prob-

¹¹ It isn't clear which Van Calcar and which book is referred to.

bly I'll set out again in November and December with the chief and the people he needs to attend to the collection of the 5 shilling tax for the English Government. Each household pays 5 shillings a year, which is collected for the Government by the chiefs. At that occasion I hope to find out a bit more about the economic situation of the population. You don't have to be worried about my travels, Moeteke. I take it calmly. And often it's healthy to make a good walk. The way to Kamboma is along a narrow wooded path; it was about two hours walking. When one goes along with the chief, of course a decent small house is provided in all the places we go to where there isn't a rest house (only in the principal place of each chiefdom is there a rest house, mainly for the District Commissioners when they are "on trek"). A real Mendi house is small, but cool and airy.

From nearby I hear lively talking and knocking. People are busily working on Conteh's new house. The posts between which the earth for the walls will be filled up, are already standing in the ground.

The weather has been more or less the same over the last weeks. During daytime it's already warm (in the house it's now 88 degrees Fahrenheit) and sunny. In the evening rain usually follows, mostly heavy rain with thunderstorms.

Now on Tuesday there'll again be a letter from you, Moeteke. I am already looking forward to it. It's nice that such a regular connection exists at all. Twenty or thirty years ago it would have been much more difficult to send or receive a letter here.

This week an inspector for the schools will also come here for a few days. This is the gentleman, a Mr Lipscombe, with whom I travelled from Liverpool and who helped me a bit on the ship. In these weeks he travels across this part of Sierra Leone to visit the schools. The schoolchildren to whom I speak, but perhaps even more so the teachers, are already very impressed by this event.

This week I attended a ceremony here for the mother of a small child that had just died. A first-born child isn't buried in the normal way, but is put in the ground along the road, at the entrance of the place, in leaves (with a normal burial the dead person is wrapped in cloth). Neither is there ceremonial mourning, wailing, etc. For people believe that in many cases the soul of the first-born dead child will return in the next child. Therefore people don't want to frighten it and scare it off by mourning. Three days after the death, the mother undergoes a ceremony. She is ceremonially cleansed from what was considered to be something impure in her and through this ceremony she is again made fit to receive life and to be fertile. There is much symbolism in such an act. She sits in a little stream on all kinds of leaves, which are supposed to have a wholesome effect, and which are packed in a mat, and three old women who have a special skill for this work, wind leaves around her head and shoulders and breast and ankles and wrists, and also cotton thread from the toes to the head. With other leaves and a white chicken an old woman sways over and around the head of the mother, swaying away her sins. And thereafter the leaves and threads are pulled from her, something which symbolizes that the evil magic power which may have killed the child is pulled away from her. Some three prayers are said to the spirit by the old woman who originally taught them these washings and who now helps them with the work as well. The night after the day of this washing the mother has to sleep with her husband

again and one hopes that she will then be impregnated again. Around all this there is still so much more poetry and also involvement of the community with producing children than in our European culture, at any rate outwardly.

Monday morning. My dear Moeteke, now my "mailbag", the box in which my letters are brought to Hangha, has to be off. [...]

Bye Moeteke, so much love from your Child.

Segbwema, 19 October 1934

My dear Moeteke,

Yesterday it was your birthday. How was it? [...] I was so glad that I was able to send you a telegram and to know that you would know on that day that everything was well with me and that I am with you. Did you have many visitors, Moeteke? And of course you received many letters too.

I have been travelling again a bit, or rather, I still am. For as you see, I am now in Segbwema. Last Wednesday the schools inspector, Mr Lipscombe, whom I had met before on the ship, came to Panguma to see the small school there. He stayed till Saturday and he stayed with me. It was nice to meet him because he knows much about educational matters and the nature of the schools in this country. I went with him to the school in Panguma on Thursday and Friday.

Sunday morning 21 October. Now I am back in Panguma again, Moeteke. Yesterday I came back here, from Segbwema. And on the way back in Hangha I found two letters from you, or rather one letter and one with the pictures. And also the newspapers. That was a nice surprise. They must have arrived with an interim mail. When there is such an interim mail, it suddenly feels much more homelike and nearer, doesn't it?

Now I'll tell you a bit more about my travels. On Saturday I went with Mr Lipscombe to Blama, where he had to see two schools. Blama is a small town on the railway, past Kenema. It has quite a lot of trade because it can be reached from different directions. One of the schools there is part of the Roman Catholic mission; the other is part of the English church, but in the hands of the Creoles. The Roman Catholic school is the best one, with respect to discipline and results. There were a few Mendi teachers there, which is of course a great advantage for making contact with the children compared to Creole teachers (the Creoles from Freetown speak English, or rather a sort of English, the so-called Pidgin English). Heading up the Catholic Mission school were two priests, one from America, and one from Scotland. They were friendly, cultivated men. We had a meal with them and they had one with us. On Sunday afternoon we made a trip with one of them in their car to Boajibu, more to the north. If one puts aside their final goal, these Catholics are fairly agreeable, sensible missionaries. They don't colour the reality, but they are good psychologists. A difficulty with the education here is that so far it has been given to only a few, or rather that only a few want to take it, perhaps also because it is in the hands of the missionaries. One now has the phenomenon, that there are schools here and of very diverse quality and of course with only a small proportion of all children in school. This breeds a group, all of whom try to get a higher job

and to earn something. However, these higher jobs (clerk, teacher, boys, court-messenger, etc.) are very scarce, especially nowadays, so that only a few of those who leave the school can be taken on. The rest, however, quite understandably, do not much fancy going back to the rice fields. They consider themselves to be "educated people" superior to the others, even though they have been to school for only three years. As a result there is an alienated group of young people. People, who are in favour of the untouched state of negro life, like many government people (perhaps also for political motives), are therefore often not much in favour of education. They prefer the real "bush negro". On the other hand, the people with this opinion have themselves had an education and again there is a question as to whether they would have wanted to do without it. I am not myself a great admirer of the primary education, such as it usually is, since it can spoil much, especially here, but it is very difficult to judge what is best for another people. As it is now, (when only a small group go to school and who can't find their way later on), doesn't seem good. There are two other possibilities: no education at all, so that one doesn't generate unpleasant differences, or general education. The missionaries are rather at a loss about it and there's no push by the Government. The policy of the Government of a country like Sierra Leone or rather the English policy regarding Sierra Leone is to leave things as much as they are, in order to avoid inconvenience and bother.

Personally, I prefer leaving the people untouched, not giving them a veneer of education, just the simple culture and the simple conditions for happiness, which exclude our dark times, culturally and morally. But on the other hand, education can also give happiness, and it can be a precondition for political independence.

Another problem for the mission is to find good local teachers, or rather to hold on to good teachers. A good teacher, although he is Christian, tends to be little inclined to follow the missionaries' ideal: one man with one woman. So there are many dismissals and as a consequence changes of personnel. In the Creole school at Blama, for example, there have been five headmasters in five years. If the mission could be less plagued by a "women complex", the chances for their work would be better, I think. As it is now, they only keep people who are either lacking vitality or who can lead them up the garden path in the long run. Perhaps it is necessary from the point of view of the missions to stick to the ideal of the monogamous marriage. But for the time being this is difficult, especially for the negro because of the whole economic structure of the society, where women do a great deal of the work on the land. Moreover, the negroes still think, luckily for the missionaries, that the marriage ideal that the missionaries want to pass on here, is dominant in Europe. If the negroes knew more about the side effects of the European marriage in general (like prostitution, divorces, etc.), then the missionaries would perhaps have an even harder job. I don't know if there exists a unanimous Christian opinion about this question. However, it seems to me that the missions confuse European (especially western European) views with Christianity.

On Wednesday I went from Blama to Segbwema. Mr Lipscombe returned to Freetown. A month ago I had promised Mr Sanders, the missionary in Segbwema, to look him up again sometime. Since I was now en route anyway, it was a good opportunity. It was nice to talk again to him, too. I also found it nice to be in Segbwema just at your

birthday because it is easier to send a telegram from there than from Hangha. The official in Segbwema has more training and practice. There is also something in spending a few days in a house, where you don't have to look after your own food at all and where you can sit quietly, without visits and external duties.

You shouldn't at all be worried, dear Moeteke, when I make such a trip. I am quite careful and I am already used to the technique of it. Another important thing is to see that one has rather regular nourishment. In the beginning I wasn't so well organized in this respect.

The newspaper articles were nice. The article on Van Deyssel rather moved me.¹² I still well remember the impression he made on me when, 17 years old, I read him the first time. I was almost beside myself, by the intoxicating wealth of his words. Weeks on end this stayed with me. I don't believe that any other book, as literature, has made such an impression on me since then.

I so much hope that you have got the bags in time. I have sent you nothing else special for your birthday, Moeteke. It's a bit difficult from here. When I sent the telegram, I was very glad, for I knew that you would be pleased with it.

Just now I reread both your letters which I received last week. What a luxury, three letters in two weeks. You should think about me with confidence, dear Moeteke. It's going very well with me and I enjoy my work. Every day something is added and so it will gradually become something that's more or less worth the effort. Once you have been here, you'll be much better able to imagine everything.

It is a nice day, sunny and not too warm. It is already getting to be the time for the rice harvest. The thunder is still rumbling a bit and last night it rained heavily, but the actual dry season is clearly coming already.

I have a quiet day at home and write a bit. A little while ago Mustapha, the friend of my boy who sleeps here at night, and a young teacher at the school, were here for a while. This Mustapha is a nice, intelligent boy. He also slept in the house when I was away last week. That must have been quite a thing for him, alone in this house, for he is quite afraid of the spirits, although he has spent six years at a mission school. And my garden may be full of spirits, according to the belief, because there are a few old cotton trees in it and spirits like living in such trees. Therefore people don't like to come here late in the evening. At first it was quite a strain for Mustapha to come here in the evening, especially on one occasion, when he had no lamp. But he is already getting used to it. He also laughs a bit about it himself, but he says that the people talk so much about spirits, that he can't help believing in them too. He is a boy with a good sense of humour, by the way. He now collects stamps and I am a good source for that, of course.

The belief in spirits and evil influences in particular plays a remarkable role here. Sorcery, for example, is often a cause of illness. Two weeks ago a man came to see me with his wife. The wife suffered from worms. I gave her my medicine for worms with Epsom salts to flush out everything. The next day the couple came back. They asked for the same medicine. I explained that one can't take worm medicine day after day. At least one week must go by before a second dose can be given. "Yes", the man said,

¹² The Dutch writer Lodewijk van Deyssel.

“this may be true, but the illness can’t be cured because it has been caused by sorcery. It is not the usual worm disease. Your medicine has alleviated the pain somewhat, therefore we would like to have it again. But it can’t cure.” I told them that the woman would become too weak from a second medication and that all would probably turn out well. Because I have been away, I haven’t yet seen them again.

One often also gets diseases in a dream. Last Friday a man died of smallpox in Segbwema. During the daytime he had slept in his hammock and dreamt that he got smallpox. When he awoke he had the symptoms and three days later he was dead. Having this in mind, the chief of Segbwema has now forbidden people to sleep during the daytime!

I close the letter now, Moeteke. Later, a lorry is going to Hangha and I will send this letter with it, for it isn’t certain that the car will go early tomorrow.

Bye dear, dear Moeteke of mine. [...] So much, very much love from your Boy.

Panguma, 24 October 1934

My dear Moeteke,

Yesterday evening I received your letter of 6 October. I hope that once more I can send you this letter with an interim post. What a lovely snapshot you sent me. You are looking well on it, Moeteke, happier, it seems to me, than when I was in England, when I also got snapshots from you. Then there was actually a heavier pressure on us, don’t you think so Moeteke, though now the distance is so much more difficult too. How will it be with you when I come back? Oh, I actually think that everything will still be familiar right away, Moeteke, and that after one week it may seem amazing that one has been away. Sometimes it can seem Europe is so very far away, and sometimes, like this morning, it seems so near to me.

You write about the time in Berlin, Moeteke. Yes, that was often very nice, wasn’t it? I am so glad that you write so cheerfully about it. In Aerdenhout it became more difficult, didn’t it? Perhaps the whole atmosphere wasn’t right. But actually we had much to be happy about there too, Moeteke. Next summer I would like to make a little trip to Berlin with you. Perhaps it would be good for me to see Westermann about language matters once more.

It is good to see that the negroes here are themselves interested in their language. In one of my last letters I told you, I believe, that in the afternoon I have a sort of language hour or rather three hours here in which a boy, David Fama, who writes about Mendi life for me, and Conteh and often one or two other interested people discuss Fama’s style and words. The day before yesterday there was a big difference of opinion about the meaning of *Kama dyji*, the word for hunter. There were differing opinions about the extent this word is also used for people who set a trap, fishermen, etc. In fact all sorts of other names for hunter exist. Yesterday morning, as I walked about with Conteh in Panguma, I asked a man about it, and soon a fierce discussion developed in which many passers-by participated. This part of our little town was completely wound up by it. And this morning this was repeated. For Fama, who usually has a

different opinion from Conteh, turned up here this morning with a hunter. All of us then went to the chief and then, of course, there were immediately all sorts of people joining in. The passion of the negroes for arguing is remarkable, whether actually in a court session or with respect to such a question of word usage. They speak and make a fuss about it as if very much depends on it. The chief has also said to me that I should thoroughly check everything that I write down about the language, the words and expressions I hear, and ask various persons about it, for there is often confusion with respect to the use of language. It's like Europe after all; a small group speak the best language.

Do you know what the postmaster in Hangha said to me last week, when I collected my letters: "Your people at home care good for you. With every mail you get letters." The postmaster is a Creole and a sympathetic man, and slightly curious as a good postman is.

Today it was nice weather here, not too warm and pleasantly fresh. Such weather one gets here just before the dry season. It's now evening and from afar the rain is already rushing in and is nearing my house. I wonder how all this, the weather and the life, would affect you, Moeteke. It is almost uncanny how used to all of this I have already become.

On Friday, along with the chief's brother and Conteh, I will start to make a survey of the population of Panguma. I would like to know the number of men, women and children in each house and household. Because of polygamy (having more than one wife) it's more complicated here than in Europe.

On Thursday evening. I read the novel "Komediante trokken voorbij" [Comedians passed by] by Fabricius.¹³ It isn't a work of high art, no great style and rather conventional. Yet it moved me. First I found the story tedious, heavy as Dutch novels mostly are in their way of telling a story. But later on it nevertheless began to grip me, perhaps because I haven't read much recently.

In my next letter I'll write about what the snapshots represent, Moeteke.

All goes well with me, Moeteke. Don't worry. I wish you so much love, Your Boy.

Panguma, Tuesday, 1-11-'34

My dear Moeteke,

Last week I received both your letters and the postcard from Amsterdam. A pity that the parcel with the bags hadn't yet arrived. Perhaps you have it by now? The children's birthday had indeed escaped me. I have now sent them a letter by airmail. Perhaps it will arrive in time. A story is connected to this letter. On Saturday morning I sent it to the post office in Hangha, with a note for the stationmaster, who has to do the postal matters too, telling him that this was a letter for the airmail. I enclosed a shilling in an envelope for the extra stamps. In the afternoon I went by lorry to Hangha myself to do

¹³ The Dutch writer Johan Fabricius.

some shopping. I also passed by the post office and discovered there that the station-master had made it a recorded letter, because of the enclosed shilling. He hadn't ever heard of airmail or planes! Although his timetable contains a whole description about airmail, the meaning of it had apparently never registered with him. Luckily the letter hadn't yet been sent. At such small stations one encounters very simple conditions, of course. But it's really nice that one can send letters from here and receive them. In the north of Sierra Leone, where there is no railway and roads are few, it would be more difficult.

I was glad that you were pleased with my telegram on your birthday, Moeteke.

Last Sunday I went off, to Lalehun and came back via Giehun. In Lalehun the leader of the Tongo secret society had died and consequently ceremonies were going on. The Tongo is a society which, in pre-European times, was particularly important for discovering persons who were guilty of sorcery. In Giehun there was a ceremony too. A sister of the chief there had died and the gifts for the burial ceremony were brought and distributed. One of the women attending had a remarkable role. She was a "professional wailer" for this occasion and had, so to speak, to ease or reassure the dead person by making all sorts of mocking comments about the living people attending. If all the people present fuss too much around the burial meal, this wouldn't be so nice for the dead person and it would make her feel the loss [of her life] too much. This is the reason this compensation is offered. There is indeed something in this. The negroes are realists in such matters. So yesterday I heard a saying, that goes: *aidyenne nengɔ, ke mu ye ε ngeili bu* which means, 'in the sky it is sweet, but let us still be on earth', or in this situation one prefers the certain over the uncertain.

We walked for about four hours last Sunday. In Lalehun I also went to a rice field where rice was being harvested. The smell of the spikes and the yellow colour reminded me a bit of a European cornfield and the colour is a nice change from all the green in this country. One then arrives home heavy from the sun and sweat and tired, but after a bath and some food one is feeling refreshed again. I believe there is much benefit for the body in being so often outdoors like this. I wish you were able to see me wandering around in the bush some time, Moeteke.

Last week we also went up one of the surrounding hills or mountains, whatever one would like to call them. Rashid, the brother of the chief, has a rice field there where we saw the people at work. It's about an hour's climbing. I took a few pictures.

The nights and particularly the evenings are so beautiful here, Moeteke, with the full moon now. It is so light that one can go everywhere without a lamp and especially nature is fairylike illuminated by the bright light. On Sunday I'll write to you again, Moeteke. Perhaps this letter will come a bit ahead of the regular mail.

So much love from your own child.

Panguma, Sunday 4 November 1934

My dear Moeteke,

Last Tuesday I got your letter from 11 October with the parcel with newspapers and the book Niels Lyhne.¹⁴ Thank you so much for everything, Moeteke. Over recent weeks there has now and then been an interim post, hasn't there Moeteke? That's very nice. It's good for me to know that you take advantage of that and now and then you receive an unexpected letter. Yesterday evening there was an interim mail too. This brought a letter from Makkum¹⁵ and a few books from Scheltema en Holkema which I had ordered.

I read about the murder in Marseille for the first time in the newspapers you sent me.¹⁶ This is rather awful, isn't it? It makes you miserable when you read such things. Life is sometimes strange indeed. And yet, such things have always been there, as you also remark with reference to the book of Busken Huet.¹⁷ It's fortunate that the consequences have so far not been too serious. [...] I also enjoyed receiving a few newspapers with book reviews from you.

Today I had a quiet Sunday with fortunately little disturbance from visits. I have worked a lot, writing my notes all day. There is so much of everything one sees and hears to note down and reflect on. Writing down everything takes quite some time. And one has to keep it up to date regularly. – It was nice, sunny and fresh weather today. It's a pleasant time now, in between the wet and the dry season. This period is enjoyable as the thunderstorms have become much less frequent. The bush is fresh green and the air is not too oppressive; there is plant growth and there are flowers which can't easily cope with the heat in the actual dry season.

Yesterday, together with Conteh and Rashid, the brother of the chief, I went to a rice field to see the harvesting of the rice. Everywhere the rice is now ripe or ripening and on many fields people are busy harvesting the rice and bringing it in. Many hands help with it. Some thirty men and women are thus at work on such a field; families help each other, for a Mendi doesn't like working on his own or in a small group. When they are many, it is easier and it is possible to envisage the end of harvesting the big field. And moreover, when there are more people, they can sing and make music. For that is a part of it. A Mendi likes to do his work to the rhythm of songs or music. Thus one regularly hears bearers of heavy loads, such as the people who carry bags with palm kernels on their shoulders along the road, sing a monotonous tune. Drummers are present, and to the rhythm of the music that continues all day people pluck the yellow spikes, which a few men, walking behind the pickers, tie into sheaves. These sheaves are heaped up on the field to let them dry there. When they are dry they are stored in a barn or in the attic. This supply then lasts for a whole year. It's interesting

¹⁴ The author of Niels Lyhne was the Danish writer Jens Peter Jacobsen.

¹⁵ Sjoerd Hofstra's father, brother and sister lived in Makkum.

¹⁶ King Alexander I of Yugoslavia was murdered in Marseille on 9 October 1934.

¹⁷ Hofstra probably refers to *Het land van Rembrand* [The country of Rembrandt] by the Dutch writer Conrad Busken Huet.

Photos 4.9-4.13



(4.9) Harvesting the rice, Panguma late 1934



(4.10) Harvesting the rice, Panguma late 1934



(4.11) Drying the rice, Panguma late 1934



(4.12) Farm hut in the main rice farm for cooking and taking shelter from fierce sun or rain, Panguma late 1934



(4.13) Midday meal of farm worker group, Panguma late 1934

to see the people busy like this. They are happy because it's harvest time and the time of hunger (between the old and the new harvest) is over. And there is a lot of rice this year. It's a good year and also more fields have been cultivated than in other years. When the prices of palm kernels were high, people paid much attention to collecting these and some people turned themselves away from the rice cultivation. Now that the prices are low, they are returning once more to the rice field. And that is good, for it is the source of the Mendi food. And his future remains in the rice field. He devotes his best efforts to it and it has all his care. The palm kernels he needs too, for oil in the comes from outside and isn't really part of the actual life here. Rice is everything and one only needs a bit of oil. One only thinks of tax when time is pressing. So life goes on nice and cosy. And now the world prices of palm kernels are low, there is no striving for collecting them and no striving for money. Our country is in fact also involved with Mendi life. For the English repeatedly stated that the main cause of the low prices is that the Dutch colonies have started palm tree plantations, which produce better and more oil and kernels in a systematic scientific manner, and thus secure the market. In this way remote parts of Africa are even connected with the secrets of world trade.

Last Thursday I went to Daru, Moeteke, for half a day. The chief had to go to the doctor there for treatment. A chief, with his many wives, easily contracts a venereal disease. He wished me to go with him so we went in his lorry. The doctor was nice and I had lunch with the officers, just like the period when I was there in May. It was no longer painful for me to go there. The doctor now lives in the house where I was. He thought I was looking pretty well. He has also had malaria himself and has been in bed for a few days, but now has recovered again. Tomorrow the chief and I will go there again. He feels more at home there and thinks that he'll sooner be helped. – On the way one often experiences nice things. Towards noon we hope to be back home again.

I have sent a second, short report to Oldham, who asked me about my plans, and I have asked him to let me stay on here till the end of March or beginning of April, as compensation for the loss of three months and also because it's probably better not to return in the middle of the winter. I have also asked him if I may travel back on a Dutch or German ship, so that I can first call in at Holland. I would like to have a few quiet weeks with you first. Perhaps the Institute will prefer me travelling on an English ship. Then I can go from England to Holland. We'll see what Oldham says.

It was fairly busy this week with all sorts of things. There were three days with all kinds of legal cases. In addition we have done quite a lot of work on the population list of Panguma that I am making. We enter each house and write down the names of the inhabitants, sex, etc. So I get a good overview of the population and also of the number of wives each man has or sometimes doesn't have.

[...] Bye dear Moeteke of me, Your own Child

Panguma, 10-11-'34

My dear Moeteke,

Now I write down the word Panguma, without thinking, I suddenly think how familiar this sound has already become in our ears. It stands there as if it were one place or another in our country, or London or Berlin. If you were to reread these letters later on and they were between other letters, from other places, it would be as if Panguma lies somewhere in a well-known territory. And yet this place, its existence, was still completely unknown to us a year ago, just as most people won't ever hear of it. Even the whole territory, Sierra Leone, is unknown to most people. Life is miraculous. Now I sit here, writing to you, and it seems a miracle to me that I sit here in this part of the world. For you it comes as a miracle to get letters from there and to know that your child is there. For me this world has gradually become quite familiar, the landscape, the people, the house and a few things around me. But still, Moeteke, when I, when we, began this study, I would never have dreamt that some time I would come here and that I would live alone, live on my own, would do work here, far away from the protection of the world and from familiar people. Africa remained always unfamiliar to me, even when I heard about it from Steinmetz and learned something about the negro tribes.¹⁸ The (Dutch) East-Indies were always nearer, because of the people, because of the religion too and because of the architecture. However, I never succeeded in getting a good picture of the life here, and at the time I didn't have a particular longing for it either. Not until the dissertation work began and the longing for contact with this reality. And I feel that it is good for me, broadening one's outlook, to know about this. I am grateful for it. Not primarily because of seeing another world, experiencing another landscape, another climate – therefore travelling, just for the sake of a change is too little in my blood. But I am grateful for this opportunity to experience such a completely different culture, other customs, to understand other people. Although our study did have a broadening effect, I would probably still, without this, be loaded with all sorts of the prejudices, from which he who later wants to write about cultural values, has to free himself. It's still so difficult to say what will be gained from it and how one will turn out oneself as a result. A bit changed perhaps, a bit older, perhaps a bit wiser, in a few things. But I think – and this may well be the benefit – chastened with respect to various theoretical views.

I received a short note from Fortes this evening. He is doing well; however, he writes that in September he had a fairly bad time because of the many rains and mosquitoes. He has been quite ill from malaria. He further writes: "Anthropology is a harder task than it seemed theoretically. To describe and analyse a whole culture seems to be to undertake an impossible task. I fear that even two years will not be enough for me to finish."

This afternoon four small girls from this locality visited me. People come to see me like this so often that I have had to set limits in relation to boys. These children, how-

¹⁸ S.R. Steinmetz, professor of social geography and cultural anthropology at the University of Amsterdam.

ever, were so nice, that I couldn't send them away immediately. I gave them something sweet, which I keep in the house for such occasions. Such children are so delightful. When children are that age, one doesn't feel they are at all different from European children. They are perhaps a bit more timid because they are with the white man. Conteh also has a boy, about three or four years old, who fairly frequently drops by here and already knows the way to that tin well. "Blama", one of the girls said to me – my Mendi name. Another said "Kεke" (father) as a greeting. It is in these ways that children show their deep simplicity.

I have continued to be busy with Conteh making a list of the population of Pangu-ma. It's quite a lot of work, which takes time. We have now done about one hundred houses. There are about 400 to 500 houses here, I guess. For each house I collect the number and the names of the inhabitants. This way I get a good overview of the number of men, the total number of women, the number of women each man has, the number of children each woman has. On the whole people are fairly willing to give the information. However the day before yesterday we came across a few very hesitant houses. These aren't really people from Panguma, but people from a village who have only been here for a short time and are afraid of getting into trouble by giving information. It doesn't help much either when one says that it isn't for the tax. By saying that one makes them even more suspicious. We also had a few cases of women, older women really, who didn't want to tell us how many children they had had. That would make them cry, they said. From the data that I get and which are probably largely reliable, it is already pretty clear that child mortality is fairly high. There are several women who have had between four to eight children and have lost them all.

The day before yesterday we visited a tragic old woman. She wasn't Mendi, but from the tribe living north of here, the Kono. In the times of slavery she had come here as a slave. She had lost eight children; three were still alive; and she didn't know where two of these were; the third, a son, was with her. Now she waited only for death, she said. She hadn't ever worn a piece of European cloth yet, she said.

The weather here is already becoming pretty stable. Fortunately the thunderstorms are over and although it is still cloudy now and then, it's mostly sunny and fairly fresh in the air. Occasionally, suddenly and fiercely, almost seeming like a mistake, there is still a downpour. That means that the rainy season says farewell, people here say.

We have had about seven lawsuits here in the past week. It is rather instructive to make reports of these because one begins to get an insight into all kinds of things through it, especially family- and marriage matters.

I have read a great deal of Niels Lyhne. There are beautiful sections in it, don't you think? The description of his life in the foreword touched me too. For St Nicholas day I'll order a book to be sent to you, Moeteke. I hope that it will arrive in time and that it is worthwhile.

It's now Sunday evening. The Sunday was calm; I have done various things, making notes and writing letters. Now it'll soon be bedtime. Tomorrow morning I'll go once more with the chief to Daru, to the doctor. The doctor wrote to me that he will soon be transferred to Freetown. That is rather a pity, he was very popular among the negroes who have been in touch with him, though he has been here less than a year.

In early December, Moeteke, I go “on trek” in the chiefdom here. The chief will travel around collecting the tax and for me it’s a good opportunity to go with him and to get to know the country and some of the conditions, in villages in particular. I’ll write to you about our travel route. I think that we will set off on approximately 10 December, for about one month. I think we will be in about 10 places, where we will stop and stay for a day or so. You shouldn’t worry about it, Moeteke. I live quite carefully and know better now how to arrange everything. And the chief is also going and he always looks after me. In each of the places we come to a decent house is fitted up for me. And one brings along bed, bathtub, sufficient food, etc.

On Tuesday a letter from you will arrive again. That’s nice. [...] Bye my own dear Moeteke,

Your own Child.

Panguma, Sunday 24 November 1934

My dear Moeteke,

It is Sunday again. The days here are also passing by more quickly than one would often wish. There is so much work that one wants to do, but a day is limited and a week is soon over. On Tuesday the post, which I am already looking forward to, arrives again. It already seems a long time ago since I had a letter from you, Moeteke. How is it with you now, and how is it now in Europe? [...] One doesn’t feel oneself really alone here, for there is of course much work but after all there is also an emotional side of life. This morning the chief and his brother Rashid called by for a talk. I then asked them about some terms for various family relationships about which I collect data and I showed them some of my papers. “We sometimes think”, the brother then said to the chief, “that the doctor is alone, but he is always surrounded by thousands of people through his books and his papers.” Rashid has a fair amount of admiration for the world of books. I often see him sitting in front of his house with an old booklet about Greek mythology, which he has raked up from somewhere. There is more thirst for knowledge among some people here than one would sometimes expect perhaps, but, of course, this longing has to be satisfied in a cheap way. For books are on the whole expensive, except for chiefs; and they of all people generally don’t read or can’t read.

This week a story-teller was here, a teller of folk tales – I think that this is the best Dutch [read here: English] word. It was a young man who is fairly famous for it. The section chief from Lalehun had sent him to me. Over three evenings he has recited all his art in Panguma, in the presence of and for the enjoyment of many people. He did it in a barri (a small, open building where all kinds of law suits are treated), sitting on a mat. Many children and women and also men sat around him, listening breathlessly, sometimes laughing exuberantly, or making a remark, to ask him about something or other. It was a lovely scene, all those people in the half-dark of such a barri, illuminated by burning wood. Thursday evening we had the first evening. He was also going to “perform” on Friday evening, but then couldn’t go ahead with it. It was a somewhat tragicomic case. Just beforehand the story-teller or his wife had discovered that the

goods, which they had brought with them, had been stolen, namely three native woven cloths for the bed and a "shirt" which the man had borrowed for the occasion from a member of his family. He had borrowed one of the cloths from Conteh. He was too much in a flurry to tell tales that evening. The next morning Conteh solved the matter by finding the thief. In fact the story-teller had been playing cards and through that won one the cloths. We already suspected that one of his opponents had stolen the goods. For theft is fairly rare here and mainly occurs among card players who are used to acquiring things without working for them. The story-teller was at first hesitant to say with whom he had been playing. For playing cards (which is always done for gain here) is forbidden and punished with imprisonment. But the thief was found and the goods as well, which had been hidden in the wood. The chief then didn't pursue the matter further, but he banned the thief, who was from another place, from Panguma, forbidding him to ever return here. This punishment is often administered here: when a man behaves in an impossible manner in all sorts of ways, he is sent away. Prisons exist in only a few places, and are where a D.C. lives. The native way is to set someone with their legs in a wooden block for three days, but that's just a short time of course as it would also cost too much food in the long run. People therefore prefer to send a troublesome person away. Thus the other day a man who was born here, but had now been banished from Lalehun, was brought in here. This man had developed the habit of living in different places and collecting palm kernels there (to sell), but he refused to take part in public work (cleaning roads, etc.), which each adult who climbs up palm trees, is obliged to do for the community. This annoyed the section chief of Lalehun and one morning the man was arrested in his bed and brought back to Panguma.

I send you a few more film packets with this letter, Moeteke. On no. 1 of the big packet you first see a few pictures of Rashid's (the brother of the chief) rice field, in which they are busy cutting the rice. It is a rice field situated on a mountain. I have also taken a few palm trees there, and, on the way down, a few pictures of Panguma as it is seen from the mountain there. In addition there are pictures on it of members of a secret society whom I saw in Lalehun last Sunday. Most of the men are members, the women are relatives of the recently deceased chief for whom ceremonies had been held. You see a man in costume; he is the dancer of the secret society. The people sitting (on chairs, I believe) include the section chief of Lalehun and, next to him, Conteh. On no. 2 of the big photos the first ones are again of the rice cutting in a field in Lalehun and further pictures of the ceremony which I saw thereafter – in Giehun – for the dead sister of the chief there. The figure who is entirely covered with straw, is a special type of dancer. Nothing of his body is allowed to be seen. From the small photos the first two are of daughters of the chief, one from here, the other living in Freetown. They are rather dressed up, but one sometimes has to take such things on request, to maintain good relations. No. 3 is Conteh's new house, with his little houseboy in front; no. 4 is the local lorry in which I always travel when I have to go to Hangha and which takes all your letters from here; no. 5 is my head boy Mabo (in trousers); no. 6 is Mustapha, a nice boy who goes to school and sleeps here at night with Mabo. And 7 and 8 are of me. I hope that I am more or less recognizable. They have been taken by

Photos 4.14-4.17



(4.14) Panguma late 1934



(4.15) Panguma late 1934



(4.16) Panguma with local lorry for Hangha, late 1934



(4.17) Sjoerd Hofstra and small boy from Lalehun who helps in the kitchen, Panguma late 1934

Mustapha, but possibly the exposure was too short. The little boy beside me is a lad from Lalehun who goes to school here and who spends the afternoon in my kitchen, at the father's request, to learn a little of that work. In the other photo I sit at my writing table on the veranda. I have recently got this table which has been made by a local carpenter for 2 ½ sh. (1 guilder). By ordering some simple, comfortable furniture to be made, I am already getting to be rather settled, Moeteke. I am also having a small cupboard made for my papers, that I can have near me, thus enabling me to quickly and easily look up my notes. I have now stowed away everything in a chest, but every day one has to dig it all out in the morning. One can't very well leave the things here on the table, because one doesn't know what curious people would be able to do with the papers. And in a house here there are rather more visitors coming along than when one has a house in Europe. Have I written to you, Moeteke, that I also have a blackboard, on an easel, on which it is possible to write with chalk, just as in school. This is very convenient for me, when we discuss Mendi words, etc. or when we are dealing with family relations, as we did these past days. The terminology for family names is very complicated with African peoples, so it makes things easier when one has it clearly before oneself on a blackboard. Discussions are then also less confused.

Now it's already evening again, Moeteke. The day was mainly sunny after all. It cleared up later on. A day without sun here would be a great rarity now indeed, I think.

[...] You ask on your card from Amsterdam whether you could send something to Conteh some time. That's a nice thought of yours, Moeteke. I'll think about it and write to you about it next time. I am thinking of bringing him with me to Europe some time. One can take along a boy for 10 English pounds. So that is not very expensive. The life in Europe might have some difficulties, but I would like to have him with me when I work up my material, if I would feel uncertain about a point. Perhaps it would be better after the second journey than the first. With the first journey one has the advantage that one can then keep up the language, but after the second journey one has more material of course, which has to be checked. We'll have to see. What do you think about bringing him along some time, Moeteke?

Now it is already late [...] and I am going to close the letter. Bye dear, dear Moeteke of me, [...]

your child.

Panguma, Freetown and return to Europe (December 1934 – March 1935)

Panguma, 4 December 1934

My dear Moeteke,

Thank you so much for the book and the gingerbread man, which arrived safely. That was a nice surprise! And it still really smelled a bit of St Nicholas Day. I have eaten it already. I did have to laugh for a moment as I found it so homely. I have read the book by Walschap.¹ It's written well, isn't it? The definition of the problem isn't so very new any longer. A bit Flemish-bourgeois, but big novels can perhaps hardly be expected from Dutch-Flanders, but psychological analysis of the type of this book also has value.

It has been cooler here these past few days, Moeteke. It's now the time of "the small cold" as people here call it. In January, when the Harmattan, the desert wind, comes blowing over, it seems to become even cooler. But in between we will get a higher temperature again. We have had a few nights when I had to use some woollen blankets. That is very unusual here and I often lie undressed underneath one sheet. But when one finds it cooler here and when the negroes find it cold and some of them shiver and one hears from several sides: *Kɔɛ ha* (cold today), then it is still a fairly high temperature: 60-65°F at night and 80-85°F by day. However, during the last few days it looks by day a bit more like a European, warm summer day. With a refreshing breeze the air is less oppressive and hot than usual. I think, Moeteke, that this period from late November till the end of January could well be endured by you.

The negroes like a lot of sun, so it very soon becomes too cold for them. And of course these days they swathe themselves in more clothes than in earlier times and more than the villager is even now used to. Women are still mostly scantily dressed, at any rate they have the upper part of the body uncovered and put oil on it, which protects them both against sun and rain. But men mostly have moved away from nature a bit further, thanks to ostentation and a bit more pocket money. Men like to move around in wide, stately, heavy gowns.

¹ Hofstra probably refers to the then recently published *Celibaat* [Celibate] by the Flemish writer Gerard Walschap.

Last Wednesday I got a telegram from the Institute (from Oldham), saying that it agrees to my proposal to stay here till March. I am pleased with this because I can spend the time very usefully. Otherwise I would have had three months (because of the illness) less than my colleagues. And the last time I saw Dr Laird in Daru, he advised me once more not to return in the middle of the winter. I would like to return earlier in order to see you, and had originally been planning this. Actually on Tuesday I received a letter from Miss Brackett, telling me that they had instructed the Elder Dempster, in Freetown to give me a ticket for the ship I wanted to choose. She thought that I would return in December-January. They hadn't yet received my letter then. The next day I got the telegram from Oldham. It seems to me a nice time to return in March, Moeteke. Then nature begins to open again in Europe and here at that time it becomes more miserable with slowly starting thunderstorms and higher temperatures.

Yes, Moeteke, I love my work here and I am not sorry to have come here. It is a good experience of life too. I'd rather not be here forever, as a civil servant for example, but a limited period, with this type of work, is good. I haven't yet heard from Fortes and Nadel about the time of their return. I'll write to them. I expect that they will return about January, unless Nadel has permission to stay longer as well, something which he hoped for when he was in London.

I have now collected some 35 lawsuits. From these one gets a better idea about the judicial procedures here. And as a result of what we hear in each case, Conteh and I discuss several things, which of course leads one further again. There is so much, Moeteke. One would like to have three hands which would be able to write simultaneously. I like writing, but time and also tiredness sometimes "sets a limit on it".

Sunday morning.

Dear Moeteke, Now I have just had a cup of coffee from my boy. Perhaps you are also drinking coffee right now. It's about eleven o'clock, I think. I don't know the exact time, for it is difficult here to get a watch to keep time properly. My watch gains time or goes slowly. I can't get it to be accurate.

Moeteke, I have bought a car. You'll be astonished and perhaps a bit worried. However, it's really safe! I could buy a very suitable one for £60 (430 guilders). The car cost £30, is 4 years old and still in a very good state. It's a Morris, for five persons. I can always sell the car again for the same price, I think. I have bought it from D.C. Hancock from Kenema who wants to have a new one. I haven't a great need for a car, but I have often found it a nuisance to be so dependent on the lorry here, when once in a while I want to go somewhere and also for the letters. When I want to go anywhere, for example to Kenema, Daru or Segbwema and return the same day, I have to hire the lorry and that is rather expensive. And it is often quite difficult getting the letters off, when there isn't a big enough load for a "trip" on a particular morning. It therefore seemed better to me to be independent, when this opportunity came along. There is a "driver" here who is very competent and whom I have employed. It doesn't cost much in this country. Besides, I am going to teach myself to drive. That's a good diversion. Under the guidance of the driver of the lorry I have already steered from Hangha to Lago, halfway to Panguma. One advantage of the roads here is that there is hardly any traf-

fic. And people move well aside for fear. I don't often take the car, but when it's necessary, it's comfortable to be able to make use of it.

A week ago yesterday we collected the car in Kenema. Just the day before the election of a section chief had taken place in Kenema. A woman was elected! Female chiefs are no exception among the Mendi. Before the Europeans assumed political power here, there were even a few female paramount chiefs. One, in Moyamba, was very well-known.

I visited the new section chief in Kenema. She is an already old woman, but still hale and hearty and with strong features. She was still suffering a bit from the after-effects of smallpox. There were quite a few people around her. Two firm daughters among them, who will probably assist her with governing. There were three candidates, two men and this woman. One of the men became her speaker. The chieftainship had already been in her family a long time. Earlier her sister had been section chief. That sister, the first female section chief there, had now died. Remarkable, isn't it, the way one experiences things in the course of being out and about?

And yesterday I went to Segbwema with our chief. We took him to the hospital. He has been ill for several weeks. I wrote to you in one of the previous letters, that I have been to Daru with him about three or four times. It was settled with the doctor that he would stay a few weeks in Daru for further treatment. But a chief is very difficult about such things. So many influences are at work around him and our chief in particular, who is a fairly meek, suggestible man, has a difficult time. When everything had been arranged, and it was time for him to leave here, he refused to go. I found this rather annoying, but he was feeling a bit better and, in addition, the tax collection, which affects him of course and for which he is responsible begins soon. Last week, however, he fell ill again. All kinds of native medicines were tried. A soothsayer was fetched who, as is usual in such cases because he is always right, ascertained a sexual misdemeanour of some form or other, which had to be washed away with ceremonies. One whole day and night the doors of the chief's compound remained closed in order to keep others away from the ceremonies. But, the chief didn't recover. Then all his wives were called together to pray for him. But that didn't help either. The problem was that the poor man there with all his wives and brothers and visitors, who still come out with all kinds of legal cases, never gets any rest. People even seem to find rest dangerous, at least some believe this. When the chief dozed off, someone quickly pushed him awake, possibly fearing that otherwise he wouldn't wake up again at all. – The day before last, however, the dignitaries came to me and asked me again to deal with the business and the chief himself also wanted to discuss it with me. At first I didn't much fancy doing so, but I also felt sorry for the chief, who is a good man and has done much for me. With the help of some sensible dignitaries I managed to get him so far, that he consented to consult the doctor in Segbwema with me. As I heard behind the scenes, there was yet more difficulty getting him to stick to the decision, but yesterday morning he went with me, after all. We went in my car, with his own driver at the steering wheel. The chief confidently expected that he would return the same day and we left it at that. I thought: the doctor in Segbwema will be sure to keep him when we get there. And so it turned out. The doctor very strongly advised him not to return, because his

heart was fairly weak and he needed a period of rest – rest which he can't possibly get in Panguma, of course. Again, it took quite a lot of effort to get him to the point of agreeing to stay, but still it succeeded. A daughter of his, a girl of about 15 years old, who had just come home on holiday from school in Moyamba, and who was quite firm, was there and succeeded in pulling it off with her father.

This morning the chief's lorry followed with all sorts of people. A few women had to come, of course, for cooking food (although the doctor had said laughingly: no women, as for a week you don't have to eat). In addition there were a few dignitaries for discussing matters of the country and also as many of the numerous legitimate or illegitimate brothers of the chief as could possibly get a place in the lorry.

In the meantime people are glad that the chief is in the hospital. Yesterday, when I returned, the dignitaries came here to thank me. "If you hadn't been here, the chief would have died", they said. Yes, perhaps. In the case of a chief the difficulty is, as I said, that almost nobody dares to take a firm line. And when people see that the condition of the chief is hopeless, they take him into the "bush" to let him get better there or to let him die, according to whether nature is kind. Yesterday morning messengers were sent through the whole chiefdom, telling the dignitaries that the chief is ill. For if this isn't done, and the chief dies, a whole case against the responsible dignitaries here in Panguma would be brought before the court. On the other hand, if people in the chiefdom do not officially know that the chief is ill, they are not allowed to pay visits to the patient. Such a man would be asked: who has told you that the chief is ill? and he would be suspected of wanting to poison the chief. So you see, Moeteke, that being around the chief is a delicate business for negroes. Fortunately a European is able to step around these things and save the situation. In the meantime one learns much about people and conditions from such cases.

I had lunch in Segbwema with Mr and Mrs Frazer, business people. Mrs Frazer cut my hair. I really needed a haircut. When I arrived home I was, after an inspection of the kitchen, a bit annoyed with the boys because they had broken one of my rather few rules. This morning I heard from Conteh, that the boys had found me extremely angry. I am almost never angry, he said and the boys had sought a link between my anger and the fact that my hair had been cut! It's a belief here, that the person who cuts your hair through that process has an influence on your mind. Therefore a negro is very careful in selecting the person he asks to cut his hair. The boys now thought that Mrs Frazer was "hot of heart" (as people here call being quick to anger), because it had had an effect on me. Thus they transferred the guilt on to her. I wasn't part of it and their own violation of the rules too! So one discovers each day something new in this attractive and strange country, which one learns to love.

When yesterday I told the doctor my story with the chief, he laughed. He had also often had much trouble and bad luck. But everything is so human, Moeteke, and I have almost never had the feeling of being entirely strange here. Basically people are probably more or less the same everywhere; only here a bit more simple and open, for the European observer.

In the evening. The lorry with the people, who visited the chief in Segbwema, has returned with bad news. The condition of the chief was very bad and rather hopeless.

Poor man, I am sorry for him. One learns here to sympathize with the community and I am involved in so many things. Tomorrow I'll probably go with Rashid, the chief's brother, to Kenema, to the Provincial Commissioner, who has to be notified and who has to take certain measures in case the chief dies. And thereafter we are likely to go to Segbwema to see how he is. This evening the dignitaries from the whole chiefdom have been summoned by messengers to come here tomorrow. Early tomorrow we will probably first have a discussion about how matters should be further arranged.

Bye dear Moeteke of me. I think that you'll get this letter just before Christmas. I wish you a happy Christmas. Last year we were still together at Christmas, Moeteke. But when you get this letter, dear, it will already be moving towards another new year. And then there'll be a new view of the future and we will already be able to count the weeks. Bye dear Moeteke [...]

So much love from your Boy, who will get a letter from you again the day after tomorrow.

Panguma (via Hangha), 13-12-'34

My dear Moeteke,

I hope that I can also send you this letter with an interim post [...]

There is a bit of disorder now here in our chiefdom. Yesterday evening the chief died. Poor man. I was really touched by it all. I had shared many experiences with him. We collected him from Segbwema yesterday evening, with my car. The situation had become hopeless yesterday and in accordance with native custom people prefer the chief to die in his own chiefdom. That did happen. But we didn't reach Panguma in time. He died on the way. In our view it would have been better to have left him in the hospital till the end, but the doctor didn't want to insist when a few of the oldest members of the family wanted very much to bring him back, hoping too that native medicine could still help. It's a sad affair for such a family. The burial is this afternoon. – The speaker, Boakani, is now automatically regent chief until a new chief has been elected. My work isn't endangered by this. For the speaker is a good friend of mine, and whoever becomes chief will probably also be well-disposed towards me. Anyway, it will take months before such a new chief is elected. This whole business has made me share in the ups and downs of the people very closely, as you'll understand.

[...] Bye [...] Moeteke, much love from your Child.

Panguma, 22 December 1934

Dear Moeteke,

This is perhaps already the last letter that I will write to you this year. The year is drawing to an end quickly. When you receive this letter it will already be early January. And then we can already count the weeks again.

It will be Christmas tomorrow and the day after tomorrow. This year is the first time in my life that I won't observe anything of it. For life here will take its ordinary course. In one of the trading centres on the railway one would notice it, because the "stores" remain closed on Monday, but not here.

Now our chief has died, my plans are a bit different from what I'd first thought. I expected to be travelling with the chief through the chiefdom at Christmas, for the tax matters, but that isn't happening now. In our little country everything is a bit disordered of course. I hadn't expected to experience this. It really affected me, because I liked the chief rather a lot.

The burial took place a week ago on Thursday, somewhat a mixture of real Mendi and Christian forms. For the chief was associated with the church here.

This was already more than a week ago. And the matter of sadness soon gets lost when one asks the other question: who will now become chief, and all the discussions connected to it. There is a son whom the chief himself would have liked to see as his successor. He is a young man who worked in another part of Sierra Leone and who arrived home last Sunday evening. He is young and he looks sympathetic and strong-willed; he belongs to the more modern type who has been at school for a while. The first two nights after he arrived, he slept in my house to protect him a bit against too many visits. There is a strong party for him, but for him the fight is against his uncles, the brothers of his father, who claim the job. They say that it's now their turn to rule and they can't tolerate that "their child" rules ahead of them. It's really a fight between the old and the young guard. If one of these brothers could be a very good chief, then people would say yes, but the brothers are not excellent, and it will be difficult for them to get the votes from the chiefdom. The problem is that there are no brothers of the dead chief from the same mother. The brothers who are around are from the same father, but from different mothers. And only between children of the same mother is there a strong feeling of belonging together. Therefore this son of the dead chief distrusts his uncles. It's a difficult beginning for him, with lots of family matters and disputes, but he seems to be fairly wise. Of course I hear all the time information from different sides and I have been asked to act as an intermediary a few times. Within a few days everything will be set on a more regular path. Today the chiefs from neighbouring chiefdoms, who were staying here for the burial ceremonies, have left again. The ceremony lasts 40 days, but the 3rd, 7th and 40th are the most important days. There is not much going on during such a ceremony, but many gifts are given and distributed again, mainly food, rice and cows. Meat is only seldom eaten, but on such ceremonial days cows are given, killed and distributed. And dancing is an important part. One has to get used to that at first as a European, that people dance during and after a burial. The idea is that the chief, just like every Mendi man, loved dancing very much and one honours him best by dancing a lot. All important "devils" of the secret societies ("devils" are the wonderfully dressed bearers of the medicines of these secret societies. I'll send you pictures of them.) have been given the freedom to dance, and they have done their best the whole week, once even all night long, till six o'clock in the morning. Now that has ended for the time being.

People here believe that during these 40 days of mourning the dead person can now and then appear to people, especially in dreams. Perhaps this is sometimes mis-used or at any rate more or less amusing things occur, like the one we experienced this week.

The missionary here, a Creole man (the mission here is American, and has negroes from Freetown in its various stations. The management is American and lives in Freetown), told a meeting of dignitaries that the dead chief had spoken in a dream to his [the missionary's] mother. The dead chief said in this dream that he wished that the mission would continue to exist here with the present leader. Whoever becomes chief, should support the mission. People shouldn't worry too much about the election of a new chief. One of the Ngeles² (his family) would become chief. He also wanted there to be more and more dancing. And, as a more or less added ending, the chief had been angry because the mission hadn't received a sufficient part of the distributed meat. – When the pastor had left, the acting chief Boakani asked me what I thought of the dream. I asked if more people had had dreams about receiving too small a portion of meat. People laughed then and chief Musa (from a neighbouring chiefdom) explained to me that Mendi believe that the dead person appears in dreams. People do believe the essentials of the dream, but thought that the pastor had added the end about the meat off his own bat. Boakani later said to me that he didn't believe much of it. But Mendi are fairly wise and cautious. The bit about dancing has been taken to heart and thus people have danced again. The elements concerning the mission and the meat have been left for what they are for the time being. And tomorrow it'll be forgotten again. For a Mendi man doesn't much trust a Creole. You see, Moeteke, what peculiar manifestations Christianity can adopt here, when such missionaries are standing behind it. He may perhaps to a large extent believe the dream, but it's not the American view, I think.

But apart from that, it's real Mendi again that people still place some food in the chief's house every day and leave it there some four or five hours, as food for him. People believe that he eats from it.

Conteh found the dream of the missionary shameless, but for the rest he also strongly believes in such dreams and says that the dead chief "is keeping very quiet" because he has appeared in so few dreams so far.

Sunday. At first I thought that it was Christmas today, but now I see on the calendar that Christmas is on Tuesday and Wednesday. Last Christmas I was with you. Then we were still looking ahead to the great experiment. Although I am not with you now, we can almost be more cheerful than at that time, for already I'll be with you within a few weeks now and then we were anticipating the departure.

I have received a letter from Nadel from the ship. He is already on the way to England. I first thought that he would stay a bit longer too, but he wrote to me that during recent weeks they hadn't been feeling very energetic anymore and were a bit "down", so that it now became time for them "Schluss zu machen" [to end] with West Africa. I have had a sort of interlude through the illness, probably because of how I feel myself

² A Ngele is a dancing devil. See Gordon Innes, *A Mende-English dictionary*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1969. With thanks to Paul Richards.

to be stronger and still entirely cheerful. This week I have been in bed for a few days with a heavy cold. One wouldn't expect a cold in this country, would you, but there have been quite some changes of temperature with cold nights. I found it quite good to stay in bed for two days, otherwise one hangs around a bit, and one also somewhat stops the visits, which otherwise happen regularly in these unusual days. And it gives you an opportunity to do some writing. Now I have got rid of the cold.

I am glad, Moeteke, that my letters give you pleasure. My good mood will certainly last, although now I have had to write about the death of the chief etc. If it goes on like this, I can quite easily continue till March. Except for the odd sceptical moment when I was very ill, I haven't yet been sorry that I have come here and that we have undertaken this. I believe that the outcome will be good. One learns all sorts of things this way, for your experience of life, as well as for the scientific value of the trip. You shouldn't worry about it at all, Moeteke. We are now busy with this work and do it as long as the opportunity is there. I am not really apprehensive about the time that follows. We will also find a way then by one or the other means. I believe that because one has developed more inner strength it will happen somehow. Even if one has to do somewhat lesser work temporarily. As long as one has enough reserves to stand above the things, everything goes along better. Looking at it from here and after these experiences I am more optimistic about it than before. Perhaps the tropical life makes you more optimistic, but perhaps it gives you also a rather accurate view and balance. It's almost as if something has fallen off me through this illness. Another thing that has perhaps taught me something is that I always have to act independently, as head of my house, and also in my work. I can consult, with Conteh for example, but in the end one has just one's own responsibility in all kinds of things and for daily decisions. One has to act continuously for oneself, and for others. That is what the life of a "big man" involves.

You ask in your letter if the nurse Ndoko is still with me. No, after my illness he went back to the hospital in Segbwema. I don't any longer have a proper visiting hour for ill people now. I help the people when they come, with simple things such as a laxative (Epsom salts), capsicum (with which one can rub the skin against pain caused by cold, rheumatism, and which the people like very much), etc. Two or three people a day at most come now. When there are serious cases, I somehow send them to the hospital in Daru or Segbwema with a letter for the doctor. Of course without a nurse it is difficult to do more. And it is very hard to get hold of a nurse who knows the work. Before (my illness) and afterwards I have treated some wounds and had good results. Since my illness I have treated about twenty, if I may express it so technically, small and big ones. The Peru Balsam has done wonders.

Two months ago an old man, who had tried to take his life, was brought to me. At the time when slavery was still legal, the man had been chief of a village and the inhabitants were his slaves. Now they are free; they had elected a man from their own group as village chief and the former slave-owner has in his turn become the subordinate of one of his slaves! So in this small world also there is tragi-comedy. The man is too old now to work and in order to get some money for the tax he took palm kernels from the forest, which had been cut from the tree by someone else. That is forbidden. The person who takes kernels out of the tree, is the owner, even if he lets them lie a

few days in the wood. The other person brought him before the village court and because the old man wasn't able to pay the fine, people wanted to put him in the stocks. I don't know the Dutch word. A prison doesn't exist. When one deprives somebody of his freedom for a short while, one places him with his legs in wooden blocks. So he sits from a few hours to three days until the family comes to pay the fine. However, this old man was, as a former village chief, too proud to suffer this from one of his former slaves and just when people were going to bring him in to the barri to put him in the stocks, he cut himself in his arm. It was already very deep, it lay completely open and it looked as if almost half the arm had been cut through. I thought that the man couldn't possibly survive that. It should have been sewed together of course. The only thing I could do was to fill up the wound with Peru balsam and really, it has helped. I said to the man: don't touch the wound at all, otherwise you'll die. Apparently he hasn't done it. Last week he was pleased to show me the arm. The wound was completely healed and closed. There was only a small scar. – And now I have a man, who, while climbing a palm tree and cutting the kernels, gave himself a very deep cut between thumb and finger with his chopping-knife. I have again dripped Peru balsam in it and it seems to be healing. Sometimes, in bad cases one can, of course, do nothing. The day before yesterday a man was brought here, a hunter, who had shot himself in his hand. A few fingers were already halfway off. I said: no, I can't do anything about it, the man has to go to hospital immediately. Luckily the people are already getting used to that idea and dignitaries saw to it that the man was quickly taken to Segbwema.

A month ago I got a snake-bite to deal with for the first time without a nurse. It was a difficult moment for me to make a cut at the place of the bite, because I don't like to see blood. But luckily the bite healed.

The attitude of the people to such things varies. I like to help people, but find it difficult to look at wounds, etc. But a man like Dr Laird in Daru is hardly affected by that. A doctor gets quite used to it, I think. When I went several times to Daru with the chief, I twice saw an operation there. However, I found it hard to keep my stomach under control. However, Dr Laird said, "I enjoy cutting into a body." Nevertheless, he is indeed a very nice, gentle person. But he likes everything that requires work with his hands, putting together and dismantling machines, instruments, etc. for example. But he finds it hard to write a letter. When I was there with my illness, a message arrived from the D.C. saying that his family had telegraphed for further information. For Dr Laird hadn't written home and to his fiancée for two months! "I simply can't write. I don't know what to write", he said to me. All the while he isn't lazy, but very busy with his work.

Oh, I am chatting about all sorts of things, aren't I Moeteke? Oh yes, about the burial ceremony here I still wanted to tell you this. A Mendi chief is always buried in the middle of the night and so it was here too. At midnight the chief was buried. This is an old custom which had a particular value in the times when there were many hostilities. For people wanted to keep secret that the chief was dead and the place where he was buried for as long as possible. Otherwise the enemy would be able to disinter the body and use it as a magic charm. Also to prevent disorder, which especially in former times was set off by the death of a chief, his death is only made public after the funeral and

after the dignitaries have had an opportunity to arrange all kinds of affairs and to be master of the situation. The chief died on Wednesday evening last week and on Thursday night he was buried. The whole of Thursday it was silent in the place. Nobody, not even his own wives and children, was allowed to express any sorrow openly, by weeping and so on. And nobody was allowed to say that the chief was dead. Just before the burial, for example, there was a meeting of the dignitaries and I was sent for. The acting chief Boakani explained the aim of the meeting to me in a short speech and said: "As you know, Blama (my Mendi name), the chief is ill. Therefore we have to discuss a few matters." The body also didn't lie in his own house, but in the second rest house here, in order to prevent the women from starting the ceremonial weeping. Only on the morning after the burial was the death officially announced with a gunshot and immediately thereafter one heard the wailing of the women. It is curious to see that, Moeteke. His wives sat against his houses or threw themselves against the grave. And his singer sang a lonely song, accompanied by a musical instrument: "Chief, how often have I sung for you. But when I now say your name, you don't answer me."

Now I am going to close the letter and wait for your letter, which will come on Tuesday. Bye my very dear Moeteke. [...]

Your Boy.

Panguma, second day of Christmas 1934. Morning

My dear Moeteke,

Yesterday I received your letters and the little book and the newspapers. That was a nice surprise at Christmas. Thank you so much, my dear. I'll write you again soon. Perhaps I can get this letter off soon. Bye dearest Moeteke. All is well with me. [...]

Greetings from your Child.

I have just received an invitation from the government man for education matters – Director of Education – to attend a "round table conference" to discuss the reissuing of a Mendi grammar. There is one by Sumner, but that is sold out. The government wants to develop a new edition, but perhaps with a rather more modern basis, I think. Sumner's book uses an old spelling. Sumner is a Mendi man whom I met after I arrived as one of the first prominent "natives" in Freetown. Perhaps you remember it. This conference will be on 17 January. Around that time therefore I will be in Freetown for a few days. I'll probably leave here on 14 January. This conference probably won't last more than one morning, but if there is other work for me to do – in January there are all kinds of missionary conferences in Freetown – then I'll stay on a few days.

[...] I'll soon write again, Moeteke. Bye.

Your Boy.

Panguma, New Year's Eve 1934

My dear Moeteke,

Now it's New Year's Eve, the end of an eventful year for us. What are you doing now, Moeteke? Perhaps looking back on everything. And, notwithstanding the many difficult things, I think you will still be quietly grateful, dear. If only for the fact that we have been saved for each other, for instance. And because we got through this year, although it was hard. It has also taught us much, Moeteke, an experience which perhaps later we wouldn't have liked to miss.

Time and again I have to look at the calendar to check the date. From the calendar I know that today is the last day of the year. Otherwise I wouldn't notice it. Everything goes on as normal here, without the traditional interruptions we know in Europe. There is indeed something in those interruptions when one is in the middle of the hectic European life. But here, where one has one's own work and where there is a certain regular and fixed division by the Sundays, one needs few other interruptions.

Just now someone came to me with a little child that has been crying a lot for a few days and has backache. These are difficult cases. I know very little about small children. The person asked me for a "purge", castor oil, to get the intestines free and I have given it. This was the only thing I could do.

Yesterday I had a calm Sunday. I have been out a few times, to the forest in the direction of Panguma, where people were busy preparing the palm tree kernels, to boil the oil out of them, etc. I found it interesting to see that. I think that, after my return, I am going to write an article for the Institute's journal about the meaning of palm trees for the people here.³ Perhaps I have already told you at some point that palm kernels and palm oil are the main export article and, therefore, the people here very much depend on the prices of the kernels and oil on the international market for the little money they get.

It was very nice and cool in the forest, protected from the sun which is burning hot in the open villages and towns. Conteh was with me and a few small girls and boys went with us; they filled the journey with their nice chatter and jokes and laughter. One has to cross a small river to the forest. And across that river there is a primitive bridge of a few narrow tree trunks. The first time I crossed it, I found it quite something and in the middle I started to crawl. Later it could be done more quickly. The people here are very skilful on such little bridges. Quick as monkeys they are. Lanky boys climb so quickly in trees and play as baboons (a kind of ape) there. The children who were with us were, however, still too young for those daring things. On the way there Conteh carried them over the bridge, on the way back they tried it themselves and it went well. Only one small boy, not very daring, did it very cautiously and stooping a bit. The other children made fun of it later on and imitated him, and the boy himself actively participated in this fun. One of the boys and a girl used the opportunity to

³ See Hofstra 1937b. The article about the social significance of the oil palm was not published in *Africa*, but in *Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie*.

Photos 5.1-5.5



(5.1) Climbing a palm tree, Panguma late 1934



(5.2) Climbing a palm tree, Panguma late 1934



(5.3) Drying the palm kernels, Panguma late 1934



(5.4) Woman extracting oil from palm kernels, Panguma late 1934



(5.5) Woman extracting oil from the palm kernels, Panguma late 1934

have a closer look at my house. They stroked my arm cautiously, probably wondering if such a white arm has a normal skin. These children are charming. And surely children are the same everywhere, I believe so, Moeteke. These negro children are daring and frank when you get to know them a little.

And some manifestations of femininity will also be the same everywhere. Yesterday morning Conteh came to me and said: "Lucie (his wife) said to me this morning that she wants to go to see her parents (who live in another chiefdom, near Daru) this morning. She had already started packing, but I have told the lorry drivers not to take her."

Half an hour later when we were in Panguma for something or other, Lucie passed us, with a basket with some clothes and a cushion on her head (women and men carry all loads on their heads here). She was going towards the road to Hangha. Conteh smiled a bit in a way suggesting this amazed him and at the same time as if he didn't know what to do. When Lucie had nearly reached the road leading to Hangha, Conteh called out to a few men who stood there, to take the basket from her head. The men did it and Lucie put up some resistance, but then she spurred on, without her stuff. Apparently, Conteh was still a bit alarmed about it and consulted an old man who was close to where we were. The old man said: "It's best to go after her and to persuade her to come back. Then let her go with the lorry in a few days". An hour later Conteh went after her on his bike. She was already in Giehun. An eloquent and friendly Mohammedan there knew how to induce Lucie to go back (a neutral third quickly gets called in as justice of the peace in all kinds of situations, including domestic problems). In the afternoon Conteh and Lucie came to me more or less cheerfully. I first thought that Lucie would be somewhat unhappy because she hadn't got her way. However, it wasn't like that. She seemed satisfied, though not triumphant. Yesterday I asked Conteh: "Well, how is Lucie now?" He said laughing: "She is happy now. She wanted to test me. Since I went after her, she knows that I love her enough. Mendi women do that sometimes to test the man". "It's inconvenient and time-consuming", Conteh said philosophically. He has already had a long training in marriage affairs. In our country something like that in a village would quickly become a small scandal, but here it's hardly found special. Passers-by asked Conteh, when Lucie walked away: "Where is your wife going?" "She walks away", Conteh said. But such a thing is taken in fairly good humour here. It's also seen in an easy-going way as a community matter.

I intended to write a short interim letter to you, Moeteke. By now it has already become rather long. Perhaps I'll go to Hangha tomorrow and post the letter. Perhaps I'll have a stroke of luck with a ship. Bye my dear Moeteke, now the new year is beginning, with new hope and a broad outlook. Do be courageous, my little old Moeteke of mine. Everything will turn out well.

Your own Boy.

Panguma, 5-1-35

My dear Moeteke,

Now we are already into January. I am reminded of the same time last year, when I arrived in this country. But now my situation is completely different. I am already so used to everything. At first such an experience, the arrival in Africa, is rather strange. One realises that only later.

Moeteke, this week I have been out to a village for three days. When you look on the map, N.E. of Panguma, you see a place Banda and further on Sabama. In between lies a small village, Banda Giema (not on the map), where my boy David Fama comes from. I very much wanted to really see a village and experience it for a few days. So I decided to do this. It's a stiff walk to get there. On the map it doesn't look so far, but it's four hours walking. And walking isn't as easy here as along a European road. The paths are really narrow through the bush. You always have to walk one behind the other, and often it also goes up and down over hills, frequently with stones on the path, and many small rivers to cross. I am used to everything, except for the strange little bridges here. Fama has often carried me over them.

It was nice to be there. I made a list of the population there and collected information about all kinds of interesting things. There are ten small houses, of which one had just been finished, but wasn't yet inhabited. I stayed the two nights there. Life goes on agreeably there and in the evening and in the early morning men sit around fires, for the Harmattan has made it cold during the nights. And during daytime the young men go to the bush for a bit of work and the somewhat older men are not busy at this time of the year, now the work on the rice fields is at a stand-still. They talk a bit, walk about, repair something or lie in a hammock.

When one is among them like this, one also sees better how all kinds of customs work. I knew, for example, that when a man in a village has to do some work which he can't do on his own, for example building a house, he asks the other villagers to help him. Another time he helps them in return. A young man, Boakani, had his own house on which the clay still had to be spread. On Thursday evening he announced "with a loud voice", that he wanted to do this work tomorrow and he asked every man to help him. I found it interesting to see what followed. Four young men helped him. The others didn't come or said that they had to do something else. When the work was not making much progress Boakani became a bit angry and sat down dejectedly. The others, who were helping him, then said to him: "It's your work, if you are already getting angry, what should we be doing then. Let's deal with it." Then they got on with it again. But the women also intervened and said that Boakani was lazy, because he had sat down on the job.

You see, Moeteke, when one finds described in an ethnological book – if a villager has important work to do, he asks for help from other villagers and people offer mutual help to each other – one only gets an abstract idea of such a thing. It's better to have seen it once and to know that within such general rules the human factor also plays a role.

I have received the newspapers and Den Doolaard's book *Moeteke*. Thank you so much. [...] It's a nice, lively book, though different from the average Dutch novel, isn't it? Last Tuesday I sent you a telegram as a New Year's greeting. Did you receive it *Moeteke*? I enjoyed arranging it and I sent it from Kenema because the new station-master in Hangha doesn't know about such special things. He was pleased that I went to Kenema with it. And at the same time I made a visit to the D.C. there.

Now I am going to close the letter. Next Monday I am going to Freetown, where I expect to stay about a week for the Mendi grammar conference. I am really well, dear *Moeteke*. [...] I like my work and am managing here fine. Don't worry. Bye *Moeteke*, kisses from

Your own Child.

Panguma, 6-1-35

My dear *Moeteke*

Again a short letter to tell you that I have received your intermediate letter of 15 December. The ships do take post. Perhaps not the Dutch ones, but at any rate the German Doermann line does, and that ship goes twice a month, so perhaps there'll be an opportunity once in a while.

I was very glad to have your letter, *Moeteke*, and I'll write more soon. This is a small happy greeting from your own true Child.

Freetown, 22 January 1935

My dear *Moeteke*,

I have a few bits of news to tell you. In the first place that I have booked a berth on the ship that leaves here on 21 March. I believe it's the "Appam". We arrive in Plymouth and London, on 30 or 31 March. *Ngewɔ jahu* (with God's protection [God willing]), as the Mendi always add to their plans. I travel together (in one cabin) with Sanders, the missionary from Segbwema. That's rather nice. Then one knows at any rate what company one will have. In March, April the ships are normally fairly crowded, and it isn't nice to share a cabin with a businessman who drinks whisky till late in the evening. I'll have to be in London for 3 or 4 days and then I hope to come to see you as soon as possible, *Moeteke*, via Hook of Holland. It already seems to be so soon, now one has fixed a date! Now you can already count the days, *Moeteke*!

I arrived here last Tuesday, exactly a week ago. We have had a few meetings and have made a decision with the government about the new script (spelling of African languages, as propagated by Westermann). This script will be used in further school publications, etc. by the government. We have in addition formed a language committee, of which I (for Mendi) am a member, that will approve for publication further gov-

ernment publications in native languages. That's a step forward towards more unity in this field.

The Director of Education has also introduced me to the new Governor and the new Colonial Secretary. The new Governor is a fairly interesting and interested man. We had a conversation of about one hour with him. It was all in all a rather nice outing. This time I was in one of the two small hotels here, because Horstead wasn't in Fourah Bay College when I arrived here. He returned here from leave on Saturday. That hotel – the Grand Hotel – is fairly good, Moeteke. It's also really good enough for a lady for a few nights, I mean when you come here. A Swiss couple run it and it is clean. They are still young people, married a year ago. The wife suffers quite a bit from headaches, perhaps because of the climate.

Yesterday I would have left here again, but for the fact that I developed a bit of fever on Saturday. I think that I have caught a heavy cold, by first sweating a lot and then sitting down for a conversation. In normal circumstances one probably wouldn't feel it so much, but I appeared to have a few malaria parasites in the blood, which could now develop. I felt pretty bad on Sunday and therefore I asked Dr Laird (the doctor from Daru who has been transferred to Freetown) to come. Initially he found my temperature to be 101°F., but that has now already gone down to between 98°F and 99°F. He thought it best for me to have a few days in the European hospital where one has good care and where there is a doctor as well as two European nurses. The doctor says that I will soon be all right again. I hope to go back again next week. It's lucky on the one hand, that I got it here, because one has good medical assistance here to suppress it immediately. So you don't have to worry at all about it. Every European here is susceptible to such a light attack of malaria.

Mr Lipscombe, the man who I met on the ship and with whom I visited schools is also here in the hospital. He has been very ill and for a few days hovered between life and death with a special type of fever. He is now just out of danger, but still as good as unconscious. It's quite awful for his wife, who is making her first tour.

It's a very nice, quiet place here, high up, on Hill Station.

Now something of a quite different order, Moeteke. Two weeks ago I was admitted as a member of the Porro [Poro],⁴ which is the general secret society for men among the Mendi. It is highly exceptional for a European to become a member, as you can understand. Only one or two other cases have been documented. One has to be trusted by the people, because members are not allowed to talk about the ceremonies with non-members, a bit like the freemasons.⁵ With this difference, however, in effect every Mendi man is a member of this society. Only boys, before they become initiated, and of course women and strangers are not members. Non-members have, so to speak, no political rights among the Mendi. They are regarded as children and can't hold a position. Only by becoming initiated and undergoing a training for some four months, does a boy become a man and a qualified citizen. We were there for less time of course, four days. It had always been the intention of the deceased chief to initiate

⁴ Porro should, and will hereafter, be spelled as Poro.

⁵ In the mid-1940s, anthropologist Kenneth Little refused to become initiated in the Poro because of this obligation to secrecy. Little 1967: 9.

me at the same time as his son, who lived in another part of the country and had visited schools and who hadn't yet become a member. Once the chief had died, I first thought that nothing would come of it anymore, but the son is now in Panguma, and the elders deemed it wise to have him initiated. Out of respect for the dead chief I was admitted as well. And at the same time also Rashid, the brother of the chief, and a few others who had been at school and weren't yet members. One lives four days at a place in the bush and there are some ceremonies. I'll tell you more about it when I come home. The advantage for me is, that I have, through this, so to say, acquired citizenship. One is also allowed to participate in all the discussions of the men. It was funny as, when we returned from the "bush", we were brought ceremoniously into Panguma. They carried Rashid and even me, in a hammock, as is customary with chiefs. You would have really laughed if you had seen the whole spectacle, Moeteke. We were dressed in gowns and some of the chief's wives sent me jewels that had been worn by their children when they became members. Those jewels may only be worn by children of a chief. One gets amber around the arms and a silver chain with leopard teeth around one's neck, for good luck. One remains dressed up in this way for four days. It was altogether a fairly tiring business of course and not as comfortable as in a European house. Perhaps I picked up a bit of some malaria there.

Yesterday, as you will understand, my birthday passed very calmly and unnoticed. It was a bit joyless because it was exactly the day I went to hospital, but, as you know, I don't very much care for the ceremonial side of birthdays and I just know that people here simply do not ask much for themselves, in fact very little. Now I have already had two birthdays here, Moeteke. It's a somewhat strange life sometimes, but I still wouldn't have wanted to miss the experience.

It has ended satisfactorily in the Saar region, hasn't it, at least without conflicts. The people won't be very enthusiastic about Hitler, but at any rate it's better that there was a large majority.

The doctor told me this morning, that he found nothing in my urine and stools. I still have a slight temperature, but that will be gone in one or two days. He says that I can go back on Monday or Wednesday next week. This doctor, Dr Walls, is known everywhere as exceptionally meticulous. Dr Laird told me that if you ask Dr Walls what he will be doing two months from today, for example at half past one in the afternoon, he'll be able to tell you!

Now, dear, dear Moeteke, I so much hope that you are well again. Don't worry about me at all. I am careful. And I will come home soon!

Your own true Child.

Freetown, Sunday 27 January 1935

My dear Moeteke,

Now it is Sunday again, still early in the morning. I am lying in my little bed writing to you, and I hope that this note can still leave with an interim post. I saw that a German ship is leaving tomorrow.

I am much better now. I am almost feeling as well as before. In a few days I hope to be discharged again. I'll then wait another two days before I return to Panguma, so it will be next Friday, I think.

Mr Lipscombe, about whom I wrote you in my last letter, has unfortunately died. I think that he had some other underlying disease, not particularly a tropical disease. It's a pity, he was an intelligent man and he therefore had a rather difficult time in his department. Brains are of little use when you are a colonial civil servant. It can even be harmful to your promotion! He was in any case planning to leave the service in a few months. But that is not how it has turned out. It's most distressing for his young wife. They were married only a year ago.

It's a quiet area here on Hill Station. By the way, I wouldn't like to live in Freetown. In a way it's half way to being in Europe. And here people long either to go back to the real Europe, or to the "bush". Being among the Mendi it's nicer and more free, I feel myself more "at home" there.

I am reading a nice book, "Personal matters" by Wells.⁶ It's very funny and I have laughed a lot reading it. A nice satire on all sorts of social customs.

[...] Don't worry about me at all. I am rather tough and I can cope quite well here. I have been very well these past weeks. Such a short interruption, caused by a bit of fever, is after all not so unusual. Several people said, before this happened, that I was looking so well. They will soon be saying that again. However, I am glad that I haven't become a doctor. I would have a feeling for the research side, but not much for the daily life of hospitals, I believe, or for all sorts of ailments.

Bye dear Moeteke, I long to be with you really soon now. But it won't be so long any more. [...]

Your Child

Freetown, 30-1-1935

My dear Moeteke,

I am completely better now. I would have been allowed to leave the hospital here on Wednesday afternoon, but I have postponed my departure till Monday morning. I would have had to wait for a train till Friday, and I thought that it would be better to enjoy the sea air here and to work quietly for a while and also to pick up the post here tomorrow. It's quiet here and I can go through my notes. In Panguma that is often difficult because one is so often disturbed, because there is something to do or because one has visitors. It is almost a similar position to yours at the time you were in "Vech-toever". One is almost never alone and never sure of the time one has. This has its good side, for it also reveals a certain empathy with the people, but it can sometimes be disruptive to quiet work.

⁶ This may well have been *Certain personal matters: a collection of material, mainly autobiographical* by H.G. Wells (1898).

I am reading the book by Künkel that you gave me.⁷ It gives me good material to think about problems with which I also struggle in my discipline, of course. I have just conceived the plan to write a book later, about the basic concepts of the social sciences.⁸ I was pleased to see, that Künkel has dealt with a similar problem in relation to human psychology. It was “anregend” [stimulating] for me and I often have a need for theoretical literature, to sharpen my thoughts, literature preferably as sharp as possible. There are in Künkel’s book also some “slips of the pen”, for example where he speaks about primitive people. I am always amazed how easily, as if in between two glasses of beer, scholars speak about primitive people. With the same ease and uninfluenced by knowledge, like the “man in the street” offers a summary about “the” German or “the” Englishman. Künkel’s book is somewhat hurriedly and lightheartedly written, but it is worth thinking through.

Freetown is really a nice place, Moeteke. Not the place itself, which is “terribly hot”, but the environment. For example, a fresh sea wind often blows up here on Hill Station. One looks out on the sea, sees beautiful sunsets, just like in Europe. It’s nice to have an open outlook again. In the Protectorate the low bush is generally so dense that one can see nothing. One sees only the road and always immediately alongside it the green forest begins. This is only penetrable for hunters and people who climb in the oil palms. In a place like Panguma I am fairly privileged because it’s a bit higher there and there are hills around it.

There are good roads here on Hill Station too. I have just made a substantial walk and breathed in real forest air. In the Protectorate we also have forests, but also low bush which is fairly new and doesn’t give the nice aroma of old trees, but a rather peculiar earthy smell. On the other hand there are also all kinds of advantages “up-country”, compared with Freetown. One lives there more freely, more in a real culture. Here it is a cliquy culture, so in between Europe and Africa; you can understand that, can’t you, just like with most people who have worked in our Indies and have remained completely untouched by knowledge of Indian life. The people here, especially ladies, who have never been in the Protectorate, sometimes have such a strange idea of the life there. They think it is very wild and uncomfortable and lonely, so lacking in company and radio and conversation and everything that makes life so precious when the brain is empty and cricket and tennis have become a religion. One has to have a sense of humour to shrug off this narrow-mindedness. At the same time it is instructive for me to observe all this, because later I want to write a book about colonial politics and a general analysis of the attitude of Europeans towards primitive peoples as it reflects in the behaviour and the world of ideas of Europeans.

The English are on the whole mild in their judgment, not hard on natives, good and humane in their treatment, but, as far as I can see they are lazy about using their brains and not truly interested. It’s difficult to get to know the English, also because, for a continental person, their conversation is often so irritatingly sweet and insignificant, with only sports, theatre, animals and other marginal aspects of life being per-

⁷ This may well have been one of F. Künkel’s volumes on applied characterology.

⁸ Hofstra wouldn’t write this book, but he did write articles on the concept of function (1946), normality (1950) and rationality (1969).

mitted topics of conversation. The English who live in the Protectorate are often different. They have had more contact with reality and say something about their feelings and thoughts, as well as being more interested. Sometime I would like to see what it is like in the [Dutch] Indies. The conventional Dutchman generally won't have a more lively mind. Apart from this half-culture, I love the tropics, Moeteke, the people, the sun and the unpopulated space. I believe that I have been born for the tropics. But after seeing the sea and high trees I also really long to wander along our beach, Moeteke, and through our woods. I'll have trouble getting used to the city again, I think.

In about six weeks I'll already be having to get ready for the journey. Time is going rapidly now. I won't do much "trekking" any more. I have to use this period to check what material I have. Moreover, I have yet to see the schools in Bo and a place north of Bo and the agricultural station in Mano. I have an invitation from the chief of a neighbouring chiefdom to see his territory. He was going to show me everything, as far as possible. It's a nice idea, but I'd better postpone it for two years. Now as a member of the Poro, one has more access to all kinds of things.

In an infirmary such as this one here it is like being in a hospital, comings and goings and a fairly mixed company. A nice young man, a sergeant, but not much military minded, is here now. Yesterday we sunbathed together on the beach. Sunbathing in January, something to envy a bit, isn't it Moeteke! There is also an engineer here, a quiet man, who reads a lot, and a nice old man who is chief steward on a ship, but needs some rest. He is an old gentleman of the sort one would wish to have as a grandfather. It's a pity that he still has to work for his bread at his age. He had quite a lot of money, but started a business on the continent and lost everything. Then he had to start all over again and now he can't see an end to his drudgery. He has already been around the world four times, knows our country too. And then there also is a young man, who is a riddle and a burden for all of us. He has a wound on his hand, is a mate on a ship, has a fallen-in mouth, is unusually restless. He plunges in at every conversation, walks back and forth and is frightfully embarrassed with himself. He is not quiet for a moment. I think that he isn't OK in his head. This afternoon he hit a native and the other patients have seized on this as a means of keeping him quiet with the fear of the risk of imprisonment. Hitting a native is strictly forbidden in British territory, unlike in the French colonies. If a civil servant commits even a very minor offence of that kind, he is immediately removed from the colony. Last year an officer had to give up his job because of such a thing.

Saturday morning. My dear Moeteke. It seems that an additional ship is about to leave. I therefore quickly stop. [...]

Your Child.

Freetown, 3-2-35

My dear Moeteke,

Yesterday I received your letter of 19 January, in which you wrote that you are ill. Of course it gave me a fright at first, but fortunately you wrote that you are feeling better again [...]

Here everything is the same. Early tomorrow I'll go back to Panguma again. The doctor said this morning that I was looking well and had no anaemia. A big difference from last summer. When Dr Laird saw me two weeks ago and took a blood sample from me, he was amazed by the deep colour of the blood. He said: "last year it was almost water." I feel much stronger in myself now than at that time.

The restless man has gone. Yesterday he was sent back on a ship to England, which might spare him imprisonment and further trouble.

Last night I was invited to dinner by Mrs Lipscombe (whose husband died a week ago) and Miss Coops, a nice lady who works at the Department of Education here. Mrs Lipscombe was brave, but of course it has been a big blow for her. Next week they will both leave for England. In one way the death was a kind of comfort for her because even if her husband had survived, his brain would probably have been damaged. It was "yellow fever" [...].

And now I am going to the beach to sunbathe with the sergeant and the old chief steward. If only you could do so too, Moeteke.

You write about travelling part of the way to meet me [...] That would be nice of course, but it would be too tiring for you now. Let's save the money for a trip in the summer. I would so much like to see Germany or Switzerland again with you, or Scotland. I am already coming to you soon. Just wait quietly for me in Holland. I'll cross from England as soon as possible.

It was nice on the beach this afternoon. After four o'clock the sun is not too hot and one can enjoy it till about six o'clock.

The snapshot is nice, isn't it my dear. I didn't get the newspapers yesterday, but they'll have landed in the train mail, so I'll probably get them on Tuesday in Hangha.

This letter is not so long, not much is happening here, Moeteke. I hope that my two interim letters will reach you in good time. [...]

So much love from your Boy.

Panguma, 5-2-35

My dear Moeteke,

Now I am already safely back in Panguma. The journey was easy and pleasant. In Bo I saw the director of the so-called Bo school [for sons of chiefs], which is still on my programme. It's a school for the education of chiefs. I travelled from Bo to Blama with Dr Johnson, who treated me last summer in Freetown. He is now in Bo.

It's nice to be back again in the "bush" and among acquaintances. I prefer life in the free "bush" to Freetown. Here everything is the same. The contest for a new chief is still going on and will probably last a few more months. The D.C. happens to be here for two days. That's rather nice for me. He is a good man with whom one can talk. The people here were, of course, pleased to see me again. This morning the usual crowd of welcoming visitors came again.

In the week of 25 February to 2 March I have to do some "trekking". On the Monday I go to Bo, where I'll stay the night with Dr Johnson. On Tuesday, a visit to the Bo school. On Wednesday to Mongeri (north of Bo), where there is a school too, and where I have to be for the Institute. On Thursday I go to Njala (north of Mano, which lies west of Bo), and where the agricultural station is. I am going there for a talk about all sorts of Mendi agricultural affairs, palm trees, etc. I want to know the scientific European view on a few things. On Friday I return to Bo and on Saturday I am "home" again, in Panguma.

All is well with me, Moeteke. It is already warm here. Today it was 90°F.! That is 10 degrees more than three weeks ago. And so it goes on steadily upwards till April. [...] Coolness is an unknown luxury now, unless one is in Freetown on the beach. But I can cope well with it and now already feel so much at home in this country and climate.

I'll post this note tomorrow – perhaps it will reach you in between the usual mailings. Bye my dear Moeteke. [...]

Your own Child.

Panguma, 14 February 1935

My dear Moeteke,

This evening I got your letter from 25-26 January with an extra mail. [...]

There is not much news from here. Life here goes on as usual. The election of a new chief will probably take a few more weeks. It will be July or August, I think. In the meantime the candidates and their supporters are busy trying to gain support. The decision actually rests, subject to approval by the government, in the hands of about fifty so-called "tribal authorities", the dignitaries of the chiefdom. The trick for a candidate is to gain the majority of them on his side. I think that the son of the dead chief has the best chance. He is still young, but the chiefdom favours him out of a sort of gratitude towards his father, who was good to the people. But the brothers of the dead chief don't want his son to become chief. They want the job for themselves. "A son can't ever reign before his father", they say. For in Mendi the brother of your father is not described as your uncle, but also as your father. The brother of your own mother is what we would call "uncle". The brother of your father is your "*kekε wulo*" (small father). There has already been a big to-do about the possessions of the dead chief. His brothers claimed them for themselves, but so did his children. The matter has been before the District Commissioner, but he says, it is a Mendi affair which they have to sort out themselves. Then it came up again several times in the court session here, with the result that the children keep the possessions, which is also Mendi custom.

The acting chief (who now replaces the dead chief), speaker Boakani, is a nice man, but not strong. So now everybody does more or less what he wants. Here too you find big differences between the people. Many a person, a born leader, would be very keen on being an acting chief. But Boakani doesn't like it. He has now been at his rice fields in Lalehun for ten days. He likes the village life but in his position he should now hold the reins here in Panguma.

On Tuesday we visited him in Lalehun. On the way back we went over to Giehun. It was nice to make a substantial walk once more and I got many eggs and oranges as gifts. Boakani is always good to me. I like him, he is a tall, handsome, wise man. His headwife in Lalehun intends to make me her son-in-law. She wants to give me one of her daughters as a wife, but fortunately the daughter is still too young. So I just make a joke about it. Obviously people here find it strange if you don't live with a woman. An African can't easily imagine life without a woman. So over time several people have offered me a daughter as a wife, sometimes one that's still a small child. But the people now know that I can do without. It's often well meant, especially in the case of Boakani and his headwife. They like me apparently and want to do me a favour. His wife is amusing. When we were in Lalehun on Tuesday, and I saw all my acquaintances again, she came too and without thinking I gave her a hand. However, it appeared that she was upset about this. In Mendi country the mother-in-law in particular has a special position. A son-in-law isn't allowed to touch her or even to touch any of her possessions. She can fine him for this. Therefore a daughter is always safe when with her mother. So you sometimes learn through experience about customs. It's also amusing somewhat to know the ideas of the people about your life. Apparently people like Boakani and his wife and many others haven't an idea that I will be leaving Africa in a couple of years. They expect a much longer period perhaps. The ideas people have about my income are also various. Some think that I am a civil servant. Others that I am a rich man who wants to see Africa. Boakani has asked my help to press the government to postpone the election until after the collection of taxes. For he is now responsible for that and as a chief he gets one sixth of it. If the election takes place quickly, he would miss this opportunity. He could become chief himself, has a right to it, but he isn't ambitious and only desires some money to be able to retire to his villages and his rice fields. Well, he'll get this money, for these elections aren't hasty affairs here. The son of the dead chief very much regrets that I am leaving soon. He has some support from me and doesn't trust all his followers. The people sometimes have an exaggerated idea of your influence, it's absurd sometimes. Through everything, you learn to keep your sense of humour and to develop it. Perhaps when I come back it will be hard for me to be serious, Moeteke, with respect to customs and ideas of people. Because of the distance from the people here you learn to see through so much and at the same time also to sense all the humanity in it.

You ask about my car. I have used it now and then, as you'll understand, when going to Kenema, Hangha, etc. But I don't like it very much after all and I want to try and sell the car before I leave. One frequently has a bit of trouble with the engine and I have no knowledge of machines and don't wish to have it either. It's not in me. On the other hand I hate to be dependent on a chauffeur or a man who has to do the repair

work. Neither do I like the steering. I like to sit in a car and look around me, but not to sit behind a steering wheel and to have to adjust the steering every second and to turn on one or another switch. It is quite comfortable to have a car to get somewhere quickly, but I only have it for that comfort. I don't derive pleasure from it, unlike most people apparently. When I return here, Moeteke, I want to have a horse. You can travel with it through the forest. I don't like the motor roads, I like the forest. I would like to have a good horse later, perhaps from the government agricultural station. The few other horses that are here and that come from the French countryside are fairly hot-blooded, of Arab origin. A horse is also much more of a companion than a car is. I don't like machine oil on my hands either. But, it's a good experience. One learns to manage things, to have them and also that differentiation in occupation is good. I have neither heart nor hands for becoming a driver and, thank God, that there are people who do have them. I have to leave the work to them.

Up until now my Mendi name was Blama, Moeteke. I have once written to you about this, haven't I? But now I am a member of the Poro society, I have got another name, namely Sovla [Sovula, meaning something like "Chief Speedy"⁹]. Everybody calls me so now. The name one generally has as a Mendi-boy before one joins the Poro, is one's child's name. In the Poro one gets another name and one's child's name is 'buried'. I am treated here as a real Mendi.

Funny stories sometimes occur in a place like this. The local missionary, a Creole from the American mission, the same one who had the dream, has been to Freetown for a few days to attend a conference. During his absence there was a sort of memorial service for the dead chief. There were quite a lot of people there apparently, so the collection would have been good. Now, you should know that the collection money goes to the minister or missionary, whatever you want to call him. It is, so to say, part of his salary. This sounds a bit strange to European ears, but it's quite wise of the American mission to arrange this with their black brethren. In the first place, because without any regulation the money would also disappear into the pockets of the Creoles, and in the second place it makes the minister active. The minister had thus thought that when he came back, he would be receiving a good collection. However, the schoolmaster who had led the meeting in his absence, gave him only 2 shillings and sixpence (one guilder). That was indeed little because when fewer people attend the church, at least 3 sh. tend to be given. The minister didn't accuse the schoolmaster openly, however, but said in the next church service to his people: "I am very dissatisfied with you. Not enough was given in the collection. The schoolmaster has shown me only 2/6d. from the big gathering." The schoolmaster thereupon left the church angrily. You can see that Christianity here is very much at an early stage, just like everywhere else, Moeteke.

David Fama, who does Mendi writing for me, has a nice, independent attitude. He says: "I am a Christian, the religion is good, but I don't like the Creoles." He doesn't go to the church any longer, but tries to be something like a Christian in his own way. It's remarkable how unsuccessful the mission is with many, but also how many still hold fast to a certain belief. Conteh, for instance, who already has an eventful history be-

⁹ With thanks to Mariane C. Ferme.

hind him, has been educated by the Methodist (English) mission in Bunumbu. He has been “preacher” and “teacher” and all sorts of things with them, but he was too clever for them and too evasive. And sooner or later almost every young man, who is employed by the Methodist mission, is dismissed because of a “woman palaver” (living together with more than one woman, legal or illegal). That is the big stumbling block for every mission. The negro can’t understand the attitude of the missionaries towards marriage and there is seldom anybody who remains true in this respect. And missionaries are also remarkably strict on that point and seem to equate Christianity with monogamous marriage (with one woman). However, polygamy (marriage with more women) is very much interwoven here with the whole social organization. One can’t change one thing and leave the rest the same. Conteh doesn’t want to have much to do with the mission any longer, but he keeps saying their religion is good and he sticks to it, in his way.

Mustapha, the boy who sleeps in my house at night and who still goes to school, has been asked by the mission to become schoolmaster here. But he is refusing. He says that the mission interferes too much with one’s private life. He wants to remain free and to go into trade later on. This is really remarkable, for many would be keen to have the salary of a schoolmaster. And David Fama doesn’t want to go on learning in a mission school either. In other ways negroes demonstrate a great tolerance. Mohammedans and heathens send their children to the mission school here and let their children sing and read the bible, but they take this into the bargain. Negroes are practical. They know that the Christian coat wears out rapidly. And the advantage for them is that they learn English and reading and writing and arithmetic. When one knows the people here, one can’t refrain from smiling about what the missionaries write to the people in Europe, who have to contribute to the mission. But it’s well-meant and there [are] so many strange and absurd things in the world, which are well-meant.

My kitten is such a nice little animal, Moeteke. In the evening it always sits on my writing table. It’s a really small forest kitten.

Tomorrow I am going to Bunumbu, my dear. One of the missionaries there, an Englishman,¹⁰ whom I met last year, has invited me for the weekend. He is a nice and scholarly man, who is very interested in Mendi life. Among the Methodist missionaries, who are on a much higher plane than the representatives of the American mission, one has sympathetic persons who try to empathize with the people and also put in a lot of work studying the indigenous language. Their only disadvantage is that they have an ineradicable “polygamy complex”. As long as one avoids that delicate point, one can have a long discussion. The Bunumbu missionaries are also very humane, normal and nice and civilized.

Monday morning. My dear Moeteke, Now I am in Bunumbu. It was a nice weekend. I am always happy, like you too, when one doesn’t have to look after one’s own household. Later on I am going back to Panguma via Segbwema. On Saturday I brought a section chief from Panguma to the hospital there, a man called Fdobasie. He has a fairly weak heart and he had a lot of pain.

¹⁰ This Englishman was actually a Welshman, Kenneth Hubert Crosby (1904-1998). With thanks to Paul Richards.

I have sold my car here, Moeteke, to the chief of Bunumbu, for the same price as I paid for it. It's better that I am rid of it before I leave, for it's not good to leave a car unused during my period of absence. Actually, an engine should be run a bit every day. The Crosby's with who I am staying here, and who have just returned from England, also told me, that there was next to no sun in December and January. [...]

A week from now, on 25 February, I am going "on trek" for a week. I still have to see the schools in Bo and Koyeima (north of Bo) and the agricultural station in Njala (north of Mano, which lies west of Bo). Then on 2 March I hope to be back in Panguma and on 15 or 18 March I leave there for Freetown. The ship leaves on 21 March. On 30 March the ship will arrive in Plymouth, where I go ashore. One can go on to Liverpool, but that takes an extra day and therefore would mean a loss of time.

How nice it'll be then to come to see you soon, Moeteke. The time passes very quickly now. [...] I send you so many good wishes. [...]

Your own Child.

Panguma, 19-2-35

Hello, dear Moeteke! I am back again in Panguma. So much love from

Your Boy.

Panguma, 23 February 1935

My dear Moeteke,

It's Sunday morning. I have had an undisturbed morning so far, quiet enough for writing and all sorts of work. The days are often so full that one sometimes longs for Sunday for catching up with various things.

Now it's already afternoon. The interruption came swiftly. For this morning Conteh has "paid" her parents the "bride-price" for his second wife. Money and some clothes are handed over to the parents and the girl. A whole morning is involved with the negotiations, handing over the bride-price, asking permission of parents and girl, consultations. Mendi are endlessly delaying decisions by negotiations and consulting. Fortunately people aren't busy here. This transfer of a "bride" occurs in public, in the presence of all kinds of dignitaries as witnesses. But Conteh hasn't reached the final point yet. The negotiations between the families have been broken off and will be continued next Sunday!

All my personnel are suddenly, and contrary to their habit, busy with women. My chauffeur, that is a young man who drove my car until a few days ago, had married a divorced woman a year ago, for whom he hadn't yet paid the full amount. It was pressing now, the girl's parents were about to be put in the stocks, a sort of indigenous imprisonment, if they didn't pay the previous husband (if a woman has a divorce, her parents have to pay back the whole bride-price, "purchase price", to the previous hus-

band). I helped out with the last 30 shillings and the marriage was made legal with a ceremony in my house.

And now three minor cases. My head boy, Mabo, has had an affair with a young, married woman, to whose husband he now has to pay the legal 30 shillings fine for “adultery” (which is judged here in a completely different way than in Europe). But Mabo says, that the woman was already divorced from her husband and he refuses to pay. We will see how far he gets with that. In any case I don’t have to help him out for he has savings.

My second boy, Tamba, had a female friend, but she has been pinched from him by another man, which is just as well for Tamba.

And my third boy, Vandí, whom we always call Kohumahei,¹¹ because he has the not so heavy task of guarding the area around the house against all kinds of casual guests and who guards the quiet for my afternoon rest hour, is faced with the same fact as Mabo. But he has no savings and because I’ll be leaving soon, he has asked my permission to leave Panguma tomorrow and go to his home, thus freeing himself from the trouble of the fine.

I am fine, Moeteke. Tomorrow I am going away on a week’s trip to Bo, Koyeima and Njala, as I wrote to you. Last Friday I went to Kenema where I saw the acting Provincial Commissioner and had a talk with him. I am probably going to see him once more next month. He has written a nice little book on indigenous law.¹² I am also going to store my things in Kenema before I leave. It isn’t sensible and also too costly to take everything with me to Europe. There are also things which one only uses here and which over time I have had made and which wouldn’t be worth the freightage, such as some chairs, a few tables and a few cupboards. I am taking my papers, books and clothes with me and the other stuff I’ll have stored – in the prison in Kenema. For this is almost empty and government civil servants store their suitcases, etc. there, when they go to Europe. The acting Provincial Commissioner advised me to do this too and that certainly is best and cheapest for me. Now I’ll be writing to you only once more from here, Moeteke! As I told you, it is the “Appam” on which I sail from Freetown on 21 March, 31 March in Plymouth. You can reach me there Moeteke with a letter, addressed to:

Homeward Passenger per M.V. “Appam”
Travellers Limited,
Colonial House
Millbay Road, Plymouth

If necessary a telegram can be sent to: Care Colonial, Plymouth.

I received a letter from the Institute telling me that in my special case I am free to travel on a Dutch ship. I would have to pay the extra costs myself. It would be nice to land in Holland, so that you could meet me in Rotterdam. But I have already booked on the English line now as it was best to do this some time in advance. Moreover, the

¹¹ Kohumahei literally means “the inside chief”. They may have called him that to indicate a small, domestic chiefly role. With thanks to Mariane C. Ferme.

¹² The acting Provincial Commissioner will have been James Stephenson Fenton. With thanks to Paul Richards.

Dutch ship arrives two weeks later. However, it could be good the next time. [...] I think that I'll cross to the Hook on the overnight ship, but as I wrote you earlier, first I need a day or two in London to see to a few things. I don't know yet in which hotel I'll be staying there. I'll send you a telegram from there about my arrival as soon as I can. [...] Perhaps the most simple arrangement, Moeteke, is if, as on other occasions, you come to Haarlem to pick me up.

As soon as I get to London (that is, if it is still possible to send a telegram on a Saturday evening) I'll send you a telegram with the address of my hotel, so that you can, if necessary, always reach me by telegram, Moeteke.

My car was collected on Friday, so now I am an ordinary citizen again. Now it's time to go to bed. Bye my dear Moeteke, I will be with you soon now. How nice it will be to see you again and talk about everything. I don't find it at all unusual, Moeteke, that I'll be back again with you. I am already talking to you so often. But it is true, there is a lot underlying the words; a great deal of experience, which perhaps later on, when I am away from here, I will understand better. [...] So many loving thoughts from your Boy.

Panguma, 3 March 1935

My dear Moeteke,

This is probably my last letter to you from my first African stay. I will already be leaving here in two weeks' time. They wrote to me from home in a letter, which I received this week, telling me about frost and snow there. That was on 10 February. Well, when I get back it will be April already and by then much can have changed. In any case the tulips should be out then. It's quite strange for me to be imagining frost and snow, while here the weather is improving all the time. It's often more than 100 degrees Fahrenheit. In particular yesterday and today have been very warm. Last week we already had some thunderstorms and rain. After that it becomes slightly cooler. A somewhat unpleasant result is that after a single shower in the evening hundreds of insects of all kinds congregate around the lamp. It's as if these shoot up from the earth after a shower. Apart from this I still rather like the warmth. A great advantage of the heat here, Moeteke, is that it is reliable and constant. One doesn't have sudden drops in temperature as in Europe on hot summer days. When one is on a trip one can count on it that it's hot from 9 – 5 and that sweating is healthy. In Europe one can easily become too cold when, after sweating, the temperature drops. Here, however, one's temperature remains constant.

How are you now, dear Moeteke? Are you still in Doorn?¹³ I am so glad that you are beginning to feel stronger again. When I come back you'll probably be my old Moeteke again.

Yesterday I returned from my one-week trip to Bo, Koyeima and Njala. It was pleasant, refreshing and informative. In Bo, where I was for the longest time, I stayed with the head of the Bo school, a very pleasant man with whom one can easily talk. He is

¹³ A niece of Mrs Overdiep lived in the village of Doorn.

one of the people who come from the English upper circles, and yet who doesn't like the social life to which one soon gets accustomed here as a civil servant. He avoids dinner parties, visits, etc. as much as possible, something with which I could, of course, entirely sympathize. In Njala it was also pleasant, but fewer kindred spirits you might say, but the work there, at the agricultural station, interested me a lot. I saw all kinds of plantations and other attempts at improvements. This time I was interested in the oil palms, because I may want to write an article about them. It was warm there on the open ground, but I like the sweaty trudging about in the open air. One feels more linked with the earth again, Moeteke. It will be difficult to be back again in a city. Fortunately first I'll be in Driehuis for a while with you. Sometimes I think that I would like to be a farmer and grow grain and other things, for the open air and the income, and do my scientific work in my spare time. But perhaps it can't be combined and the scientific work is the principal thing. But for scientific work one needs a certain independence. I mean getting away from group life and cliques and sweet-talk. One becomes so independent in this country, Moeteke, and perhaps gets a certain right to it. After all, the experience here has an influence on your character. I mean, one learns to view university groups and theories even more sceptically than before. I am very glad to have studied and to do scientific work, but it's also good to see that there is a relative side to everything, like it is with life as a whole. I tended to do this earlier on too, but perhaps not with such a free mind then. I am also glad to have my doctorate, because now one is no longer dependent on a teacher. You did well, Moeteke, not to encourage me to go for the professorship in Amsterdam prematurely, although it was tempting at the time. It's better that I came here. Now I have more right to look people straight in the eye and laugh at vanities. Otherwise many things would have annoyed me perhaps unnecessarily. I certainly wouldn't want to say that "I am there". Everything is so relative, it is just that one feels oneself to be somewhat more independent. And I think one should be. More independent from and yet at the same time connected with the people. But for you I remain the old Poet, Moeteke!

What a lot I am writing about myself. It's not very important, but sometimes one thinks about it. And anyway, life will find its own way with one. Actually, I am hardly worried about it, Moeteke.

Now on Tuesday a letter from you will arrive and perhaps I'll also find a letter from you in Freetown.

I received a letter from Malinowski telling that he is in America and will be back in May. Therefore I won't have to go to see him, which saves time. I'll only have to see Oldham and then I'll come to you as soon as possible, love. I have already written to you about how I will travel, haven't I: 30 March, Plymouth. Probably the train will arrive in London on the same day. When I arrive there I'll send you a telegram, at least if there is an opportunity in the evening. For it will then be Saturday. The next day, Sunday, is rather difficult with telegrams. So if you don't hear from me till Monday, you shouldn't worry, Moeteke. I believe that the train will arrive at Paddington Station in London. After a few days I'll be able to see you at the station in Haarlem. How nice that'll be, Moeteke! That'll be in just in a month's time. [...]

The head of the Bo school had a catalogue from the London bookseller that included books on Asia and Africa. My dissertation was also in it. Apparently there are one or more copies for sale in London. A couple of English journals had written nice reviews.

Bye dear, dear Moeteke, when you get this letter, I will almost have set sail, on my way to you. [...] Bye bye, so much love from your Child.

Panguma (via Hangha), 9-3-'35

My dear Moeteke,

Your letters arrived on Tuesday, probably the last ones for this "tour", unless an extra letter arrives this week.

It's good to know that things are better with you again, Moeteke. So you are now back home again. But take it easy [...]

You write about frost. It's strange indeed to read about frost while here it's burning hot. March is the hottest month here, before the beginning of the rainy season. The rains and tornadoes begin as early as April. Yesterday it was 133 degrees F. in the shade here. From 11 in the morning till 3 in the afternoon one can't do much now. Still, I don't find it unpleasant. One wears hardly any clothing and sweats a lot. It's better than many clothes and coughing in the European winter, I think. This is my last week here. There are still all sorts of things to be done, but I finish it off calmly. Conteh is amazed that I am not yet packing. He says: the missionaries are always already packed a month before they go on leave and then don't do much after that. Well, I don't like to be packing and worrying over a long period, but I do it quickly during the last two days. That should be enough. Moreover, I can store most of my stuff in Kenema.

Within four weeks, on Sunday, I'll be with you, Moeteke! *Ngewo jaa*, with God's protection [God reward you], as the Mendi say. How nice, I can hardly imagine it yet. It's still busy here and in a whirl of work. On the ship one becomes more reflective and Europe becomes so much closer again.

On Tuesday I will go to Pendembu to meet an American German there. He has already asked to meet me several times. He got my address through Westermann. He seems to have connections with the mission and studies languages in Liberia. A job that takes some courage. However, he is also interested in the social life and wants to talk about that a bit. Because it's too far for us to visit each other, we have agreed on Pendembu, halfway. I will travel back in the evening to spend the night in Bendu, a small distance north-west of Segbwema. A long time ago I promised the chief there I would visit his land sometime. I hope to be back on Wednesday. On Friday I have to attend a ceremony in a village near Lalehun. And then packing and starting the journey!

Bye, dear Moeteke, what is your blue dress like? All is well with me. Do get strong again soon, love. So much love from your Boy.

INTERLUDE

Sjoerd Hofstra returns to Europe (March 1935 – May 1936)

Sjoerd Hofstra's letter from Panguma of 9 March 1935 to his adoptive mother, Mrs Overdiep (Moeteke) was probably his last one from his first journey to Sierra Leone. On 21 March in Freetown he boarded the ship for Plymouth, arriving there on 30 March. After a few days in London, he travelled on to the Netherlands for a month's stay with his adoptive mother in Driehuis. During this period Hofstra would also have visited his family in Friesland. In April he made a short trip to Cologne with his adoptive mother.¹

On 11 May 1935 Hofstra returned to London for the intervening year between his first and his second journey to Sierra Leone where he rented a bed-sitter in Kensington.² From his letters to his adoptive mother it can be seen that he was at first busy 'looking through and ordering his material, and here and there posing questions which one wants to be answered and completed during the second journey.'³ In early June, Hofstra mentioned that he had had tea that afternoon with Mr MacRobert, District Commissioner in Bo who was on leave in the U.K. In the same letter he also wrote that he was going to visit Malinowski the next evening,⁴ when Mr Kittridge from the Rockefeller Foundation would also be there. No further mention was made of this visit. In early July Hofstra wrote that he would be going to Brighton with the Nadels on the following day.⁵ In late July he wrote: 'tomorrow afternoon I'll be together with Fortes and Nadel.'⁶ This is about all that Hofstra's letters reveal about his work and contacts during these first three months in London.

In the second half of July Hofstra went on holiday in Scotland, together with his adoptive mother and his youngest sister, Kloe Hofstra. He then returned to London and in early August he left for a month's stay in Driehuis. Around this time he had fallen in love with a young Dutch woman!

¹ Letter Hofstra to Overdiep from London, 7-6-1935.

² His address was 32 Bramham Gardens, S.W. 5.

³ Letter Hofstra to Overdiep, 14-6-1935.

⁴ Letter Hofstra to Overdiep, 6-6-1935. Malinowski had recently returned from a visit to the U.S.

⁵ Letter Hofstra to Overdiep, 5-7-1935.

⁶ Letter Hofstra to Overdiep, 30-7-1935.

It was four months earlier, during his previous stay in Driehuis, that Hofstra had met his sweetheart for the first time: Wouter Hendrika (Woutje) van den Bergh van Eysinga (1914-2005), the youngest daughter of G.A. van den Bergh van Eysinga (the liberal parson in nearby Santpoort whose services Mrs Overdiep had been attending), and J. van den Bergh van Eysinga-Elias. The story goes that after Hofstra's return from Sierra Leone, Van den Bergh van Eysinga had been visiting Mrs Overdiep and Hofstra in order to hear about his African experiences, and that Woutje had wanted to accompany her father on that occasion. After Hofstra's return to London in May, he had kept in touch with Woutje, who was sixteen years his junior, and was about to finish her last year at the School of Social Work in Amsterdam. Mrs Overdiep and Woutje got on well together too, as can be read in Mrs Overdiep's letters to Hofstra.⁷ Anyway, in the course of the summer it became clear to everyone that the young people were in love. They decided to get married towards the end of the year and to set off together for the second journey to Sierra Leone. In the meantime, from September onwards, Woutje was to join her fiancé in London, in order to improve her English and to learn typing skills which would be useful for assisting her future husband in his work.

In his first letter after his return to London Hofstra wrote that it had been very pleasant at the Oldhams. 'He was very tired, however, and very busy. I believe that Mrs Oldham was delighted with Woutje, who already managed a little bit of the English.'⁸ Shortly afterwards the young couple had visited the Nadel. 'Fortes is apparently out of town. Malinowski will return on 3 October. From Miss Brackett I got a letter with warm congratulations. She was on holiday and wrote immediately after her return. [...] I have also returned to my palm kernels and putting in order all sorts of papers.'⁹ In early October Hofstra wrote: 'The work has already got going. I am still on the palm kernels, yes. Fortes writes, at the request of Westermann, also an article about a similar subject. Our articles will appear in the April issue, which will be specially devoted to food problems.'¹⁰ He also mentioned that Malinowski's seminar would only begin in mid-October. In his next letter Hofstra mentioned that they were going to have tea with Fortes. He also wrote that he had briefly spoken to Malinowski the day before. 'His wife has died a few days ago. Perhaps it was best this way, but it's still a hard thing for him, isn't it? He was looking very tired.'¹¹

In early November Hofstra had to read his paper – probably on the oil palm – at Malinowski's seminar. 'Luckily it all went well. I was dreading it a bit, but it went fairly smoothly, with a pleasant discussion.'¹² He also wrote about Alleney, the Mende language teacher in London, 'Tomorrow Alleney will come again. Last time he already taught Woutje a few sentences of Mendi. These last weeks he has earned some money

⁷ From May to mid-July 1935, only the correspondence between Hofstra and Mrs Overdiep has remained.

⁸ Letter Hofstra to Overdiep, 10-9-1935. Oldham was administrative director of the IIALC. See also chapter 1.

⁹ Letter Hofstra to Overdiep, 16-9-1935. Miss D.G. Brackett was secretary of the IIALC.

¹⁰ Hofstra's article on the oil palm would appear in *Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie*. See Hofstra 1937b.

¹¹ Letter Hofstra to Overdiep, 8-10-1935.

¹² Letter Hofstra to Overdiep, 7-11-1935.

by acting in films and he is further earning some extra by palm reading. At the School of Oriental Studies he has, moreover, a few classes. It remains a bit of pottering about for such a man. He has left his wife.¹³ A few weeks later Hofstra complained that Alleney had failed to turn up: 'Now we haven't seen him for ten days. I had made the mistake of lending him 5 shillings. Perhaps the reason is that he has a problem paying me back, but, surely, he could openly talk to me about that. "You shouldn't lend money to a Mendi man", Conteh sometimes said to me. "That makes him avoid you further, and that's not good for our work."'¹⁴ However, it soon appeared that something quite different had happened. 'Alleney has just been here and the riddle of Alleney's staying away is solved as he has been four days in jail. On Saturday he was in one of the markets and caused a bit of a traffic jam with his palm reading, and that is not allowed according to the law. It was a somewhat severe punishment for him: he couldn't pay the fine. Now he has just told a story about such prison life. He is a sharp observer. It's a nasty institution, and it is very instructive to hear his reactions. Tomorrow afternoon he will come for the actual Mendi work.'¹⁵

The work went well, according to Hofstra in this same letter of late November. He had slightly revised the oil palm article and was nearly ready. He had also thought about other things, including new questions for the second "tour". 'I feel inclined to write the first book after my second journey about the agriculture of the Mendi. A great part of the economic life, the oil palm included of course, comes with it, also labour relations and family life. I'll try to get enough material for this during the second journey. Next to this, one collects as much as possible about other subjects, of course. This economic life is so attractive, because so far not much attention has been paid to it in ethnological books, but also because it forms a solid basis for the description of the rest. If one immediately begins with the "superstructure" after having known the people for only a relatively short time, the danger is to be a bit vague, at least if one wants to fill a whole book with, for instance, religion. Still, later on I would also like to work on European problems, for instance the relation man-animal about which I last told you, and other subjects too. I find it a nice exercise to write in English. It's not easy, one really has to work on it a bit [...]'¹⁶

In early December Hofstra wrote that Woutje was typing his article, and shortly afterwards that the article had been sent off to the Institute. 'Miss Brackett will forward it to Westermann. I have got an invitation to give a paper in Oxford on 23 January. That's rather nice, isn't it?'¹⁷ Hofstra and his fiancée had also been to Malinowski's, 'The usual visit for students before the holidays. We were there with a few other people. Bep came with us and she found it of course nice to have this experience.'¹⁸ Meanwhile Hofstra had been trying to get an increase of salary for his second journey

¹³ Letter Hofstra to Overdiep, 8-11-1935.

¹⁴ Letter Hofstra to Overdiep, 20-11-1935.

¹⁵ Letter Hofstra to Overdiep, 22-11-1935.

¹⁶ Letter Hofstra to Overdiep, 22-11-1935.

¹⁷ Letter Hofstra to Overdiep, 6-12-1935.

¹⁸ Letter Hofstra to Overdiep, 10-12-1935. Bep, L.M. Mispelblom Beyer-van den Bergh van Eysinga, was Woutje's eldest sister. She spent a short time with Hofstra and Woutje in London – like Woutje's parents and also Mrs Overdiep had done in the months before.

to Sierra Leone to cover part of the costs for Woutje. He mentioned that he had seen Oldham about it, 'He says that he has much personal sympathy for me and that he is in favour of it, but there are more factors. On 30 December there is a meeting of the leading people of the Institute and then the matter will be discussed. We'll have to see. If it wouldn't be granted, then it wouldn't be insurmountable yet.'¹⁹ In his last letter before returning to Driehuis, Hofstra wrote that he had hoped that perhaps he could have come a bit earlier. However, 'tomorrow afternoon Malinowski would like to see some more of my work. Yesterday afternoon I also spent some time with him.'²⁰

The wedding of Sjoerd Hofstra and Woutje van den Bergh van Eysinga took place on 30 December 1935. Woutje's father consecrated their marriage in the village church of Santpoort. The newly-wed couple returned to London on 9 January 1936 and stayed there until early April, after which they spent another month in Driehuis with Hofstra's adoptive mother before their departure for Sierra Leone. From these last three months in London no letters of Hofstra (or Woutje) to Mrs Overdiep have been kept. However, Mrs Overdiep's letters to Hofstra from this same period provide some indirect information about Hofstra's work during these months. In early February she expressed the hope that everything would go well in Oxford on the 6th.²¹ A few days later she wrote that she hoped that a good deal of the article was going to be finished that week: 'I hear that Malinowski will be going on holiday on the 15th'; then it should surely have been read by him. You do understand, dear Poetie, how interested I am in your work, and how deeply I hope and trust that you have finished it now.'²²

In mid-February Mrs Overdiep wrote that she was very grateful to him for sending the paper. 'I can imagine so well that it has made a good impression.'²³ A few days later she continued, 'I have read your Oxford paper and found it very good and well-organized. Mrs Van den Bergh [van Eysinga] said on Sunday that you had discussed the sexual matters somewhat prudishly in your lecture in Amsterdam. She said that Malinowski did this so exceptionally clearly in his book which she was now reading – I don't know the exact title any more – and that you could still learn much from it. In this paper you also skip over it, but surely you do this on purpose, it wasn't necessary because of the length, and perhaps it wouldn't be fitting in a lecture. I felt a great admiration in Mrs Van den Bergh for Malinowski's books; they want to go and see him and talk with him and take him out to dinner. I thought that it is very fine for you to have such influential parents-in-law, who can also judge the scientific merits of people, and who are so completely at home in this atmosphere, being persons of consequence

¹⁹ Letter Hofstra to Overdiep, 13-12-1935.

²⁰ Letter Hofstra to Overdiep, 15-12-1935.

²¹ Letter Overdiep to Hofstra, without date (early February 1936). Apparently the earlier mentioned date of 23 January for the Oxford paper had been changed to 6 February.

²² Letter Overdiep to Hofstra, 9-2-1936. The article mentioned will have been the one on 'Personality and differentiation in the political life of the Mendi' which would appear in *Africa*. See Hofstra 1937a.

²³ Letter Overdiep to Hofstra, 14-2-1936. This will have been the Oxford paper. This will probably have been on the same subject as the article mentioned in her previous letter.

themselves. I very much hope that it will help you in the near future.'²⁴ In later letters of Mrs Overdiep to Hofstra no more mention was made of his work, except for the occasional remark about the long time it took the Institute to grant permission for Hofstra's second journey. However, the permission did come, and on 8 May 1936 the Hofstras sailed from Antwerp harbour bound for Sierra Leone.

²⁴ Letter Overdiep to Hofstra, 18-2-1936. J. van den Bergh van Eysinga-Elias had studied Dutch and history and held a doctor's degree. She was scientifically active and promoted the cause of women's emancipation.

PART II

The letters from Sjoerd Hofstra:
The second journey
(May – October 1936)

Return to Panguma and an untimely end to the research (May – October 1936)

Saturday morning [9 May 1936; on the ship “Wahehe” from Antwerp to Sierra Leone, after Sjoerd Hofstra and his wife Woutje Hofstra-van den Bergh van Eysinga had been seen off at Antwerp by Mrs Overdiep (Moeteke), Sjoerd’s youngest sister Kloe Hofstra, Woutje’s parents and Woutje’s eldest sister Bep Mispelblom Beyer-van den Bergh van Eysinga]



Photo 7.1 Sjoerd Hofstra and his wife Woutje Hofstra-van den Bergh van Eysinga at Antwerp on the boat for Sierra Leone, May 1936



Photo 7.2 Sjoerd Hofstra and M.F. Overdiep-Ham at Antwerp on the boat for Sierra Leone, May 1936

My dear Moeteke, [...]

It was very difficult to have to leave you, yesterday. It's so strange. When we couldn't see you any longer, and Woutje and I came back in the cabin, you think: is this really necessary? Is it alright? Can I leave Moeteke alone again like this? And for oneself, one also goes towards an unknown future again with all kinds of things about which one can't yet have clear thoughts. But on the other hand, I then think that the work which I am now doing is still good – and that it is worthwhile that someone does it. And perhaps everything will turn out better than expected.

On the ship it's fairly pleasant, I believe. Yesterday evening we had to wait a while in the Scheldt because of the fog. Now we keep sailing along the coast, on to Boulogne. It's a somewhat grey sky. Our cabin is good. There is a bit too much coming and going overhead. I think that one of the staircases goes alongside or above it. But perhaps we may still change cabins. But otherwise it will do.

The German mentality here is less reserved, somewhat sooner opening up for an agreeable talk than the English, at least when I compare the life on the ships. Both have their advantages. Since the number of passengers is so small here, travelling is OK, so it seems to me.

We go on bravely, won't we Moeteke? I smile at you. Bye Moeteke!

Your own Boy

Las Palmas, Saturday morning [May 1936; writing paper Woermann-Linie, Hamburg]

My fine Moeteke,

What a great surprise it was to get your letter this morning! It moved me so much and it filled my eyes with tears. Now I write only briefly, Moeteke. The ship lies here only a short while and we will later go into the town to visit the post office and to see something of the town. For a proper trip there is no time now. The weather is a bit dark. This often seems to be the case here. Last time it was also like this. A man from the ship told me that tomorrow the sun will be shining again. Now it's Monday. Women's peace march, isn't it Moeteke? Do tell me about it.

Bye Moeteke, I think of you a lot.

Your own Boy

Wednesday 20 May, 1936

My dear Moeteke,

Tomorrow we will be already in Freetown. After all, such a journey goes fast after Las Palmas. It has become warmer all the time and especially today it's already really tropical. Fairly early tomorrow, at 6 or 7, we are in Freetown. Thus the ship is there one day earlier than according to the arrival times. It's so strange to approach Freetown

again. I now haven't any longer the tension, unlike the last time, knowing I was near the African coast. Now one has been there once, the tension is somewhat less strong, of course. So it will also be with the sight of Freetown. But at the same time it remains strange, for there remains so much that is unexpectedly connected to it. How will everything there turn out now? How will one find things in Panguma and how will the opportunity be to work there again? I am a bit anxious about it, and I'll soon write to you about it once we have arrived there. I am confident about everything, although one also feels at the same time the difficult aspects and one's responsibility.

The past days on the ship have done me good. I am feeling much stronger again and rested. I am already looking very brown, Moeteke. I have already said several times to Woutje that I would wish that Moeteke could see me like this.

Here on board life runs its daily course. There are some fairly nice passengers and one gets used to each other and gets to know one another somewhat better.

It is strange how, now as one approaches the real Africa, the skies become different, with a much clearer, sharper pattern of clouds than in Europe. The water is very quiet now, almost flat. We have had much sun during the past days. Only today it was cloudy at first and therefore rather sultry. We are very fortunate now because the new cabin has two portholes and one can get some circulation. In the previous cabin it would have become very oppressive, I think.

Monday [25 May 1936]

Now we have already been a few days in Freetown, Moeteke. I haven't yet got down to writing properly. That will come when we are back in Panguma again. Life is here somewhat irregular yet with small things to keep one busy. But the main problem is the great heat. Even for Africa it's a quite warm time just now. And in the hotel here it's quite oppressive. Wednesday we'll depart for Panguma. In the inland the rainy season has already started and it's therefore already a bit cooler. Conteh and Mabo also find it very warm here at the moment. It's as if it strikes me more than the first time, but that is also because it's now here in Freetown the oppressive time before the start of the rains and also because the hotel is situated in the town. This afternoon we had tea at Fourah Bay College. It was somewhat cooler there. It's more open there so there is more wind.

Dear Moeteke, if only I could have a message from you, a message which I could receive much sooner. There are always two weeks in between, are there not? How is it, Moeteke? How big the distance is again, but it's also the case that I won't go further now. And in a certain way I can also think more freely of you, Moeteke, with the pressure from London gone. Now one goes more directly towards one's goal with the work and I know that this also means a relief for you.

It's hard to tell what this journey will bring again, what gain there will be for my work, but I am quite confident about it. It's nice to take up things again and it is interesting to write down new things.

Conteh and Mabo arrived on Saturday evening. I was very pleased about this, especially because of their token of fidelity. They would otherwise already have come on Thursday, but just last week there was the election of the chief of Panguma and

Conteh had to stay there till the end. However, there hasn't yet been a decision. The parties couldn't reach an agreement. Now the government will probably, to bring the matter to an end, in a few months' time appoint a chief of their own choice. Well, the main difficulties are over now. Conteh says that the people are glad that I am coming back again. A diviner in Panguma had already foretold that I would come back again! There is something very moving in the fidelity of these people.

At first it was very strange to be back here again. But one soon settles in. Yet, this change itself is also strange. And also the fact that one gets used to such a new environment. In the sunny climate I do feel at home of course and in nature. I am so glad, Moeteke, to have had such a nice, quiet time with you after London. Such a city isn't at all a good place to live in. It was so wonderful to be able to spend a longer time quietly with you, Moeteke. We hadn't had that for a long time. I am feeling stronger again, though the heat does strike one.

I'd have thought that the rainy season would already well have begun, but there seem to be shifts at the beginning and the end. Two years ago the rainy season began earlier. In the interior it has already started and there it will be somewhat cooler now. This evening the wind is blowing a little fortunately, and it is more comfortable. It was oppressive indeed.

I have already seen several people again here. On Saturday evening Woutje and I had a meal at Fourah Bay College with Mssrs Brandwood, Snellgrove and Prickett, who I knew from last time, and this afternoon we had tea there with Brandwood. It was again very warm-hearted there. The head, Mr Horstead, with whom I stayed in the beginning, you remember, is in England. He has been appointed bishop of Sierra Leone in the meantime (in the Church of England) and therefore won't come back as head of Fourah Bay College. Still, he is a young bishop.

I have also met Mr Hodsgon, the head of the school in Bo, with whom I stayed a few days at the time. He is a nice man, who really loves the country and the people. He is a friend of the District Commissioner, whom I also happened to meet in London.

It seems that an air mail will go tomorrow, Moeteke. I very much hope that we can send this letter with it. The next Elder Dempster ship only departs from here on 3 June.

How is the weather now in Holland, Moeteke? Can you already sit out much in the garden? How was the women's peace march? If only I could have had a quick look at all these things with you. But I do know a lot, Moeteke, and I am near you, notwithstanding the many experiences that I am living through. It was therefore also so nice that I could stay with you for a while quietly.

On Wednesday we'll leave here. Then we are on Thursday afternoon, if all goes smoothly, in Panguma. From there I'll write to you again in more detail about everything, the land and the experiences, Moeteke. Here in Freetown everything is still more or less the same.

Woutje is alright. She does suffer from the heat, of course, but it might have been worse. She was very tired in the beginning, but it isn't too bad. It's still all new for her of course and she sees so much that interests her. Freetown is a colourful town indeed, with all this variety of types of people and the busy life. When one sees this for

the first time it makes a special impression. Woutje said already several times that Moeteke should see this with her sense of humour! There certainly is much to observe. Now the warmth is very testing for Woutje. Anyway, it'll soon become somewhat cooler.

With our car we still have some problems.¹ It is forbidden, as we were told at our arrival, to import cars with the steering wheel on the left side. Only cars with the steering wheel on the right are allowed here. The car is still parked on the quay now and we will have to depart tomorrow without the car. I have of course seen the various authorities about the matter and everybody would like to help, but that's the law. There are three possibilities: send back the car, but then one has to do without, or have the steering wheel changed here, but that costs between ten and twenty pounds; or it may be possible that by a special government order for visitors like us a car like ours would be allowed for a certain period. It's now permitted for visitors during three months, but a law is nearly ready which is meant to prolong this period. It is possible that one now speeds up the introduction of this rule for us. In any case, we can't wait for that. I have had to write an official letter to the Government here and an answer should come soon. If the matter is successful, the car will be sent after us, or the steering wheel will have to be altered. It's quite a nuisance, isn't it? Whoever could have known about such a rule. Everybody finds it nonsense. But that's the law at the moment.

We have had a nice thing made here against the mosquitoes. It is a net that doesn't hang straight around the bed, but forms, as it were, a sort of small room in which the beds can easily stand with a small table in between on which the lamp can stand. Then one doesn't lie so cramped and one doesn't have the flies so close to the lamp if one still wants to work in bed in the evening. It seems to me a nice solution. The net rests on slats that are screwed together and it reaches to the floor.

I have translated yet another part for you, Moeteke, from the book of Bertrand Russell, *The Conquest of Happiness*, during the journey and here. I'll send it to you from Panguma. I find that there are nice parts in the book. Of course you'd best read the original. But I found it a nice exercise and so pleasant to do something for you.

Bye my dearest Moeteke. Now the letter has to be posted. So many dear and fondest thoughts I send you. I think much of you, Moeteke! Will that help you? We'll be good and brave, won't we? Bye Moeteke,

Your own Child

¹ The car was a wedding present from Woutje's parents and shipped from the Netherlands to Sierra Leone.

Panguma, 31 May 1936

Sunday morning

My very dear Moeteke,

Now we are already in Panguma again since Thursday and life here is getting on its way. I am glad that we are here and in familiar surroundings again. Such days in Free-town are quite warm and sticky. Of course, here it also takes a few days at first to unpack everything and put things in order, but now one has the feeling that this is the final destination.

The journey went well, Moeteke. We have had a very warm welcome here. When the lorry with which we travelled arrived, most people were assembled in the open place for the court sessions, not far from our house. A gunshot was fired, the welcome which otherwise is only intended for a governor. The schoolchildren had organized a parade and walked with a banner on which it said: "Panguma welcomes you". And they also played on drums. The school personnel and the black missionary with his wife were there too. It was all very nice and warmly meant. And especially the inhabitants had also made it festive and the official persons of the secret societies danced. You'll remember, Moeteke, the "devils", dressed in strange costumes, who also danced at the time after the death of the chief. That was quite an honour for me, as it only happens on rare occasions. I almost became a bit embarrassed with all this display. And yet it was also so nice and simple. The people themselves seize such an opportunity too in order to dance and to be merry, so one had the nice feeling that it wasn't meant only for us. Till late at night one heard the dance music.

On Friday we immediately began unpacking, but that wasn't the end of it. At the moment we have the dressmaker in our house to fix the curtains. Conteh is more or less in charge of this business; he finds this quite interesting and it saves me supervising. It's so nice, Moeteke, that the dressmaker has brought his treadle sewing-machine and he does the work here. He has two helpers. One takes turns with him with the sewing and the other works on something else, not for us. So his whole business has been temporarily transferred to here, his machine and his two helpers: that is his whole equipment so to say.

Woutje is thrilled with the house and with the nature here. The house exceeds her expectations. In the other rest house here, which the government formerly used as an office, were still two cupboards and a rack with shelves. Yesterday we paid a short visit to Kenema, to the District Commissioner to ask his permission to move these cupboards to the house here. That was OK. We'll have these cupboards cleaned a bit; Woutje gets one of them for her clothes and all sorts of things, and I'll get the other for my papers. It's very nice for me to have my stuff conveniently arranged together. I'd first thought about having cupboards made, but it's always a long story in this country; it's better like this. Carpenters have a somewhat special position when there is some work, for there are only a few of them who understand the work. At the moment two houses are being built, so it's difficult to obtain them for a job. And a job doesn't make



Photo 7.3 Rest house, Panguma summer 1936

fast progress. The house of Fdobasie, the sub-chief, was nearly ready when I left and now it still isn't finished. But it also sometimes depends on how far the customer pays for the work. When the payment isn't promptly made, another person who pays better, has more rights.

It's so strange to be here again, Moeteke. Everything is very much the same as last time, of course. Actually, I had dreaded to come back here, to start this life again, but now one has arrived here, one soon gets used to the atmosphere again. It makes all the difference that I know everything. For Woutje everything is still new and she finds everything very interesting and colourful. The people are very nice to her. Even so it will be different for her than for me the first time, because she can now exchange thoughts and also because I told her much about it in advance.

The beauty of the nature here strikes me again now, Moeteke. Nature is often grandiose here and so spacious. You really should see it some time. I would so much like to see your reactions to all kinds of things, especially the people. So very good-natured the people here appear to me in many respects, and often amusing too. You know the stories already. Several old friends have already visited us, but no one has troubled me much yet. Conteh told me that the interim chief has told the people that they should leave us alone during the first few days. Conteh's wife and a few other women come to see Woutje now and then. Yesterday Kaadi came to see us too, the head-wife of James Ynee, the deceased chief. I was really sorry for her. She excused herself that she hadn't been present at the dancing on Thursday when we arrived, because too many memories had become stirred up within her. Apparently she is really stricken by grief for her husband. From such reactions you tend to learn some more about the mental life of the people, although it's difficult, of course, to gain a good insight in general.

The fatigue around my eyes is over now. Several people here said that I am looking well again. This struck me, because it proves that the negroes observe differences where Europeans are concerned.

Fortunately it's much less oppressive here than in Freetown. In the evening there is even a nice cool breeze. It really makes a big difference. The tornadoes seem to be over here. One only sees some lightning in the evening. Strange that the rainy season is already more advanced here than in Freetown, isn't it?

The personnel is also complete again now. About Conteh and Mabo I have already written, haven't I? They came to Freetown. The other boy who I had here, Tamba, a Kissi, has also remained loyal and came back. He was for some time in the service of a Syrian trader here while I was away, but he immediately went over to my camp again. I have given him one of the pipes which we bought at Woolworth's. He was very pleased with it. The actual giving of presents hasn't yet begun though. We'll have to wait a few days until everything is unpacked.

We have also got a cook, a boy from the same group as Mabo, also someone who has earlier been in the service of the missionaries. Two years ago he had already asked me a few times for a job and now Conteh has brought him here. It's rather good to have someone for the food, otherwise it would have become a bit busy for Mabo. Now Mabo can concentrate on the actual household work. Moreover, the new cook knows a bit more about cooking than Mabo. I have also got a night watchman. Last time Mabo and his friend Mustapha slept with me in my house, but Mustapha is now in school in Koyeima (north of Bo) and Mabo has a wife now. So something else had to be arranged. One shouldn't have to be really afraid here, but I did find it pleasant to have someone with me. He wouldn't only be there in case of a potential theft, but it might also occur that one should want to send a messenger into town. One is otherwise a bit isolated here at night. Now Woutje is here, I think one should feel safe and I still find it difficult myself, although one has already been here for a longer time, not to lie listening at night when one hears unfamiliar sounds. The forest is always somewhat mysterious with all kinds of sounds. One hears mostly crickets and birds, but on the road not far from our house you can sometimes late at night hear voices and it's difficult to tell whether or not they are coming to your house. The night watchman, who we have got, has done this work earlier on and is experienced. He will do some garden work at the same time, I think. I haven't yet seen again the night watchman Yengbeke, who you know from my stories. Perhaps he is busy on the land now.

Now the Sunday is already nearly over, Moeteke. It passed quickly with bringing cupboards into the house, unpacking, visits from children and grown-up people and all kinds of small things.

Monday morning.

My dear Moeteke, now I suddenly have to finish the letter because the lorry is leaving.

Bye dearest Moeteke, [...]

your own Boy.

Panguma, Sunday evening 7 June 1936

My dear Moeteke,

On Tuesday we got your three letters. That was very nice, Moeteke. Now the letters have arrived and one knows about each other, it's as if the distance is somewhat smaller again too. You'll already have got our letter from Freetown too? How are you, dear Moeteke? If only you could have a look at us here. But you can more or less imagine everything, can't you?

The weather is good here and quite a difference with Freetown. The heavy rains haven't yet begun so it is often nice and cool. When the sun is shining, however, it's very warm and oppressive, but often it's also cloudy. On Friday morning I have been to a rice field, belonging to Joe Ynee, the son of the dead chief. It was near a village about one hour from Panguma in a very hilly region. It was quite a warm trip. But otherwise it goes well. The people who work on the land often even complain about the cold. I think it is because of the humidity. I believe that I have told you already that I had a medicine here, capsicum it's called. It's a red salve which one applies on the skin. I brought along a few tins of it from Freetown; there weren't any more of them there. The people are very fond of this capsicum. A few dozen people have already asked for it, so the two tins were soon finished. I have now ordered more of them, but it will take about a month before they come. When the people buy it, they often say that it's cold on the land and that they therefore like to rub on this capsicum. It seems to help well against muscular pain. It's rather nice that people are now paying more promptly than two years ago when they bought medicines. There is somewhat more money in circulation than the last time because the prices of the palm kernels are higher. I found it nice to observe this because the last time I sometimes rather suspected some people of not wanting to pay.

The Peru Balsam has also proved its value already. This morning a boy came here who had badly cut his thumb with a cutlass when in the wood. We have put a lot of balsam in and over it.

I'll also get my own rice field, Moeteke. It's already a bit late in the season for sowing it, but it is still possible. I get a piece of land which was a rice field two years ago and where the vegetation is therefore not high. Joe Ynee arranges the land (I mean that I get it from him) and Momogbnanya the labourers. One is then able to see the work at all stages. The people find it, of course, nice that one joins in with such a thing.

We have also got a few kittens through Conteh. My old cat hasn't emerged again. These new ones are rather nice too. They are still very young.

In the sphere of politics it's relatively quiet. The actual contest is over and one is now waiting for the decision of the government, which will probably come in a few months' time. This period has the advantage that all parties like to make a good impression on the government and therefore don't want to give cause for complaints. The party who is now Regent Chief, is also friendly and helpful to me. I come as usual to the court sessions and also I live as usual with them. The Regent Chief doesn't suspect me, I believe, of supporting one of the parties in particular. So I am able to do my work quietly. It remains somewhat delicate of course. This afternoon Joe Ynee was

here for a while and he quite understood this. He said: "Several members of my family have already said to me: Why don't you go more often to the "doctor"? You are friends after all. They think that when one is a friend, one should visit each other all the time to renew it. But I know that a European keeps to his word. I would also bring you in a difficult position if I would visit you frequently. Therefore I prefer not to come often."

On the other hand a chiefdom where such things are going on, is very interesting for me of course. Conteh had a good insight in this respect. This week he told me about what had happened during my absence. I then said: "Aren't such difficulties occurring in many chiefdoms?" "Yes", he said, "but there are also chiefdoms with a strong chief or where little is going on for other reasons. Such a chiefdom, however, wouldn't be good for our work. Just when there is some friction, one gets to know the right points. Otherwise the people just bow to everything the chief says." That was rather nicely thought up by him, wasn't it? He always chuckles when people argue about a point so that we can hear different standpoints.

In the Times I read a report about the women's peace march, Moeteke. It said that in Amsterdam 18,000 women participated in it. Twice as many as last year. Surely that was rather a success, wasn't it?

[...] Bye my very dear Moeteke, I hope that you get this letter between the regular times.

Your own Child.

Sunday afternoon, 14 June 1936

My very dear Moeteke,

Now I had hoped to be able to quietly spend this afternoon with writing letters, but one can't often plan in advance here what one is going to do. This morning there was a death in Panguma and we did have to be there, I mean at the ceremonies, the burial, etc.

[...] Here the world rests in the afternoon heat. I have rested a bit and I am still sitting on my bed while writing to you; Woutje is still resting in her bed too. Fortunately there hasn't yet been a knock on the door this afternoon by visitors. It's nice to feel oneself fairly safe from callers for half a day. – Yesterday afternoon the District Commissioner, Mr Shaw, arrived here in Panguma. He will probably stay a few days to settle a few matters. He lives in the other rest house. Tonight he will come and have supper here.

It's already busy here with all kinds of things. There is so much to note down, Moeteke, with what one gets to know through talks and with what one sees. One would almost need another pair of hands. The physical strength to write down everything in the evening and to sort things out a bit, is not unlimited of course. It is still sensible to go on enjoying a good night's rest in order to keep fit. Several times this week we have had court sessions. There is always much to learn. This week we have also had all sorts of talks about religion. One then gets to know fairly interesting things. It's good to discuss such complicated subjects over a longer period of time. If one waits

until the last moment, it goes in too much of a hurry. One should make many inquiries and argue and ask several people about it before one gets to know the ins and outs of it. This week I have noted down all sorts of things about the belief in spirits and ancestor worship. I did know something about these, but I am not yet very systematic.

Basically one has two types of spirits, the *ngafei* and the *dzinei*.² The first ones are the spirits of dead people, the second are spirits who have never been humans. Among the *ngafei* both good and evil spirits can be found. They, that is the good ones, are being worshipped at regular times or, when one is in trouble, one presents offerings to them. However, there are spirits who are worshipped in this manner by the family, thus by a bigger community, and spirits who can be worshipped individually. The real fathers of a family are commemorated by the family, those who have occupied an important position. But brothers, sisters, nephews, etc., thus other types of family members, gradually pass into oblivion, unless a living member of the family commemorates them and presents offerings to them individually, which does indeed occur in several cases. However, some are more assiduous than others and some people make offerings regularly, while others wait till the ancestors complain about them in dreams. It really is human all this, isn't it? In dreams much can happen and dreams occupy an important place.

The *dzinei* are a completely different group of beings. They live in the water or in the forest or along the road, where they live just like human beings, having a chief, etc. Among them there are also good and evil ones. Especially those people who are often in the forest can meet them. The good ones make people rich. The people who have contact with them come to some sort of agreement with them, as one did in medieval stories with the devil, or as it often occurs in our legends, with gnomes or another sort of beings. The *dzinei* make someone rich, order him to do certain work which brings him prosperity and give him advice. In exchange for this they demand something from you which you love which could be your wife, your child, and so on. Therefore rich people often have few children.

There are also less good, pestering *dzinei*, who bother people at night or when they are on their own on the road. Of the people who are possessed it is also said that a *dzinei* has touched them. It seems that the *dzinei* isn't within the human being, as it says in the Bible about demons; it seems to surround the person. There are special people who are able to exorcize such a *dzinei* out of an insane person. From the mad person one tries to get to know the name of the *dzinei* and when the exorcist mentions that name, the *dzinei* leaves and will never return.

An interesting question is also where the dead person goes to, namely the land of the dead. The ideas about it are pretty vague. Generally the dead person goes back to the already dead family from the paternal side. When a woman dies, she generally goes to her husband's family, and so to him if he is already dead and if the marriage was legal and they loved each other. If the marriage was badly arranged and her family also claims the children, or if it concerns an only daughter of a family, then the burial might also be organized by her family and one supposes that she also returns to her

² See Hofstra 1940a and 1942a. The dictionary spelling of *dzinei* is *jina/jinei*. With thanks to Paul Richards.

family once she is dead. During burial arrangements and at the place where someone gets buried, feelings and affection tend to be expressed too. For example, James Ynee has been buried next to his mother because he loved her dearly.

These things interest me very much of course, Moeteke. I hope that I'll gradually be able to give you a good account of them. You are told all kinds of stories here, but the real art is to bring system and coherence into them. I find that very nice work.

Early this week a start will be made on our rice field. We have got a field where the burning of the cut-down trees hasn't completely succeeded and which the owner, who doesn't have much help, has left like that. He is pleased that I am taking it over, for it's better that it gets cultivated. Probably on Tuesday the work, namely the clearing away of the cut-down trees which haven't been burnt, will be done by people from a neighbouring village to whom we give salt and tobacco in return. They would rather have this than the same amount in money, because money is easily spent or is taken away from them by a "big man". Village people still don't seem to like buying things; they rather prefer to receive goods for their services or to exchange something.

Monday morning. It was yesterday evening with the D.C. quite pleasant. He is a nice man, not someone with whom one would always like to have contact, but just for an evening it's a pleasant change. We have also played the game, Moeteke, that we got from you in London. It usually stands on a table on the veranda. Some negroes have also tried it. It's funny to observe how lively some of them are at it. They follow the course of the ball with all kinds of body movements.

The weather is pleasant so far. There haven't been many rains. In the evening there mostly is a thundery shower. During the day, when it isn't raining, and the sun shines, it can often be quite warm, but still not so warm as at the end of the rainy season around February and March. It's now a fairly good time for Woutje to settle down here. It will suit her quite well, I think. We only have to see to it, especially for her, that we get a sufficient night's rest. You can't afford here to become overtired. Then your body soon loses its resistance. Woutje can't yet spend much time in the sun, but that isn't necessary after all. She helps me by typing up my notes. That makes them more conveniently arranged and easier for me to read them through. Yesterday morning we were quite a long time outside, because of that death and the funeral. Then the warmth is at first rather too much for her, but that is natural; also when you are used to it, you sometimes find it really very oppressive. One should be careful, of course, not to cross the boundary.

[...] Bye [...] Moeteke,

your own Child

Panguma, Sunday 21 June 1936

My dear Moeteke,

Now we have already been here three weeks. Time flies by. Yet, one experiences a lot in such a relatively short time period and it therefore seems as if one has been here

longer. This week especially has been rather emotional due to several calamities of the people here. It has been a fairly bad week for Panguma because of a few deaths.

I wrote to you last week about the case of the young woman who had died last Sunday. The next morning, Monday, there was another death. It concerned a quite different case, namely an old man, who was here without his family and who didn't own anything. Therefore there were no mourners for him and the funeral was the simplest possible. Because there was no family to see to it, he was buried "by the municipality", in this case the chiefdom. What's more, most people were in fact afraid to be involved with the dead person because he belonged to a special secret society and a member of that society should actually be buried in a ritual way by other members. It is the so-called Tongo society which engages itself with soothsaying and medical matters. However, members of this society live in Lalehun and couldn't, perhaps also for money reasons, arrive here in time. So there wasn't any ceremonial at all and there were only some twelve people present at the burial. Woutje and I and Conteh were there. We first saw the old man lying in the small room where he had died. It was a very old face, like a mask, so bony, with the eyes half open.

In such a case, when someone hasn't had a proper burial, there exists the fear about getting involved, because the spirit isn't content and can become nasty. A few days afterwards I heard that the deceased had appeared to somebody in a dream, in which he said that he would like to walk around, but that he was ashamed because he was naked. For he hadn't been buried in a garment, but with just a cloth over him. The room in which he died is being avoided until people of his secret society have performed a ritual washing there. But you also have variations in the belief in between. For the house in which that room is situated, contains more rooms, which the proprietress of the house lets out to strangers for a few shillings a year. Conteh said, "After a few months the proprietress is likely to let out the room to somebody who isn't aware of the case!"

This whole story was instructive for me because, in the first place, it formed a glaring contrast to the burial of the previous day, when there was a great deal of attention and Mohammedan ceremonial because the deceased belonged to a big family. In the second place, because it offered me a glance at the beliefs, the relation to the dead and fear of the dead in certain cases.

Another difficult and painful case this week concerned a suicide attempt. We sat in court on Thursday morning when a message arrived that a young man, who had severely wounded himself, was going to be brought in. Half an hour later a small procession came in with the man carried in a hammock and also there were his sister and a few people from the village where they came from. The sister cried loudly and wailed almost in the ceremonial manner for the dead. We then got to hear in court from the people what had happened. The young man had been away from the village for three months and had returned the previous day. He then showed various symptoms that indicated that he was mentally ill. The next morning his family talked with him and he then told them that he was continually being persecuted by a ngafei or spirit, and that he therefore wanted to take his own life. Immediately he had drawn a knife and inflicted himself with a deep wound in his belly. He had then run into the forest and had,

before anyone had been able to grab him, cut off his genitals. It was all very horrid. I saw the wounds and just the sight of it made my stomach heave. The wound in the belly was about 10 centimetres long and some 3 or 4 centimetres deep. But it hardly bled. He hadn't hit any vital parts. The strange thing was that the man gave no sign of it hurting. It should have hurt a lot, but he just looked down or sideways. I think that he will be dead by now. He was taken to Kenema in the afternoon. There is a history attached to this case. For this man had gone off to seek his wife who had gone to the Kono country. This wife was murdered while he was there. Another man is suspected of it, but the husband, being the man who tried to commit suicide, also seems to have been involved.

It is hard to find out in such cases what had moved such a man. Being possessed has already been explained by a spirit following you and this man too complained about this. On the other hand, if he was involved in the murder, the fear of discovery may also have contributed. It could also have been an unconscious mixture of both, and the persecution by the spirit is perhaps what we would call a (guilty) conscience.

This was by no means the end of the series of accidents this week. While we were yesterday morning in court again, we heard a sudden mourning by women. We heard that a young woman was dying, from the same family as the girl who died last Sunday, but from another mother. When we arrived at the house, she had already died. Women still rubbed her breast and underneath her arms, hoping that life would return. But already soon this hope had gone and the women began to mourn loudly. That mourning is something quite strange to hear, Moeteke. I was sick at heart because of it and at the same time it's strange because of the loudness. By now I have noticed something which Conteh also told me, that one can discern three kinds of mourners: firstly onlookers or distant family who don't cry, but now and then call out oo! yei! oo! or something like that. Then the family who call out something like that as well as the name of the dead person and then cover their face with their hands and sometimes also cry. Finally the people, who were the most closely related with the dead person, the next of kin, such as the mother and sisters. Their crying is much stronger and, apart from their ceremonial utterances, one can see with them real sorrow too. In yesterday's case it was very sad indeed for the mother. She had already lost a few children, this was her only child and she had hoped that this child would bury her later on. The mother was completely expressionless, I believe, or almost mad, so it was as if things were going on without her being aware of them. Therefore she even didn't cry. Other women held her fast and kept her in another house. Among all the ceremonial there is so much that is really human, Moeteke, I mean utterances which one finds in all cultures when it concerns the big problems of death and life. It all gives you much to think about.

I have noted down those different words of the lamentations yesterday. For repeating this later this is always helpful, I think. Some things remind you almost of a biblical style. The girl, or rather, young woman who died, was fairly pretty. One of the wailing women summed up her beauty with all kinds of comparisons. Through talking about these cases I have, moreover, got interesting material, Moeteke, that also connects to the things which I wrote to you about last week. This morning the funeral took place.

An aspect of humour wasn't absent because the dead person wasn't steady in her contacts with men and didn't have a legal husband. According to Mohammedan custom it isn't possible to pray for her then, for the husband should, so to say, present her at the funeral and lead the prayers and offer her to Allah. In order to prevent the funeral being dishonourable and "bare", one had therefore to think up a trick. So one found a Mohammedan medicine man from French Guinea, who was willing to be her husband. He asked one pound for this, but they agreed on four shillings. It's a rather unusual case, that a husband has to be found quickly for a dead person and that he acts as the husband of the wife. So one actually tried to slightly deceive God and several people did find it somewhat strange, I noticed.

On Sunday, one isn't ever sure one will not be disturbed. For after this funeral we went to see a man who I had already seen before in Kenema and who is psychologically very peculiar. Because he is passing through here, I just had to talk to him this morning. He is a man who dresses up as a woman and entirely lives as a woman. Strange, isn't it? He doesn't seem to have sexual intercourse and I think that he is impotent. He has a female voice, walks and behaves like a woman. He is a very good dancer. He dances as a "devil" for the Bundu, the secret society of women. In the neighbouring chiefdom Dodo he has recently danced and then it was discovered – which they didn't know before – that he wasn't a woman. For punishment they confiscated his Bundu mask. Therefore he is now in trouble. This morning I have noted down part of his history, which, according to him he has experienced, and he makes a calm, reliable impression. Tomorrow I'll continue writing down that history. His mother was one of the chiefs of the Bundu. When she died, she subsequently appeared in a dream, according to his story, and she then told him where he could find special charms which would turn him into a great dancer. That was under water in a river. He dived in there and had encounters with spirits who demanded that he would further live as a woman because those charms were only allowed to be used by a woman. After three days he found himself back again in his house. Since then he lives as a woman and travels through the country.

It could be that strong dream experiences lie at the root of all this, couldn't it? Moreover, every day there have been court sessions, about twenty during the past weeks and that provides much for me to note down.

This is all about the life here and about my work, Moeteke. I have written about it more or less in order, because I know that you like to share in it as much as possible. It's difficult to present the right background for each case, of course, and one almost has to be here for that, but you do have a certain amount of fantasy and empathy, don't you, Moeteke? For Woutje it was quite something, all this strange life this week, with its depressing aspects. This way she does make contact with another part of life. That is instructive at the same time, though also oppressive sometimes.

We do take care to get enough rest, Moeteke. Often one would only like to have two pairs of hands to note down everything.

Now it is Monday morning and the day is ready for work. Often one wonders in the morning: what special things would there be today? There is always the regular work, but unexpected things often come in between.

The rains already begin to get stronger. Sometimes it is nice and cool, but it can also be oppressively warm in between.

[...] Bye, my dear Moeteke,

your own Boy

Panguma, 28 June 1936

My very dear Moeteke,

Again a week has already passed. It often goes quickly; each day brings its own work and the week is over before one knows it. We have been in Panguma more than a month now. I am not dissatisfied with it. I have collected some quite nice material during this time; still more about the religious life too. One easily experiences that as a result of the deaths here during the past weeks. This week a woman and a young child died, so altogether there have been five deaths during the past two weeks. It has been a relatively cold month, for this country at least. The people complain a lot about it and they come for medicines against it. There is still much to do on the land with clearing [of branches] and sowing of rice. I think that the cold has an impact on the causes of death. During the past two days, for instance, there hasn't been any sun. For Europeans this can be comfortable, but for negroes it's a bit shivery, of course. Everything around such a death, the funeral, the supposed causes and ceremonies, provide me with material of course, not only for description, but also for further questioning.

It's now Sunday morning. Where would you be now, Moeteke? Have you been to church? I can imagine so well how everything is in the house and how you are there, Moeteke, although everything is far away.

Yes, we will do our utmost to assess everything here. There is much to do, very much and I like doing it. In this second year and after the experience I got in London through writing, one is gradually more able to systematize everything and get an overview of it for oneself. I believe, Moeteke, that such work has a value, not only for yourself, not only because it gratifies your scientific needs doing this, but also to let people read it later on. As you recently mentioned too, one sometimes thinks if one couldn't do better work in Europe, where there is so much to be done. During the time in London I have also asked myself this several times as you know. But I still believe that it is good to do it, Moeteke. Not all people are doers. Now I do know that in Europe much research can be done without having to be an actual fighter, and I hope to participate in it later on through this work. But I believe that this has a great cultural value, getting good descriptions of primitive peoples, and so becoming aware of our own culture. And also it is a counterbalance against the countless ill-founded speculations on primitive cultures, which one still finds in psychological and other types of literature. After all, the value of scientific work is less obvious than much other, more direct work. Of course I know that you agree with this and we have also started this African work with this in mind. But it's good to reflect on it occasionally and I myself too, because one also has moments of doubt. It's difficult to find the right way in life, but I believe that a task lies within it, Moeteke, to bring this work to an end as successfully as possible.

Gradually one hears – always incidentally, by one or the other circumstance or event – all kinds of interesting things about the beliefs of the people. In London, for instance, I heard from Alleney [a Mende] that you can also take on guilt on oneself, according to Mendi belief, by treating animals badly. You can become ill by it and then you have to confess and make up for it. This week I accidentally heard an example of it. Conteh's second wife has twice had a miscarriage so she went to a diviner and asked him the cause of them. The diviner said that she had probably somehow misbehaved towards animals. She then confessed that she had several times tied up chickens with their head underneath the wings in order to keep them silent when they hindered her while stamping rice. She is now no longer allowed to eat chicken until she has got a child and the child can walk. There is also another woman here in Panguma, who has the same taboo.

Strange, isn't it? They also have a word for cruelty, including cruelty towards animals, especially chickens. Chickens are important animals for the Mendi, of course, and it's understandable that one protects them. But bad treatment of other pets, for instance dogs, seems to have the same consequences. Now it's difficult to determine what counts more in such prohibitions: an aversion to cruelty as such or the need to protect animals because of their usefulness. Against this latter idea the objection can be raised that in European culture useful animals were not, or only in later times, protected. There is also this difference with us that cruelty against animals is only punished when it gives offence in public. Here, however, it's a sin that entails a supernatural punishment, whether it has been done alone or in public.

Such things provide me with interesting subject matter of course, also for the later study about the relation between man and animals.³ Apparently, researchers have paid little attention so far to such questions. As yet I haven't found any description of what I told you about the supernatural reaction to cruelty. Yet it would surprise me greatly if it didn't occur among other primitive people as well.

Fortunately there haven't been many court sessions this week. Otherwise one wouldn't be able to keep up with noting down everything. It's already quite a job.

Yesterday morning I attended a peculiar ceremony, namely the withdrawal of an oath or curse, whatever one wishes to call it. A year ago a woman had falsely sworn on the *sɔkpɔi* [?] medicine, that is the medicine on which one swears in court. Recently she had been frequently ill and she confessed what she had done at the ceremony. The further impact of the oath has to be undone through a special ceremony when the medicine is told that the case is now finished. When one swears on the magical medicine that one is telling the truth, one at the same time invites the medicine to kill you in case you don't tell the truth. There is a strong belief, that this magical power will have a go at you in the end, even if you escape from it for a while, when you tell lies. It's so to say a kind of impersonal force, which one activates and the operation of

³ See Hofstra 1945 about Man's attitude towards nature. Between 1953 and 1973 Hofstra was a member of the board resp. secretary (1958-1961) and chair (1961-1973) of the Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals. Between 1958 and 1974 he was also a member of the board resp. chair (1966-1974) of the World Federation for the Protection of Animals.

which one has to stop through a special ceremony. Interestingly, a tortoise has to be present at the ceremony.

There is so much to be observed here, Moeteke. The longer one is here, the more coherent it becomes, of course.

Bye, dear Moeteke! Now it's Monday morning again and the letter has to be sent off. On Friday we are planning to send another letter, for on 7 July a German ship leaves from Freetown, I believe.

Next week we are planning to be away a few days from Panguma. In Laoma, a small town in this chiefdom, is the election of a town chief. Our chief and his people are going there and it's rather nice for us to be there too.

Bye, very dear Moeteke of mine, now a letter will arrive from you tomorrow, nice.

Bye, your own Boy.

Panguma, 3 July 1936

My very dear Moeteke,

We got your letters on Wednesday. Lovely that they arrived. It's so nice that there is now regular contact again.

This is a short letter, Moeteke, and it is a small greeting, which I hope will reach you with an interim mail. You once wrote to me that it's such a nice surprise when you get a short letter in the post unexpectedly. An almost bigger surprise than the expected longer letter.

There is not much to write about from here since Sunday. On the land the work continues busily. This year, one is late with sowing because in spring the rains started earlier than expected. In many cases this meant that the correct burning of the cut-down wood failed. There are quite a lot of people who suffer from cold and are therefore a bit ill. It seems strange in this country to suffer from cold, but due to the many rains there often is little sun and the people now have to walk frequently on cold, wet ground. There is also quite a lot of change in the weather because first the sun is shining and then it's pouring.

The man who the other day attempted to commit suicide, has been brought back to Kenema. He had become mad there. His wounds have been dressed. I don't know if he can get better, but his mind is confused anyway. His family has taken him back to their village. He has remained here a few more days because one wanted to send for someone from Lalehun, who exorcizes spirits. This man, however, sent a message that he wasn't able to cure this case and didn't dare to do it because the spirit was too strong for him. Apparently such exorcists are rather cautious and, for the sake of their reputation, don't want to expose themselves to failures. Otherwise I certainly would have liked to have attended the ceremony. Viewed from a religio-psychological standpoint, such things are very remarkable, of course. The whole way of life here is still truly bound up with the contact with spirits, and all kinds of supernatural forces, Moeteke.

Such cases of being possessed by a spirit, which is exorcized, are almost biblical, aren't they?

Come Sunday the Acting Governor will pay a visit here. He is touring the country and also calling upon Panguma. It mobilizes a lot of people of course. It will only take an hour, anyway. He is the Colonial Secretary and the substitute for the Governor.

I have also had a small cold, Moeteke, and stayed in bed a few days this week. It was angina, I think. It's over again now. Fortunately it wasn't malaria. It's rather nice and quiet to stay in bed for a few days. One is then able to do some overdue writing undisturbed and be free from all kinds of visits. By perspiring strongly the cold has come out again. It's also quite a significant difference in temperature here, compared with Freetown.

Next week I'll respond to your letters somewhat more as before, Moeteke. [...] Bye, very dear Moeteke of mine! [...]

your own Boy

Panguma, 12 July 1936, Sunday afternoon

My very dear Moeteke,

Now it's Sunday afternoon again, about half past four. What would you be doing now, Moeteke? [...] It's strange that, while you are now in the middle of summer, it's here the coolest time of the year and later on, when you have the winter, we have the hottest time.

It rains almost every day, though not all the time. One day it hardly rains, another day a few hours and yet another day most of the day. At night it sometimes rains continuously too. Often it's rain as with you, but sometimes it pours down in a really tropical way. The thunderstorms are completely over now. The mean temperature is at present between 75 and 80 degrees. It is remarkable that one finds it this cool already; in Holland it would be quite a high temperature. But compared to the 113 degrees when I left here last year, it's not that high, of course.

This week not much has happened. Last Sunday we have had the substitute Governor on a visit here in Panguma. He was on a three weeks' tour of the country. He was with his wife and they only stayed an hour. Several people had supposed that a new chief would now have been appointed by the government, but that wasn't the case. The town had been thoroughly cleaned. Some 160 labourers from the chiefdom had been summoned for this and they have worked at it for five days. Therefore it was a pity that the visit was so short. Such official people often don't quite understand the character of the natives, who expect a certain amount of ceremony on such an occasion. They had particularly decorated the barri (the place where court sessions are held) with flowers, etc. and they had put chairs there, thinking that the Governor would sit there a while and give a speech. However, he said his speech while standing. Perhaps he also wanted to avoid all kinds of petitions now the chiefdom is still in a state of unrest.

He and his wife were also here in our house for quarter of an hour. He told me that the government of Sierra Leone has this year also granted a subsidy (about £25 or £50) to the Institute. They were quite nice, by the way, and the result of the visit was that the town is thoroughly clean for once.

Our chief has spent a week in the hospital in Bo. I think that he had some sort of venereal disease earlier on. Therefore there hasn't been a court session. And the planned trip to Laoma didn't go through. It will probably happen this week.

On our farm it has been quite busy. I got help from the labourers of a neighbouring village. They have worked hard there for a few days and now most of the work is done. Tomorrow they will come again. Woutje and I have already spent a day there. It's nice to experience that, Moeteke. Together with Conteh's wives, Woutje has been busy cooking rice for the labourers. Such rice, which is given to the people who work on the land, is called *kondei*. There were three big bowls for some twenty people. When one is there on such a day, one learns to notice all kinds of things, much more than when you look around on someone else's land, because you can take your time over it and you have a more easy-going relationship with the people who do the work. Conteh is also active with it and Momogbnanya, one of the "big men", was here for the supervision. The "big men" here quite appreciate it that we have this farm. This week there was a court case about a village. A man had apparently refused to join in with the ordinance to help each other getting the farms ready. Because the farms are late this year, the chief has ordered that the people should help each other on their farms. It was mentioned then that I, as a stranger, did join in the farming, but that a Mendi man backed out. So one learns all kinds of things here about small matters. One has to participate in many things and then one learns in an unostentatious way the most, I think. One can't always only bother people with questions. When you participate in the one or the other Mende activity, they tell you more.

We have also got a girl in the household. It's a somewhat sad case. The girl – she is about eight or ten – is from Lalehun, but her parents there don't seem to care particularly well for her. I believe that her mother may have died. The girl now lives in Panguma, but didn't have a good lodging. We got to know about her because she came here for medicine. It now appears that boys have played with her sexual organ and the girl is very upset by it. Not so much because of the act, the meaning of which she hardly understands yet, but more so because it is against the rules of the Humui society (the society which guards the purity of the sexual morals). Also she thinks that she's ill because of this offence (by way of a supernatural punishment a Humui offence is followed by an illness). She has, moreover, dreams in which witches try to lure her. Because the girl is actually without protection and would like to undergo the ritual washing of the Humui Society, Conteh and I (Conteh is also rather interested in such cases) have asked one of the old leaders of the Humui to do the washing. She is prepared to do this, but according to the proper order of these matters the boys who have committed the offence (or their parents) have to pay compensation. To get this done and to see the further outcome, I have now summoned the boys, according to Mendi custom, because in this case I here represent, so to speak, her parents. With the compensation which the boys have to pay (if this doesn't happen such a girl becomes

the plaything of all kinds of boys) the ritual matters can be done. We are likely to also get a ceremony with an exorcist.

Conteh and I always come across these remarkable cases, or rather he in particular, because he gets in touch with more people of course. It's indeed an advantage by getting to know one place somewhat better and to have contact with the people, rather than travelling around a lot.

I wrote to you some time ago, Moeteke, that I have collected some data about the religious life. Something more has been added to it. I don't know why I have collected rather more than last time. Before I have described a few ceremonies, but there was so much to be digested first and I then wanted to have a better idea of ordinary life, and about the economic and the juridical life, because I thought I would miss a certain basis otherwise. By noting down several things for my last article, in which I initially also had a part on the religious life, one learnt to notice all kinds of things. Moreover, because the population trusts you now, one is better able to investigate religious topics than at the beginning. So this week, for instance, I have noted down four dreams of people about whom I had heard that they had just had a dream. I have written down these dreams in Mendi, together with the translation, in order to be able to feel the atmosphere of those things better when I'll be working up the material later on. Such work requires a certain trust of course and one can't expect people to come to you with these things in the first weeks. Therefore I am still pleased, Moeteke, that I haven't followed the usual practice of travelling much.

The dream world is very interesting because it has an important place here, as with all primitive people. The dreams still have a meaning here. There exists in each dream a specific explanation. For instance, if you have sexual intercourse in your dream, a witch has tried to approach you. If one dreams about someone living as being dead, this means a long life for that person. A boy Tawali (also called Samuel) who is related to Conteh and who is staying here a while and also gives me information, told me that when he was often hungry as a boy (his mother is dead), his uncle, who is now also dead and who was always good to him, sometimes appeared in his dream and gave him food. The next morning he was feeling satisfied. If, on the other hand, your existing enemy gives you food in your dream, this mostly means a future illness (by poisoned food). There are numerous such explanations.

One of the dreams which I noted down this week was of a man from a neighbouring village. The previous night he had dreamt that his teeth had fallen out. This meant a death in his family, so the people established who were in the house and heard the dream. The man wanted to go to a diviner in order to get to know what he could do to ward off the disaster.

Another man dreamt that he saw a swarm of bees leaving someone's house. That also means something unfavourable for this person. Now it is an interesting custom that when you dream about someone and this dream can have a meaning for that person, that you then tell him your dream. That person is then, so to say, warned and can take measures with one or another offering, if the dream was unfavourable.

In this case, however, the dream concerned someone with whom the man who had dreamt it wasn't on friendly terms. In such a case, Conteh said, you inform him through a friend. However, the man concerned didn't seem inclined to do so.

It's interesting, Moeteke, the way they inform each other about dreams. They are very open about it. In the morning the people tell each other about their dreams if they think that there is some meaning in them. Sometimes one tells it in a bigger group than the others, depending on the importance of the matter. There is something nice in this openness how it creates special relationships between people.

With respect to the explanation of dreams one can, I believe, distinguish three groups of people. First the most simple people, who are soon at a loss about the meaning of a dream; then the more knowledgeable, the somewhat more sophisticated, who are more certain; and finally, the diviners who are the professional dream interpreters. Particularly when one is in trouble and has had a dream, one wants to hear from the diviner what one should do in the future. Yesterday we have had a diviner at work here in the house. Conteh had seen a woman, who had just had a dream about her child, which was in a neighbouring village. She dreamt that the child was ill. Conteh then traced a diviner for her, who explained the case here. He worked with a number of special stones and pieces of iron. In them he read that the child was sound, but that in this particular village an old woman was dying. The woman has now returned to her village. She has promised to return next week and tell us if it was true what the diviner said. I asked Conteh if she was likely to tell the truth then or if she would perhaps be ready to help the diviner. No, he said, we are not afraid of diviners. Rather, we often test them in order to know who is a good diviner and who a liar.

It's so remarkable, Moeteke, that all this is still so much alive here. You sometimes read about it in books, but you only get a stronger sense of the power of such a belief and the reality of the dream life for the people here by living among them. This happens to me at least, because from most written descriptions I was never able to get such a good understanding.

Real human things are also manifested in dreams. Thus Joseph, the boy who also works with me (I believe that I have already written about him, haven't I?), told me that he repeatedly dreamt about his mother, who talks to him (his mother is dead and he doesn't seem to care much about his father).

A remarkable phenomenon one gradually discovers here too, is the way in which wrong deeds can be undone again. I don't mean offences against the law, which fall in a separate category, but what they would call "sins" and with which the law doesn't concern itself. One can make them undone by paying certain compensations through offerings, ritual washings and through confession. These methods are mostly done together. In this manner I gradually try to get some system with the data. There is quite a lot in this field, Moeteke. I am glad, after all, to carry on, for I think that one can write a valuable book about it, if all goes well.

This morning – on Sunday mornings we get up at 7 instead of 6 o'clock – I have read part of "Bartje" to Woutje.⁴ We came to the part about the death of his mother. I

⁴ Bartje Bartels figured in Dutch novels by Anne de Vries.

found that piece very moving. One can hardly read it with dry eyes. What's more, so many memories of your own youth are brought back then.

It's now already Sunday evening. It's raining outside. On the table before me, among all kinds of papers, the kittens are sleeping, curled up with their little heads against each other and their little bodies over each other, warming themselves by the lamp. Woutje sits and writes at the other table on the veranda.

All kinds of noises one still hears outside, birds and crickets. Actually, the air is always filled with noises here, all night long. Apart from the wonderful skies, they give something mysterious to the nights.

Where are you now Moeteke, dear Moeteke? I so often think of you, Moeteke. Do you realize this? I also know that you are with me all the time with your fondest thoughts.

Woutje is doing well. It exceeds my expectations that she can take the heat. Of course it's now a relatively cool time of the year, but it's also a good time to get accustomed to the climate. She begins to get used to the life here. Everything must have been very strange for her at first. It's all so completely different, and especially when all those deaths occurred here, it must have been difficult for her for a while. But otherwise she already copes with the life here quite well. By now there is of course more regularity in life after the busy time in the beginning and to a certain extent it's also a more free and natural life for Woutje here than in London. She feels herself more at home with nature. If life continues like this, then it will be well, I guess, Moeteke. The life here also makes one more mature.

Monday morning. [...] Bye Moeteke,
your own Boy

Panguma, 22 July 1936, Wednesday morning

My very dear mother,

This is a very small greeting in between the regular mails. I don't think that there is an interim mail this time, but it's always possible.

It was so nice to get your letters, Moeteke. And on Saturday morning we received a letter from you unexpectedly, in between the regular mails. That was such a lovely surprise.

I have been very busy last week and also the present one with ceremonies. There have been a few Humui ceremonies (the Humui is for proper sexual morals), a Poro ceremony, the prayer of a father for an ill child, a ceremony on the rice field and an exorcism of a witch out of someone. All quite interesting, but it provides very much work in the way of writing, working up and correcting. I'll to write you more about it, Moeteke.

Bye my dear, it's well with us. [...] Woutje will soon write to you again.

Your own Boy

Panguma, 26 July 1936, Sunday morning

My dear Moeteke,

How soon such a week passes by. From the outside one might say that not much is going on here, but when one lives here, there is so much that one wants to describe that one is short of time. And almost every day there is something different.

Last week I was able to collect some more data about the Humui society. This is a society, represented in every place, which guards against offences against sexual morals and everything connected with sexuality. Its leaders are mostly old women. It's, for instance, forbidden to have sex in the forest, thus outside the town. During the day in the house, sexual intercourse isn't allowed either. Besides, there are all kinds of rules with respect to sexual intercourse, pregnancy, and getting children. Offences against these rules can have illness as a consequence. If someone, for instance a woman, is ill, she will often go to a diviner and he will often be able to tell that she has done something against the Humui rules. She then confesses what she has done and has to be ritually washed by the Humui society.

Last week I attended two such ceremonies. One for a girl who had been molested by boys a few years ago, not with actual intercourse, but by touching with their fingers. Perhaps I already wrote to you that we have more or less taken this girl into our protection and the boys have now been fined. This girl was repeatedly somewhat sickly and a diviner had told her that she should be washed by the Humui. That has now happened. An old woman did it and "washed" her morally clean again, with small speeches and water with all kinds of medicinal leaves in it. The water that is used for ritual washings, is always blended with special leaves. Each society and the medicine man have their own secrets for this.

The other Humui ceremony was for a young woman who was quite ill and who had had sexual intercourse during the daytime. This ceremony – the other one was performed behind Conteh's house – was more complicated and secretive. The woman concerned had to stay all night in the house where the next day the ceremony was going to take place and on the evening before there was much drumming and dancing. Only a few leaders of the society were allowed to attend the actual ceremony. For during this ceremony the secret medicine of the society had to be shown and outsiders aren't allowed to be there. Besides, there also exists a rule that membership of one secret society makes it difficult for one to be a member of another secret society, because each society has its special medicine, which the other isn't allowed to see. Moreover, each society cooks its ritual rice in a special way and eating the rice of another society can result in death, according to the people. Members of the Poro are not allowed to attend the Humui ceremonies (a ceremony like the last one).

Yet I wanted to attend one and asked if I could. The leaders had first to deliberate over it. They weren't completely opposed to it, but they found it dangerous for me because I am already a member of the Poro. The matter was brought before the chiefs and they didn't object to it. I paid the leaders 5 shillings, so they could pray to the spirits for my health. Then it was all right. Conteh and Joseph, who are both members of the Poro, didn't want to join me. Samuel, who isn't a member and who knows much

about the Humui through his grandmother, was allowed to attend together with me. In itself such a ceremony is not so mysterious. Ritual words and washings are performed and magic is practised with medicines. All kinds of mysterious medicines, for instance, twelve horns of deer full of medicines were taken out of a basket. One let out a “devil” that buzzed through the air. This “devil” consisted of a piece of wood on a string. It’s of course too elaborate to describe it all here.

Woutje has already attended the first Humui ceremony, the one for the girl, but the leaders didn’t allow her to attend the second one. Well, it was very smoky and mysterious in the small room, so it was just as well.

Further I have been in a village, Gbebu, about three hours from here, where a woman who had confessed to having spied on some Poro secrets, had to be washed ritually. This ceremony only took a short while and was also secret, but as Poro members Conteh and I could be present. On one’s way one sees all kinds of interesting things in the villages – we passed through five villages. When we are back home again, Moeteke, you’ll be able to read over everything in my material, for now it is being typed, it’s more convenient for reading through, of course.

This week there were three more deaths. One concerned a very old woman, another a man who had been sickly for a long time, and the third a boy who had measles. And then there was also something very strange, Moeteke. This week a very deformed child was born. I have seen it. The eyes were positioned unequally. It had six toes, strange flat hands and the sexual organ was deformed too. A curious long head, very scary to see. It lay on a mat, in a partitioned place in the forest near the town where the mother had given birth. Again it was a bit difficult to get there, because men are afraid and they are also not permitted to be there. However, they were prepared to show me the child. With Lucia, Conteh’s wife, I have been there. Conteh himself and even Samuel didn’t want or weren’t allowed to go with us. For there is a remarkable belief that it isn’t a human being, but the incarnation of a *ndɔgbɔyusi*, a bush devil. Such a child isn’t kept alive, but it is immediately killed by the midwives. It can’t even be taken into town. Apparently, this child was already dead when it was born. Such a child is cremated, in the first place because it represents a danger and pollution for the town – for it is a bush devil – and in the second place because the midwives make medicine from the ash which protects against the birth of such a child. Pregnant women can carry such a medicine in a small bag around their hips. According to an old custom – which, however, hasn’t been upheld during the past years – the whole town should be ritually cleaned after the birth of such a child and the ash of the cremated child should be given to young women. The explanation for the birth of such a child is that the mother has shown herself naked outside her house after six o’clock in the evening, perhaps for bathing, and that a *dzinei*, a spirit, has revealed itself to her. – I attended the cremation of the child, etc. Woutje wasn’t there because there wasn’t time to call her. I just managed to be there in time. The ashes were carefully put in little bags by the midwives and the place of the cremation was cleaned and washed in order to leave no traces. Otherwise people who make bad medicines would be able to take remnants of it. The old midwives were very serious about this. It was curious to see these old, wrinkled, secretive women busying themselves with their buckets of wa-

ter with all kinds of medicine leaves in them and sprinkling themselves with this water from time to time.

At the funeral of the old woman one could also observe that even here differences between poor and rich make themselves felt. The woman was from a former slave family. The funeral was really Mendi, without Mohammedan influence. I was there, just as I attend all funerals without distinction and also to contribute something for the costs. The people appreciate it, I believe, that I do this indiscriminately. With this family particularly one could see that. They value your presence at a funeral and to them I am no longer there as an observer.

What was special about this funeral was that a curse which the old woman had said over one of her daughters, was withdrawn at the grave and thereby undone. The eldest daughter, or the eldest child, has the right when one of the parents has cursed a child, to withdraw the curse again by the dead body of the parent.

Yesterday the man who had died was buried. Something remarkable happened there too. According to Mohammedan custom his wives confessed, while the corpse was still above the ground and before it was buried, what they had done wrong towards their husband and also what he had done wrong towards them. And they forgave him in the same way that they hoped that he would forgive them. Two creditors also came forward, who told them how much they still had to claim from the dead person.

When Conteh and I were in the house of mourning where the boy had died of measles, we saw at the head of the bed, on which an ill woman was lying, a branch with some leaves. We asked the meaning of this and it appeared that a diviner had told the woman that she had become ill because she hadn't offered anything to her ancestors for a long time. This twig, now, was a kind of boundary between her and her ancestors which the last ones weren't allowed to cross to bother her and which at the same time held a sort of promise to mend one's ways. We have attended the ceremony in which she thereupon prayed to her parents and her dead husband and offered rice to them. In indigenous belief this relationship between the living and the dead is very strong and it is the bond between both which isn't only kept alive through memories, but also through prayers, dreams and offerings.

One could consider these offerings, confessions of wrongdoings, ritual washings, etc. as the main characteristics of Mendi religion and moral life. It's all very interesting, Moeteke, as I am attempting to penetrate the meaning of these and bring some system into it.

[...] Do you know what I would like to receive from you? I often come in contact here with Mohammedan things and I would therefore like to know a bit more about Islam. As far as I can recall, I have in my bookcase at home at least one booklet about it, I think in French. Would you please have a look, Moeteke, and send it to me?

[...] You ask me, Moeteke, how I put my material in order and if I still keep it in the iron chest. I put the material which has been written up in separate files, according to large subjects, for instance economy, family, relation to the supernatural world, law, etc. Gradually one gets subdivisions of course, but I am not yet sure how to classify everything exactly. Some time ago I had already devised a whole scheme to sort out

the contents of the book, but that sometimes changes of course, according to your own ideas and the material that is added. However, we are now considering to give each specific item a number already and then make a sort of catalogue which indicates in which file a certain number is to be found. This is easier for looking up things. I no longer have the material in the chest. That was a bit inconvenient. I have it now in one of the cupboards which we got here from the office. In that cupboard there are many compartments which is very handy for this purpose.

Our health is still OK, Moeteke. Of course, now and then I have a very tiring day which gives me a headache, like yesterday afternoon. But that is understandable after a quite busy week. It's always somewhat difficult to give oneself enough rest. We are doing our best, but sometimes there is a series of circumstances in your work against which you can't do anything. One can't always organize things as one wishes. Woutje is doing well too. In the morning she is first busy with patients, and also there are plenty of opportunities for her to talk and observe. And she does a lot of typing. It isn't good for her to travel very much with me, as I have found out. At home and in town it's all right for her, but plodding around in the heat is very fatiguing for her. Therefore she shouldn't often go on a trek.

I also send you some photographs, Moeteke. Would you please tell Berman that he should develop all of them. There may be a few which have been taken at a ceremony and which he may not find worth developing perhaps because they are unclear. For me, however, they could still be valuable, of course.

Monday morning. Bye dear Moeteke of mine [...] I send you so many good and fondest thoughts, dear Moeteke,
your own Child.

Panguma, 9 August 1936, Sunday evening

My dear Moeteke,

I had planned to write you a longer letter yesterday and today, but so much has come in between now. It's strange this time, almost every day there is something new. As well as ceremonies of various kinds, it is especially the deaths that disturb the daily routine here and which therefore often determine my work too. These past few months the number of deaths has been unusual. Since mid-June, eighteen people have died here, that is about two per week. This week it was very strange as there were six deaths. It's partly the cold of the rainy season that affects people, partly old age. There will probably be other causes too sometimes, such as old venereal diseases, but it's difficult for a layman to judge, of course. It's often a tragedy, Moeteke, and one can often hardly avoid to empathize with the people, not on account of my work, but as a human being too.

Yesterday afternoon was very tragic. I was there when Momokane died, one of the "big men" here – I believe that I have already told you about him, as you'll remember perhaps, Moeteke. He had just died when the news arrived that his head-wife had just

Photos 7.4-7.7



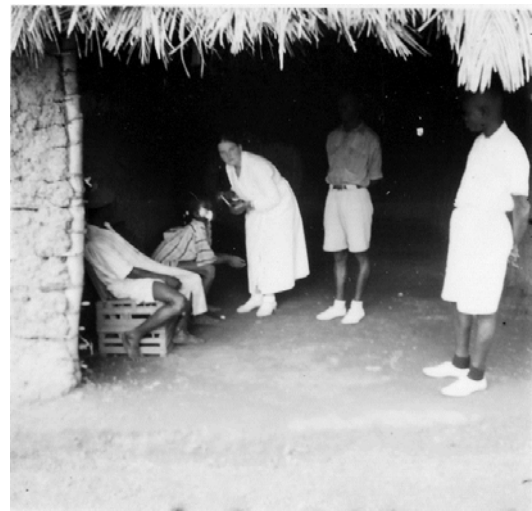
(7.4) Sjoerd Hofstra at work with Mende informants in rest house, Panguma 1936



(7.5) Sjoerd Hofstra at work with Mende informants in rest house, Panguma 1936



(7.6) Sjoerd Hofstra at work with Mende informants in rest house, Panguma 1936



(7.7) Woutje Hofstra nursing Mende people, Panguma 1936

died too. It appeared that, when she had heard that her husband was dead, she had thrown herself in the river behind the house. When I arrived there, people were busy scattering sand on her breast and wetting her with water and ventilating her with air by making movements with leaves. I sent for Woutje, and together we then did our utmost with artificial respiration, etc. and it succeeded! The people were very grateful that we intervened. I had to involve Woutje in it and it's also good of course, that she sees one thing and another. But I don't take her everywhere with me, Moeteke. Not only would this be too tiring for her, but it would also often be too moving for her.

Today there were ceremonies for the man who died yesterday. Because he had formerly been section chief for a while, the funeral was a matter for the male secret society, the Poro, which assembled for this occasion. As a member of the Poro I could be present at the various discussions. I have been admitted now to the inner circle of this society. You are then informed of all secrets and in the future you can attend the discussions of chiefs and other political leaders that are held in the Poro. It may not be so important perhaps, but it's nice of the people here and a token of confidence, that they have done this for me and it initiated me into their secrets.

This time I won't write so much about various cases, Moeteke. I have had to do without the needed rest these past two days. I'll write about these cases next time.

The life here often conveys the impression that the essential human traits of love and hate, joy and sadness, longings and fulfilment and human relations are basically the same everywhere. The ritual outline, the system of customs and habits around these basic traits are often different among the various peoples and particularly among, for us, the more remote African peoples. And conversely, these various customs can have their impact on their basic attitudes. We see it in our own society, how social institutions, governmental systems, etc. can induce a certain "Einstellung" [attitude] among people. All this is a very interesting cultural psychological problem and therefore it's good, I believe, to be able to make such comparative studies. It provides the people with an understanding of each other's life and destiny.

It was so nice to get your letters, Moeteke, from which I feel how you empathize with us and with my work and think with us about everything. I am pleased with the book by Schotman.⁵ I have already read parts of it. I find it very interesting and one can feel that it is based on reflection and much experience. Here and there it generalizes too much, for instance where he writes about primitive people, but his remarks are mostly "erregend" [stimulating] and when one doesn't agree with it, his ideas challenge one to reflect and contradict, which is also a good thing. Later on I would also like to write a general book about all these problems.⁶ That is certainly my ideal. One can then incorporate the knowledge, which one gradually collects, and offer one's own view on the problems. I would do it in more detail and a bit more comprehensively, I believe, but I quite understand that other people, like Schotman and Huizinga, do it within a brief and somewhat generalizing scope. Schotman's book seems to me often

⁵ This may have been: Johan W. Schotman, *Naar open water: de koers uit den cultuurnood* [Towards open water: the way out of cultural distress] (1936).

⁶ Such a book, however, remained unwritten.

deeper, showing a better psychological insight than Huizinga's book.⁷ It's more universally conceived, which is probably due to Schotman's special experiences.

I agree with you, Moeteke, that one should compare all the time and that is indeed always my ambition. There is a danger, of course, that one temporarily concentrates strongly on the problems here, that one even gets lost in them sometimes, but it is always my ambition too to see them from general standpoints. Therefore I like to read books in between. I am also very curious about the book by De Ligt.⁸ On the other hand one wants to avoid the superficiality with which many authors have written about other people from general standpoints, and I therefore want to describe the negroes well and in detail. Gradually one also learns to order all particulars together in a kind of coherence and classification. For instance, all these deaths provide me with material, which one classifies in a particular system about the psychology of illness and death here. From different viewpoints one thereby pays attention to the causes of illness and death, what the people themselves think about it, the attitude of the ill person himself, what is done for him, how he himself behaves, the attitude towards him on the part of family and friends, how people are buried and which ceremonies are connected to it and what one thinks about the life in the hereafter, etc. Such is the scheme, but I have drafted it in more detail. Later on one may well think: if only I had also paid attention to this or that. There will remain gaps, of course. Reading other material is therefore also good, because, when one reads about other people, one thinks: how is this and that here?

It's already Monday morning. The letters have to be sent off again. [...]

Bye Moeteke, [...]

your own grateful Child.

Panguma, 14 August 1936

My very dear Moeteke,

We saw on the list of ships that on Sunday a German or Dutch ship will sail from Free-town. We hope that it's possible to let you have these letters⁹ with this interim mail. With the regular mail on Tuesday there were no letters from you this time, Moeteke, though we did receive the *Guldenvrouwenboek*¹⁰ and your parcel with newspaper cuttings. It was rather a disappointment, but I'm not worried. It could be that the letters, which arrived earlier with an interim mail, would otherwise have come with this mail.

It's now dry again here for a change, after much rain. From Saturday evening till Wednesday evening four full days and nights it rained continuously, with at most half an hour's break. Yesterday it was dry and the sun was shining. That was quite a relief. It becomes rather dreary with so much rain and wetness. Added to this comes the

⁷ See Johan Huizinga, *In de schaduwen van morgen* [In the Shadow of Tomorrow] (1935).

⁸ It concerns the Dutch pacifist Bart de Ligt, and it may well concern his biography of Erasmus, published in 1936.

⁹ Woutje enclosed a letter too, as she did on a fairly regular basis.

¹⁰ *Guldenvrouwenboek* means: Golden Women Book. A bibliographical search action was unsuccessful.

tragic side of life because of the deaths here, the ceremonies connected to it, etc. So yesterday we were very glad to see the sun again. This morning it looks grey again.

There have been quite a few Poro ceremonies and much commotion due to the death of Momokane. Next week there'll probably be a special Poro meeting to let the chieftom know that I have been admitted to the higher rank in that society and where one then receives the further "learnings".

Yesterday evening, at the end of the ceremonies for Momokane, the dancing "devil" of the Poro returned to the forest. In town there was much dancing. Woutje has been watching it too. It's rather interesting to observe this, the expressions of the people, their joy, their exuberance at such occasions, the great agility of specially trained dancers, etc. What also struck me after the death of James Ynee, the former chief, (Woutje noticed this to her surprise too) was the cheerfulness that goes hand in hand with the funeral rituals. The fact is that these Poro ceremonies and dances are in the honour of Momokane. However, they do bring about a general cheerfulness. Perhaps it's a kind of mental reaction to stress which one would otherwise experience due to the deaths. These copious ceremonies are of course only being held at the death of chiefs and big men. It's a strange mixture, the real grief which one often sees, and next to it the ceremonial wailing and all the dances and ceremonies, with many arrangements, organization and bustle, in which friend and foe participate and in which the actual reason for all this seems to be lost in all the talking and commotion.

I had ordered a book that has now arrived with the mail on Tuesday. It is "The Fear of the Dead in Primitive Religion" by Frazer,¹¹ the well-known ethnologist, who also wrote his study of mythology and religion, "The Golden Bough". One finds much interesting, comparative material in it, which is of great value to me when studying these problems. It's always good to see what the same problem looks like to other people and what other researchers have observed.

Because I am attending so many kinds of ceremonies, which are seldom attended by the same Mendi man, which one fears is because the membership of the one society conflicts with membership of another society, Conteh and several others gave me a type of nickname, very funnily thought up, namely *ngulɔ gbɔu*, which is red (unboiled) palm oil. This oil is, as a matter of fact, one of the items which (together with rice and salt) has to be present at every ceremony, regardless of which kind it is. For a Mendi man this switching to all kinds of spheres could be dangerous, but for me, as a white man, it can be done, one says. Conteh and Joseph sometimes don't join in, but Samuel (alias Tawali), who knows much about Mendi customs, always comes, though even he is sometimes a bit scared of all the strange medicines which one gets to see. He really belongs to the contemplative type, being almost old already in his knowledge, though he is only about thirty.

Woutje is busy reading the book by Axel Munthe, which she finds very interesting.¹² She is fine. Last week she was a bit tired as so much was happening here and all those

¹¹ James G. Frazer, *The Fear of the Dead in Primitive Religion* (1934)

¹² This may well have been Munthe's *The Story of San Michele* (1929).

Photos 7.8-7.13



(7.8) Burial ceremony, Panguma 1936¹⁴



(7.9) Masqueraders, Panguma 1936¹³



(7.10) A 'falui' masker, a one-armed warrior spirit, Panguma 1936



(7.11) Masked 'gbini' dancer, Panguma 1936¹⁵



(7.12) Musicians, Panguma 1936



(7.13) Musicians, Panguma 1936

¹³ The masqueraders are tentatively identified as members of Gboji, a ko-Mende society for chiefs and big men, found in Malema and neighbouring chiefdoms (with thanks to Fomba Kanneh, Gola Rain Forest National Park).

¹⁴ With thanks to Paul Basu (UCL).

¹⁵ With thanks to Paul Richards (Wageningen University).

deaths will have weighed fairly heavily on her. I don't bring her into contact with everything right away, but of course she can't avoid some things, because people rely on your help. It does bring Woutje into quite another world in this way. I guess that she will be able to keep going and that it's good for her to be here. We do it calmly, Moeteke, and if it continues like this, it'll be alright, I think.

[...] When Samuel last saw your portrait on the table and asked who it was, he said that we resembled each other.

Woutje already wrote to you, wasn't it, that our house here will be painted. I think that I'll like it. The colours are now a bit ashen.

[...]) Bye dear Moeteke of mine [...]

your own Child.

Panguma, Sunday morning 23 August 1936

My dear Moeteke,

Where are you now? On Tuesday there will probably be a letter from you again. It's now already about three weeks ago since your last letter arrived. Perhaps your previous letter was just too late for the mail? You do have a list of the Elder Dempster ships, don't you Moeteke? [...] It's raining here all the time. This week we have had a few days in between which were dry and sunny ones. That was a big relief. But usually it rains only a few days and nights on end, and when it isn't raining, like this morning, it's still cloudy. Everything one has which is made of leather, becomes mouldy. The cameras one has to clean regularly too. It's remarkable, for in Holland the temperature compared to here would be quite high, but here it is sometimes chilly. It's nice to work in, one doesn't perspire continuously and one is able to walk to and fro without having to put on clean clothes all the time. The temperature in itself is of course pleasant for us Europeans, but often it's so very humid and cloudy, which is a drawback. The actual summer is just arriving again and with it the heat, while it is winter and spring in Holland.

Life is again going on more or less as usual here, Moeteke. Almost every day there is something new, but one can't note down and keep up with everything. It becomes too much then and too many overdue notes remain lying about, the fine points of which one tends to forget. There is always so much one is interested in and which belongs to the subjects that one would like to discuss systematically. But one can't do everything and one just has to restrict oneself.

Much has been going on with all the deaths over the past weeks, as I wrote to you. It gives me much to do, not only because of the human interest, which one has for these cases, but especially because of noting down as many details as possible. Sometimes the events happen in quick succession. I told you then, didn't I, about some five deaths in one week. That's now become less. But on Friday there was a ceremony at the grave of an old woman, who died some time ago, and just when we were near the burial place we heard the wailing from the town for someone who had just died. That very morning I had been with the man, when he was dying. He had pneumonia. It's

remarkable that, before he died, he saw the spirit of James Ynee, the dead chief, passing by. He was able to tell this to somebody. One says that this happens often. When someone is about to die, he sees, as if a twinkling, the spirit of a dead person passing by. It's as if he then has already had contact with the spirits. It's very hard to understand in some order all these ideas, facts and beliefs and also to investigate them accurately. Sometimes the conceptions are vague and one person may describe it a bit differently from the other. That is also understandable, but it runs counter to the theory according to which there would be a great uniformity of beliefs among primitives peoples. I have now asked several people about the spirits and about the question what happens to someone after his death. There does exist a general idea which is also expressed in the funeral ritual. One has to do certain things for the spirit, give him food for on his travels and help him, through a ceremony, to cross the river which the spirits have to cross. But when one, apart from these customs, asks about personal ideas, then one gets a much more detailed description from the one than from the other. There are also differences. For instance, after the death (for men the third day, for women the fourth day) there is a ceremony, which is called *tindyamei*. This means crossing the river. The spirit is supposed to have to cross a river before he can socialize with other spirits. It so happens that the spirits have a sort of community life with other spirits like some other religions, although the conceptions about it are vague, and they hope to become united again with their family. So one waits three or four days at the river. There is a big gathering there, for several people are waiting because the ceremony for them hasn't yet been performed, or it hasn't been correctly performed. For people, who for instance have no family any more or who die far from home, the ceremony hasn't yet been performed for them and they are waiting there.

At this ceremony a chicken is killed and with this chicken one crosses the river. According to the first explanation that I heard, the spirit flies on the back of the chicken across the river. However, upon inquiry with several people, it appeared that there was uncertainty. One also said that the spirit hangs this chicken onto him. When he appears with this to the other spirits, so one says, they know that he really is a dead person, and with this present he is also received well. Of course this isn't a very important point, but it demonstrates that there is room for variation in the beliefs.

I therefore also follow this method to examine certain cases as much as possible. The depth is after all more important than the breadth. It's always a difficult problem to decide what exactly one is going to investigate and what one can leave out because of the time available. Every researcher who reflects upon method, has to struggle with this. It moreover depends on personal inclinations and interest for specific problems on which aspects of a culture one sheds the most light, although the longing remains that one will provide an impression of the whole as much as possible. Someone like Nadel, for example, travels around quite a lot. This has the advantage that one can compare conditions in different areas. For some issues this works, issues about which one can basically get an "outline" in a relatively short time, such as the way in which a chief gets elected, certain customs, etc. I wonder, though, what one really gains in this way, because one doesn't have such an intimate contact with the population if one stays, for example, just one month in a place. I already find it quite a job to describe

everything that occurs here in Panguma and the surrounding areas. Besides, the whole chiefdom is open to me in the dry season. I do want to see a few more places, but travelling a great deal isn't my thing, I believe. I would rather prefer to observe the same group daily, a group which is anyhow fairly big already. One loses material this way, of course; all kinds of interesting things can occur when one is not there; but I think that, on the other hand, one can also gain when one observes a limited area intensively. Moreover, when one travels it can of course also happen that the important things occur each time just when one is absent. I believe, at least for the time being, that it's best for me to continue in the way I am doing it now.

If one is temporarily in a region, one also sees a lot. For instance, one can observe Bundu ceremonies everywhere as well as some other ceremonies when it is the right time of the year. Nobody will keep you from doing that. But there are other things, I notice, for which you really have to have the people's trust and for which you have had to live with them during a longer period of time in order to get to know these things. One has to have patience in this type of work and have time to wait for certain things and sometimes to wait until people open themselves up. One could almost compare the broad brush method of working with the work of a journalist and the method of working more in-depth with a psychiatrist's work. In the one case a great many facts are gathered about a big field, in the other fewer facts are looked at in greater detail. Of course I wouldn't want to say that one can achieve the same depth here as a psychiatrist or a psychologist in Europe. These two are closer to their people after all. They concentrate on a much smaller number of people, whereas I also have to describe the main aspects of the whole culture because the reader isn't familiar with it as he would be if it concerned Europe. I would so much like to show you the notes I am gradually collecting, Moeteke. I am not dissatisfied with the results, though one is also frequently aware of the gaps and the imperfections. In scientific work it is always a struggle to find the right balance between method and facts. But I am very glad that I am allowed to participate in it; others, who will do similar work after you, can learn from your mistakes. So a certain progress in scientific work is always possible. Yes, I would also like to work in Europe again and perhaps look around in an Eastern country too if circumstances allow, to make one's comparisons as encompassing as possible.

Now it has gradually turned into evening again. For once I have taken turns with Woutje making tea and I did it this time. That meth's burner which we bought together in London is very handy on Sundays. Woutje is also writing letters in her niche and I am sitting at the other end of the veranda. Luckily the air has cleared and it's dry now. The boys have just arrived to see to the meal and a few other things. The rest of the Sunday they are free and since a few weeks ago we have also started to give them an afternoon off during the week. Although this isn't the custom here, it did seem a good idea and they rather appreciate it, I believe. It isn't hard work here and in the afternoon they always have two to three free hours, but apart from that they always have to be here regularly and they also like to get away sometimes, for instance to a small village.

Today we have had the odd visitor, but on the whole it is quiet and we are able to maintain the quiet Sunday atmosphere. Just now the substitute chief was here for a

visit, together with a few of his followers. One has to keep them hanging around for a while and let them sit. In this country it is hard to turn away people who are kindly disposed towards you. Of course one sends people away sometimes, especially people of whom one knows that they are just interested in a small present, and one also sometimes says, especially when I am at work in the morning, that we are too busy. But when it concerns people with whom one has good relations, one always has to spare them a few minutes. As we all do, a Mendi man likes to be treated with consideration and especially in a country like this, where time doesn't play a big role and where one participates in the life, it is difficult to excuse oneself by saying that one hasn't got time. In any case one should spend a few minutes and then the people are very nice and understanding most of the time. I would so much like you to experience all this, Moeteke, and to form your own opinion about the people. I think that it would often appeal to your sense of humour. There is so much really about human behaviour to see and experience here, Moeteke.

But often the tragic side is here too and so we have just been to see a sick child. Just when I was writing to you about the people here, and about the often humorous aspects, a man came here called John Bull. He is a very nice man who often gives us fruit as a present. On Tuesday he came to us with a cheerful face and told us that his wife had had a child that night. We then went there and we thought that we would have regular contact with them in order to see how one cares for and treats such a small child. But apparently it wasn't to be so. Yesterday the baby already began to be ill and we came there again when he called us. It also had convulsions and the eyes were regularly sealed. Neither could it move its jaws up and down. This morning John Bull came here to ask if we would have a look. Woutje could still help to open its bowels then. Just now he came again and we have been there again, but one is so helpless in such a case. The child will probably die, I think. The wife has already lost five or six children [...] They both cried. Conteh says that John Bull, before he obtained this wife, had intercourse with her mother, in fact with his mother-in-law, and that this, according to Mendi belief, is the cause of the children's deaths. Apparently he was now too ashamed to confess it, according to Conteh, and also because the wife's family was likely to ask him for compensation. The mother-in-law is probably ashamed too, according to him. A ritual washing can make up for a thing like that. It's hard to tell what the truth of it is. The Mendi have a strong belief in spiritual causes of illness. But the tragedy remains. Medical help would be one of the things that would be beneficial here. For the time being it's much more needed than schools, I think.

I haven't yet been initiated into the higher rank of the Poro. Things often don't go so quickly here, especially when deliberations are involved. The "big men" have to be approached about it first and they promise it and agree, but it takes a while to get everything organized. The problem is to get permission from all parties, not because it concerns me, but because there are now four political groups here, in connection with the election of a chief. What the one party approves and does, the other party is inclined to reject. It is therefore difficult to bring them to a consensus on certain points and some careful planning is needed. But it will turn out all right, I think. Poro matters aren't all that important any longer, at least not as much as in former days, but

knowledge of them does give you an understanding of how it was earlier on and how one then achieved unity in the tribe by means of this strong organization.

On our rice field the rice is already shooting up nicely and regularly. Yesterday afternoon Woutje and I have been there a while. It's just a nice walk, and as it was after four o'clock you didn't any longer have to wear a helmet against the sun.

I wrote to you at the beginning of this letter about funeral rituals, Moeteke. Now one is often so closely involved with those deaths and sometimes witnessed the actual dying, one also wonders if the people are afraid of dying. Of course it's extremely difficult to find out. But through observation and a few talks I have got a first impression. One should consider first that they don't have our ideas of a heaven and a hell, so they don't know a fear of hell. I have the impression that they think that if the ceremonies are performed in the right way and the ceremonies, if needed, have freed one of possible offences before one's death, and the funeral rituals are performed as well, that they then don't have to fear the situation in the hereafter. It only becomes difficult when your family here on earth doesn't take care for you in the correct way, and doesn't see to it, by performing the ceremonies correctly, that you can properly enter into the community of spirits. One hopes to be united with one's family there. But apart from the ideas about the situation in the hereafter, there can also be the purely biological reaction being the aversion to die, because of the desire to live. It's hard to find out about this. I haven't yet been able to observe a strong fear. As someone told me, it also depends, as in Europe, what your situation is, such as if you enjoy life or if you are old and your children have died. A big fear is to have no children any more. A few times I have heard lamentations of mothers for their child, "Who'll now bury me?" But these are subtle things of course and it's hard to form an opinion about it.

Now it's already about ten o'clock and therefore bedtime. One shouldn't go to bed much later, for then you would feel it the next day at work.

Monday morning. Bye dearest Moeteke, Woutje and I hope to take the letters to Hangha this time. We will make half a day's outing of it for a change. Since we are here, we haven't yet been away like this. It's perhaps a good idea to make a small trip for variety's sake.

In the issue of "Uitkomst" which you sent me, was an interesting review by Felix Ortt of a book by Dr Dietz about the dream life, which is a kind of exposition of all kinds of explanatory theories.¹⁶ I have ordered it now because it seems to me to be good for my work. One touches on dreams here so much and with the meanings they are given. I believe that I already wrote to you something about this subject, didn't I? By asking after it and also by hearing about it spontaneously, one gradually gets to know more about it. With such a subject in particular, you feel that you have to know the same people a bit better, or else they won't be so open about such things, of course. During a shorter stay they will tell you the general things, but then one risks arriving at wrong conclusions, it seems to me. For instance, one hears a man say that when you dream this or that, then this or that will happen. After some time, however, you will discover that in certain cases this explanation only goes for him and that it is

¹⁶ See P.A. Dietz, *Mensch en droom: Een studie over het droomleven* [Man and Dream: A Study about the Dream Life] (1935).

solely based on his personal experience. For another type of dream, however, a more generally valid explanation exists. This is, of course, also interesting for my question concerning phenomena of individuality.

It's so nice to discuss all these things about my work with you, dear Moeteke, as I did in the first year too, I think. I know so well how much you empathize with it. These past few weeks the subjects have been slightly on the gloomy side, with the deaths here. I hope this is something temporary. It's also unusual, almost an epidemic. In the dry season, when there is plenty of sun again and the people also have plenty of food again after the new harvest, happier events will be discussed much more again. But even now all kinds of nice things occur, and amusing things too. There is so much that one can't always describe everything well in letters. You can understand this, can't you Moeteke? I mean about this lighter and humorous side of the life here, which I have so often told you about.

Conteh and the other two helpers also regularly see to it that they tell me news of this sort. They are very witty often, especially Conteh. And sharp observers too. For instance one day Conteh asked me if I happened to have a watch chain for him. He remembered that I had earlier on had my keys on a chain. I then said that I didn't know where it was and that I'd have to look. He then laughed and said, half to Samuel, that I knew exactly where all my papers were, but not where such things are. I then said that I only wasn't sure if it was here or in Europe. He then said, "O, I thought that Europeans were often like our chiefs, who are also leaving much to other people and don't know exactly where their things are". "We have noticed", he said, "that when you arrived here, Missus immediately arranged everything in her cupboards and that you asked right away where your books were and that you began to put your papers in order!"

Our small cats are so nice, Moeteke. We have got too younger ones as well. So we have now four in all. One of the older ones is so playful still and he plays so nicely with the smaller ones. They are very special little animals and so tremendously playful and lively. One could watch them for ages. You notice among such cats real individual differences too.

The situation in Europe still remains turbulent, doesn't it? Especially in Spain, according to the news I read in the Times two weeks ago, although this news is already one month old. Since then much can have happened again. The matter with Abyssinia came to an end very tragically indeed, especially for the prestige of the League of Nations. It doesn't look as if it will immediately end in a war, but there is the continuous threat of conflicts. The question is that as long as states exist in their present form, there always will be tensions. In France at least one embarks on a new course in several respects. But there too and even in Russia, one won't perhaps be able to do much before there is a mutual understanding all over the world, and especially an *Ausgleich* [a settlement] in the sphere of economic interests has been reached. As it turns out more and more, a European peace alone isn't the solution; the other continents are continuously involved in it after all. What Schotman says concerning the psychological background I'll write to you about later, Moeteke.

[...] Bye dear Moeteke of mine, so many good and fondest thoughts,
your own Boy.

Panguma, Tuesday evening 1 September 1936

My very dear Moeteke,

I like to send you a short greeting in between the longer letters. [...] On Sunday morning we walked in our small grounds around the house and looked at our plot of tomatoes; the tomatoes are already blossoming out. When you are quietly walking around like this on a Sunday morning, the thought of home can suddenly become so very vivid; it's always there, but sometimes the atmosphere brings you so much nearer. On Sunday it was nice and quiet and we made a real Sunday of it. Sometimes this succeeds better than other times because of events. It was such a nice temperature too, on Sunday, with a high wind, a bit of sun and clouds, like on some European summer days. Yesterday the weather was also like this. Today there has already been a small thunderstorm. Gradually the thunderstorms are coming. This is a somewhat unpleasant period. I do hope that it won't affect Woutje too much.

I think that we'll go to Kenema tomorrow. A man is there who killed his father. I think that it is a man who we would consider to be mentally ill. Each Friday a spirit seems to have appeared to him, who told him that he should kill his father. Under this pressure he has finally done it. Such at least was the story we heard here. I'll try to find out a few more details about it.

Bye dear Moeteke of mine, [...]

your own Boy

Panguma, 6 September 1936

My dear Moeteke,

It's a quiet Sunday morning here, devoted to writing [...]

There is not much of importance to tell this time. Only that on Friday I have been "initiated" into the chief's group of the Poro. There wasn't much ceremonial involved. These higher ranks in the Poro have also lost some of their significance since the European government is in charge here and war belongs to the past.

The Poro organization is composed mainly as follows. There is the general Poro of which almost every man is a member and in which one is initiated as a boy. This initiation I too have gone through, as you know. One gets marks on one's back, as you'll remember and one learns to know the tribe and male virtues. Boys learn climbing palm trees, weaving, braiding mats, etc.

Photos 7.14-7.16



(7.14) Little boy in Poro outfit,
Panguma 1936



(7.15) Boys returning from their initiation
in the Poro, Panguma 1936



(7.16) Masked Bundu dancer with her retinue,
Panguma 1936

Within this general organization there are smaller, leading groups. One doesn't have to belong to these and the majority of the Poro members don't belong to them either. Those smaller groups are meant for the leaders of Poro matters and tribal matters in general and also for the various functionaries of the Poro. There are seven such groups.¹⁷ From the bottom up it begins with:

- a) The messengers of the Poro who walk in front of the "Poro devil" when he appears and, in former times, conveyed important messages.
- b) The smiths who had to make the weapons and were therefore important too.
- c) The Mohammedan medicine men who made protective medicines during the war and who also let the Poro members swear on strong charms so that they wouldn't betray the Poro secrets and the unity (in pre-European times such strong medicines were made of parts of the human body and human sacrifices and occurred at important occasions).
- d) The so-called *bolisia*, who are always around the "Poro devil" when he is in town to protect him and to keep him from falling; in former times the man who acted as "devil" was killed when he fell; now he gets a fine of £5 in such a case. The danger of falling is not so unlikely, as perhaps you still remember from the pictures, that he walks around in a very heavy robe.
- e) There is the *Mabɔli*, that is the family, the descendants of the man to whom, according to the story, the secret of the Poro organization was initially given by God. This family is still one of the most important groups in the Poro. Women in this family automatically become a member of the Poro too and they are therefore excluded from the women's organization, the *Bundu*. The women from this family help with all kinds of ceremonial in the Poro. When a member of this family dies, they are buried in the Poro forest. When we last went to Lalehun, it was for the funeral of such a Poro leader.
- f) The highest group in the Poro, finally, is formed by the *Mahavebu*, which means house of the chief. This is the group of the higher political leaders. For in former times the political organization and Poro matters often coincided with each other. The chiefs have the final say in Poro matters and they also have access everywhere. In old times this group was even more important of course. In this group decisions were made about war and peace, laws were made, chiefs elected, etc.

I have now become a member of this last group, so one can, so to say, get to know all the secrets of the Poro. Theoretically one also belongs to the highest political authority in the country. Nowadays this isn't so important any more, but as long as the Poro exists and has influence, these higher groups are active too. And one learns how things were done formerly. For one needs that too if one wants to gain a correct appreciation of the present. Moreover, I found it nice that the people admitted me, because it is a token of trust. I don't think that any European before me has become a member of this group. There are instances of Europeans who have been admitted to the general Poro, as I was earlier on. Until recently I didn't know about these other groups, but it's good to know something about them. Otherwise one would get a wrong image.

¹⁷ Hereafter only six of these groups are being mentioned – unless the "Poro devil" is meant to be counted as a separate group.

Scheltema en Holkema have sent me a prospectus of a book by an Austrian, Dr Ralph Eberl-Elber.¹⁸ Last year he travelled around in Sierra Leone and neighbouring areas and he has “studied” some nine tribes in nearly eight months. The prospectus is rather boasting and says that the author had managed “tiefen Einblick in das Leben und die Seele der westafrikanischen Menschen zu gewinnen” [to acquire a profound knowledge of the life and soul of the West African people]. When one realizes how difficult it is already to get to know a smaller region seriously, one knows what such an opinion is worth. The book seems to be meant for the sensational taste of a large public. I’ll order it now, not because of the value of the book, but because I should know what kind of things others are writing. When I get it and have read it, I’ll send it to you too. The man writes that he has also become a member of the Poro. It is a great pity that it is often hard to distinguish between truth and a lie and between whole and half-lies in ethnological books. But on the other hand it also inspires confidence that an informed public will be able to distinguish scientific books from sensational ones.

About a tragic incident that occurred last week in the Mendi land, somewhere in the south, I believe I have briefly written to you about it in my last letter, haven’t I Moeteke? In any case, I wrote that we were going to Kenema in connection with it.

On Wednesday Woutje and I went to Kenema, where a boy of about 17 or 18 years old is in prison for killing his father.¹⁹ We got permission from the D.C. to see him and to have a talk with him. It was a tragic history. About five years ago the boy got compulsive ideas in which spirits appeared who made him wild. In the beginning he ran on one of these occasions to the forest, where he roamed about for two days and nights. Thereafter the spirit apparitions stayed away for a while, but then, after a few months, they recurred from time to time. In the end the boy no longer worked and only got the food that his father gave him. His mother died eight years ago. His father also gave him a medicine for his illness. Friday last week he was together with his father in a barri, which you know is the small public building where court sessions are being held. Except for them an old man was there too. According to the explanation of the boy, two spirits suddenly stood next to him, one on each side. They were dressed in golden gowns. They told him to kill his father or else they would kill him. They kept a knife at the back of the boy by way of a threat. Under this compulsion the boy then took a forest knife and killed his father with it. He was arrested, of course, and brought before the D.C. in Kenema.

I read the report of the D.C., to which the explanation of the boy was added. A preliminary inquiry had thus already taken place. The explanation mainly contained what I just told you, only a bit shorter perhaps. Because I liked to hear the story in the boy’s own words and also get one’s own impression, we have looked him up in prison. I have noted down the story in quite some detail in his own Mendi words. From him we also heard that his father was a Mohammedan medicine man who, as such, exorcized the type of spirits that drove the boy to the deed. For the medicine men make medicines

¹⁸ Ralph Eberl-Elber, *Westafrikas letzten Rätsel: Erlebnisbericht über die Forschungsreis 1935 durch Sierra Leone* [West Africa's Last Secrets: an Eyewitness Account of the Exploratory Expedition 1935 through Sierra Leone] (1936).

¹⁹ See Hofstra (1942a) about this case of parricide.

against the evil type of spirits. According to native theory this is a dangerous occupation and now the spirits have thrown themselves on the boy, according to them, and forced him to kill his father. In this way they were freed from the medicine man who fought against them. It's a tragic history, which is also felt as such by the native people. They don't blame the boy because they say that he was forced into it against his will and because this can be the risk of the father's occupation.

The boy himself looked very decent. At first he found it difficult to speak about it, but when others told him that he didn't need to be afraid of me, he told us all sorts of things. He also said that he would prefer to die immediately, rather than being dragged around much. But later one could also notice that he wanted to go on living. The spirits hadn't visited him any more since the deed.

I am going to send the D.C. my notes in detail. He was rather interested. Perhaps it can also help towards a better understanding by the authorities who have to try the case. Of course such a D.C. doesn't know much about the people's belief in spirits here.

There are, according to this belief, two main groups of spirits: 1. the so-called ngafanga; 2. the so-called dyinanga. The first group, the ngafanga, are the spirits of dead people, thus of their ancestors.²⁰ They have a communal life after death. The second group, the dyinanga, haven't been spirits of dead people.²¹ But they have their own life separate from the people. They are born and they die too. They may be compared to those secretive figures in our fairy tales and legends to gnomes, dwarfs, etc. There are good and evil ones. The good ones help the people and make them rich if one enters into an agreement with them. The evil ones pester people, frighten them at night and make them restless, etc. Mohammedan medicine men in particular have medicines which protect one against the influence of the evil dyinanga.

Altogether it's a strange belief, isn't it? With us it's only to be found in fairy tales, but here it's still such a strong belief. It's quite possible that the boy has acted under the influence of obsessive ideas and that he has seen dyinanga in his imagination, having been brought up in this whole atmosphere and especially because his father was a medicine man.

It's still raining a lot here, but already less than in August and July. We have already had a few thunderstorms, but only in the distance. The real thunderstorms are still to come.

Rice begins to get scarce at this time of year. Every year there is such a period which the people call the "hunger time", in between the old and the new harvest. The new rice harvest will be available in about one or two months' time or, for some people, in three months' time. This depends on the condition of the land and the time at which the land has been sown. Several people's stocks of rice are already finished and these people have to either buy or get rice from family and friends. So there is now quite a lot of carrying rice to and fro with complaints about hunger and high prices. The Syrian traders especially make use of this situation by buying at a low price during harvest time and then selling again at a high price around this time.

²⁰ See Hofstra (1940a) for an account of this group of spirits.

²¹ See Hofstra (1942a).

It's remarkable that the native people, after the yearly recurring experience of a hunger period, don't cultivate more land or deal with rice more economically. However, as soon as the new harvest is available, the people are very lavish with it. One has done so long without and waited so long for the new harvest. Once the harvest is there, the worries are forgotten and there is joy and one eats a lot more than one needs. Rice is also frequently given away to family and friends, until the period of scarcity returns. Of course there are differences between people, so some are more economical than others, but it still seems to be a sort of general trend.

It's Sunday afternoon now. It has been very calm here all the time, good for writing and luckily not troubled by visitors. Wouteke has been writing in her own area and I am at my table in the bedroom. I don't often sit here, but today I really liked it again. Off and on I have rummaged in my cupboard where all my papers are and put them in some order. With all the new ones, that have been added this year, I have put file folders in small conveniently arranged groups according to subject. This way one gradually gets a system that makes it possible to look over and handle one's notes. This urges one to take them up now and then and to compare what one already has. Last time I had them more or less ordered in groups too, but as yet not so well, I believe, and so this does not encourage me to look through them frequently. Now that Woutje is typing my notes, I have them much more concentrated and conveniently arranged before me. Woutje also types my notes from the last time I wrote them.

She is now resting on her bed and reading after the letter writing this morning. She always very much enjoys it when such a Sunday remains so quiet and undisturbed and is only devoted to letter writing. Sometimes this fails to be the case because of something happening and because one can't refuse visitors or one has to receive them briefly. It's really very good to regularly have such a quiet day in between busy ones.

I wrote to you this morning about the secret societies here. I believe that one could almost advance as a general proposition that especially in former times the whole social life was resolved and enfolded in societies. Times of war made a strong organization necessary and everything was aimed at concord within a tribal area. But other matters too, such as religious and magical activities, are practised by these secret societies to a large extent. For each society it is interesting to investigate how concord, survival and control are achieved and by what means. I believe that here they were achieved for the large part by secret societies and it partly still is, though these societies have of course lost much of their significance.

With the Institute I have regular business-like correspondence, as it is needed now and then. With the next mail I hope to send them my first three-monthly report. I haven't yet corresponded more fully with Malinowski. In the beginning, when we arrived here, I wrote him a note out of politeness to let him know that we are here again. I think that I'll write to him more fully about a problem before long. A letter to him should be different from a report to the Institute.

We have decided to send our car back to Holland. It has been a tale of woe with the car. As you know, it wasn't permitted to import it because the steering wheel was on the left side, whereas the law here only allows cars with the steering wheel on the right. It is a fairly ridiculous law which we could hardly have foreseen. But that's the

way it is and the law exists. We have tried hard to see if they couldn't admit the car as an exception, but however much they were willing to help me with several other things, the government wrote to me some time ago that they can't make an exception to the rule. We then thought that it would be best to have the steering wheel changed, and the firm in Freetown where the car is parked would let us know the price of the parts which were needed for the change. The firm let us know a few days ago that the change would cost about £25 (pounds) and that it would take about three months. This is too expensive for us and it would take too long. We wouldn't be able to spare the money just now and moreover, it would be hard to tell from here if such a change in Freetown could be done in a reliable manner. We have hesitated a long time before making a decision, but this seemed the most sensible option. Woutje has just told me that she has also written to you about the car. Therefore I won't add any more details about it. It is a bit difficult concerning Woutje's parents because the car was a present from them, and also because the sending back of the car means bother for them again. Yet it seemed to us the most rational solution. Koster²² will be able to collect the car in Antwerp or a Dutch harbour. We will ship the car with the Woermann line again.

Monday morning. [...] Now the letters have to be sent off. There is always still so much more to write, but you do know a lot, don't you Moeteke, without my writing it. This time there is also an interim mail when we will write to you.

So much love and good thoughts, Moeteke of mine, I smile at you,
your own Boy.

Panguma, 14 September 1936, Monday morning

My very dear Moeteke,

A small greeting in between, as I wanted to write to you again. [...]

Here it is raining continuously. Yesterday morning, for instance, it was dry; at about four o'clock it started raining and it has been raining all the time till now and it may well continue like this for quite some time. I have made a few trips to places in the vicinity, Dodo and Laobu. Trudging around in the rain and on fairly muddy roads has its particular charm too as it reminds one of a Dutch autumn landscape. I would so much like you to experience all of this some time, Moeteke.

It's frequently very busy for me during the day. In the evening I read a bit in bed, or rather, we both read with the lamp in between our beds. I have started more or less systematically with the book by Schotman. The book on Erasmus has arrived too. Thank you so much, Moeteke! It looks as if it is well-written.

[...] All is well with us, and our health is fine.

Bye dear Moeteke of mine, I send you so many brave thoughts, and greetings, very many, from Wouteke,

your own Boy.

²² Koster would have been the owner or employee of the Dutch garage where the car was bought.

Panguma, Wednesday evening 16 September 1936

My dear Moeteke

It was a big surprise to get your letters from 22 August this afternoon as they arrived by an interim mail. We were very pleased with them and the cheerful tone of your letters was a great joy for us.

So you have now spent some time quietly in your house, Moeteke. I very much hope that you have been able to rest well.

I rather agree with you that in my work some rest is sometimes also a good thing and that one should avoid too much fatigue. The past weeks were very concentrated because of the circumstances, but now there are quiet days in between, fortunately. One sometimes has to get away briefly. On working days it has mostly been so busy up till now that there was hardly an opportunity to get some rest. Sunday was then left – and sometimes not even sufficiently – for reflection, making notes and writing letters. Now on Monday I have given “my personnel” a day off, so I could spend time on quietly putting my papers in order. Today I have been doing this too. Otherwise one gets too tired of course. I’ll try to be careful. If once in a while one can take some time off during the week, one has more of the Sunday for just rest and letter writing.

Recently I have also made a start with travelling in a hammock – I have been a few times to Laobu and to Dodo. At first, in the first year, I didn’t like to be carried, but perhaps it’s more sensible. The boys who do it are specially appointed to do this for the chief, and they are very strong. Moreover, they like to earn something. A few times after trips when I have walked, I have been very tired, with a headache and vomiting when I came back home. One always loses time while one is recovering. When one travels in a hammock, one still feels fit when coming home and on the way one can even make some notes. Yesterday we have been in Dodo. Woutje went too. Tongo players are doing their thing there. They dispel a dangerous type of witchcraft, the so-called boa constrictor. There is a “bad medicine” which one calls ndili or boa constrictor. At night it changes into a boa constrictor which is the big snake that is found here in thick forests, and it gives the owner of the medicine the power to eat people, exactly in the manner of witchcraft, but then even more dangerously. The Tongo dancers are specialists who have the reputation to be able to find these ndili medicines. The owners keep this medicine hidden, of course. If there are many deaths in a chiefdom which one attributes to the ndili, the chief can let these Tongo people come. That has now happened in Dodo. On Saturday we heard that they were there. I went there straight away in order to get to know more about it, for the Tongo don’t often make their appearance and it’s pure luck if one comes across them. I had expected to be able to see the Tongo people working. However, when we arrived the leader was somewhat unwilling to begin. He said that he was very tired. According to people in Dodo this was just an excuse. One first expected the D.C. that day (this, however, appeared to be a mistake; the D.C. was to come a few days later). The Tongo man apparently didn’t want to be disturbed in his work or to be closely watched by the D.C. I think that he was a bit afraid of me too, in case I would perhaps report on him. However, I believe that he came to trust me and Conteh, Samuel and others have pleaded for me

strongly and pointed to my membership of the Poro and several other things, such as our farm, etc. All this inspired him with confidence, I believe, and I hope that I'll actually be able to see him working when he starts again in a few days. With such things it becomes all the more clear to me how much one depends on the trust of people who have known you for a long time. If one just travels through the country, much will remain closed to you. For this type of medicine men it is difficult to be open with strangers and they seldom or never do so for a European, I think.

Sunday evening. Now it's already Sunday evening, Moeteke. How was your day? [...]

There still is so much to tell, Moeteke, but this time my letter won't be so long. I have been busy today with my report to the Institute. That took quite some time yesterday and today. For tactical reasons I'll send a copy to Malinowski. With the next mail I hope to send you one as well. Woutje will then type it over again. She is now busy typing the copy for the Institute. Then it can be sent off tomorrow.

Apart from that, the day was fairly quiet here. This morning I still had to attend a ceremony, the *fɛfɛwaaɪ* [*fɛfɛ wai*, literally big breeze]²³, which I couldn't very well miss. Woutje was ready early with her letters this morning, but now she still has to finish the report. In between we have also played a round with your game of marbles, you remember, the one we chose in Selfridges. It's sometimes quite exciting and fun! We enjoy doing it now and then. I also had to write to Miss Brackett about all kinds of business-like things, about the expense claim, etc., so there was quite a lot of writing to do for the Institute. But now that's finished again.

Fortunately no visitors came, except for short visits by Conteh and Samuel and this way we could maintain the intimate Sunday atmosphere. For Woutje this is very important, of course, and I too need the silence from time to time, a day of being isolated from people. I think that I'll try to take some proper rest tomorrow and perhaps the day after tomorrow too, or else one gets too tired perhaps.

On Saturday the Tongo man from Dodo has been here to visit us. I have noted down a whole story of his of how he, or rather his father, had originally come into the possession of the medicine with which he works. His father got it, according to his story, from a *ndɔgbɔyusi* [*ndɔgbɔ yɔɔɔɪ*] that is a sort of bush spirit, who made his appearance to him. His father was poor, but he had a good head on his shoulders. The *ndɔgbɔyusi* therefore wanted to help him and he gave him this medicine to work with thereafter and so to earn his living. It's remarkable how this bush spirit, according to the natives, helps poor people. He sometimes appears to people who spend their whole life on the rice field and who are not esteemed in town, and to hunters and similar people on whom he confers benefactions. Rich people or children of rich people, on the other hand, he sometimes lures into the wood in one way or another and he lets them lose their way or makes them insane. In various other ways he also plays a trick on people. So he sometimes changes himself into the shape of an animal; when a hunter wants to shoot, he evades him. The hunter never hits him until he has finally used up all his ammunition and stands there crestfallen. This is what the wood spirit likes.

²³ See Gordon Innes, *A Mende-English dictionary*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1969. With thanks to Paul Richards.

What is remarkable for me in these stories is especially the one of the Tongo man. Firstly the way in which he has got his medicine, thus in a supernatural way like others get their miraculous medicines in dreams too, and, secondly, that the *ndɔgbɔyusi*, the bush spirit, confers benefactions on poor people and plays tricks on rich people. It's as if a sort of moral ideology of the people is speaking here, a shift of ideals of justice, which aren't satisfied in the real life but in a supernatural world; and also a reaction of the poor and their world of ideas against the rich.

It is of course extremely difficult to determine to what extent there is a reality behind all these beliefs. The people here don't seem to have any doubts about it; for them such a bush spirit is something real and they talk with it. However, as a more critical European, one would like to be present when it appears sometimes.

I think that I may get in touch with the Tongo man a few more times. He can be an interesting source of data for me. He is very famous all over the country and he is, moreover, a nice man.

The whole world of ideas of the people here attracts me very much all the time, Moeteke, and I believe that this is where my strength is more or less.

The leader of the *fɛfɛwaai* ceremony this morning was Momogbei. He is a very old man who was also in charge of the initiation into the higher rank of the Poro. He seems to be the oldest man of the chiefdom and he knows much about former times and he also knows about many medicines. He rather likes me, I believe, and I'll be able to get to know much more from him too.

Monday morning. A small talk this time, Moeteke, There is always so much to talk over with you and to tell you. I still wanted to tell you, Moeteke, that I was very pleased with your letters, because I gather that you are enjoying the quiet of our little house and are seeking wisdom, and that you are a bit cheerful too. Dear Moeteke, if only we could tell it each other face to face, but from your letters I already know much too. You are right to see the things, such as what happens in Europe, in a broader perspective. One should each time be able to look further than the daily facts, however shocking and disturbing, to the bigger consequences of it all.

I'll be careful or try to be it at any rate, against illnesses. Sometimes, as with the case of measles, one is already in a house where one hears lamentations, before one knows the type of illness. Fortunately, patients are nowadays hardly coming any longer and things are quieter.

It's already sunnier and warmer here the past three days. Woutje can cope with it so far and I find it nice that it's a bit warmer and that one sees the sun again. [...]

Bye very dear Moeteke of mine, [...]

your own Boy.

Freetown, Wednesday morning 6 October 1936

My dear Moeteke,

I would have liked to send you a somewhat cheerful letter for your birthday, but this fails to be the case now because I fell somewhat ill. Woutje will write to you about the

details. I can't write so much just now because writing tires me a lot at the moment. It started on Monday two weeks ago when I had a temperature and was feeling very tired. Fortunately it was the day when we had already just sent off our letters, so the mail left on time.

Woutje went the next day to Dr Kearney in Segbwema for advice. I stayed in bed quietly. On Friday he came and had a look himself. He found nothing disquieting then. Last Friday he came again. He had found traces of a kidney infection and the urine was fairly dark too, so he was afraid that, if it carried on like this, there would be a danger of blackwater fever. Fortunately, afterwards no more traces of kidney infection were found. Dr Kearney, who was very nice to us, advised us to go to Freetown for further observations because he didn't think it fair for Woutje and me to be left on our own with it. He himself is busy and, also because of the distance, he can't come often. He made all the arrangements for an ambulance compartment on the train. On Sunday evening he again came himself to accompany us from Hangha to Bo. That was very nice and helpful of him.

On Monday morning we started our journey. My camping bed was in the lorry, so I could rest comfortably till Hangha and from there in the train. The journey to Bo turned out better than expected. In Bo Woutje and I could sleep in the ambulance compartment; for there are two beds in it, all very comfortable. The doctor from Bo and his wife also visited us in the train. Yesterday morning I felt much better. Doctor Kearney, who would have been prepared to accompany us to Freetown, then didn't any longer find it necessary to go with us, because he is very busy in Segbwema. Yesterday the journey went very well too, only a bit tiring because of the long distance. Of course there was a risk connected to the journey because of the danger of blackwater fever, but it had turned out better than expected, according to the doctor. The urine is lighter again, luckily. Here in the European hospital in Freetown I am also in good doctor's hands. The doctor examined me yesterday evening. I don't yet know the result and the doctor is, by the way, a very close-mouthed man. I am already feeling better than a few days ago and I am less hot and the heart isn't tired any longer. We are hopeful that it will be alright again within a few weeks. Doctor Kearney hoped so too. But it was important to be very careful and therefore it was best to be here.

Woutje has been very brave and she did her utmost with the nursing and the doctor was very pleased with her. But everything was quite a strain for her, of course, causing anxiety, and it's therefore better for her too that we are here. Then she will also be able to get a few days of rest. She is now staying with friends of the Horsteads who are very nice people.

You shouldn't worry, dear Moeteke. I have written everything honestly and Woutje will do that too. But it's now looking much more favourable again and I'll do my best to keep quiet and to get completely strong again soon. A period of rest will do me good too. At this moment I can't say more about it, Moeteke. On Tuesday, after you have got this letter, we will send you a telegram. I had first thought that I would do this on your birthday. You wrote, Moeteke, that we shouldn't send you a telegram, but it's one of the few things I can do for you from this distance. I so much want to do that, Moeteke. But in this case we thought it better not to send one on your birthday, be-

cause you would then get a fright when we mentioned about my health. Tuesday is better therefore. If, however, you haven't got a telegram before you have got this letter, you'll surely know that nothing serious has happened in the following weeks.

I am very sorry, Moeteke, to have to give you this new anxiety, but in this country there is always the risk of illness and my kidneys are a weak spot apparently. But as I said already, it's all now looking better again, Moeteke.

All my best thoughts are with you on your birthday and always, dear, dear Moeteke; you do know that, don't you? I would have so much liked to have given you some joy, but that couldn't be. We people are in a mysterious way subject to higher powers, who seem to regulate one's life. It teaches you humility towards the bigger "Whole" of which you are a small part, and of which your own worries are also but a small part after all. When one is ill one feels oneself almost still more akin to the whole nature from which one originated and also with the human world which is always a marvel to look at. Dear, dear Moeteke, I would like to write you so much more and also cheerful thoughts, which occur to you when you are pondering about life and eternity, but I'll leave that for next time. I have thought quite a bit recently about matters of science and life in their mutual relationships and also how I can organize my book in the most satisfactory way. I believe that I am gradually seeing some light here.

[...] Bye dear, dear Moeteke of mine, don't worry, we will write to you about everything very honestly. [...]

your own Child.

My address here is: Nursing Home, Hill Station, Freetown, but it would be best if you would still send your letters to Panguma.

I am so glad that I could still write you this letter as earlier on I was too tired and in the train yesterday I couldn't do it either.

Freetown, 10 October 1936

My dear Moeteke,

Now I can already give you a better message about myself, fortunately. I feel that I am already getting stronger again. The doctor hasn't found anything more in the urine and faeces. The malaria isn't any longer in the blood. The urine hasn't yet the usual colour in the morning, but it's much clearer already. It will take some time, for the red blood cells which one loses during the whole illness process to recover. The doctor said that there is no more danger now and that I am getting better; however, I have been on the verge of blackwater fever, he said. I am very grateful that everything has gone so well. It has made a difference that I went to bed at an early stage and that Woutje had gone immediately to Dr Kearney, who has helped us very much. By promptly taking Atebrin,²⁴ the temperature has probably stayed low or perhaps the malaria was suppressed in any case. What I wrote just now about the temperature isn't always so. A

²⁴ Atebrin (Generic name – Quinacrine) is an acridine derivative formerly widely used as an antimalarial.

temperature like I had during the two weeks when I was in bed in Panguma (between 27° and 37,4°) can be just as bad as malaria with a high temperature, so the doctor said.

I probably already had the malaria in me for some time, only one doesn't notice it so well. During my last trips to Dodo and Laobu I was very tired indeed and it made me vomit.

The doctor here, who is a very cautious man, wants to discharge me from the hospital here in the beginning or middle of next week. But he thinks it necessary that we should stay on here for another three weeks to recover my strength completely. That is alright and I also feel that I need a quiet, steady period. I have brought all my material, partly to work on it and partly because in Panguma there is now always a fire risk with the tornadoes. We are busy trying to find a bungalow; we being Woutje together with the people with whom she is staying.

I am not the only European here who is ill, Moeteke. Last week the hospital here was overcrowded and there wouldn't have been a place for me. There have been quite a lot of cases of dysentery too. Dr Kearney said that this rainy season has been extremely tiring for Europeans. It has been an unusually long and cold rainy season.

Today I have been allowed to be up for some time, Moeteke, lying on a chair on the veranda. That's rather nice because the man with whom I share the room here, is getting an injection today which means his temperature will rise very much and he will be feeling very rotten. He is Captain Eccles, head of the customs here. I knew him already. A fairly quiet roommate. The first night, when it was even fuller here, I was in another room with four beds and where it was very noisy. There was also a Greek who slept heavily and made other noises. I couldn't have kept this up there. I have also asked the doctor why I seem to get blackwater fever fairly often. He didn't think that it came from the kidneys. He said that it has rather to do with the individual composition of the blood. With one person the blood gets quickly affected in the case of fever; with another the blood seems to become thick quickly. The first seems to be the case with me. Perhaps not the second, for the blood keeps circulating well. If that isn't the case, it is very dangerous for the destroyed blood cells which seem to get easily stuck around the heart and that is what usually makes blackwater fever fatal. This is at least what I have understood from the doctor's explanation.

It is a very nice idea for me that Woutje is staying with good people who are friends of the Horsteads. She will surely have written about them to you herself.

I very much hope that you have got my letter that I sent you from here on Wednesday. It was rather at the last moment and the letter went with a sailor who returned from the hospital here to England.

It was very nice to get your letters, Moeteke, and all the printed matter and the pen. Thank you so much, my dear. With the pen I am already writing this letter and, as you see, it is a very good one, with a very nice way of filling and just like the pen I also have.

[...] Bye dear Moeteke of mine, your own Boy.

Freetown, 21 October 1936, in the morning

My dear Moeteke,

Fortunately I am now much better, Moeteke. On Tuesday, a week yesterday, I left the hospital. The doctor advised me to either make a journey to the Canaries, a round trip (so Madeira or Las Palmas) or to stay here in Freetown for three or four weeks, preferably here on Hill Station. Such a journey to the Canary islands is fairly costly and, however refreshing such a sea voyage is, I also doubt if one has enough benefit from it, compared to the high costs. For there are also all kinds of awkward things connected to the sleeping situation and food, and it has to be seen what the weather is like. If it should be necessary in the end, one can always still do it.

However, we have rented a bungalow from the Government for about a month. It's here on Hill Station, the quarter where most Europeans are living. It was nice that we could get a bungalow here. It is fresh and roomy, with a view of the sea and small mountains around you; a bit like Switzerland. One even has running water and electric light. So one wouldn't be any better off in a hotel. We had already taken our cook with us from Panguma, and now Mabo has come too.

I think that this period will do us much good. Actually, apart from illness, one sometimes needs a short, quiet rest; a period in which one can quietly think about one's material. And here that is possible because one doesn't have visitors. In fact one should, if one comes to Sierra Leone a third time, take such a short holiday after about four or five months, and not wait until one has an illness. But a human being has to learn from all kinds of experiences. We are considering taking another few weeks off, for instance in January or February, and then come here for a quieter period.

Now I am stronger again, I have in these last few afternoons already had talks with Conteh and Samuel, and in the next few days I'll calmly go through my material. This way one can spend the time rather more productively.

Among the series of subjects which one can briefly indicate as religion and magic, there is one to which I haven't yet paid much systematic attention, but one that I nevertheless came across frequently, namely the dream life. I have a few books about it now. One of them is by Dr Dietz, and is "Mensch en droom" [Man and dream], a review of which I saw some time ago in "Uitkomst".²⁵ It provides an interesting overview about the times of dreaming and the way in which they are explained in various scientific theories. Something that gives you a new perspective again and a stimulus for systematic research.

I believe I already wrote to you that I have often come across dreams here, because people have contact with spirits in dreams or because future events are predicted to them in dreams. I now want to note down the more common types of dreams too, including information about the people who have these dreams, the type of dreams and the symbols which are used in them.

Tonight we were reminded of dreams in a very noisy way. Our boy Mabo sleeps here in a room next to the house. This morning at about five o'clock we were suddenly

²⁵ See letter Hofstra to Overdiep, 23-8-1936.

woken up by loud screaming. We went to investigate and then it became clear that Mabo had screamed in his dream. He had dreamt that he was sitting on a bench to clean his nails. A man had come to him then and asked him for money. He said that he had no money. The man had then cut him with his knife in his leg. When Mabo saw the bleeding, he had screamed. When he awoke his leg was very cold as it had probably been lying uncovered for a while. This is a type of dream that also occurs with us, doesn't it? Moreover, Mabo is very chary at the sight of blood.

Several dreams in Panguma are now related to the elections, thus they are a sort of portentous dream. Dreams of primitive people are also fairly interesting because all kinds of modern theories like those of Freud and Jung are connected to them. And there is also a connection with parapsychology, the science of extrasensory phenomena.

The book by Dr Eberl-Elber about Sierra Leone has arrived. It's fairly superficial, written from a commercial rather than a scientific angle. However, it has very good photographs. Very little about the daily life of the people though. More the sensational cream on the milk. When I have finished it I'll send it to you. You do get an impression of the country by means of the pictures and there are a few good descriptions of the landscape.

The Dutch newspapers have brought quite some news, haven't they? First with Juliana's engagement²⁶ and then with the guilder. The public has certainly taken the devaluation fairly calmly, at least according to the news. If only the prices won't go up now. What a blessing that you don't any more have to think about the fluctuation of stock prices, Moeteke. I wonder how matters will go further with the economic situation in the Netherlands. I was pleased with the cuttings you sent me about all kinds of things. In Spain the battle is still going on, isn't it? And in all of Europe there is more unrest. Perhaps Madrid has already fallen. But that doesn't in the least mean the rest in Spain will, even if the nationalists would win it all. For there are too many individualistic movements among the Spanish people.

Bye dear, dear Moeteke of mine, so many good and dear thoughts I send you, your own Boy.

Elder Dempster Lines, On Board the R.M.S. "Adda", 3 November 1936

My dear Moeteke,

What a change has suddenly come in Woutje's and my life with this journey and how much closer to you we are now already!

The decision to go to Madeira was quickly taken in the end. We had thought about it before because the doctor had already advised it when I left the hospital. But when two weeks ago the telegram from Woutje's parents arrived with the offer to send the money for the journey if a stay on Madeira would be necessary, we still thought we wouldn't go. The costs put us off, of course, and also the temporary break with Africa. I

²⁶ Princess Juliana van Oranje-Nassau got engaged to prince Bernhard zur Lippe-Biesterveld.

first wanted to try to have a break in Freetown. When I left the hospital three weeks ago the doctor thought it best if we made a sea voyage to the islands, and as a second option he advised us to stay on in Freetown (Hill Station) for a while. The idea of Madeira was far from me and I thought that a doctor can easily advise something, but he doesn't necessarily know my circumstances so well. Moreover, two years ago I also recovered in Freetown, so I therefore wanted to try it again in Freetown. As you know we had got a nice bungalow from the Government and that seemed very good in the beginning. In the afternoons we went to the beach several times.

Last Tuesday I went to the doctor for another examination. We had prearranged this. He found me somewhat better, but not nearly strong enough to begin my work again. He advised me even more strongly than before to go to Madeira for a few weeks. He deemed it a loss of time to stay on longer in Freetown, because one was just hanging around a bit with no visible results, and in any case no quick results could be seen, especially not during this transition of the wet to the dry season, which is a particularly exhausting time. He further said that if I would go back like this, with anaemia more or less, my work would suffer by a lack of energy and also that, although one wouldn't notice it right away, perhaps it would manifest itself later on in your life if you don't completely recover now. Such a second attack seems to exhaust one even more than the first time. However that may be, if a doctor insists like this it is difficult to resist it as a layman, the more so because you want to become as strong as possible again for your work. In Freetown I did feel that I recovered very slowly. I had such a very tired feeling in my back and it makes you nervous then to think when one will again be strong enough to be able to travel in "the bush". Woutje and I have therefore decided, after the talk with the doctor, to go. It was a big responsibility, financially and in other respects, but we felt that we had to do it. The doctor who advised us to do so is a very capable man and Head of the European hospital, with many years' experience. He said that he really wouldn't advise it if he didn't think it necessary, but that I'd see that this expense is for my health, being the most economical option in the long run.

Last Thursday the boat sailed. From Tuesday till Thursday we put our things in order and packed. The boys and Conteh and Samuel have greatly helped us with it.

The sea voyage was very good. It was wonderful weather all the time. How wonderfully refreshing and strengthening such sea air is again, isn't it? The tiredness in my back is already gone for the most part. Feeling like this one would almost be able to go back. But the doctor in Freetown had warned me against that feeling. He said that when you are feeling better again on Madeira, you still have to stay there a while in order to build up a reserve. Actually, there has been very little rest since Christmas, for unfortunately we had to use the three weeks I spent with you before we went to Africa to get a bit stronger again. It couldn't be a real holiday therefore. A pity that I couldn't stay with you a bit longer then. But it will turn out alright now. For Woutje this trip seems to me to be good too. She bore it all well, but yet she got tired; and it will be good for her to be without the household with boys for a while.

We have brought all my papers with us, of course. I can quietly work at them. As I last wrote to you, one needs a calmer period for reflection now and then. I have been

very much in doubt as to whether or not to go to Madeira, but now it has come this far I am really looking forward to work a lot at my material and write overviews of it, so that one already gets parts of the embryo of the next book. In Panguma one would otherwise continuously be forced to dive into the facts. Anyway, I already had the plan to go somewhere for a few weeks or a month where one would have less to do with people. Woutje has also brought the typewriter. For her too there is still much typing to be done and she really fancies it.

I had first seriously thought to take Conteh with me now because I could use him effectively for checking all kinds of translations, etc. But then I also thought again that it would be a bit lonely for him. He and Samuel get on very well together, so I am still thinking of letting them come over together. There is much that I can do with them together. Samuel has been to several meetings of secret societies with me and that material I still have to work out. But we will first have to see what the circumstances are like on Madeira and if they could be housed cheaply somewhere. They can make the journey cheaply, for something over £4.

What a lot about myself, isn't it, but I feel I should explain everything. I so much hope that you haven't worried too much. Everything will soon be well again, Moeteke. This is probably the best way, I think. How are you now [...]? How nice it would be if you could also come to Madeira for some time. You have been thinking once or twice to come to Africa, but I fear, Moeteke, that the exertion of the journey and the heat and the whole climate would become too much for you. But Madeira is quite different of course and it would also be so good for you, Moeteke, if it could be arranged. It's strange that one can only enjoy the sun on one's way and afterwards on Madeira, and not in Africa. In Freetown, for instance, one could only go to the sea at 4 o'clock; as before that the sun was burning too much.

The journey went well. There were only a few passengers and the sea was calm. Only today it wasn't and the sea is still rough. Woutje isn't feeling well because of it and she is lying in her cabin.

There are cheap return tickets, Moeteke, from England with the Elder Dempster to Madeira: £20 first class and £15 second class return. Perhaps the Dutch line has something like that too. I enclose details about the return tickets.

In Freetown I have also met a man who has done a few months' research in Nigeria, the Gold Coast and Sierra Leone into the occurrence and the nature of mental deviations and mental illness among the natives. It was a certain Dr Brown, a very nice and pleasant old man, already 70 years old, but still looking young and strong. He came to visit us, but unfortunately he could only spare an hour, because it was just before his boat was leaving. He touched upon some very interesting things, which interest me very much too, about the relationship between emotionalism and physical exercise, for instance, and details about mental deviations. I would have liked to have talked with him longer. I think that we may meet each other again in London. He was a retired doctor, but he made this journey for the English department of Colonial Affairs. All of this evoked the desire in me even more to work on the psychological aspects. It would be nice if one had more psychiatric knowledge, to be able to make a diagnosis in different cases, but perhaps that will happen one day.

I wonder how the Institute will react to our going to Madeira. They can hardly disapprove, I think. After all, I can't help it that I fell ill and that the doctor deemed this necessary. I have got a letter from him for the Institute in which he declares the necessity because I "narrowly escaped blackwater fever". In it he says that I should stay there three months at least, but that seems to me rather exaggerated. I would think that one should be quite strong after one or two months.

We haven't a hotel yet, Moeteke, but there are several of them. Tomorrow we should first look around for a good and somewhat cheap hotel. You'd best send the letters to: c/o Elder Dempster Lines, Madeira. Elder Dempster will then forward them to us.

To the Institute I have of course already written before about going to Freetown. I have, moreover, sent a telegram from the boat here and while on the boat I'll send a letter with further details.

Wednesday morning. Now we will soon be in Madeira. It will be very nice to enjoy the sun there for some time. The offer by Woutje's parents to pay for the journey is very generous. It was rather difficult for me, but I felt that it would also be good for Woutje if we went. I am trying to get the money refunded by the Institute as possibly they can get it back from the insurance.

If you do come here, Moeteke, it would be best if you travelled first class. It's often fairly rough towards the end of the journey from England to Madeira and if you travel second class the cabins are right below and you often have to keep the portholes closed.

Bye dear Moeteke of mine, I am very much longing to get a letter from you soon. But perhaps this will take some time, for your letters have of course gone to Africa. From there they will be forwarded.

So many good and fondest thoughts
from your own Boy.

Madeira, 9 November 1936 [last letter]

My very dear Moeteke,

It was so nice to get your telegram, Friday. We were just going out for a walk and could take it with us as a nice possession on our walk. It was so nice to know something direct from you and something so good and cheerful. Thank you so much, dear Moeteke. Now there will probably soon be a letter from you again. The letters which were already sent to Sierra Leone will of course be forwarded to us here.

I think that it will be really good for me here. I already feel myself getting stronger again. It's a wonderful air here and mild. And when I get stronger I'll also go swimming to get entirely fit again. For us the food is somewhat monotonous here; in the hotel one is dependent on what is given to you and it's more geared to a meat menu, of course. And also because a lady with TB is staying here in the hotel, we think it better to have our own cottage, where one is more independent with the food. We are also a bit worried that, when the busy season starts, there will be more noise in the adjacent

rooms. Now it's still very quiet. It is really a nice, quiet hotel with pleasant rooms. The TB lady will probably leave, so the manager of the hotel assured us, but when one is on such an island where quite a number of invalids come, one is never sure who will come after her. This morning we have been house searching. That's not easy because it's much less equipped here for strangers than in Switzerland or Austria. Apparently the Portuguese haven't much of an enterprising spirit in that direction. You would really like it here, Moeteke. The nice climate; and then there is the romantic nature. Narrow, brick-paved roads with old, small walls on the sides. Very many small walls which you like so much, don't you, with gardens and hidden cottages behind them. The mountainous country is cultivated with vineyards and banana gardens up to the very smallest place.

These first few weeks I am just lazy in order to relax properly and thereafter I'll start between times working with my papers again, with reading.

It seems that still more cheap services depart from Holland, Moeteke. For instance the Kon. Ned. Stoomboot Mij. [Royal Dutch Steamboat Company], which has a service to the West Indies and which calls at Madeira, and also the Royal Mail (that could be the Kon. [Royal] Mail? Or something like that; I don't know the Dutch steamboat lines so well). From England there are also several. It would be nice, Moeteke, if you could come here.

The letter has to be posted now. We still have to see the lady who is a kind of agent for the house we saw this morning and hear the price from her; and on the English boat with which this letter is carried, we will go and see Miss Wrong who is someone who works at the mission office where Dr Oldham is too. Miss Brackett sent us a telegram with a request to go and see her. We know her from London. Miss Brackett has already sent about three telegrams: one about this, and then two for finding out the address of our doctor in Freetown and our address here, with her best wishes. They contained clear expressions of concern, I think. She wanted to know the doctor's address for the insurance. Perhaps we will still get something reimbursed. That's rather necessary too, because we have had a lot of expenses with one thing and another, of course.

Now that we will probably be leaving the hotel here before long, Moeteke, you'd best send the letters for the time being to: c/o Elder Dempster Lines, Madeira. Then we will get them from them.

Bye dear Moeteke, nice that we are now so much closer to each other, isn't it? [...]
your own Boy.

EPILOGUE

The Mende project after Sierra Leone (1937-1951)

Back in the Netherlands

Hofstra's letter from Madeira of 9 November 1936 to his adoptive mother, Mrs Overdiep, was the last one, or the last one kept, from his second journey to Sierra Leone. Shortly afterwards Mrs Overdiep undertook the journey to Madeira herself, arriving there on 19 November. A few weeks later Mr and Mrs van den Bergh van Eysinga (Woutje Hofstra's parents) also came over to Madeira. During his stay on Madeira Hofstra was struck down by another attack of malaria.¹ On 31 December 1936 the Hofstras, Mrs Overdiep and Woutje's parents boarded the "Stuyvesant" in Funchal (Madeira), which was heading for Amsterdam. The doctors in Sierra Leone, Madeira and the Netherlands all advised Hofstra, in view of the possible further risks to his health, not to resume his research in Sierra Leone.²

After his return to the Netherlands in early January 1937 it took Hofstra a few months to recover from his illness.³ He and his wife first stayed with Mrs Overdiep in Driehuis. In late July 1937 the Hofstras moved to Noordwijk aan Zee, and in March 1938 to Rotterdam, where Hofstra had been given a post as interim Director at the Museum voor Land- en Volkenkunde (Ethnological Museum) and the Maritiem Museum "Prins Hendrik" (Maritime Museum) in November 1937. In October 1938 he was appointed permanently as Director of the two museums. In the meantime Hofstra had been scientifically active and his main publication in these two years consisted of an essay on the social aspects of knowledge and science (Hofstra 1937c).

Of course, the big question was what Hofstra would be able to do with his Mende material. The IIALC kept urging him to get on with writing up his material and to produce the required book on the Mende. From the letters of the Institute to Hofstra

¹ Telegram Brackett (IIALC) to Hofstra, 10-12-1936, with the following text: 'Sympathise fresh anxiety do you need money'. See also letter Brackett to Hofstra, 22-12-1936.

² Letter Brackett to Hofstra, 1-2-1937.

³ Letter Brackett to Hofstra, 9-2-1937.

which are among Hofstra's papers – Hofstra didn't keep copies of his own letters to the Institute –, the following picture emerges.⁴

Already by the beginning of February 1937, Miss Brackett wrote on behalf of the Institute that, in addition to the doctor's reports, they also needed to have 'a statement as to what stage your work has actually reached, i.e. what material you succeeded in collecting, both on your previous trip and on this last one, what part of this you regard as sufficiently complete to be written up and what part you regard as too sketchy to have any permanent value. In addition to this statement of fact, we should like to have your own suggestions as to how you consider the best use can be made of the material and what your ideas about it would be.'⁵ After having received the required statement, Miss Brackett replied that this 'is just the sort of thing we want. There is one point on which I should be grateful if you would let us have a little more information, and that is [...] where you say you would like to have the help of two of your informants. How do you propose that this would be done? Would it be your idea that you would correspond with them and that they should be paid a fee for supplying information, or had you some other plan in mind?'⁶ Regarding the matter of the informants no further reaction on the part of the Institute is to be found among Hofstra's papers.

In early March Hofstra received the following letter from Malinowski:

'My dear Hofstra,

I need not tell you how terribly sorry I was to hear of your new attack of blackwater fever. I wanted to write at once to Madeira, but I was away on the continent and couldn't get your address. Since my return to London, I have been suffering from a recurrent "grippe" [influenza]. And then I understood that you were coming here some time or other.

You may have heard the Business Committee has taken an attitude of interest and sympathy towards the publication of your work. As you may know, the Institute now is in a very difficult financial position, and has not the latitude previously enjoyed through the generosity of the Rockefeller Foundation which has now been withdrawn.

I am going away from London the second half of March, and shall not be back till May. If you are thinking of coming over here, it might be advisable for me also to see you, so please let me know.

Kind regards to your Wife and her Parents, as well as to yourself.

Yours very sincerely,

B. Malinowski'⁷

⁴ Hofstra's papers contain several more letters from Brackett on behalf of the IALC, as well as letters from Westermann, and a few letters from R. Coupland, who in summer 1938 had been appointed Administrative Director of the IALC in succession of Oldham. The archives of the IALC (IAI) seem to have no correspondence with Hofstra. With thanks to Sue Donnelly, archivist LSE. The Index of the Oldham Manuscripts collection has no entry for Sjoerd Hofstra. With thanks to Linda Blackwood, Senior Helpdesk Assistant, New College Library, Edinburgh.

⁵ Letter Brackett to Hofstra, 1-2-1937.

⁶ Letter Brackett to Hofstra, 9-2-1937.

⁷ Letter Malinowski to Hofstra, 3-3-1937.

Another letter from the Institute among Hofstra's papers dates from early November 1937. Westermann, one of the directors of the IIALC, thanked Hofstra for sending his writings, some of which he had immediately read, while he was going to read the rest 'with pleasure'.⁸ He further remarked that he could see that Hofstra was 'fleissig bei der Arbeit' (working hard). Of course, as Westermann continued, Hofstra's important work for the Institute, with which he would now begin or had begun, would interest him even more. Westermann asked for an overview of Hofstra's work plans and the dates at which particular parts would be ready.⁹

Soon afterwards, a letter from Miss Brackett arrived, telling Hofstra that the Chairman and Directors 'all approve of your accepting the post of temporary Director at the Museum for Ethnology at Rotterdam. They consider it will enable you to continue your scientific career under very favourable conditions and hope that the post will be made permanent, the possibility of which you indicate in your letter. You will understand, however, that they feel some anxiety about how this new work is going to affect the fulfilment of your obligations to our Institute and the writing up of the material obtained during your two visits to Sierra Leone. As you were not taking up your new duties until this month we imagine that you will, as originally arranged, submit the first chapters of your book by the end of this year, together with the outline of the rest of the material and a statement as to how you propose to deal with it. [...] They feel sure that you will be anxious to push on with it as rapidly as possible, not only because of your obligations to the Institute, but also because you will wish to make your contribution to anthropological knowledge as effective as possible, and this will obviously be achieved by the publication of your results.'¹⁰

In March 1938, Miss Brackett wrote to Hofstra that Professor Westermann had reported at the meeting of the Bureau 'on his visit to you and the conversation he had had with you about your work and plans. The members of the Bureau were glad to hear that your work is making satisfactory progress.'¹¹ Westermann himself sent Hofstra several more letters about the progress of Hofstra's work, as did Miss Brackett and, to begin with in July 1938, the recently appointed Administrative Director of the IIALC, R. Coupland. Coupland emphasized 'the importance of ensuring speedy publication of our Fellows' results. The Rockefeller grant was given us to carry out a special task and the publication of the results of the research is a very important part of our undertaking to the Rockefeller Foundation. [...] Will you therefore let me have a statement of the present position in regard to your own work. Professor Westermann has explained to me the reasons which have caused the delay in its production up to the present, but I am glad to think that your health is now re-established and I hope that you are making good progress with writing up your Mende material. Dr. Wagner has submitted a detailed synopsis of his book and I enclose a copy, as something of

⁸ Among the writings sent to Westermann may well have been Hofstra's publication on the social aspects of knowledge and science (Hofstra 1937c) and a review of a German ethnological textbook (Hofstra 1937d).

⁹ Letter Westermann to Hofstra, 3-11-1937.

¹⁰ Letter Brackett to Hofstra, 17-11-1937.

¹¹ Letter Brackett to Hofstra, 18-3-1938.

this kind in relation to your own work would give me the information as to how far the writing up is complete.¹²

In a later letter Coupland congratulated Hofstra on the confirmation of his appointment as Director of the Museum. 'You will, I expect, be glad to complete the re-organisation of the scientific side of the Museum and get more time for your own writing. I look forward to receiving your synopsis in the course of the next few weeks and should be glad at any time to see you either in London or Oxford if you are visiting this country.'¹³ However, a letter from Miss Brackett to Hofstra in early March 1939 reveals that it took Hofstra a few months rather than weeks to complete his synopsis. She wrote that she was sorry that Hofstra had been obliged to postpone his visit to London. 'Professor Westermann brought with him the synopsis of your book and laid it on the table at the meeting of the Bureau. The members were glad to know that your work is making progress and I gather that you were able to discuss it to some extent with Professor Westermann when you saw him in Rotterdam. The manuscript of the synopsis is here in this office and we have noted that you do not wish it shown to anyone for the present.'¹⁴

A year later, in March 1940, Miss Brackett sent Hofstra a letter with her reaction to his offer to submit some of his material for publication in *Africa*. 'You will have seen in the January issue of 'Africa' that for the duration of the war the production has been handed over to an Editorial Committee of which Professor Coupland is Chairman. He was up from Oxford on Tuesday so I was able to show him your letter and he was very glad to hear that you would like to submit to the Committee some of your material for publication. It is very doubtful how far we shall be able to continue with the issue of supplements and we would therefore suggest that you send us an article for consideration. [...] I was glad to hear that your work is progressing well and am grateful to you for sending the offprint of your recent paper on primitive mentality.'¹⁵ It is interesting to know that you are being referred to from Sierra Leone for information and advice and I hope that eventually your plan to make a further visit will materialise.'¹⁶

The material which Hofstra offered to submit for publication in *Africa* may well have concerned the beliefs of the Mende in ancestral and non-ancestral spirits. He did write two articles on these subjects (Hofstra 1940a and 1942a), but they were published in *Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie*, rather than in *Africa*. These would be Hofstra's last publications in English about the Mende.¹⁷ A few more publications on the Mende or related topics appeared in Dutch: a lecture on the life of a primitive people (Hofstra 1938), the already mentioned article on the problem of primitive mentality (Hofstra 1939a), a lecture on the attitude towards death among the Mende (Hofstra

¹² Letter Coupland to Hofstra, 9-7-1938.

¹³ Letter Coupland to Hofstra, 3-10-1938.

¹⁴ Letter Brackett to Hofstra, 7-3-1939.

¹⁵ This will have been Hofstra's article 'Het vraagstuk der primitieve mentaliteit' [The problem of primitive mentality] (Hofstra 1939a).

¹⁶ Letter Brackett to Hofstra, 21-3-1940.

¹⁷ The other two publications in English on the Mende had appeared in 1937 (Hofstra 1937a and 1937b).

1939b), an article on the economic structure of British West Africa (Hofstra 1940b) and one on primitive individuality (Hofstra 1941).

After the Second World War Hofstra once more made plans to complete and write up his Mende material. In January 1946 he let the Institute – which by then was called the International African Institute – know that he hoped to visit England in the near future.¹⁸ In February 1946 he did indeed travel to England, combining his work for the Rotterdam museums with a visit to Professor Daryll Forde, Director of the IAI. He also discussed his work with Raymond Firth, who had succeeded Malinowski as Professor of Social Anthropology at the London School of Economics.¹⁹ Next among Hofstra's papers is a copy of a draft text for the Institute, titled 'Memorandum by Dr. S. Hofstra on his proposals for publication and further research among the Mende in Sierra Leone', dated 4th March 1946. The text went as follows:

'During the war years I have continued working on my Mende field material and have published papers on several aspects of culture. Owing to the fact that my second period of field study was curtailed by illness, I am keenly aware of the inadequacy of the investigation at certain points which made me reluctant to embark on a comprehensive study. I have, however, very substantial material on Mende religion and cults including not only the character and content of rituals and religious organisations but bearing on the problems of basic values among the Mende with regard to social solidarity and in particular their relation to kinship, the structure of the chiefdom and the integration of economic activities. I hope, therefore, to proceed without delay to a preliminary organisation of my material in this field and hope to be able to complete a provisional MS on this subject in accordance with the work already published on Mende religion during the coming year.

I am, however, anxious to resolve a number of open questions by further observation in the field and would revise my study accordingly if this should be necessary.

I believe that I could obtain leave of absence for a period of approximately six months, to undertake further investigations in the field and if my services were desired I should be happy to contribute to scientific field studies of value to the authorities in Sierra Leone in the near future.

I have already undertaken some investigations during my earlier field work which are likely to be of public interest and I should be prepared to conduct further investigations on some or all of them according to the facilities that could be arranged:

Study of land tenure in relation to agricultural methods and social structure with special reference to rice farming.

The organisation of labour supply for household and for the Chiefdom (public services under the direction of the chief).

¹⁸ Letter Mrs B.E. Wyatt, secretary IAI, to Hofstra, 1-2-1946. She wrote that Miss Brackett had had to retire as secretary of the Institute, owing to illness, that Lord Lugard and Sir Hanns Vischer had died, and that Lord Hailey and Professor D. Forde were now Chairman resp. Director of the IAI.

¹⁹ Letter Woutje Hofstra-van den Bergh van Eysinga to Hofstra, 20-2-1946.

The political structure of the chiefdom (I understand that Dr. Little is making a special study of political life in the Bo area and could with supplementary investigations provide comparable material for Bambara).

I have deposited in the Institute copies of the papers already published and will report in more detail on the progress of my arrangements for preparation of further studies. In the meantime I would be most grateful for the support of the Institute in furthering my preliminary proposals for further research. I have discussed this fully with the Director and with Professor Raymond Firth in connection with possible opportunities for making use of my services on behalf of the Government of Sierra Leone.'

It appears that Hofstra's final proposal was eventually sent to and favourably considered by the Colonial Office, as in July 1947 Hofstra received a letter from P.A. Wilson from the Colonial Office, telling him that 'we have now heard that the consulting physician considers you physically fit to pay a six months' visit to West Africa.' The same letter also mentioned a grant that had been allowed for his expenses.²⁰ A few months later Hofstra was informed on behalf of the School of Oriental and African Studies at the University of London that his wish to work with their Mende informant could be complied with. 'He is a highly educated African, Rev. D.J. Manley B.A. and he would be very pleased to work with you. He will be with us for another year at least, so there is plenty of time.'²¹

However, for the time being, no further progress regarding the Mende research seems to have been made. The delay may well have been due to Hofstra's appointment in autumn 1947 as Extraordinary Professor of African Ethnology at the University of Leiden, a part-time position he combined with his directorate of the two Rotterdam museums. Moreover, in February 1948 the Hofstras' second child was born,²² so a six months' stay in Sierra Leone was hardly feasible at that stage. A letter from Fortes, which he wrote shortly after a visit to the Hofstras in April 1948, does hint at doubts on the part of Hofstra making a visit to the Mende. Fortes wrote: 'On my way through London I saw Wilson of the Colonial Research Council for just a few minutes. He seems to be frightfully busy and I shall not be able to have a good talk with him until the 27th. However, your Mende visit was touched upon in a tentative way. It is clear that the Council is extremely keen for you to go out to Sierra Leone and would be disappointed if you withdrew. Needless to say I myself said nothing to suggest that you yourself had not quite made up your mind.'²³ Hofstra's papers contain no further information about this particular matter, but what is clear is that he didn't return to Sierra Leone to complete his Mende research. Correspondence with the Research Department of the Colonial Office reveals that Hofstra, after having submitted new proposals in September 1948, got a grant for a two month's stay in London for working with the above mentioned Mende informant, Mr Manley. As it turned out, Hofstra came and worked with

²⁰ Letter Wilson to Hofstra, 16-7-1947.

²¹ Letter A.N. Tucker to Hofstra, 24-9-1947.

²² Wouter Hendrik Hofstra (1948-2005). Their first child, Maria Frederika (Marijke) Hofstra, was born in 1940.

²³ Letter Fortes to Hofstra, 14-4-1948.

Mr Manley from mid-June till mid-July 1949. A second visit to London for four to six weeks in 1950 had to be cancelled because of illness, first Hofstra himself and then Mr Manley.²⁴

Eventually this cancellation proved to be the end of Hofstra's Mende project. The publication of K.L. Little's book on the Mende in 1951²⁵ may have contributed to this outcome, notwithstanding encouraging advice to Hofstra by Max Gluckman, Professor of Social Anthropology at the University of Manchester since 1949. For Gluckman let Hofstra know in December 1951 that, having read Little's book on the Mende, he saw 'no reason why you should not write on them. I have enjoyed your two papers on them.'²⁶ Gluckman enclosed a type-written copy of his fairly negative review of Little's book. It ran as follows. 'Modern anthropology is based on the collection of data by the meticulous observation of life in small social segments. At the end of their field-tours anthropologists have so much information about the interaction of persons in particular institutional settings, that perforce they have ceased to write general descriptions covering everything from the implements to the religious beliefs of the people they have studied. Instead they have analysed problems involved in the growing up of children, married life, political and economic activity, behaviour connected with beliefs in witchcraft, oracles and magic, etc., as systems within a larger social system. In this book Dr. Little attempts a book on the older model, with short chapters on various social roles and institutions. His attempt emphasizes the wisdom of his colleagues in writing specialized analyses. As an anthropologist I find the book dull and uninspiring [...] One seems to learn nothing, except local terms, about anything.'²⁷

It hardly needs saying that Gluckman's statement about modern anthropology was very much in line with Hofstra's own ideas about anthropological research. These ideas he ventilated in his letters to his adoptive mother and put into practice in his anthropological research and publications on the Mende.

Hofstra's letters revisited: Plans and outcomes

Compared with Hofstra's original research plan of December 1932 and the joint memorandum of Fortes, Nadel and Hofstra of October 1933, Hofstra's actual fieldwork and its outcomes demonstrate a considerable gap between plans and practice. The plans of the three Mandarins were formulated on a fairly abstract, theoretical level. Their aim was to make all-embracing studies of the cultures of the West African peoples they had selected and to compare these cultures. Moreover they intended to apply the functional method à la Malinowski.²⁸

²⁴ Letters P.H. Canham, Secretary, Colonial Social Science Research Council, 21-10-1948, 10-1-1949 and 10-5-1949. Letters Mrs E.M. Chilver, Canham's successor, 30-5-1949, 3-6-1949, 22-7-1949, 11-5-1950, 2-6-1950, 23-6-1950. Copy letters Hofstra to Chilver, 4-6-1949, 13-8-1949, 28-2-1950.

²⁵ In his Memorandum of 1946 Hofstra had already mentioned Little's research. See also a copy of Hofstra's letter to Little, 12-9-1949.

²⁶ Letter Gluckman to Hofstra, 21-12-1951.

²⁷ Gluckman didn't mention in which journal his review was (going to be) published.

²⁸ See chapter 1 about the original research plans.

Hofstra's letters to his adoptive mother reveal that the research plans may have provided an overall guideline for the actual fieldwork, but hardly more than that. It was an open matter where he would stay, whether he would stay there all the time and how he would further organize his fieldwork. Hofstra preferred to stick to Panguma and make trips from there, whereas Nadel travelled around much more. Although unplanned, Hofstra's medical work proved to be highly functional for getting into contact with the population of Panguma. The course of his fieldwork was to a large extent determined by events, such as the selection of a chief or funerals, and his increasing attraction to in-depth research.

Hofstra's book on the Mende would remain unwritten. The planned comparisons between the findings of Fortes, Nadel and Hofstra would not be realized. Hofstra's articles in English on his fieldwork focus on political, economic and magical/religious aspects of Mende culture (Hofstra 1937a, 1937b, 1940a, 1942a). Unlike the original intentions, little if anything in these articles points to the use of the functional method. Actually, within a few years and before Merton discussed the topic (Merton 1949), Hofstra wrote a critical paper – in Dutch – on the use of function as a concept in sociology, distancing himself from Malinowski's ideas in this respect (Hofstra 1946).²⁹

However, more or less in line with Malinowski's suggestion regarding schematization, Hofstra's articles demonstrate a highly developed analytical sensitivity, systematically discussing numerous aspects of the themes at issue. Both in his letters and his articles Hofstra was careful to avoid overhasty generalizations. He showed a great interest in matters of personality and differentiation. For example, in his article on the political life of the Mende (Hofstra 1937a), but also in his articles on Mende beliefs in ancestral and non-ancestral spirits (Hofstra 1940a and 1942a). His letters contain much information which would later be included and systematized in these articles. Compared to the themes discussed in these three articles, the letters have relatively little to say about the social significance of the oil palm, the subject of the remaining article (Hofstra 1937b). This is, moreover, the one article in which effects of cultural contact between African and European civilizations in a colonial setting – the theme which figured prominently in the original research proposals for the Rockefeller grants – received some attention: by selling palm kernels Mende households provided themselves with the means to pay the yearly tax of 5 shillings to the Government.

Hofstra's letters also reveal other themes about which he had collected material or intended to do so, but about which he did not publish. These included the proceedings of Mende law courts, Mende family life, their secret societies, their medicines and illnesses, and their education as provided by mission schools. It goes without saying that this last subject would have provided further examples of the effects of cultural contact and may thus have resulted in practically applicable knowledge as far as the missionaries and, indirectly, the colonial government were concerned. Although Hofstra did not refer to it in these terms, his interpreter/informant Conteh was himself a product and a specimen of this cultural contact, having been educated and employed by a mission school. As the letters make clear, both Hofstra and Conteh could and did take advantage of Conteh's intermediary status. Moreover, the friendly contacts with the

²⁹ More about this in chapter 9.

paramount chief in Panguma, his brother and numerous others proved to be of great value for Hofstra in becoming familiar with Mende life. It is telling that he called them 'my Mendi friends' in one of his articles (Hofstra 1940a: 194, 196).

Sjoerd Hofstra's later career

Like many of his colleagues and research fellows at the IALC/IAI, Hofstra aspired to an academic position. He did get one, or rather two, but he had to wait until after the war. After his return from Sierra Leone to the Netherlands Hofstra first acquired, as has already been mentioned in the previous chapter, a post as interim Director at the Museum voor Land- en Volkenkunde (Ethnological Museum) and the Maritiem Museum "Prins Hendrik" (Maritime Museum) in Rotterdam (1937) and subsequently as Director (1938-1949). After the bombardment of Rotterdam in May 1940, an important part of the museum collections was transferred to a countryseat in 's-Graveland, near Hilversum. The Hofstra family, which by then had increased to three,¹ soon followed and in 1946 they would move back to Rotterdam. In addition to his papers on the Mende (Hofstra 1940a and 1942a) and related subjects, Hofstra published during this period on social and historical factors in the freedom of science (Hofstra 1939c), the responsibility of science towards culture (Hofstra 1940c), the relationship between science, morality and religion in the philosophy of Auguste Comte (Hofstra 1942b), the attitude of man towards nature (Hofstra 1945), and the concept of function in sociology (Hofstra 1946).

Stressing the need for clarity and accuracy of sociology's conceptual apparatus, Hofstra analysed in his article on the concept of function both its actual use and its potential usefulness in sociology (Hofstra 1946: 25). He distinguished between seven different ways in which 'function' was used, ranging from the most general use – the functioning of a phenomenon in contrast with structure or purpose – followed by three interpretations of function according to which a phenomenon *has* a function in relation to something else, to the interpretation that a phenomenon *is* a function of another phenomenon, either as a functional relation of reciprocity or as a mathematically formulated functional comparison (Hofstra 1946: 37-38). Discussing the potential usefulness of the concept of function in sociology, Hofstra especially warned against 'the undesirable restriction of much functional research to the analysis of functions which are considered to be useful and ignoring disintegrating or destructive effects. Sometimes this interpretation goes so far that the mere existence of a phenomenon and of its functions is being identified with usefulness and efficiency. [...] Related to this ap-

¹ Maria Frederika (Marijke) Hofstra was born in October 1940.

proach is that, particularly in ethnological research and in social evolution theories, often only those functions are being examined which emphasize the meaning of a phenomenon for its integration in a whole of social phenomena.' (Hofstra 1946: 51) Hofstra illustrated this with the example of Malinowski's work in which 'the idea of integration and adaptation together with the implication of usefulness, plays an important role' (Hofstra 1946: 51, note 26).

In autumn 1947 Hofstra obtained his first academic position: an Extraordinary Professorship of African Ethnology at the University of Leiden. His inaugural lecture discussed problems, place and meaning of African ethnology (Hofstra 1947). His second academic position followed in autumn 1949, when he was appointed Professor of Sociology at the University of Amsterdam and he therefore had to resign as Director of the two Rotterdam museums. Hofstra's inaugural lecture in Amsterdam was devoted to the concept of normality in sociology (Hofstra 1950). In this same year Hofstra was elected as a member of the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences. In later years he would publish articles on topics such as the relationship between sociology and cultural anthropology (Hofstra 1952), the meaning of some new group phenomena for the social integration of changing Africa (Hofstra 1955), science and society (Hofstra 1956), social aspects of the energy problem (Hofstra 1958), Georg Simmel (1959) and the state of sociology in the Netherlands (Hofstra 1967). In 1968, at the age of seventy, Hofstra retired from the University of Amsterdam with a valedictory lecture on the university, Marcuse and rationality. In Leiden he would lecture for another year. Although Hofstra's publications weren't numerous, some of his articles and essays were quite innovative at the time, like the ones on the social aspects of knowledge and science (Hofstra 1937), the attitude of man towards nature (Hofstra 1945) and his analyses regarding the concept of function (Hofstra 1946) and the concept of normality (Hofstra 1950). However, as they were written in Dutch, they were to remain largely unknown to an international public.

This didn't mean that Hofstra wasn't internationally active. From January 1952 until September 1953 he was Director of the newly founded international Institute of Social Studies at The Hague, a function which he combined with his duties in Amsterdam and Leiden. In 1952 he travelled to Pakistan, India, Ceylon, Iraq, Lebanon and Syria in order to establish contacts and recruit students for the Institute of Social Studies. In 1954 he made a similar trip for the Institute to Nigeria, the Gold Coast and Sierra Leone. From December 1955 till April 1956 and from December 1956 till April 1957 he worked as visiting Professor at the Department of African Studies of the University of New Delhi.

While Hofstra was in Sierra Leone in 1954, he also paid a short visit to Panguma. In a letter to a former colleague of the Maritime Museum in Rotterdam he wrote that in Sierra Leone he had been a week 'up-country [...], to the places where I have lived, especially Panguma and other places where acquaintances are still living. The reunion with Panguma was quite emotional for me. Many acquaintances of the population were no longer alive, but, on the other hand, many who I believed to be dead, were still alive. They still knew me well and after a few hours it was as if I hadn't been away.

I had never thought that I would come back there and I am very pleased with this experience.²

Hofstra was also quite active in the field of Animal Protection. In 1953 he became a member of the Dutch Society for the Protection of Animals. From 1958 he was secretary and from 1961 until 1973 he was the chairman. He also became a board member of the World Federation for the Protection of Animals, and he was chairman from 1966 until 1974. Both in the Netherlands and internationally he published many articles to promote the cause of animal protection.

Hofstra died in 1983, at the age of eighty-five. His former student and assistant L. Laeyendecker delivered a commemorative speech at a special session of the Royal Dutch Academy of Sciences (Laeyendecker 1984; see also Laeyendecker 1998 and Noordegraaf 2001).

² Letter Hofstra to Miss B.J. van Overeem, 3-3-1954.

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Photocopies of the English articles on the Mende by Sjoerd Hofstra

1. Personality and differentiation in the political life of the Mendi.
Africa, vol. X (1937), no. 4, pp. 436-457 263
2. The social significance of the oil palm in the life of the Mendi.
Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie, vol. XXXIV (1937), no. 5-6,
pp. 105-118 284
3. The ancestral spirits of the Mendi.
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PERSONALITY AND DIFFERENTIATION IN THE POLITICAL LIFE OF THE MENDI

SJOERD HOFSTRA

THE PROBLEM STATED

THE purpose of this article is to contribute some facts from Mendi life to the problem of differentiation and uniformity in primitive societies. As this problem is closely connected with the wider and controversial issue of the place the individual occupies in primitive group life, a few remarks will precede our facts.¹

The use here of the words 'individual' and 'group' does not in any way imply an antithesis between these two entities. On the contrary, it is postulated in the present paper that the construction of such an antithesis is based on a sociological fallacy. The two entities—it need hardly be stressed—are correlated with each other. The individual, on the one hand, is influenced by the ways of feeling and thinking, by the standards of action which are prevalent in the group of which he is a member. These ways and standards are from a very early age impressed upon him by language, custom, and social organization. The fact that he is already born as a member of certain groups; that he belongs to a race and people, is placed in a class and in specific cultural surroundings; that he enters into a series of social relationships which are to some extent given, moulds his behaviour to a large degree, and shapes his innate qualities. The group, on the other hand, is not an independent, self-contained unit either. It is composed of individuals who react upon it, sometimes change it, and are not merely members. Moreover, there exists in no culture simply 'the' group, but always a multiplicity of groups, and the individual participates in the life of these various groups in different degrees of intensity. Among the Mendi, for instance, we find the family and kinship groupings, the territorial groups of chiefdom, town, and village; the secret societies; of each of these groups the individual Mendi is a member, but his rights and obligations within these groups, the

¹ I am greatly indebted to Professor Malinowski and to Mr. Godfrey Wilson for helpful criticism of the first draft of this article.

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 practical implications of his membership, differ according to the type of group.

The problem of the relation of individual to group has, it seems to me, for the purpose of sociological analysis to be solved in several questions. Such questions are, for instance: the correlation between individual and social differentiation; the range of social processes in which the individual must or can take part; the types of customs which have validity for the individual and the degree of regulative force of these customs; the obligations and rights of the individual in each group and the way in which these obligations are carried out and the rights are enforced; the forms and degree of group-formation in a given culture; the extent of associative and differentiative relationships; the scope which exists for the expression of personality.

Our object in the present paper is to investigate the part which individual differentiation plays in political life and the ways in which differentiated behaviour there occurs. It seems to me that this approach offers a sufficiently objective basis for the isolation of a group of facts and for the disentangling of a complicated problem which has suffered too long from a vague terminology.¹

The facts given in this article do not mainly refer to breaches of law or other forms of anti-social behaviour in which the individual is directly in opposition to his group and its customs. Customary behaviour includes among its constituent factors not only rules, breaches, and sanctions, but also, as Professor Malinowski has shown, the positive ways in which compliance with the rules is secured and further the deviations which are possible within the more or less normal working of these rules. Such deviations are taken here as instances of differentiated behaviour.

The general context of my facts and the background of uniformity against which they have to be placed is briefly indicated in the section entitled 'Political Organization in General'.

Note on the people. The Mendi, among whom I have been doing field work for about a year, live in the central and eastern part of Sierra Leone, where, some 600,000 in number, they form the strongest

¹ For the theoretical background of this article see: S. Hofstra, *Differenzierungserscheinungen in einigen afrikanischen Gruppen. Ein Beitrag zur Frage der primitiven Individualität*, Amsterdam, 1933.

438 PERSONALITY AND DIFFERENTIATION AMONG THE MENDI tribe. Agriculture is their main economic pursuit; hunting and fishing are minor activities, while cattle-keeping is of small importance. The cultivation of rice and the gathering of the fruits of the oil-palm are the main activities of Mendi economic life; rice is the staple food and the fruits of the palm provide oil for food and kernels for export. The country is divided into a number of relatively small chiefdoms which are from the native point of view the political and juridical units. The local groups within the chiefdoms are towns varying from about 300 to 2,000 inhabitants, and villages varying from about 20 to 300 inhabitants. The family system, a mixture of matrilineal and patrilineal traits, is patrilocal; polygyny is widely practised. A characteristic feature of the community consists in the secret societies which play an important part in education, political life, and magic.

There is a considerable trade in palm-kernels, the principal article of export, especially in places along the railway which runs through the country. This trade constitutes one of the main forms of European contact, the other forms being the supervision of the British Administration and the activities of a few mission stations. European contact has on the whole not yet had a strongly disintegrating effect.

POLITICAL ORGANIZATION IN GENERAL

The chiefdoms form the main political and juridical units. Each chiefdom has more or less well-defined boundaries with the adjoining chiefdoms. The size of the chiefdoms in Sierra Leone in general varies from about 20 to 500 square miles. At the head of each chiefdom is a paramount chief (*ndomahei*),¹ who rules independently of any other chief. He is assisted by a council of tribal authorities,² consisting of the principal elders and head-men of the chiefdom. In Upper Bambara, a rather large chiefdom with which I am best acquainted, there were about fifty such tribal authorities. A chiefdom is usually divided into sub-chiefdoms—for instance, the chiefdom just mentioned is divided into six sub-chiefdoms—each of them ruled by a section chief. Each town or village again has its chief or headman. Each chief or headman is furthermore assisted by a speaker (*lavari*) who acts as medium

¹ *Mahei* is the general title of all chiefs, both local and paramount.

² This is the official term used by the British Government to denote the leading men, members of the chief's council.

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between the chief and his subjects and who speaks for him in court
and on other occasions. The speaker again often has a second speaker
to help him. A paramount chief will usually also avail himself of the
help of a clerk, and he has some messengers, drummers, and hammock-
boys in his service.

The chiefs, especially the paramount chiefs, have certain rights over
communal labour and tribute. Their authority is, as far as I can judge
from my observations and from the attitude of the natives, based on
a genuine respect, a sense of loyalty on the side of the subjects. This
relationship of loyalty is, however, as we shall see, for its right
functioning partly conditioned by the personality of the chief; there
exists a reciprocity of feeling and of mutual interest between the chief
and his subjects. There is no great display of ceremonial or pomp
connected with the office of the chief, who in many ways lives like
other notables. His office has, moreover, no sacred character. Differ-
ences in wealth between chiefs exist however; these differences are
connected with the size of their territory and are noticeable, for in-
stance, in their dress and the decoration of their houses.

The possibilities of professional differentiation in the political sphere
are, as is clear from this brief outline, very limited, and in consequence
many young people find no outlet for their abilities and ambitions in
this field.

THE AUTHORITY AND PERSONALITY OF THE CHIEF

A concrete indication of the nature of the authority of the chiefs
is provided by the factors which play a part at their election. I shall
therefore, as far as my material allows of conclusions, give an analysis
of these factors. After that, the importance of the personality of the
chief in the actual carrying out of his work will be described.

My data on these points are derived from observation and many
talks with people, and especially from witnessing the elections of a
paramount chief and three section chiefs and the canvassing for the
election of another paramount chief. In the chiefdom in which I was
staying the chief died while I was there and I was consequently able
to observe the events following his death; being the only European
there I had the advantage of being in close touch with several of the
main actors. My friendship with them was facilitated by the fact that

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 I had been admitted as a member of the Porro, the secret society for men, which, in the old days, played an important part in political life, and which still does in the education of boys; I gained through this fact a more or less recognized status in the Mendi community.

THE FACTORS AT AN ELECTION

Procedure of Elections. The modern-sounding term 'election' should perhaps be explained here briefly. A paramount chief is elected by the tribal authorities of the chiefdom. There are usually several candidates brought forward by the few royal houses which have the right to rule, and the candidate who obtains the majority of the votes becomes chief. There is nowadays a strong ambition to become chief, and in consequence there exists among the natives a good deal of interest in the elections, and there are more candidates than in former times. One of the main reasons for this is that the Government has made the office more attractive and secure than it used to be. The Government has greatly strengthened the position of the chiefs by giving them legal rights to labour and also the right to collect one shilling tax per house. The chiefs have, moreover, a further right to tribute in kind; in the chiefdom of Upper Bambara this consisted of one bushel of rice and one tin of palm-oil per house per year. It is clear that in large chiefdoms the chiefs receive a relatively large income. Chief and trader are indeed the only two professions in which it is possible to acquire wealth.

The following figures give an idea of the competition at elections. In the Southern Province thirty-four elections for paramount chief took place between March 1932 and August 1934 with a total number of 179 candidates, giving an average of more than five candidates per election. Candidates normally come from two or three different royal houses. In former times when there was less ambition to become a chief the election seems to have been more in the nature of an agreement between the principal houses; but nowadays elections have, through the fact that they are supervised by the British Administration, received a more formal character. Moreover, the fact that there are now more candidates than in former times and that they fight hard to become chief adds importance and excitement to the election and to the period preceding the election.

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When the tribal authorities think that the time is ripe for the election, they ask the Provincial Commissioner to come for it. At a meeting of the tribal authorities, at which the Provincial Commissioner presides, and which is usually attended by a large crowd, the candidates state their claims. After these statements have been made the tribal authorities discuss the matter further at a secret meeting without the presence of the Provincial Commissioner or the public. In the meantime the people are anxiously waiting for the result of the discussion and the voting of the tribal authorities. When the secret meeting is finished the tribal authorities return to the Provincial Commissioner and tell him how many votes each candidate has received. If there is a sufficiently large majority for one of the candidates the Provincial Commissioner will declare this candidate to be elected; if, however, there is only a small majority and a good deal of disagreement among the tribal authorities the Provincial Commissioner will ask them to consider the matter again. If, after renewed meetings, they are unable to come to an agreement, the Provincial Commissioner usually postpones the election for a few months. I witnessed the election of a paramount chief in August 1934; two election meetings had previously been held in July and October 1933, both without success. This third time a chief was elected, but even then not without difficulties; it took the tribal authorities two long secret meetings to come to a decision.

If at the first election meeting the tribal authorities are unable to come to a majority decision, the Government insists that they appoint a regent-chief who rules till the new chief is elected. From the death of the chief till the election of a new chief or the appointment of a regent the speaker acts as chief; he becomes acting-chief automatically after the death of the chief and he has all the rights and obligations of a chief till he is relieved by the new chief or regent.

The Government usually only confirms an election where one of the candidates attains a large majority, because such a majority is some guarantee that the new chief will be able to maintain order. There have been several cases in the past, I heard, where parties of nearly equal strength continued their quarrels for a long time after the election and where consequently the chieftdom remained in a state of unrest. Two days after my arrival in the country I happened to

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 witness the last part of a case which was tried in the court of the Provincial Commissioner between a chief of such a chiefdom and several of his opponents. The chief won his case, and the Provincial Commissioner ordered his principal opponents to leave the chiefdom.

It is, for the rest, the principle of the Government to leave the tribal authorities free in their choice of a new chief and to restrict its own task to the confirmation of that choice. The Provincial Commissioner invites the paramount chief from one of the neighbouring chiefdoms to act as 'assessor chief' and to give him and the tribal authorities advice at the election.

The election of a section chief takes place in a somewhat similar way. The electors are here the headmen of the section. The Government does not interfere with the election of a section chief; the paramount chief presides at the election meeting, and he and the principal tribal authorities declare a section chief to be elected after the headmen of villages have either voted or come to an agreement. From the number of houses each voter represents, it is possible for the chief and his advisers to come to an estimate of the support each candidate has. In the cases which I witnessed the role of the paramount chief was by no means a purely formal one but was rather that of a mediator between the parties of the several candidates; he used a good deal of his influence to bring the candidates and principal men to an agreement. It is important that the principal men should all agree, not only the headmen. They all take part in the discussion though only the headmen vote.

Analysis of factors. After this outline of the procedure followed at elections we will turn to an analysis of the factors working in them.

Among these factors there is first of all the rule that a candidate is elected from one of the royal families. In each chiefdom two or more of the principal, often related, families, have a right to the chieftainship. This right, which is often exercised in turn by the families, is now stabilized by the Government and restricted to the families who have reigned in the past. In former times, when besides the ordinary chiefs there were also war chiefs, there was an opportunity for people outside the principal families to become war chiefs. Even slaves sometimes became war chiefs, informants told me. It is difficult, however, to check their statements, as the term 'slave' has a somewhat

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 ambiguous meaning here. There was often no certainty whether children who claimed to be, or were claimed to be, sons of a chief were children of his real wives or of the slave wives whom he owned and who were working for him in the villages. For instance, in a chiefdom with which I am acquainted there were a whole group of men who claimed to be sons of one of the late chiefs who was a great warrior, but I know that many people had a strong doubt about the validity of that claim.

The candidates for the chieftainship are usually brothers or sons of the late chief. There is in the rule of succession no preference for either of these groups.

We are thus able to isolate the hereditary principle as the regular and constant factor in the election. Now a series of factors of a more differentiated character begins. They are: (*a*) disagreements within the royal families; (*b*) parties among the tribal authorities; (*c*) wealth; (*d*) age; (*e*) character.

(*a*) *Disagreements within the royal families.* A family does not always stand as a unit and supply one candidate, but in many cases more than one member of the same family try to become chief. For example, in the chiefdom I know best there are three royal houses. Two of them nominated only one candidate each, but the third house could not come to an agreement and had three candidates: two brothers of the late chief and his eldest son. As I am rather intimately acquainted with this case, a few details will follow here. Immediately after the funeral of the late chief the struggle began within the family. This struggle concerned not only the right to the chieftainship but also the inheritance of the late chief's property. The brothers claimed a right to the property—a few hundred pounds—and the children too. Both parties appealed to the District Commissioner, who, because of the unfixed character of native law in regard to details of inheritance, referred the matter to the native court which was then sitting under the presidency of the speaker, acting as chief. The court decided that the property should belong to the children. The question of the property was important to both parties, because, as we shall see, money plays a part in the election and the candidate who is able to be generous has an advantage.

There were several reasons why both parties did not come to an

444 PERSONALITY AND DIFFERENTIATION AMONG THE MENDI agreement about the succession. Firstly, because of the material advantages connected with the chieftainship. Secondly, the candidates of both parties were very ambitious and eager for prestige and power. Thirdly, they were prevented from coming to an agreement by a strong suspicion of each other's intentions once the election was over. The brothers of the late chief argued: 'Our son promises us that we will get a good position when we support him and he becomes chief. Perhaps he is serious about that, but we do not trust some of the people who support him. They are against us and want to use our son for their own purposes. Once he is chief, we lose our influence.' The son in his turn said: 'If I support my uncles I do not know what will happen to me and to our property. I fear that once they get the chieftainship they will take the property as well. My uncles said to me: "You can keep the money and become a trader and later on you can become a chief", but I do not trust that. Moreover, I want to be the chief.' A fourth reason was a difference of opinion as to family rights and obligations. Again, the uncles said: 'A son ought not to reign before his father. We are your father, we must reign first. Moreover, our brother had only been reigning about three years. We, his brothers, have not yet had much opportunity to gain influence. It is therefore our turn now.' The son, on the other hand, argued: 'It is just because my father had not yet been reigning very long that I want to continue his work for our own family. It was, moreover, the wish of my father that I should become his successor.' He also felt that, though his uncles promised him the chieftainship later on, there would be a great chance that the uncles' own sons would also stand as candidates then, and be in a stronger position than he.

(b) *Parties among the tribal authorities.* The support of the majority of the tribal authorities which the would-be chief has to receive in order to become elected is not readily or spontaneously given in many cases. The tribal authorities who are solicited for support by the candidates feel themselves, as far as I am able to judge from the cases I know, partly bound by loyalty to one of the royal houses, partly they are hesitating, looking about for the best candidate or open to persuasion and promises of favours. The time between the death of a chief and the election of a new chief is therefore usually a time of unrest, where there is scope for many meetings, intrigues and

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bribery too. These several tendencies will become clearer from the following facts.

Talks about the chieftainship start immediately after the death of the chief or even when he is ill. I had occasion to observe that in the chieftdom in which I was staying. The morning after the death of the chief I saw here and there, somewhat apart, people standing together in small groups; some of them at any rate were already discussing what their attitude would be in regard to possible candidates for the chieftainship. Feeling personally as a loss the death of the chief who had been my friend, I was somewhat astonished to see that so many people were already talking about a new chief. I know that there were many people who felt real grief, especially some relatives of the chief and also his supporters and many others, because he had been a good ruler and had not been oppressive. But it was difficult to distinguish between the real and the purely ceremonial mourners. One of my friends, who had a good deal of experience in such affairs and who felt excited by the events, said to me: 'We Mendi really like a change in chieftainship. When a chief has been reigning for a number of years it is good that another man in his turn gets an opportunity. Some people lose their position through the death of a chief, but others get a position in their turn.' He was thinking especially of the material advantages connected with the chieftainship.

Moreover, the formal funeral rites and the excitement of ceremonial dancing, the many meetings which the principal men had together or in small groups, all dominated public life so strongly after the death of the chief that little else was apparent to the observer. In the villages where people were less engaged in meetings I met many people who showed real grief and who spoke sympathetically of the late chief.

Within a few days of the funeral the talks of the principal men took definite shape. Three members of the royal houses announced that they would be candidates. They already had their small group of supporters among the principal men and now the struggle for securing the support of a majority among the tribal authorities began. The candidates and their groups of faithful supporters went round the chieftdom talking with the tribal authorities, trying to come to an agreement with them and in the meantime hiding their own movements as much as possible. After a few weeks each of the candidates

446 PERSONALITY AND DIFFERENTIATION AMONG THE MENDI had a group behind him, but there still remained a group of tribal authorities who had not yet made up their minds. This group gradually decreased in number, but not until the day of the election were the candidates quite certain of their supporters. As one of them said to me: 'We Mendi are difficult to know. We are only certain about our supporters when it actually comes to voting.'

It must be added, however, that the attitude of hesitating tribal authorities is not only based on consideration of immediate material advantages but on the fact that some of them find themselves in real difficulties. There are tribal authorities who know immediately to what party they will belong because they have strong affiliations to one of the royal houses and their position is bound up with that house; others are differently situated. A few examples of cases I personally know will illustrate this. For instance, tribal authority A is a relative of the late chief and he was one of his main advisers; not only loyalty to family interests, but also the continuance of his own important role in political affairs makes him a strong supporter of the candidate of the family of the late chief. Tribal authority B is, on the other hand, in a less clear position; he was a supporter of the late chief and he likes to remain loyal to his house; but one of the main supporters of the candidate of this house is hostile to him and he is therefore much afraid that he will get into trouble if this candidate is elected and his enemy at the same time gains an influential position. With the other parties, however, he is not on friendly terms either. He has therefore to choose between two risks. The position of tribal authority C, again, is different; he is a section chief and several of the principal men in his own section are against him. It is thus to his advantage to support the candidate who has the best chance of becoming chief, because if the candidate whom he supports loses, there is every reason for him to fear that his opponent will try to influence the new paramount chief against him.

We have given here a short description of the events following the death of a chief as they were observed in a concrete case; of the excitement and unrest which accompanied these events; of the anxiety felt by part of the population and of the satisfaction felt by others; and finally of the questions which arose for the principal men of the chiefdom and the difficulties in which they found themselves involved.

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At the final stage of the election-time, the election itself, we see a more exact expression of the differences in attitude among the tribal authorities in the number of votes which each candidate receives. For example, at the election for paramount chief which I witnessed there were six candidates. Candidate no. 1 received six votes; no. 2 eleven; no. 3 twenty-five; no. 4 one; no. 5 four; no. 6 two. As the Provincial Commissioner did not find this result clearly enough in favour of one of the candidates, he asked the tribal authorities to consult again. The result was that they agreed to restrict the votes to two of the candidates: no. 2 then received thirteen and no. 3 thirty-six votes. After the Provincial Commissioner had insisted on unanimity if possible, and after prolonged discussions, the third candidate received all the votes and was therefore elected. We see here an interesting reshuffling of the votes, a common fact in the elections. Of further interest is the fact that at two previous meetings where the tribal authorities did not arrive at a clear decision the new chief had less votes than his strongest opponent. At the first meeting the latter received 26, the new chief 21 votes; at the second meeting the position was 25:23. Similar examples of division and rearrangement of votes could be given from the other elections which I witnessed, but lack of space forbids me to give more details.

Elements of agreement. We have pointed out the differentiating element in the attitude of the tribal authorities; in the figures given here there is, however, an element of agreement also indicated. 1. We see, for example, that, although the votes were first divided over six candidates, an agreement was reached to restrict the choice to two candidates and from this stage of settlement the tribal authorities came to a unanimous vote. 2. Another type of agreement consists in the fact that at the elections for section chief which I witnessed, the paramount chief and his principal advisers arranged that all the candidates should get a post as far as possible. The purpose of this arrangement was to restore the peace. For instance, at one of the elections one of the candidates became section chief, the other his speaker, and a third a town chief. It happened, however, that in two of the sections unrest and animosity between the parties continued for some weeks. Some people therefore criticized this type of arrangement and it does not seem to be followed in all chiefdoms. The

448 PERSONALITY AND DIFFERENTIATION AMONG THE MENDI critics said that it was better for the peace of the country if the principal people of the section and its new chief were left quite free to choose people for the main posts. 3. Again, it happens that a candidate who knows that he has no great chance of becoming elected still stands in the hope of coming to an agreement with the party which is likely to win. By going over with his supporters to that party he is probably able to secure a position for himself later on; I know, for instance, a candidate who speculated in this way. The reverse attitude is, on the other hand, that of two people I also knew, who for some months gave a vague assurance of support to one of the candidates but who, shortly before the election, stood themselves.

(c) *Wealth*. A candidate who is wealthy is in an advantageous position not only because he can spend money during the election time but also because he has been able to be generous and to gain popularity over a long period beforehand. My facts in regard to the influence of wealth make possible a distinction here between bribery in the direct sense, that is to say gifts of money, and what may be called purposeful generosity. Cases of bribery occur, as I know, and the fact that I frequently heard people talking about the spending of money for the election, shows that it is not uncommon. The Government tries to suppress bribery; one case which occurred in the chiefdom to which my description mainly refers was tried before the District Commissioner, and he ordered the tribal authorities, who admitted having received money from one of the candidates, to return it. In Mendi eyes, however, this form of influence seems to have a less illegal character. I heard a chief boasting publicly how much money he had spent in order to become chief; his boast included both the presents of money before the election and also the customary gifts of cows which a chief offers to his chiefdom after the election.

On the other hand there is a rule that the paramount chief and his principal men who act as his advisers at the election of a section chief should refrain from discussing election affairs with the candidates and their supporters during the time preceding the election, and any suggestion that this presiding chief has been bribed is hotly resented. At one of these elections which I witnessed, for instance, a supporter of one of the candidates objected to the presence of one of the presiding chief's advisers at the beginning of the meeting. He said that this

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 man had been in touch with the supporters of another candidate some days before the meeting. The adviser who was accused defended himself by saying that he had indeed had a talk with these supporters but only in his position as a senior member of their family and not because he was in favour of their party. In order to avoid all appearance of bias, the chief and his other advisers decided, however, that their accused colleague should not take further part in the discussions. At one point the presiding chief indignantly asked the accuser whether he was suggesting that he, the chief, had been bribed, and the accuser said 'No'.

Generosity is, of course, more subtle in its functioning. I witnessed a case where a man who had the intention of becoming a candidate joined with one of his relatives to lend some money to a man who was in need of it. They said afterwards to me: 'It may be good for our name to do this.'

Wealth is, however, not necessarily a decisive factor. Character and age also count as we shall see.

(d) *Age*. From talks with people I have the impression that they do not like their new chief to be too young or too old; for the rest age does not in practice seem to play a very decisive part. Opinions differ here, however. In the case which I described at some length I referred to an antagonism between a young candidate and his uncles who wanted the chieftainship for themselves. One of the arguments of the uncles was: 'Our son is still too young and it is not good that a young member of a family reigns before an older member.' It was not noticeable, however, that their opinion was generally shared. Some people of the parties who were against the young candidate, however, genuinely feared that when the latter became chief he would not be able to stand against the influence of some of his forceful, experienced supporters.

On the other hand, at two of the elections for section chiefs younger candidates who were strong and of forceful personality were declared elected by the presiding chief although there were older candidates with at least equal rights and actually more support among the headmen, who alone vote. At one of these elections, for example, there were five candidates. Three of them had considerable support among the headmen. Of these three the man with the highest number of

450 PERSONALITY AND DIFFERENTIATION AMONG THE MENDI houses behind him was a very old man; the candidate who followed him was younger but was known to be somewhat dull and not a good speaker in court. The third candidate, also a young man, had been acting chief already and had proved to be a very good ruler. The paramount chief and his tribal authorities who had to give the decision considered that he would be the best ruler and they therefore declared him elected. The exact extent of support for each of these three candidates, as represented by the votes of the headmen, was not announced to the general public, but only known to the presiding chief, his advisers, and the clerk who counted the houses of each voting headman. It was definitely said privately in this presiding group that the first candidate was too old already and that he, because of his age, would not be sufficiently active. The decision of the presiding chief and his advisers was not an over-riding of general public opinion, for before announcing the election of this third candidate they called a general public meeting and made the people group themselves, the supporters of each candidate together. It was then seen that the votes of the headmen had not represented general opinion, for the group supporting this third candidate was slightly larger than any other.

At the other two elections of section chiefs which I witnessed the mechanism of election was the same; first the voting of headmen, secondly informal discussion in private between the presiding chief and his advisers, thirdly a general meeting, and finally the declaration of election, and at both these other elections the candidates finally elected had a majority at the final meeting.

(e) *Character*. From the first example mentioned above it is clear that character is taken into account in the election of a chief: this candidate was elected because he was judged to be a good ruler. At an election of a paramount chief I heard people praising one of the candidates because he had never been cruel to people. It is an advantage if a candidate is known to be a strong man, many informants told me, but, on the other hand, the Mendi do not like severity in a candidate. Further, account is taken of the general good name and record of a candidate's family. For example, among the candidates at one of the elections there were two people who were still relatively young and who therefore had not yet had an opportunity to show their

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 qualities. I knew them both well and I heard people discussing them. About one of them, whose father had been a kind chief, many people said: 'We like him, his father has been good to us'; many people, however, distrusted the other one because his uncle had been a bad ruler as regent-chief. I have pointed out already that a reputation for generosity also counts.

The point of view of the candidate. In our account of the factors which play a part at the election we have given an analysis of facts as they presented themselves to the observer. We will now try to translate briefly the point of view of the candidate himself. We distinguish here between (a) the claims of the candidate, and (b) the reasons why he wants to become a chief.

(a) *Claims.* As example we will take the claims as they were stated by the six candidates at the election for paramount chief and briefly reformulate them. 1. A common claim was that their own family was one of the royal houses. 2. Another common claim was that they belonged to the owners of the country.¹ One of the candidates falsely claimed that the family of another candidate had come from a foreign chiefdom and through their money had gained influence. Lack of space forbids my entering more closely into questions of landownership which were expounded in considerable detail by the candidates. It is, moreover, extremely difficult to check these statements. Some of my informants who had a good knowledge of the history of this chiefdom and were also unbiased, told me after one of the meetings that there were many lies among the statements which had been made. 3. The parties not belonging to the house which had last been reigning, claimed that it was now their turn to reign. For example, one of the candidates stated: 'The chief died. We asked his family to support our house this time. They said "No"; they wanted the chieftainship again. We said: "You have to give us the chance now. We have supported you twice. You ought to support us now." The others said: "We are a ruling house. We cannot give up that right."' 4. One of the candidates, a young man, said that he knew that he had not much chance of election. He wanted, however, to establish his

¹ The families who originally occupied the chiefdom are the owners of the land; these families have the main political rights, and strangers have no right to become chief.

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 right for a future occasion. 5. Another of the candidates invoked the good name his father left as chief in his own support. 'My father has done much work for the country. He never did any wrong to the Government. He was one of the good chiefs.' Another candidate too claimed that his father had worked hard for the country when chief.

(b) *Reasons for wishing to become chief.* At the elections candidates do not normally state in public their personal reasons for desiring the chieftainship, but simply expound their claims to it. But from observation and from talks with candidates and other people, it is possible, I think, to deduce the main personal motives for desiring to become chief. These are: the furtherance of family interests; material advantages connected with the chieftainship; desire for power, and fear of the power of opponents. The desire to gain the chieftainship for his own house is strongly developed. 'My father has been chief, it is my duty to succeed him and to keep the chieftainship for our own family', one of the candidates said to me: he had been a clerk in a good position and had therefore no immediate material reason. This desire, however, is on the whole not merely based on family feelings as such, but it is, as can be deduced from the facts already given, closely connected with the material advantages which are implied in the chieftainship. With some of the candidates, at any rate, the desire for power also weighs. One of them admitted to me: 'I do not want the chieftainship for money; I do not care so very much for that, but I want the power it gives. I want to be independent and if I become the chief I do not need to be afraid of other people.' The reverse of this desire for power is fear of the power of others if they gain the chieftainship.

It must be pointed out that the affairs described here, the struggles between people and between groups and the final coming to an agreement, are largely the concern of the principal men in the chiefdom. What is the attitude of the ordinary subject in these affairs? Those who are, whether through family interests, labour relations, or otherwise, connected with the acting personalities, have, naturally, an interest in the events. A good many people, however, remain more or less aloof and unconcerned. One hears ordinary people discussing the elections, taking an interest in the news of the day and the possibilities of the future, but the real movements and decisions are made by the important people.

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The role of magic. Magic too plays its part during the election-time. In the first place, people who come to an agreement to support a candidate often take an oath on 'medicine' at this private decision; they swear to keep their agreement and to remain united. I have not seen the oath taken, for that happens at a secret meeting, but I have so often heard about it that it seems to be a common practice.

Secondly, it is a widespread custom for the candidates to avail themselves of the help of magicians, who work for them and try through magical influence to secure a majority. In one chiefdom where I stayed there were two working during that time. I saw one of them, an old, venerable-looking man, on several occasions at work making designs on sheets of paper or writing texts from the Koran; the paper was soaked in water, and this water, together with the ink remaining in it, formed a 'medicine'. During the night the magician is supposed to be in communication with spirits who give him advice. The magician I have mentioned, being old, found it difficult to keep awake at night, and he therefore had four of his former pupils in his service for the important election; they watched during the night. The magician spoke with disdain of the abilities of his competitor, a youth, who was working for one of the other candidates.

The magicians do not seem to be at all reluctant to promise their candidates a majority provided they pay the necessary fees and make the sacrifices which the magicians prescribe. As only one magician can be successful, however, the others run a great risk of getting into difficulties after the election, and the Mendi tell you amusing stories of how unsuccessful magicians are chased away from the town or how they suddenly disappear as soon as the result of the election is known.

But though the Mendi are able to make jokes about the misfortunes of some of the magicians, they have, as far as I could observe, a genuine fear of the medicine of competitors. Some candidates even hide their sleeping-places. One candidate, an educated young man, with whom I was quite friendly, was staying with me for two days. I invited him to stay longer, but he declined. I learned afterwards that he did not sleep more than two consecutive nights in the same house; every third night at least he went to stay with another friend in order to mislead his enemies about his sleeping-place.

PERSONALITY OF THE CHIEF

We have seen that differences of character and personality are factors which count in the election of a chief. They find still more scope for expression in the actual carrying out of the office.

The Mendi recognize the influence of circumstances on a man's character and they know that responsibility sometimes modifies a man's habits. 'We do not yet know about him, but we watch his doings', I frequently heard said. This realistic point of view is also noticeable in their opinions of chiefs. I was told of several cases where a not very promising candidate turned out a good chief. For instance, one of the chiefs had, before he was elected, a certain reputation for drunkenness and rowdy behaviour. Although he was supported by a large majority at the election, I heard that the fear had been then expressed that his habits might cause difficulty. Soon after he became chief, however, he began to drink less and he was later on known as a good ruler.

Differences among chiefs are not only noticeable as objective facts, but they are clearly recognized by the people. They distinguish between good and bad chiefs, cruel and mild chiefs, active and lazy chiefs. A good chief is on the whole a chief who is kind and just, but firm, who does not oppress, and who keeps to one line of policy so that the people know what to expect from him. A bad chief is mainly an oppressive chief or one who is unable to maintain order.

But although there exists a certain general opinion as to the qualities of a good or a bad ruler, yet I noticed in the cases with which I was acquainted that judgements differed about one and the same chief according to the special point of view, the interests and individuality of the speaker. An example will make these distinctions more clear. I knew one chief with a general reputation for mildness. He did not ask for high court fees, in court cases he often tried to bring the parties to an agreement instead of applying the strict rules of law, nor did he press for all the tribute to which he had a legal right. His own conception of his duties was that he should not interfere too much with the people. 'The Mendi like to have a weak chief because they like to go their own way', he once said to me. And he himself was very reluctant to take any severe steps. On the other hand, it was evident

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that there was a purpose in his policy also: he wanted to retain the chieftainship for one of his children and he knew that it was therefore important to leave a good name. Some of his principal subjects, on the other hand, had different interests. For instance, some of his brothers complained that the chief did not give them enough opportunity to gain influence. The relatives and friends of a chief often gain influence through their proximity to him and enjoy certain favours, either in kind or in money, because of it. In the case to which I am referring, some of the brothers said: 'What is the use of our brother being chief? He does not give us anything. Nor is he strong enough. He had a right to a tribute of so many bushels of rice this year but only a part has come in.' The chief, in his turn, said that his brothers wanted to take too much money from the country. Some of the principal men who judged in court cases found also, as I know, that the court fees were too low (the court fees are shared among the judges). They argued: 'The chief has enough income, he is a rich man, but we have to get some share too.' The speaker also was dissatisfied; he said: 'I have spent sixty pounds in order to become a speaker, and this year I only got eight pounds back.'

The point of view of the ordinary subject, again, would differ. It is difficult to make any generalization here as it is obviously impossible for a field-worker to come into contact with all the inhabitants of a chiefdom and still less possible to know their true opinions. Many times, however, I heard people refer to the chief as 'a very kind man'. From my knowledge of conditions in sub-chiefdoms and in towns I know also that people dislike a chief who is too eager for fees and tribute. 'He only searches for money', I sometimes heard people say about a chief or a principal man. People definitely distinguish between chiefs who are strong and chiefs who are oppressive.

Distinctions are, further, made between chiefs who know native law very well and others who do not. For example, after the death of the chief to whom I have so frequently referred, several of the neighbouring chiefs paid a visit to the chiefdom and stayed there for some time, as is customary on such an occasion. As several difficulties arose in chiefdom affairs at that time, their advice was often invited by the tribal authorities. One of these chiefs was especially praised and trusted because of his fair judgements and wide knowledge of

456 PERSONALITY AND DIFFERENTIATION AMONG THE MENDI native law. Such a reputation does not only come from age and experience. The chief in question was still relatively young, but he had a liking for court affairs. On this last point people differ, although I received the general impression that most Mendi enjoy court cases. I knew, for example, two brothers of a chief. The one often tried to dominate the native court, and he would offer himself as arbiter in private cases even without being asked; but his knowledge of law was generally appreciated. His brother, on the other hand, had different inclinations and rarely attended court cases. 'I do not understand', he said, 'what pleasure my brother finds in always sitting in court. I do not like it at all.'

Instances of other types of differences among chiefs could easily be mentioned, but lack of space does not allow of more details.

We see thus that along with a certain stereotyped idea of the rights and duties of a chief there exists scope for the expression of different personal qualities. A chief, indeed, though backed by a general sense of loyalty on the part of his subjects and assisted by the tribal authorities, largely depends for his authority upon his personality.

CONCLUSIONS

Our analysis of differentiating factors in the political life of the Mendi and of the scope which it affords for the expression of personality shows, briefly summarized, the following phenomena: (a) During the time between the death of a chief and the election of a new chief new groups are formed: first, by the candidates for the chieftainship, and the relatives and supporters who canvass for them, and later, as a result of this canvassing, among the tribal authorities. These groups have an incidental, temporary, and unregulated character; their co-existence with the ordinary, customary groups is interesting, as it shows scope for behaviour which is not governed by strictly fixed, traditional rules. (b) We have seen that personal interests play a large part at the election, in many cases cutting across family interests; that competition, fear, suspicion, desire for power, and similar processes come to the fore. (c) The character of a candidate is one of the factors which, besides family relations, wealth, and age, weighs heavily at the election of a new chief. (d) In the actual functioning of the chieftain-

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 ship personality is an important factor. There exists, further, within the limits of customary behaviour scope for differentiation among chiefs. And, finally, we have seen individual variations in the expression of public opinion about chiefs.

SJOERD HOFSTRA.

Résumé

LA DIFFÉRENCIATION ET L'UNIFORMITÉ PARMIS LES MENDI

CET article se propose d'apporter certains éléments aux problèmes que posent les concepts de différenciation et d'uniformité et que soulève le rôle de l'individu dans la vie du groupement primitif. On estime que l'anthithèse entre l'individu et le groupe est fondée sur une erreur sociologique. Les deux entités appartiennent en effet, à une réalité sociale, elles ne sont point indépendantes ni renfermées en elles-mêmes, mais toujours en relation l'une avec l'autre. D'autre part, on ne saurait considérer simplement l'individu et le groupe, car il existe une grande variété d'individus et de groupes. C'est pourquoi l'étude des relations entre l'individu et le groupe est conditionnée par un certain nombre de problèmes concrets. La présente étude porte sur le rôle que la différenciation individuelle joue dans la vie politique des Mendi, ainsi que les cas dans lesquels se produit l'attitude différenciée.

La chefferie forme ici la principale unité politique et juridique. La superficie de chacune varie de 20 à 500 milles carrés. Un chef supérieur complètement indépendant est placé à sa tête; il est assisté par une sorte d'orateur et par le conseil des autorités de la tribu. Une chefferie est partagée en sous-chefferies, chacune d'elles commandée par un chef inférieur; d'autre part chaque bourg ou village possède son propre chef. Une indication précise de la nature des pouvoirs du chef est fournie par les facteurs qui jouent un rôle dans l'élection de ce dernier. Les faits analysés ici sont en majorité, des faits d'observations personnelles réalisées par l'auteur qui a assisté aux élections d'un chef supérieur et de trois sous-chefs ainsi qu'à la période de discussion ayant précédé l'élection d'un autre chef supérieur.

Un chef supérieur est choisi par les autorités tribales parmi les candidats proposés par les quelques maisons royales ayant droit au commandement. Le désir d'être chef suscite de grandes ambitions, aussi le choix d'un tel personnage est-il un événement de très grande importance qui bouleverse la vie sociale de la chefferie pendant une longue période.

L'hérédité peut être considérée comme un facteur régulier et constant de l'élection. À côté de lui se manifestent d'autres phénomènes plus différenciés: des accords entre les familles royales, constitution de partis opposés parmi les autorités tribales, richesse, âge, caractère. L'étude analyse la valeur de ces différents éléments ainsi que le rôle joué par la magie.

THE SOCIAL SIGNIFICANCE OF THE OIL PALM IN THE LIFE OF THE MENDI

BY

SJOERD HÖFSTRA

A. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS

1. The Mendi live in the central part of Sierra Leone. They form numerically the strongest tribe in this West African colony; according to the census of 1921 they number about 537,000. Agriculture is their main economic activity; they also go hunting and fishing but this is not important when compared to their farming. Before European political intervention—the interior of Sierra Leone became an English protectorate in 1896—the Mendi were engaged in war and slave raiding. They still vividly remember the time when they were a conquering tribe, and their social organisation, especially their labour relations, still bears traces of the slave system. Besides, the unsettled conditions of former times and the spreading out of the Mendi over a large territory are apparent in their agriculture. The forest used to be cut down indiscriminately in order to provide new rice farms and, as plenty of land was available, the system of shifting cultivation was, and still is, widely practised.

Rice is the staple food, a few other crops are grown such as cassava, yams, guinea corn, benni-seed, cotton, beans and pepper. Cattle farming is of very small importance; in the north of Sierra Leone more cattle are kept owing to the large grass-lands found there.

2. After the rice farms the oil palm (*tokpoi*), both economically and emotionally, is of great importance in the lives of the Mendi. The oil palm forms a characteristic feature of the landscape of central Sierra Leone, especially in the secondary forest commonly known as the 'bush'. The tall stems and the long feathery leaves of the palm tree rise up from the thick, low-growing bush and break its monotony. The tree grows nearly everywhere, from Freetown as far as the border of Liberia and from the coast as far as the grass-lands in the north. Although the oil palm is growing over a large area, its denseness varies, dense patches alternate with areas of scattered growth or areas where trees are almost entirely lacking. There are special palm oil belts, one, for instance, round Blama where the tree is found in abundance, covering nearly the whole area of the bush.

Already before European penetration and consequently before a rapidly developed trade in palm kernels with Europe began, the oil palm was of great importance to the people. From the fruits of the tree oil is extracted which provides the principal fat for native food and which is used for various other purposes.

The opening up of the country to trade has added another factor of quite a different order to the importance of the oil palm, while at the same time its value for domestic economics remains. In 1908 the building of a railway running from Freetown to Pendembu, and passing through the Mendi country, was completed bringing along a strong development of the export of palm kernels. Money began to circulate. With that money the Mendi are able to pay their tax (a house tax of 5/— is paid) and to buy clothes and small luxuries from the stores. The sale of palm kernels, by far the most important article of export, is almost their only means of acquiring an income in the form of money. The cultivation of other export crops is still in an early stage; only lately the growing of piasava, which was encouraged by the Government, has been developed.

The significance of the oil palm for the Mendi life, briefly indicated here, will be described in further detail in this article. A survey will be given of the work connected with the palm tree, and of the place this tree occupies in the Mendi system of land tenure and property rights, in religious ritual and native knowledge. The value of the products of the oil palm for native diet and other purposes will be indicated. Finally the trade in palm kernels and the circulation of money in the country which results from it will be mentioned. It is important to distinguish from the very first two factors in the significance of the oil palm: one concerning internal economics, a factor independent of any contact with Europe, the other concerning export trade.

A brief account of the environmental and cultural background will precede our analysis.

The geographical factor has already been mentioned. The fact that the oil palm chiefly grows in the secondary forest has an important influence upon economic conditions as far as they are affected by European contact. Whereas people in the centre and south of Sierra Leone get their money for the tax and other expenses from the sale of palmkernels, the northern tribes derive it from trade in cattle and in some crops such as tobacco and kola.

The Mendi live in small towns and villages. Around a town or village some bush is usually reserved for gardening while the outlying land is used for rice farms. A system of shifting cultivation exists. Every year part of the land is used for farming and then it is allowed to lie fallow for about eight or ten years. There is no shortage of land. It is owned and cultivated by individual families, each family having their own more or less defined part of the bush. Transfer of land to another family through debt or the dying out of a family occasionally happens but it seems to be rather rare. The chief has his own family land; he and his tribal elders act as the guardians of the land in their chiefdom.

The family structure presents a mixture of the patrilineal and matrilineal principle, and the family are patrilocal. Polygamy is strongly developed; men with about twenty or even more wives are not uncommon. Social esteem and the system of farm work are closely connected with polygamy. Women do a great deal of the farm work and the number of farms a man is able to cultivate depends on the number of his wives. A household consists of the husband, his wife or wives and his children; the households of men of rank, moreover, usually include one or more men who act as a kind of labourers and who work on the farms of the head of the family. There are a good many men, especially young men, who have no land, either through slave descent or because their own family bonds became too tight for them and who therefore try their success outside their own village. They offer their services to a man of rank, and in many ways they are considered as members of their master's family. Each household cultivates one or more farms which provide the food for the family.

B. LABOUR

1. During a certain part of the year, roughly from December till June, one sees people working in the palm tree. Most of the fruit seems to set towards the end of the rainy season and in March most of it seems to be ripe and to contain enough pericarp oil for extraction. It is therefore not until February or March that the real season for climbing the oil palm begins. Before that time climbing will take place mainly when people are in particular need of palm kernels. The rainy season, lasting from June till October, is less suitable for the work, as the trees are slippery during that period. Only the cracking of the kernels can be carried on during that time. Whereas the first stages of the work, from the climbing of the tree till the extraction of the oil, have to be performed within a comparatively short time owing to the quick fermentation of the fruits, the cracking of the kernels is often postponed to a quiet time when farm work is less pressing.

The work on the palm trees and that on the rice farms cannot be strictly separated. The oil palms are growing everywhere in the bush near the farm lands and on the farms. Thus it is only natural that the two kinds of work will often be interchanged. 'A Mendi does not like to do the same kind of work the whole day,' I was often told by the natives.

Two factors tending to disturb the indicated seasonal round of the work will be mentioned below.

2. Of the different stages of the work the climbing of the tree is the first. Only simple implements are needed for it. Ladders are not often used, as the oil palm grows to a considerable height. While using a climbing hoop (mbalei), with which he encircles the palm tree and his waist, his feet against the trunk and lifting the part of the sling which is round the tree a little with every step, a man will rapidly ascend the trunk. With a cutlass which, while climbing, he holds between his lips, he cuts away cumbersome ends of the petioles that remain on the tree and also dead leaves at the top. Over his shoulder hangs a stick with an iron point; with this stick the fruiting heads are cut. How many trees a man will be able to climb in the course of one day will depend on the stems being smooth or not, on the distance between the trees and on the thickness of the bush through which he has to make his way. The average time for climbing and for cutting off the fruit is about five to ten minutes. The climbing of a palm tree is not always performed without danger. Accidents either through slipping down from the trees or through an encounter with a snake in the crown happen from time to time.

The next day or so the man will, perhaps with the help of his wife and children, collect the heads of fruit and take them to an open place in the bush, where they are left exposed to the sun for three to five days; the heat loosens the fruit from the thorns which enclose them. The next stage is the cutting up of the heads. The nuts are taken out and piled together, the extraction of the oil from the pericarp must then follow within about two days. Too long an interval between the cutting of the nuts from the tree and the extracting of the oil would cause fermentation of the pericarp and influence the quality of the oil.

The oil which is extracted is derived from the pericarp. The oil from the kernels usually is not extracted by the natives. The kernels, after having been cracked, are sold to the traders for export to Europe where the kernel oil is largely used in the manufacture of soaps and also of margarine. The reason for this is that the quantity of pericarp oil obtained is quite sufficient for native uses. A surplus of pericarp oil is even sold to the traders. Moreover, the kernels, as

they are, are much easier to handle for trading purposes than the extracted oil would be. Finally, the cutting and collecting of nuts, the extracting of oil from the pericarp, the drying, cracking and selling of the kernels occupies a good deal of the natives' time and attention, so that they would probably not like any extra work on the kernels.

The extraction of the oil from the pericarp is carried out in a somewhat open rocky place in the bush near a stream which provides the water for the boiling of the oil. The extraction, which is the work of women, is, with a few variations, performed mainly in two ways.

The first way is to boil the fruits for two or three hours in a large cauldron. After the boiling, which already loosens the pulpy pericarp, they are pounded in a mortar in order to separate the pericarp from the nuts. The loosened pericarp and nuts are put into a large bowl filled with water and are pressed, which process completes the separation. The kernels remain at the bottom of the bowl and the oil is removed from the fibre by pressure. The fibre is then put into a second vessel with water, and again pressed to remove more oil and eventually it is thrown away. A woman skims the oil from the surface of the water with her hands and pours it over into the cauldron in which water is boiling. Oil and water together are then boiled for about two or three hours. By adding cold water most of the oil is driven to the surface so that it can easily be skimmed off.

By the second method of extraction, the fruits are not boiled at first but are often allowed to ferment. The pericarp is loosened by pressing the fruits with a stick or trampling them with the feet in a square pit filled with water. The oil which is thus driven to the surface is afterwards boiled. The second process, omitting the boiling of the nuts, is the simpler and quicker one. Its disadvantage is that a considerable part of the oil remains in the fibre. It appears to be less usual than the first method; it is generally performed when people have collected a great quantity of fruits, so that boiling would take rather a long time.

After the oil has been extracted from the pericarp, the remaining kernels are dried—here the men's share of the work begins again—and then they are either cracked or stored for later cracking. Whether the kernels will be cracked immediately or later, will depend on the owner's need for money and also on his farm work. Farming must necessarily be done; it occupies the regular round of every year's work. The cracking of kernels and similar activities on the other hand will preferably be carried out during quiet intervals.

3. In the foregoing account some indication has already been given of the men's and women's shares in the work. This division of labour will be briefly summarized now.

The cutting of the heads of fruit from the trees is the work of men. Occasionally a woman will climb a low palm tree where the fruits are within easy reach but, in general, it is not considered appropriate work for a woman. This rather rough and difficult part is the men's share of the labour. Every man has to know how to climb a palm tree. As a boy he will learn it in the Porro, the secret society for men, where he is initiated, but he often knows it already before entering the Porro. A man who does not know to climb a palm tree is regarded as only half a man. A young man's public duties begin when he is earning something by the sale of kernels; he is henceforth liable to pay tax and to do his share of communal labour. 'I gunga na a tǎkpǎ hũ lela' (he is able to climb a palm tree), is said of him.

Not every man, however, actually climbs palm trees. As the work is rather heavy, it is only natural that most of it falls to the share of young and middle-aged men. Besides age, rank and a man's position in the labour system, as far as this is determined by land tenure, also tend to make exceptions to the general rule, as will be further shown in the section on property rights.

Individual differences in ability to climb palm trees are noticeable. Among boys it is not only economic necessity which determines whether they start climbing at a very early age or later. I have often heard of boys who showed great courage and began climbing without having been told by their parents to do so. On the other hand some grown up people still seem to show fear in climbing. In every village there are at least two or three of such less courageous men, natives told me. Some men became famous as skilful climbers. One of them by the name of Suakata acquired an almost mythical fame. His name is known everywhere and people often told me of his wonderful ability in climbing. They attributed to him the power, reinforced by magical means, of leaping from the top of one palm tree to another which enabled him to climb a great number of trees in a short time.

Usually a man will cut the fruits on his own account and for the benefit of his own household, but sometimes men work together in this activity. The collecting of the fallen heads from under the tree is men's work; perhaps a man's wife and children will help him. The extraction of the oil is mainly the work of women although there is no strict division of labour. If a man is married, his wife, often assisted by one or more other women, will boil the oil. When a man has no wife, he will ask a woman friend or some other woman to extract the oil for him. He will leave the oil to her—the oil is in general the woman's share of the profit—and will also give her a small compensation for the work. Men will often help the women by carrying the implements and bringing the fruits and water. Whereas the women are glad to get the oil for the household, the men are mainly interested in procuring the kernels. They will dry and crack them. Women, however, often assist in the cracking and, in cases where they have collected the fruits for themselves independently of men, they will also do the cracking. The final stage of the work, the bringing of the kernels to the stores for sale, is naturally the task of men.

4. The question arises: how much time do the people spend on the work described here and how much do they earn by it?

It is difficult to give an accurate estimate of the time the natives spend on the palm tree work. In spring most men are, during a certain number of days, engaged in it, which number mainly depends on the climber's need for money. During the other part of the year occasional climbing and a certain amount of cracking are done. Once the oil for the food and the necessary money for tax has been provided, the additional industry of the people will to a certain extent depend upon the fluctuations in the price of the palm kernels. In times of low prices more kernels are needed in order to secure the tax money and accordingly more labour is necessary than in times of high prices. There does not seem to exist a strong tendency to put an excessive amount of energy into the work or to make profit beyond what is necessary for the satisfaction of existing needs. That does not mean that the people do not keenly appreciate high prices, far from it. They postpone the cracking of their kernels till prices are good; higher prices are promptly answered by an increased supply, low prices by reluctance in selling, as far as I could observe. There is, however, not a marked tendency to make a living out of the climbing of palm trees and the sale of kernels alone (apart from the fact that there are native traders in kernels). The work relating to the palm tree has not become part of a specialized occupation, but is carried out side by side with farm work. The Mendi people like variety in their work and a change from the farm land to the oil palms is often welcomed as are occasional hunting and fishing.

The remuneration of a man's labour depends, of course, on the price of the palm kernels. In 1934, the year of very low prices, the remuneration seemed very small. For instance: a young man, whose labour I watched, cut thirteen heads in about two hours. The collecting of the fruits

took about the same time. The splitting of the heads took him and another man also about two hours, while he and a woman finished the separating of the fruits from the heads in three hours. The boiling of the oil took four women about eight hours. I was told that the cracking of the kernels afterwards would keep our young man busy for about two days, let us say twelve hours. The revenue, one bushel of kernels and one tin of oil, represented, roughly estimated, 56 hours of labour. The value of the kernels and oil was at that time $1/9$ sh. One has to take into account that the extraction of the oil by the women is not entirely a full-time occupation: it is combined with cooking of food. On the other hand the bringing of the kernels to the stores often involves loss of time which is not counted in our estimate. In the bigger places there are stores that buy the kernels. Villagers living comparatively far from a town very often have to undertake a whole day's journey with their loads of kernels which they carry on the head. In the busy season, especially towards the time when the tax has to be paid, one constantly meets men carrying a bag of kernels on their head and singing a cheerful tune which makes their journeys easier on roads and bush paths.

5. The incentive to the labour is the need for oil on the one hand, on the other hand the need for money for the tax and other small expenses. I have already mentioned that generally I did not notice a strongly developed desire to make much extra profit; yet it must be added that the Mendi are naturally susceptible to a good price, as their whole income depends upon it. In 1934 and in the spring of 1935, when the price was exceptionally low, one could daily hear people discussing the possible reasons for this state of affairs, wondering when the price would go up again. I once attended a service held by an English missionary in a village. After the service, which the majority of the villagers attended, was ended, the opportunity was given to them to put questions to the missionary. The people, however, used this opportunity not for a discussion on relevant religious or metaphysical questions, but at once engaged the missionary in a long conversation asking him to explain why the price of kernels was so low!

As the people are, however, not dependent upon the sale of palm kernels for their strictly domestic economic life, there is no strong and constantly pressing incentive to labour in connection with the oil palm. One of my informants who had acquired some hearsay knowledge of European life, once said to me: "You in Europe have your banks in which you invest your money and when you need money you go to the bank. The bush is our bank and, when we are in need of money, we simply cut a sufficient quantity of palm fruits." This perhaps expressed what many people feel about it.

6. In a previous section I referred to two factors tending to influence the normal seasonal activities. The first is the farm work. Rice farming ranks as the main occupation of the Mendi. It happens that the best time for collecting palm fruits coincides with one of the busiest stages in farming, i.e. the clearing of the bush. The owner of the rice farm naturally has an interest in getting the farm work done; his labourer, on the other hand, in procuring enough kernels, as it is the latter's right to collect fruits in his master's bush. It will occur that these two interests come into conflict. The farm work, providing the food for the whole population, represents a general concern; many chiefdoms therefore made regulations, forbidding the cutting of nuts during a certain time of the year, mostly in February, March or April. In other cases similar arrangements are made by the inhabitants of villages or towns for smaller areas. Another reason for such a regulation is, as was explained to me, that it purports to prevent unfair competition. Households with many domestics who, merely through their numbers, are able to finish their farm work more quickly than smaller households, would be in a position to usurp the cutting of palm fruits. The

above mentioned arrangement is a check on the advantageous position created by the different sizes of the households.

The second factor is the payment of the house tax. In the chiefdom in which I was staying the tax was paid in March to April during which time people are busy on their rice farms. In 1934, when I was in the country, the fluctuating prices of kernels were very low. Consequently people had to provide far more kernels than would have been necessary in a time of high prices. It caused them to spend a good deal of their time on the cracking and selling of kernels which work they would otherwise have left till the farm work would have been more advanced. On the other hand it was noticeable that the low price of kernels tended to increase rice cultivation, whereas high prices caused a tendency to regard the farm work as less important.

C. PROPERTY RIGHTS

My information on this point has naturally been gained through varying stages of accuracy. Because of the intricate nature of the subject clear-cut statements necessarily tend to premature generalization and may therefore be deceptive. I shall give a short account of the result of my observations and of talks with many informants on the subject.

Three groups of property rights can be distinguished:

- a. ownership of the palm tree;
- b. the right to climb the trees and to collect the fruit;
- c. the right to the produce.

a. As a rule the owner of a tree is the person who planted the tree. Palm trees are, however, rarely planted and consequently their ownership cannot be defined. It may be said that palm trees should belong to the man on whose bush or farm land they stand. As, however, the main value of the oil palm lies in its oil, it is clear that the right to climb the tree and to collect fruits, hence the right to its actual use, is of more importance than rights of ownership of a more formal character.

b. The right to collect fruits is not the exclusive right of the owner of the bush where the palm trees stand. He shares the right with the members of his household and, to a certain extent, with other town or village people.

Let us first consider rights within the household. I have already mentioned that many of the young men are employed by the owners of the land, by heads of families. These young men, together with the family of the owner, have a right to collect palm fruits in his bush. Their duty is to do farm work for him and in return he leaves them free to collect fruits as far as this does not interfere with the farm work. The labourer, if one may apply this term to what is more or less a domestic relation, needs the kernels for the payment of the tax and for small expenses. A second type of rights appears when the owner of the land is a man of rank and 'owns' villages. The ownership of villages appears to exist in two forms. In the first case the ownership has a nominal character only. The real owners would be the inhabitants of the village. The function of the nominal owner, who usually lives in a town and who probably is co-owner of the village bush, will be to protect the villagers and to help them in their legal affairs and troubles. In their turn they will recognize his authority in all kinds of village matters and compensate him with presents or some form of tribute. They have, of course, a right to the palm fruits from their own bush but they also have access to the bush of the village owner. In the second case the term ownership of a village is used in its more proper sense. The whole area of a village would then belong to a

man of rank and his relatives. Probably some of his wives with domestics, in former times slaves, would be living in such a village. In this case the villagers are free to cut fruits in the owner's bush within the area of the village.

The right of cutting and collecting fruits is, however, not strictly confined to members of the owner's household but it is often shared by town and village mates. In how far this is actually the case is difficult to state; it depends on custom and on the goodwill of the owners of the bush. Only very few of my informants judged that cutting is entirely free to every inhabitant within the whole area of a town or a village irrespective of boundaries. The majority of them stated emphatically the fact that the right is restricted for each family to its own bush; but that, in practice, many heads of families will not object to other people collecting in their bush, provided that friendly relations exist between them. If one is not on good terms with another man or uncertain about his feelings towards one, one will not collect palm fruits in his bush without his permission. Otherwise one is asking for trouble. Some people are more strict about their rights than others. It is a general rule that the palm fruits from land actually under cultivation are only collected by the owner of the farm and his dependents and not by other people.

Whereas thus the right of collecting the fruit of the palm tree is partly restricted by ownership of the bush, it is also limited by the boundaries of a town or village. It is a rule that people are not allowed to collect fruits outside the area of the town or village in which they live. Even villages owned by the same man will keep to this rule. Exceptions occur but are again conditioned by friendly relations and consent.

c. The fruit of the palm tree belongs to the man by whom it has been collected. A clearly defined property right exists here; it is forbidden to touch another man's palm fruits even if he leaves them for a few days under the tree from which they have been cut. Labour and domestic relations, however, tend to a certain extent to the sharing of the revenue.

I have already mentioned that a man will leave the oil from his palm fruits to the woman by whom it has been extracted. Moreover, when he has sold his kernels and has come home from the store, his wife or a woman friend will often expect some money or some material or another article for her household from the store. Then there is the head of the family to be reckoned with. Legally he has no right to the nuts collected by his dependents—they are their property—; in practice he will expect a share. All my informants pointed out that a man is under no obligation to give a part of the palm fruits he has collected to the head of the family; but, they said, it is better if he does so, as it promotes friendly relations and mutual service. It is therefore customary that some part of the produce, either in fruits or in kernels, is given to him. I once asked a village headman what would happen if a young man in domestic service did not give such a part. 'We would not be able to force him to do so,' he said, 'but we would keep an eye on him in the future. When a young man comes to the live with us, we watch his doings for a certain time. If he is a good man, we may, after two or three years, give him a wife; if he is ungenerous, we give him to understand that he had better go.' There are still other ways open to the owner of the bush of getting a share of the produce: directly, by reserving a part of the bush for himself, as some owners do; indirectly, by borrowing money from his dependents in case of need. As the paying of debts is often a very prolonged affair, borrowing will in many cases amount practically to receiving a present. Another still more circumstantial way, though considered to be a less honourable one, consists in making a 'palaver' for adultery. The owner of the bush, having usually several wives, will in many cases not unrightly suspect one of his domestic labourers of having adulterous relations with one of his wives and if he makes legal use of the fact, he is entitled to a compensation of thirty shillings.

D. THE UTILITY OF THE OIL PALM

The foregoing pages have described the activities and regulations connected with the oil palm; now some details will follow about the various uses to which this tree and its products are put. That this usefulness is felt by the people themselves is illustrated by a song in praise of the palm tree at the end of a religious ceremony which I shall describe below; the same appreciation is expressed in the saying: "Ngeiwɔ gbua wɔ tɔkpɔi woma" (God is not behind the oil palm; He has left the whole tree to human beings for their use.).

To native economy, considered apart from European factors, the importance of the palm tree lies first of all in its providing oil for food. Rice is, as will be remembered, the principal food of the Mendi. He may have consumed a good deal of cassava, bananas, plantains or yams, only a rice dish, however, will give him the feeling of having had a real meal. Together with the rice a sauce is eaten, mainly composed of oil, vegetables, salt and pepper. Chicken or fish is often added; meat is much less available. Whereas chickens abound and fish are to be found in the many streams, cattle, especially cows, which are soon affected by the tsetse fly, are not regularly kept. In larger places one or two cows, mostly brought down from the north by traders, are killed every week; in villages meat will only be eaten when a cow, a sheep or a goat is killed for ceremonial purposes. Hunting is not an important activity though all kinds of bush animals, even snakes and rats, are readily eaten.

It follows that palm oil is much more used than animal fat and that it therefore plays a very important part in the native diet.

The oil is further used for various other purposes. A soap is made chiefly from burnt banana stems, that provide the required potash, and oil. As most people cannot afford or have no opportunity to buy imported soap from the stores, home-made soap is still largely in use; some women make more than they need for their own household and carry on a little business in it. Goldsmiths, of whom there are a few in every large place, burn the oil in their lamps; carpenters need the oil for their tools. Some people make themselves primitive little lamps in which they burn oil soaking through some cottonwool; European lamps and kerosene are too expensive for the majority of the Mendi.

Women rub their skin with oil. In the dry season, so the natives explain, the oil protects the skin against the sun and in the wet season against the rain. As women have to do a good deal of the farm work during both seasons, and, as they wear fewer clothes than men, they must protect their skin. Men, in general rub their skin with oil less frequently but old men also do it, apparently as a protection against cold.

A remark must be added here about the local trade in palm oil. Most people extract the oil they need for their own households. Some retail trade in oil is carried on apart from the trade in oil which is sold to the stores for export. Small native traders and some women who sell vegetables or soap often include oil among their articles for sale. Another form of small trade practised is barter. Somebody who is in need of oil will go round the streets and cry out that he has to offer rice or salt, for instance, in exchange for oil. Children are mostly sent out on this business.

The oil of which the different uses have so far been indicated, is pericarp oil; kernel oil is usually not extracted.

From the fibre of the leaves ropes are twisted. These ropes are used for hunting and fishing nets, for weaving looms and for strings with which birds are driven from the farms. Parts of

the leaves serve as bedding for the people and from the petiole sweeping brooms are made. The whole leaf is used for the roofing of farm houses and for fences around washing places and for making hampers in which loads are carried; these hampers, as far as they were used for carrying the palm kernels to the stores, have been largely replaced by bags nowadays.

The young leaves in the top of the tree are sometimes eaten as a vegetable, a native cabbage. As the cutting out of these leaves is, however, harmful to the tree it is in many chiefdoms forbidden by native law. A kind of wine is also tapped from the palm tree known as *nduvui* (*raphia vinifera*). Finally the stem of the oil palm which is said to be very strong, is used for bridges.

E. A RELIGIOUS CEREMONY

So far I have mainly dealt with the economic side of the significance of the palm tree. It might be expected that the economic importance I have tried to show would find its religious or magical correlative in frequent ceremonial proceedings and in elaborated ritual. This is not so, however. It is a fact that in general the ritual side of the economic life of the Mendi does not seem to be very strongly developed.

At the beginning of the rainy season a ceremony, called *tɔkpɔgɔlei*, is performed in many villages. Food is offered to the oil palm and the spirits particularly associated with the tree in order to secure their goodwill, and their help in preventing falls from the tree is invoked.

In March 1934 I witnessed the ceremony in the village Masondo in the chiefdom of Upper Bambara; it is a small village, numbering only six houses. At the time fixed for the ceremony in the morning only very few people were there. The others, busy with farming, gradually returned from their rice lands so that after about two hours, the ceremony could begin. In the meantime the cooking of the ritual rice had caused some trouble. The women, probably busy with other work, were not in a hurry to do the cooking; after some reluctance young men undertook the task. The rice having been prepared, the people went to the spot where the ceremony was going to take place under a high palm tree reserved for ceremonial purposes at the entrance of the village.

The leader of the ceremony was one of the oldest men of the village. No special gifts nor hereditary rights form a condition for leading the palm tree ritual; it is entrusted to one of the village elders who possesses a good knowledge of ceremonial traditions.

First a young man went up into the tree in order to see if it was still safe for climbing. The leader thereupon mixed the rice with the accessory ingredients which together form the ceremonial food. This consists of rice, oil and salt necessary for every ritual food to which, for the palm tree ceremony, a few rats are added; rats are frequently found in the top of the oil palm and are thus connected with this tree. While preparing the food the leader addresses the spirits of people who have been known as skilful climbers as follows:

"Bindipaamei, bia wɔ ba tɔkpɔ loli ga, Suakata, Momodugba, Blamagome, ke Kpɔlubahū ke Gɔmaluvandɔle, i hiti wu ma, i hiti Kpɔlubahū ma. Wua wɔ towi lei, tamia gbuei ngi vei ngi yei hei viei, ke wa wɔ wa towi lei, kia numu a ngula tɔkpɔi hū. Nga ma aa yali, i ngula aa ha tɔkpɔi busia mu bi gɔma bi li i leei. Nunga vulisia va taa ngula tɔkpɔ hū; taa ha. Kali aa numu nyi tɔkpɔ hū; ngali aa numu lei tɔkpɔ hū ke mua va mu valangɔ ta ma ndɔlei hū. Tamia mu ngi li leei ma mu fei dʒi veia i hiti ngi ma sɔ. Tuleibla taa namu tɔkpɔ ma, taa ngula, taa ha. Yei kpundeī na aa ngula mu ma. Yei mbei mia ngi feima."

(Free translation: Bindipaamei (name of a once skilful climber), you once danced on the oil palms, Suakata, Momodugba, Blamagome, Kpɔlubahū and Gɔmaluvandɔle (names of other famous climbers) let this (food) reach you; let it (also) reach Kpɔlubahū, long ago you cut palm fruits. Therefore I came last night and said a prayer, so that nobody may fall from the that we bring you your gift, let your heart be cool. Let the living people not fall from the palm tree; let them not die. See that no snake bites a person in the tree and that no thorn cuts him; our lives depend upon it. We therefore make its (the tree's) heart cool and give it this pot, let the whole of it reach the tree. May the climbers not slip from the oil palm, let them not fall, let them not die. Let no danger fall on us. This is the rice I am giving).

After this prayer the leader placed some rice on a banana leaf at the foot of the tree and said: "Na na mu ngepei kpele lia. Mu yaa bi gɔni ngeivuli dɔi hū. Mba gbi ti bi gɔa ke mu yaa bi gɔni mbei. Yei fe wa kpamaai lo." (This was the word we all spoke. We shall not again give you a gift during this dry season. All our companions have, but we here have not yet offered you your gift. This is a large, mighty pot.)

He then again laid some rice on the leaf at the foot of the tree and near it a strip of white cloth and the two kinds of leaves which are used by the Porro society for ceremonial purposes. Some rice was also placed on the road at some distance from the tree; it is for the less sociable spirits, called *ndimanyɔyafangaa*. The leader thrice poured water over the rice near the tree and told the spirits to wash their hands: "A wu yeiya wa" (you wash your hands) and soon afterwards, by which time the spirits are supposed to have finished their meal, he again gave them water and said: "Wu mbei mia, wu wu yeiya wa" (you ate the rice, now wash your hands.).

A young man now climbed the tree with some rice wrapped in leaves and a small strip of white cloth. It was a gift to the palm tree itself, whereas the rice and cloth placed at the foot of the tree, were for the spirits. When the young man was near the top of the oil palm, he addressed the tree with the following words, prompted to him by the leader sentence after sentence:

"A tɔkpɔi, mu yaa bi gɔni wa. Mba gbi ti bi gua, tamia mua bi gɔna bi nda mbei mia. Yei navuli lo navuli dɔi, mu kɔima mu kɔima bia hū. Bi nda navuli mia feingbei dɔi." (O palm tree, we have not yet given you a gift all this time. All others have given you (already). Therefore we come (now) and give you your own rice. The property is this property, we are getting it through you. This white cloth is your own property).

The young man placed the rice and cloth at the top of the tree and shouted: "seiseisei" The other people joined, singing: "Towi maleini, o Suakata, towi maleini, o yei, o!" (You cut palm fruits, o Suakata, you cut palm fruits!) While slowly coming down the young man gave a display of his courage by making dance movements, skilfully keeping himself poised, his feet planted against the tree, his body supported by the mbalei. When he had reached the foot of the tree, he cut through his mbalei with a cutlass; in this form the mbalei was left round the foot of the tree. (This mbalei remains round the tree till the following year when the next ceremony is performed). The old leader thereupon also gave his little show and climbed half way up the tree; he wanted to see if he had not yet become too stiff and old for climbing and, indeed, he was still remarkably agile in his movements. Two young men then climbed the tree and showed their skill in a kind of dancing as their companion had done. Somebody beat a drum, and a few people accompanied the music with singing in which, after a short while, everybody joined. They thus praised the palm tree:

"Ngɔ kula yili nyɔmɔi yo tɔkpɔi. Ngɔ nyaha dɔi nyɔmɔi yo tɔkpɔi. Ngɔ kpolo me nyɔmɔi tɔkpɔi. Ngɔ tawa gbɔi nyɔmɔi yo tɔkpɔi. Ngɔ kpaya yi nyɔmɔi yo tɔkpɔi." (If last year I wore clothes,

it was through you, o palm tree, if I married a wife, it was through you; if I ate salt, it was through you; if I smoked tobacco, it was through you; if I tied a head kerchief, it was through you).

The ceremony which lasted about one hour bore a simple character; it was witnessed by all the people present in the village, some thirty men, women and children.

F. KNOWLEDGE

As even scientific knowledge concerning the West African oil palm is still in an experimental stage, it cannot be expected that the Mendi will have an extensive knowledge of the life, the growth and the varieties of this tree. Moreover, the oil palm grows wild and in abundance, so that the need for knowledge of its habits has never been greatly felt.

Such knowledge is not entirely lacking, however. The people know for instance when the fruit on a tree is ripe; in many cases birds or monkeys have already paid a visit to the tree and if particles of the pericarp skin have been left behind by these animals, a climber knows that the fruit is ripe for cutting. The Mendi also know that the cutting of the young leaves to use as a vegetable is harmful to the tree. They are very well acquainted with the fact that fermentation of the fruit sets in when the extracting of the oil is delayed and that fermentation affects the quality and the quantity of the oil. They also have a general knowledge of the methods of extracting oil.

An interesting fact is that different varieties of the oil palm are recognized by the Mendi. They classify a palm according to the kind of its fruit, the age of the tree or the ripeness of the fruit. The thickness of the pericarp, of the shell and of the kernel of the fruit varies with the different kinds of oil palm and this fact is known by the people. In Sierra Leone only a few varieties exist although there seem to be many crossbreeds. My informants recognized four varieties: *kawei* (or *kawuli*), an oil palm of which the fruit has a rather thick shell and a comparatively thin pericarp and which is the most common variety, *kpɔlei* and *hinui*, varieties only locally known, with a thick pericarp, and *tugbui*, with a very small kernel and a soft shell.

The native distinguishes seven stages in the growth of the palm tree, which depend upon its age: 1. *kpɔkpɔtɔli*; 2. *tɔkpɔvali*; 3. *heinduei*; 4. *kpɔgɔei*; 5. *dyɔndyɔkɔei*; 6. *bobotali*; 7. *mawei*. Of these stages those of *kpɔgɔei*, *bobotali* and *mawei* are mostly referred to in everyday speech. The names of the other stages are, I noticed, known to most people but are less commonly used. Three kinds of fruit are recognized according to their degree of ripeness; they are as follows: 1. *tugbuli*, the green unripe fruits; 2. *tumamɛnyei*, the half-ripe fruits; 3. *togbɔli*, the ripe ones.

The distinction based on the age of the tree and on the ripeness of its fruit is better known than that based on the kinds of fruit; this is easy to understand as the latter group comprises in Sierra Leone only one important variety, whereas the age of the oil palm and accordingly its condition — roughness or smoothness of its stem, its length, its fruit-yielding capacity — and also the ripeness of the fruit are important to the people. These two distinctions have a practical value and the names they imply are actually used. When, for instance, a man wants to tell another man about the condition of the oil palms found in a certain area, he will in many cases explain things sufficiently by simply mentioning their name. Or if you want to sell or give palm fruits to somebody or make any kind of transaction concerning them, you will describe their stage of ripeness on which depends the quantity of oil you will be able to extract from them.

Differences in knowledge exist here. It is well known that primitive peoples are not only in closer touch with nature than we are but that their knowledge of nature is also more widely spread than with us. If you walk through the bush with a Mendi he will tell you the names of most of the plants and animals you come across spontaneously and not merely because he knows that you will be interested in the matter. Yet, although knowledge of the plant and animal world is widely spread, individual differences in extent and accuracy of that knowledge are noticeable. They are partly due to personal differences in interest and intelligence, partly to circumstances. It is, for instance, natural that a hunter or a medicineman knows more about bush life than a trader or a goldsmith, and that a boy who is helping in farm work and climbing palm trees knows more about this tree than his companion who is spending his youth at a school. There is an increasing number of younger people who have attended school, whose knowledge of farm life is less intimate. Differences in age have also to be taken into account.

G. EUROPEAN CONTACT AS A FACTOR

I have pointed out already that two factors have to be distinguished in the significance of the oil palm: one bearing on domestic economy of the Mendi, the other on the change which European trade and other forms of contact have brought about. The first factor, the oil palm in its relation to native labour, to property rights, to religion and knowledge and to nutrition, has been mainly referred to in this paper; a few details about the second factor will now follow. The two factors, however, cannot be strictly separated. For instance, the work that I have described partly concerns native nutrition (provision of oil) and partly European contact (trade in kernels). It has also been shown how the necessity of having the tax money and a desire for a small income beyond that necessity affects the labour relations between the head of family and his domestics, and family life in general.

Thus the trade in palm kernels indirectly reacts upon native life. Its influence is most strongly felt in the larger places. Along the railway line are many trading centres where Creole, Syrian and native traders buy kernels and sell cheap European and Japanese goods. A few motor roads connect these trading centres with towns farther up in the interior. In nearly every town of some importance one or more stores are to be found to which people sometimes from quite a long distance, bring their kernels and from where these kernels are transported to the railway line. In Panguma, for instance, a place where I did most of my fieldwork, are three Syrian, one Creole and three Mendi stores; the town, numbering about 1500 inhabitants, is twenty miles from the railway line and is the centre of a large area. Almost every day one saw men carrying kernels to the stores; on the morning of a day in March, for instance, I met on one of the bush paths leading to Panguma no fewer than eighty people each of them carrying a bag full of kernels. In the busy season from February till April three or four lorries loaded with kernels were daily running to the railway station, often even several times a day. This trade naturally lends a very lively character many of the towns.

It lies outside the scope of this article to deal fully with the changes brought about in Mendi life by trade and the circulation of money resulting from it. Some of the effects that the fluctuations in the price of palm kernels have, will, however, be briefly indicated here.

In order to realize these effects one has to remember that palm kernels (with palm oil) form the greater part of the export in Sierra Leone. The income of the people is thus closely connected

with the sale of kernels. They would be able to live an economically self-contained life, as their rice farms provide the necessary food, and the indigenous cotton is sufficient for their clothes; every commodity above this level must, however, be obtained from the export of kernels. When the price is so low that, after the tax has been paid, there is no surplus for their expenses, it is clear that trade is stagnating and that people are unable to buy goods from the stores. But not only trade, the work of the Government and of the missions also feels the influence of the economic depression caused by a low price of kernels. The educational work especially has had to suffer as many parents could not find the means to send their children to school.

A low price has, on the other hand, in some respects a stimulating effect on native activity. I have mentioned, for instance, that a tendency to pay more attention to the cultivation of the rice farms was noticeable. The big decrease in the people's capacity to buy cotton goods from the stores has had the effect of encouraging the Mendi to take up weaving again. As the Mendi are very good weavers, this was, at least artistically, a distinct advantage. Payment of court fines and of dowries in native country cloth instead of in money came into use again, as has been the custom before the circulation of money was introduced.



1. Oil palms.



2. A dense patch of oil palms, Panguma.



3. Climbing a palm tree.



4. Drying of the kernels.



5. Women extracting oil.



6. The leader of the religious ceremony dividing the ceremonial food.

THE ANCESTRAL SPIRITS OF THE MENDI

BY

DR. SJOERD HOFSTRA

I. INTRODUCTORY REMARKS.

1. NOTE ON THE PEOPLE.

The Mendi live in the central and eastern part of Sierra Leone, where, some 600.000 in number, they form the strongest tribe. Agriculture is their main economic activity. European contact has on the whole not yet had a strongly disintegrating effect.

My field work was carried out in 1934—35 and 1936 during two tours which together lasted for about one and half a year.

2. THE ELEMENTS OF THE SUPERNATURAL WORLD.

The supernatural forces in which the Mendi believe comprise the following groups: 1. the Supreme Being (*Ngewɔ* or *Lɛvei*); 2. spirits as more or less personal forces; 3. magic as the collective name for the more impersonal forces (*halei* is the general name for "medicines" and substances containing magical power); 4. witchcraft (*huana hinda*; *huana* or *huana-mui* is witch, *hinda* is thing). The spirits can be divided into two main groups: the ancestral spirits (*ngafanga*, sing.: *ngafei*) and the spirits who have not been human beings (*dzinanga*, sing.: *dzinei*). The latter group of spirits live in the water and in the bush; they are often troublesome, and though some of them bring riches to the people for whom they have a special liking, the Mendi in general fear an encounter with them. The present article will deal with the ancestral spirits. Our purpose will be to describe in outline the nature of the Mendi beliefs in their ancestral spirits, and the important place which these beliefs occupy in their life.

3. CONCEPTS.

A remark may first be made about the concept of soul among the Mendi, or, to put it in a more direct way, about the absence of such a concept. I have not been able to discover an equivalent for our religious or metaphysical idea of a soul. Not only does a definite notion fail, but neither the religious behaviour of the people nor the impression which I gained from many discussions indicated that the Mendi are inclined to make a distinction between body and soul in the European sense. They recognize, however, very clearly a difference between life and death, they recognize also that at the moment of death the human being undergoes a definite change. *Ndevu* means life, breath, and when a person has died, one can hear people cry or announce as a message: '*Ndevu* is not in him', or: '*Ndevu* has gone from him'! The dead body, called *poma*, is distinguished from the living human being. The Mendi believe, on the other hand,

that, after death, a person survives, and here a difficulty arises. The surviving personality goes to the land of the dead, but at the same time the Mendi are aware of the fact that the body of the deceased remains in the earth. A second difficulty is formed by the belief that witches during their nightly excursions are able to leave the body. A part of the personality evidently separates itself from the body which remains in bed. It is, therefore, even dangerous to awake a woman who as a witch has left her body, because she may have difficulty in finding her way back. Specialists are even able to catch witches, to keep them in their power, and when a woman is caught in this way, she loses her vitality and feels poorly. Though these difficulties exist, it would be wrong to introduce sharp distinctions which the Mendi themselves do not make. They recognize, as we have seen, a difference between the living and the dead person, but they do not dogmatize about this difference. It is where a person enters the stage of spirit that the Mendi ideas become somewhat more definite and detailed ¹).

The name *ngafanga* (*ngafei*) is generally applied to the ancestral spirits. It is, however, not usual to call a particular dead person *ngafei*. In this case there would be a possibility that the name might be felt as an offense by the family. To indicate the dead, the name *ndɔbla* (*ndɔ* is earth, *bla* is people; sing. *ndɔmui*) or the name *habla* (*ha* is dead; sing. *hamui*) are preferred. Though the name *ngafei* is generally used, and though, as we shall see later-on, there are good and evil spirits, my experience was that in first talks with people they tended to regard a *ngafei* as a troublesome spirit. The circumstance that the Mendi fear to meet a *ngafei* accounts perhaps for this fact. My informants did, however, not try to avoid the subject. If a person prays to his own ancestors in particular he will use the word *ndebla* (sing. *ndemui*).

It is evident that the missionaries find themselves in some difficulty when they try to translate the word soul. The solution which is found in using the word *ngafei* is, however, liable to lead to misunderstanding. My informants, at any rate, found the idea that a living human being could be animated by a *ngafei*, very strange and impossible. A person can be possessed by a *ngafei*, but that is, of course, a very different matter.

Although the difficulties of terminology to which I referred undoubtedly exist, I am using here the term spirit for reasons of convenience, and in accordance with anthropological practice. I must ask the reader, however, not to attach a definite meaning to that term. My only purpose is to indicate a phenomenon. The same remark applies to the use of the somewhat ambiguous notion of the supernatural.

II. ILLNESS

1. ATTITUDE TOWARDS ILLNESS.

We shall begin our account of the relation of the Mendi towards their ancestral spirits by giving some details about their attitude towards illness and towards sick people. From here we shall proceed to a short analysis of the emotional sphere which surrounds death. Consideration of these points will already give us some idea of the way in which the Mendi regards the stages lying between the full life of a human being and the status of a spirit.

The Mendi give, as is general with primitive peoples, to the supernatural forces a large place in the explanation of illness and death. Yet, not all cases are attributed to these forces.

1) Some accounts of West African tribes present to us a very elaborate analysis of the idea of the soul among the people they are describing. This is, for instance, the case with Spieth's book on the religion of the Ewe and with Herskovits' recent study on Dahomey. Mendi thought, on this subject seems, however, to be more similar to that of the Kpelle, from what can be gathered from Westermann's account of that tribe.

When, for instance, a man dies after a fall from a palmtree or after some other mishap, or when old people die, death will be accepted as a natural phenomenon. In those cases where, as often happens, an illness is caused by the violation of a taboo, the neglect of the duties towards the ancestors or some other sin, people will perform certain ceremonies of which confession, a ritual washing and an offering form the main elements. There are many other cases of illness, however, where in the first instance a natural cause is looked for and where the ordinary medicines of the Mendi will be applied. There are no rigid rules or invariable dogmatic opinions in this matter. In general the following way of treatment would be followed. People would first try to cure a beginning disease with simple natural remedies of which there exist a large quantity. (The word *haiei* is used to denote both natural and magical medicines, but the differences are recognized). When, however, the illness does not show signs of mending or is getting worse, a diviner is called who will probably reveal that some sin has been committed or that witchcraft or other evil influences are at work. But here again various ways of conduct would be possible. In the first place the authority of a diviner or medicineman has in general no absolute value; it is partly dependent upon fame and success. In the second place, when the treatment which he has prescribed is not succeeded by the desired results, and therefore, his diagnosis was probably wrong, people would look for a different method.

When, for instance, the chief of Panguma got ill, he first took some simple medicine. After some days, however, his condition became more serious, and the family then made an offering, presumably in order to obtain the goodwill of the spirits or to appease them in case some wrong might have been done. At a further stage a diviner revealed that the illness was caused by the fact that some of the wives of the chief harboured grievances against him. The wives were then asked to come together and frankly to state their complaints. After they had done this, a cow was offered, and according to the medicine man the chief ought to have got better now. This did not happen, however; the chief died a week later in a missionary hospital. Another man, whom I knew well, and who was seriously ill, underwent several ceremonial purifications. When it turned out that one rite did not bring improvement, then the illness was attributed to some other sin, and consequently another rite was performed. In this particular case people had no difficulty in pointing out several sins as the man was known to be a rascal. From the several cases I came across it seems possible to conclude that illness and death are explained by natural as well as supernatural causes, and that the standardized attitude towards these phenomena allows for a certain variation of behaviour, for experiments and for personal inclinations.

2. ATTITUDE TOWARDS SICK PEOPLE.

In the attitude of the Mendi towards sick people the usual range of human elements such as sympathy, interests, family- and friendship-relations, the character and rank of the person, play a part. When, for instance, the chief whom I mentioned already, fell ill, much sympathy was shown towards him. This was partly due to the fact that he was the chief and to the custom that the principal people are supposed to visit a chief during his illness, partly also to the fact that he was a popular chief. Principal people who do not pay a visit to the chief when he is ill may easily be suspected of having something to do with the cause of the illness. This happened to one of the principal men of Panguma who after the death of the chief was accused by the brothers of the chief of having caused the death. They based their accusation on the fact that he had not called on the chief during his illness. The man defended himself by saying that he had not been on friendly terms with the late chief, and that the people would have become suspicious if he had

come. He was condemned to pay a fine. The fact that the man in question was known to be a political adversary of the late chief and the fact that probably the brothers feared him as a candidate for the chieftainship which they wanted to retain for their family may also have been a motive. Real or ill-founded accusations play from time to time a considerable part in the political struggles between important persons and families.

A person who is ill, will, in general, receive visits from his family, his friends and his neighbours. They will show him their sympathy, give him advice, and perhaps tell him what they have seen in their dreams in regard to his illness. For a person who has little or no family relations and few friends or who is living away from his homeland, the situation is different. People will take less notice of such a person. This applies also to old people who have no children. There was, for instance, at Panguma an old woman who fell seriously ill. She had no children; her husband who had been a chief died long ago. Only a few people, neighbours, seemed to take care of her; the descendants of her late husband themselves were in difficulties as at that time a fight for the chieftainship was going on. As soon as the woman died, however, many women, at least ten, came to her house for help, for the washing and the dressing of the body. Two of my informants with whom from time to time I had paid a visit to the old woman, when they saw this sudden activity, remarked spontaneously in a slightly ironical way that they thought this behaviour somewhat strange. One of these informants who had gained some idea of the European way of life, but who at the same time had a deep love for his own people, said then: 'We Mendi, show our interest mainly in burials. Then we give a fee and it is finished. You, Europeans, spend much money in order to get a person cured. We wait till a person is dead and then we spend our money. We are also a little afraid when visiting sick people of being asked for fees. The family may say to you: "The soothsayer has said that he can get cured when we offer a goat, but we have no money for it."' It seems to me that this remark, apart from the criticism which it implied, expressed good observation, even though it was, both in regard to European as well as to native conditions, not free from too much generalization.

Of dying people whose mind is going it is said that they already enter into contact with the world of the dead. They are able to see what happens in the after-life. Once I was present when an old man died. When he was already in a state of half-consciousness he told the people who were round him in his room that he saw the late chief who had died some months before.

The attitude of the people who are present when a person is approaching death, does, as far as I was able to observe, not differ in any considerable degree from our own attitude in similar circumstances. Grief, restrained or openly expressed, efforts to do something for the dying person, or indifference can be noticed. I am, however, aware of the fact that for an ethnographer it is extremely difficult to make general statements about human feelings in such cases.

III. MOURNING

1. WAILING SONGS.

A socially more regulated element enters as soon as it becomes known that a person is dead. The wailing begins then. Although the wailing mainly falls to the share of the women, they must wait till the men have begun the wailing. A Mendi once gave me the following rationalized explanation for this fact: "The women would begin too soon. The men are better able to control themselves and to wait till a person is really dead". I do not know whether the Mendi in general are aware of such a reason. The simple fact that the men have pressing duties for the arrangement of the burial seems a sufficient explanation.

The wailing of the men lasts only a short time. A man is not expected at that time to indulge in his emotion; it is regarded to be his duty to take as soon as possible the necessary steps for the preparation of the burial which takes place on the same day. When a man shows much grief, people will understand and probably sympathize with him, but they may also think that he has difficulties in paying the expenses of the funeral ceremonies. I once witnessed a man, whose brother had just died, lying at full length on the floor of his house, loudly lamenting. He had been in this state for over an hour. Some of his neighbours and friends who were present then told him in a friendly manner that he ought not to continue in this way. He gradually became calmer, but it was clear to everybody seeing him, that he felt deep grief. In this special case the difficulty in which the man found himself was great. In the first place, he had been very much attached to his brother. In the second place, there had recently been two other cases of death in his family, involving heavy expenses for him. He was, therefore, unable at present to fulfil his duties and to contribute an important share towards the costs of the funeral.

The wailing ceremonies are very interesting from a psychological point of view. From the details which will follow below, we shall be able to get some idea of the reactions of the Mendi when they are faced by the reality of death. It will not be our purpose to deal at full length with the ritual aspects of the wailing and mourning ceremonies. We shall restrict ourselves to an account of the wailing songs and to a short analysis of the attitude of the Mendi towards these songs.

In order to give an idea not only of the context of the wailing songs but also of the emotional sphere which surrounds the mysterious transition from life to death, I will briefly describe one of the cases with which I became acquainted. A young woman at Panguma died suddenly one morning; she had been ill only since the previous night. When we heard the news of the death we were sitting in court. The mother came to the court and asked the help of the chief in sending messages to her family who were living in a neighbouring chiefdom. At the news of the death the court dispersed, and we went to the house where the woman had died. Near the house, at the backside, many women were loudly crying. They ran in and out of the house in a very agitated way. A young man, a brother of the deceased, came out of the house, lamenting and wildly flourishing his arms; he was supported by three or four women. Inside the house many women and some men, their faces expressing restrained emotion and still in waiting attitude, were looking at the dead who was lying on the floor. Three women were kneeling beside her, weeping and crying; they touched the body in different parts, on the forehead, the arm-pits; their hands went along the breasts, feeling if there was still life. They tried to talk to the dead woman, while they were bending their heads very close to the body. After some minutes no hope was left, and the deceased was laid on a bed in the centre of the room. Till then only the women who had been kneeling near the body and the nearest relatives of the deceased had been crying, and this crying had evidently been a spontaneous and very natural expression of more or less deeply felt grief. Now that they realized, however, that death had really set in the general wailing began in which all the relatives, friends and neighbours who were present in and outside the house, participated. This wailing bears at once a more ceremonial and obligatory character than the previous weeping, though, as we shall see, it leaves room for the personal expression of feelings and of sorrow.

I shall give here in free translation the main wailing songs which I heard on this occasion (the term song is used here for reasons of convenience; actually the words are intoned). We

must bear in mind, that the words are repeated over and over again and that the contents undergo several variations.

A sister (of the same father): "O my sister, yoo! My sister is silent behind me. With whom shall we talk now? I am disgraced, oo!"

A cousin (while she is saying the words, her head is nearly touching the body): "Maama! Let me not see this! Let me not see this! My sister, yoo! Maama, my sister is disgraced!"

A woman who is a Bundu-fellow and close friend of the mother (Bundu is the secret society of women where the girls receive their education): "Let me not hear this! My child, big forehead, woman with plenty of hair, what brought this for you? How is it that you are leaving me? How is it that you are leaving my sister Maato (the mother of Maama)? My Sandeigirl (Sande is another name for the Bundusociety), move along, let us lie down. Bundugirl, this thing, it looks shameful, do not do it!"

A woman-relative: "Do not do this! This, it is not in our family. Do not let me be ashamed. How will you tell the news to Dyu (the mother of Maato)? If I had known this before, I would not have joined this family. If we have to go to the farm, I shall go and you will remain behind? My child, great fame, with whom shall we stay now? Do not leave me, carry me away! Oo, carry me away, do not leave me, o big forehead, o my child, fine neck!"

She then asks Maama to give a message to the ancestors: "You go, you remember me to Dyu, you talk for me to our *ngɔ* (elder brother or sister), remember me to them. I have no cloth on me. You must tell them that you left Maato and me on the road, you left us in crying, you left us in thinking, you left us in hard thinking, in thinking. You go and tell them that they must not forget us."

Another woman-relative: "My child, yoo! Hair like (that of) a *tingo* (water-spirit in the form of a woman with long hair); neck like rattan; teeth like a white fruit; breasts like cockroaches; buttocks like finely moulded clay; calves like a *sipo* (heavy stick used as a lever)! How is it that you are going to leave us? (A person) like you will not be in my belly. Full-grown child, how is it that you are going to leave us, you, the centre of our friends!"

An uncle: "I am disgraced, oooo! My child, Maama! I am disgraced, o ya yei! Ya yoo yeooo! Death fell down again. We have to go. You must not leave in such a short time! Remember me to my mother!"

Here follow a few of the songs which I heard on other occasions.

The following words were said by a mother whose only child, a boy about fifteen years old, had died in a neighbouring village. The news of his death reached the mother while people were already on the way to bring the body to her house. "Kpo, people, my head is confused, what is this, what am I hearing? What shall I see? What shall I hear? Ko, ko, what happens to me! What shall I do now? I will not see in (this). Let me not hear (it) at all! My child get up! If he had gone to the farm, he would have come back. Let me go, you remain! I shall not be able to bury you. Get up, you must bury me. Let me not see, I will not see this grave. Men, children, people, they go to the burial, I will not go. I remain useless. Ko, my Kapindi (his name), come, you sit down a while, your rice is here, your water is here, come you wash your hands (the mother speaks here as if the boy was still with her as a small child). Get up! I am disgraced, o people! Something strange fell upon me for nothing.

I cannot again get a full-grown child. The clay (with which the mother rubbed the child when it was born) is spoilt. I rubbed clay for nothing, I worked for nothing! A great foolishness fell upon me.

Women who have already born a child, you come, you see me. I have buried the child that ought to have buried me! I cannot cry further, I have stopped (crying), people. How shall I bear (this grief)?"

Now follow the words said by a woman about forty years old who lost her husband. She had been his chief wife, and she had been very much attached to him. She even tried to commit suicide when she heard of his death. Her words are full of memories, and she praises the qualities of her late husband.

"Ko, my husband, oo! (You were) very fine, ko, proud. Ko, whoever did something wrong to him, he would revenge it. With whom are you leaving me? O strong walker, large chest, o my beautiful husband. 'Go, you come with your cloth, o Nessi (she repeats here words which he used to say to her). Come, you lie down near me, my wife. Come, you pour out palmwine for us and we drink, my wife.' — 'Where is Momo' (his name)? 'He is in the court'. — 'Where did Momo go to-day?' 'He went to Darami.' — 'Where did Momo go to-day?' 'He went to Conteh.' — 'Which of your gowns do you want now you are going to Dodo' (she said to him). — 'They killed a cow at the market-place, what part shall we buy, my wife?' — My beautiful husband, my husband, my father, my own!"

The following words are from a woman whose brother (from the same mother) has died.

"O, my brother, oo! What has happened to my brother! My brother, my father, oo! The father of my children, my brother became silent. You did not do right to leave us in this way, o brother. Who will now feed me and my children? This I said yesterday to people, I said: my brother is deceiving us for nothing (she means that her brother has been careless in the treatment of his illness so that he had not given the impression of being very ill). My brother, yoo! Mother told us some time ago (when she died) that we should remain." The woman who was standing outside the house where her dead brother was lying, then looked through the window, and cried again: "Kpo, kpo, kpo, I cannot see this!" She then fell down on the ground, lamenting: "o yoo, o yoo!"

The man of whom I told already that he was very much grieved at the loss of his brother, cried: "He was my mother and my father! He left me, who will now arrange things for me? O God, my brother went, definitely. I lost the man who arranged everything for me. O my brother, this is not a good time to leave me. My brother left me, he disgraced me! O ya, o ya, people, how shall I (ever) stop crying?"

2. ANALYSIS OF FACTORS.

After this account of the wailing ceremonies we will examine some of the factors working in them. For our present purpose we will restrict ourselves to indicate: a. the ritual factors and b. the factors of a more differentiated character.

a. *Ritual factors.* By ritual factors are understood here the ceremonial duties and the rules of behaviour which are laid down by tradition. These factors are clearly recognizable; they attract the attention of the observer in the first place. There is first of all the fact that the wailing is a custom which will generally be followed by the family, friends and neighbours of the deceased, and from which probably nobody of them, if not for reasons of sentiment, then for reasons of social solidarity, will abstain. A second factor forms the way in which the words are said. The choice of the words, the intonation, the repetition of words or expressions, the long-drawn ejaculations (o yei, oo, yoo, kpo, etc.), they are all subject to certain rules or at least they are standardized to some extent. The wailing songs are expressions of real or affected

grief, formulated in a more or less traditional way. The person expressing the words complains that she remains on earth and that the dead has left her; she praises the qualities of the dead or she asks him to give a message to the ancestors.

b. *Factors of a more differentiated character.* Every social institution can be seen as an interplay of constant and of variable factors. This point of view which at first only has a classificatory value, becomes sociologically interesting when we investigate the quality, the intensity and the interrelation of those factors. It then provides one of the main means of comparison of social phenomena. It is natural that the reaction of a group of human beings when faced by the mysterious and important fact of the death of one of its members, contains, besides the standardized factors, several variable factors. With the Mendi it is not different. We can, in the first place, distinguish certain general elements among these variable factors. For instance, the types of expressions, words and ejaculations which are used by men and women are not the same. Moreover, the men, as we saw already, wail only for a short time, whereas the women perform the real wailing. The men show less emotion, and it is their duty to arrange the funeral as soon as possible. The behaviour during the wailing will also depend upon the degree of relatedness to the dead. A person who is only a neighbour will probably express himself in a different way and with different words than a near relative.

There are, however, also variable factors of a more personal character. The few examples of wailing songs which we have given show already that room is left for individual expression and individual emotions. From the way in which a person wails, from the words he uses, from his gestures and his whole behaviour, the depth of his emotions is recognizable to a large degree. The observer feels the intensity of emotion, the agony of grief of the mother who cries because she lost her only child, although she expresses herself in relatively conventional words. The wailing songs have, moreover, no fixed form; a person is free to use the words which he likes or which come from his heart.

Till now we are speaking from the point of view of the European observer. How is the attitude of the Mendi themselves towards these expressions of grief and of ceremonial wailing? There exists as far as I could make out, a great amount of sympathy with the bereft person, but this sympathy generally goes together with sufficient critical sense and discrimination. I started my field work with certain theoretical conceptions and advices which, as it seemed to me, were yet sufficiently free from prejudice. One of them was not to overvalue the importance of ceremonial behaviour, but to try to look deeper into the real human feelings, into the attitudes and motives which might be concealed from first observation. One of the first times, however, when I witnessed a wailing, I could not help feeling sympathy with the group of women whose husband had just died and who now were loudly lamenting and crying. I concluded that their sorrow must be very great, and I said so to one of my informants who was walking with me. His answer, however, cooled down my feelings to some degree. "We Mendi wait. After three months you can see which of the women is feeling real grief. The wives who loved their husband, will then still show their grief. The others, however, will be glad, because they will then get another husband". (Three months after his death, a man's wives will be married to his brothers, or they may be free to go their own way). Although I am not inclined to generalize from this remark, it contained more than a personal opinion. Moreover, it showed that my Mendi friend was at that moment better aware of sound methodological principles of observation than I myself was.

After the wailing for Maama which I briefly described, I heard my informants making

remarks about the affected way in which one of the women relatives praised the beauty of the dead. They thought also that she had been too hasty in asking to give messages to the ancestors. On the other hand, the mother of Maama was unable to cry. At first we heard her announce in bewilderment to some people whom it concerned: "Life is not in Maama!" or "Life is not in my child!" But later-on, when the people were wailing, she stood at some distance from her house, leaning against a wall; she was evidently overwhelmed by grief and unable to say a word. This was clearly understood by the people, as could be noticed from their respectful and sympathizing attitude. Such and other ways in which the personality can express itself are possible within the framework of ceremonial behaviour. That the Mendi themselves are aware of the differences which exist between different cases is also shown by certain expressions. When, for instance, wailing takes place for a person who is known to have led a bad life, or who was old so that death could be expected, people might say: *ngɔ gbama*, the wailing is for nothing. I mentioned the crying of a mother who lost her son. The boy had done several bad things and he had, therefore, been driven away from our town. A brother of the mother, a man of social standing, offered, however, a cow for the funeral. In this case some people remarked: *navo nyanile*, the property is waisted.

The interest, taken in funerals, like the interest which is shown for sick people, comprises a complex of sentiments, of family- and friendship-relations. The constant factor is formed by the duty of the members of the family of the dead to perform the funeral rites and to contribute a share toward the cost of these rites. But another type of interest of a less obligatory character is possible at the same time, and here a variable factor enters. For instance, a woman died at Panguma for whose burial a more than usual interest was shown. The number of people who contributed towards the funeral rites and who participated in them was much greater than had been expected by the family. This interest was due, according to my Mendi friends, to the woman having been noted for her good character and for her readiness to help others.

3. AN IMPORTANT FUNERAL RITE.

A death is followed by a series of funeral rites. Animals are offered, goats or sheep when the family of the deceased are relatively poor, and cows when they are of higher social rank. When a man of importance such as a chief has died, dancing and other ceremonial activities of which the collaboration of the secret societies forms a chief feature, take place. The death of a chief especially means a great upheaval in social life. For days and days dancing and drumming, performances of the "devils" of the several secret societies are going on, and the feasting of important visitors and their followers who are staying for many days, their coming and departure, adds colour to the strange mixture of festivities and expressions of sorrow formed by an important funeral.

It is not our purpose to describe here in detail the several funeral rites of the Mendi. They are only relevant to our present subject as far as they express some characteristic feature of the beliefs of the Mendi about an after-life. In this connection it will be useful to give a brief account of the ceremony which takes place on the third day after a death. This ceremony (called *tindyamei*) and the beliefs, connected with it, bring us into nearer contact with the conceptions of the Mendi about the world of the dead.

One of the ritual acts which forms part of this ceremony, is the offering of a chicken upon the grave. The Mendi themselves give different explanations of the meaning of this offering. According to one of the opinions I heard, the chicken is offered in order to enable the spirit to

give a present to his ancestors when he meets them. Another explanation states that the spirit, when beginning his voyage to the land of the dead, has to cross a river, and he is carried over this river on the wings of the offered chicken. However, these explanations as such are not especially relevant here, but the beliefs they imply. The conception of a land of the dead lying on the other side of a river, is generally found. *Tindyamei* means: to cross the water. The spirit cannot cross the river before this particular ceremony has been performed. It is, therefore, extremely important that the dead should have near relatives on earth who are able and willing to perform the ceremony. When, for instance, a person dies in a strange country, far from home, or when he leaves no relatives, and nobody cares for his *tindyamei*, then his spirit cannot go to his ancestors. He remains on this side of the river. Of several persons it is known that for some reason the *tindyamei*-ceremony has not yet been performed for them. There is danger that their spirits after a time will become restless and dissatisfied with their fate; they may even take revenge by troubling the people on earth. They would then gradually fall under the group of the evil spirits.

The ancestral spirits (*ngafanga*) form one great community in which those *ngafanga* for whom the *tindyamei* has not yet been performed do not possess full rights. The food which is offered by the people on earth, is divided among the spirits, and the fact that a spirit is able to divide this food, that his share is contributed, admits him into the community of the *ngafanga*. There remain, however, some problems which the observer finds difficult to disentangle. For instance, it is believed, on the one hand, that the spirits of the people who recently died, are waiting near a river or have crossed this river. On the other hand, these spirits are believed to visit their family and friends on earth by appearing in their dreams. It would, however, be wrong to try to bring too much system and consistency into these beliefs; they remain more or less vague and indefinite. A man with whom I was discussing these problems said that the *ngafanga* are free to go where they like, and his opinion was shared by others who were present. It does not seem, however, that the *tindyamei* can be regarded as the only performance making a spirit acceptable to the community of the other *ngafanga*. During my stay at Panguma a former section chief of that place died. He had committed a breach of the rules of the *fefewaai* (strong wind)-society, a secret society of old warriors which possesses a potent and secretly guarded "medicine". The man became ill and a diviner diagnosed that his illness was due to the sin I mentioned. Though the purification rite was performed, the man died. I asked my informants if this rite was not regarded as a failure now. They replied: "No, because if the ceremony had not been performed, it might have been difficult for the *ngafei* to cross the river. The other *ngafanga* might not have been willing to accept him, and he might, therefore, have found himself obliged to appear to his family and to ask them to make an offering in order to appease the *ngafanga*." As the section chief had been a rather wicked man who had committed many other breaches of taboos besides the one to which I referred, I asked my informant by what means the *ngafanga* could be propitiated for these other transgressions. His opinion was: "Perhaps big ceremonies will be held for him, and that may please the *ngafanga* so that they let him cross the river."

IV. THE ANCESTRAL SPIRITS AND THE AFTER-LIFE

1. THE ANCESTRAL SPIRITS.

Several forms of contact with the spirits are possible. In normal circumstances the spirits are invisible, according to general opinion. There are, however, some spirits who appear as

human beings clad in white. People are afraid of meeting them because it makes them speechless or confused for a time. The normal group of spirits, the good ones, appear only in dreams. "When somebody sees *ngafanga*, it is bad; when we pray to them, it is good," as Mendi said to me.

Though the beliefs in these matters are not at all dogmatic, it is probably correct to state that the spirits are thought to be more or less like human beings of which the forms have become somewhat vague. But again, when the Mendi philosophize on these points, various opinions may be heard. From a discussion held by a group of them, I cite, for instance, the following statements. One of them declared that when a *ngafei* appears in a person's dream, his colour is just like it used to be when he was still a human being. Another said: „When a person dies he leaves his skin. He changes just as a caterpillar becomes a butterfly." A rather sophisticated young man who had received some education in the European sense and whose opinions seemed to waver between scepticism, pagan and Mohammedan beliefs, thought that after death you can change into something else, perhaps become a European, or an elephant, a dog or a monkey. This seemed, however, to be his more or less private opinion.

The belief in the existence of *ngafanga* is uniformly held, but even here unorthodox opinions can be found. From my collection of Mendi statements I may quote, for instance, the following one: "I do not believe. I cannot say that the *ngafanga* are there. I myself I don't believe. I cannot say that the *ngafanga* are not there. A person does not know the time when he comes on earth and a person does not know the time when he returns into the earth. Therefore I said that I do not believe it, therefore I said that I cannot press another word out of my head. I myself have not seen a *ngafei*." This opinion was expressed by a storyteller who had undergone some Mohammedan but no European influences. More statements of a similar type could be given here. Such opinions are interesting, not only because they reveal both the general and the more personal and speculative aspects of the beliefs, but also because they are indications of the degree of tolerance in religious matters.

2. THE LAND OF THE DEAD AND THE LIFE OF THE ANCESTRAL SPIRITS.

Our account of the *tindyamei*-ceremony has shown already that Mendi generally believe in the existence of a land of the dead lying on the other side of a river. About the location of this world the ideas are less definite. The belief that the spirits reside in the earth seems to be the one most commonly held. There also is the stream which they have to cross before they can reach their family and the wider community of *ngafanga*. When, as one of my informants told me, the *ngafanga* appear to people, or when they receive food, they come up from their place underground. There exists, however, also the belief that the spirit goes to a mountain. A special mountain not far from the town where I was living was indicated as the place where the spirits resided. Some people even asserted that they had seen persons who recently died, going through the air to the mountain. The following conception in which, as I was informed, many people, especially the older people, believe, is also found. After having been created by *Levei* (God), people begin their lives in the sky. When they die there, they are reborn on earth. When they die on earth, they go to a place under the earth. There also the process of being born again, of dying and of moving to a place which is situated lower down, is repeated several times. In this way a human being goes through ten lives. My informants were unable to say whether the end of this cycle would bring the total extinction of the spirit. They were inclined to think that extinction would follow.

When a family wants to make an offering to their ancestors they go on the previous night to their graves. They call the names of the ancestors and invite them to come the next day for the offering. This would indicate that the spirits are supposed to be hovering near the graves. The problem of the location of the spirits seems to be to Mendi children no less puzzling than to the ethnographer. Mendi declared at any rate that their children are often asking whether the *ngafanga* are in the graves.

The belief that a spirit enters into a great community of *ngafanga* is in a way restricted by another belief, namely that the spirit joins his own ancestors. My information on this point is, however, still in a very preliminary stage. The groupings of the spirits present similarities to the groupings of the people on earth. The family system of the Mendi forms a mixture of matrilineal and patrilineal traits; it is patrilocal. The group which a spirit joins seems as a rule to be his father's family. There are, however, several exceptions to this rule. For instance, the question with whom the deceased has been living on earth, and also the question which of his relatives have already died before, play a part. One of my informants, a young man about twenty years old, whose mother was dead, was not living with his father but, in another village, with his maternal uncle. He said that when he died, he would go to his mother. If his father had been living and had died in the village where my informant was staying at present, he might have joined his father. Another informant thought that he would go to his maternal uncle and this uncle's son; of both of them he often dreamt. In the opinion of Mendi with whom I talked this matter over, one continues to a certain extent to live with the same members of one's family that, when they were still alive, were also one's companions on earth. It is interesting to notice that, although, generally speaking, a spirit joins the group of his family, yet ties of affection seem to play an important part in determining one's choice. With this may be connected the fact, stressed by my informants, that while one is living, one's dead mother is very often near one.

Whereas the spirit of a man goes to his own family, with the spirit of a woman the question seems to be somewhat more complicated. According to several statements the spirit of a woman joins as a rule the family of her husband, but here again there are exceptions. In a discussion some Mendi pointed out to me that the way in which a woman is buried, holds some indication about her future status. A recent case was mentioned where a husband buried his love-wife in front of his house. Burials in general would show the degree of affection which existed. For instance, the chief of the chiefdom in which I was living, was buried near his mother because he loved her. A woman's relatives are only allowed to bury her if an arrangement is made between them and the husband. A woman will also be buried by her own family when she is divorced. In case she is an only daughter, the family may like to bury her, and, as my informants put it, her spirit would be between her own ancestors and her husband's ancestors. It might, however, look disgraceful for a woman to be buried by her family because it might imply that she had not been a steady woman.

The life of the *ngafanga* seems in many respects to be similar to that of the people on earth; it is only more limited in possibilities. Some people say that the *ngafanga* are grouped together in villages, or that they are building towns; they cultivate ricefarms just as human beings do. But others — and they formed the majority of my informants — admit that they do not know what the *ngafanga* are doing. There is a saying: "*Ndamo ninei i wa, ye a mu li kpa hu. Te baa hei gba, bi bi wombi ma me*". (Dead man new he comes, he says let us go farm to. They (the *ngafanga*) say you not sit aside, you your knees on eat). This would mean that a person who has recently died, tries to continue his daily life and his going to the farm. The other *ngafanga*

tell him, however, that he must sit near them. They do not work for their food, but they wait till they receive it (from the people on earth). They sit in waiting attitude, with their elbows or their head resting on their knees.

Although, according to these conceptions, the *ngafanga* do not cultivate their own ricefarms, they take nevertheless an interest in the activities of the people on earth, and they know their troubles. Your ancestors are the guardians of your farm, and they make your rice grow. When you are working on the farm, they walk, though invisible, with you. And when you take your meal there, you offer a small part of it to them. There are *ngafanga* who, as human beings, were known to be especially fond of farmwork. As they like to be on the farm, they are called *mbayengeiyafanga* (rice work *ngafanga*). When an offering is made on a farm the names of the dead who have especially been connected with this farm, are invoked. When the hoeing of a farm is finished, a ceremony is performed for the prosperity of the farm. At such a ceremony for instance, the following prayer to the *mbayengeiyafanga* was said:

“Dyogbogonda ke (and) Nando, ke Gbɔno Kadyiti, ke Fagoma, ke Kulingama, ke Beki, ke Damba, ke Kango, ke Fufolowaai, ke Bomboyɔndyo!

Wu kpe i hiti wu ma. Kpalei dyi mu kpɔya; mu mbalei hũ
 You all it reaches you on. Farm this we finished; (may) we harvest in
 kakaka. Hinda aa kpalamui, hinda aa mavebunyahei
 very much. Thing it not farmowner, thing it not his wife who takes care of the farm
 viei ke nasia gbi ti ngengei vieima hũ. Yei mbei lo ngi feima wue.”
 happens and those all they work are doing in. The rice is I am giving you.

There is another saying to which the Mendi drew my attention as an indication of the condition of the *ngafanga*: “Poma la ndi lo lei” (corpse lying heart firm is). This would mean that a dead man must be stout-hearted, that he must know to bear things and to be patient. Flies may come on him and he is unable to remove them. A dead man has to wait also for his food till others bring it to him.

The conception that the after-life is in some way a continuation of the life on earth, and that the *ngafanga* keep their former interests, does not only apply to the spirits who watch the work on the rice fields. There are in life special people who are connected with the several secret societies; they are the leaders or the possessors of the special protective sorts of medicines of these societies. When they die, their spirits continue to be the guardians of the secret society for which they worked on earth. Their names are invoked at the rites which are performed by these societies, and at the end of each rite the officiants try to ascertain, by means of throwing up kolanuts, whether the *ngafanga* approve of the rite and of the way in which it has been performed. There are, moreover, the spirits of men who gained fame as great climbers of the palmtree, a kind of fame which gradually has taken almost mythical proportions. At a ceremony which is held yearly for the palmtree the names of these people are invoked.

The same idea of continuation underlies the differences in character, existing between the *ngafanga*. The Mendi make a general distinction between good and evil spirits (*ngafei yekpeisia* and *ngafei nyamuisia*). The evil spirits are the spirits who are troublesome. They comprise in the first place the people who already during their life had a bad character. They are also formed by the *ngafanga* for whom, as we saw, the funeral rites have not yet been performed or, as may be the case with members of secret societies who need very special funeral rites, these rites

have not been performed in the proper way. Such spirits become dissatisfied and they may bring trouble on people by suddenly appearing to them or taking possession of them.

At every ceremony, when rice is offered to the *ngafanga*, some rice is also thrown on the road near the house where the ceremony is performed, or on other occasions at some distance from the place where the offering is made. The rice which is thus thrown away is for the *ngelepeleihūyafanga* (*ngafanga* who stop on the road). These *ngafanga* are not the really evil spirits, but when alive they were people who led a somewhat wandering life or who remained outside family life and who, therefore, did not get their food in a regular way.

The Mendi believe in certain forms of reincarnation. Especially when a first-born child dies, the possibility is great that the child will come back. Some people, I was told, give the child a mark, a slight cut on one of the fingers, and in many cases the same mark will be found on the child which is born afterwards.

When I stayed at Panguma, a young child died there. It was the fifth child the mother lost. The death was attributed to several causes, one of them being witchcraft and another a violation of the rules which are associated with the Porro, the secret society for men. As a third possible cause it was thought by many people that it had every time been the same child, which, having a bad character, tried to grieve the mother in this way. The child was buried in a special manner near the crossing of three roads, thus preventing, as Mendi explained it, the spirit from returning. At the bottom of the grave, over the body and again upon the grave thorny twigs were laid which had to block the way for the spirit. Then the spirit was told not to return. The mother and the father of the child were not present at the burial. The maternal uncle of the mother acted as the main person in the burial. When he laid the child in the grave, he said the following words, freely translated: „Now we are throwing you away, you must not return here. Your family is not here, you must not come again. You have no living mother, your mother is not here. Do not walk about behind our child (the mother). We do not like you. Go away from our child. You never must return to her.” A woman who participated in the burial and who laid some special leaves over the body, then said similar words: “Do not return to our child. Your mother is not here. Do not look back again. Your family is not here. We do not like you. Never return to us. Go and find another place now. Do not return to us. We do not like you.”

I asked my informants with whom I had been present at the burial, how it was possible that on the one hand Mendi supposed the *ngafei* walking about and disturbing his family while on the other hand they believed to be able to keep the *ngafei* in the grave. Their explanation was: “When after a time the thorns have withered and have lost their power, the *ngafei* will go out of the grave and will try to find its way”.

A similar burial (called *ndowilimei*, the throwing away of a child) took place for the child of one of my Mendi friends. Here it was the seventh child the mother lost. The parents, who had been very pleased with the child, were much distressed about the loss; the child had lived only for a few days. Although in such a case the child is buried in a rough way, because the parents do not want it to come back, it will, however, be thought that there might be something wrong with either the mother or the father. If the parents do not confess some sin the family may curse the person who has probably killed the child on the grave of the child, or divorce may even follow.

It also happens that a man is reincarnated as the child of his own child. One of my Mendi friends, for instance, told me that his grandfather (on the mother's side) before he died had told that he would reappear „before his son”. The child which was then born by the wife of my

informant's maternal uncle was believed to be the returned grandfather. There is another way in which a person can make known his identity, namely in a dream. The mother or the woman who nurses the child will have a dream in which she is told how it is. When a child resembles one of its grandparents very much, people will exclaim: "The man has not changed at all, he came back very quickly!"

It is believed that in some cases a recently departed man continues for some time after his death to live as a human being at some other place where his death is not yet known. Several of such cases were mentioned by my informants. The dead person will show himself in other places where he will stay a few days, possibly with his relations, and then perhaps reappear in another place. As soon as his death becomes known, he will disappear. Unfortunately I did not get an opportunity to investigate a special case. One day the rumour spread at Panguma that a young woman who had died a few days ago, had reappeared to her uncle, living at a distant village. The rumour soon proved, however, to be false, but I learnt on that occasion that the belief in this form of reappearance is uniformly held.

V. RELATIONS BETWEEN THE ANCESTRAL SPIRITS AND THE PEOPLE ON EARTH

I. REVELATION BY ANCESTRAL SPIRITS.

During the first days after a death has taken place often the spirit of the dead man will appear to his family or to his friends in their dreams. It is a very common phenomenon, and I know of several persons to whom the spirit of a departed appeared in their dreams. On the whole people do not seem to fear these visits; on the contrary they appreciate them because in this way they remain in touch with the dead, they hear his wishes and get to know his feelings. When, for instance, the chief of Panguma died, social life was at once considerably disturbed not only because of the funeral rites which were taking place, but also because of the political struggles which now rose up round the chieftainship. A few days after his death, however, the chief appeared in some one's dream and asked to tell his followers that they need not be distressed; there ought, he said, to be more dancing and he prophesied that the chieftainship would remain in his family (this turned out to be true several months afterwards). People who do not receive any message from a near relative who has died may even feel troubled about it. I knew, for instance, an old and somewhat helpless woman whose daughter had died and who was in great sorrow. She did not hear from her daughter, and she, therefore, asked other people several times if her daughter had perhaps appeared to them.

A word may be added here about the significance of dreams in the life of the Mendi. They play, as is the case with other primitive peoples, an important part. But although dreams are a common experience, the degree of knowledge which is necessary for their explanation, varies a great deal, and the importance Mendi attach to their dreams depends again upon the type of dream. There are simple dreams of which the meaning seems to be known to everybody. There are more difficult dreams which still can be explained by the more informed part of the public, and, finally, there are other dreams which require the specialized knowledge of a soothsayer. The dreams in which the *ngafanga* appear do not, in general, need a special explanation. They are, moreover, mostly of a private character or only of interest to the family concerned. But not always do the spirits appear to their nearest relations, they may also choose other persons as mediums for their messages. And here we come across another important factor, namely the communication of dreams. The need or the desire to tell your dreams seems to be a common

element of dream experiences. In the morning people will tell each other their dreams when these are found to be sufficiently interesting. If the dream has some relation to a person and the dream may be of interest to him, it is, moreover, regarded as a duty to report it to him. Often a dream reveals that a sacrifice should be made, and especially to sick people it is important to know from the dreams of their friends what kind of sacrifice they have to make in order to get better. Not always, however, will a man communicate his dream to the people who are most concerned when a spirit has appeared in his dream. I knew, for instance, a case where a spirit appeared to a man outside the family of the dead. This man did not like to tell his dream to the family; he thought that they might be offended because they themselves had not yet received a message. As time goes on the appearance of spirits in dreams becomes less frequent and is more limited to special occasions, for instance, when the people on earth are in difficulty and need the help of their ancestors. It has to be remembered here that generally speaking only the good spirits appear in dreams. The attitude of the spirit towards the living members of his family will also depend on the special ties of affection which existed when he was alive. One of my informants told me that, as a boy, he was for time under the care of Mohammedan teachers. He did not get enough food then and he often went to bed still hungry. Several times he dreamt then that he received food from his (maternal) uncle and the latter's son, both of whom were dead. The next morning he felt quite satisfied. My informant, a very trustworthy young man, sincerely believed, that in his dream he had in some way or other enjoyed a meal. He often dreamt of this uncle and his son and also of his mother; they gave him advice when he was in difficulty. Of his father he only dreamt once.

The spirits—we are still speaking of the good spirits—reveal their will and feelings also by other means than dreams, especially when they are dissatisfied. Good spirits too may become dissatisfied. When they feel themselves neglected, when no offerings are made to them or when wrong has been done to them in other ways, they may remind their family of their existence by causing illness or some other calamity. The living people have, as we shall see, to fulfil several duties towards their ancestral spirits, and a neglect of these duties may engender serious consequences. Sometimes when you are ill the diviner will reveal that for a few years you have not made an offering to the near members of your family who are dead. But the *ngafanga* do not only keep a watchful eye on the interests of their own family, nor do they only react when they personally have been neglected. They, or at any rate a group of them, also guard the interests of the community and of the secret societies. Every serious violation of the rules of these societies and of the rules of public morality forms a sin against the *ngafanga*, and such a sin can only be removed when a purification rite has been performed. The evil spirits too may vent their feelings by sending disease, but they chiefly manifest themselves by haunting people and by taking possession of them. The appearance of a spirit except in dreams, is, as we said before, greatly feared. Such a spirit will waylay people, will attack them on the road, or will trouble them in other sudden ways.

As an example I give here the story of a young woman, Massa, who experienced a meeting with a *ngafei*. She ran away from the Bundu (secret society where girls receive their education) and was living with a young man, Mimɔ, in the village of Kamboma, the same village where Mimɔ's mother was living. The mother, Dyatu, proved to be a witch who had given her own child to the witches. The child therefore lost its health. A diviner found out that the illness was caused by witchcraft, and the help of the *Kondobla*, the specialists who are able to counteract the forces of witchcraft, was called for. The *Kondobla* tied round the neck of the child a special

gun which goes off whenever a witch approaches. One day the mother went out with the child and it happened that the Kondogun shot her. Dyatu became very ill and died. Before her death, however, she told her family that they were not allowed to give her child to her fellow-wife Nasu of whom she had been very jealous. The main part of the story now follows in Massa's own words, freely translated.

"This was the word that she spoke and she died. Her heart it went. And they carried her and buried her. When they had buried her, then mother Nasu took the child. And she dreamt of mother Dyatu, who said: 'I said at the last that you are not allowed to take my child'. She said: 'But you have taken it'. At daybreak Nasu repeats these words and explains them to people. People said to her that she must take it. She herself said: 'No, I shall not touch it, I shall not take it'. And the people said to me, they said: 'Then you take the child', and I put the child on my back. After I had put the child on my back the child's mother Dyatu *ngafei* followed us on the road. And she took the child from my back. And she asked me, saying: 'Why did you give my child to Nasu? I thought that at the last I said: Not even when I am dead you give my child to Nasu to handle it. Why did you give it to her'? And she passed me with the child, she also nursed and fed it. After she had done that and it had sucked, she gave it back to me. And I handled the child. And she said to me, saying: 'If it had not been for you and if you had not been in love with my child Mimɔ, I would have killed you. For that reason I said at the last: Even when I am dead, I shall return with my child if you give it to Nasu. Therefore, I am going with my child'. And she gave the child to me, she left the road free to us. Then we passed her, and my mouth was speechless. And we reached a farmhouse. As soon as I put down the load from my head, then my cloth loosened, the child came out of it, and it fell. When it came from my back it fell. And they sent people to the town; and they came with medicine with which they rubbed me, and I was able to talk. And I took (the child), I put it on my back and we returned to Kamboma. Two days afterwards the mouth of the child began to swell from the milk which its dead mother (*ndɔmui*) had put into its mouth. Therefore, its mouth swelled very much, it burst open on the jaw side. There the illness remained and the child died." The end of the story is that the family of Dyatu tried to make Massa responsible for the death of the child, and they made even a court-case of it. The court, however, found itself unable to judge the case and dismissed it.

Possession can be caused both by *dzinanga* and by *ngafanga*. It would be difficult, however, always to distinguish sharply whether the spirit enters into the person or haunts him by being constantly near him. I came across one case where a man tried to commit suicide because a *ngafei* was always near him. One day, when we were in court a man, Lebi, was carried in a hammock from a neighbouring village. He had two severe wounds in his belly. His sister and the village speaker who accompanied the group, told the following story. Lebi went to the Konnohcountry in order to look for his wife who had run away from him. In the village, however, where she was staying, she was murdered. Three persons seemed to be concerned in the case: the husband, another man whose arrest had already been asked by the chiefs and a brother of this man. When Lebi came back from the Konnohvillage he was not normal. The husband of his sister who was a specialist in Mohammedan "medicine" had already tried to treat him by shaving his head and rubbing "medicine" on it. The night before the attempt at suicide took place, the man was restless; several times he went out of his room. In the morning he called together his family and he explained to them that he was constantly followed by a

ngafei, and that caused him to take his own life. Immediately he took his knife and wounded himself. He then ran into the bush and wounded himself for a second time.

There are special persons who are able to drive away the *ngafanga* or *dzinanga* who possess or haunt the people. Such a specialist is called *ngafamalemui* or *dzinamalemui* (male = to meet). As we had no *ngafamalemui* living in our town, the specialist from another town was called for the treatment of Lɛbi. He sent a message, however, that he did not like to treat this case; it was too much for him. My informants said that this happens. If a *ngafamalemui* thinks that he cannot succeed in a case, he does not try it. He fears that his reputation might be damaged by failure.

2. THE ATTITUDE OF THE MENDI TOWARDS THE ANCESTRAL SPIRITS.

In our foregoing account we dealt with the active part which spirits play in the relation between them and the Mendi. We will now have a brief look at the other side of that relation, at the activities of the living people. An important part of these activities consists in the fulfilment of the ritual duties of the Mendi towards their ancestral spirits. There is no organized priesthood associated with these spirits. But in each family a special person is appointed whose task it is to perform the offerings and to look after the graves of the ancestors. The offerings take place more or less regularly, but no rigorous rules seem to be laid down for the times of the ritual. My information is, however, limited to the practices, existing in a few families I knew. Some families are more strict than others. One of my Mendi friends, the head of a large family, offered twice every year. Others are less regular and may not even perform a sacrifice once a year. As one of this latter group said to me: "You will generally make an offering when you are in trouble or when you know that the spirits are dissatisfied with you". The offerings take place on the graves of the ancestors and during the offering the names of the more important ancestors, from the father's side as well as the mother's side are invoked.

Apart from these more or less regular occasions, there exist many special occasions on which an offering is made. We referred already to the fact that a family will approach their ancestors when they are in difficulty. Or when a diviner has found out that the spirits are dissatisfied with the way in which a family fulfils their duties, they make a sacrifice. Not only the families as a group, but individuals too, enter into relation with the ancestral spirits. In the individual relations the element of a special affection we mentioned before will play a part, while the sacrifices as a rule will be of a more modest character than in the case of family offerings. We stated also that groups such as secret societies or the village community have their own guardians, and to these guardians offerings are made on special occasions.

These activities form in the first place a system of duties of the living people towards the ancestors. But at the same time the ancestral spirits are regarded as the protectors of the interests of families and other groups as well as of individuals. This gives to the relation a deeper, more human meaning than could be the case with a mere system of formal duties. Here we have to make a short digression on the notion of sin or wrong which is called *kotui*. The *kotui*-relation may exist between living people and also between the living people and the ancestral spirits. For instance, when a boy leaves the Porro, the secret society where he has received his education, and when on this occasion an animal is offered by his family, then a *kotui* would be caused if later-on in the same circumstances a similar offering should not be made for the other children of that family. But the wrong would not only be done to these children but also to the ancestors of the family. The moral relations which exist between human

beings continue to a certain extent even when one of the parties dies, especially if there is a *kotui* between them. The *kotui* which plays an important part in the life of the Mendi, creates therefore a moral relation between the people on earth and the spirits. Not only the negative aspect of this relation, the existence of *kotui* is important, but also the positive side, the desire to avoid *kotui*. The spirits in their turn may be guilty of a *kotui* towards the living people, still dating from the time when they were on earth. In this case it is the duty of the family of the spirit to remove this *kotui* in the proper ritual way; otherwise the spirit may experience the harmful consequences of it in his present state.

A short survey has been given here of the ritual and the moral aspect of the relation between the living people and the spirits. The question may now be asked: how long does that relation last, or formulated in another way: how much time passes by before a spirit falls into oblivion? We have to distinguish between the ritual and the psychological side of the remembrance. The duration of the ritual obligations will depend upon the position which the dead occupied in his family and in group life, upon his age, rank and similar social factors. For important members of a family they will extend over a longer period than for ordinary members; the spirits of chiefs and leaders of secret societies again are distinguished by their greater permanence. I was informed that usually offerings will be made during the first three or four years after a person's death, but probably these ritual practices are not governed by definite rules; they will be left to the individual inclinations of the families. In important families where reasons of prestige also enter, offerings may be made to the ancestors of several generations. A member of such a family explained to me: "In the house of my uncle we offer to the fathers and grandfathers of my uncle and to his brothers and the other leaders of the family, because they were important people. The ceremony takes place in such a way as to enable people to see that we are in a position to make a large sacrifice."

Remembrance as a psychological fact exists side by side with the ritual aspect, but at the same time it transcends the ritual bounds, belonging, moreover, to the sphere of personal relations. We referred before to a few cases where affection played a great part in the relation between the spirits and the people on earth. Remembrance continues also in those cases where no ritual obligations, but simply human sentiments are present. At Panguma I was collecting population data. It happened in two cases that elderly women when asked for information about births and deaths in their families were hardly able to speak; they became for some moments overwhelmed with grief when they mentioned the names of the children they had lost at an early age.

It would be difficult to classify the feelings of the Mendi towards their *ngafanga*, according to a customary ethnological distinction, either as fear or as worship. Such a rough and simple classification would fail to do justice to a complicated system of sentiments. It would probably be correct to state that the sentiments which existed in regard to the living person, continue in general to be felt for his spirit, only in a less vital form. It is, of course, extremely difficult to gain intimate knowledge about the mental life of a people, especially in this matter. The behaviour which we observe during the ceremonial activities supplies only one side of the information we need. As far as I am able to generalize, however, it seems to me that fear is not the ruling sentiment with the Mendi in their relations to the *ngafanga*. We have seen that the evil spirits are feared, but it would be entirely wrong to suppose that people are constantly conscious of their existence. Fear will be shown on special occasions, for instance, when some calamity has occurred, when a malicious spirit manifests itself or, in a lesser degree, when it

has become known that a spirit is dissatisfied. Towards the good spirits in any case the attitude of the Mendi is not founded on fear, but rather on a sense of mutual interest and help. Even fear for malevolent spirits, however, is not a feeling which dominates every-day life. Moreover, when a term such as fear is used in order to characterize the state of mind of a people, it implies a valuation. By applying the term to a primitive people, we want to state that this people is to a higher degree possessed by fear than other peoples, especially European peoples. This may on the whole be true when we restrict the term to the fear of supernatural forces, although the existence of this kind of fear among primitive peoples has been greatly exaggerated in European accounts. The ethnographer, however, who would not be aware of the many other and no less intensive forms of fear existing in modern societies, for instance, fear of economic and political forces, would risk to base his comparison on a sociological fallacy.

VI. ATTITUDE TOWARDS DEATH

We will, finally, consider briefly the attitude of the Mendi towards death. This question immediately calls forth the opposite problem, namely their attitude towards life. We saw before that the theory according to which the mind of primitive man is constantly occupied with the supernatural, does not apply to the Mendi. They are a good natured, sociable and vital people; they pursue with industry their agricultural activities for a great part of the year and from the early morning till the evening. Many of them develop a passion for court cases, and they love dancing and music. On the one hand we notice a very human attachment to life; on the other hand no definite fear of death seems to exist. But here again, it is, of course, difficult to speak in general terms.

Mendi children swear readily as likewise do the adult people. While swearing they invoke death in order to enforce their words. They will then, as my informants pointed out, be rebuked by their parents in the following way: "Do you think that death is like the rainy season? The rainy season comes, it ends, and it comes back. But when you are dead, you remain there, and you do not return to us." Parents want to stress by these words that death is not a thing which may be taken lightly.

Cases of suicide occur. In the cases of attempts at suicide known to me the motive seems to have been fear of public disgrace in a few cases, grief in one case and possession by a *ngafei* in another case. I have not heard of persons committing suicide because they felt a special longing for death as such. I knew of two old women who several times told other people that they would like to die soon because they longed to be near their dead children. These feelings did not lead to suicide, however. The persons who commit suicide are, as far as I could make out, not buried in a special way, and no special fate awaits them in the after-life. Though suicide is not frequent, people do not seem to look at it with horror. A Mendi explained to me: "We think differently about it, as to the case lies. If a man is haunted by a *ngafei* and he commits suicide we feel sorry for him. In a case such as occurred some time ago at Dodō where a man took his own life because of a debt, we may perhaps laugh about it."

In a talk which I had with a group of Mendi friends about these problems of death, one of them remarked: "We Mendi have a saying: If I die, it cannot be helped. I am not going the way of a stranger. I shall meet my family there." These words probably express the general mental attitude of the Mendi.

THE BELIEF AMONG THE MENDI IN NON-ANCESTRAL SPIRITS, AND ITS RELATION TO A CASE OF PARRICIDE

BY

DR SJOERD HOFSTRA

I. INTRODUCTION

1. Like many other primitive peoples the Mendi ¹⁾ believe in two main groups of spirits: the ancestral spirits ²⁾ and the spirits who, in a former existence, have not been human beings. The present article deals with a case in which the belief in the latter group of spirits plays the main, and at the same time a tragic part. These spirits are called *dyinanga* (sing.: *dyina*) ³⁾.

Early in September 1936, while I was staying at Panguma, I received information that a few days before (on the 28th of August) a boy from the southern chiefdom Gauru had killed his father. My informants told me that the boy had acted under the compulsion of *dyinanga*. In order to get some further details about this case I went to Kenema, where the boy had been put in prison; it seemed to me that such details might perhaps throw some light both on the significance of the belief in *dyinanga* in Mendi life, and on a special type of abnormality from which some natives suffer.

The District Commissioner gave me permission to have a talk with the boy who was about seventeen or eighteen years old; two of my native assistants were present at this talk. The boy, called *Dyuana*, showed little or no reluctance to give an account of the way in which he had been driven to his deed by the *dyinanga*. This account will follow below in the boy's own words.

2. For a better understanding of the case, it will, however, be necessary, first to give a few details about the Mendi belief in *dyinanga*. This group of supernatural beings may be compared to those figures who play a part in our fairy tales and legends. They live their own, independent lives, though their ways are in many regards similar to those of human beings. Thus they possess, for instance, their own towns and chiefs, they have their longings for food and sexual intercourse, and they are, in their relations to men, prompted either by good will or by a less friendly disposition. They are supposed to live in rivers or on earth. Near villages where there is a stream running, one can often see a special place where from time to time food is offered to the *dyinanga* of that stream.

1) The Mendi, some 600,000 in number, live in the central and eastern part of the West African colony of Sierra Leone. My field work among them was carried out in 1934-1935 and 1936, mainly in a small town, Panguma, and in some of the neighbouring chiefdoms.

2) A detailed account of this group of spirits has been given in my article: "The ancestral spirits of the Mendi", in: Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie, Vol. XXXIX, p. 177-196.

3) Mendi nouns may be indefinite or definite. The indefinite forms singular and plural *dyina* and *dyinanga* are used in the present article. The singular and plural definite forms are: *dyinei* and *dyinangeisia*.

Just as human beings and ancestral spirits show different moral qualities, so there are good and evil *dyinanga*. The good ones bring luck and good fortune to the persons with whom they are in contact. The evil ones like to disturb people, and to worry them in their sleep; they find pleasure in making noises round the houses at the outskirts of villages and towns or in attacking people going home in the dark from their farms.

The good *dyinanga* are able to enrich you when they choose to do so. People working daily in the bush, poor men like hunters, may meet them and receive their favours. When you find some special object on your way, it may form an indication that a *dyina* wants to get into touch with you. There are, for instance, special red stones which the *dyinanga* leave behind. Finding such a stone, you will take it home, and afterwards, so the Mendi say, a *dyina* will appear to you in a dream. It may then happen that he reveals some secret knowledge. For instance, I got acquainted with a medicine-man who had inherited his power from his father, who in his turn had received it from a *dyina*.

The *dyinanga*, on the other hand, do not always give their favours for nothing. Some kind of service will be asked from the people with whom they are in contact. In native stories it is frequently mentioned that *dyinanga* have sexual intercourse with human beings in their dreams. The *dyinanga* also have to be propitiated by offerings. Something or somebody a person is very much attached to, for instance his wife or his child, must be sacrificed to his *dyina*.

The Mendi distinguish several kinds of good *dyinanga*. Such is, for instance, the *dyɔwei*, a long being in the form of a chain, who lives in the water; the *tingɔi*, a beautiful spirit in the form of a woman; the *dʒalɔi*, who is white and who also has the appearance of a woman. A special kind of *dyina* is the *ndɔgbɔyusi*. He lives in the bush, and on account of his unusual shape and large size, he especially engages the imagination of the natives. The *ndɔgbɔyusi* is also believed to help poor people; on the other hand, he will take rich people or their children into the bush, and drive them mad.

The attacks by evil *dyinanga* may sometimes take a dangerous turn and may even lead to a form of mental disorder. There are medicine men who specialize in driving away the troublesome *dyinanga*. Some of the Mohammedan medicine men especially are known for this work. The profession is, however, not without dangerous risks. The *dyinanga* may, according to Mendi belief, try to revenge themselves and to do harm to the exorcist. The case which is related in the present article probably forms an instance of such a struggle in its tragic outcome. If the specialist is able to find out the name of the evil *dyina*, this spirit will, so my informants said, go away, and will never come back. The afflicted person is, therefore, pressed to mention the name of the *dyina* who is troubling him. A similar procedure seems to exist for the driving away of a bad *ngafei* (ancestral spirit). Unfortunately, I did not have an opportunity of witnessing a performance of exorcism. Medicines are also applied in order to cure a person from this malady.

3. A few words may, finally, be said about the place which the *dyinanga* occupy in native life. Though they do not form a negligible part of the supernatural world, their significance to human beings is less important than that of the ancestral spirits. The relation of the latter group of spirits to men is of a closer and often more intimate kind; they occupy a greater place in rites and dreams, in emotions and thought. In a different way magic and witchcraft too are of greater importance to the Mendi than are the *dyinanga*. It would probably be right to state that the relation between human beings and *dyinanga* bears a somewhat incidental character, at least when compared to the relation of the Mendi to their ancestral spirits; it seems that in the

attitude of the *dyinanga* the elements of surprise and arbitrariness are present to a considerable degree.

According to my informants the *dyinanga* appear less frequently than they used to do, at least in the neighbourhood of towns. This is supposed to be due to the European custom of increasing the number of bridges. The noise which is caused by bridges, especially by those of the concrete type, compels the *dyinanga* to retreat to quieter places, where they are able to continue their life less disturbed. The interference of men in those parts of the country where the *dyinanga* reside, makes these spirits moody or even hostile. At some distance from our town, for instance, a Creole trader tried to begin some mining work near a stream; his attempts, however, frequently failed, and this was ascribed to a hostile attitude of the local *dyinanga*.

This short outline of Mendi beliefs may provide some background to the case with which we are dealing here; the boy's account will follow now.

II. THE BOY'S ACCOUNT ⁴⁾

1. "It is now five years ago since it began; these things (the *dyinanga*) then appeared to me ⁵⁾, they stood before by eyes. This went on till once they appeared again to me. I ran into the bush, I remained in that bush, I reached a farmhouse, I slept there two nights, I lived on these small bananas. People from my home did not recognize me, they regarded me as a thief, and they came in the night, they wounded me on this knee. When they had wounded me, they brought me to the town. When they had brought me to the town, my father Momo, the same whom I have killed, made them take me to the D.C. ⁶⁾ here. But those who had wounded me, denied it. The D.C. investigated (the matter), and it was proved that they had done this to me for no reason. The D.C. then said (to them); he said: 'you have to go to prison for two months for what you have done'.

"Father then saw to it that they carried me to the medical people here. They dressed (my wound). They treated me till the hunger ⁷⁾ became strong. They prepared a medicine for me, they gave it to me, we returned to my home. We were there, we applied the medicine which they had given to me till I became cured. My knee was cured, and the *dyinanga* did not appear to me.

"It happened again one time, that the *dyinanga* again got hold of me. I was very restless. I said to myself: 'I will run into the bush again'. But they (the people) fetched me, they put me in the stocks. When I had been in the stocks for two nights, they let me go. My father (then) came with *nessi* ⁸⁾, he said that I should drink it and rub myself with it.

"Since the *dyinanga* appeared to me, I sat down there, doing nothing, I was not able to do any work. I did not cut palmnuts. I did not do farmwork, I did not do public work ⁹⁾. I was not able to earn money, I could not pay the housetax. I was not able to get it. I was not able to get clothes. Even trousers I was not able to get. They gave them to me. I was not able

4) The account was taken down in vernacular. For our present purpose, however, a translation will be sufficient; the text given here forms a compromise between a literal and a free translation.

5) *Ti ghua nya yama*, lit.: they came out my eyes.

6) Usual abbreviation for District Commissioner.

7) In the weeks preceding the new harvest rice becomes scarce in many families.

8) Medicine prepared by Mohammedan specialists.

9) Every household has at regular times to provide one or more labourers for upkeep of the roads, cleaning of the town, and similar public works.

to do anything. I just sat in that town, doing nothing. And when my father got food, he gave me some of the food.

"In this condition we remained, so that he continued to give the *nessi* which I had to drink, my father, the man whom I have killed. We remained like that till last Friday. We were sitting in the *seme*¹⁰). I saw two *dyinanga* on that very Friday. One of them stood on my right side, the other stood on my left. One wore a golden gown, his head was covered by a cap; the other one (also) wore a golden gown, his head was covered by a cap. This one had a sword in his right hand, the other one had a warknife in his right hand. And they then said that I must kill my father; they said that if I did not kill him, they would kill me. With the knife which they had in their hands, they wounded me. My body hurt badly, I felt it, you see, my flesh itself they wounded.

"I was sitting (with) a cutlass in my hands, pulling the bark off a cane for a mat. The cutlass was in my hands, therefore I stood up now, I wounded father with it while he was sitting in a hammock. There were many people in the town that day on Friday. People did not go out to the farms. Nobody came there to stop me or even to knock me on the head with a stick so that I might have fallen down, and I would not have killed my father. But because the *dyinanga* themselves were wounding me, saying that I should kill father, I continued wounding him. The wounds on father became serious now. People came afterwards. They now tied me, they took me to the chief's town Dyuru. They went to the chief; the chief (however) said: 'I am not able to judge (a case) like this; take him, therefore, to the D.C., he knows to look into it'.

"We came here, we met at this palaver before the D.C. I likewise explained this, I explained it to the D.C. At this palaver I covered my head with my cap, I said that I really did do this to my father; I said: 'I do not know if I will prosper. I will not prosper', I said, 'because my father himself whom I have killed, he used to give me food and clothes, he treated this illness, and', I said, 'in return I did this to him'. I said: 'I don't know if I will prosper again'. I said: 'it would have been better if those who seized me, had killed me at once, and if they had brought here (not only) my father (but also) my dead body'."

2. After the boy had given this account I asked him how the situation in the *seme* had been before the event. He explained:

"I was sitting in a hammock near father, he himself was sitting in his own hammock. I was stripping the bark off a cane to weave a mat which is used to make the seat of a bench. When we were in the *seme*, father and I, two other persons were there. The name of the one is Selu, the name of the other is Seifui. Selu is a young man, Seifui is old. While we were in the *seme* somebody came and called Selu from the *seme*. As soon as he (Selu) went out, the *dyinanga* appeared to me. We and the old man only were there. Everybody was in the town, they were sitting in their own *seme*; everybody was in the town. Selu's house is not far from the *seme*, he came out of the house then, he came, and struck me on this arm, he seized me, he shouted: 'drop (the cutlass)'; then people came."

3. I asked him if there was anybody else in his family who had been afflicted by this illness. He denied this:

"I am the only one who got this illness. Where I got it, I don't know; whether I got it in the river, whether I got it upland, all this I don't know. I only saw them appear to me."

10) Building with open sides, used for native court sessions and other gatherings. In every town and village there are mostly several of such buildings.

The boy added the following details about his family:

"The name of my mother is Dyatu. When she was (still) alive, I was not troubled by anything. This first came over me after her death. I am the only child who was born by my mother, though my father has other children as well. My mother died nine years ago. The present wives of my father are Feimata, Massa and Keima. My brothers and sister (by the same father) are Sayo, Braima, and Maama.

"My father does *mori work*¹¹⁾, we all do. I used to do it, and even now, as we are sitting here, (I could do it). At the time when no *dyinanga* appeared to me, my father made me write the Koran. We all did that, (and) I also had to. But even that was a trouble to me.

"My father treats craziness with medicine, but I am not yet cured of this illness. You asked me if I got this illness through the *mori work*, (but) only God knows that.

"Sayo uses to be near my father (as assistant), he does *mori work*."

About the *dyinanga* who appeared to him and about his dreams the boy stated:

"Their hair was rather long, a cap was on their heads; their hair came out from under the cap, it fell over their foreheads. They were very white. But my eyes did not rest on the dress which they wore, because it (the dress) was very dazzling.

"It is now about five years ago that the *dyinanga* began to appear to me. They appeared in my dreams and in the day-time.

"It once happened in that same town that we were on the road between this town and the next. It happened that I was going along that road. I reached a stream, but I grew afraid there. I met a man in the dark near the place where people wash their clothes. I was not able to pass that way, so I took another way in order to reach the town.

"I dreamt again of them and I saw them again in the day-time. But since father was killed, I have not seen them. Between the time when they appeared before my eyes and I fled into the bush, and when they wounded me, there were three months in which I did not see them. Sometimes they did something violent to me, then they disappeared for a long time, and I did not see them.

"I used to dream of my mother¹²⁾, we sat together and talked. These dreams had no relation to my illness. Already long before I fell ill, I dreamt of my mother. And even during this illness I dream of her. Since the time they brought me here I did not dream of my father nor did I see him in any other way."

Finally, the boy stated that he had not suffered from any other illnesses, and that he had not yet had sexual intercourse with women.

III. REMARKS

A few remarks may be added to this account.

1. In the first place it must be stated that the boy made the impression of genuinely believing in his experiences with the apparitions he described. This impression was not only conveyed to me, but—and this was of greater value in this case—also to my two very reliable native assistants and to others with whom we afterwards had a talk about the story. These assistants, who stood in no relation to the boy, emphatically denied the possibility of his account being made up. The experiences of the boy were in no way at variance with the general body

11) Mohammedan medicine work.

12) Dreams in which the mother appears seem to be frequent among the Mendi.

of doctrine of the Mendi. Though the boy looked rather sad, as was only natural in his circumstances, he was able to give his account in a calm and coherent manner. His speech was simple, and so his mind seemed to be, as far as the relatively short encounter which we had enabled us to judge. The boy made the impression of being unsophisticated, of being neither dull nor exceptionally emotional. There was no attempt in his account to cast any blame on his father; on the contrary, he evidently recognized the goodness his father had shown towards him.

2. My record is incomplete, and my knowledge of the Mendi beliefs about the *dyinanga* not very full either. I regret that circumstances prevented me from continuing the study of these beliefs. This was mainly due to the fact that my anthropological investigations had to be broken off before the end of the planned period, but also to the delicate nature of the subject. It has been a part of my method to rely more on observation and on spontaneously given information than on putting direct questions. It seems to me that this method has its advantages in regard to reliability and accuracy; it has its disadvantages in not being able to provide a synthetic "picture" of a culture in a short time, assuming at least that such could ever form a scientific aim. The procedure followed here means an approach to knowledge in stages, and, at a given point of the investigation, with regard to the different subjects coming within the range of observation, this knowledge can be attained only in different degrees of completeness. Even chance plays an important part in the matter of subjects; thus it was by chance that I came across this special case. If the circumstances referred to above had not prevented my collecting more information it would have been possible to do so, especially in the village where the crime had been committed, about the life and character of the boy, his family, the attitude of the people and similar factors. However, I venture to suggest that even in this incomplete form the record may be of some interest, especially to students of psychology and of comparative religion, because accounts of this kind seem to be relatively rare in the existing literature¹³).

I have not been able to collect any accurate information in regard to the frequency of apparitions of this kind among the Mendi. The opinions of my informants differed on this point. It seems certain, however, that emotional movements, like prophetism or "possession" bearing a definitely social character and for which, for instance, some of the Bantu-tribes are known, do not occur among the Mendi to any considerable degree. My informants had not heard before of a case like this one, ending in murder. In the majority of cases the *dyinanga* would, according to them, compel a person to do harm to himself.

3. My informants agreed in thinking that the *dyinanga* had acted on the boy in order to revenge themselves, because the father, being a medicine-man, had been working against them.

4. How a crime like the one which is recorded here would have been punished according to native law, my informants were not able to say exactly. They thought that perhaps the boy might have been killed immediately, but if this had not been done, and if, therefore, the case should have come to be investigated, the boy would probably have been set free, because, without the slightest doubt, he had acted under the compulsive influence of spirits.

5. In the older psychological and theological literature, and sometimes also in anthropological descriptions, it has been customary to speak of possession in those cases where an evil spirit is supposed to enter a person or where, as has been recorded of many primitive peoples, a spirit speaks through the mouth of a prophet. Though the term has become somewhat anti-

13) „Autodeskriptive Nachrichten über Besessenheitszustände sind dagegen überaus selten“ (T. K. Oesterreich, *Die Besessenheit*, 1921, p. 11).

quoted, it might be useful to consider in how far it could be applied to the case with which we are dealing in the present article.

From the boy's account we know that he had been pursued and attacked by spirits at intervals for a long time. It will also be remembered that on the day when, finally, they compelled him to kill his father, he saw two *dyinanga* near him. He was even able still to describe their appearance. From this it would seem possible to conclude that the spirits did not enter him but that they remained outside him. They, therefore, did not take possession of him in the restricted sense of that term.

The expressions used in order to indicate that a person is affected by spirits, would lead to the same conclusion. Of a person afflicted in this way it is said: *dyinei* (or: *ngafei*) *gbua ngi yama* (lit.: a *dyinei* (*ngafei*) has come out of his eyes); or: *dyinei* (*ngafei*) *ngi gula* (lit.: a *dyinei* (*ngafei*) knocked him down); or: *dyina* (*ngafa nyamui*) *ngi woma* (lit.: a *dyina* (evil *ngafei*) is behind him, is following him). I do not know whether, besides attacking people exteriorly, spirits sometimes also take possession of them. In the two cases which I came across, the evil spirit pursued his victim, who after a prolonged inner struggle finally succumbed and was compelled to do something against his own will.¹⁴

It must, of course, be left to students of abnormal psychology to decide — if, at any rate, our fragmentary material admits of a conclusion — in what group of abnormal phenomena this case would come, and whether a term like "splitting of consciousness", "dissociation", or "hallucination" could be applied here¹⁵).

It may be added that the local medical officer had found the boy to be physically normal. The boy himself refers in his account a few times to "this illness" in regard to the attacks of the spirits.

6. It is interesting to note that not all forms of abnormality are believed to be caused by spirits. On the contrary, only certain definite cases of mental disorder are supposed to be

14) The other case where an ancestral spirit was the pursuing agent is mentioned in my article "The ancestral spirits of the Mendi", in: Internationales Archiv für Ethnographie, Vol. XXXIX, p. 193, 194.

15) The term possession has not yet been entirely abandoned. Oesterreich, for instance, discusses in his book „Die Besessenheit“ (1921) the distinctions made between the terms possession and obsession. He says: „Unter obsessions versteht die französische Psychologie heute alle Zwangszustände überhaupt. Als possession werden zwei besondere Gruppen von Zuständen bezeichnet, der dämonische Somnambulismus sowohl als der Zustand innerer Spaltung, in dem das Individuum den Dämon als zweites Selbst in sich zu erleben meint. Es verdient hervorgehoben zu werden, dass die theologische Psychologie der Neuzeit wie des Mittelalters diese Spaltungsphänomene mit zu den obsessions zählt und nur den voll entwickelten dämonischen Somnambulismus als possession gelten lässt.“ — „Doch muss gesagt werden, dass diese Terminologie nicht immer streng innegehalten worden ist. Je mehr sich der Obsessions-Zustand wenigstens für den Zuschauer der Possession annähert, um so eher wird auch diese Bezeichnung in Anwendung gebracht“ (p. 74, 75). According to this terminology, however, the case with which the present article deals, could not be grouped as possession. We have seen that the spirits in this case acted exteriorly.

The term obsession, on the other hand, would also present difficulties when applied in our case; this term, moreover, does not seem to be precisely defined. Jaspers, for instance, characterizes the „Zwangsideen“ in the following way: „Diese letzteren sind dadurch charakterisiert, dass das Individuum einen meist bedeutungsvollen Inhalt glaubt und doch weiss, dass der Inhalt falsch ist“ (Allgemeine Psychopathologie, Berlin, 1923, p. 68). The latter condition would not apply to the present case either, as the boy did not feel any doubt as regards the reality of the apparitions. McDougall, writing about delusions, says that: "fearful delusions, such as tormenting by devils, appear to be extreme forms of the delusion of persecution" (An Outline of Abnormal Psychology, 1933, p. 337).

due to them. The Mendi distinguish several kinds and degrees of abnormality. In language and in attitude they clearly differentiate, for instance, between dullness and idiocy, between foolishness as a more or less constant quality of mind and an isolated foolish act. These qualities are, as far as I am aware, not commonly attributed to the influence of attacking spirits.

7. The case recorded here cannot be understood simply in cultural, nor only in psychological terms. It is evident that the special form which the supernatural experience receives is derived from the cultural surroundings in which it takes place; it is also clear that one type of culture leaves greater room for supernatural experiences than another type of culture. The belief in spirits forms part of native thought, so that some members of primitive peoples, without necessarily being insane, already for that reason are sooner predisposed to undergo supernatural experiences than members of our own culture. This, however, exhausts the possibility of cultural explanation. The possible existence of some genuine form of insanity has to be taken into account. Moreover, for a right understanding it would be necessary to have a greater knowledge of the specific individual who undergoes the supernatural experiences, and our knowledge in this particular case is too fragmentary. Finally, it need hardly be said that such general psychological terms used in popular literature as fear or fantasy are of little use here.

We are for the present not concerned with the question of the possible reality of supernatural apparitions.

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Note on the editor

Marijke Gijswijt-Hofstra (b. 1940) is emeritus Professor of Social and Cultural History at the University of Amsterdam. She has published on the granting of asylum in the Dutch Republic; deviance and tolerance (16th-20th centuries); witchcraft and cultures of misfortune (16th-20th centuries); the reception of homoeopathy in the Netherlands (19th-20th centuries); women and alternative health care in the Netherlands (20th century); and the history of psychiatry and mental health care in the Netherlands in the 20th century.

Map 2 The north-eastern part of the Mende area

