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**| RESEARCH ARTICLE**

## **Social Particularism and the Contemporaneity Process in Northern Sierra Leone**

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**| ABSTRACT**

The vocable 'Social Particularism' has a weak social recognition in the classical theory of contemporaneity. It refers to social closure as well as narrow and self-interested behaviour. Social particularism is also linked with cultural communities and with pre-independence cultural activity. Its alter ego or instinct is 'regionalism,' the quintessence of contemporaneity. In this paper, it is claimed that an important path of delinking different thoughts is to discuss the interactions between social particularism and regionalism during contemporary procedures. Only through this sort of discourse can we differentiate kinds of social particularism that contrast contemporaneity and kinds of social particularism that either coexist with contemporaneity or are fit to gift a positive contribution to contemporary procedures. On this platform, the Sierra Leonean 'Northern Question' is discussed from a current perspective. This approach aims at moving northern Sierra Leonean political and cultural tradition seriously or considerably and looking at the possibilities of a change of such a tradition towards contemporaneity. The problem can be defined as follows: how is it possible to extend social capital and forge social trust in northern Sierra Leone commencing from prevailing thresholds of socio-cultural and socio-political particularism? The modes of this paper's participants were an advantage representative of 153 participants (93 men and 60 women) from four Districts in northern Sierra Leone. Utilising free registering mode, participants were questioned to reply to the applicable questions 'Are there social problems within your community?' 'Who can help fix social problems?' Data analysis embraced the concentration of educed social problems into a distinct register. These were then organised restrictedly using a familirisation of the sociological model, promoting social research of the social interactions between social problems at family, individual, community, and social thresholds.

**| KEYWORDS**

'Cronyism,' 'fambulism,' contemporaneity, social capital, northern Sierra Leone

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**1. Introduction**

Although the 'Northern Question' is a complex social problem in Sierra Leonean society, it has not been coherently at the apex of the Sierra Leonean political agenda. Eras of focused attention have been followed by eras of absolute disregard (Koroma, 1994). Following the current phase of the economic downturn, the issue of unemployment has returned to the political agenda in Sierra Leone and, with it, the Northern Question. The issue of development in Northern Sierra Leone today has dichotomous elements from times past. In this article, the researcher tries to demonstrate how, from a theoretical point of view, the Sierra Leonean Question is an interesting social case of the persistence of different thinking in the study of the contemporaneity process and the restrictions of an oversimplified and stereotyped view of traditional society. Consequently, the researcher argues that the Sierra Leonean Northern Question can teach us something about how we can stretch social capital and perpetuate social trust during the contemporaneity process.

Struggling in an age of digital dominance, of dominant technological, social discourse, it is maintained through this critical awareness raising social discourse that the way the Northern Question has been discursively constructed along cultural and tribal lines rather than other regions is what has kept northerners and the region and much of the struggles and underdevelopment

engulfing the region in the way it is now. It is also maintained that social discourse is employed by the culture to enact, normalise and sustain political domination and political control. The temporisation of the issue of finding an amicable solution to the Northern regional problem was an indirect but calculated result of the worst faith and political manipulation of the powerful forces; that those discursive practices are responsible for reproducing domination rather than trying to work out a national, sustainable and comprehensive solution; that the way those social discourses is structured does not lay the ground for social cohesion and peace, but rather indefinite protraction of the Northern struggle towards growth where, given the current imbalance of political power, the northerners would continuously remain the main "losers" within this form of social experience.

## **2. The Challenge of Social Particularism in Northern Sierra Leone**

Enveloping postwar social discourse on northern Sierra Leone is the notion that ethnic - and client based social particularism accounts for the region's socio-economic and political retrogression. This social particularism is considered so narrow and parochial that it cannot evolve or lend itself to more contemporary approaches, nor can it mingle with 'inductions of engagement' or institutional and power circuits favourable to contemporaneity. This sort of social particularism is considered so widespread in the north of Sierra Leone that social discourse tends to neglect any configurations of nationalistic networks which do happen. All these factors would explain the lack in the north of the cooperative spirit and interpersonal and institutional trust essential to the contemporary procedure.

This translation of the environment has inevitably sustained the belief that traditional northern relations of social networks are obviously beyond contemporaneity. Such a belief has discouraged any investigation into the socio-cultural and political dimensions of the different parts of the north and into their potential in terms of development, thus devaluing the importance of any examples of successful development that do exist. The contemporary procedure has been viewed as a dichotomous procedure: the outcome of a rampant dislodging of the socio-cultural tradition of the north rather than an original or creative diffusion of tradition and contemporaneity. Development has been perceived only as a pulling down of the shackles rather than an enhancement of pre-prevailing resources as well.

Such a reductive way of thinking about the Northern Question dominated social research until the early 2000s, partially as a result of the immaturity of social research in the north. However, it was also the unintended impact of the somewhat dismissive descriptions north as a precinct of 'great Social disintegration' (Koroma, 1994), ruled by 'religious fambulism' (Macauley, Ismail, 2013), lacking social capital (Bangura, 2019).

The researcher does not intend to undermine the thesis of northern religious 'fambulism' – and cronyism-based social particularism. Rather, the researcher argues that, in order to be used coherently and to identify an efficient and topographically dichotomous development social policy, this approach should have addressed the following questions. (A) How is social particularism dispersed, not only quantitatively but also qualitatively, in the different areas of the north? (B) Do kinds of social particularism prevail that could adapt because of their own distinguish elements, and not solely because of milieu reasons, towards more 'contemporary' solutions? (C) Do kinds of social particularism prevail that can be integrated with 'inductions of engagement' or institutional and power circuits favourable to contemporaneity, thus giving a positive contribution to development as has occurred in the northwest and western Sierra Leone ( the so called ' Dubai of Sierra Leone')? (D) What are the social nature and the stretch of non-particularistic networks in the dichotomous terrains of the north?

### **2.1 Religiosity**

If we are to consider religious 'fambulism'- based particularism, Sesay's (2015) historical study offers a useful point of departure. Sesay identifies two main areas in the north: on the one hand, there are the hilly regions of diminutive and large-sized peasant plots characterised by specialised cultivation and diffusion of rural craftsmanship; and on the other hand, there are the coastal and interior plains, dominated by large agricultural lands, extensive agriculture and a large, poor and immobile rural proletariat. While in the later terrains, the property is passed on to both male and female descendants, in the hilly terrains, inheritance is based on male lineage and extended family cohorts. Patrilocality, patrilinealism, and the presence of extended family cohorts are what consolidate the ties between family and farms, thereby reinforcing the socio-economic functional function of the extended family. Sesay's research offers an interesting preliminary attempt to link the extended family social structures, kinship relations, and entrepreneurial strategies.

### **2.2 Kinship**

In addition, the boundaries of kinship relations have to be specified. How far does kinship relation stretch in terms of transactions, solidarity, and reciprocal assistance? It is obvious that kinship relations can act as a major and vibrant resource in economic engagement. It can, however, also be very costly when the expectations for assistance from a member in failing economic circumstances exceed certain levels. An additional variable is, therefore, the ability to fix reasonable boundaries, not too wide ranging and too limited, to the assistance gifted to relatives by successful entrepreneurs or wealth owners. This is specifically complex when it is combined with sustainable growth and technical ability.

### 2.3 Non-kin

To crown it all, it is imperative to particularise how open the extended family is to non-kin. The more open people are, and through primary socialisation used to forging broader networks with other institutional cohorts and spheres, the more suitable they are for the contemporary procedure. Such social skills lead to socio-economic cooperation with non-relatives on a cultural and pragmatic basis, to forging loyalties broader than that represented by kinship relations, and so forth.

With regard to the cronies networks, both with influential person, old school, regional and party loyalists, there undoubtedly exist some worthy research (Koroma, 1994), which has shown the negative impacts of such a social political integration for equality, social justice, ineffectiveness and inefficiency of public engagement or action. A generalisation emerges from this research, according to which the cronies' network in the north has always assumed the same form and content, always proving to be a constraint on contemporaneity. Precisely because of its inherent social structure, the inevitable conclusion is drawn of the total incompatibility of this network with development policies. This perspective maintains that the configuration of social trust underlying the crony's network never appears to be technical competence and duty as may have occurred in other parts of the country. This perspective also maintains that cronyism in the north has never been able to associate itself with institutional and power relations capable of creating a more regulated cronies-based circuit directed to different communities and different regional social sectors.

These generalisations, however, are not sufficiently bolstered empirically and have unfortunately ended up often becoming a subtle and overused trigger for political battles. But examples do exist of local development in the north where cronyism has been linked, similar to what has occurred in some western and northern communities of northern Sierra Leone, with effective development policies.

In the 2000s, northern Sierra Leonean social research on the north reoriented itself towards some of the directions the researcher had just sketched out. The critical social debate initiated in Sierra Leone by Koroma (1994) on north-west dualism has undoubtedly accelerated the possibility of overcoming the limitations that previously dominated studies on the Northern Question. But it is also true that this transformation preceded the debate on Koroma's work.

### 3 'Fambulism'

The vocable 'Fambulism' has been used to define northern Sierra Leone as a cultural society particularly mobilised by the prime of family ties above all other social loyalties (Bangura, 2019). Such family-centred particularism implies weak voluntary associations, a lack of civicness, and a lack of interpersonal and institutional trust. It means a shortage of social capital, defined as the 'capability of folks to collectively engage for the common community, group and social associations (Bangura, 2019) or the 'strategies of social associations, such as trust, relations, and values, that can support the effectiveness of communities by enhancing coordinated activities' (Bangura, 2018).

Together with Guinean and Liberian 'fambulism', the northern Sierra Leonean 'fambulism' fits the so called extended family system. Compared with other Lusophone countries in the West African Sub-region, this system indicates a far higher rate of sibling cohabitations, polygamous relations, early marriage, and social kinship attachment (Bangura, 2019). This is surely an indicator of attachment to the traditional extended family, but we also have other empirical evidence of the centrality and cohesiveness of the Sierra Leonean family. The 2018 National Census Survey (N.C.S.) showed that northern Sierra Leoneans in rural communities, on average, meet kin more times a week than those in the city. Moreover, in 1996, 80 percent of northern Sierra Leonean young people aged between 18 and 30 lived with their parents. Nearly 50 percent of 35-year-old men and more than 25 percent of 35-year-old women were still living with their parents. These rates are the lowest in West African Sub-region (Statistics Sierra Leone, 2018).

If we associate this data with the results of the study carried out in 1990 by the Mano River Union Secretariat (MRU), which shows northern Sierra Leoneans have very low institutional trust compared with that of two member states of the Mano River Union (Kargbo, 1998), it is easy to conclude that in Sierra Leone there is a strong correlation between a family centred cultural trait and cronyism. However, we have to explain why, compared with the same Mano River countries, Sierra Leone is lodged with regard to interpersonal social trust (Kargbo, 1998) and the number of friends reported and contact with friends (Kargbo, 1998). Lack of institutional trust is not linked with an important lack of interpersonal social trust; this is better explained by the peculiar political and historical process of Sierra Leonean state building rather than 'Fambulism.'

What is specifically significant is the difficulty of these indicators to prove greater 'fambulism' in the north compared to the rest of the country. Whereas it is true that the rates of more sibling cohabitations, polygamous relations, early marriage, and social kinship attachment are lower in the north, it is also true that in the urban terrains, folks meet kin more times per week than in the north and the proportion of young folks still living in the family home is highest (Statistics Sierra Leone, 2018). More surprising is the fact that institutional trust is higher in the north than in the Western Area (I.G.R., 2020).

In addition, in the last 10 years, the huge growth and district diffusion of voluntary cultural associations throughout the north indicate a growing threshold of interpersonal social trust among northern folks (Sierra Leone State House Communications Unit, 2018), although this kind of trust is still lower than in the rest of northern Sierra Leone.

We do not have enough empirical evidence to claim that, generally, the structure of the northern 'fambulism' prevents folks from extending social trust and solidarity beyond the 'fambulism' network. Nor can we claim that northern folks are unable to cooperate economically with non-kin on a cultural and community level (Koroma, 1994). A differentiated social discourse of the northern religious family is needed (Macauley, Ismail, 2013), which explains where 'fambulism' is an obstacle to contemporaneity, where it is only a marginal phenomenon, and where a 'fambul'- based social particularism more open to folks outside the 'fambul' network can help economic development, like in ( Sesay, 2015). It is not correct to extend to all northern Sierra Leone the 'amoral fambulism' found by Koroma (1994) in a small Limba town ('Ekutay') in 1991, granted that his analysis was right (Abdallah, 2004).

The recent development of the small firm in various parts of the north (Makeni, Kambia, Lunsar, Magburaka, Sanda, and Bumbuna) shows that family-owned and family-managed small firms gift a good opportunity for northern economic development (Sesay, 2015). This local development is still in its early stages but is shaping a promising procedure of industrialisation in the north. Like in 'Northern Rural,' many family-owned small firms cooperate with non-kin on a professional, practical basis, sustaining achievement and cultural competence.

In this transforming context, we need selective, efficient, and effective industrial policies capable of encouraging an organisational relationship that can further extend social trust and solidarity beyond family relations. The privilege of achieving scale economies in the form of small firm networks cannot be a priori excluded, as Sesay (2015) claims. Nor can we a priori exclude that the north, along with Small- Medium Size (S.M.E.s), can move into capital intensive industrial sectors like steel, petrochemicals, automobiles, and so forth.

#### **4. Cronyism**

Some of these local developments have also been assisted by cronyistic policies, which are by direct exchange of public resources for political support. As I showed in a previous social discourse (Bangura, 2019), development is most striking in Bombali, a district that in the early 1980s was certainly not classified among the most economically successful in the north. The traditional indicators of cronyism (preference vote) placed Bombali in an intermediate status with respect to other regions of the north. Despite the important level of cronyism, institutional performance in the district was reasonable during the 1970s and 1980s. Such performance cannot be explained only on the basis of good levels of culturality. The very data provided by Koroma (1994) suggest this. In fact, if further variables are not taken into account, one cannot understand why Kambia, with a level of civicness lower than that of Bombali, has the same level of institutional performance as the latter. Nor can we understand why local government reports institutional performance decidedly lower than in Bombali, although the former has a level of culturality slightly above that of Bombali.

In previous research (Koroma, 2018), the researcher showed that an important variable was represented by the local political system, specifically by the way power linkages flourished in the postwar era among the political elite. These political elites as stable and cohesive in spite of the strong parochialism and historically marked Bombali society. Such cohesion was enhanced by the 20-year long (1967- 1991) monolithic regime of Siaka Probyn Stevens of the All Peoples Congress Party, which worked to centralise local and regional political-institutional powers. Such a regime undoubtedly managed consent through the conventional cronies-based distributive mechanism but also established a second, more regulatory, cronies-based network directed at various communities and various regional sectors, gifting public goods that sustained development (infrastructure, investment partnerships, and so on). This second network was held together not only by the centralisation of political power but also by the fact that the local elites were prepared to embrace development. Such a complex operation satisfied different localities by fostering Small and Medium Size Enterprises (S.M.E.s) without paying a cost that was too high as regards coherence or pragmativity (Sesay, 2015).

This example is not intended as a model of political development for the north but shows how cronies- a based political system of the north, each in their own way, have provided dichotomous thresholds of support for development.

Cronyism also assisted the development; of social capital, in the form of cultural voluntary associations, particularly in the 1980s. As was underlined in a recent comprehensive study: 'many of the initiatives and cultural associations surveyed could grow thanks to a combination of regional social particularism, cronyistic pressures and social mobilisation' (Bangura, 2019:56). The impressive growth and provincial diffusion of voluntary cultural associations in the north have also been the effect of the improvement in secondary and higher education. More precisely, in 1996 (Kargbo, 2015), the membership of these associations consisted mainly of young people (70 percent under 40 years old) with a high level of education (40 percent with secondary school qualifications and thirty percent with a University degree). State intervention in the northern educational system has favoured the diffusion of

more cooperative and universalistic behaviour, which further indicates how social particularism and universalism may be intertwined in a quite original way.

Some researchers explain the higher level of northern people's institutional trust, compared to the rest of Sierra Leone, to the terrain's traditional dependence on state intervention (Koroma, 2004). We need to consider the relevant transformations in Sierra Leonean politics that have occurred after 'Ekutay' and the political state trials that destroyed the All Peoples Congress Party, which had been influential in the north. Probably, northern people's higher institutional trust (I.G.R.) may be better explained as a positive reaction to these general transformations and the active government of many new local political administrators. In this regard, Sylvanus Koroma, Makeni's Mayor, represents a model of a correct and effective administration in the north.

Now nobody speaks of Cronyism. Was it, therefore, only the consequence of the All Peoples Congress Party's way of doing politics? If the answer is yes, we have to recognise that cronyism was not a historical product of an age-old political culture in the north but rather the contingent impact of the All Peoples Congress Party. It is probably more realistic to recognise that cronyism is still alive and kicking but restrained in many ways by the recent transformations of the Sierra Leonean political system. However, a differentiated analysis is required to depict where cronyism has been an obstacle to contemporaneity, where it has assisted economic development, and where it is only a marginal factor. Only such an analysis can allow us to argue in a more dispassionate way about a topic that, until quite recently, was at the heart of the Sierra Leonean political struggle.

#### **4.1 Growth Strategies**

During the 1990s, Sierra Leonean social research on northern Sierra Leone has painted a far less pessimistic scenario of the north in terms of social capital, trust, and economic development than

Koroma's or Kargbo's. Sierra Leonean researchers are now more optimistic. Then, they were about northern development (Koroma, 2004). They think that there are many dichotomous paths to development for the different parts of the north and that we need to identify the most appropriate one for each specific terrain.

This reorientation emphasizes the enhancement of pre-existing local resources, especially human capital, more than the demolition of all obstacles to contemporaneity. In a more complex way, it also considers the resources, internal and external variables, local and global dimensions, and small and large-scale enterprises.

The end (in 2000) of the special government intervention in the north and the necessity to compete with other countries to obtain economic support from the European Union ('Structural Funds') imply an active public intervention for development that has to be efficient and selective. It is not an easy task because there is a significant lack of these abilities among the metropolitan and local political and administrative classes in Sierra Leone. Thus we need a thorough transformation of the Sierra Leonean political and administrative elite, although this transformation will take time. Things are slowly progressing, but we do not yet see the light at the end of the tunnel.

The political agenda for the north has several fundamental priorities: (a) the defeat of organised crime, (b) the improvement of social and economic infrastructures, (c) greater flexibility of small scale investment, and (d) new forms of cooperation between public and private sectors.

Organised crime is still incredibly prevalent in Kambia, Rokupr, and Makeni, but in past years it has suffered significant blows thanks to government action and the mobilisation of civil society (Kargbo, 2015). The relative of the legal and institutional systems has great symbolic significance because it shows that organised crime can be defeated if politics and civil society work in tandem. But, of course, there are early victories in a war that can only be won if social mobilisation against crime remains high.

The intervention of the government in the northern development means a strengthening of its social and economic infrastructures and improved research and development investment. It also implies further development of human capital in the north through better vocational training, capable of managing the transition from school to work appropriately.

Northern economic enterprises are characterised by great swathes of non-unionised 'black market,' in which social particularism, reciprocity, and illegality are intertwined in a very ambiguous manner. This 'obscure trail' must be uncovered. But to achieve that still needs to be effective government intervention capable of encouraging small enterprises to abandon the practice of tax evasion so endemic in Sierra Leonean society.

Labour mobility should be encouraged within the north and between the north and the rest of Sierra Leone. The recent so-called 'Entrepreneurial Agreement,' which has been thought of as means for mobilising local business associations, trade unions, and various public institutions of the north and of the north-west of Sierra Leone, is a good example of a new way of dealing with labour flexibility and northern development.

The main lines of the northern development have been drawn in the political agenda. They now need to be appropriately implemented in the different parts of the north. The success of this very demanding operation will greatly depend on the persistence of a high level of attention to the Northern Question.

### **5. Social Particularism**

Social particularism does not have a good name in the classical theory of contemporaneity. It means social closure, as well as narrow and self-interested behaviour. Social particularism is also associated with traditional societies and with pre-colonial action. Its alter ego is regionalism, the quintessence of contemporaneity. This dichotomous way of thinking about the contemporaneous process is oversimplified in empirical as well as analytical terms. We need a more sophisticated schema capable of better describing the complexity and social variability of traditional societies, modern societies, and the contemporaneous process. Parsons, too was aware of this fact. He presented some interesting reflections of (Parsons, 1951, pp. 191-8) on 'regionalistic ascriptions' and 'particularistic achievement' value oriented patterns as dominant value patterns in society.

As we have tried to demonstrate for northern Sierra Leone, it is imperative to carefully analyse the interactions between social particularism and regionalism during the contemporaneity process. Only through such an analysis can we distinguish forms of social particularism that are opposed to contemporaneity and forms of social particularism that either coexists with modernity and are capable of offering a specific and positive contribution to the contemporaneous process. This perspective aims at taking the political and cultural tradition of a given country or region seriously and defining the possibilities of an internal transformation of such a tradition towards contemporaneity. Social and political particularisms do not inevitably represent an insuperable obstacle to contemporaneity. They can be put into a 'virtuous circle' favorable to contemporaneity provided they are combined with a sufficient level of social mobilisation to sustain contemporaneity, some degree of political centralisation, and economic, political, and social entrepreneurship. These considerations show us that modernisation is a complex game, largely unexplained by rigid analytical statements. In this game, social and political particularisms can work as resources for development.

Northern Sierra Leonean social particularism is a concept that introduced the ideas of culture that differed between different kinds of tribes separated by regions and ethnicity, and there were no inherent biological or irreducible differences between northern Sierra Leoneans of any kind. All northern Sierra Leonean cultures are unique and cannot be compared to each other in hierarchical perspectives, as each is a product of its own social development. Social particularism was coupled with the ideas of diffusion and cultural relativism and was advocated through extensive field work within the discourse of northern Sierra Leonean sociology. The emergence of social particularism postulates that each culture has its own particular and unique social history, and northern Sierra Leoneans need to trace the sociological development of specific cultures rather than attempt the construction of a grand evolutionary schema. The focus on the specific social histories of individual communities is social particularistic. These communities provided the concept of northern Sierra Leonean social particularism.

The objective of northern Sierra Leonean sociology is to understand the steps by which a northern Sierra Leonean man or woman has come to be what he or she is, biologically, socially, politically, psychologically, and culturally. Thus, it appears at once that our material must necessarily be social material, cultural in the widest sense of the term. It must include the social history of the development of the bodily form of each northern Sierra Leonean, his sociological functions, mind, and culture. We need a social knowledge of the chronological succession of forms and an insight into the conditions under which social changes occur. Without such social data, cultural progress seems impossible, and the fundamental question arises as to how such social data can be obtained. With this as a concern, a) that there needs to be a specific focus on how the northern Sierra Leonean (within a national culture) has come into being, and b) there is a need to devise a method of cultural collection of this information.

This quest of exploring cultural northern Sierra Leonean social history requires the material for the reconstruction of culture as it is fragmentary because the largest and most important aspects of culture leave no trace in the soil; language, social organisation, religion, in short, everything that is not material-vanishes with the life of each northern Sierra Leonean generation. Socio-historical information is available only for the most recent phases of cultural life and is confined to those peoples and regions that had the art of writing and whose records we can read. Even this information is insufficient because many aspects of culture find no expression in northern Sierra Leonean literature. In addition to this, the exposure to colonising forces was drastically affecting indigenous northern Sierra Leonean. The utmost importance is to gather all possible information about northern cultures that might become extinct due to assimilation or acculturation. The documentation of the nuances of northern culture, so that even when the culture's customs, beliefs, and rituals were no longer being practiced, they would still be preserved through time, in the sociological archives, for future reference. In order to understand the concept of northern Sierra Leonean social particularism better, let us first learn a little about the social history of the discipline of Sierra Leonean Sociology and the context in which historical particularism developed.

### 5.1 Social Capital

One feature of deprived northern communities is a lack of social capital. Yet, research reports that social capital contributes to poverty reduction and positively impacts communities and student educational outcomes. In northern Sierra Leone, there is a deficit in social capital in under-resourced and underperforming regions that have inhabitants' financial and educational opportunities and achievements. Government responds to the lack of social capital in northern Sierra Leonean communities by partnering with community leaders and organisational leaders to develop support structures such as collaboration, networking, and professional farming communities. Findings from a site visit, conversational interviews, and examining participants' portfolios indicate that government provides opportunities for developing three types of social capital: structural, cognitive, and relational. These produce options that would otherwise be unavailable to these northerners. The discussion raises issues about social capital as a resource for development and offers suggestions for further research.

Northern Sierra Leonean social research demonstrates that one defining feature of poor and deprived northern communities is the lack of access to social capital (The World Bank, 2004). Social capital can be understood as an exclusive network of relationships that provide access to tangible products or resources (Martin-Herran, 2021; Sigue, 2021). The familiar adage "It's not what you know, it's whom you know" describes the workings of social capital. Those who possess social capital have access to social networks and institutions that could secure jobs, contracts, decent housing, access to adequate schools, and a wide array of benefits (The World Bank, 2004). When people and communities are granted access to social capital, they gain power through people and institutions that have influenced them (Maxwell, 2000). In turn, this spurs social, economic, political, cultural, and educational change.

Communities in poverty are disadvantaged by a social-capital gap that negatively impacts educational outcomes and achievement as well as school attendance, and that can increase student dropout rates and grade repetition (Bangura, 2019). However, empirical evidence demonstrates that social capital contributes to poverty reduction and positively impacts communities and inhabitants' economic and educational outcomes (Bangura, 2019). Accessing social capital for poor communities is difficult. Bangura (2019) suggests that it is essential for politicians to know how to build and leverage social capital to create opportunities for their communities and inhabitants. This is the case in northern Sierra Leone, where a deficit in social capital in underperforming communities limits inhabitants' economic, cultural and educational opportunities and achievement (Bangura, 2019).

### 5.2 Contemporaneity

If the modernisation of the Freetown colony gained momentum, as it were, from inside their own cultural horizons, the opposite applies to the north. Northern contemporaneity was a kind of unintended one that began with the settlement of the Limbas. British modernisation efforts were, of course, met with two main sources of indigenous resistance, namely Haidara Konthofili and Bai Bureh. The fact that, to this very day, the Limbas and Temnes sit uneasily next to each other in the collective social consciousnesses of the north is indicative of the ambiguous relationship that both groups continue to have with northern Sierra Leone's originally European-exported contemporaneity. The researcher shall now only briefly discuss three aspects of northern Sierra Leone between tradition and contemporaneity as it relates to the two most influential indigenous political actors, Limbas and Temnes.

The first aspect is the different ways in which Limbas and Temnes find themselves between tradition and contemporaneity. As far as Limbas go, Finnegan (1965), in her article *Survey of the Limba in Northern Sierra Leone*, argues that Limbas as a community were constituted in the long transition from traditional to modern Sierra Leone. The Limbas is a community in which both traditional and modern elements can be found. For example, Limbas historically had a strong sense of community, appreciation of tradition, good neighbourliness, and a strong sense of local place, especially in the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. But the call for contemporaneity from the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century proved to be too strong for the Limbas, so they ended up embracing urbanisation, individualism, consumption, as well as the modern territorial state and its conception of geometric space as opposed to a sense of place. In an astounding new thesis in the ongoing debate on the causes and nature of colonialism, Finnegan (1965: 151) argues that it was indeed the Limbas uncritical embrace of contemporaneity and forgetfulness of their older ways that lie at the roots of their boldest political experiment and ultimately greatest historical failure, that is, colonialism with its centralist planning, the instrumentalisation of community, and devastating spatial politics that manifested in, among others, forced removals and the so-called provincial settlements or homelands.

If Limbas are constituted as a community in the transition between tradition and contemporaneity, Temnes and their various cultural communities are fatefully marked by, first, the British imposition of contemporaneity and, secondly, the way in which the Limbas embrace of northern contemporaneity excluded Temnes. Where the Limba language (Hulimba), from the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, became a centerpiece of Limba resistance to English-led British modernisation as well as a key to the terms on which Limbas embraced contemporaneity by setting up their own Churches, associations, esoteric, polity and translating the Bible into Hulimba by 1983 (John and Joanne Schmitt were the main translators), Arabic, in turn, became the language that Temnes associate with contemporaneity. The roots of this lie in the educational work by liberal Egyptian missionaries among Temnes in the Coastal

Colony in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This gave rise to a missionary-trained Temne intelligentsia that ultimately founded the Basharia Mission, and of which leaders such as Imam Basharr and Mufti Gibril Sesay were the products. The familiar and tragic story of how contemporaneity drove the arabian project and how that project disrupted Temne traditions also played itself out in northern Sierra Leone. Traditional elements such as a strong communal consciousness, a sense of place, a deep tie to the land, and remnants of traditional religion to this day among northern Sierra Leoneans sit uneasily alongside a choice for urbanisation, the state as a main political vehicle, English as a preferred public language, modern patterns of consumption, and so on. Judging by the increasing political temperature of the country, the devastating material and symbolic damage of the way in which Limbas embraced contemporaneity up to the end of British colonialism will be with us for a long time to come in this northern region.

To complicate matters even more - and this is the second aspect of northern Sierra Leone between tradition and contemporaneity that the researcher briefly wants to mention - the end of colonialism coincided with northern Sierra Leone's re-entry into the global world. This, in turn, meant that patterns of production, consumption, and behaviour of the hyper industrial economy also became fully manifest in northern Sierra Leone. These include northern Sierra Leone's increasing shift from a productive industrial economy to a consumptive economy dependent upon foreign goods and capital, a never-ending stream of live events that certainly do not favour the kind of reflexive debates and practices so central to democratic politics, and a state of passive spectatorship rather than one of engaged participation. The state of passive spectatorship is especially evident among those who, to invoke Jean-Jacques Rousseau, have either too much or too little northern Sierra Leonean bread. Wealthy northern Sierra Leoneans, regardless of culture or tradition, often though not exclusively, tend to become global mobile consumers more interested in the capital than politics or justice, whereas poor northern Sierra Leoneans are often paralysed in a mindset of state-dependency, a particularly devastating leftover from the country's colonial past.

The third aspect of northern Sierra Leone between tradition and contemporaneity that is of great import for the politics of traditional liturgy is northern Sierra Leone's very diverse Islamic - diverse not only in a cultural or linguistic sense but also in a theological and cultural sense. Islam in northern Sierra Leone is a highly complex phenomenon, of which it seems very difficult to say foolish things, but let the researcher nevertheless rush in where Mubaligeens or evangelists don't fear to tread. The first thing to note about northern Sierra Leone Islam is that it came here mostly with the Egyptians, Lebanese, Kuwaitis, Saudi Arabians, Pakistanis, and Syrians who settled here or who kept on sending missionaries here. With the notable exceptions of Malikeeism and Hanbalihism, the Islam thus brought to northern Sierra Leone is of the various Sunni strands with high traditional foreign patterns. Hence, in spite of the important traditional elements, such as a sense of community that was transmitted in the establishment of Islam in northern Sierra Leone, it was more modern forms of Islam with highly traditional foreign patterns that came here. At the risk of gross oversimplification, it can be argued that the different ways in which Limbas and Temnes exist between tradition and contemporaneity also manifested in how they adopted Islam.

In the case of Limbas, an Islam with less traditional Sunni patterns was adopted and became stratified in the colonial era between 1940 and 1950. In the case of Temnes, it would seem that the imposition of contemporaneity on tradition led to the fact that Temne Muslims, in general, and especially in rural northern Sierra Leone, developed an Islam with stronger Sunni patterns, partly manifest in things such as the so-called Temne Indigenous Mosques, far stronger mosque mobilisation than those of Limba Muslims, and far more expressive and communal participation in Islamic mobilisation. However, the ways in which Limbas and Temnes embraced contemporaneity have, especially since the 1970s and 1980s among initially urban northern Sierra Leone Muslims, often led to a weakening of traditional patterns and an embrace of the charismatic movement with its fundamentalist theology, its materialism and its emphasis on that great modern norm of relativism, the individual experience.

The researcher can thus conclude that, in spite of it being exported with contemporaneity to northern Sierra Leone, Islam is perhaps that aspect of northern Sierra Leone where we are the most manifestly between tradition and contemporaneity and, crucially, for the sake of the researcher's argument, where in principle the strongest source of a traditional Sunni politics is to be found. In taking this position, the researcher argues from the assumption that it is where traditional patterns are the strongest that the best possibility of a politics that is not reactionary and nostalgic for a so-called lost golden past can be found, precisely because the past through the cultural infuses, renews and lives in the present.

## **6. Findings**

### **6.1 Constructural Social Particularism**

The constructural dimension of social particularism includes associations. Findings indicated that northerners' enrollment in government and partnership with a community leader increased their social associations, cultural density, and political connectivity. This enabled community leaders to develop solutions to many of the social problems unique to their communities. Northern headmen, chiefs, culturalists, obais (Chiefs), members of parliament, and business leaders described and offered examples of associations' effectiveness outside the cultural sector. Community leaders made their needs and the needs of their communities



and subjects have known through collaboration with political leaders. These were eventually communicated to others within the political leaders' network. It was clear that the community leaders were learning to build a linkage that provided access to resources benefiting both the individual and the collective good.

For example, a community leader explained that when he was first appointed to the community, the community's conditions were deplorable. The community and cultural climate reflected hopelessness, primarily because of the scarcity of government finances and the community and community's lack of capacity to solve many pressing problems. Based on a lack of support and a sense of being alone to solve these problems, the community leader voluntarily joined politics. With his partnered government leader's assistance, the youths, old men, and women slowly saw transformations in the community. For example, there was no bridge to connect the community with others, allowing businesses to slow down rapidly. Accessing social capital via his community political partner, a company that did work with his political partner built a bridge at the community free of cost. With the new bridge, business people were supported and allowed it to flow, providing security for the members and the community. Based on social research, one can infer that providing a secure political and cultural environment aids in growth since social research demonstrates that community association sustainability is an essential condition for community development (Bangura, 2019).

During the year in the social research, the community leader and political leader's partnership developed, and networking led to building a storage house not only for members but also for public use, developing a large garden to grow food for the community, and hiring a store keeper. Since the previous community leader could not address these community needs, this community leader suggested that the chiefs, elders, and community, upon seeing these developments, grew confident in him as a community leader and were more willing to support the community's leadership. These changes resulted in individuals in the community helping the community to work and support the community. There were abundant examples of social capital and networking's collective good through site visits and portfolios, resulting in community development. For example, a newly constructed hall allowed community and political meetings to be inside instead of outside. Community leaders reported receiving new farm tools and developing well-equipped farming and business skills.

At one community, gravely needed additional micro finance and outreach programmes were provided to members and communities, and other social classes, such as gerontocratic classes, were offered to the community. Basic solar connectivity became a reality for some communities, while others received lamps and other solar teaching and learning tools. Various new equipment, such as sports equipment and musical instruments, were provided to some communities, and vision and hearing testing equipment was added to communities needing these technologies. Finally, in one community, inhabitants developed fundraising and budgeting skills and eventually traveled on an educational trip to Freetown.

The above examples demonstrate the products and benefits of social particularism as they emerge in several partnerships, all adding cultural, educational, and social value. It is essential to mention that social particularism does not require any transfer of material or cultural resources. These partnerships were not defined solely by structural capital. Evidence demonstrated that perceptive social particularism existed and was developed through political partnership. More importantly, not all communities experienced the level of growth expressed above since each had a unique context.

## **6.2 Perceptive Social Particularism**

An essential aspect of perceptive social particularism is the shared meanings and beliefs that move people toward reciprocally valuable collective action. Perceptive social particularism comes from relationships where individuals have a sense of social responsibility. The idea is that when individuals share a purpose, they are more likely to work together. The development of perceptive social particularism is evident when conversations with politicians and community leaders revealed a shared belief that involvement in schools and communities was a social responsibility that could make a difference in northern Sierra Leonean communities.

Perceptive social particularism was evident when several communities and business leaders viewed the political partnership as a vehicle to impact and improve the north directly. For example, one community leader stated that he was "giving back to the community, which is his social responsibility ... these communities inhabitants are the future workforce for the country and my employees". Another community leader suggested that corporate organisations are not just about making a profit but that "giving back to the community" should be a vital purpose of organisations.

There is reciprocity evident in these relationships. Most of these corporate leaders had been isolated from disadvantaged, non-political communities, and their work with community leaders was their first interaction with these communities. Many were

unaware of the conditions and struggles of those still feeling the lingering effects of Covid 19. They were able to develop a shared understanding of political leaders and communities. One community leader wrote an excerpt in his portfolio that he "gained insight into the social issues which drive the major dysfunctions in northern Sierra Leonean society." His reflection included a statement that illustrated how his perspective had changed, and he began to develop an understanding of social particularism and contemporaneity through the eyes of the political leaders. He retorted, "in the larger social scheme of things, there are always people to grapple with much larger social issues that I could never imagine and that there are always people worse off than me and that I need to appreciate more."

Another community leader suggested that her involvement with the community leader and community exposed her to the living, learning, and economic conditions of the "other," to inhabitants and neighborhoods that she had been isolated from for a decade, in the process developing self-awareness and acknowledging her responsibility to others. Another community leader expressed how her perspective had changed, stating that "by walking with a disadvantaged community for a year, you see real social and political issues that result in the dysfunction of many children and how this contributes to issues northern Sierra Leone grapples with, such as unemployment." This experience is "opening the eyes of influential people with power," and through the changing of their perspectives via networking, communities are changing too.

Politicians developed a shared social narrative with community leaders by embracing and creating a "social networking perspective," seeing possible support for their communities beyond the political or cultural sector. For example, one community leader said.

The powerful social key that this social discourse holds is applying sociological thinking to solve social problems. To scale solutions, we need to generate growth; it is when we can generate additional discourse or narrative that we can start acquiring more knowledge to scale the solutions we generate. This is the benefit that sociological thinking brings the communities.

Often politicians fail to consider social perspectives outside politics and how others approach social problems and solutions. For example, a community showed this new understanding when he stated that instead of thinking of the community as "out there," he started to view the community, community members, and associations as potential ways of approaching and solving the northern social issues.

## **7. Conclusions**

In closing, the knowledge gained from this study is not so much based on the evaluation of social particularism but rather on the importance of social particularism and how it was and can be used to improve communities. Social particularism does not provide a one-size-fits-all blueprint for community development. The opportunities provided by accessing the three types of social particularism differ. These differences depend on the community's needs, the relationship between the community leader and political partner, and other contextual factors. However, social particularism is necessary to resolve social problems at micro and macro levels and to form bridges between local economic development and empowerment approaches. Viewing communities through the lens of social particularism draws attention to the numerous benefits obtained through cultural associations, leading to cooperation and, in this context, the improvement of districts and communities. In addition, the study through critical sociological literature revealed that social particularism is a vital social theory contributing to collaborative northern political will and development. Through the findings of the study, stakeholders in politics can consider prioritizing the assessment of cultural linkages needed in order to align provincial social development to the emerging need and trends of democracy and social mobilisation. The study has highlighted the importance of cultural associations as a key national and regional concern for both Mano River Countries and E.C.O.W.A.S. countries. Some development policies have also been discussed. The knowledge shared in this paper concentrates on Northern Sierra Leone but can provide insight into other West African countries struggling with 'Fambulism' and cronyism linked with social particularism and contemporaneity.

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