

just like it had fragmented them in the more distant past.

G. R. Cole: *The Krio of West Africa. Islam, Culture, Creolization, and Colonialism in the Nineteenth Century*. Athens: Ohio University Press 2013, 272 S.

Reviewed by
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The Krio are the descendants of liberated slaves of diverse backgrounds who settled in Sierra Leone from the late 18th century onwards. Gibril R. Cole's major objective is to foreground the role of Islam in the formation of Krio society in the 19th century. The Muslim Krio have taken a backseat in much of Sierra Leone's historiography, which largely described Krio society as a relatively homogeneous group characterized by Christian values and an English worldview. Contrary to this widely (yet not unanimously) accepted view, Cole explores the heterogeneity of Krio society that included many who were neither Christians nor followers of Victorian values. He focuses on Islam in the construction of Krio society and the emergence of Krio identity, thereby shedding new light on processes of creolization in (and beyond) the region more generally and putting the assumed dominance of European-ness and Christianity among the Krio into a more specific perspective. Cole argues that "African Muslims played

a crucial role in the evolution of Krio society, which included vital contributions to the social, economic, and political landscapes of nineteenth-century Sierra Leone and West Africa" (p. 2). Cole "rejects the assumptions that Christianity and Europeanization were prerequisites for inclusion in a society that evolved out of the multifarious groups of Africans resettled in the Sierra Leone Peninsula" (p. 2). He shows that the relationships between the different groups of liberated Africans and local populations were more complex than hitherto anticipated and that the identity that evolved among them incorporated and integrated dimensions of various ethnic backgrounds. Hence, Krio society has always been multi-faceted and complex, rather than centered on European-ness and Christianity as its core characteristics. Krio identity, Cole claims, did not primarily build on a heritage of enslavement and emancipation, but on a heritage of multi-ethnic interaction and integration.

The book consists of six chapters plus an introduction and a postscript. In his introduction to the book, Cole explains the objectives of his book and reflects upon (some of) the achievements and (many of the) shortcomings (see previous paragraph) of previous scholarship concerning the study of Krio society. In the first chapter, Cole deals with the different processes of creolization (and Kriolization) in the 19th century that led to the emergence of Krio society as the result of ethnic interaction and mixture. The second chapter deals with the liberated Africans who settled in Sierra Leone after having been freed from slave ships bound for the Americas and with the spread of Islam among them. Cole shows how European officials

and missionaries alike disapproved of the increased number of Muslim settlers, interpreting it as threatening their political interests and civilizing mission. The spread of Islam among the settlers was rejected as a form of local resistance against colonial superiority. In chapter three, Cole focuses on (male and female) Muslim traders' roles in linking the colony with its Sierra Leonean hinterland and Atlantic West Africa more generally. The Krio diaspora in southern Nigeria – the so-called Saro – takes center stage in the fourth chapter. Cole shows how this diaspora that – according to the author – was driven by “a desire to expand their trade ventures for purposes of profit maximization, but also by a long and burning desire to reestablish contact with their natal communities” (p. 132), contributed to the spread and maintenance of Islam under colonial conditions in Southern Nigeria. Chapter five deals with the intra-faith tensions which arose between different groups of Muslims in some of the major settlements of liberated Africans (e.g. Fourah Bay, Fula Town), namely “between those who did not believe there was a place for indigenous African customs in a community defined by its Islamic values, on the one hand, and on the other, Muslims who asserted their right to uphold these customs” (p. 148). The final chapter looks at the educational efforts undertaken by Krio Muslims, not least in reaction to the increasing number of Christian missionary schools. Cole retraces the establishment of Muslim schools in Sierra Leone, paying particular attention to Edward W. Blyden's role in this process and with regard to the inclusion of “an African consciousness of history” (p. 208-9) in the school curriculum more generally. In his postscript Cole

reflects on the relevance of Islam on the emergence and establishment of Krio society in Sierra Leone and (referring once more to Blyden) on the cosmopolitan and – to some degree – Pan-Africanist dynamics given rise by “the cross-cultural and religious encounters among Islam, Christianity, and Yoruba and indigenous African religions in Sierra Leone and across West Africa” (p. 211).

Cole's book is an important contribution to the history of Krio and Sierra Leonean society. It focuses on social dynamics and interactions which played a vital role in the construction of Krio identity. It also contributes to our historical knowledge concerning the spread of Islam in West Africa and the Krio Muslims' role in it.

I do not see Cole's work as the re-writing of Krio or Sierra Leonean history and I disagree with his view that previous scholars have largely been “intellectual architects of the Krio myth” (p. 1), misleadingly characterizing the Krio as “Black Englishmen” (p. 1). There are many scholars who, before Cole, have stressed the heterogeneity of Krio society, many who have criticized the over-emphasis put on the Krio's proclaimed European-ness, many who have dealt with the African dimensions of Krio social and cultural practices. The solution to the – rightly stated and bewailed – neglect of Islam in the construction of Krio, Sierra Leonean, and Atlantic West African societies lies in the in-depth study of the latter, not in the retrospective denial of the Christian and European dimensions of Krio identity. Irrespective of whether the author (and other intellectuals) like it or not, there have been, and still are, many among the Krio who have emphasized and continue to emphasize their being more

“civilized”, “Westernized”, “European”, “English”, “educated” ... than the “natives”, the “people from upcountry”, the “Provincials”. Not too long ago (and not for the first time), a Krio in Freetown told me that he felt like a black man with white blood. I am not saying that this speaks of his – or other Krio’s – European-ness, I am saying that such statements tell us something about how people (like to) see themselves in relation to others and that if we want to study people (whether as historians or as anthropologists like myself), we cannot ignore what people say about themselves and others, irrespective of whether we share or like the ideologies underlying their statements.

To sum up: The weakness of Cole’s book, in my view, lies in his de-contextualization and de-historicization of previous scholarship. The strength of his book – which clearly outweighs its weakness – lies in its author’s ability to venture in depth and in detail into yet under-researched and under-represented dimensions of Krio and Sierra Leonean history and to aptly demonstrate the interrelations between various historical processes in a comprehensible and convincing manner.

Willard Sunderland: *The Baron’s Cloak. A History of the Russian Empire in War and Revolution*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press 2014, 344 S.

Rezensiert von
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Der an der Universität von Cincinnati lehrende Willard Sunderland ist ein durch mehrere Veröffentlichungen zur Kolonisation in der eurasischen Steppengebieten des Zarenreiches ausgewiesener Spezialist. Er versteht seine jüngste Studie als eine Darstellung des Russländischen Imperiums im Prisma des Lebens von Baron Roman Fedorovič von Ungern-Sternberg. Dieser wurde 1885 in Graz in eine deutsch-baltische Adelsfamilie geboren und 1921 in Novonikolaevsk (Novosibirsk) nach einem Schauprozess von den Bolševiki erschossen. Den Umstand, dass zahlreiche Details seiner Biographie nicht zu rekonstruieren sind, deutet Sunderland nicht als Nachteil. Er macht aus der Not eine konzeptionelle Tugend in der Form eines bifokalen und zugleich asymmetrischen Ansatzes. Das Werk ist weniger als Biographie denn als mikrohistorische Studie konzipiert: „With a simple turn of our camera, we can transform him [Ungern, LH] from a poor biographical subject into a revealing microhistorical one“ (S. 9). Ziel ist ein Synergieeffekt, der sich aus der Kombination zweier Untersuchungsgegenstände, einer Region und des übergeordneten imperialen Forschungsproblems, erzählt aus der