

tensified after independence. That is educational and economic expansion drew youths to the cities, frequently disrupting family continuity and creating labor shortages in village endeavors.² To maintain the integrity of the village community became a primary goal of the elders that affects the resolution of crimes or misdemeanors (see Adams 2004).

In contemporary Bo communities, the inherited rules comprising the moral order are stubbornly persistent, but the elders' treatment of violations functions more as a process, affected by historical experience and modified by immediate social and political concerns (see Moore 1978: 1–31).³ This point is illustrated by broad shifts in the way Bo elders handle rule-violations. For example, in the past, secrecy surrounding elders' decision-making was a significant feature of Bo councils, a practice that allowed, for example, private negotiations over allocation of land according to changed kin relationships, and helped to avoid retaliation against a person for judgments delivered.⁴ In the 1980s, consideration of rule-violations in public became an instrument of elders' policy. Rather than the frightening spectacle of punishment determined secretly for violations, young Bo individuals were exposed to the course of arguments as well as public acceptance by the disputants of the ultimate resolution. These points are illustrated in the first trial I witnessed.

Bridewealth

This trial concerned a suit for damages for lack of a bride-price contract.⁵ It took place in Medibli village (pop. 514), as a public event in April, 1985. Among the Bo, as in many other areas of West Africa, marriage is arranged between the father of the bride and the suitor and their respective patrilineages (here referred to as "Families") upon payment of bridewealth. In Canton Bo the bride-price is high, amounting to approximately 100,000 local francs, CFA. (In 1985 the exchange rate was 500 CFA to \$ 1). For this large sum, the groom's family pays in installments, which may continue throughout the groom's life. The initial binding act, however, is a small gift from the suitor to the bride's father. It may be no more than a bottle of liquor, but it is essential to formalize the commitment.

One morning, I saw a strange wagon creaking forward behind an old passenger car, coming toward the village. When it halted several men came forward and lifted a heavy burden off the wagon. It was a large wooden coffin, closed and covered with textiles. On the side of the road in a clearing in front of a few trees, they set it upon a simple wooden platform and rearranged the cloths. In the coffin lay a young girl originally from Medibli village.

At noon, several young men set up assorted chairs on three sides of the coffin. A bit later, there was a formal assembly. The judges, four elders in long gowns and white slippers, took their place in armchairs set on a bank in front of the trees. Facing each other on opposite sides of the coffin sat clusters of older men and young women, while thirty or so young men and women gathered in the open space between the others. Unlike the anonymous audience that crowds funeral celebrations, this arrangement resembled a modern court of law with designated judges, two principal parties arrayed on opposite sides, each led by an authoritative speaker-negotiator, and open discussion of the issues.

This trial set the two leading patrilineages (here, following Bo usage, called Families), Siahio and Paou, who occupy opposite sides of Medibli village, against each other. The aged Zoué François, head of Siahio Family, was the leading elder of the village. Several months earlier, on a visit to Medibli, his grandson persuaded a young girl from

² To help solve the labor problem, some elders hired immigrants from the states to the north while their own youth sought high school diplomas, secretarial and tailoring skills, or factory work in the cities. Nevertheless, these youth do not want to lose their rights to return to their home and family. They retain emotional attachments, family rights to plantations, and other heritable property, plus a need for the practical and spiritual support of their kinsmen.

³ Moore and other scholars in legal anthropology perceive changes in the rules functioning not as inflexible dictates but as a process, responding to and modified by immediate social and political concerns. However, she recognizes that in many Sub-Saharan African communities, in spite of new state laws, inherited practices have been "stubbornly persistent" (1978: 1–31).

⁴ Communities moved frequently in search of more productive fields. Land use rights were traditionally held by the founder who cleared the forest, and his descendants. With the shift to more long-term cash crop plantations and the declared national policy that land belongs to the persons who make use of it, land use for Bo villagers stabilized. Currently rights to land can be sold. In 1990, Côte d'Ivoire's national program of assigning lots to family units to form a legal basis for use reached Canton Bo.

⁵ Ivorian civil law promulgated in 1964 abolished bride-wealth, and polygamous marriage (Girard 1967: 174), with little effect. – Text edited by M. Fritz (as of 4/15/2005).