

**INTELLIGENCE
IN ACTION**

**A STUDY OF AGRICULTURE
IN RURAL LIBERIA**

**John Gay
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PREFACE

This book is set primarily in the village of Gbansu, which is located about 15 kilometres southwest of the bridge where the main north road in Liberia's interior crosses the St. Paul River. Information included in the book derives also from other villages in Bong County. In most cases these villages are not more than a day's walk from Gbansu, and the cultural patterns are so similar that the village names are not given. In some cases, however, particularly when the village is on the main motor road, there are substantial differences from the situation in Gbansu, and the location of such villages will therefore be mentioned.

Much of the information was collected during a stay of eight months in Gbansu from December 1973 to July 1974. Except where otherwise noted, I will use the present tense for this period of time. Other information was collected in several villages in Bong County while I was teaching and doing research at Cuttington University College. I owe much of the credit for this book to my co-workers, who are acknowledged at the end of this preface. I will use the plural "we" in the broadest possible sense throughout the book, since I as the final and principal author cannot claim full credit for any insights which the book may express. On the other hand, if there are errors, I as an individual accept full responsibility.

The land which Gbansu uses is roughly 90 square kilometres of farms, young bush, mature bush, swamp and high forest. The people are 1106 men, women and children, combined into 131 households in the central village of Gbansu and its 26 satellite hamlets, plus an indeterminate number of persons who identify with Gbansu but live outside the village, in such places as Monrovia, the Firestone rubber plantation, and Gbarnga, the seat of government for Bong County. In the census which we conducted in Gbansu, household heads listed another 110 family members who had migrated elsewhere, but it is clear from the interviews held in Monrovia and at Firestone that many more than 110 persons claim Gbansu as their home. The discrepancy most likely arises because many persons have been absent so long that no household presently claims them.

The reader can legitimately ask why this book was not published earlier. An earlier draft was scheduled to be published in the early 1980s, but the publisher was forced to withdraw for financial reasons. Moreover, when I tried again to have it published in the mid-1990s, publishers felt that the research represented was dated, did not represent wartime conditions, and in any event was of only specialised interest.

These criticisms are both true and untrue. It is true that agriculture in rural Bong County has been severely disrupted by the horrors of civil war from 1989 to 2003, and thus the picture of a relatively undisturbed rural community has not just been changed but has been smashed. On the other hand, now that the civil war is over and there is an as-yet uneasy peace, the agricultural and social practice displayed in this book have to be where people start over. The high-tech modern sector of the economy was even more thoroughly smashed than the traditional sector, and thus if people are to feed themselves in the aftermath of civil war what this book describes can be the starting point.

Another reason for the delay must be acknowledged frankly and honestly. It has proved very hard for me to get the style right. The book, even in its present and hopefully final version, is an odd and uncomfortable mixture of insider and outsider perspectives. It would have doubtless been easier and more conventional to speak as a sympathetic outsider, writing from the privileged

perspective as a social scientist. It might also have been easier to assume the role of member of the community and write another novel, as I have already been done three times.

I have chosen to do something in between, something which may not in the end be possible. I try to let the people of Gbansu speak, as much as possible in the very words with which they spoke to us. I try also to integrate their words into an intellectual framework, using devices which are supposed to display in an unbiased way the underlying structure of Gbansu residents' ideas.

This book is thus a study in inductive epistemology, as well as a study in rural agriculture. The people of Gbansu have made a world for themselves. This include not only the physical acts of planting, cutting, building and cooking, but also the mental processes that make sense out of physical acts. I use techniques that give a lens through which the intellectual-cum-material world of Gbansu's people comes into focus.

I am not consistent in applying techniques. I intrude the research team and its observations at many points. I can only say the obvious: that it's hard for me as an outsider to understand and express a vision which is compounded of the ideas of 1106 residents of Gbansu. I take the easy way out in many cases, and try simply to describe what we as outsiders saw in those cases where I am unable to focus in words the Gbansu people's own understanding of their world.

So this book is an uneasy compromise. The reader may be impatient as I put our techniques to work. They may seem ponderous and awkward, and doubtless they often are. "Why not just say what you know? Just give us the conclusions you reached. After all, you were there and saw it for yourself."

I feel that such a simplistic approach is not appropriate or even possible. We deceived ourselves into thinking we saw many things which in fact are not part of the Gbansu world, and many parts of that world we only saw (or even failed to see) after they emerged from our formal interviews. What we thought we saw very often fooled us. What Gbansu people said was less likely to do so. But we did not always ask the right questions, and so there were many blank spots in the images which were projected through the lens of our interview techniques. Where there are blanks, I have added what I believe to be true and appropriate so that the total story can be told.

I thus ask the reader's patience as I shift from relatively transparent narrative to somewhat less transparent images processed through the lens of our interview techniques. The latter may seem technical and difficult to follow, but I honestly believe them to be more accurate representations of the mind and muscle which are the world of Gbansu than simple narration.

I wish to thank many people who assisted in making this research possible. I must single out the United Nations Development Programme and its Monrovia staff during 1973 and 1974, particularly its Resident Representative Curtis Campaigne, whose constant intercession and aid gave logistic and financial support. Hans Ekhardt and F. Mumm von Mallinckrodt were instrumental in making this support operational. Jordan Holtam, at that time also with UNDP, was responsible in large measure for the intellectual shape of the project and the courage to go on with it.

Many Liberians in official position provided invaluable assistance. Melvin Mason made possible the initial contact with the United Nations. Bishop George Browne of the Liberian Episcopal Church and Fr. Emmanuel Johnson, president of Cuttington University College, were gracious

with their help and encouragement. Harry A. Greaves, Superintendent of Bong County, provided introductions to the appropriate government officials of Bong County, as well as needed advice and moral support. Dr. Nyema Jones, Minister of Lands and Mines of the Republic of Liberia, supplied essential maps of the area. I am particularly grateful to the paramount chief, clan chief, elders, chief and people of Gbansu, and especially Benjamin T. Mulbah, village elder, for their active cooperation and their hospitality in allowing us to live in their community. I can only say at this point that I hope and pray some of them are still alive, after this terrible period of war.

I must particularly thank the members of the research team who helped to gather much of the data on which this report is based. Edward Yarkpazuo was a principal collaborator and consultant during our stay in Gbansu. Without his courtesy, gentleness and careful understanding of his own people, this work would have been impossible. Other members of the team worked with us and with one another in a most remarkable and productive way. They included Paul Ricks, Flumo Kerkula, Paul Sulongteh, Henrique Tokpa, Philip Dorweh, Kiapah Jackson, Suakoli Bomosii, Peter Mulbah, Moses Bondo and Judith Gay, to all of whom I extend hearty thanks.

Thanks must also be given to those who gave valuable assistance at the time of analyzing the data and writing this book. They include Michael Cole and Sylvia Scribner, long-term colleagues, who are responsible for many of the ideas used here; Sandy Robertson, who made available the facilities of the African Studies Centre at the University of Cambridge, and also offered excellent advice about the politics of development; Jack Goody, who made possible a sabbatical at the University of Cambridge; the Leverhulme Trust Fund, which financed this sabbatical period; Andrew Wager, who developed computer programs used by us in analyzing our data; Nick MacLaren, who provided invaluable advice on computational procedures; Peter Coxhead and John Hutchinson, who suggested key analytic ideas; Peter Gay, who performed much of the basic data tabulation and typed the first draft of the book; and the staff and fellows of Clare Hall at the University of Cambridge, who provided a stimulating environment in which to work. I had hoped that Gordon Thomasson would contribute a chapter on iron technology, but this has not proved possible. Thayer Scudder read much of the present draft and made very useful suggestions, which we have tried to incorporate.

To all of these, thanks! And to the people of Gbansu and nearby villages, special thanks, and best wishes and prayers as they rebuild their society at the end of a devastating civil war.

Cambridge, Massachusetts, 13 July 2008

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Wars old and new

The ancient certainties, the old order, shook on May 29, 1919. Einstein's general theory of relativity was decisively confirmed and a minor inter-village skirmish in the interior of Liberia was stopped - both consequences of an eclipse of the sun which traced a narrow path from West Africa across the Atlantic to Brazil.

For the residents of villages in what is now Liberia's Bong County, the eclipse was to become as decisive an event for their lives as the confirmation of Einstein's theory was for the larger world that these villagers were about to enter. That day in 1919 the people of Gbansu and neighboring villages were once again at each other's throats. They had no one else to fight except each other, since the government in Monrovia had not yet significantly touched their lives. And fight each other they did, with gusto, trickery and a harshness only tempered by the short range of their weapons.

Wolomian was the war chief of the villages around Gbansu, and sought to exercise his control over the war chiefs of nearby areas. After a surprise attack at night when closely packed houses in the villages, walled against frontal attack but not secure against the secrecy of night, were burned and their dwellers dispersed, the two forces were arrayed against each other with bow and arrow, cutlass, knife, and probably also muzzle-loading rifles obtained through trade. The sun went black, and the opposing war chiefs decided that they must no longer fight. The heavenly warning was too much for them.

That was the last battle these, then relatively isolated, people fought among themselves, and it was also the beginning of the end of a time of self-sufficiency, not only in the arts of war but in the arts of peace. The end was not abrupt, of course, nor is the end final even today, in the mid-1990s, when we write this account.

In particular, 1990 was a year of renewed war for Gbansu and neighboring villages. Charles Taylor began his onslaught on the corrupt and repressive regime of Samuel Doe on Christmas Eve 1989, and reached Bong County, where Gbansu is located, in early 1990.

The war appears not to have actually reached Gbansu during the early phases, according to one of the original team who made this research in 1974, although we do not have subsequent information about the village due to the impossibility of visiting the area under conditions of civil war. This researcher visited Gbansu in November 1990 and found people maintaining their lives and their community. Charles Taylor had put the local schoolteacher in charge of the village, and since he is a Gbansu citizen, the regime was not too harsh on the people. The one problem they encountered, along with most villages in the interior, was that their supply of rice was being commandeered by Taylor's forces. Fortunately, the 1990 harvest was said to be good, and prospects for 1991 were also expected to be good. According to subsequent BBC reports, however, groups of "bandits" have been roaming the countryside, demanding food from people. Moreover, in the latter half of 1994, Charles Taylor's forces suffered military defeats at the hands of the coalition of ULIMO and the Liberian Peace Council, and it is likely that villages in the Gbansu area were also victims of the burning, killing and rape reported for towns along the main road between Gbarnga and Totota. As a result it is very likely that traditional agricultural practices in Gbansu have ceased to operate, and may well not operate until the war is over.

The war against the Monrovia government and the ascendancy of Charles Taylor have meant that the old tradition of self-sufficiency will once again have a role to play in the life of Gbansu and its people. The imported goods on which people had come to depend will hardly be available in the immediate post-war situation. There is scarcely a money economy now, and the flow of economically valuable goods is, as in so much of contemporary Africa, out rather than in. For the people of Gbansu to survive, the way of life which Wolomian knew, minus the wars which he waged, inevitably will become more than just a memory, but will have to be a reality.

That self-sufficiency is by no means a dead issue is an important reason why this book documents what the people of Gbansu and villages like it in Bong County know and apply in their lives. There is still enough left of the old self-sufficient way of life to encourage people to use that knowledge in building for a better future. When Liberia finally starts to rebuild from the horrors of a civil war which killed tens of thousands and displaced hundreds of thousands of Liberians, the knowledge and skills of villages like Gbansu must be called on and put to work. Those who assist the war-torn country to try to feed itself would be well advised to attend closely to the methods and underlying ideas which allowed one village to achieve that goal in the period immediately preceding the pillage under Doe and the civil war under Taylor.

1.2 The old chief returns

Were Wolomian to return to Gbansu today to help in the reconstruction process, he would find much to amaze him, but he would hopefully also find much that is familiar. If the village is still intact after the civil war, he would find a village chief and his elders discussing disputes as he remembered them being discussed.

Under the assumption that there is still a Gbansu, Wolomian would feel at home on the upland rice farms that are once again being cultivated to provide food. He would take his turn beating red-hot iron into useful tools in the village blacksmith shop. He would be reassured that children are still being trained, as the Poro and Sande society bush schools are re-opened after their presumed closing due to drunken and drugged young men with AK-47s ruling the village with a cruel and iron hand. He would join in the dancing and drumming of a moonlit night in the village, now that people no longer feared to venture out of their houses after dark.

But he would soon realize that these familiar activities were somehow not what they had been, that the heart had gone out, leaving in many cases only superficial forms in its place. He would realize this fact even more strongly were he to visit what remains of villages along the main motor roads, where the customary ways of life that tie the present to the past in Gbansu even before the war were almost forgotten. He would see villages devastated and even emptied by civil war, villages ruled by decrees issued arbitrarily by ignorant teen-age boys. He would find refugees who were huddled in camps in Guinea and Cote d'Ivoire, now trying to return to homes long since destroyed.

He would realize, in particular, that the real authority to settle disputes comes, not from the villages chiefs or even, in the last resort, from traditional war chiefs such as himself. The real authority lies outside Gbansu. It lay up to the end of 1989 with the government in Monrovia, a government of which he knew only stories in 1919, a government which had then extended its writ only to a few main towns in Liberia's interior, but not to the peripheral villages.

The Central Province of Liberia, where Gbansu was located, established its authority over rural communities in the area in the early 1920s. A new political system was imposed, drawing on models of indirect rule from other parts of West Africa. Formerly power had alternated between owners of the land and war chiefs, with the final authority lying in the secret societies. From the early 1920s an alien system of clan chiefs and paramount chiefs, subservient to government authorities in the central town of Gbarnga and ultimately to the President in Monrovia, was imposed on the people. Only local matters, of strictly local interest, could be decided at the village level.

Authority lay in the early 1990s with Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia, whose headquarters are in the Bong County capital of Gbarnga. By the end of 1994 it apparently lay with no one central authority, with what once were armies (at latest count in early 1995 there were 10 different armed factions fighting each other in rural Liberia) reduced to armed gangs of desperate young men looting and killing in order to stay alive. Wolomian might recognize them as potential war chiefs, like himself, but he would find few with the potential to heal the wounds of war. Where authority might lie next year is not within the control of the people of Gbansu, and apparently also not within the control of Liberian warlords and politicians and those who have attempted from the outside to bring the fighting to an end. As of this writing, there seems no end to the bloodshed and pillage.

If Wolomian were to have returned when we did our research, he would find that people still made rice farms in the old way, but he would quickly learn that only in the most remote hamlets are there the same large surpluses of rice that used to tide people over when the crops were poor. He would learn that, the closer villages are to centers of political and economic power, the less are they able to feed themselves, and the more likely people are to have their rice taken by one of the warring factions. He would find the old cooperative system breaking down, and people farming more and more for themselves alone. And he would have found, before the collapse of the rural economy as a result of the civil war, people increasingly dependent on money and markets for their food.

In those last days before the civil war, he would have returned from the farms to the blacksmith shop, where men had always gathered to be men, to forge out of hot iron the tools that the village needed for clearing the bush, for making houses, for making war. The blacksmith shop would be there, but it would appear unimportant, passed by in the rush of change. Different tools, made in far-off places, tools without the balance and beauty that he knew from his time, are being used, clumsily and awkwardly, to do the tasks that his favorite cutlass and knife could have done so much better.

While the fragile peace continued, marked by the rapacity of Samuel Doe's regime, the Poro and Sande societies would have still existed, to be sure. They still taught young men and young women. But Wolomian would see children entering the bush at the beginning of the dry season and coming out before the rains had fully started, instead of spending the three or four years he remembered from his own childhood initiation. Moreover, he would find another system of schooling which demands more time and produces graduates whom he could hardly recognize as members of his own society. And he would note that both systems of schooling had suffered serious setbacks during the period of decline in the 1970s and 1980s, with the overall population increasing while the numbers attending school decreased. The elite continued to attend schools, while the poor and disadvantaged were prepared for nothing other than the war they eventually

joined. He might indeed ask what had been the benefit of the new school system if it was responsible for a war far worse than any he had fought in.

He would have joined the singing and dancing of a moonlit night while peace still prevailed, but he would find that the heart had gone out of this activity. More of the young people were dancing by themselves in the village bar, where they drink new and more intoxicating drinks and talk of matters he could not understand. The community as a whole was not present on these occasions, and even may be said not to exist in a way that he could identify.

Wolomian's complaint would not have been that his people are changing. He knew that the people of the forest had never been afraid of new ideas, new technologies, new places. It was common knowledge that the people of Gbansu had come from the savannas and drier rain forests of what today we call Guinea. He had relatives farther up into the interior of West Africa who had not pushed down the St. Paul River toward the ocean, and who provided sanctuary to many Gbansu people during the early 1990s. He also had relatives who had gone much farther than had his own family toward the ultimate barrier of the Atlantic, and who had come into close relationship with the coastal Liberians. Change as such was not his problem. It was the kind of change he would find upon returning to Gbansu that would worry him.

The changes that had preceded him and made possible his life in the Gbansu area had been part of a great agricultural and technological revolution, one which took place about the year 1500 AD. Wolomian probably didn't know it, but in the expansion of his ancestors to the southwest from the savannas of Guinea, they had adopted new ways in every generation. New crops were introduced, and new varieties selected. New techniques of metallurgy and house construction were developed, to suit the conditions of the dense rain forest. Under highly diverse conditions, his people and his relatives had made life-sustaining and productive adaptations successively to the grasslands, the scattered forest, and the high rain forest.

1.3 From self-sufficiency to dependency

So change came naturally to Wolomian's people. The fact of change would not have disturbed him had he come back in the Samuel Doe era to see the people whose grandparents he had led to war in 1919. What would have disturbed him is the type of change, resulting in a loss of self-sufficiency and self-management by his children's children. Whereas in his time, the residents of Gbansu governed, fed, equipped, taught and entertained themselves, now Wolomian would have found their children's children a dispirited lot, dependent on the mercies and cruelties of outsiders who want to remake this forest community into a creature which fit models that have no relevance in the forest, in short outsiders who want to "develop" the people of Gbansu and other villages like it. He would have seen how the late President Tolbert had absorbed fields and whole villages along the trail from Gbalatue (on the main Gbarnga-Zorzor highway) to Gbansu, in the name of progress. In this context he might even find it a relief from continuous pressure by outsiders that the civil war had to a large extent thrown Gbansu back on its own resources. He might even have joined the war in 1990, with the mistaken hope that Charles Taylor would once again bring dignity and self-reliance to his people.

This is the story which this book tells, the story of a society which has changed from being a self-sufficient, productive community to a marginalized dependent adjunct of a world which is alien to them in almost every way, and now perhaps because of the civil war to be a community once more dependent on its own resources. The alien world had taken away the most talented citizens

of Gbansu and remade them into new people, people which have no place in the forest. The alien world first asked these new people to share in "developing" their home, a home which is really no longer their home, and then inflicted a war that in the course of almost five years has made the area almost unliveable.

But it is fundamental to this story to realize that the game is not over. A peculiar fact about Liberia in the 1980s was that the so-called development process was aborted and side-tracked by a decade of mismanagement and corruption so profound that changes in the rural way of life nearly came to a halt. As the 1980s drew to a close, there were fewer children in government schools every year, despite the rapid population growth rate. Because of the civil war, all formal outside education ceased, except for a few with ties to the Taylor NPFL regime and a larger number who escaped to Guinea to find refuge.

Rural roads were also breaking down, and communities were becoming more isolated. The main roads after 1990 also were broken, and only the occasional official vehicle or food aid convoy was allowed through the many roadblocks which divided Monrovia and Gbarnga. The trend away from rural areas and to the capital city Monrovia had already been reversed when the civil war erupted. During the war some persons managed to escape to Monrovia, but most were forced either to hide themselves in rural villages or to leave the country. Many of the processes visible now in rural Liberia as a result of the war were already implicit in the breakdown of social and economic order of the late Doe years. These processes have been speeded up by war, leading to devastation and a total breakdown in the civil order.

1.4 Can old skills help?

What is required for recreating some degree of self-sufficiency and self-confidence in Gbansu and its counterpart villages throughout Bong County, is a conscious rethinking of technologies that sustained these communities throughout the roughly 400 years before the 29th of May 1919. A revival of the past is never possible. History does not work that way. The alternative is a reworking of technologies and social structures which have been tested by the past, so that they can be brought into the present and used in the building of the future.

This book attempts to explain a central element of the intellectual-cum-material construction that is Gbansu. It tries to allow the people of Gbansu to explain farming, which is a fundamental part of the technology that sustained the people of Gbansu for those long years of relative self-sufficiency. Not only have we observed the various activities which compose agriculture in Gbansu, but more important they have been explained to us by people for whom these activities are central to their world view.

These skills are still known by many, and most are still practised, at least until the coming of the civil war. They are useful skills, and could make an important base for further growth in a changing world, just as they now provide the people of Gbansu with the possibility of rebuilding from the horrors and deprivations of civil war. The knowledge and practical good sense which are present in techniques for growing crops can be adapted to present conditions, and can lead to a better way of life for communities which have suffered from irrelevant and destructive forms of outside interference.

It is hard to say which form of interference has had the most damaging effect on Gbansu - the civil war, the exploitative Monrovia government, the greedy commercial economy or the

insensitive and domineering agents of "development". Clearly there is no single villain in the story. Fortunately the people of Gbansu have a heritage to fall back on in resisting all these harmful forms of interference and change. It is that heritage that this book attempts to explore, so that in the aftermath of the war, people have the knowledge of the past which will enable them to start over again.

1.5 Village or "tribe"?

One last question before turning to the full story. Who are the people of Gbansu? Who are the people who eventually became part of the Central Province and then Bong County on Liberia? What "tribe" are they? It is important to see that this question of "tribal identity" is an anachronism, an imposition of 20th century categories onto a reality which they do not fit.

It is becoming increasingly evident to historians and anthropologists that outsiders - slave traders, missionaries, colonialists, government officials, business people, aid givers - have felt it necessary to impose "tribes" on African peoples. They ask: "What tribe are you? And where is your leader?"

The people of Gbansu did not have a tribe. They had an owner of the land, a war chief, and a set of village chiefs and elders. They had relatives in neighboring villages, and in still more distant villages they were able to understand what people said, even though they did not have family members there. As the distance increased, even language became more difficult, and interpreters proved necessary.

Anthropologists, including even myself in previous writings, as well as government officials, have tried to say that the people of Gbansu really belong to the Kpelle "tribe". In fact, there never was such an entity, nor does it exist as such even today. The people of Gbansu know the term "Kpelle" in two senses: as a language, and as a region somewhere up the St. Paul River in Guinea. They speak a language which can be understood by others who are also called "Kpelle". But the differences of language between some "Kpelle" and other "Kpelle" is at least as great as that between some "Kpelle" and nearby members of the neighboring "Loma" people.

These large classifications and distinctions are impositions of a modern day, when African governments and their unwitting supporters in the development and academic worlds are attempting still further to incorporate the people of a thousand Gbansu's across Africa into tame and obedient political units, so that they can be "developed". This imposition of foreign patterns for the purpose of social division and control were most obvious in yesterday's South Africa, where the politics of ethnicity were used to maintain white power. But the same phenomenon exists wherever people are divided and categorized by ethnic origin. And the results sadly result in ethnic violence, as in Rwanda and Burundi, when communities, forced to be what some superior authority defines them to be, attempt to achieve group power over their neighbors.

This sad phenomenon was most acutely visible in Liberia when the so-called "Krahn" used the hegemony of Samuel Doe to exploit speakers of other languages in Liberia, and then when they were victimized in turn by the followers of Charles Taylor. The ethnicity which erupted into violence and hatred is an artifact of the quest for orderly management of interior peoples under Tubman and Tolbert, and then for selfish power under Doe. Hatred and war existed prior to the invention of ethnic categories, of course, but more often than not the wars in those days were

between speakers of the same language. In short, ethnic conflict is in many ways a modern invention.

Speakers of the Mano language were busy killing speakers of the Krahn and Mandingo languages in 1990. In 1994, Krahn and Mandingo members of the United Liberation Movement took up the same task, with the forces of Roosevelt Johnson and Alhaji Kromah speeding the ethnic slaughter. On the other hand, prior to 1980 integration among and between these language groups was slowly but surely taking place. This history is witness both to the folly and the artificiality of these ethnic groupings. The alternative, the natural process of integration, takes place all over the world where the fluidity of ethnic boundaries is recognized and people are allowed to be simply themselves. In the Gbansu to which Wolomian might have returned prior to the civil war, people of Mandingo and Kpelle origin lived in harmony, and the newly elected chief in the late 1980s was himself a Mandingo. Sadly we hear that he was forced to flee to Guinea, when Charles Taylor and the NPFL took control in Gbansu and related rural villages.

This book documents and celebrates what we knew of and rejoiced in about the citizens of small forest communities in the rural rain forest of Liberia. It celebrates them, not as Kpelle or as Liberians, isolated from the rest of the world, but as people who made a remarkable adaptation to their environment. Moreover, this adaptation was made possible by an intellectual construction of the world and attendant technologies that made and still make sense. This intellectual construction is still viable, and is still available for them and their friends as they attempt to reconstruct a broken and battered society.

These technologies and the people who practise them can serve as models for a world that is badly in need of them. All humankind needs the rain forest in order to continue to breathe. All equally need the ingenuity and vitality of the people who have lived in creative harmony with the rain forest for many centuries past. And all finally need each other, in a dynamic but nonetheless integrated world society, in order to keep a few from destroying the entire world in the search for profit. There remain ways of life, exemplified by the people of Gbansu and neighboring villages, that can help us in this quest.

1.6 The village as a system

Central to this effort to allow the people of Gbansu to speak for themselves is the conviction that Gbansu can metaphorically be considered a collective intelligence, an awareness of what it is doing and where it is going that transcends any individual within the village. This book is therefore about thinking and knowing more than it is about technology considered only as a set of cultural practices. As has already been said, the world as it is known to the people of Gbansu is a world which they have created in, by and through that act of knowing as they seek to sustain life. What they know is what they needed to know in the process of making their world, and what they do is shaped by what they know. This knowledge, complex and expressed in diverse ways in and by the individuals who embody it, is what has kept the community alive, despite the immersion of Gbansu in a new and very different society. It is what may in all likelihood help it survive today's civil war.

It is obvious that a community is more than just the individuals which compose it. This book goes a step farther. In particular, it claims that the community's corporate understanding goes beyond the knowledge, attitudes and beliefs of the individual members. When a community is coherent, when it "works", then it is in a real sense an living entity which, among other activities,

does farming intelligently as a way to maintain itself. When the community is incoherent, then breakdown occurs, something dies, and something new and unexpected is born.

When we lived in Gbansu in 1974, on the edge of the rain forest, we found a community still coherent enough to maintain itself, even though all the changes that would have so disturbed Wolomian were at work among all the people of the village. Gbansu at that time was (and is, according to the time perspective we are using in this book - for we will refer throughout our text to a present tense of 1974, before the disasters of Doe's regime and the civil war of 1990) an organism in much the same way as Aunt Hillary in Douglas Hofstadter's book *Godel, Escher, Bach* (1980, pp. 311-336). The image which Hofstadter uses is that of an ant hill which has a life of its own, but which is made up of the individual ants, just as the brain (or a computer) is more than the neurons or individual transistors which compose it. In a brilliant book on the physical nature of mind, *Bright Air, Brilliant Fire: On the Matter of the Mind* (1992, p. 6), Gerald Edelman quotes William James to the effect that "mind is a process, not a stuff". It is in that sense that this book attempts to understand the mind of Gbansu, a process which has made the agricultural system of Gbansu a set of technical processes, a self-guided and self-managed social process, and a shared vision of what their world can be.

Gbansu is certainly more than the individuals and households which make it up, and in fact the individuals and households complement each other in such a way as to promote the well-being of the total system. It has a corporate spirit like that described by Walter Wink in his book *Unmasking the Powers* (1986): "The corporate spirits of IBM and Gulf+Western are palpably real and strikingly different, as are the national spirits of the United States and Canada." (pp. 4-5). It is important to consider communities as systems, and not fall into the trap of reductionist science. Because the ideas and values of each of the 1106 citizens of Gbansu differ from those of the rest, it would be impossible to describe the intellectual construct that is Gbansu in either reductionist or holistic terms. The total picture requires that all the multiple points of views and perspectives and ideas be represented and given proper weight in the total picture.

In Hofstadter's book, Aunt Hillary is the greatest of friends with Anteater, despite the doubtless negative feelings of the ants themselves. Anteater says of himself, "Far from being an enemy of the colony, I am Aunt Hillary's favorite companion. ... I grant you, I'm quite feared by all the individual ants in the colony - but that's another matter entirely." (p. 319) It depends on the level of thought. Reductionist science insists on looking at the bottom level only, and sees the upper level as merely a conglomerate. This book disagrees. However, this book also asserts that the upper level cannot be represented as a statistical average, a central tendency in which all difference is cancelled out.

1.7 Reductionism and holism

In the view expressed here, there are therefore two mistaken ways in which to look at farming in Gbansu and, in general, the life of the mind which expresses itself in that particular style of farming. One would be to think only of the individual citizens, as in reductionism, in which case confusion results. The other is to fall into the trap of holism, which Hofstadter shows to be the other side of the coin from reductionism (p. 310). In this second form of error one has to invent an abstraction called, as development experts often try to do, The Kpelle Farmer. He (she? - the problem is, of course, that an abstract farmer can have no gender) is just as much a misconception as The Peasant or The Capitalist, because nowhere do these Beings exist.

What does exist, in the opinion expressed here, is a system, a whole which functions because of the parts and which provides the parts a reality within which to function. The individual citizens of Gbansu very much exist (and very much have gender), each individual with his or her own understanding of farming, an understanding which leads to action. Some are not even farmers at all, a fact which is most important to the well-being of the community, as shall be pointed out in detail later.

In a community which succeeds as a system, the choices that any individual makes complement each other within the whole composed by all the individuals and their choices. Even what some members of the community may see as foolish or incomprehensible behavior may be necessary to complete the whole pattern. The argument here must not go so far as that of de Mandeville, who said in his 18th century *Fable of the Bees* that public benefit is made up out of private vice; nor does it altogether accept Adam Smith's idea of the invisible hand which guides the economy of a complex system. The system may in fact fail, things fall apart, and the whole become less than the sum of the parts.

The mistake that many development workers make, a mistake which neither Aunt Hillary nor the organism that is Gbansu would make, is to generalize from economic and social averages to The Kpelle Farmer. The experts then assume that each individual farmer is The Kpelle Farmer (assumed to be a male, and assumed to be generalizable to anyone defined by the outside world as "Kpelle"), and invent strategies to help this person. This strategy has failed across Africa. It has to fail, because it deals with a mythical beast, and because it manages, quite remarkably, to commit simultaneously the errors of reductionism and holism.

The only viable alternative is to deal with the community as a living whole, realizing that both the community and the individuals that compose it are real and mutually dependent. It is in this sense that it is possible to say that the community understands farming. If the system "works", as it did at least partially when we were living in Gbansu in 1974, then the whole is distinctly greater than the sum of its parts. The reason is surely that the parts contribute to the whole in ways that no individual could by himself or herself imagine or predict.

The goal of this book is to express the complex system that makes up Gbansu's understanding of its world. This world-view is made up of the ideas of the diverse individuals who compose the community. This book obviously cannot and should not give a mind-numbing and repetitive enumeration of the individuals and their individual ideas. But also it must avoid the barren abstraction of creating some sort of central and normative mid-position of all the individuals. Neither reductionism nor holism will give us the understanding that is required of what is Gbansu and how it survives.

The ideas which make up the Gbansu world-view are held by no single individual, but are participated in by each individual. Clearly, such a communal understanding will have tensions within itself, disagreements which are sometimes, but not always, reconciled within a larger agreement. Only a schizophrenic individual could claim to accept all that is implied by the system. Yet the complexities and inconsistencies must be held in creative tension by community leaders, who can see the system whole and thus benefit personally from the complexity and hopefully lead the community into further growth. The world of Gbansu is not a single world, but rather a world perceived through multiple perspectives, a multi-dimensional, multi-centered world, because each person has a set of perspectives which distinguish that person from the neighbor.

Each of the various approaches to understanding the corporate intelligence of communities such as Gbansu begins by collecting information from as many individuals and households as possible. These data are the basis of generalization - but not just to central tendencies and statistical measures of fluctuation. The mean and standard deviation are only starting points for digging out how the community understands itself.

What is needed are ways to see the distribution as a whole, where the deviant ideas are as necessary to the entire system as those ideas which are centered about some kind of mid-position. In cases where there is general agreement, such as in the creation of a map of Gbansu, deviant ideas are of little concern. But in cases where different people give significantly different responses to our questions, then statistical methods which describe both the central tendency and the deviations are needed. Annex 1 discusses briefly two such approaches, namely, cluster analysis and multi-dimensional scaling.

These technical devices are of value only if they assist in showing Gbansu as a whole. And seeing Gbansu as a whole is valuable only if it can lead to reconstruction and renewal of a torn and battered society. Rural Liberia has suffered greatly over the past two years. What is here stated about Gbansu may contribute in some small way to relieving that suffering.

In particular, the different forces which will ultimately intervene to reconstruct Gbansu and its many counterparts throughout Liberia should think deeply about the intellectual and technical and social system that kept Gbansu alive. It would be folly to attempt to wipe the slate clean and introduce a American or Israeli or Chinese or Kenyan system of farming to people who have little to cling to outside their memories of a home that was almost destroyed by a barbaric civil war. It would also, of course, be folly to take the pre-war pattern as a blueprint for reconstruction. This book makes no such romantic, backward-looking suggestion.

What is needed is to see Gbansu the way it was, then assess the changes (horrible as they may have been) which broke the old order, and from this union of thesis and antithesis create a new alternative. This can ultimately only be done by the people of Gbansu, not by outsiders. We who have observed the last days of Gbansu before civil war destroyed civil society can assist in the process by offering an account of agriculture in the 1970s. Those who seek earnestly for a renewal of life in rural Liberia are urged to help the returning citizens of Gbansu use their heritage as one of the elements needed for rebuilding.

This book finally urges citizens of the many other Gbansus across the continent of Africa to remember their own heritage. Rwanda and Burundi are only the most recently devastated of many badly torn and broken African nations. Much has been said about the death of Africa, as Robert Kaplan does in his February 1994 article in *The Atlantic Monthly*, foreshadowing an impossible 21st century. Basil Davidson in his recent book *The Black Man's Burden: The Curse of the Nation-State in Africa* (1992) speaks of the breakdown of a nationalism imposed by the western world. Even such a scholar as Ali Mazrui has called for recolonization of Africa, this time by Africans (*International Herald Tribune*, 3 August 1994).

These sobering projections into the future, based on a past which has been increasingly disastrous, must somehow be tempered. Memory of what African societies, such as that which we knew in Gbansu, can be one source of hope. This book offers a brief account of agriculture in a rural Liberian village as one possible model of ways in which memory of the past can help build a future where life, admittedly a new and very different life, is possible.

CHAPTER 2. THE SETTING

2.1 The land

The word for "land" is a very general term, and describes all the area that lies within Gbansu. The boundaries are well known to the people of Gbansu, and separate Gbansu territory from that of the neighboring villages. For the purpose of locating Gbansu in the framework of the larger world, the book must for the moment step outside the role of allowing the Gbansu people to speak for themselves. For obvious reasons, very few Gbansu residents have the geographic knowledge and sophistication to do this for themselves. On the other hand, as shall be shown shortly, the foreign temptation is to say that outsider observers are able to know it all and don't need to be taught. For a macro-picture of Gbansu in the world, outside knowledge is useful. For the corresponding micro-picture, such outside knowledge turned out to be deceptive, often only a caricature of the reality on the ground.

Figures 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 show, in successively more detailed views, Liberia within Africa, Bong County and Gbansu within Liberia, and the land around Gbansu itself. Gbansu is set in what was originally dense tropical rain forest, much of which has been cleared for farms, then allowed to lie fallow for up to 10 or 15 years before being farmed a second time. Part of Gbansu's land is also swamp, another part steep and fairly rocky hillside, and a third part the St. Paul River and its banks.

FIGURE 2.1
LIBERIA WITHIN AFRICA

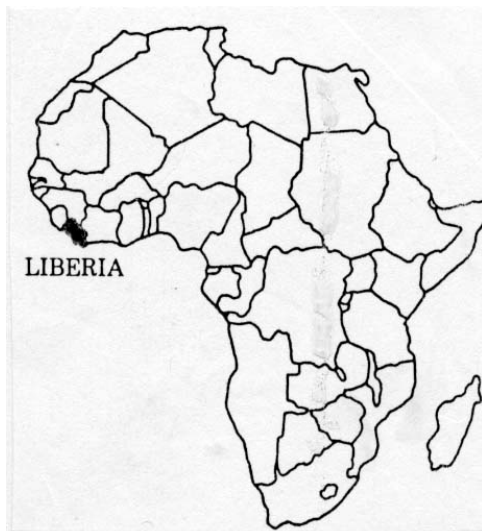
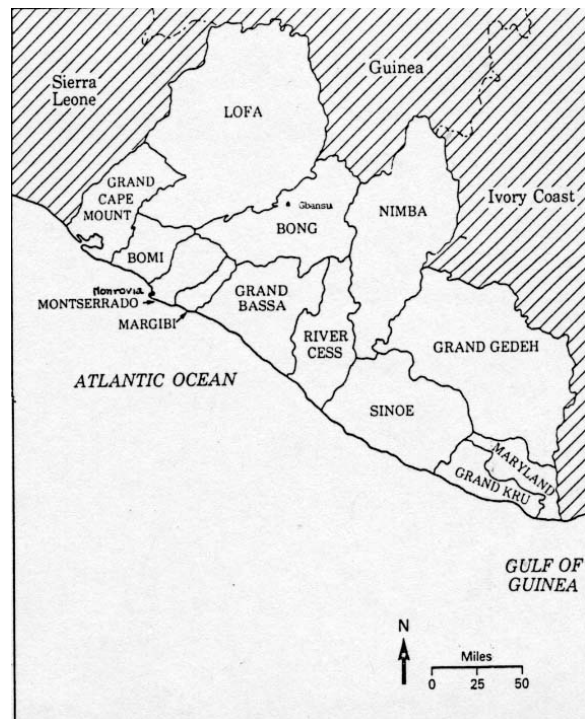
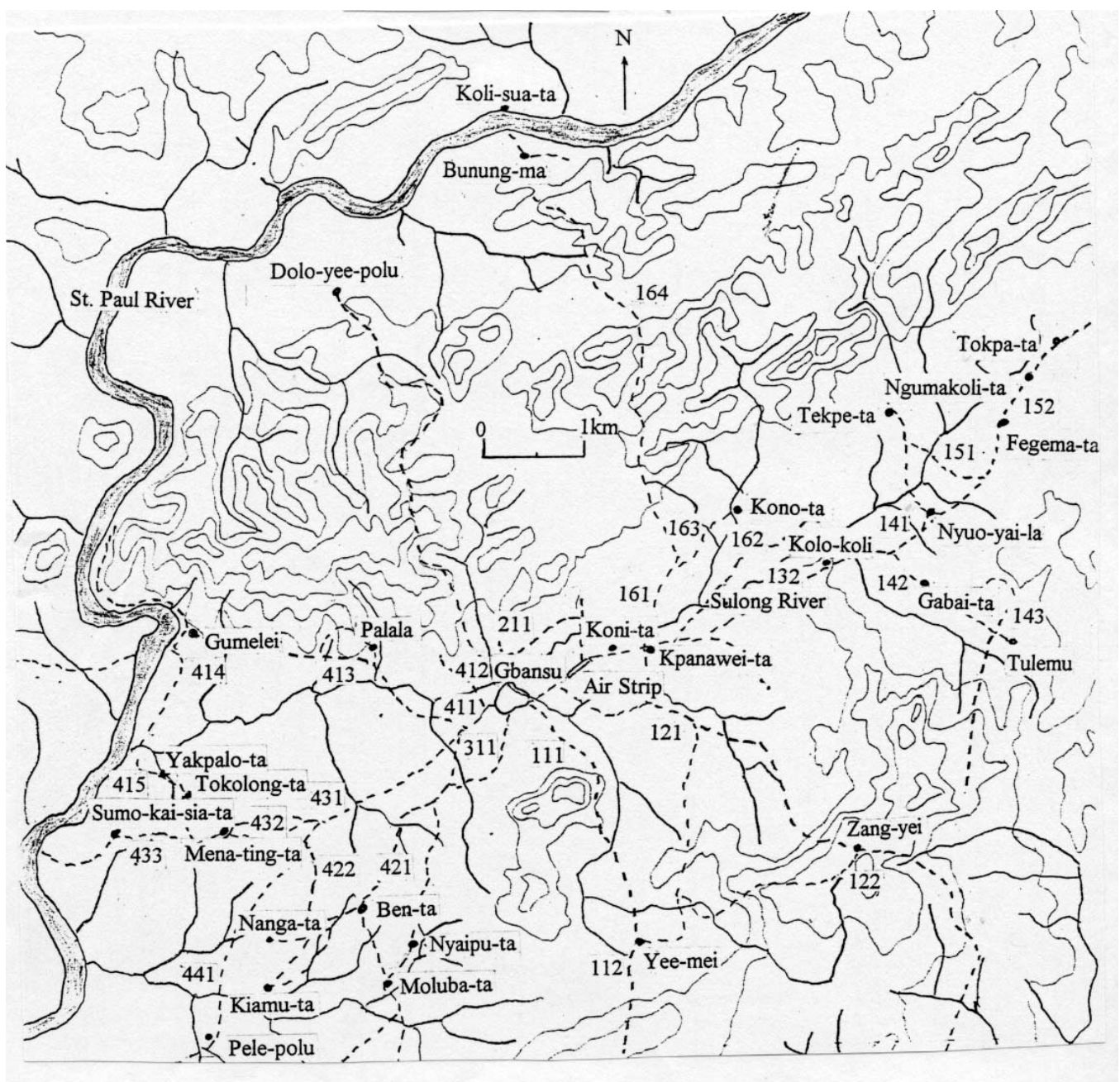


FIGURE 2.2
GBANSU WITHIN LIBERIA



The third map, showing Gbansu territory, gives a deceptive impression. Such a map is essentially useless on the ground, as we found in our initial efforts to locate on the Liberian government's 1:40,000 map the details of sub-villages (called hamlets in what follows), farms and sub-trails which were naturally omitted by geologists who made the map. We started from the village, equipped with map, compass and pedometer, and promptly got lost. We sketched trails where they did not belong, we stumbled upon small hamlets of only a few households, we had only the most infrequent glimpse of nearby hills through the rain forest, our compass was deflected by the high iron content of the hills which we could not see, and the pedometer refused to adjust itself automatically to our varying pace lengths as we negotiated the swamps and hills.

FIGURE 2.3
GBANSU AND ITS LAND



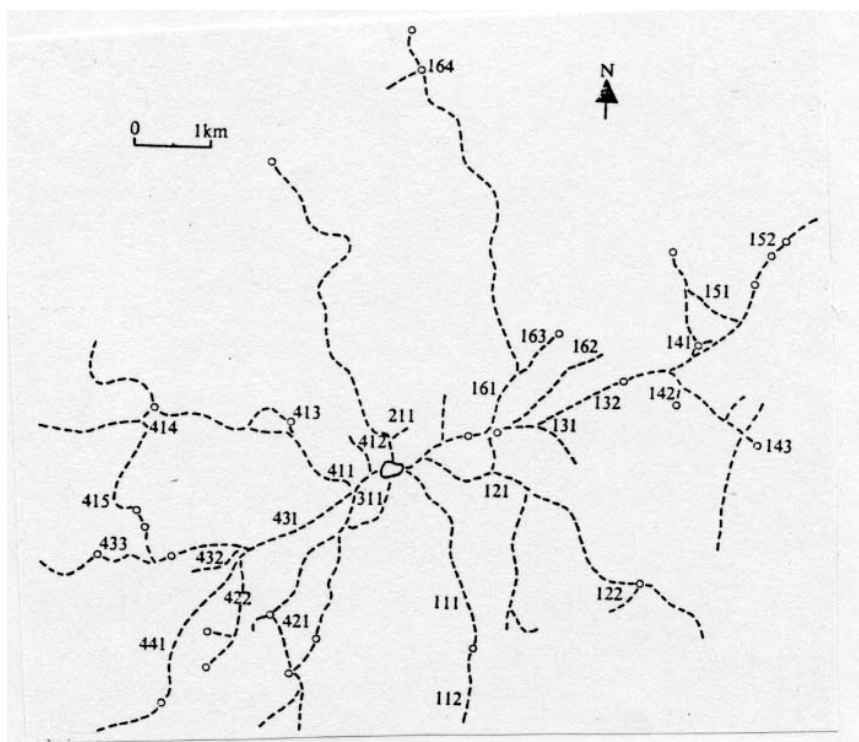
The Gbansu farmers who were our guides were curious as to what we were doing. We became curious ourselves, as it became clear that they knew quite well what they were doing, unlike ourselves. We eventually made sense out of the government map and managed to locate hamlets, farms and trails, but only after we learned the Gbansu way of mapping the region, and integrated it with our own.

Their mental map comprised a hierarchy of trails, branching from the central village to the surrounding hamlets and farms. Ours was a three-dimensional Cartesian coordinate system, in which we could eventually specify the approximate latitude, longitude and altitude of a farm. Our typically western map was in fact much less useful to us in our day-to-day research activities than the Gbansu way of mapping, in which the location of a farm or hamlet was stated operationally, beginning from the central village and branching out.

We tested this intuition when we subsequently collected interviews with local farmers, who told us how to reach their farms from the center of the village. The formal structure was strikingly similar in all these interviews, and strikingly efficient. There were no deviations from the general consensus in this case.

The instructions would begin with a description of which trail to take from the central village - behind what house, near what tree, over what river, through what hamlet. Whenever a trail divided, the farmer would name both paths, describing first the wrong and then the correct alternative. At each intersection, moreover, redundant information was given to make clear which branch to take. The process was repeated, with more redundant information as the farm came closer, until the farmer had reached the shelter at the centre of his farm. We finally found it most convenient to number the trails by reference to branch, sub-branch and sub-sub-branch as shown in the (Cartesian!) map in Figure 2.4, where the trails and hamlets are shown, and where the numbers refer to specific farm areas.

FIGURE 2.4
TRAILS, HAMLETS AND FARM AREAS IN GBANSU



2.2 The world of things

Gbansu's land is the home of people, 1106 of them, but it also provides the non-human setting within which people live. Some of the setting is still very much as it might have appeared to the first settlers hundreds of years ago. The remainder has been shaped and organized by the people of Gbansu into something new. The people share this setting with a rich variety of objects, living and non-living, both fashioned by the people and occurring naturally.

Outsiders who approach Gbansu from the outside see the people and their setting in their own foreign way. But, just as in the case of trying to draw a map of the land, what is important is not what outsiders see, but what the people of Gbansu know to be present. They know it, not as observers, but as creators. They have created what they see not only in the immediate sense of having materially made and organized what they see, but in the deeper sense of having given intellectual shape to what they see. The outsider sees what his or her own experience makes evident, but the insider sees more deeply into the meaning of what is present.

What is that meaning? This point requires the next excursion into letting Gbansu people speak for themselves. The technique was to ask people to identify and classify as many "things" as they can. The Kpelle word used is *seng*, which refers broadly to what are called "things" in English, but it also includes people, organizations and non-countable substances such as water. In English the word "thing" is generally used to refer to something clearly defined spatially, and set off from other "things". The word *seng* in Kpelle is more general, in that it has a much wider reference than the English equivalent.

The people we interviewed had no trouble giving superordinate and subordinate categories for things familiar to them. For instance, salt is a prepared food, belonging in turn to the classes of cooking things, household things, working things, and, at the top of the hierarchy, village things. Likewise, animals are sub-divided into many classes and sub-classes.

On the other hand, it would be wrong to think that there is a single unique classification. People disagreed on where to put certain items, and their disagreement was based on their own position within the total community. The overall taxonomy is a composite of the views of many people. The result mirrors the world of the Gbansu people, and is shown in Figure 2.5.

Translations are always inadequate to the reality expressed. The reality which is created and described by the people of Gbansu in their act of knowing the things of their land cannot precisely be expressed in English terms designed for a different act of knowing. For example, the first term in the taxonomy, namely, "dancing things", refers not only to the paraphernalia for dancing but also to the dancers themselves, to the extent that their human identity is hidden and their ritual non-human role as representatives of the moral order is emphasized.

Yet even this category does not include all dancers whose identity is hidden. Under the forest are listed the so-called "evil things", which include the mysterious and fearful "big thing", who represents the sacred order of the forest, and who is crucial to the Poro and Sande secret societies which lead children into the status of adults and control the deep spiritual life of the people.

"Dancers", on the other hand, refer to people as they dance for joy and sorrow, entertainment and instruction. Outsiders might consider all three classes to refer simply to human beings and the

things they have made for entertainment, instruction and social control, but the people who helped us prepare this taxonomy saw the classes as quite different.

FIGURE 2.5
CLASSIFICATION OF "THINGS"

Things															
VILLAGE THINGS							FOREST THINGS								
PLAYING THINGS	PEOPLE	VILLAGE WORKS	VILLAGE ANIMALS	WORKING THINGS	THE EARTH ^a	THE EARTH ^a	TRAPS ^c	ANIMALS	ROOT CROPS	WATER FOODS	MUSH-ROOMS	VINES	TREES	SHRUBS	^b EVIL THINGS
dancing	children	houses	walking	vehicles	dirt	dirt		hoof	wild	water		wild	wild	wild	poro head
equip-ment	adults	sheds	animals	medicines	stone	stone		(two-part)	planted	oil		planted	planted	planted	sande head
dancers	good people	fences	birds	herbs	sand	sand		hoof	honey						fearful
drums	evil people	bench		charms	mud	mud		(four-part)							things
drums	workmen	loom		societies				claw							witches
horns	status			evil				dragging							genii
games	appearance			divining				snakes							dwarfs
				western				snails							spirits
				household				fish							
				things				nonscaly							
				sleeping				scaly							
				things				worms							
				beds				crawling							
				cloths				edible							
				mats				nonedible							
				tools				water							
				clothing				burrowing							
				cooking				tree							
				things				leaping							
				utensils				edible							
				foods				nonedible							
				prepared				flying							
				forest ^b				birds							
				traps ^c				insects							
								edible							
								nonedible							

^aThe earth is a major subclass of both village and forest things.

^bThe edible forest things within the dotted lines are also a subclass of village things as indicated.

^cTraps are a major category of forest things and a subcategory of village things.

It is not possible to enter into all aspects of the classification of "things" here. The whole classification system has been discussed in more detail, with an explanation of the way in which we elicited the terms, in the earlier book *The Cultural Context of Learning and Thinking* (Cole, Gay, Glick, Sharp, 1971, pp. 61-66, 242-248). For now the basic fact, a fact on which will be built much of the subsequent analysis, is the major division in Figure 2.5 between things of the village and things of the forest.

2.3 The forest

The forest is the primal arena, the setting within which people must make their lives and create a moral order. The village is the ultimate human artifact, which is set over against the forest while at the same time using the forest to make human life possible. To look at the matter in another way, the village is an "artificial" overlay on the "natural" forest. The forest is the raw material, and the village is the product.

The division between forest and village in fact cannot be sharp and absolute. If it were, it would rule out human penetration and control of the forest. The livelihood of people is rooted in the forest, and is derived ultimately from the animals, root crops, vines, trees (by which people mean plants which stand by themselves, including what would be called trees in English, as well as such planted crops as rice and maize), shrubs, water foods and mushrooms, which people can eat.

These edible forest things are therefore also a subclass of village things, just as the substratum of dirt, stone, sand and mud belongs to both categories. The village is of the earth earthy, and the people of the village must depend on the earth and the products of the forest in order to maintain life.

Gbansu is exactly what its citizens understand it to be, namely, forest and village, and neither makes sense without the other. The first task is to elucidate the two realms, before trying to explicate Gbansu's view of farming.

We asked Gbansu people to complete 20 sentences in any way they wish concerning a wide variety of topics. These sentence introducers include such phrases as "I think that...", "I am sorry that..." and "In the future..." The appendix discusses the sentence completion method in detail. Table 2.1 gives the responses concerning the forest which comprised 2% or more of the total.

Outsiders may look at the forest and see ecological stability, or the restoration of oxygen to a tired atmosphere, or the cool beauty of the rivers that cut through an unbroken canopy of trees, or the exotic birds that show themselves to the wary observer, or the profit that can be obtained by clear-cutting the forest giants and selling the wood to first-world countries.

Not so the people of Gbansu. They understand the forest in terms that make sense of the environment in which they must survive and against which they must protect themselves. Table 2.1 shows how the people of Gbansu respond to the forest, their forest.

TABLE 2.1
MOST FREQUENT RESPONSES CONCERNING THE FOREST

RESPONSE	PERCENT
The forest can grow rice	14.7
We work in the forest	12.2
The forest is good	11.8
We make farm in the forest	7.8
There are animals in the forest	3.8
We hunt in the forest	3.8
The forest is bad	3.3
The forest can grow crops	3.0
There are trees in the forest	3.0
The forest grows crops poorly	2.5
We have forest land	2.4
We clear the forest	2.3
Medicine comes from the forest	2.2
We walk in the forest	2.0
The forest helps us	2.0

For the people of Gbansu and nearby villages the forest is the source of life. It is a good place, where people can grow rice and other crops, work, make farms, hunt animals, cut trees, and find medicines.

Our informants mention the wild animals which outsiders are so concerned about, but their concern with them is not as objects of natural beauty. Rather these animals are, to use the Kpelle term, "meat". Protein-rich foods are not common, and so animals are hunted to enrich the diet and to supplement the animals which are raised in the villages, notably sheep, goats and chickens. Most unfortunately, it appears that the Taylor forces in the civil war commandeered most village animals, leaving the rural people even more short of protein. It will be difficult to maintain the forest population of animals in these circumstances.

Clearly the main interest of Gbansu people in the forest is its potential for making farm. The centrality of rice, which is the staple crop of most Liberians, is evident. Even the terms "work" and "make farm" in the Kpelle language refer basically to making rice farm. The "crops" that are mentioned are primarily vegetable and cereal crops which can be grown in the second season after the rice is harvested. They will be discussed in more detail later.

Gbansu people also make negative responses to the forest, reflecting a basic fear of what might happen to a person there. The forest is the primary source of life, but it also harbors fearful things. The classification of things in Figure 2.5 lists, as a category of forest things, witches, dwarfs, genii (a term derived from Arabic referring to tall white apparitions which frighten lonely people on the trail as they walk through the forest) and other spirits. This category also includes the leaders of the secret society, about whom nothing can be said in public except that they are both fearful and at the same time the ultimate guarantors of a peaceful and moral society.

The sentence completions on the forest differ not only from individual to individual, but also between the different subgroups of the whole population. We divided the people of Gbansu in four different ways, in order to sample differences in attitude and knowledge. We chose our respondents in such a way that in each case we interviewed equal numbers of men and women; schooled and unschooled persons; children (8-11), young adults (18-21) and mature adults (40-50); and residents in the central village and the outlying hamlets. There may have been other ways to ensure a representative sample (for example, it might have been useful to include equal numbers of those who had lived in the more westernized parts of Liberia, and those who had lived all their lives in the more remote forest areas such as Gbansu), but hindsight is easier to come by than foresight.

There are important differences between the ways the various groups view the forest. These and other differences reflect the complexity which is necessary for a community like Gbansu to function well. Consistently this analysis mentions only those differences which are significant at the 95% level or more, using a binomial distribution to calculate the probabilities. In other words, significant differences are those which are likely to reflect the true situation in 19 out of 20 cases. Other differences appear in the analysis, but they may well be coincidental.

Men place more emphasis than women on tree crops and the wealth that can be obtained from the forest, while women comment more often on the forest as a source of medicine. It is common across the continent that men gain more from cash crops than women. In fact it is often the women who do the work and it is men who get the profit. This is true in Gbansu. Equally, women are more concerned than men with healing and are in fact more likely than men to know the herbs, leaves, roots and other medicines which can be found in the forest.

Those who have been to school, males and those who live in the central village think of the forest as a place to use, whereas females, unschooled respondents and hamlet dwellers see it as a place

to live. For the one group, the forest is merely instrumental, a place to dominate in order to produce wealth. For the other group, the forest is best described as home, a place with which they have a symbiotic, caring relation. It is common in every culture to find those who merely want to exploit nature for personal gain and those who have a strong ecological concern for nature. Preaching environmental concern to those who have little care for the natural world is important but difficult.

The attitude of those who live in the central village, in contrast to that of the hamlet dwellers, is particularly important. Historically, the hamlets grew up as extensions of the central village. Families would make rice farms in their accustomed locations, about which we will say more at a later stage. The press of work on the farm, combined with the nuisance of walking sometimes up to four or five kilometers each way from home in the central village, meant that junior wives or clients would build houses at the farm, at first only for temporary occupancy when the work was at its peak, but later for permanent residence, after trees had been planted and gardens dug. The residents of the central village were therefore senior to the hamlet residents. As will be shown in greater detail as the argument develops, these village residents are family heads, managers, entrepreneurs and politicians.

Village residents continue to plant crops on well-used land close to the center, while relying on their junior relatives and clients to cultivate the unfarmed, peripheral land, on much of which the forest has not yet been cleared. The villagers stress the benefits they receive from the forest, as mediated through the efforts of the hamlet residents, who see the forest as home. The villagers thus take advantage of the hamlet people, regarding them simultaneously as ignorant country folk ("They go to bed when it's dark, and don't know how to behave when they come to the village!") and as the source of much that can sustain the more complex social life of the village. The hamlet residents in turn are suspicious of the villagers, their night life, their drinking places, their corruption and their politics, but equally must depend on the central village for money, consumer goods and protection against predatory Liberians who come from the towns and cities.

In the small compass of 131 households, 50 in one central village and 81 in the 26 hamlets, the worldwide story of the exploitation of the periphery by the center is told once again. This book will return to this theme at many points.

Cluster analysis and multi-dimensional scaling have been applied to the sentence completions concerning the forest. Cluster analysis reveals which responses belong naturally together. For example, the two responses "The forest is bad" and "The forest grows crops poorly" are given in very similar proportions to the overall set of introducers, e.g., almost never to "I am happy" and "In the old time", and commonly to "I am worried" and "It is a serious matter". Two other responses which are given in very similar proportions to the different introducers are "Our people have told us about the forest" and "We have seen the forest", both of which imply a distancing of the respondent from the forest.

Cluster analysis yields groups of responses which display basic attitudes of Gbansu people to the forest. One large cluster concerns the use of the forest by people, and is given in Table 2.2. For convenience, general headings have been added in bold face. The responses themselves are given in ordinary type at lower levels in the table. One word which is very difficult to translate is *kwii*, which means roughly modern, civilized, educated, well-dressed, exploiting and foreign. The book will refer to this term on many occasions, and in most cases the term is left

untranslated. The word is used throughout Liberia in very much the same way in many different Liberian languages, including English.

Table 2.2 includes even responses given in only a few cases, unlike Table 2.1 which lists only the most common responses. These isolated responses flesh out the total world-view of Gbansu concerning the forest. Use and knowledge go together, each with its own set of closely related responses. Likewise, exploitation and destruction of the forest go together.

To repeat what has been said above, the responses in each set are closely related, not because it is useful to think them so, but because they show a very similar pattern across the various sentence introducers. The similarity and the relationship thus lie in the data and not in any interpretation of the data, which is confined to providing general headings. The headings may well be subjective and even wrong, but the sets of responses must be taken as empirical facts.

TABLE 2.2
RESPONSES CONCERNING PEOPLE'S USE OF THE FOREST

I. Management of the forest

A. Use of the forest

1. Food production

- a. The forest can grow rice
- b. Animals are in the forest
- c. The forest is good
- d. The forest helps us
- e. The forest can grow crops

2. Usefulness of the forest

- a. The forest is high
- b. The forest provides planks
- c. The forest is clear of undergrowth

B. Knowledge of the forest

1. Our people have told us about the forest
2. We have seen the forest
3. There is water in the forest
4. The forest is for strong people

II. Exploitation of the forest

A. Use of forest resources

1. The forest grows tree crops
2. The forest helps us grow rich
3. The forest provides us ropes
4. The forest provides us sticks

B. Destruction of the forest

1. The *kwii* have taken away the forest
2. People destroy the forest

On the one hand, Gbansu citizens manage the forest as an ongoing resource, for rice, crops, animals and building materials, based on their knowledge of the forest. The absolute necessity of the forest for the maintenance of life comes through clearly. Knowledge of the forest comes both from the past and from direct observation. It is also important to note that the forest is no place for weaklings. Felling the giant trees of the forest, clearing the land of undergrowth and

burning the dried leaves, branches, and tree trunks, while leaving the roots to sprout again in another season, is hard work.

On the other hand, some Gbansu people stress the fact that they take away what the forest gives in order to get rich. They acknowledge that they replace its natural growth with cash crops, until in the end the forest is turned over to modern *kwii* people who destroy it. This is most evident in the huge expanse of rubber farms throughout Liberia, a few of which have already been planted in Gbansu territory, rubber farms which earn foreign exchange for the wealthy, but which leave the rural people, and the land, poorer than before they were planted.

To summarize, the people of Gbansu know how to care for the forest as a basic resource, on which their life and survival depend. But some among them also practise forms of exploitation which will eventually destroy the forest.

A second major cluster of responses concerns the power and mystery of the forest, and is given in Table 2.3. One term which appears in this table should probably also not be translated, but with some fear and trembling the important Kpelle term *zo* is replaced by the rough English translation "powerful doctor". The *zo* is the secret society head, teacher, provider of medicines, healer, enchanter, judge, executioner and poisoner, as the need arises.

This group of responses complements the earlier group, which was largely instrumental and pragmatic in its reaction to this forest. It is quite different to see the forest as a place of mystery and danger. Even though both pragmatism and mystery are necessary parts of the Gbansu people's understanding of the forest, the set of responses in Table 2.3 stresses only spiritual power.

TABLE 2.3
RESPONSES CONCERNING POWER AND DANGER IN THE FOREST

I. The forest as a source of power

A. Livelihood

1. We hunt in the forest
2. Powerful doctors live in the forest
3. The forest provides food
4. People live in the forest

B. Medicine

1. Medicine comes from the forest
2. We make sacrifices in the forest
3. We cut down and clear the forest

II. The forest as a source of danger

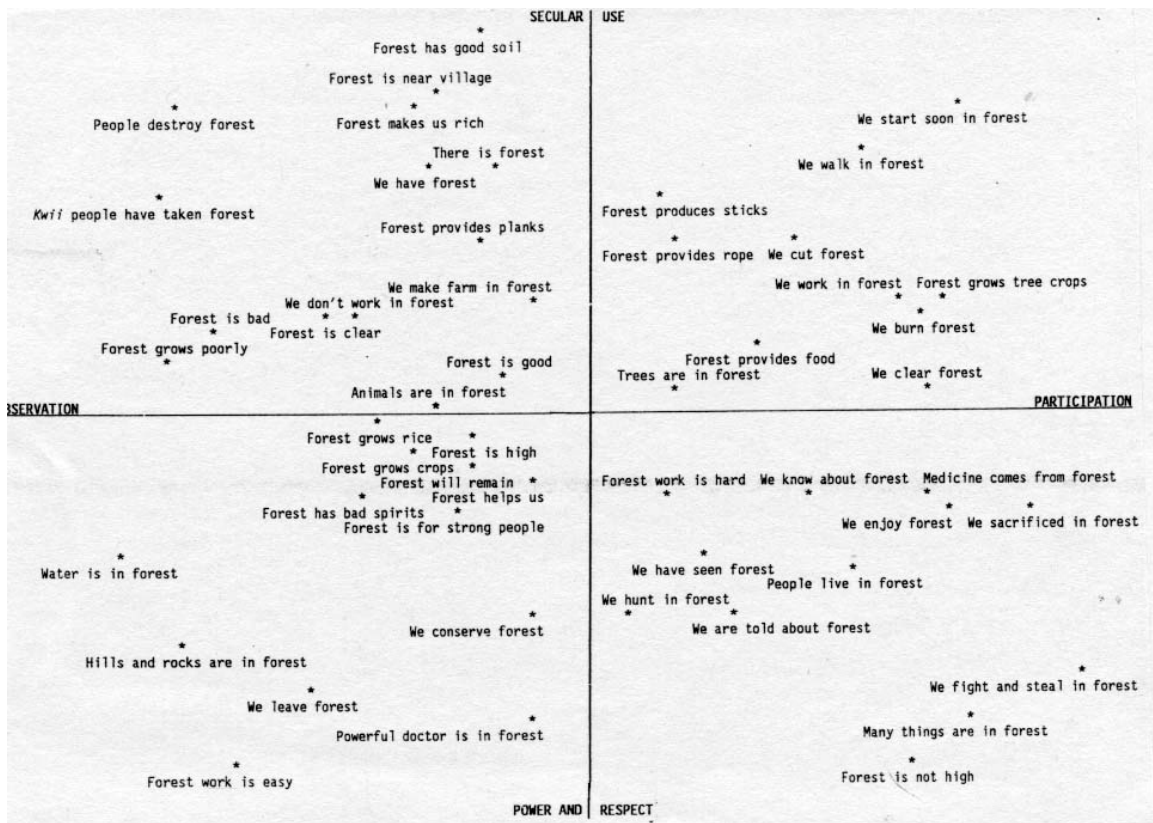
- A. Many things are in the forest
- B. People fight and steal in the forest
- C. The forest is not high

On the one hand, the forest is friendly, a source of livelihood and healing. On the other hand, there are "many things" in the forest, a euphemism for the spirits, dangerous beings and secret society leaders who are believed to dwell in the forest.

The fear of the forest seems to arise from its very density. From the air, the unbroken forest looks like an overgrown bed of broccoli, while within it is a quiet and secretive world where the sun never penetrates and where it is impossible to see more than a short distance. The sunlit world of farm, hamlet and village is a very different place, one which is friendlier and more human, but one which cannot survive on its own without the forest. The people of Gbansu know and fear the forest. They cut it down to bring their world within the compass of human domination. Some, unfortunately not all, also know that when the forest is gone, so will their life be gone. Others, generally the educated male village dwellers, appear to accept the capitalist world's desire for short-term gain as their criterion for exploiting the forest.

Another analytic technique used in the work is multi-dimensional scaling. This method locates the responses to the sentence introducers in a space, one dimension for each sentence introducer. The coordinate for a given response in each dimension is the proportion of times that response was given to that sentence introducer. The method produces the least distorted reduction of that multi-dimensional space to the ordinary two-dimensional plane. The extent to which responses that are far from each other in the full representation are located near each other in a two-dimensional plane is called the stress of the representation. In the analyses reported here the stress was generally low, with less than 20% of the responses being misplaced. The value of this technique is that it shows the principal dimensions along which people in Gbansu structure their ideas. Figure 2.6 shows the two-dimensional representation which multi-dimensional scaling generates for responses concerning the forest. In this representation, responses should be located near each other if the proportions of responses to each sentence introducer are similar. In fact, a few, but only a few, of the responses seem out of place. Overall there are two clear dimensions, one ranging from secular pragmatism to power and mystery, and the other ranging from outside observation of the forest to full participation in the life of the forest.

FIGURE 2.6
TWO-DIMENSIONAL REPRESENTATION OF RESPONSES ABOUT FOREST



There are two principal dimensions in this representation of the sentence completions concerning the forest. The horizontal dimension contrasts ways of observing the forest from outside and entering the forest as an active participant. The vertical axis contrasts secular use of the forest and the power and respect accorded it as the home of the spirits.

A close look at each quadrant of Figure 2.6 reveals underlying attitudes to the forest. As has been said above, due to "stress" not every response is in a sensible position. In particular, the response "the forest is not high" does not at all seem to belong to the group in the lower right quadrant.

Overall, apart from this anomalous response, the lower right quadrant depicts medicine, sacrifice, hunting, stealing, fighting, and the "many things" as well as the (often dangerous and mysterious) people who live in the forest. Active participation in the mystery of the forest prompts both fear and fascination in the people of Gbansu. Those who are sufficiently brave and sufficiently well versed in the mysteries of the forest are respected and feared as powerful leaders of the community, as we will see in greater detail later.

It should be noted that this quadrant includes people who live in the forest. Our experience in Gbansu confirmed the respect and fear accorded to such people. One was a known murderer whose patron, the paramount chief of the area and a wealthy businessman, had placed him deep in the forest, where he grew mammoth quantities of rice. Another was a man who chose to live on the opposite bank of the St. Paul River, where he too raised far more rice than he could use. He could only be visited if he consented to send his son across the river with a canoe to pick up the visitor - and he often refused requests to visit!

The upper right quadrant is different, even though it too reflects people's activities in the forest. Here the activities are secular, and are directed toward maintenance of life. They include walking in the forest (perhaps inspecting it for a farm site), starting to work early, working (which also means, as mentioned earlier, making rice farm), cutting, clearing and burning the forest. In this quadrant are located the trees, sticks, rope, food and tree crops which people need for life.

The upper left quadrant reflects secular knowledge of the forest, concerning its existence and ownership, its soil, its location, its animals, its good and bad qualities, and the neglect that comes when people destroy and take away the forest. That the two statements "forest provides planks" and "we make farm in forest" are just to the left of the vertical axis results from a non-zero stress in the two-dimensional representation of the sentence completions. These responses ideally would have appeared on the right of the vertical axis.

Finally, the lower left quadrant is generally descriptive, with a greater emphasis than in the upper left on spirits, strong people, powerful doctors, and the hills, rocks and water which are not productive of crops. The few items near the center of the diagram again reflect the problem with stress, since ideally they would be just above the center line rather than just below it. More problematic is the location of the response "forest work is easy" at the bottom of this quadrant. However, overall the distortion brought about by these mislocated responses is not serious enough to render this interpretation suspect.

Anomalies arise both from the difficulties of reducing multi-dimensional data to a two-dimensional representation, and from inevitable problems in data collection and recording. What is important in the case of this analysis is not so much the distortions as the overall coherence

and faithfulness to the reality we saw on the ground. Without observational data, these computer artifacts cannot be interpreted. Equally, without objective analysis of rigorously collected and carefully coded data, qualitative impressions cannot be trusted. Both are necessary.

In summary, the forest within which Gbansu is set is simultaneously a home, a source of livelihood, a place of mystery, and a setting for the harm that people do to each other. Gbansu is land and people, and the land begins and ends with the forest. People clear and destroy the forest at their own peril, when they see the forest only as a place where they can obtain profit. The people we interviewed, particularly the females, unschooled persons, older people and hamlet residents, take a more balanced view, a more ecologically and spiritually sound view, than those who simply wish to improve production of food and export crops.

It is only in recent years that outside "experts" are beginning to realize that they, like the older unschooled rural people, must also respect and love the rain forest, that in fact their very life, just as the life of the people of Gbansu, depends on the care they give to the world in which they live. And, in that world, the rain forest is critical to the survival of all humankind. It would benefit everyone to see the forest as a place of mystery and danger and power, and not just a source of raw materials.

In the end, both views are present in the understanding which Gbansu people, and therefore Gbansu itself, articulate concerning the forest. The forest is their home, but it is also their creation. If Gbansu is to survive, the forest must, of course, be used. But it is equally, if not more, important that it be respected.

CHAPTER 3. THE PEOPLE

3.1 The households

Gbansu is more than just forest. What makes it different, what makes it into a community, is that it is forest which has been shaped and organized, forest made liveable and useable by people. It is thus necessary to attend to the people of Gbansu, presenting them as far as possible in the way they see themselves, rather than only as outsiders see them. Only after fully understanding the community is it possible to consider its interaction with the forest, particularly their creation of the technology with which they manage their world.

Gbansu has (here, as throughout the study, the present tense refers to 1974) 50 households in the central village, and 81 households altogether in the 26 satellite hamlets. We conducted a complete census of these households, allowing them to state what persons they consider to be members of their households and thus Gbansu residents.

Table 3.1 gives the number of individuals in specific subgroups of the population. Those listed in the table as "other males and other females" are persons living in the household, but not members of the central core of the household. Some are visitors, some are clients, some are distant relatives. The table demonstrates that villages like Gbansu are not static, isolated entities, but are in continuous social interaction with the rest of Liberia. The fact that so many migrants are listed as still being members of Gbansu households supports this contention. On the other hand, Table 3.1 shows that there are many more women than men in the village, which can be explained because so many men have left the village for employment or education, and have been gone so long that they are no longer considered members of the community.

**TABLE 3.1
POPULATION OF GBANSU AND ITS HAMLETS**

GROUP	VILLAGE		HAMLETS	
	HOME	MIGRANT	HOME	MIGRANT
Married men	79	13	98	4
Married women	136	4	133	0
Unmarried men	35	22	63	26
Unmarried women	52	9	56	18
Boys	98	3	97	7
Girls	95	3	78	1
Other males	23	0	23	0
Other females	15	0	25	0
Total	533	54	573	56

Several households contain more than one family, usually because a young man, newly married, will live with his or his wife's parents, or because a client may move in with his patron during the early years of marriage. This is particularly true in the central village, where there is an average of 1.58 married men per household, while in the hamlets the average is only 1.21.

The number of married women is greater than the number of married men, both because 5 households are headed by widows and because many of the marriages are polygynous. The ratio of married women to married men is 1.7.2 in the central village, and only 1.34 in the hamlets.

Households are larger in the central village, where a mean of 10.7 members are living at home and 1.1 living outside, than in the hamlets, where a mean of 7.1 members are living at home and 0.7 living outside. Households vary in size from 1 to 34 members in the village, and from 1 to 20 in the hamlets.

The largest household belongs to the chief. He has three wives, who have borne him at least 16 children. Two of his sons are also married, with two wives and three wives respectively, and have at least 6 children, all living in the chief's compound. In addition, there is one child of a relative staying with the family, as well as two non-related persons.

Figure 3.1 shows a typical extended family, which is in fact larger and more diverse than a family composed of a man, one wife and their children. The people in this photograph are those whom the village elder assembled when we asked to take a picture of his "family". In fact, included in the picture are people from almost every area of the village as well as a number from the hamlets. The elder is seated with his newest child in his arms, and around him is, in effect, the village of Gbansu, through its haphazardly selected representatives. We can only conclude that, from his point of view, his extended family is in fact the village, confirming his position as elder.

FIGURE 3.3
GBANSU'S ELDER AND HIS "FAMILY"



We were at first annoyed that the elder chose to collect this disparate group of Gbansu residents as his "family". We knew very well who lived in his compound, and we knew that many of the people in the photograph lived in other compounds or were even family heads on their own. But, on second thought, we realized that our limited outsider's understanding of "family" distorted the conceptual framework within which the elder organized his world. If we had insisted that he line up only those who physically lived and ate with him on a regular basis, we would have misconstrued his importance as a central person in Gbansu. He should be considered as a central component of the social cement that makes the village a unity in diversity. Essential to understanding the cognitive complexity of Gbansu, with its diverse and even contradictory strands, is the role the elder and his "family" play in forging the contradictions into a unity.

3.2 The leaders

The leadership of the community is an important element in what knits Gbansu together as a living system. We as outsiders often felt resentment against what seemed an exploitative domination by the elder, the chief and certain other key figures in Gbansu. But without this leadership, the diverse strands, such as those which have been noted in people's attitudes to the forest, would not come together. That Gbansu still "works", despite the fact that some of its members stress the ecological centrality of the forest and others stress its accessibility as a ready source of income through exploitation, is in large part due to the ability of the leadership to embrace the contradictions of the total world view within itself. The persons in the elder's "family", as shown in Figure 3.2, hold between them most of the views mentioned concerning the forest, and he as elder helps make it possible for them to be one community.

Of course, there is much more to the leadership than just one person. It is the classic error of outsiders that they ask to be taken to the chief, to the leader, to the person in charge. The leadership is complex, just as the world view is complex, and there are multiple centers of authority. This structure is both a cherished legacy from the past, and an imposition by the Liberian government. Even in 1991, during the first phase of the civil war, the leadership included both the Charles Taylor appointee and the customary leaders to whom he must offer respect.

Ever since the Liberian government took authority over the people of Gbansu and neighboring villages, and not just in 1991 under Charles Taylor, there has been a hierarchy of externally imposed top-down control. Only today in 1995 has the hierarchy apparently yielded to total anarchy. Whether order can be restored after the war is over is a difficult question

At the top of the hierarchy as it was in 1974 is the president, and under him are county superintendents, paramount chiefs, clan chiefs, village chiefs, and "quarter" chiefs. This system has been superimposed upon an older structure, which alternated authority between war chiefs and owners of the land, while behind both were the publicly invisible secret society leaders. Village and quarter chiefs are in an anomalous position, since they do not really differ from what existed prior to the imposition of the Liberian system, but have nonetheless been given official, and thus imposed, status. Prior to the present, the war chief or the owner of the land functioned largely as today's village chief would function.

The old structure is still present, albeit without the war chief, in the public system of elders and the privately still powerful secret societies. The elder of Gbansu is in effect the owner of the

land, as the photograph of him and his extended "family" makes clear. There are also elders in each quarter, who are the leading male family heads, all related to the town elder in some way.

Day-to-day administrative matters are handled by the village and quarter chiefs, but important decisions which affect the internal well-being of the community are in the hands, first of the village elder, and finally of the secret society leaders. It is primarily external relations, affecting the two-way flow between the secular world of Liberian politics and the village, that operate through the other hierarchy, of clan chief, paramount chief, county superintendent and president.

We explored the structure of leadership within Gbansu, by asking a series of questions concerning people who play leading roles in the village and the hamlets. Altogether, more than 20% of the population of Gbansu was named in answer to at least one of these questions. For the sake of analytic ease, we eliminated from the list persons who were named only once. This still left 63 persons, or 5.7% of the resident population. Clearly, leadership is widely shared in the community. Anyone who hopes to tap the resources of a village such as Gbansu in the hope of helping rebuild the economy and society of Liberia must bear in mind the complexity of leadership which Gbansu displays.

In order to analyze the answers to these leadership questions, a table was prepared listing these 63 persons and the number of times each person was named in response to each of the 25 questions. This allowed cluster analysis and multi-dimensional scaling, both of the questions and of the individuals named in answer to the questions. Table 3.2 shows how types of leadership are classified, as revealed by cluster analysis of the questions we asked. Added in bold typeface are headings of the groups which are generated by the computer, while the descriptions of the leadership types are in ordinary typeface.

TABLE 3.2
CLASSIFICATION OF TYPES OF LEADERSHIP

I. Traditional

A. Power

1. Ability

- a. Does farm work well
- b. Is a strong person
- c. Will be the next chief
- d. Works well with money
- e. Brings new things

2. Wealth

- a. Has a large family
- b. Has many crops
- c. Has good land

B. Wisdom

1. Tradition

- a. Knows the forest well
- b. Helps you with traditional medicine
- c. Knows traditional matters well

2. Personal relations

- a. Gives you advice in serious matters
- b. You trust
- c. You respect
- d. Is your best friend

II. Modern

A. Power

1. Ability

- a. Has much intelligence
- b. Helps you with government affairs
- c. Is a wealthy person
- d. You fear most

2. Wisdom

- a. Resolves disputes well
- b. Decides court cases well

B. Knowledge

1. Helps you with modern medicine
2. Helps you find modern work
3. Knows modern matters best
4. Is changing old things

This corresponds almost exactly with what we observed to be true about the leadership structure of Gbansu. The principal power-wielders are the men (in fact, all men) who fill a role which predates the Liberian conquest, men with ability and wealth, men who are good farmers, men from among whom a new chief is likely to come. These are the men who make the major decisions concerning village life.

These power-wielders can be contrasted with persons who have wisdom and insight, but not necessarily power. These are persons, a few of them female, who know the past, the forest and the traditional medicines of the forest. Their advice and help are sought by friends in time of need. Their influence is important, even though they themselves do not hold power.

The traditional group contrasts with those who are leaders on the basis of their status as members of the new *kwii* world. These persons are also grouped into those who hold power and those who have useful knowledge of the changing world. The first group consists of people who play an inescapable role as links with the outside but who are also feared, while, just as in the case of the traditional bearers of wisdom and knowledge, those in the second group are helpful in time of need.

Access to the people of Gbansu clearly must come through the leadership. But the unfortunate thing about many outside developers is that they do not understand the roles of the different segments of the leadership. It may be easy and satisfying to communicate with the modern leaders. They speak English, they are conversant with government procedures, they know the value of money, and they play down their ties to traditional secret societies and ceremonies.

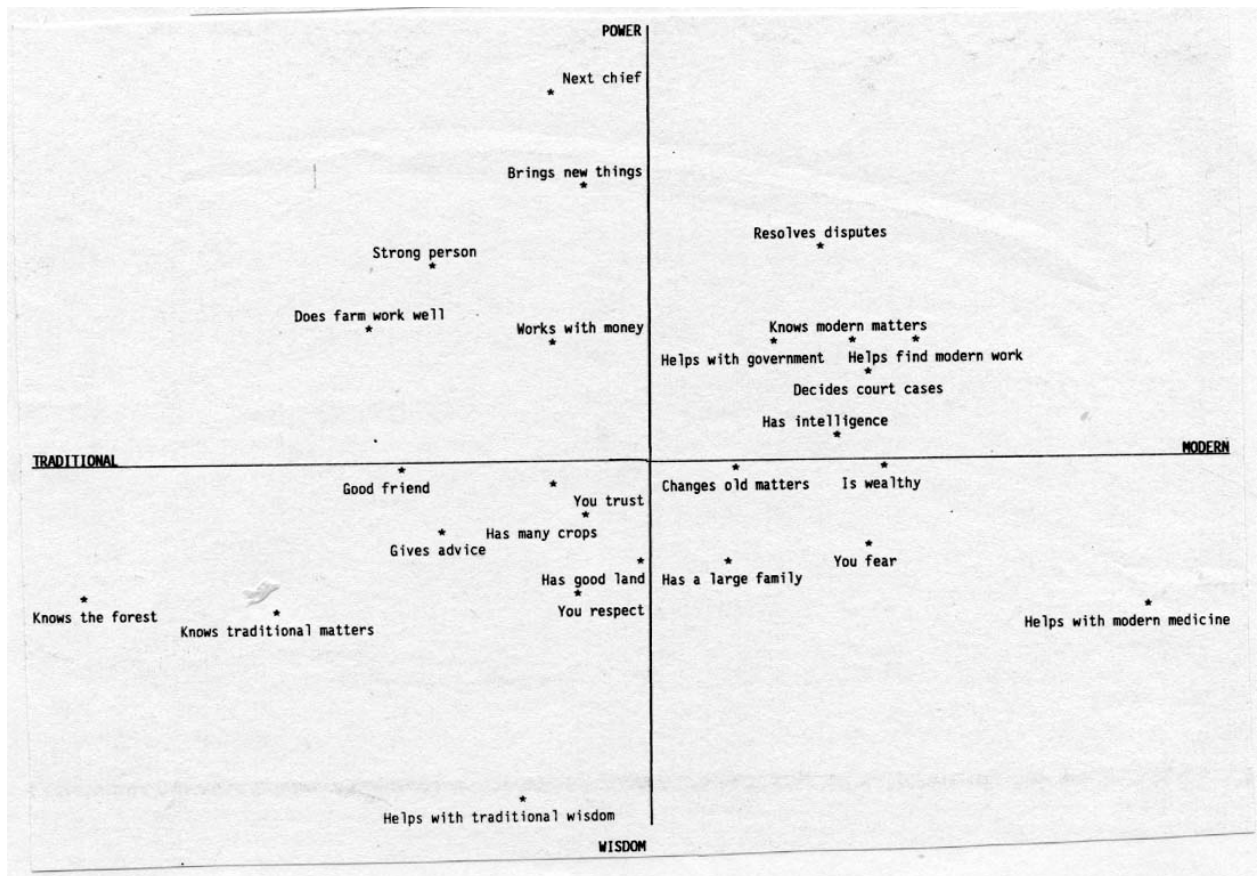
However, few development goals are likely to be achieved by working with these people. The earlier discussion of attitudes to the forest should make the problem clear. Planning for the exploitation of undeveloped or fallow land, when done only with the modern money-oriented

sector of the leadership, is likely to produce the kind of mindless destruction of the rain forest which is endemic throughout tropical countries.

Areas near Gbansu have witnessed this kind of destruction. An Israeli company bulldozed several hectares of prime forest only about 20 kilometres from Gbansu, and in the end only a barren expanse of laterite remained to show for their efforts. The developers in all likelihood had talked only with the bright young educated males in the nearby villages, if indeed they talked with anyone, and had not consulted those who understand the fragility and instability of forest soils. Had they consulted and respected people like those who exercise power and wisdom in the traditional sector they would have been much less likely to make the mistake of destroying an irreplaceable piece of forest.

The same two dimensions, power vs. wealth and traditional vs. modern, also are basic to a two-dimensional representation of the questions, as shown in Figure 3.2.

FIGURE 3.2
TWO-DIMENSIONAL REPRESENTATION OF LEADERSHIP QUESTIONS



From left to right the categories move from traditional to modern, with the most traditional being knowledge of the forest and the most modern being knowledge of modern medicine. From bottom to top we see the shift from wisdom to power, with the knowledge of traditional medicine at the bottom and likelihood of becoming the new chief at the top.

Bringing new things, resolving disputes and being a strong person are qualities which are likely to mark the new chief. But the chief is not the only wielder of power, nor do new things make sense without consultation with the guardians of the old. Furthermore, strength alone is not a guarantee of successful and integrated growth of the community. And, finally, the ability to resolve disputes in public, which is the domain of the chief, is subject to the ultimate resolution of disputes through the secret society, which takes place in and through the power of the forest.

Up to this point we have considered the dimensions of leadership. We now turn to the actual leaders, the persons who were named in answer to the questions we asked. The names are obviously not relevant to our explanation of the leadership of Gbansu, but the roles which are filled are very important, since they illuminate and give content to the abstract categories which our questions pose and elicit. Table 3.3 lists the leading individuals, stating the number of categories each one filled and the total percent of responses which mentioned each person.

TABLE 3.3
LEADING PERSONS IN GBANSU

PERSON NAMED	NUMBER OF	PERCENT OF
	CATEGORIES	RESPONSES
Village elder	22	13.1
Village chief	23	8.5
Leading Muslim	18	6.2
Leading blacksmith	17	4.8
Influential farmer	17	4.7
Young wealthy farmer	16	4.5
Young storekeeper	11	4.1
Young educated medicine seller	15	4.0
Older work group leader	15	3.8
Younger work group leader	17	3.5
Educated son of village chief	18	3.2
Assistant village chief	14	2.2
Head of large family	13	2.2
Quarter elder	13	2.1
Head of large family	17	2.0
Head of large family	15	1.9
Young storekeeper	3	1.8
Quarter elder	13	1.7
Head of Muslim household	10	1.7
Good hunter	4	1.6
Traditional doctor	3	1.6
Good hunter	3	1.3
Good musician	5	1.3
Quarter elder	9	1.1
Traditional doctor	6	1.1
Educated son of blacksmith	7	1.1

Certain persons are clearly named far more often than others, with the elder and the chief at the head of the list. Not only are they named between them in 21.6% of the responses, but they are named in almost all the categories. The leading Muslim is a young man, a son of a village mother and a Mandingo father, part of the most recent in-migration from Guinea into the interior of Liberia. In 1974 he was in line for the chieftainship in terms of his popularity, and his ability to meet the criteria suggested in the analysis of Figure 3.2, had he not alienated other members of the village by refusing to eat meat which was not killed in the proper Muslim fashion. After the research was complete, he was in fact in the 1980s elected village chief. It is not known whether he continued to insist on all Muslim customs.

The blacksmith, who is also one of the principal work group leaders, is the leader of the local Lutheran church and is reputedly important in other, more secret ways. He is perhaps the most respected person in the village, although not the most powerful, primarily because he does not come from the leading branch of the chiefly family, and also because he does not play the harsh games which are required by local politics. The lightness of his touch, the gentleness of his ways, and his deep understanding of the forest mark him as a person who keeps the community together in other ways than the overtly political and economic.

The influential farmer is the paramount chief of the area, and owns the only producing rubber farm, as well as the most impressive rice farm in the village. This rice farm, which we mentioned earlier, is far into the forest, on the other side of the St. Paul River, and is managed by a client of this farmer who is known to have escaped from the law and to have been taken under protection by the paramount chief. The power of the forest to produce good crops, as well as the mystery of the forest, are encapsulated in this remote client of the paramount chief.

The next three young men - wealthy farmer, storekeeper and educated medicine seller - live close together and are the main modernizing elements in the village. The two work group leaders cooperate with the blacksmith in administering the cooperative work groups which will be discussed in detail later. The educated son of the village chief works closely with his father and with the assistant village chief (himself also a quarter chief) to administer village affairs. The next man, listed as the head of a large family, in fact became the village chief in 1975, following the death of the man who was chief at the time of the research.

The remaining persons are important, each in his own way, to the village. The quarter chiefs advise the chief and maintain peace in their sections of the village. The hunters supply the people with meat. The doctors provide traditional medicine. And the musician brings the cooperative work groups the rhythm and vigor necessary for a hard day's work. These somewhat marginal individuals supplement and complement the leadership skills which the principal figures provide. Without them the complex interaction leading to stability and growth would not be complete.

One important fact about this list of 26 persons is that none are female, even though an equal number of males and females answered the questions. Very few women were mentioned, each in less than 1% of the responses. Despite the fact that there have been a few women chiefs of importance in the region, Gbansu remains a firmly patriarchal society.

Cluster analysis can be applied also to the set of village leaders. Table 3.4 gives the result of cluster analysis. In this case, all the entries in the table are in bold typeface, since it is not useful to give actual names of the people involved.

TABLE 3.4
CLASSIFICATION OF LEADING GBANSU CITIZENS

- I. Traditional leaders**
 - A. Middle-aged adults**
 - 1. Village-centered leaders**
 - a. Non-entrepreneurs**
 - (1) Village leaders**
 - (a) Political leaders**
 - I. Core leaders**
 - (I) Chief and elder**
 - (ii) Muslim leaders**
 - ii. Quarter chiefs**
 - (b) Family heads**
 - I. Minor office holders**
 - ii. Wealthy family heads**
 - (2) Forest leaders**
 - (a) Secret society leaders**
 - (b) Good hunters**
 - b. Entrepreneurs**
 - (1) Muslim storekeepers**
 - (2) Unscrupulous young men**
 - 2. Farm-centered leaders**
 - a. Farm leaders**
 - (1) Cooperative work group leaders**
 - (2) Hamlet heads**
 - b. Energetic farmers**
 - (1) Women**
 - (2) Marginal men**
 - B. Elders**
 - 1. Leading elders**
 - a. Senior elders**
 - b. Junior elders**
 - 2. Traditional doctors**
- II. Modern leaders**
 - A. Leading young adults**
 - 1. More modernized young adults**
 - a. Young adults active in the village**
 - b. Young adults residing outside the village**
 - 2. Less modernized young adults**
 - a. Young farmers**
 - b. Political appointees**
 - (1) Evangelist**
 - (2) Teacher**
 - (3) Clan chief**
 - B. Modern healers**
 - 1. Healers residing in the village**
 - 2. Healers residing in Monrovia**

If we had been asked to organize a list of village leaders in Gbansu on the basis of observation and personal understanding, we would not have done as well as this computer-generated taxonomy. The list has a wealth of detail that is both correct and illuminating, and that must be respected if constructive use is to be made of the community's resources.

The central political leadership is the set of 21 persons called non-entrepreneurs, and is divided into 16 village leaders and 5 forest leaders. The village leaders include a central core of office holders and a peripheral group of family heads and minor office holders, such as messengers and musicians. The forest leaders are hunters and those whose power is not accessible to the non-initiated public.

This table once again shows the fundamental split between village and forest. On the one side are the pragmatic public village leaders. And on the other side is the private power, which undergirds the public presence, supporting and sustaining the village leadership from within the mystery and fecundity of the forest.

Farm-centered leaders are in a peripheral position, showing the importance of farming but at the same time its subordination to village politics. The heads of the hamlets appear in this group, correctly located as hard workers and food producers, but distinctly not at the center of power and prestige.

Elders form a clearly separate group, classed with traditional healers. They are the holders of wisdom, not of overt political power. As we have mentioned above, they have considerable influence in the community, but exercise this influence outside the public display of power. They are key people in shaping the community but they are likely to be ignored by development experts, who seek out only the officially recognized leaders.

The modernized Gbansu residents form the second major category in Table 3.4. They too are divided into wielders of secular power and healers. This modern cluster contains the entire group of political appointees, consisting of the church-appointed evangelist (who assists the blacksmith in running the local church), the teacher and the clan chief, here mutually supporting each other as they do in real life. The political appointees are important people, of course, but they are not central to the village leadership. They can only achieve their goals if they cooperate closely with the central core and listen to the wisdom of those who understand the deep facts of Gbansu life.

3.3 The network of families

The central village of Gbansu has four sections, called quarters, into which it is divided. Figure 3.3 shows the village from the air, as it was during our stay in early 1974, surrounded on all sides by secondary forest. Most of the houses have corrugated iron roofs, but there are still some with thatch roofs. This is a drastic change from 1963, when we first visited Gbansu and found only one house with a corrugated iron roof.

Figure 3.4 is a schematic drawing of the village with the houses labelled and the quarters separated by dotted lines. The households within each quarter are closely allied by marriage and descent, while the relations between quarters are mediated through the elder and his family, whose great-grandfather early in this century was a powerful land owner who dominated the entire group of villages along the St. Paul River.

FIGURE 3.3
AERIAL PHOTOGRAPH OF GBANSU

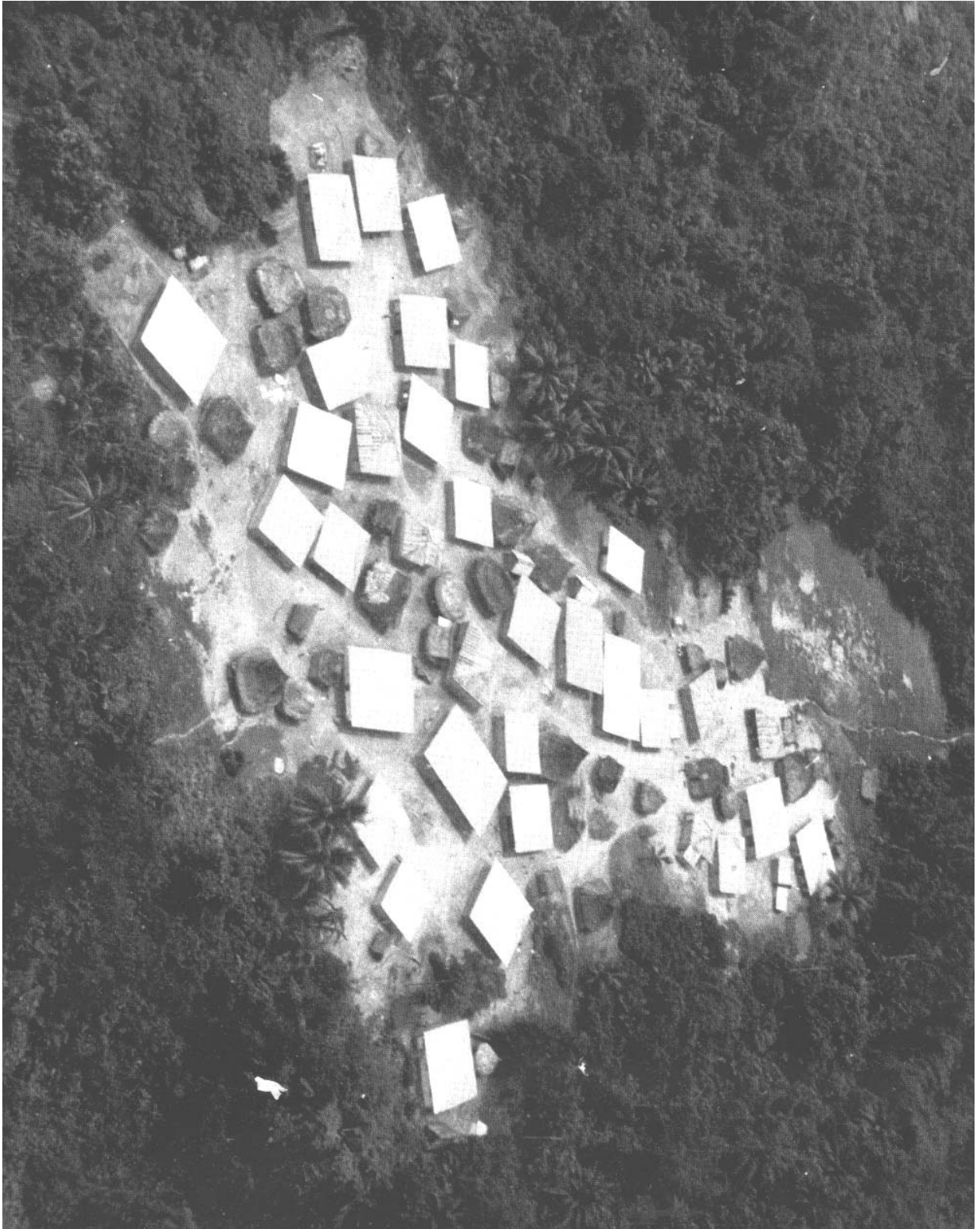
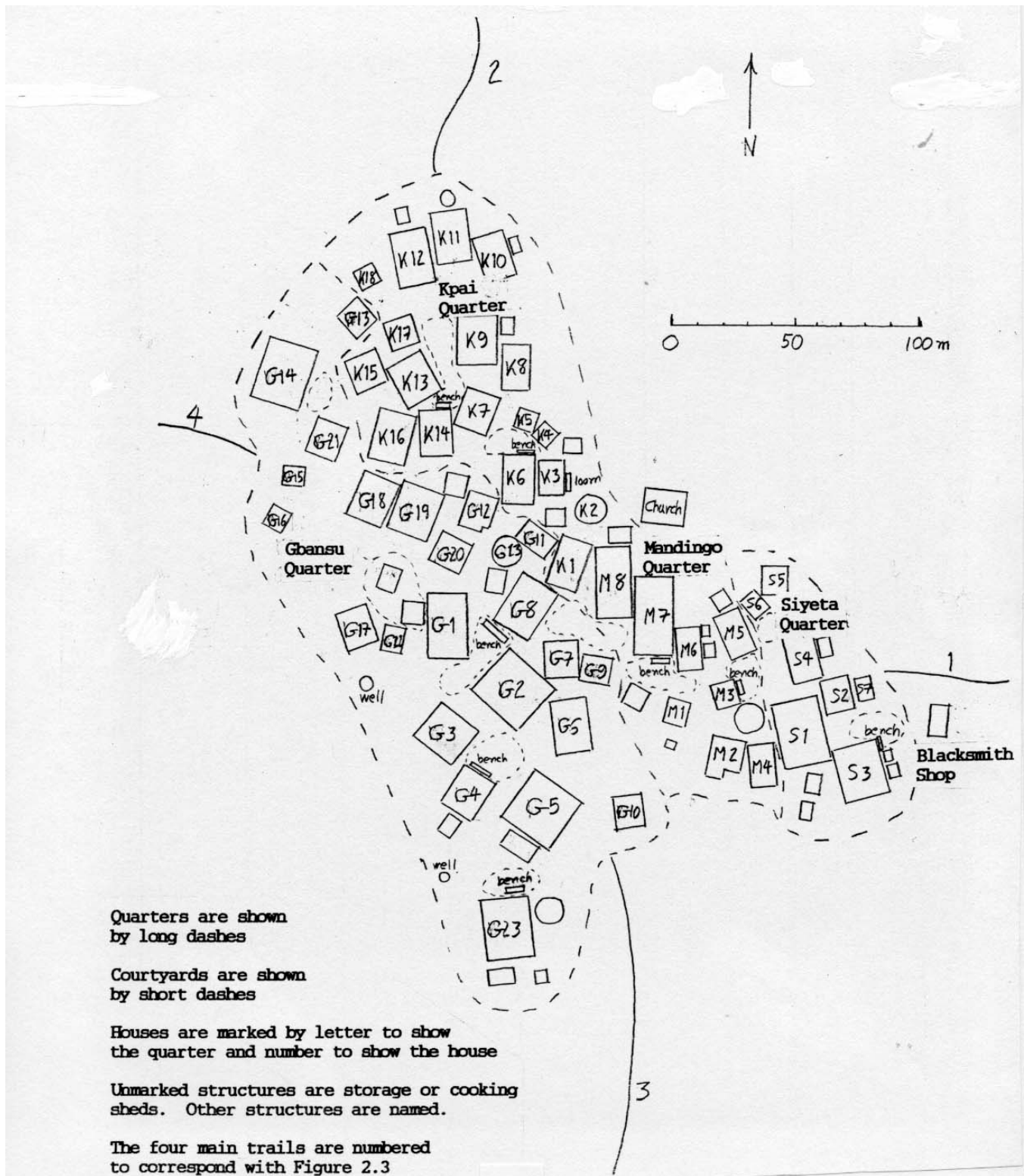


FIGURE 3.4
GBANSU VILLAGE LAYOUT



A careful study of the genealogy of Gbansu shows that the Kpai and Siyeta quarters are linked through marriage. These links precede their present ties, again through marriage, to the principal Gbansu quarter, of which the elder is the head. In many ways it is as important who are you related to, by blood or by marriage, as who you are in yourself. The elder always stressed his ties to other members of the community, as the analysis of his "family" photograph showed.

The Mandingo, or Muslim, quarter is more closely bound to the Gbansu quarter because its quarter chief is a great-grandson of the original land owner. His first wife, moreover, is a great-great-granddaughter of the original land owner, while his second wife is a half-sister of the present town elder. He became a Muslim because his first wife's sister was given in marriage by the then town elder to the first Mandingo trader to settle in Gbansu.

The chief who was selected by the people in 1975, after the death of the chief we knew, is also a member of the Mandingo quarter, as well as a relative by marriage to the Kpai and Siyeta quarters. He is himself a powerful and wealthy man who had 32 members in his household in 1974 when we were in Gbansu. Many of the members of his household are clients, through whom he is linked to other important families in the village and the hamlets. He has a strong agricultural base through these hamlet and client ties. He is reputed to have been a strong farmer, but he is no longer active on his farm, even though he is still young and physically strong.

Two of the links tying the new chief to the ruling lineage are through second marriages of key women. Such remarriage of women, often by transfer from patron to client or from client to patron, is an important mechanism in creating the kinship network in Gbansu and similar villages. Women do not themselves hold leadership positions in Gbansu, but they are instrumental through marriage in binding the community together.

A description of the kinship relations in Gbansu is as easy for the leaders of the community as it is difficult for outsiders, who do not think in these categories. For good reason, the most appropriate representation is structured like a map of the land. A tree diagram, with stems and branches, fits the land much more economically than a Cartesian map. Similarly, a tree diagram starting with the present elder's great-grandfather explains the community far better than a western profile based on economic class. One of the first questions which a newcomer to the community must answer concerns his or her family ties to the village leadership. And if no ties exist, then they must be created by the decision of that person to attach himself or herself to a leading family as a client.

The kinship links explain how members of the community relate to each other within the central village, between the village and the hamlets, and within the hamlets. These links begin in the central village, which may appear from the aerial photograph to be without plan, but which is in fact a model of the kinship system. Each house, each courtyard, each path is so positioned as to show its connections with relatives and friends.

The most important courtyard is that between houses G1, G2, G3 and G4, as shown in Figure 3.4. These are the homes of the village chief, the village elder, the Gbansu quarter elder, and the Gbansu quarter chief. In that open space the major disputes of the community are discussed and settled. The fragile and often rebuilt piassava bench in this courtyard is a place for disputes, conversations, marriage arrangements, decisions about farming, rest for the weary and public pronouncements.

The second main courtyard is that before houses M6 and M7, which belong to the chief who took over in 1975 and the young Mandingo who eventually became chief. This was the principal meeting place of young men during our stay in 1974, and these two buildings housed shops where one could buy cloth and salt and shotgun shells during the day, or dance and drink raw rum at night. The pivotal position of the new chief's house is further evidence of his unifying role in the village, located as it is at the corner of the three main quarters.

In general, life takes place outdoors in Gbansu. The courtyards before and between houses are the sites for cooking, playing games, discussing farming, healing, weaving baskets and nets, combing hair, training children and telling stories. Physical structures are used for sleeping, for storage, for privacy, for protection from the rain, but not for communal living. Each quarter, indeed the entire village, is a residential unit, within which sub-units are separated from and yet integrated with each other. Uncarpentered as it may appear to the outsider, the village organization makes excellent sense in its own terms.

One very important fact to notice about the village layout, as given in Figure 3.4, is the position of the blacksmith shop, the church, which doubled as a school, and the house of the doubtless strange visiting anthropologist, when we lived in Gbansu. All three lie outside the main body of the village. People speak of a village like Gbansu being surrounded by a theoretical vine or rope, which has been laid around the village to protect it against the dangers of the forest and the outside world. The church and the anthropologist's house, G23 on Figure 3.4, are outside the vine, because they are from the modern world.

The blacksmith shop is outside the vine, because in an important sense it is part of the forest, not part of the village. The leading blacksmith is always an important person in the secret society. Women are not allowed in the blacksmith shop, which is therefore in effect a part of the men's secret society, which must lie outside the village.

CHAPTER 4. THE VILLAGE AND THE HAMLETS

4.1 The hamlets

The network of families extends beyond the central village to the hamlets which are satellite subvillages, as shown in Figure 1.4. Most of the hamlets have acquired an identity of their own, their residents having pushed farther into the high forest than the residents of Gbansu, and settled there permanently. But their links to the central village still remain. The village depends on the hamlets for food, and the hamlets depend on the village as a place to sell food, recruit farm workers and get protection. Figure 4.1 shows a typical remote hamlet, surrounded by the farm areas for the families that live there.

FIGURE 4.1
TYPICAL GBANSU HAMLET



Hamlets are generally small, with an average of only 3.1 households per hamlet, the largest hamlet having only 8 households. They are materially simple, in that more than half the houses in the hamlets have thatch roofs and some even have thatch walls instead of the standard mud walls. On the other hand, two-thirds of the houses in the central village have corrugated iron "zinc" roofs, and none have thatch walls.

The hamlets are unspecialized, in that there are no shops, and only one has a blacksmith's shed. The village, on the other hand, has an airstrip, four bars, a church which serves during the week as a school, a blacksmith shed, three shops, a Mandingo Muslim quarter, and a resident anthropologist!

The way a hamlet grows up is roughly as follows. A village family may build a rice storage shed in the rainy season, both to provide storage for the rice after harvest and to provide shelter for the family during the heavy rains which may fall daily from June to October. The rain may continue until evening, and a woman and her child decide to remain in the storage shed overnight.

The storage loft is built over an open space, within which people may cook and take shelter. A fire is maintained in the open space under the loft, not only to cook a mid-day meal, but also to keep the rice in the loft dry and free from insects. The only thing lacking to a proper house is walls, and they can easily be built from thatch, as a temporary and occasionally even permanent measure. We knew one farmer who told us that thatch walls were his defence against the tax collector. When word came that the collector of the hut tax (levied on each house owned by the family) was about to arrive, he would take the thatch walls down, hide them in the nearby bush, and tell the tax collector it was not a house, only a rice storage shed!

The next step toward making a storage shed into a hamlet is for the wife to persuade her husband to join her at the farm, and to bring their few possessions from the village. She may have been in the habit of bringing chickens in a basket in the morning and taking them home to the village in the evening. Now she can leave them on the farm all day to scratch for their food and lay their eggs, and roost there overnight. The husband may bring his cutlass, his axe and his knife to the farm, and keep them in the loft. The wife will not have to carry her cookpot and utensils back and forth every day, and she will have a convenient supply of garden vegetables at hand. Finally, the family can pay close attention to the farm, during all seasons of the year, if in fact farming is their priority.

If the area is good and the family is truly committed to farming, other friends and relatives may join them, and soon the rice storage shed is the nucleus for a hamlet, and perhaps ultimately for a new central village. Gbansu has moved several times during this century, and its new location has usually been the farm storage shed of some leading citizen.

The storage shed itself may last at most 5 or 6 years, with an average of about 3 years. The storage shed may be built anew for one of several reasons. The old shed may collapse through the ravages of time and termites. The farmer may move his farm so far that the old shed is no longer convenient. The old shed may be destroyed by fire, unfortunately not an uncommon experience. The fire which is used to cook a mid-day meal or dry the rice may spread to the dry thatch of the loft, particularly if the person tending it falls asleep or leaves unextinguished embers when he returns to the village. In some cases, the storage shed may be deliberately burned, out of jealousy or hatred. Such a fire may destroy an entire year's rice crop, and the household forced to beg for help from friends and neighbors. The farther the storage shed is from the central village, the less likely this is to happen.

A good example of hamlet culture is the three hamlets with which the village elder has the closest ties. He has a hamlet of his own, Ben-taa, he has married a woman from Tulemu, and he is closely related to the head of Gumelei. From each of these hamlets he can expect political and material support, provided he gives them patronage when needed.

In particular, the hamlet Ben-taa is where the elder makes his rice farms, and where he has planted most of his tree crops. He has expanded his traditional family land to the point where it can support a hamlet of five households. The heads of these households are either clients that he brought to the area, giving them wives in return for labor on his land, or they are close relatives of his own head wife. He has built a house for himself at the hamlet, and visits there regularly, both to oversee farming activities and to rest. Figure 4.2 shows a group of men at his hamlet beating palm nuts to extract oil, while he, wearing a hat to show his status, stands by.

FIGURE 4.2
GBANSU'S ELDER AT HIS HAMLET



Each of the hamlets is related in some such way to one of the leading residents in the central village. This relation is so strong that it is possible to reproduce a map of the trails connecting the central village to the hamlets by multi-dimensional scaling and cluster analysis.

The basic structure of the trails leading to the hamlets from the central village is a tree diagram, as has been noted previously. The village is located at the center, and the trails radiate outward to the farm and hamlet areas. There are some cross-linkages between trails, but in fact these are only hunters' trails, difficult to locate under the best of circumstances. To all intents and purposes, the connection between hamlets which are not on the same branch trail lies through the central village.

4.2 Village, trails, hamlets and farms

We hypothesized during our research that the map of the central village and its various quarters mirrors on a small scale the trails, hamlets and farms which make up the whole of Gbansu territory. The importance of this hypothesis is that people's lives mirror their technology and their world organization in a well-functioning society. If Liberia is to put the technology of its rural citizens to work in reconstructing the country, it cannot separate the means people use to maintain life from the quality and structure of the life itself. The hypothesis, in short, is that how people live mirrors how they work, and both are reflections of how they understand their world.

To test the hypothesis, we set up a comprehensive matrix measuring on a scale from 0 to 5 the strength of the ties between 120 adults (chosen as representative of Gbansu and the satellite hamlets) and the four quarters of the central village, the 20 leading hamlets, the 28 clearly recognized farming areas, and the 25 most important community leaders. We scaled each person's ties with the quarters, hamlets, farm areas and leaders on a 0-5 basis, where 0 shows no relation and 5 an intimate connection.

Cluster analysis and multi-dimensional scaling were applied to this matrix, and produced striking confirmation of the hypothesis. As Figure 1.4 shows, there are four trails leading out of Gbansu, numbered 1-4 on the map. Trails 1 and 4 lead to the territory of neighboring villages and, if looked at from a larger perspective, can be considered parts of the same trail which links Gbansu and its neighbors. However, from the perspective of the central village it is more appropriate to consider them as separate trails, since they lead to different sub-areas of Gbansu land.

The two principal trails have many branches and sub-branches which lead to the hamlets and farm areas. Trail 1 has six branch trails, each with its sub-trails. Trail 4 has four branching trails, each also with its sub-trails. Trails 2 and 3 do not lead to neighboring villages, and perhaps for this reason are only minor trails with no branches.

The ease has already been noted with which Gbansu territory can be mapped by using a tree diagram. This was contrasted that with the difficulty of preparing a typical Euclidean map of the type printed in atlases. This explains why the tree diagram makes so much more sense than the Euclidean map. The tree diagram represents a social reality as the Gbansu people envisage it, not some abstract reality as seen from a low-flying airplane.

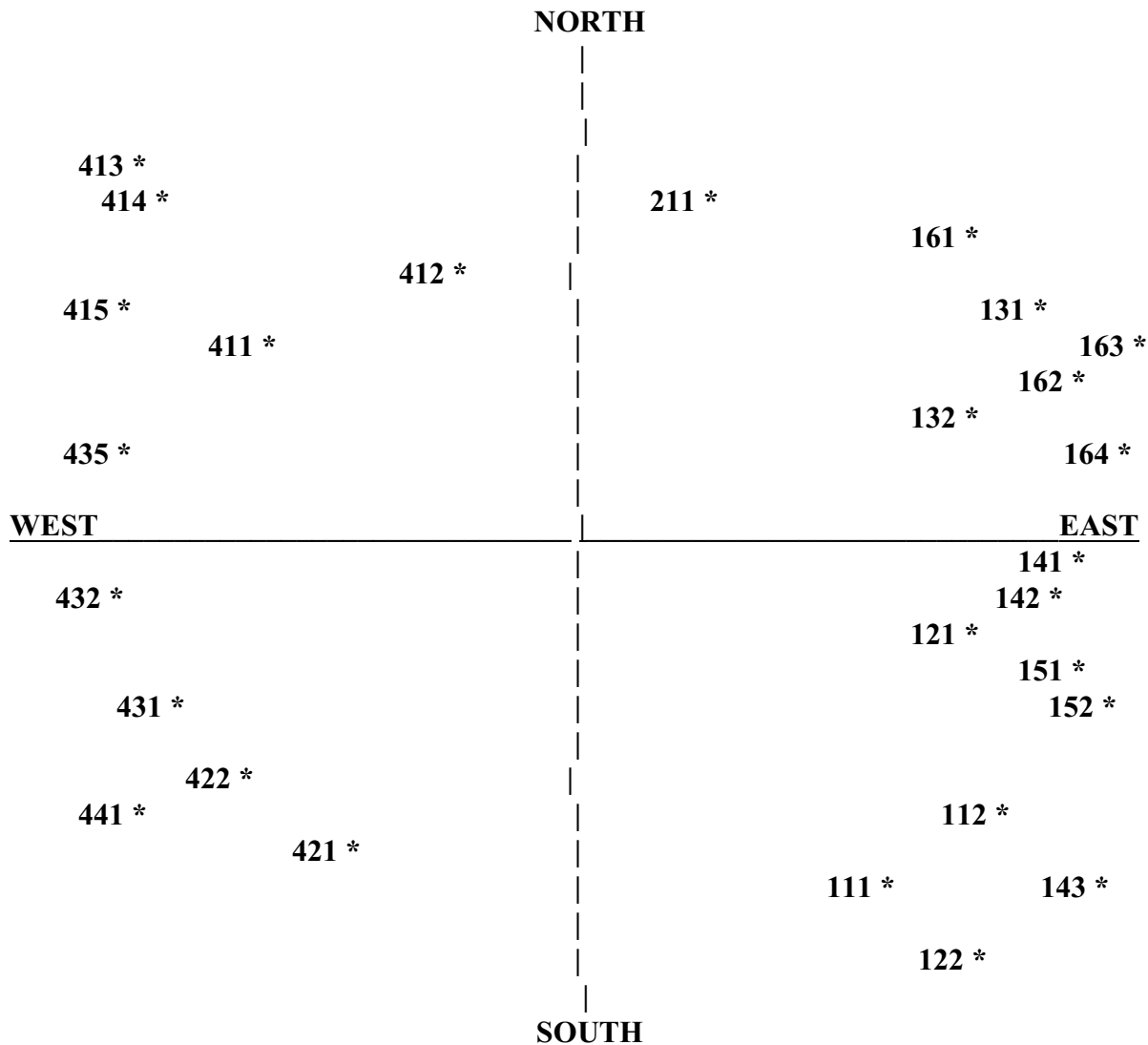
Table 4.1 shows how the tree diagram implied by Figure 1.4 provides the natural framework for the results of cluster analysis of the relations among the farming areas. This cluster analysis is generated by allowing the computer program to examine the similarity of the pattern of links, on the 0-5 scale mentioned above, of each of the 28 farming areas to the 120 individuals included in the matrix. No use was made of spatial relations in setting up the matrix, and thus it is highly significant that the resulting cluster analysis reproduces almost perfectly the map as we found it by asking our way around the area. The relations among people are primary, and determine the ways in which space is viewed by the people who inhabit the area.

TABLE 4.1
CLASSIFICATION OF FARMING AREAS

<p>I. Western areas</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">A. North</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">1. Near</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">a. 411</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">b. 412</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">2. Far</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">a. 413</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">b. 414</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">B. South</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">1. Near</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">a. 421</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">b. 422</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">2. Far</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">a. 431</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">b. 432</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">c. 441</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">d. 433</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">e. 415</p>	<p>II. Eastern areas</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">A. Far east</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">1. Northeast</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">a. 141</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">b. 142</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">c. 151</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">d. 152</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">2. Southeast</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">a. 122</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">b. 131</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">c. 132</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">d. 143</p> <p style="padding-left: 20px;">B. Near east</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">1. North</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">a. 211</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">b. 161</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">c. 162</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">d. 163</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">e. 164</p> <p style="padding-left: 40px;">2. South</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">a. 311</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">b. 111</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">c. 112</p> <p style="padding-left: 60px;">d. 121</p>
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Multi-dimensional scaling makes the point even more clearly, as shown in Figure 4.3, which should be compared closely with the map in Figure 1.4. There are very few distortions in the diagram produced by multi-dimensional scaling, when comparing it with the actual locations as given in the physical map. It is ironic that it is easier to generate a two-dimensional Euclidean map of Gbansu by use of complex statistical techniques than it is to draw it on the ground by walking the countryside. The reason is clear. The map generated by multi-dimensional scaling uses the actual experience and understanding of the people of Gbansu, while the two-dimensional map we tried to draw is externally imposed on the land by outsiders!

FIGURE 4.3
TWO-DIMENSIONAL REPRESENTATION OF FARMING AREAS



One anomaly is farm area 164, which is located in the two-dimensional representation at the far eastern end of the representation, whereas it should be in the north. This anomaly can be explained because the farmer who lives in area 164 is the person mentioned earlier as a man who chose to isolate himself from the rest of Gbansu. He moved across the St. Paul River into the high forest to make his farm. He keeps his canoe tied up permanently on the far side of the river, only sending it to welcome guests if they suit his mood! It is therefore not surprising to find his area in effect "off the map", thus further confirming the power of the method to map social relationships.

It has already been noted that almost everyone in Gbansu and the hamlets is related to everyone else - but through the mediation of the village elder. Links between people are hierarchically formed, and generally must pass through the center of the set or sub-set of families to which they belong. And even in a sub-set the links between individuals are through the family heads.

The Gbansu system of trails and families is a branching network, which is connected and not too dense. In the forest, one does not clear a trail just anywhere. Making and maintaining the trail

requires a considerable investment of time and energy, thus militating against a profusion of small trails. Gbansu is best modelled by a tree with branches, not by a spider web, because the spider web would both require far too much effort and would also produce social chaos. Moreover, social chaos is what must be avoided if rural development is to work, and the most important way to avoid social chaos is to respect the way the community understands and creates its world.

Just as the map of trails is orderly and economical, so too ties between families are not scattered and casual, but depend on the formal hierarchies of kinship, with the elder at the center. Intermarriage between quarters, hamlets and farm areas does take place, of course, but it is mediated through the leading members of the community, and is not simply a matter of romantic attachment. The "family" photograph of the village elder in Figure 3.1 makes exactly that point.

The implication for agricultural development of these formal hierarchical links between people is that decisions about production and marketing of goods are not made by individuals. They are made within the total setting of the community. Isolating one family or section or socio-economic group within the community will lead to breakdown and the loss of economic and social productivity.

Perhaps the most striking illustration which we saw of the close integration between economic activity and social structure came when an elephant was killed in a forest area near the rice farm of the paramount chief's. The man who killed the elephant was another client of the paramount chief, and thus was obliged to take the news to the paramount chief before he could proceed with butchering the elephant's carcass. It took 24 hours before the paramount chief had given instructions as to the disposition of the meat, the feet, the trunk and the tusks. We joined the party which eventually went to the site of the killing, and were part of the cutting up of the beast, which proceeded according to strict rules of precedence. To the casual observer it seemed like chaos, and to the flies who gathered there it must have seemed like heaven. In fact the village leadership organized the whole event along lines of kinship, quarter membership and farm ownership. The village blacksmith, whom we have mentioned previously as a key figure in the hidden power structure, was instrumental in cutting up and distributing the meat.

An unfortunate exception to the rule of interlocked agriculture, land tenure and social structure occurred when the village chief and elder broke the rules of the game and gave away an important piece of land. An educated and wealthy visitor from Monrovia brought whisky and got the village leaders drunk. In this way he sealed the transaction by which a rich piece of agricultural land near the river was sold to an outsider. However, when we were living in the community, this land had not yet been put into rubber production by the usurping owner, and thus so far the wound in the body politic had not yet been made visible.

Further confirmation of the pattern of relations between people, village and hamlet, farm trails, and farm areas arises from applying cluster analysis to the 120 people who form the basis of the matrix. It would be of little value for us to present the details of this analysis. The people are too many, and their names mean nothing to the reader. Instead the findings will be summarized and related to the map of trails and farm areas.

Figures 1.4 and 4.3, as well as Table 4.1, show that the group of farm areas in the west is divided into a northern and southern subgroup, as well as areas which are close to the main trail. Cluster analysis puts into one major cluster the people who farm the northern subgroup, and close inspection shows that all these adults belong to families who live in the Gbansu quarter or in the

hamlets along trails in this area. Moreover, almost all these people are especially closely related to the village chief and village elder, who themselves live in the Gbansu quarter of the central village.

The area south of the trail leading west gives rise to a cluster of individuals from the Gbansu and Mandingo quarters. The Mandingo group has married into the family of the village elder, and thus has acquired land rights within the area assigned to the Gbansu quarter.

Anomalies arise on the main western trail, which is an area that has deeper historical roots than Gbansu itself. Farm areas here include the leaders of the Kpai and Siyeta quarters, and seem to refer to an earlier historical time before the ascendancy of the present elder and his family. On the other hand, these families retain land only on the main trail, and not in the sub-areas north and south of the trail, which sub-areas are linked, as we have seen, to the village elder.

The eastern areas correspond to a cluster of families outside the main leadership system of Gbansu. There are newcomers to the Gbansu and Mandingo quarters, who were allocated land farther from the center of Gbansu influence. There are also families from Kpai and Siyeta quarters, who have farmed land along the main eastern trail from times which preceded the ascendancy of Gbansu. The fact that the new chief comes from these groups may mark a shift in power relations and thus in land use.

The analysis of relationships can be carried a step further. Thus it has been shown how membership in quarters of the central village is reflected in adjacency of farm land. Even within the quarters of the central village, these relations continue. For example, seven households which live in adjacent compounds in the Mandingo and Siyeta quarters have farms next to each other in the same way as these households border each other in the village itself. In fact, only 4 of the 50 households in Gbansu fail to fit the pattern, and these are occupied by the school teacher, the evangelist sent by the Lutheran Church of Liberia to assist the local church leader, a wandering healer who is mentally unstable, and a house full of old people who depend on village charity for their subsistence.

Apart from these anomalies, the central village of Gbansu is a microcosm, a miniature copy, of the surrounding hamlets and farms. Equally, the hamlets and farms can be seen as a large-scale redrawing of the village housing pattern. Either viewpoint is legitimate. Those who live as neighbors farm as neighbors. It will be important to remember this point when considering the ways in which people cooperate in farming. The cooperative work group is another way in which the intricacies of relations among people in the village are reflected in the ways in which they work together. These work groups will be analyzed in detail later, when considering the way in which upland rice is grown in Gbansu.

The consequence should be clear for those who wish to help agricultural production in such rural villages as Gbansu. One cannot simply redraw the map and put clever young men in charge of farms that are supposed to produce a surplus of rice, using modern methods imported from research stations. The allocation of land that has grown up over the years is a reflection of the social and political order, and changing it would undermine the fabric of relations that has made Gbansu "work" over the years. There is more to the production of rice and other food crops than intensive cultivation of alienated land.

This fact is displayed in clear perspective in a story told by one of the villagers when he was asked to describe a selfish person. The selfish person was one who built his own farm, did all his cultivation by himself, refused to share the work and the produce with his neighbors, and eventually found that when he was in trouble there was no one to help him.

It is true that there are some farmers who seem to operate by themselves, such as the man who made his hamlet on the opposite side of the river and cut himself off from the others. But the general impression is that he, and others like him, will eventually find that such isolation does not succeed. In fact, that man does weaken his own isolation when he visits the central village, by contributing physically and morally to the community and helping to sustain his extended family members.

4.3 Attitudes to village and hamlet

The relation between central village and farm is mediated by the hamlets, as should be clear by this time. Gbansu has one central village, a metropolis of 50 households, a place of loose living and endless fascination to the occupants of the 26 satellite hamlets. Similarly the residents of the central place look on their country cousins as hicks, naive souls who go to sleep when it is dark and don't know how to behave when they dare to enter the "nightclub" in the central village. The world-wide urban-rural contrast is repeated on a tiny scale in the 400 square kilometres and 1106 individuals that compose Gbansu. A story is told about one hamlet resident who fit the stereotype.

This man always sleeps in the hamlet and works hard. He harvests plenty of rice. But after he finished harvesting his crop, he came to the village and acted like a crazy man.

Attitudes to the village and to the hamlets differ strongly among the different population subgroups. We asked people - male and female, old and young, schooled and unschooled, village residents and hamlet residents - to complete the sentences (mentioned previously in the discussion of attitudes to the forest) about both hamlet and village. Table 4.2 lists responses concerning the village which were given in 2% or more of the cases. The centrality of the village, as a kind of urban focus for the whole of Gbansu, emerges clearly from these responses.

**TABLE 4.2
RESPONSES CONCERNING THE VILLAGE**

RESPONSE	PERCENT
We go to the village	7.2
We live in the village	6.5
We take food to the village	4.9
The village is good to live in	4.3
Many people are in the village	4.2
We leave the village	2.9
We build a house in the village	2.8
We have family in the village	2.8
We buy things in the village	2.6
Food is needed in the village	2.3
We play and dance in the village	2.2
Village people work together	2.0

The village has a school	2.0
We attend school in the village	2.0
We have friends in the village	2.0
We sell things in the village	2.0

Other responses, given in less than 2% of the cases, state that the village has good things, sports, money, a church, a market, fine clothes and entertainment, but point out that the village is expensive and that life there is difficult.

It is particularly striking that there is so little emphasis on farming in these comments on the central village. Food is needed by the village, and people bring it there, but consumption rather than production is the key issue. The urban-rural contrast which is so common across Africa, whereby urban people only have enough to eat if the rural areas produce the food, has its beginning in villages like Gbansu. It may seem odd to call a village of only 50 households an urban center, but there is no doubt that the residents of both the village and the hamlets see it in that way.

Responses concerning the hamlet show the other side of the contrast, as given in Table 4.3. Here is the true rural area, the place where people grow the crops and do the work that ultimately makes it possible for the village people to live a good life.

TABLE 4.3
RESPONSES CONCERNING THE HAMLET

RESPONSE	PERCENT
Hamlet people can work hard	13.3
Hamlets are good	10.3
We plant crops in hamlets	7.0
We live in a hamlet	5.2
There are hamlet people	4.2
We build a hamlet	3.2
Hamlet people get rich	3.0
We go to the hamlet	2.9
Hamlet people work together well	2.7
Hamlet people are bad to each other	2.7
We live well in the hamlet	2.3
People hunt and fish in the hamlet	2.2
Hamlet people tell stories	2.1
Hamlet people can eat well	2.0
We leave the hamlet	2.0

In comparison with the village, the hamlet is a dull place. It does not have the variety of things that make the village interesting. On the other hand, in the hamlet people work hard, raise good crops, hunt and fish, and have enough to eat. Other responses, made in less than 2% of the cases but nonetheless of interest, are that people go to sleep early, keep animals and have many children in the hamlet.

Hamlets are for children and older adults, and not for worldly, educated young adults. There are many strongly significant differences in responses to the hamlet by the different subgroups we interviewed. In particular, those who have been to school simply see the hamlet as a place where people work hard to grow rice. It is the unschooled who emphasize that hamlet people eat well, hunt and fish, work well together, have many children, get rich and live well. It is evident from the differences in responses that school is the most important mechanism by which people leave the hamlet, leave it intellectually, emotionally and physically.

Young adults, both schooled and unschooled, have significantly less interest in hamlet life than the older adults. The older adults, on the other hand, particularly those who have not been to school, see the village as a place where leaders of the family live, where hamlet dwellers sell things to make money, where they must bring food, and where life is expensive and difficult. For them the hamlet is a more attractive place to live than the village. Young adults, on the contrary, are deeply attracted to and involved in the variety of life in the village, and emphasize dancing, sports, market, church and work.

The attraction leading from the hamlet to the village, and from there to the road towns and finally to Monrovia and places of employment such as the Firestone rubber plantation, is felt by the young, the schooled and the village residents. They would like to avoid the hard work of the farms and the hamlets in favor of the attractions of urban life, whether in the relatively urban center of Gbansu village or in the far more complex urban center of Monrovia. As long as there remain unschooled people who must work in order to feed their families, people who have little chance to succeed in the urban areas, they will continue to work on the farms. If there is to be agricultural development, it is not the clever young school leavers who will bring it about.

The classification of responses to the sentence introducers, as obtained by cluster analysis, separates pleasant aspects of the village from the unpleasant. In particular, one section of the classification shows how the village is a place of change and development, as given in Table 4.4.

TABLE 4.4
RESPONSES ABOUT URBANIZATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN THE VILLAGE

I. Urbanization

A. Construction

1. We build a house in the village
2. There is a church in the village
3. The village is for our family
4. Village houses have zinc roofs

B. Relation to the hamlets

1. Hamlets send food to the village
2. Things have changed in the village
3. No farms are near the village

II. Village development

A. Village improvement

1. We go to the village
2. We have family in the village
3. We play and dance in the village
4. The village has a school
5. We sell things in the village

6. We will improve the village
7. We take food to the village
8. We work hard in the village
9. We live in the village
10. There is food in the village
11. Animals and fowl are in the village

B. The good life

1. The village is big
2. Fish and meat are in the village
3. Cars are in the village
4. We have friends in the village
5. We buy things in the village
6. Fine clothes are in the village
7. There are teachers in the village
8. Village paths are dirty
9. We clean the village

The village is clearly a place for living well, and not a place for farming. The modern emphases stand out throughout the list. And nowhere in this list is farming mentioned. Only the results of farming, the food and the animals, are mentioned. Farming is done elsewhere.

And yet the village is also a half-way point, poised between the hamlet where productive farming takes place and the city where the lights are truly bright and dreams are occasionally even fulfilled. There are problems which arise in the village, problems whose solution may lie either in moving on to the city or moving back to the hamlets. Table 4.5 gives that part of the cluster analysis which includes village problems.

TABLE 4.5
RESPONSES CONCERNING VILLAGE PROBLEMS

I. Village backwardness

A. Village stagnation

1. No new ideas are in the village
2. No church is in the village
3. We forget farming

B. Village poverty

1. Life is cheap in the village
2. We don't play in the village
3. There is no school for us
4. The village is small
5. Village houses have thatch roofs

II. Village difficulties

A. Dislike of the village

1. We don't live in the village
2. We live far from the village
3. We have no friends in the village
4. We have no money
5. Village people are lazy
6. We don't take food to the village

7. We can't get things in the village
8. The village lacks services

B. Dangers in the village

1. We don't go to the village
2. People hurt us in the village
3. We avoid people in the village
4. Bad people are in the village
5. People cause trouble in the village
6. There are no animals in the village

There are two points of view represented in Table 4.5. The one, shown primarily by the first half, looks at the village from the point of view of one who knows the wider world. Such a person sees the village as out-of-date, uncivilized, uneducated and backwards. And the person explicitly asserts that he or she is finished with farming. These are the persons who will sooner or later leave the village for the motor road and perhaps the bright lights of Monrovia.

The second half of the list reflects opinions of a person who probably lives in a hamlet, and who finds visits to the village difficult and unpleasant. This person is contemptuous of the villager who is lazy and troublesome, and wishes to live at home in the hamlet, away from the village and its temptations.

The ethos of the hamlet is quite different from that of the village, and the attitudes to the hamlet are likewise quite different from those to the village. Table 4.6 is one sub-cluster of the computer-generated classification concerning the hamlet, and expresses the very heart of how people view life in the hamlet.

**TABLE 4.6
THE HAMLET WAY OF LIFE**

There are hamlets
People are in the hamlets
Hamlets have many children
Hamlets have food
We plant crops in the hamlet
We keep animals in the hamlet

Hamlet life is simple, and is centered around people, large families, farming, food and animals. The hamlet is where the core of committed farmers is to be found, and is where, if anywhere, productive agriculture can be restored to Liberia. The vision of the hamlet expressed in these responses may seem perhaps romantic, perhaps reflecting a view of the simple and good life untouched by the diseases of urbanization. But this vision is not externally imposed - it derives directly from the responses of the people themselves. It did not require a Rousseau to create such a vision! It is deep rooted among the people of Gbansu.

A second sub-cluster of responses concerning the hamlet delineates the good life, which lies in a very different set of activities than those which make the village attractive to its residents. Table 4.7 presents aspects of the good life in the hamlets.

TABLE 4.7
RESPONSES CONCERNING THE GOOD LIFE IN THE HAMLET

I. Hamlet wealth

A. How to get rich

1. Hamlet helps us
2. Hamlet people get rich
3. Witches are in the hamlets
4. Hamlet people get money
5. Hamlets have good soil
6. We are well in the hamlet
7. We have hamlets
8. Hamlets have medicine

B. The simple life

1. Rice can grow in hamlets
2. We sleep early in hamlets
3. Hamlet people are sensible
4. Hamlets have poor facilities

II. Hamlet life

A. Contentment

1. We are happy in hamlets
2. Hamlet people are many
3. Hamlets are for old people

B. The daily routine

1. Agriculture

- a. We make farm in hamlets
- b. Hamlet people hunt and fish
- c. Hamlet people beat and cut rice
- d. Hamlet life is hard
- e. Hamlets have leaders and chiefs
- f. Hamlets are clean
- g. We plant rice in hamlets
- h. Hamlets have rice storage sheds
- I. Hamlets are near water

2. Relaxation

- a. Hamlets are good
- b. Hamlet residents can play
- c. Hamlet crops grow well
- d. Hamlet residents tell stories
- e. Hamlet residents can eat
- f. There are many things to do in hamlets
- g. We build a hamlet
- h. Powerful doctors are in hamlets
- I. Animals eat crops in hamlets

For those who are attracted to the clean and simple life of unremitting but satisfying farm work, and who are willing to remain in the hamlets and work hard, these responses give a good recommendation. It is only a minority of the people who are willing to live in the hamlet,

however. That minority must be content with a clean life, good food, good soil, good crops, a good night's sleep after listening to stories, the chance to hunt and fish, the chance to get rich in the traditional way, and a house full of children. Material conditions may be crude, but for those who like it, the life is good. Even the witchcraft mentioned in this group of responses is productive, since many persons believe that rich and productive rice farms depend on a proper relation to the world of the spirits.

Diverse and contradictory as hamlet and village may be with respect to each other, it is also clear that the village and the hamlets complement each other and in fact need each other. Between them they compose a system that works very well. Neither village sophisticate nor hamlet rustic is The Kpelle Farmer, a mythical person whose existence has already been rejected on many grounds. Between and among the residents of hamlet and village, living and farming are part of the total organic system that is Gbansu. And that system, as noted above, is understood by and used by the social organism, particularly through its complex leadership, to maintain life and health in balance with the forest. The contrast is made clear by this story of a hamlet resident.

This man always sleeps in the bush, and gets his own food. He always has big farms and plenty of rice. But one day he was summoned by the village chief to answer a law suit. He did not know how to explain his case, and so he was found guilty.

Of course, the contrast can be taken too far. There is no such thing as The City Slicker or The Country Bumpkin in Gbansu. It would be quite inappropriate to generalize to stereotypes for village and hamlet. There is great diversity in each place, with individuals composing a functional system even at the family level. The diversity is needed to make the entire system, the entire organism, work.

4.4 The place of hamlets in the system

The key role played by the hamlets in Gbansu's farming system can be understood in more detail in the discussion of rice farming. That the system succeeds as an organic whole depends on the existence of the hamlets.

In fact, it is possible to think of the process of building hamlets as an extension of the system of shifting cultivation. When a family clears a piece of forest or high bush for a farm, it must spend long hours clearing, planting, weeding, chasing birds and rats, and harvesting the rice. This rice growing cycle will be discussed in much more detail later. If its field is far from the main village, the family may choose to build a temporary thatch hut on the edge of the field. Then, at harvest time, the family may decide to store its rice in the loft of a second open-sided structure. The need to work on the farm, the difficulty of walking back to the main village every night and returning in the morning, and the importance of protecting the harvest may lead the family to make the thatch hut and storage shed into the nucleus of a new hamlet.

A young and growing family may divide its time between central village and hamlet. The wife and young children may live most of the year in the village, while the husband commutes. As the family becomes more prosperous, the difficulty of keeping two residences will lead the husband to seek a second wife with the assistance of his first wife, who will then become head wife. A successful family may also be joined by junior relatives, or even clients from outside Gbansu, who will be assigned to live and work at the hamlet. In the case of the village elder and village chief, this process has meant building hamlets with several households under the authority of the family

head, who only visits the hamlet to rest or supervise the work. The hamlet may be at the edge of the forest, allowing the family head to allocate pieces of forest land to additional relatives and clients. In the long run, such a hamlet may become a rival to the central village.

Another alternative is that the family which has started a new hamlet may decide that it is more interested in farming than in the political and social life of the central village. If the family head is not ambitious, such hamlets remain simply satellite parts of the central village.

This process of hamlet-building which could lead to formation of independent villages is active in Gbansu. In particular, the areas at the northern and southern extremes of Gbansu's territory are still expanding and shifting, to suit agricultural possibilities. The hamlets in farming areas 112 and 122 in Figure 1.5 are actively growing, as more people join the farmers who have opened these areas.

In particular, area 164 is very likely to grow rapidly in the near future, particularly because the open land to the west of it has been abandoned for several years after a series of unexplained deaths caused its owners to leave the area's fertile flat land that is now growing rapidly back to forest. When we visited there in 1974 we saw bananas and papayas almost swallowed by the young bush, and we saw places where elephant and hippopotamus had reclaimed land they had been forced to give up to humans at an earlier date. It is only a matter of time before the disasters of the past are forgotten and the area is cultivated again, if in fact the new disasters caused by the civil war are themselves overcome.

Along the main trail from southwest to northeast the situation is different. The bulk of the population have settled here. Houses are more likely to have zinc roofs, and even cement foundations. This trail is the site for the new motor road, and here deeds have been signed and parcels of land posted by owners officially recognized by the national government. Along this trail, a permanent settlement pattern is emerging.

In particular, Gbansu itself is not likely to be moved, even though there is historical evidence that the central village was itself once only a farm hamlet. Older Gbansu residents have told us how the central village was in several different locations in previous generations. But today's Gbansu, with school, church, shops, airstrip, zinc roofs and concrete foundations, is more permanent than any village could have been in the time of Wolomian or in the early 1960s when we first visited.

The change that can be expected will be for an increasing urbanization of Gbansu itself, and an increasing tendency for the hamlets to become independent villages. This process has come to fruition along the main road from Monrovia to Gbarnga, where villages that once displayed the same pattern as Gbansu in 1974 have now become more firmly centralized and more independent of their erstwhile hamlets. And one result of this is a breakdown of the once-efficient farming system that built on the unity within diversity of a village and its satellite hamlets.

Now that civil war has come to the area, it may be that the fulfilment of these predictions will be delayed. In particular, the urbanized areas both along the Gbansu trail and along the main road may come once again to realize their dependence on the hamlets. Those who wish to restore agricultural productivity and food self-sufficiency to Liberia should re-evaluate their commitment to the young, the educated, the sophisticated and the urbanized citizens. The strength of rural Liberia lies in those who know how to create a vital living community. It is the totality of Gbansu's citizenry who accomplish this goal, and who can be a model for real development.

CHAPTER 5. THE GOOD LIFE

5.1 What is the world like?

Old and young, male and female, unschooled and schooled, hamlet and village residents make up a complex community. They hold diverse ideas and feelings concerning the forest, the village and the hamlet, as has been shown in the preceding chapters. And yet they share a common life, even though they understand that life from a variety of perspectives. Technology is a part of that common life, and can only be properly understood from within the whole.

What more can be said about the common life of the people of Gbansu? One way by which we explored the question was through sentence completions. An earlier chapter showed how sentence completions could give an insight into attitudes to forest, village and hamlet. It was there shown how the different subgroups have different attitudes to these primary realities.

More basic than attitudes to forest, village and hamlet is the overall understanding of the world which they have made and within which they live. To that end we have asked our respondents to complete the same 20 basic sentences in any way they wish, not requiring a particular topic. In responding to the sentence introducers, they said whatever was uppermost in their minds.

The dominant impression from these responses is of people torn between continuing to farm in order to obtain food and entering into the new and modern world of school, money and work. Table 5.1 lists the responses given in more than 1.5% of the cases.

TABLE 5.1
MOST FREQUENT SENTENCE COMPLETIONS WITH NO SET TOPIC

RESPONSE	PERCENT
We make farm	7.6
We can go to school	4.5
God is good and helps us	3.5
The world has changed from before	3.2
We have enough food	3.1
We don't go to school	2.9
We need more food	2.7
We should work to support ourselves	2.7
<i>Kwii</i> matters dominate us	2.7
We use animals and fish for food	2.7
We don't grow crops well	2.3
We don't have enough money	2.2
Making farm is good	2.1
Parents help their children	2.1
People will be good to each other	2.1
We have enough money	2.0
We grow rice	1.9
We like old and not <i>kwi</i> ways	1.9
We have good clothes and look good	1.8
We will go down-country	1.6

The country is improving	1.6
We have a large farm and good crops	1.6
There are witches and evil spirits	1.6
We enjoy good things in life	1.6

Even the most common answers show the diversity of the community. Some members rejoice in their education, while others worry about the lack of it. Some think about the modern world, while others look to the forest, with its farms, animals and fish which will help them sustain life.

Despite the diversity, the dominant response concerns farming. And it must be made clear from the outset that in the Kpelle language to make farm means to make a rice farm. It is very common in any language that the central focus of the culture does not need to be made explicit. Everyone knows what the speaker means. A comparable example from another African country is of a menu in a village restaurant, which mentioned chicken, beef, fish - and "food". Outsiders had to ask what the restaurant meant by "food". They were told by the restaurant owner that it meant the local staple, and it did not need to be spelled out!

Three of the responses given in Table 5.1 refer to making farm, and thus indirectly to growing rice. A fourth response directly refers to rice, and is in fact the only specific crop named by any of the people we interviewed. Overall, one in seven of the responses refers directly to growing rice, which is in that way shown clearly to be the central focus of Gbansu's technology and support system.

An obsession with modernity is another focal point. If making farm is one common response, then the ability to attend school is the second common response. And, overall, more than one in five of the responses refer to the modern *kwii* world, either affirming it or resisting it. The modern world is dominated by the school, but money and employment and travel and government also play a vital part.

Here again is the same split noted in the previous chapter, where it was identified with the village-hamlet dichotomy. It was noted then that it is the hamlet residents who are primarily interested in farming, while the village residents see farming as a necessity but themselves would prefer to leave the hard work to others. These responses which refer to modernity make clear the fascination with the *kwii* that is so common throughout Liberia.

In this case also the population subgroups have different emphases, many of them statistically very significant, and all reflecting the difference between the modern, secular, instrumental way of life and the traditional, spirit-filled, organic way of life. Men, for example, significantly more often than women mention government and the life outside Gbansu, whereas women are concerned about rice, food, evil and the maintenance of life.

Likewise, those who have attended school more often speak of education, the way they appear to others, and achieving pleasure in life than their unschooled fellow villagers. Those who have not attended school, on the other hand, stress basic village problems, including food, sickness, the supernatural world, and the burdensome necessity of leaving Gbansu in order to find work.

It is statistically strongly significant that young adults speak far less about farming issues than do children or mature adults. They speak rather of the problems involved in moving into the *kwii* world, and they speak of government and administration. Young adults, in short, have their eyes

turned outward, away from Gbansu, away from the narrow confines of farming and village politics.

Clearly farming and the modern world are the major issues in people's lives. However, it is not everyone who emphasizes farming. Women, children and unschooled respondents uniformly have a higher level of interest in farming than men, adults and schooled people. Unfortunately, it is precisely the latter group that many development experts want to think of as The Kpelle Farmer, despite the fact that members of this group turn their attention to government, modern life, education, morality, religion and money. Such non-farm issues are, of course, important to the well-being of Gbansu, and must form part of the collective mind. But, if the task is to improve farming, one should not preach to people for whom non-farm issues are paramount.

The application of cluster analysis to these responses generates a very striking picture. As in the previous section, where cluster analysis graphically displayed such diverse intellectual constructs as village leadership, attitudes to the forest and the pattern of trails, hamlets and farming areas, here also there is a clear distinction between traditional and modern responses. There is a sharp and dramatic split within the taxonomy between responses suggesting the modern urban world of money, government and school, and those reflecting the older rural world of rice farm, forest and spirits. Both sets of attitudes and values and ideas are present in the community, and they make a system that confirms the fact of rapid social change in Liberia. In this way Gbansu is a microcosm of the nation, and its collective consciousness reflects this split.

5.2 The old ways

Table 5.2 lists the responses which refer to traditional life, as they are organized by cluster analysis. As before, headings for the subgroups and have been identified with bold type face. The actual responses are given just as they appear in the computer-generated cluster analysis.

TABLE 5.2
CLASSIFICATION OF TRADITIONAL RESPONSES

I. Benefits of traditional life

A. Farm life

1. We make farm
2. We have good clothes and look good
3. We use animals and fish for food
4. There are witches and spirits
5. We enjoy good things in life
6. Making farm is good
7. God is good and helps us
8. Medicine is powerful
9. We have a large farm and crops grow well
10. Stealing and murder are bad
11. We grow rice

B. Values

1. We have enough food
2. We should work hard to support ourselves
3. We have enough money
4. People will be good to each other

II. Problems of traditional life

A. Farm life

1. Shortages

- a. We need more food
- b. We don't make farm and crops grow badly
- c. God is not helping us

2. Difficulties

- a. Farm work is hard
- b. Government exploits us
- c. People sell things in the market

B. Values

1. Religion

- a. Jesus lived and died to save us
- b. We will die and the world will end
- c. Many people are sick
- d. God is true
- e. God made everything

2. Morality

- a. We must tell the truth
- b. People are sinners

There is a split between good and bad, favorable and unfavorable, in this classification. The split between good and bad forms the basis for deciding what actions should be taken, often very different actions by different individuals, depending on how the individuals and their actions fit into the entire dynamic and rapidly changing system that is Gbansu.

The principal benefits of traditional life include having enough food, both crops and meat, and enjoying good clothes and a comfortable life. The sources of these benefits include God, medicine, hard work and good friends. Similarly, the principal problems also relate to farming, and include a shortage of food and difficulties in farming.

It is particularly striking that the hard work of farming, exploitation by government, and the necessity to sell things in the market go together. Across Africa, a hard life and reduction of the standard of living have gone hand in hand with producing cash crops for the market. Foreign experts have sung the praises of producing goods which are needed on the world market, in return for cash, but the Gbansu world view recognizes the fallacy contained within this position. Up to this point in Gbansu's history, marketing of crops has been directly associated with exploitation by government and the outside world.

Another important observation is that farming finds its place close to medicine and witchcraft, and even morality and God Himself, in the taxonomy. Farming is not just a technical, scientific activity, as developers would have it, but is knit into the world of right and wrong, spirits, ancestors and supernatural powers.

5.3 From old to new

A transitional group of responses forms a bridge between the traditional and the modern life. These responses are loosely connected to the set of traditional responses in the cluster diagram,

although basically they stand by themselves. Table 5.3 lists these responses, with the headings listed in bold type face.

The responses in Table 5.3 illustrate the predicament of the persons who are not sure which world is theirs. They know that changes are taking place, and they are not at all sure they wish to be associated with them. They buy the products of the *kwii* world, but also know that they must travel a long distance in order to get them. And they have been persuaded that much which is made by people in Gbansu is old-fashioned and out of date. This book will argue later that this is a misapprehension of the true situation, all the more now that the civil war has reduced the supply and the availability of foreign-made consumer goods.

TABLE 5.3
CLASSIFICATION OF TRANSITIONAL RESPONSES

I. Changes in life

- A. The world has changed from the old days
- B. We like the old ways and not modern ways
- C. People make out-of-date things
- D. We fight wars and don't like each other

II. The dominance of the new

- A. We buy things
- B. Modern business is dominant
- C. We walk long distances

5.4 The new ways

The second major group of responses which arises in the cluster analysis of the sentence completions which can be called modern. These responses are listed in two major sub-classes, according to whether they are seen as problematic or as beneficial. Table 5.4 gives all the responses which fall into this group.

TABLE 5.4
CLASSIFICATION OF MODERN RESPONSES

I. Benefits of modern life

A. Life at home

- 1. We can go to school
- 2. Parents help their children
- 3. We will all have enough work
- 4. We should help our country
- 5. The country is improving
- 6. We are healthy

B. Life away from home

- 1. The road will be improved
- 2. It is hard to find a good spouse
- 3. We will finish higher education
- 4. We will have a big government job
- 5. We will go down-country
- 6. Children work for their parents

7. Children don't obey their parents
8. We do wage labour
9. The government will treat us well

II. Problems of modern life

A. Children's life

1. Schooling

- a. We don't go to school
- b. We don't have enough money
- c. Parents don't help their children

2. Delinquency

- a. We smoke and drink too much alcohol
- b. Young people's future is uncertain

B. Adult life

1. Human relations

- a. Wrong-doers will be punished
- b. Women can't be trusted
- c. Young people love but don't marry
- d. We should be careful with pleasure

2. Public life

- a. School is good and we should attend
- b. We should go to church and confess our sins
- c. Men can't be trusted
- d. There is a great variety of created things
- e. President and officials will help us
- f. There are new government officials

The benefits of modern life center around school, the motor road which leads away from the isolation of villages such as Gbansu, the wage employment which can only be found as one leaves the village, the nation (as opposed to the narrow setting of village and hamlet), and the Liberian government, which is the focal point of and central fact about the nation. Consistent with earlier findings, males, persons who have attended school, and young adults significantly more often than their opposite numbers stress the benefits of the modern world: higher education, good clothes, the trip down-country, the good job, the close relation to government, the optimism about the nation's future.

There are some anomalies in the list of benefits of the modern world. There is uncertainty about the obedience of children to their parents, clearly reflecting the conflicting desires to remain loyal and yet to get out of the confines of remote rural life. The difficulty in finding a good spouse is also mentioned in this group, perhaps reflecting the danger of as well as the opportunity for sexual freedom, away from the restricted marriage choice of the home village.

The problems of the modern world are the reverse side of the same coin. School remains the great hope, but the poor and the disadvantaged cannot hope to attend. They have no money, their parents refuse to help them, and the future remains uncertain. The pleasures of the unrestrained life can backfire. Neither men nor women can be trusted, and the seductive drugs of alcohol and tobacco cause only pain in the end.

In this list of problems there are also anomalies. The government officials who offer to help are nonetheless problematic. Equally the great variety of things in the outside world is a danger to people who are accustomed to the relatively simple life of the forest.

The negative aspects of the larger modern world are most often stressed by women and the unschooled persons. They are the ones who primarily see the danger in the new society, because they are the ones least well equipped to cope with these dangers.

5.5 A two-dimensional world

Multi-dimensional scaling is another way of analyzing sentence completions. The similarity function used for cluster analysis can be understood as a distance in multi-dimensional space. As was explained earlier, if there are as many dimensions as there are responses, then a perfect representation of the distance is possible. The test comes when dimensions are reduced to two, so that the responses can be placed in a flat plane. When there is a clear and consistent pattern, there is little distortion caused by reducing many dimensions to two. This is true with the sentence completions concerning the forest, as will be shown below.

In this case the two dimensions of modern-traditional and good-bad, as revealed by multi-dimensional scaling, are clearly displayed in Figure 5.1.

The contrast between the traditional and the modern is evident in this two-dimensional representation of the sentence completions. The upper right quadrant includes work, money, school, wages, the market, good health and general improvement of the country. These responses reflect the favorable aspects of the new world into which Gbansu people are moving.

On the other hand, the upper left quadrant shows the negative aspects of modern life. The problems of a young person's future, the difficulty in getting a good spouse, lack of schooling, punishment of wrong-doers, lack of trust, conflict between parents and children - all are issues which this quadrant raises.

As in other two-dimensional representations, there are inevitably some responses which seem to be misplaced. The improvement of the road should perhaps be in the right quadrant. On the other hand, the building of a road to rural areas in Liberia, as elsewhere in Africa, is often a mixed blessing. It allows exploitation, as well as the introduction of destructive and confusing innovations. Likewise, school appears on the left side of the central axis. However, we must not forget that the unavailability of school for the poor and the marginal people may make it seem negative to some of the population. The fact that their fellow villagers can attend school, but they cannot, introduces a negative element into the evaluation of school as a modern institution.

The two lower quadrants reflect the traditional way of life. On the right are all the positive values of rural Gbansu: food, medicine, farming, rice, good crops, animals, fish, good clothes, the powerful spirits of the forest, God, the truth and hard work. It is interesting to note that Jesus appears in the traditional category. Mission work has been active in this part of Liberia for two generations, so that now Christianity has become a normative part of life. In fact, the younger generation are the ones who now, as in many parts of the world, are turning their backs on the church.

FIGURE 5.1
TWO-DIMENSIONAL PATTERN OF UNPROMPTED SENTENCE COMPLETIONS

MODERN	
Roads will be improved*	
Youth future uncertain*	*We have enough work
Finding good spouse hard*	Parents help children* *Should help country
Children don't obey*	* Finish school college
	*Smoke drink too much
New government officials* Have govt job*	
Government treat us well*	*We can go to school
*Go down-country	*We do wage labor
Top officials help*	*Country is improving We are healthy*
Women can't be trusted*	*Parents neglect children
Children work for parents*	
*Wrongdoers are punished	*People sell in market
No school*	
Too little money*	
Go to church confess*	People help each other*
Men can't be trusted* School good should go*	*We have enough money
BAD	GOOD
Be careful with pleasure*	*Work hard, self-support
Modern world controls*	*We have enough food
	*Stealing, murder bad
Government exploits us* Dont like new ways*	*We buy things
Many created things* People are sinners*	*We enjoy good things
We walk long distances*	*We will die, world end
	Medicine is powerful*
	Making farm is good*
World changed from old*	We make farm* Jesus saves us, died*
Farm work is hard*	*Many people are sick
We need more food*	*We grow rice *Large farms, good crops
	*God is good, helps us
	Animals, fish are food*
Fight wars, hate others*	*Good clothes, looks
God made everything*	*God is true *Witches and spirits
People build old things*	
God is helping us*	
	*We must tell the truth
TRADITIONAL	

The lower left quadrant documents the problems with the traditional world. Government exploitation, problems with pleasure, long distances to walk, the changes that are taking place, a lack of food, war and hatred, poor crops and failure to make farm, out-of-date ideas and techniques, and even abandonment by God are included in this quadrant.

There are two striking anomalies in the lower left quadrant, and they are in fact the farthest two items to the left. One says that God made everything, and the other says that there are many created things. There is no convincing explanation of this pairing.

5.6 Hopes and fears

We explored more deeply the question of what people hope to get out of life, and what they fear might go wrong. Residents of the central village and the outlying hamlets gave a wide variety of responses, covering three major areas. Family and household concerns were roughly half of the total hopes and fears. Farming matters covered another third of the hopes and a quarter of the fears. And matters of community life occupied the remaining one fifth of the responses.

Consistent with earlier findings matters concerning rice farming were mentioned in 12 percent of the good possibilities and 14 percent of the bad possibilities. We asked people to rank from 1 to 15 a set of selected responses, both good and bad. The most desired benefit in life is a large rice farm which produces a good harvest, and the third most desirable outcome is to have enough good food to eat. As was noted above, having clever children who can attend school is second in the list. Table 5.5 lists the good possibilities in mean rank order, where the lower the rank the more desirable the outcome.

TABLE 5.5
RANKED GOOD POSSIBILITIES IN LIFE

GOOD POSSIBILITY	RANK
My rice farm is large and produces much rice	4.6
I have many clever children, who all go to school	5.1
I have enough good food to eat	5.9
I have many friends who are helpful to me	6.4
My family and I are all healthy	6.7
I have many cash crops which produce well	8.2
I have many garden crops which give me food	8.3
I have a good lover	8.4
I have a good house, clothes and property	8.5
I get good things freely	9.1
I have enough money for what I need	9.3
I have many animals	9.3
I have a good loving spouse	9.8
I am a respected leader in the village	9.8
I kill many animals in the forest	10.4

The traditional and the modern are mixed together in this list, as they are in the rest of life. Schooling, cash crops, house and property are all *kwi* ambitions. Some ambitions are mixed, and can apply to either way of life, including food, friends, animals and leadership. Others are clearly traditional in character, such as the rice farm, the animals and the ability to hunt successfully.

The differences between population subgroups are not surprising. Village residents stress cash crops and leadership, while hamlet residents are concerned about good health and ownership of animals. Men are more concerned than women with being village leaders, producing cash crops and having lovers. Women, as everywhere, are more concerned with having a good and loving spouse than are their polygynous men!

The fears in life show the specific dangers of life in the rain forest. Disease and accident are side by side with the loss of the means to sustain life. Table 5.6 lists these bad possibilities in life in rank order, where a lower score implies a stronger fear and concern about these possibilities.

TABLE 5.6
RANKED BAD POSSIBILITIES IN LIFE

BAD POSSIBILITY	RANK
I fall from a palm tree	4.4
I am bitten by a snake and almost die	4.6
Rice on our farm is eaten by birds and animals	4.9
Rice grows badly on our farm	5.7
I am very sick	6.3
I am not able to get a spouse	7.0
I am not able to get enough food to eat	8.3
My child dies from fever	8.6
My house and property are destroyed in a fire	8.9
A car kills my brother on the motor road	9.1
My family members do not respect me	9.6
My peanut farm produces few peanuts	9.6
I insult a person in the village	10.1
My food and property are stolen	10.3
I have no friend to help me when trouble comes	11.1

Personal accidents vie with unproductive rice farming as the source of the greatest worry. Falling from a palm tree, which men climb in order to get palm oil and palm wine, and being bitten by a snake are serious worries to people who depend to a large extent on the gifts of the forest. There is a high mortality rate from many diseases, of which malaria is perhaps the greatest killer. Failure of the rice and other crops is a very real possibility, and happens frequently. The destruction of property through fire is an ever-present danger, because roofs are made of palm thatch and are highly flammable.

The social dangers are interesting. Failure of family members to respect a person can result in serious problems. We came to know one Gbansu resident whose children had left him to his fate, reportedly because he had treated them so badly. He in turn was almost helpless, and even though old was forced by his fellow villagers to do menial work for others simply in order to survive. Insulting another person is a grave offence. And having no friend to care for one in time of trouble leaves a person helpless in the face of danger.

There are significant differences between the population subgroups, as in all the previous cases. Village residents fear the loss of the rice crop and the social dangers of village life, while the hamlet residents are more secure, fearing mainly sickness, lack of friends and the possibility of insulting someone. Men are more concerned about leadership, money and social status, while women fear loss of friends, inability to find a spouse, and poor garden crops.

It is one thing to think what one wants in life, and another to be able to achieve these goals. We asked people to state whether or not the good possibilities in life listed in Table 5.5 are within their control. Each item was ranked on a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 means it can be done with ease

and 5 means that it is very difficult indeed. Table 5.7 shows the mean ease of achievement of each of the goals. What is striking about this table is the close correlation between it and Table 5.5. That which people hope to get is in most cases within the control of the people who want to achieve these goals.

TABLE 5.7
ABILITY TO ACHIEVE GOOD POSSIBILITIES

GOOD POSSIBILITY	EASE OF ACHIEVEMENT
My rice farm is large and produces much rice	1.3
I have many clever children, who all go to school	1.6
I have many cash crops which produce well	1.8
I have many friends who are helpful to me	1.8
I have many animals	2.0
I kill many animals in the forest	2.1
My family and I are all healthy	2.3
I have a good loving spouse	2.3
I have a good house, clothes and property	2.4
I have enough good food to eat	2.4
I have enough money for what I need	2.6
I have many garden crops which give me food	2.6
I have a good lover	2.6
I get good things freely	3.0
I am a respected leader in the village	3.1

The first, second and fourth items of Table 5.7 are the same as the corresponding items in Table 5.5. Moreover, there is a Pearson correlation of .62 between the two lists. Clearly, the desirability of an object in life is closely related to its feasibility, a good sign of a realistic, pragmatic attitude to life.

The second important fact about Table 5.7 is that 10 of the items have a score less than 2.5, showing that they are considered quite possible to achieve. And none of the items is considered totally outside of the control of the individual. Even becoming a leader in the village and getting good things freely are neutral on the scale, but not impossible. Clearly the people of Gbansu set goals for themselves which they believe they can achieve and they avoid impossible goals.

The most difficult items on the list to obtain are money, good garden crops, a good lover, free benefits in life, and leadership positions. These are all more associated with the village than with the hamlets. Village life can be seen to involve a gamble to get larger rewards than are available in the hamlets, with a correspondingly high risk of failure.

The ranking of ability to avoid bad possibilities in life is not at all correlated with their importance, as given by Table 5.6. The rankings lie much closer to the neutral mid-position, and do not display a significant pattern. There would seem to be no relation between ability to avoid a danger and its importance. This makes very good sense, since it is not possible to choose the dangers one would like to escape, whereas it is possible to choose the benefits one would like to secure.

The next step in our exploration of good and bad possibilities in life was to ask for causes and reasons. In the Kpelle language, these are different. The cause for something can be translated as "that which makes it be what it is", while the reason is "that which lies within it". The reason therefore is inherent in the action or the event, while the cause is an external source which brings the action or event into being. The reason is like the final cause of Aristotle, while the cause may be interpreted as Aristotle's efficient cause.

Clearly there is much overlap between the reason and the cause. God, cleverness, strength, good ways, good reputation, health and wealth appear on both lists, but in one case as the motivating factor and in the other as the impelling factor. Table 5.8 lists the most important reasons why good possibilities take place, while Table 5.9 lists the most important causes. The table includes only causes and reasons which are listed in 3% or more of the responses.

TABLE 5.8
REASONS FOR GOOD POSSIBILITIES IN LIFE TO HAPPEN

REASON	PERCENT
Get respect and reputation	9.0
Have large faithful family	7.1
Be clever and intelligent	6.7
Be kind and helpful	5.7
Get happiness	5.7
Get good home and property	5.7
Have friendship and love	5.2
Live a good life	5.2
Get money and wealth	4.8
Get enough food	4.8
Have good health	4.3
Have good soil and seed	4.3
Be strong	3.8
Have good farming practices	3.8
Respect God	3.3
Be a hard worker	3.3

The reasons which motivate success and the achievement of a good life are complex. At the top of the list is the desire for respect and a good reputation, followed by the goal of having a large and faithful family. Also near the top of the list are reasons which are specific sub-aspects of these two main motivating reasons. Kindness, happiness, friendship and love are important components of respect and reputation, while a good home and property, money and wealth, and enough food are tied closely, as was noted above in the case of the Gbansu village elder, with having a large and faithful family.

Much lower on the list are the agricultural reasons for success. The desire to have good soil and seed, be a strong and hard worker, and do good farming are generally lower than the more socially prominent reasons. Serving God is also very low on the list, whereas Table 5.9 shows that God is the most commonly noted cause of success. The explanation of this seeming contradiction is one that the theologians should explore. It may well be that God is seen as the creator and prime mover of events, but not a force or person that can easily be influenced or served.

TABLE 5.9
CAUSES FOR GOOD POSSIBILITIES IN LIFE TO HAPPEN

CAUSE	PERCENT
God	19.2
Cleverness	12.5
Strength	9.6
Good ways	9.1
Luck	7.2
Good soil	5.3
Generosity	4.3
Love	4.3
Kindness	3.8
Caring for the farm	3.8

Farming is also low on the list of causes for the good life, although the possession of good soil in sixth position. The important causes are social in character. The world is within the control of the people who live there, provided they respect the social norms and respond to God's assistance.

One omission is striking, granted what is known about the people of Gbansu in other contexts. Almost no one mentioned medicine, spirits, witchcraft and the powerful doctors who inhabit the forest. We know that these are considered to be important reasons and causes from our observation and from inference. But they are not mentioned directly. It could well be that norms of secrecy interfere with mentioning these subjects.

However, when people were asked to rank causes and reasons which we suggested to them, rather than volunteering the causes and reasons on their own, these non-natural categories were acknowledged as important. Table 5.10 lists 25 representative causes and reasons, with the mean ranks which we elicited from those whom we interviewed. Each person ranked the entire list from 1 to 25, and the table gives the means of these rankings.

TABLE 5.10
CAUSES AND REASONS FOR GOOD EVENTS RANKED BY IMPORTANCE

CAUSES AND REASONS	RANK
Hard work	5.8
Good farming methods	6.6
Medicine	10.1
Good luck	10.4
God	11.1
Good farmland	11.1
Honesty	11.1
Goodness	11.2
Good food	11.6
Money	11.9
Thinking	12.3

Ability to speak well	12.6
Good health	12.6
Kindness	13.3
Respect	14.0
Wealth	14.0
Helpfulness	14.3
Ancestor spirits	14.5
Love	14.6
Cleverness	15.1
Large and healthy family	16.1
Good sense	16.5
Strength	18.4
Modern ways	18.4
Reputation	19.4

The principal means to success are hard work and good farming methods. On this almost everyone agreed. But not far behind are medicine, good luck and God, all giving supernatural support for ordinary human efforts. The remainder of the list combines social virtues and good material conditions. It is a pragmatic list, with all sources of help considered and balanced, to maximize success and minimize danger. It is interesting that modern ways appear very low on the list. Perhaps people believe that being *kwii* is no guarantee for achieving one's goals as long as one remains in the village.

The supernatural is more prominent in explaining bad occurrences in life. Fully one third of the causes for bad events are supernatural, including witchcraft, evil spirits and Satan. Another 40% of the causes involve personal weaknesses or misdeeds. The remaining quarter of the stated causes have to do with objective conditions over which individuals have little control, including bad farming and village conditions and poor health. The pattern of reasons is similar, although perhaps inevitably supernatural enemies are less involved as reasons than as causes. Spirits, witches and bad medicine are less likely to be conscious or well-articulated reasons for bad fortune than they are to be unknown or hidden causes, particularly given the tendency we noted above for people not to speak about their supernatural agencies.

Explanations of bad events in life are less likely to be directly teleological, as was the case for explanations of good outcomes. The reason doubtless is that bad possibilities and occasions are not designed to produce the results which actually occur. People desire the good results they actually achieve, and thus the underlying reason and the end result are identified, whereas people rarely desire the bad things that happen to them, thus cutting the connection between reason and result.

Just as in the case of causes and reasons for good happenings in life, we made up a composite list of the 25 principal causes and reasons for bad results, and asked Gbansu people to rank them according to their importance from 1 to 25. Table 5.11 gives the list in order from the most to the least important. It should be noted particularly that witchcraft against the person is by far the most important, with an overall mean rank of 5.4.

TABLE 5.11
CAUSES AND REASONS FOR BAD EVENTS RANKED BY IMPORTANCE

CAUSES AND REASONS	RANK
Witchcraft against the person	5.4
Poor farmland	9.0
Drunkenness	9.4
Laziness	10.9
Unwillingness to help others	10.9
Witchcraft by the person	11.4
Stupidity	11.4
Carelessness	11.6
Poor workmanship	11.6
Unwillingness to listen to others	12.0
Bad farming	12.8
Evil spirits	12.9
Forgetfulness	13.3
Mischievousness	13.6
Badness	13.7
Sickness	14.2
Satan	14.3
Lack of respect for others	15.1
Greed	15.1
Selfishness	15.1
Haste	16.0
Inability to work	16.4
Fear	16.4
Poverty	16.8
Ignorance	19.6

Clearly witchcraft is important - and is also a two-edged sword. The person who uses witchcraft is likely to be caught by it, a cause of problems to the practitioner of the same importance as stupidity, carelessness and poor workmanship. One is almost tempted to believe that the one who is stupid or careless or incompetent at witchcraft, is the one who finds the power turning against him or her.

The other reasons at the top of the list, except for poor farmland, are those over which the individual should have control. There is by implication no reason why the person should be drunk, lazy, unwilling to help others, stupid, careless, incompetent, unwilling to listen or poor at farming, and so on down the list. Factors over which the person seem to have the least control are at the bottom of the list, including inability to work, fear, poverty and ignorance. Those are, it would appear, excusable.

The natural next question is: to what extent are these factors which seem to underlie success or failure in life in fact under the control of people. We asked people to state, on a scale of 1 to 5, whether they could in fact put the causes and reasons for good fortune to work in their daily lives, and whether they could consciously avoid the causes and reasons for bad fortune.

The principal finding is that the self-centered virtues of good sense, health, cleverness, family, strength and possessions can without too much difficulty be controlled by the individual. The social virtues of goodness, reputation, respect, helpfulness, kindness and love are more difficult to control. And finally the most difficult of all are ancestor spirits, modern *kwii* ways and medicine. These are virtues which seem to come from outside the individual.

There are some significant differences between the different groups of people we interviewed. Hamlet residences are closer to the forest, and thus are more able to use medicines to good effect. Likewise, they are more likely to be honest than village people, who in their turn seem to rely more on thinking and cleverness. This fits the pattern previously described, of the hamlets as places where people can live a straightforward, simple, honest life, and a life where they are closely in touch with the mysteries of the forest.

Not surprisingly, men believe they are more in control of strength and ancestor spirits than women, whereas women find love, kindness and a good reputation easier to achieve than men. It is also not surprising that middle-aged adults feel they are more in touch with the ancestor spirits than the young adults, who in their turn find good health to be relatively easy to achieve.

Whereas it is relatively more difficult to achieve the social virtues, it is relatively easier to avoid the social vices of badness, selfishness, greed, and fear. Similarly, while it may seem easy to achieve personal ingredients for success, it is harder to avoid their opposites, once one has fallen into them. More difficult to avoid are the supernatural factors of witchcraft and Satan which cause evil outcomes in one's life, although evil spirits can be outwitted. From interviews with Gbansu people, we find that the evil spirits which inhabit areas of the forest and bush near the village are generally not as vicious as human beings who apply witchcraft in their lives. Often these spirits are simply mischievous, rather than being actively malevolent.

A final remark concerning the ease of application of causes and reasons for success and ease of bypassing causes and reasons for failure is found by correlating the ranks of their importance and the difficulty or ease of achieving or avoiding them. The Pearson correlation between the rank of importance and the ease of achieving good causes and reasons is $-.24$, while that between the rank of importance and the ease of avoiding bad causes and reasons is a very substantial $-.46$. Importance would seem to imply difficulty in the view of those whom we interviewed. In short, those causes and reasons which are easier to manage are less a cause of concern than those which give trouble. Surely this is what would be expected in any community, and it is a fact which allows confidence in the correctness of the information we have been given. Internal consistency is what would be expected in a community which is well integrated.

CHAPTER 6. THE MEANING OF WORK

6.1 Farming and work

It has been noted that the residents of Gbansu take a variety of attitudes toward farming. They generally recognize the centrality of rice, and they know the value of having a good crop. It spells the difference between life and death. They know that their livelihood depends on the proper use of the forest and the resources, human and otherwise, that are to be found in the forest.

But it has also been noted that there is much more to life than the material base upon which life is built, important as that material base may be. Gbansu people have many motives and values and desires in life other than being good farmers. In fact, only a minority of Gbansu people are really interested in farming. Moreover, a preponderance of those who take farming as a way of life are hamlet dwellers, uneducated persons and women.

In particular, therefore, it is claimed that there is no such person as the "Rural Peasant", the "Traditional Farmer". There are instead many individuals in a community such as Gbansu, and these individuals seek many different goals in life. Those who prefer to seek education, or political leadership, or the bright lights of the city, or a paid job in one of the towns, or a share in the faceless mystery of the secret society, are as important to the community as those who actively find their fulfilment in farming.

On the other hand, it is important not to overstress this point. Almost everyone in the village participates at one time or another in farming. Not to take one's share in the communal labor is a serious breach of the social code, as will be pointed out shortly. Even those who know and care least about agriculture know that there must be rice in the storage shed if they are to eat.

Farming is therefore part of the larger set of activities which keep the community alive. One way of thinking of such activities is to speak of "work". As noted earlier, "work" means primarily all the complex set of activities which must be done before there is rice in the storage shed and rice in the family pot. But increasingly in this new and complex world there are other meanings of the term "work". We asked Gbansu people to complete our usual set of sentences concerning this term. As we expected, the dominant response was farm work, but there were many other responses as well, showing the dynamic diversity of the community. Table 6.1 lists the responses to the sentences which were given in more than 2% of the cases.

TABLE 6.1
MOST FREQUENT SENTENCE COMPLETIONS CONCERNING WORK

RESPONSE	PERCENT
We work on the farm	11.4
We work for money	6.1
We work hard	4.8
It is difficult to work	4.1
We always work	4.0
Some people don't work	3.7
There are different kinds of work	3.6
Some people work well	3.4

We go to school	3.2
We work to help our family	3.1
My father works	2.9
Work is good	2.9
There is much work	2.5
We learn to work	2.5
We must work to eat	2.3

The most frequent response, almost twice as common as the next response, concerns work on the farm. However, it is important to realize that this response is most strongly given to the sentence introducer "In the old days..." The implication is that things are now changing. And the second most common response, namely, "We work for money", shows that the change is in the direction of the modern cash-oriented world. In particular, the response "We work for money" is most commonly given to the sentence introducers "I want..." and "Someday...". The future, according to many people, lies in wage employment, not in continuing the endless cycle of making rice farm.

But obviously someone must make the farms. If too little rice is produced, then either people will starve or they must be fed from some outside source. That outside source can be either through wage work, in which case the wage earner buys food, or it can be through food aid, in which case a pattern of dependency builds up.

What emerges from analysis of the response of the different subgroups is that farm work is the activity of women, of young children, of uneducated persons and of hamlet residents. This is fully consistent with other findings, and supports the view that extension agents and development advisors must go beyond and behind the easily accessible educated young men, who are their usual targets.

In particular, the unschooled Gbansu people stress the traditional way of life, in which farm work is necessary so that people may eat, men work for their wives' parents in order to secure their marriages, children look forward to a lifetime of work when they grow up, and men go outside the village to tap rubber for a living. School people, on the other hand, prefer the work of learning, teaching and even preaching, presumably all ways out of the hard business of scratching a living from the earth.

Cluster analysis of the wide range and variety of responses to the sentence introducers in the matter of work shows the complexity of the question. Two suggestive clusters of responses show the problem of work. One displays the basic difficulties, and the other the transition to modern society, as shown in Table 6.2.

TABLE 6.2
CLUSTERS OF SENTENCE COMPLETIONS CONCERNING WORK

I. Problems of work

- A. We work on the farm
- B. We don't get enough money
- C. It is hard to work
- D. School is work
- E. We work at Firestone Rubber Plantation
- F. There is little work

II. The transition to modern society

- A. We don't work on the farm
- B. We don't work in the swamp
- C. We walk to work
- D. Playing sports is work
- E. Mat-making is work
- F. Rubber-tapping is work
- G. Cutting rice is work
- H. We work in the nation
- I. Tradition is finished
- J. We sell farm produce
- K. Eating is work
- L. Fishing is work

The bewilderment of people who are not attracted to the traditional work of making farms, but who at the same time do not have easy access to the modern world, is clear from these two clusters of responses. These responses are the ideas of people who still belong to rural society, but who seek alternatives. They say that the tradition is finished, and seem not to want to work on the farm or in the swamp. But the alternatives for this group are limited, including mat-making, rubber-tapping and sports. Some turn to selling farm produce as a way of earning the money needed for survival in a new society. Fishing is a way of life for some men as well as for women in the dry season. And, for some, even eating is work!

6.2 The central position of rice

Rice-growing is not just a technical activity. Even though people play different roles in the complex village society, all recognize the importance of rice. It is more true in the hamlets than in the village, but even in the remote capital city of Monrovia, rice has been a primary issue in national politics.

It was the "Rice Riots" of April 1979 which set in motion the train of events that led to Samuel Doe's takeover from President Tolbert, and eventually to the overthrow of Doe and the present state of national chaos. Monrovia's population had swollen to an unmanageable size even before the 1979 events, and, after Doe promised free rice and the Americans cooperated by sending more and still more PL 480 rice to Liberia, the rural population flocked to the city. And today Monrovia is home to more than a million people, crammed into a very limited space and almost totally dependent on foreign food.

Why is this true? To be sure, many people have fled the outrages committed by the ragtag soldiers in the militias of the warlords, but many have also fled to where they can get free imported rice, courtesy of international aid agencies. The importance of food aid, and its negative effects on rural rice production will be discussed. But for now the issue is the centrality of rice in the economy and life of Gbansu.

Symbolic of this importance was a small carved figure of a man which we saw at the side of the trail leading out of a remote hamlet on the fringes of Gbansu territory just at the start of the new year. With the carved figure was new rice from the last year's harvest, laid out on a green banana leaf. It was an offering to the ancestors, with the hope that they would make the coming rice season fruitful.

We asked Gbansu people to complete the same 20 sentences, this time about rice. The responses given in more than 2% of the cases are listed in Table 6.3. They show clearly the depth of emotional and intellectual concern for rice. Without it, the people and their culture die.

TABLE 6.3
MOST FREQUENT SENTENCE COMPLETIONS CONCERNING RICE

RESPONSE	PERCENT
We don't have enough rice	7.5
We make rice farm	6.1
We have rice	4.7
Rice farming is hard work	4.7
We eat rice	4.5
We have enough rice	4.1
We should have more rice	3.8
We cook rice	3.4
We need rice	3.1
We should make rice farm	2.7
We plant rice	2.6
We keep rice	2.3
Rice is good	2.3
We don't make rice farm	2.0
We make big rice farm	2.0

The most common response is that there is not enough rice. There is in fact never enough rice. There is always the danger that the next season will be bad. Relatives come to visit. Rice must be sold in the market to pay taxes. The politicians and the military make exactions on rural villages, so that people must give up their rice or suffer. Those who are working away from the village must be fed.

Yet the overall image is secular and pragmatic. The offering to the ancestors does not appear, even among the responses made in fewer than 2% of the cases. The power and the mystery associated with the forest are not here. Rice is the material foundation of life, basic but this-worldly. Rice is what makes people happy, particularly in the old days, which are remembered as a time when farms were big and rice was plentiful.

Familiar distinctions between population subgroups, significant at the 95% level or better, appear in the sentence completions. Women see themselves as doing the work of rice farming, including planting, drying and cooking. Men, on the other hand, say they are the ones who buy and eat rice. Men are the consumers, and women the producers.

Likewise the unschooled persons stress doing the work of rice farming. They speak more often than their schooled counterparts of joining the work group, clearing the bush, fencing the farm, protecting it against birds, and cutting the rice. Hamlet residents also speak more often of doing the work on the farm, while village residents speak of the benefits of growing rice.

Clearly there is a strong asymmetry in rice farming. The persons who do the work, according to their own statements, are the hamlet residents, the females and the unschooled people. Those who

benefit from the system without doing as much of the hard work as their counterparts are the village residents, those who have been to school, and the males.

Cluster analysis reveals the way in which these responses are organized in the minds of the Gbansu people who answered our questions. Two sub-clusters are of particular interest. The first lists activities which are done together, as community shared labor. The second lists the problems encountered in rice farming.

Table 6.4 lists the responses which concern working together on the rice farm. It is the custom for people to work together as they grow rice. One of the most important arguments against growing rice in the swamp, as given by the people we interviewed, speaks directly to this point. They say it is difficult for the cooperative work group to work together in the swamp, because it does not allow for the music, the working in a line, the sense of accomplishment, and the vigorous display of skill, all of which are important aspects of upland rice farming. Table 6.4 is divided into two subgroups, one on caring for the rice and the other on work on the farm.

TABLE 6.4
RESPONSES CONCERNING WORKING TOGETHER IN THE RICE FARM

I. Caring for the rice

A. The rice cycle

1. We clear the rice farm
2. We make big rice farm
3. We plant rice
4. We eat rice
5. We care for and fence the rice
6. We keep rice
7. We beat rice

B. The rice harvest

1. The work group makes rice farm
2. I help my family grow rice
3. We cut rice
4. We clean rice
5. Rice is in the bag and bucket

II. Work on the rice farm

A. Family work

1. We walk to the rice farm
2. We eat rice and soup
3. Women work on the rice farm
4. Men work on the rice farm

B. The benefits of rice growing

1. We should make rice farm
2. The work group works on rice farm
3. Forest is good to grow rice
4. Boys take rice

This table emphasizes the point that the community works together as a whole to do what is needed for a good harvest. Working together makes life good and productive. It is of particular interest in Table 6.4 that the different stages in the rice growing cycle are grouped together. That

list of activities will be used when discussing the stages in more detail. For the moment, it should be noted that clearing the farm, making the farm, planting the rice, caring for and fencing the rice, cutting the rice, cleaning the rice, keeping the rice, and eventually beating it to eat are all in the same sub-cluster.

The problems encountered in growing rice are listed in Table 6.5. This table should be compared with Table 6.4, since the former stresses the good side of growing rice, while the latter stresses the problems and shortages which can be encountered.

TABLE 6.5
RESPONSES CONCERNING PROBLEMS ON THE RICE FARM

I. Hindrances to production of rice

A. Shortage of rice

1. Birds and animals eat rice
2. Rice is very important
3. Weeds kill rice
4. Rice is costly
5. There is no rice to buy

B. Evaluation of rice-growing

1. We have different types of rice
2. Rice is growing well
3. People don't make rice farm as before
4. Rice is not growing well

II. Difficulties of growing rice

A. Small farms

1. Rice farming is hard work
2. People make small rice farms
3. Children refuse to work
4. We don't have enough rice

B. Not making farms

1. We don't make rice farm
2. We work alone on the rice farm
3. School children don't make rice farm
4. Some children make rice farm
5. We eat other foods besides rice
6. We buy rice

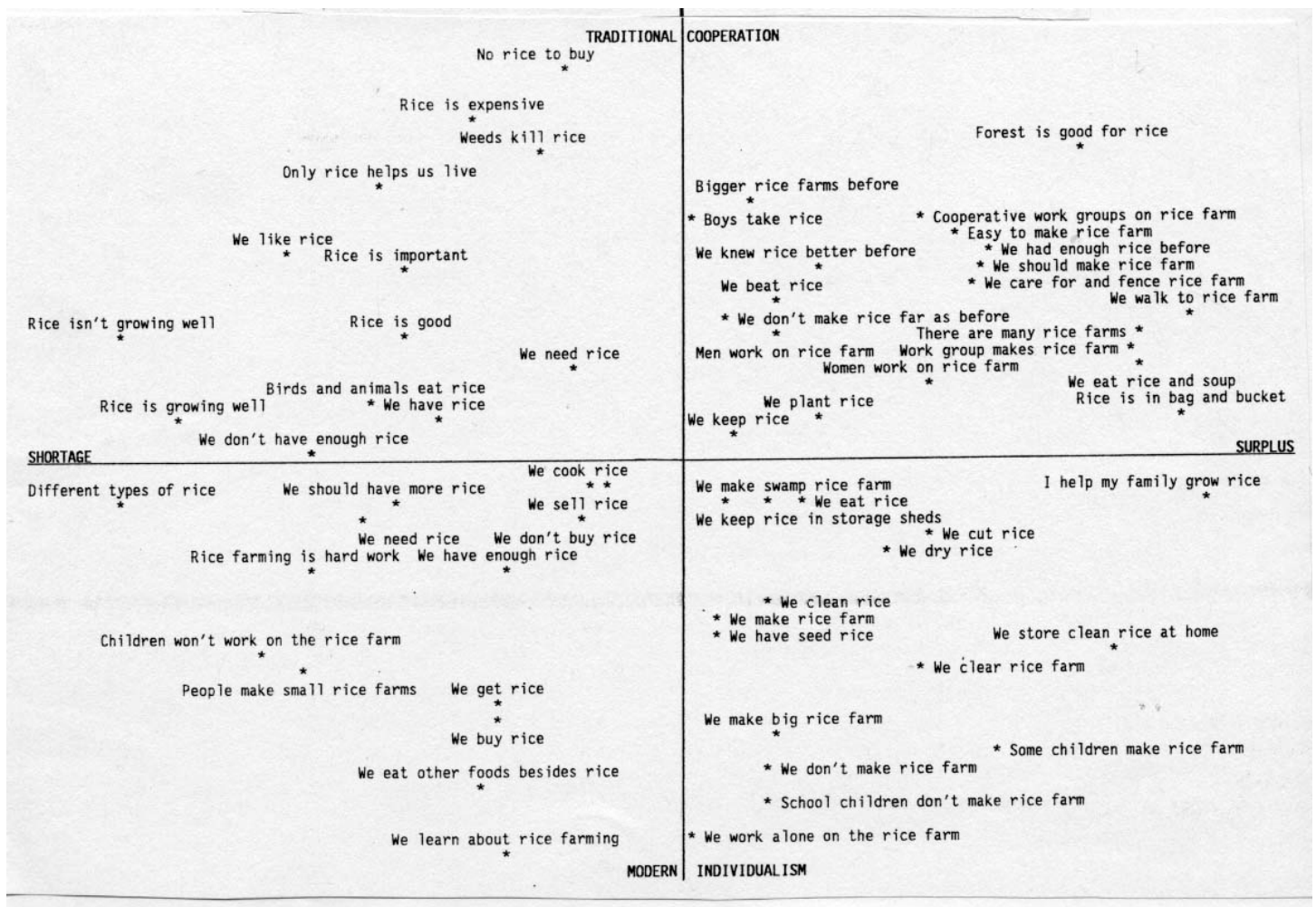
Small rice farms and a shortage of rice are associated with weeds, birds and animals, refusal to work and the need to buy rice. In particular, school children don't work on the farm, and children as a whole are often unwilling to work. The result is that some people work alone or even do not make rice farm at all, a pattern very different from what people remember of the old days. Another result is that people now eat new types of food, and have to buy their rice - if it is available, which it often is not, and if the price is reasonable, which it also often is not.

Tables 6.4 and 6.5 show the vital necessity for people to work together. Gbansu residents realize that successful rice-farming is a community activity. Self-sufficiency can only be achieved if people come together for mutual support. As discussed earlier, it is essential to think of the community as a whole, even though different segments and different individuals play different

roles in that totality. In rice farming, as elsewhere in life, this form of cooperation is essential, involving recognition of diversity but also the necessity for each to play his or her own role to the full.

Multi-dimensional scaling provides further insight into the structure and meaning of rice farming for the people of Gbansu. Figure 6.1 reveals the structure of their ideas along two dimensions: from shortage to surplus, and from traditional cooperation to modern individualism.

FIGURE 6.1
TWO-DIMENSIONAL REPRESENTATION OF RESPONSES CONCERNING RICE



The upper right quadrant combines tradition and a surplus of rice, and thus represents the elements of Gbansu culture which are most richly tied to what some might call "the good old days". This quadrant begins with the forest as the most ancient element of Gbansu life, as we have already discussed. Next there is the claim that rice farms were bigger in the old days, that people knew more about rice, and that there was enough rice in that time. Both men and women are said to work on the rice farm, and there are many farms, which are easy to make. People plant, care for and fence the rice farm. And at the end there is rice by the bag and bucket full, and people eat their fill of rice and soup. It is an impressive, but perhaps idealized picture!

The upper left quadrant reflects some of the problems of rice farming, even in the traditional mode of farming. The importance and virtue of rice is stressed, but without the assurance that it will be forthcoming. Weeds, birds and animals and even boys take the rice, and the result is that rice does not grow well and there is a shortage of rice.

The lower left quadrant combines a shortage of rice with modern conditions. Small rice farms, hard work on the farm, the refusal of children to work on the farm, the need to purchase rice or to sell it, the coming of different types of rice, the need to eat foods other than rice, and the ultimate indignity of having to learn how to grow rice, are all combined in this quadrant.

Finally, the lower right quadrant reflects modern individualism. Rice is stored at home, people grow rice in the swamp rather than on the hillside, children make their own farms, and some persons work alone on their farms. A few anomalies appear in this quadrant, reflecting a surplus but not individualism, including clearing, cutting, drying and cleaning rice, as well as storing rice for the next season. These apparently misplaced responses may show that the distinction between individual and communal rice growing is not quite as sharp as some would like to believe is the case.

In summary, rice is the source and basis of life, whether in traditional or modern dress. In years gone by, as well as in the minds and hearts of the older, unschooled and hamlet residents, its cultivation has been a cooperative, community venture, uniting village and hamlets together, whether for feast or for famine. It is not an isolated technical activity, but is a pragmatic way of life. In its most modern form, it becomes individualistic and lonely, perhaps symbolized best by work in the swamp, whether it is the work of an old woman who has to plant late in the season in order to survive, or the work of an educated person applying new techniques he has learned in the outside world.

6.3 The varieties of rice

When we were working in Gbansu, a request came from the United Nations to gather samples of as many varieties as possible of traditional crops from across the world to store in a seed bank. Increasingly, agronomists are concerned that concentration on single varieties of a few basic crops may lead to the loss of the genetic diversity which is so important to continued productivity. Concentration on a single variety of a single crop could lead to radical crop failure and even starvation, if that single variety were to prove susceptible to disease or genetic deterioration. As a result, we collected seed from as many varieties of rice as possible, as well as from the other cultivated crops of the area.

We asked Gbansu people to bring us as many different varieties as they could locate. In the process we put together a collection of 112 different varieties of rice within just a few days, with

very little effort. Had we wished for more, we are sure that our friends could have brought us up to 200 different varieties in that community and its close neighbours.

But the exercise was of benefit beyond the simple collection. We learned a great deal about what people themselves know about rice. We found that every community has its own set of rice varieties. These varieties have been bred over the years, some fortuitously and some by design, to suit specific land varieties, times of growth, and qualities of cooked rice.

Each of these varieties has its name, although the names often differ from household to household. Some of the names refer to color, some to location, some to texture, some to the source, and some to factors we could not identify. These names are known to the farmers who are experts in rice selection, in most cases the women. One woman, leader of the principal women's cooperative work group in the village, could easily name all the 112 varieties on sight, and could state special features of most of them, such as where to plant them, and how long they would take to ripen.

It would obviously be pointless to list the names here. Much more to the point is to elicit the structure of the set of rice varieties, using the names and the physical features as keys. For this purpose, we selected a subset of the 50 most commonly used varieties for a series of studies.

The first and simplest study required the person we interviewed to name the 50 varieties, and describe the appearance and use of those they could name. Table 6.6 gives the percent of each subgroup of persons interviewed who could identify the rice varieties. We accepted any name given by a person as an identification, which may therefore have led us to accept some errors as correct identifications. However, we could not avoid accepting what the people told us, since there are no absolute standards for these names.

TABLE 6.6
IDENTIFICATION OF RICE VARIETIES

POPULATION GROUP	PERCENT NAMED
Females	50.8
Males	10.3
Mature adults	34.3
Young adults	26.8
Village residents	31.0
Hamlet residents	30.0

Clearly the major distinction in this table is between females and males. Most women know a large proportion of the rice varieties and most men generally know few or none of the varieties. There is a tendency for older persons to know rice varieties better than younger persons, but this tendency is only marginally significant. There is no apparent difference between village and hamlet residents.

For those who could name a particular rice variety, we asked additional questions about preferences of where to plant the rice, what makes the variety good, and what problems arise with the particular variety. Table 6.7 lists the preferred places to plant the varieties, as stated by people who claimed to know those varieties. There was not total unanimity about where varieties should be planted,

but the consensus was sufficiently close to allow us to believe that rice varieties are selected with care to fit the soil where they are most suited.

TABLE 6.7
PREFERRED LOCATIONS FOR PLANTING RICE VARIETIES

LOCATION	PERCENT
Flat bottom land	38.2
Hillside	17.5
Swamp	17.1
River and swamp bank	15.9
Old farm	6.8
Early farm	2.4
Good soil	1.6
Everywhere	0.4

The greatest number of varieties are intended for flat bottom land, which is obviously the preferred place to plant. It is less subject to erosion, and has a better possibility of accumulating fertility in the fallow years of the cycle.

Hillsides are in second position. Since the terrain around Gbansu is broken and hilly, it is inevitable that many rice farms must be made on hillsides, often quite steep. Thus a large number of varieties are selected for their use in hilly country.

In third position are the varieties which are planted in swamps. It should be noted that the swamp rice which is planted in Gbansu is not the same as the swamp rice planted in carefully laid out swamps, according to the procedure recommended by foreign experts. Swamp rice will be discussed in greater detail later, but for now it should be noted that swamp rice is usually the last resort of families whose upland farms did not burn well or who do not have a good labor supply or who have no other land on which to farm.

River and swamp banks are generally good places to farm, because the fertility is often high. However, the total area of such places is low, because of the wide variation in water level between dry and rainy seasons. Thus there are not so many varieties suitable to those areas.

Rice is often planted on exceptionally rich farms in the second year of cultivation. Where soil is marginal, the farm, as will be discussed in detail later, is allowed to go back to fallow immediately following the first year's harvest. An intermediate step is to plant vegetables, if the fertility is adequate. But when the soil is exceptionally rich, two years of rice can be planted, and for this purpose there are special varieties of rice.

An early farm is one which is planted before the rains have properly started. Such rice varieties, and there are a few of them, will germinate without heavy rainfall and will ripen early, during the rainy season.

The last two categories are of less interest than the first six. They probably imply that the persons answering the question in that way do not really know as much about rice varieties as the other informants who responded to our questions with a specific use in mind for the rice.

We asked how rice is selected for the new farm. People generally agreed that women select the varieties that will be planted. We then interviewed several women respected for their knowledge of rice, asking what method they used to select rice. Their answers agreed closely.

The first step in selecting a variety is to observe which individual rice plants seem to be growing best shortly before they are harvested. These plants are marked, and then harvested separately. The rice may be a familiar variety, which the woman knows from past experience. It may be a new variety which she has obtained from another woman or from an outside source. It may be a volunteer variety which she did not plant, perhaps coming from an accidental cross-breed. In any case, the seeds from these good plants will be stored separately and not used for food.

At planting time the woman will then choose the three or four specific varieties she wants to plant. The types are chosen according to the soil, the age of the bush, the amount of decayed matter, the availability of water, and the slope of the ground. However, each woman has certain varieties that she feels are her special favorites and that she feels will always grow well for her.

All the women we interviewed agreed that they must plant several varieties in the same farm, to prevent them all from ripening at the same time. One woman elaborated on this need:

It is not good to plant the farm with only one type of rice, because when it gets ripe at one time, and there is not a work group to cut it all, it gets dry on the stalks and most of the seeds fall to the ground. When you plant many different types, while one area is ripe and ready for harvesting the other area is getting ready.

If several varieties are planted, it is essential to keep them separate. For one reason, it is not possible to harvest varieties which ripen at different times in one area, since it would mean spending too much time deciding which stalk was which. A second reason is that women do not like to mix varieties when cooking rice, since each variety cooks in its own special way. A third is that they want to make sure that the seed they select from each variety for the following year is unmixed and pure.

Before planting rice varieties, women will wash the seed carefully to remove impurities. They will then make sure that the seeds are sorted by variety, so that only one variety is to be broadcast in a given area of the farm. This is one obvious way of learning to recognize rice varieties, since making a mistake greatly increases the work at harvest time. Usually it is the senior woman of the household who actually broadcasts the seed at planting time, so that she can make absolutely sure the seeds she wants are planted in the areas she has set aside for them.

What makes rice good or bad, in addition to where it should grow, was the topic of our next set of questions. Not surprisingly, about a third of the good qualities relate to eating, and about 20% relate to the ease with which it can be grown. Similarly, about 20% of the problems relate to eating and about 30% to difficulties in growing. One seemingly odd fact is that 14% say a variety is good because it is white, while 18% say it is bad because it is red. Negative feelings have been observed toward the color red, which is associated with evil, danger and warning. Moreover, red is a color which only powerful leaders of the secret society may wear. Why this carries over to rice is not clear!

6.4 Identifying rice varieties

The discussion thus far has focused on the description and use of rice varieties. At a different and more abstract level of knowledge of rice we then asked people to identify rice varieties without having them pointed out. The purpose of this exercise was to show that the names and descriptions of these varieties are common intellectual currency among those who know rice.

In our first test of knowledge of rice varieties, we asked two persons to sit back to back, with stalks of the same 25 varieties of rice before each person. One person named or described each variety in turn, in a randomly selected order, while the other was asked to pick out the correct variety. After the first person had attempted to communicate these 25 varieties, we then reversed the process and asked the second person to communicate another 25 varieties, samples of which were before each person. We did this study only with persons who were acknowledged by the community to be experts in rice.

Over 70% of all trials succeeded, whether the persons communicating and receiving the descriptions were male or female, old or young, village or hamlet residents, provided they were known to be experts. To confirm the necessity of choosing experts, we asked two men, who cheerfully admitted not to knowing rice varieties, to communicate rice varieties. They were unable to communicate even a single variety out of the 25 successfully!

We were able to find experts from all population subgroups, thus showing that rice knowledge is not the exclusive province of any one subsection of the population. However, confirming what is stated in Table 6.6, it was much easier to find women who knew rice varieties than to find men with the same skills. In fact, essentially all women in the village were willing to try the test, while it was hard to find men willing to make the effort. The implication for development work is clear. Find the experts, who in the case of knowledge of rice are more likely to be women than men.

In every communication test, we recorded exactly what people said in communicating the rice variety. Table 6.8 lists the principal features by which our experts identified the rice varieties in these tests. The sum of the percents in the table is more than 100% because many persons identified varieties by two or more features.

TABLE 6.8
FEATURES OF RICE USED IN COMMUNICATION OF VARIETIES

FEATURE	PERCENT
Husk color	81.8
Hair length	41.2
Name	38.6
Hair color	31.0
Seed color	19.4
Seed length	16.2
Hair location	14.2
Seed size	9.2
Coating on husk	2.4
Other	4.0

The primary features which Gbansu people use to describe rice are those which are visible on immediate inspection. The few features which are listed under "other" deviate from this pattern, and were not useful in communicating varieties. The principal features allowed successful identification in most of the cases, while the less obvious features did not allow for successful communication.

Clearly, one of the principal factors leading to successful identification of rice varieties is agreement on the characteristic. Where a majority of the people agreed on a feature of a rice variety, there was 80% success in identifying the variety, while there was only 59% success in cases where several different descriptions could be given for a particular variety. This tendency to communicate correctly varieties for which there is a common vocabulary is statistically highly significant.

Whereas this fact is hardly surprising, it should be remembered by developers who wish to communicate successfully with rural farmers. Know the language and vocabulary with which they discuss the crop. Then, and not before, discuss development.

We continued our study of these 50 varieties of rice by asking our experts to classify them into groups that made sense. Cluster analysis was then applied to the groups they formed, in order to determine the underlying principles of classification. Table 6.9 lists the main headings of the cluster analysis, without naming the rice varieties themselves.

TABLE 6.9
CLASSIFICATION OF RICE VARIETIES

- I. White husk**
 - A. Long hair**
 - 1. Pure white husks**
 - 2. Ambiguously white husks**
 - B. Short hair or no hair**
 - 1. Hair on grain edges**
 - 2. Hair on grain tips**
- II. Non-white husks**
 - A. Red husks**
 - 1. White hair**
 - 2. No hair or black hair**
 - B. Multi-colored husks**
 - 1. White hair**
 - 2. No hair or black hair**

The color of the husk is the most salient dimension for sorting rice varieties, just as it was for naming the varieties. The hair length is second in importance. Multi-dimensional scaling shows the same distinction between white and non-white husks, but in this case red is at one extreme and white at the other, with multi-colored husks in the middle.

It is not clear just how this classification procedure can be used when developing new rice varieties or when promoting more productive varieties. But before such activities can be undertaken, it is clearly essential that the local classification system be understood, since surely any new varieties will find their way into the system.

CHAPTER 7. SELECTION OF THE FARM SITE

7.1 Preparations for a new season

Table 6.4 lists the stages in growing rice. The first of these is clearing the site in preparation for making the farm. This is itself a complex operation, involving several stages. Perhaps the most important is selection of the site, since having a good harvest depends on choosing vegetation and soil which will be productive when cleared, burned, planted and harvested.

In early January, after the harvest is in and after the festivities and relaxation of the Christmas season are over, the new agricultural year begins for the 131 households in Gbansu and its 26 satellite hamlets. Last year's rice farms, scattered across the 70-80 square kilometers of dense tropical rain forest that make up Gbansu's territory, are still sharp with stubble from the rice harvest, now drying on racks at the farms and soon to be stored in nearby sheds.

Farms from the previous year, where vegetables and a supplementary rice crop were grown as a second year's efforts, are beginning to be reclaimed by the dense secondary bush which will make these farms impassable when the rains come, as shown in Figure 7.1. The early morning air of January is still cool with dry season mist, before the sun burns off the clouds to continue its work of drying the land for the new farming season.

FIGURE 7.1
THE PREVIOUS YEAR'S FARM



This is a time for many family and community decisions, not just concerning the farm. The farmer who leaves the village early in the morning to choose where on his family land he will locate this year's farm may have spent much of the previous night with his neighbors deciding the time for initiation school activities. First things must come first, and so the community will not begin in earnest its corporate task of clearing the land until matters are properly arranged for the secret society schools, Poro for the boys and Sande for the girls.

Yet each household head must individually find time now to select where he wishes to make his next farm. He will walk through the dense undergrowth of forest and secondary growth on his family land. When he finds a site that pleases him, he will cut a narrow line through the trees and shrubs to show where the land is to be cleared.

In theory each of the 110 families would have about 60 hectares of land, if the total area were all arable and if it were divided up equally. In fact, much of the land is not arable, because of rocky hillsides and swamps. Moreover, other portions of the land have been set aside for secret society matters. Finally, the arable land is by no means equally divided among the households. For example, the elder, whom we have discussed in detail above, has far more than his share of land, including a hamlet with several households that produce rice and cash crops for him.

Furthermore, land is more densely used the closer it is to the central village, while the land at the remote corners of Gbansu territory is only lightly used. The reason for this, as we have mentioned before, is the length of time needed to walk to these boundary areas. It is roughly a two-hour walk from the central village to the farthest farm areas. This means that a family which makes its farm on the periphery would only be able to do so if it lived at the farm, which means establishing a hamlet there. And, as we have pointed out, it is not every family that is willing to sacrifice the social and political benefits they gain from being resident in the central village.

Despite the inequality and the unavailability of certain areas, there is nonetheless no real land shortage in Gbansu. Most households have at least 30 hectares from which to choose a farm site for the coming season. Of these 30 hectares, however, not all are equally attractive. Soil types vary greatly, even within the small compass of a household's family land. Thus probably only about half the area in a typical area of land would be considered very suitable for farming.

7.2 The fallow cycle on family land

We asked what qualities the household head would be looking for in his choice of the new farm site. It is essential, first of all, that enough time have elapsed since a previous farm was made in that location, in order that fertility be restored to the soil. The fundamental principle is that the same site cannot be used for rice for more than at most two years. After that time, the land must rest, the vegetation, including shrubs, vines and trees must regrow, and the fertility, which cannot exist in the thin layer of topsoil, must be restored in the living matter which is above the ground. Only then can productivity be made available to a soil which is quickly exhausted by the demands of rice and other crops, and by the power of the heavy tropical rains to carry organic matter away, leaving only inorganic lateritic material behind.

The length of time between successive farms in an area depends strongly on whether the farmer is resident in a subsidiary hamlet or in the central village of Gbansu. We asked how long farmers had waited before going back to a specific area. They were able to tell us precisely where they had

made their farms over the previous years. The result was that farmers from the central village were not able to wait more than an average of 7.5 years, while farmers from the outlying hamlets could wait an average of 9.5 years. This result, which is statistically highly significant, shows graphically the difference between village and hamlet which we have discussed above. In particular, it shows that more good land is available in the hamlet areas than in the area immediately surrounding Gbansu village.

It has been estimated by Van Santen (1974) that upland rice farms in Bong County are roughly 1.3-1.4 hectares in size. Farmers must thus select about 10% of the good quality land on their family land for the new farm. This is consistent with the Gbansu farmers' estimates of the length of time between successive farms on the same land.

That Gbansu farm families follow a well-defined pattern when they leave land fallow is confirmed by a survey of the family land of 25 households, chosen haphazardly from both the village and the hamlets. We located an average of 6.8 clearly identifiable farms, old and new, in each family area, and there were probably more than we could not see, because of the regrowth of the forest. Figure 7.2 shows an old farm almost fully grown back to the point of being ready for a new farm to be made there.

The old farms we found were clearly made in successive years, rather than for different wives in the same year. We were told that this is true because if a man has more than one wife, the farms for the different wives will be located in different areas. Thus we could be sure that the farms we found within a given area were part of a single fallow cycle for that area. A re-survey in 1975, moreover, showed that each of these 25 households continued to make its new farm in the same family area as the previous year. It is thus probable that the minimum number of years before a farmer returns to an old site is at least 7, confirming the farmers' own estimates.

The new farm is in most cases located near the farm of the previous year. Village dwellers located the new farm near the old one in 91% of the cases, while hamlet farmers did so in 74% of the cases. Similarly, the new farm was located near the storage shed in 84% of the cases for village farmers and only 61% for hamlet farmers. These differences, which are significant at the 2% level, are doubtless based in the fact that there is less open land near the central village, so that farmers are circumscribed by each other, and thus must continue to make their farms in a tight cycle around their land. The hamlet farmers, on the other hand, have more open land into which they can move, as they go farther toward the boundaries of Gbansu land.

Ultimately, of course, there is a limit. The main trail shown in Figure 2.3 runs from southwest to northeast. Beyond the hamlet of Pele-Polu at the southwest edge of the village is the territory of the next big village, and likewise beyond the hamlet of Tokpa-Ta at the northeast is another big village. To the southeast there is some open land, but another village has its territory just beyond a high ridge separating the St. Paul River watershed from the St. John River watershed.

But to the northwest, across the St. Paul River, there is open forest, into which a few of the hamlet farmers have begun to move their farming operations. The self-isolated man we mentioned in Area 164, as shown in Figure 2.4, has made his farm just across the river. And the ex-murderer, client of the paramount chief, has also made a farm across the river. Reports from the years after our field research was completed show that this movement is continuing.

FIGURE 7.2
AN OLD FARM ALMOST FULLY GROWN BACK



Farmers receive their family land in a variety of ways. Table 7.1 lists the various sources of land for families in the village and in the hamlets. Unfortunately we did not ask whether the family sources are on the husband's or the wife's side. It is our impression that more of the gifts of land involve the husband's family, but that a significant minority are on the wife's side.

TABLE 7.1
PERCENT OF SOURCES OF FAMILY LAND

SOURCE	VILLAGE	HAMLET
Parents	52.3	52.7
In-laws	18.2	11.1
Brother	4.5	8.3
Uncle	0.0	4.2
Husband	2.3	0.0
Friend	2.3	15.3
Village people	9.1	1.4
Purchase	4.5	5.6
Personal claim	4.5	1.5
Debt	2.3	0.0

More than three-quarters of the land comes from the family, most of it from the family into which the husband or wife is born, and the remainder from more remote relatives. The only real difference between village and hamlet is that the hamlet people tend more often to invite friends to share their land, whereas the village people have a more formal structure by which to allocate land.

Purchase of land by powerful outsiders is just beginning to become important in the Gbansu area, with about 5% of the land being acquired in that way. It is quite possible that the new motor road, completed after this survey was done, will make it easier for outsiders to buy land. It is hoped that the Gbansu people will be able to secure their village and hamlet land on a communal basis before they lose it to wealthy outsiders. The recent civil war has doubtless slowed the process, but it could well begin again, once Liberia's interior is open to free movement after the end of the civil war.

7.3 Types of soil and vegetation

If the first criterion for selection of the new farm site is that it have had enough time to regenerate fallow land, the second criterion is the type of soil and vegetation available. An astute farmer discussed with us the types of land and vegetation he could identify. There were 32 in all, each with its own advantages and disadvantages. Of these, 20 were types of primary or secondary forest, 6 were types of swamp, and 6 were types of soil. We accompanied him into the forest, and photographed each type. We later obtained descriptions of each type from other experienced farmers.

We asked first what are the overall qualities the farmer is looking for when he seeks a site for his farm. Table 7.2 lists the qualities in rank order for village and hamlet residents.

TABLE 7.2
PERCENT NAMING QUALITIES SOUGHT IN A NEW FARM

QUALITY	VILLAGE	HAMLETS
Good for rice	29.5	44.4
Thick bush	7.4	12.5
High bush	1.5	14.8
Mature bush	7.4	10.2
Bad soil	7.4	1.1
Rotten leaves	7.4	0.0
Good vines	5.9	1.1
Soft soil	5.9	0.0
Good rock structure	5.9	0.0
Good previous farm	1.5	4.6
Black soil	2.9	3.5
Size of area	2.9	1.1
Good root structure	2.9	1.1
Good grass	2.9	0.0
Thorny bush	2.9	0.0
Other	5.9	5.6

Hamlet farmers appear to find it easier to locate good soil and vegetation than the village farmers. The first four items on the list are an indication of a good farm site, and are mentioned by 82% of the hamlet farmers, but only by 46% of the village farmers. The village farmers, on the other hand, must consider more closely the specific qualities of the bush before they can be satisfied. Where good land exists in abundance, as it does for the hamlet farmer, good vines, good rock structure, good soil, good grass and good bush, to name only a few of the qualities desired by the village farmer, are automatic consequences of a general inspection of the area, and need not be specified in detail. The hamlet farmer can concentrate his intellectual energies on other features of the farming operation.

Of the 32 types of vegetation and soil, some are considered very good for rice, others acceptable, and still others poor, as following examples show. It would not be helpful at this point to list all types.

All the farmers to whom we spoke agreed that the type of vegetation called *tabe kporo gbang* is very good for growing rice. However, they also agreed that it is very hard to cut, as shown in Figure 7.3. It has many thorns on the vines and trees, which are difficult to cut through when the bush is being cleared. In order to make the work easier, the farmer may burn off these thorns during the dry season, before proceeding to cut the bush in February. Because the bush is so thick, the cut vegetation must be allowed to dry until May, before the farm is burned. At that time, it should burn very well and leave a thick layer of ash. Farmers say that rice planted on such ash-laden soil will grow well.

FIGURE 7.3
GOOD BUSH FOR GROWING RICE



A quite different type of bush is called *sebe loo*. Some farmers like it because it produces good straight sticks which can be used for house construction. Other farmers don't like it, because they say this type of tree grows only in poor soil, and in the end the rice crop may be small. This bush can be identified by the white undersides of the leaves when the wind blows, and by the sound it makes. Because the trees grow straight, it is easy to walk in this type of bush. The trees, however, are hard to cut.

Another variety is *boo loo*, which consists of the low vegetation which grows on flat ground at the edge of a particular type of swamp, as shown in the background in Figure 7.4. The swamp and the flat ground can both be cut together, and then burned in April or May. Quick-growing varieties of rice can be planted there in June or even in July or August, if the family had problems earlier in the season. This type of bush is suitable for many crops, including bananas and sugar cane. Rice can be planted under the banana trees, where our informants tell us it grows very well.

FIGURE 7.4
LOW VEGETATION ON FLAT SWAMPY GROUND



Entirely different from the above types is the high forest, *wula da loo kpao*. Figure 7.5 shows high forest which has been recently been cut to make a farm. This is the farm of the man whom we have

mentioned earlier, who has drawn up his canoe on the opposite side of this river (the St. Paul River, which marks the northwest boundary of Gbansu land). The canoe is barely visible at the left side of the picture. Fortunately, when we visited him, he was willing to send the canoe for us!

FIGURE 7.5
HIGH FOREST



Before the vegetation can be cleared in such an area, the big trees must be removed. This may be done at the end of the previous season, so that the rest of the work can be done on time in January or February. To cut a forest giant, which may be as much as 10 meters from one end of its buttress roots to the other, a platform must be built about 2 or 3 meters off the ground, well above the buttress roots which support its bulk. The diameter of the tree may itself be at least 2 meters. Men boasted to us that they could cut down such trees with only an axe and wedges made by the Gbansu blacksmith. Two or more men will work on one tree, and it may require two days of hard work to bring the tree down. But when it crashes to the earth, it brings with it enough of the smaller undergrowth and competing trees to justify the effort and to clear a substantial space.

Proposals have been made to combine commercial timber operations with rice farming in areas such as the forest near Gbansu. Unfortunately, commercial logging companies are in too much of a hurry to make a profit for such combined activities to be practical. Conservation of forest resources and quick profit do not often go together. Fortunately, the dense forest on the