

# **Witch doctors in an institutionalized organization: 'modernity of witchcraft' in the civil war of Sierra Leone**

*Author:* Hideyuki Okano (the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science/Osaka University)

## **Short Abstract**

I examine witch doctors who came to be institutionalized under a pro-governmental force in Sierra Leone. At one point, they played critical roles in endowing magical power to fighters from local militias, however, they were institutionalized under a semi-bureaucratic system of the pro-governmental force.

## **Long Abstract**

Anthropologists have argued on various aspects of contemporary warfare; several works have discussed witchcrafts and magical powers in contemporary civil wars (Ellis 1999, Behrend 2000), whereas other works have examined how armed groups were organized and the ways in which combatants behaved during civil wars (Keen 2005, Peters 2011). This paper follows suit the previous contributions by illuminating local aspects within a civil war. The civil war in Sierra Leone (1991-2002) broke out with the incursion of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF). Mende people in war-affected areas organized local militias called 'Kamajors' in order to defend their communities against the rebel. Some traditional leaders, who led Kamajors in their respective communities, used witch doctors to empower their own fighters with magical and spiritual powers. During the war, the ritual of endowing magical powers by the witch doctors became so prevalent that it began to be regarded as an essential practice for Mende people to become qualified fighters. When the local militias and their fighters were integrated under the umbrella of a pro-governmental force, the Civil Defense Force (CDF), the witch doctors were also organized as one of the departments within the CDF. This process demonstrate a case of "modernity of witchcraft" in an uncertain situation. However, as the act of institutionalization and the bureaucratic system itself were not fitting to the practices of witch doctors, witch doctors in the department eventually began to be seen as a source of concern for cadres and administrative officers of the CDF.