The London School of Economics and Political Science

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'Family business': work, neighbourhood life, coming of age, and death in the time of Ebola in Freetown, Sierra Leone

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Declaration

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Abstract

In 2014 the Ebola virus entered Sierra Leone, soon to become the epicentre of a global health crisis. A state of emergency was declared, propped up by a large-scale and far-reaching humanitarian intervention; characterised by stringent bureaucratic and biomedical protocols, restrictions on social and economic life, and novel monetary flows. Based on 17 months of ethnographic fieldwork in Freetown, Sierra Leone's capital, immediately before and during the state of emergency, the thesis presents an intimate account of the lives and social worlds of young men living in an urban neighbourhood. The thesis outlines the centrality of the domestic sphere – home, neighbourhood, and family – in young men's projects of coming of age, as well as in surviving and brokering 'crisis' and foreign intervention. Rather than 'crisis' halting the processes of social reproduction, such processes became central means through which a conflict between 'foreign' and 'local' expectations – brought to the fore by external intervention – was reconciled and negotiated. The thesis demonstrates how a political economy of crisis maps onto core social tensions between independence and dependence that young men ambiguously negotiate around the home, and how resultant social practices and understandings connect to Freetown's deeper and more recent histories of intervention, crisis, and entanglement with the Atlantic World.

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Acknowledgments

Finally, and most of all, I would like to thank my brother, Jacob Lipton, my mother, Diana Lipton, and my partner Eda Seyhan. It was Jacob that first introduced me to Freetown and residents of Congo Town, and he has remained an inspiration in his commitment to maintaining relationships there, as well as in our on-going exchange that has so influenced the character and direction of my thinking and work. Diana has been equally integral to the birth and completion of this project: I am so lucky to have been able to share these discoveries with her. Her influence in my own journey in anthropology – in the details and bigger picture – cannot be overstated. And I am so thankful for Eda's insight, inspiration, companionship, and proximate, non-waning, support during the writing-up phase of this project, and in our lives going forward.

The thesis is dedicated to the memory of my father, Peter Lipton, who never knew of my journeys in Sierra Leone and graduate studies in London. I am certain that he would not have found these directions surprising, and would have fully embraced them. He is an enduring model of how to act, discover, interpret, share, and love in this world.

List of figures and illustrations

List of key characters

The list centres on two families in Congo Town that my fieldwork was largely structured around.

<u>The Bangura Family</u>

James

Rachel (James's partner)

Moses (James and Rachel's son)

Jonathan (James's father)

Rachel (James's step-mother)

Kadiatu (Rachel's niece)

Zainab (James's 'sister')

Samuel (James's uncle)

Brima (James's neighbour)

Aisha (Athur's 'sister')

Kei (Aisha's husband)

<u>The Kamara Family</u>

Alhassan

Foday (Alhassan's brother)

James (Alhassan's father)

Auntie Alice (Alhassan's neighbour / patron)

Sam (Alhassan and Foday's cousin)

Umaru (Alhassan and Foday's cousin)

Human Right (Former driver with Foday and Alhassan)

Balloon Burst (Human Right's apprentice / host)

Prologue. Two taxis

It was May 24th, 2015. I was packing my bags in the front room of a friend's house in Streatham, where I had been staying for the past 6 months, getting ready to return to Freetown, Sierra Leone, which I had left after 11 of a planned 18 months of ethnographic fieldwork due to unforeseen circumstances: the West African Ebola virus outbreak, of which Sierra Leone was an epicentre. Leaving the country was getting harder, and the virus was projected to spread from the east of the country to the capital. Thankfully the virus did not explode in the capital city to the extent some had anticipated. In the neighbourhood where I was based, Congo Town – also my primary fieldsite – a couple of cases were identified, leading to several homes being quarantined, but the virus did not spread and even those diagnoses were questioned. The state of emergency was still in place, but it felt safe to return for a final 6 months of fieldwork. I was both apprehensive and eager to get back.

The underground line I had intended to use to get to the airport was experiencing severe delays. Concerned that I would miss my flight, I decided to order an Uber – my first time using the taxi smartphone app. Moments later a spotless black car arrived, the inside of which was overpowered by the smell of air-freshener. The driver, Mohammed, was a Sierra Leonean man in his late 20s or early 30s, who had been living in the UK for the past six or seven years. We spoke in Krio – the lingua franca of Sierra Leone – about Freetown, the Ebola crisis, and the unfolding political drama after the sacking of the country's vice-president earlier in the month. Mohammed wondered if I was a member of the Sierra Leone Lebanese community, or a medical worker. I explained that I was an anthropologist. Most years, he said, he returned during the festive season, around December, when he would earn the nickname 'JC' (just come), given to visiting diasporic Sierra Leoneans. Driving was a way of paying the bills, albeit a somewhat risky form of the 'gig economy' work exemplified by Uber employment. Mohammed had also been studying law, and was planning on getting married over the summer. He told me that he missed his home country, even though it was a tough place, and that he hoped to go back one day after he had established himself a little more.

Driving around with Sierra Leonean taxi drivers was a familiar activity for me. I had accompanied drivers in Freetown on countless occasions as part of my research project, which – although it had since shifted direction (see below) – initially centred on young taxi drivers. I had been taught to drive by Alhassan, a taxi driver from Congo Town, who also helped me obtain a license, and I sometimes even drove his and others' cars commercially. My journey with Mohammed thus felt at once novel and strangely familiar. As we were arriving at the airport, my mind was cast back to a day I had spent with a driver and close friend who went by the name of Human Right, shortly before I had left the field. These two journeys were in many ways mirror images of each other.

My ride with Human Right was in a beat-up Nissan from the '90s, which he had recently acquired cheaply – reflecting its poor condition – with money, yet to be repaid, from an *esusu* (rotating credit association) operated by his mother and involving fellow female church members. We had to make several improvised repairs during the day, and since the battery was flat, we relied on surrounding volunteers to help me push the car while Human Right used the momentum to 'jog' the engine into life. At one point, we visited a mechanic who advised Human Right to replace the brake pads because the tyres were overheating. He reluctantly went ahead with this suggestion, explaining in philosophical vein, 'in maths there is only one answer, but it is not a *real* answer'. He had hoped the car would be the first in a small fleet of taxis and *poda poda* (minibus taxis) that would take his life to the 'next level', but the car seemed to be pushing him the opposite way.

Human Right was famous (and infamous) among taxi owners and fellow drivers for his driving style. It involved weaving at speed through improbably small gaps in the traffic, relying on oncoming drivers to 'chicken out' at the last mini-second, and taking mountainous 'short cuts' that resembled rocky river beds – and during the rainy season were precisely that. He worked with a sense of 'magical thinking' in which the limitations of space and time, and lack of fuel in the tank and available funds, were never objective obstacles. To date, he had never had an accident. Human Right's working days included stopping by his parents' new home in a remote area of the mountains – which was being increasingly populated in

response to overcrowding in town – as well as visits to his friends and his girlfriend, Ramatu. When Human Right was driving, he seemed happy; he had money in his hand from the day's passengers, which he would spend generously at road-side food stalls and makeshift bars. He could express himself on the road, while doing favours for friends and family, in which he took a great deal of pride.

On this occasion, things were different. As the evening progressed, the streets of the East End of Freetown – normally lively at night, with small crowds on the corner of every junction – were empty. The state of emergency, recently declared to contain the spread of the Ebola virus outbreak earlier in the year, included bylaws that affected taxi drivers significantly. Business activity was prohibited after 6pm each day, and taxis could accommodate only two customers in the rear seats rather than three, a measure intended to reduce bodily contact. To make matters worse, Ramatu had recently been publicly spending time with other partners, signifying a break, or at least a serious set-back, in her relationship with Human Right. He commented bitterly on how hard it is to find a girlfriend with patience to build a foundation with a poor man like himself in Freetown: 'there is too much money love'. At times like this, Human Right resented his now crippled father, who had once held a good job working for an international shipping company, but had – in Human Right's view – squandered it on a lifestyle beyond his means. Shortly after the end of the civil war, in the early 2000s, Uria Bangura (as Human Right was then known) had been forced to leave school and take to the streets to work as an apprentice on a *poda poda*.

The virus had not reached Freetown yet, but there was a familiar sense of foreboding; the civil war had emerged from the same borderland region in the east of the country, spilling over from Liberia and eventually reaching the capital with devastating effect. In this case, the threat had crossed from Guinea. We drove by the hospital where Human Right had, on that occasion, taken refuge with his parents and siblings when the rebels entered Freetown and British bombs were falling from the skies – a dark episode in the city's recent past that was rarely talked about.

By now it was close to midnight and the light drizzle had gradually turned into rain. We were crossing over from the East End, where Human Right's parents lived and he spent many of his days, back to Congo Town in the more established west, which had become Human Right's adopted neighbourhood in recent years. He was staying with a friend there, another young man, who was formally his 'apprentice' but who was also hosting him in a room near his family compound, making Human Right's relative seniority somewhat unstable. Human Right became connected to the neighbourhood through driving work he had done for various taxi owners in the area.

We arrived at a highway police checkpoint, which comprised a makeshift rope that was suspended in front of oncoming vehicles. The police officer identified various problems with Human Right's car, and pointed out in addition that it was irresponsible to be out driving late in this time of Ebola, as if the virus was a beast that came out at night. In what sounded like a line from a dialogue performed by fatigued actors grown bored with the script, he threatened to take Human Right to the local police station, after which he accepted a bribe. This routine was all too familiar, but this time the payment was double the usual.

Despite this, Human Right remained generally positive. The weather was drying up from the rainy season, which he and others had been led to believe would halt the spread of the virus. When he thought about the future his mind appeared to travel through space, in converse proportion to the way that his past and present were limited by the streets of Freetown he navigated every day. Like many young men in Freetown, he dreamt and speculated about the world overseas, particularly what were known as 'white man countries'. Human Right was particularly preoccupied with an uncle in Canada. For the entire time I knew him, he was expecting and praying that this uncle would send money to his family, which he hoped they would pool together to buy him a brand new *poda poda* from Conakry, Guinea. This was an interesting counterpoint to the way that Mohammed, likewise an informal worker in a zero-hours 'gig economy' contract in the metropole, seemed fixated on the world he had left behind and his projected return to it.

Human Right and most of his peers were unable to get *there*, but the 'foreign' or 'white' world on which they were fixated was about to become an immanent reality *here*. In the next few months, an extensive humanitarian intervention comprising scores of international bodies and authorities was to descend on Freetown, attaching itself to existing state structures in the form of the National Ebola Response Centre which governed the state of emergency and formal Ebola response. This created severe restrictions on many aspects of social life in the form of a host of far-reaching, often onerous regulations and protocols, informed by bureaucratic and biomedical logics. At the same time, many thousands of young Sierra Leonean men and women mobilised in the Ebola response became benefactors of the money and materials that flowed into the country. Indeed, these actors in many ways became the 'face' of the state of emergency, and redefined in their own terms its operations and objectives. These were strange times, but, as I gradually understood, what I was witnessing and hearing in Freetown were familiar echoes – faint and loud, distorted and pitch-perfect, remembered and forgotten – of the notes of transatlantic slavery and return cried out by the city's founding mothers and fathers, and seemingly destined to be replayed over and over.

Chapter 1. Introduction

"It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity". W.E.B. Du Bois 1903 The Souls of Black Folk.

The 2014 Ebola outbreak, and humanitarian intervention, positioned Sierra Leone as the epicenter of a global health crisis. This was, in some ways, a familiar place to be. The place of Sierra Leone in the popular Western imagination is one of repeated crisis. As I write this introduction in the summer of 2017, Sierra Leone has re-entered the global news cycle after major flooding and a devastating mudslide in Freetown. But what does 'crisis' mean for young men like Human Right – described in the prologue – who, born in the 1980s and 90s, have lived their whole lives through a series of what are considered crises and interventions?

The 1980s saw a severe economic downturn, the collapse of the single-party state that had been in power for decades, and the implementation of IMF- and World Bank-led structural adjustment projects, which entailed the deconstruction of state apparatus and severing of patrimonial networks in a bid for 'clean governance'. The 1990s were marked by a decade of civil unrest and war, in which mostly rural youth took up arms against the severely weakened state. The post-war years have seen extensive peace-building and humanitarian initiatives, while the economy has continued to informalise and stagnate. Relatively peaceful elections in 2007 and 2012, and a government that is well-versed in development and liberal state discourses, mask an informal mode of statecraft and lack of essential services. Freetown has grown rapidly in past decades, with a significant bulge in its youth population, but urban life remains precarious for many.

Taking into account the on-going nature of 'crisis' in Africa, Vigh suggests that 'rather than taking a traditional social science approach to the phenomenon, by historically placing a given instance of crisis *in* context, I propose that we gain an insight into this key area of anthropological research by seeing crisis *as* context' (Vigh 2008). Yet if crisis has become the norm, then what is crisis? For Roitman,

'Crisis is claimed, but it remains a latency; it is never itself explained because it allows for the further reduction of "crisis" to other elements, such as capitalism, the economy, politics, culture, and subjectivity' (Roitman 2016:36). Her answer entails 'asking questions about how we produce significance for ourselves—about how we produce "history"' (Ibid 48).

My thesis does not evade the problem of crisis in Africa, but tackles it head on. It aims ethnographically and analytically to extend our knowledge of crisis, interrogating the ways in which residents of places defined by 'crisis' inhabit, act in, and understand their world. The thesis centers on young men, but quickly expands to the social worlds around them. What does 'crisis' mean for them? If 'crisis', as Roitman highlights, is so often about 'us' and 'our' narratives, interventions, interests, and culturally specific standards, then where does that leave 'them'? How, if at all, is 'crisis' shaped according to 'their' specifications, and what are they?

In an attempt to understand the lives of those who lived through and around this history, my thesis takes as its starting point the most intimate and quotidian realms: everyday life around the home, family, and neighbourhood. This 'domestic' perspective is strikingly absent or marginalized in scholarship about and popular renderings of male youth in Africa, yet in Freetown it is arguably the most significant arena in the lives of young men. The home and the neighbourhood are primary spaces of sociality, livelihood procurement, recognition, and social mobility for young men, but they are also ambiguous spaces fraught with dangers and social tensions.

My central observation is that young men in Freetown are faced with a perennial tension between 'independence' and 'dependence' in their day-to-day journeys of coming of age. They are caught between desires, on the one hand, to escape, work outside of, and challenge social structures in which they are junior or marginal, and, on the other, to further embed themselves in these structures as a mode of mobility itself, or, ironically, to further their anti-establishment tendencies. This tension is a near-universal element of sociality and social reproduction – 'should I

stay or should I go?' – but what makes it significant in Freetown is how, in shifting ways, it interacts with a political economy of 'crisis' and foreign intervention.

Crisis, in Sierra Leone, has often entailed a return to the home and a greater mutual reliance on intimate others. Conversely, crisis creates uncertainties and change. These sow the seeds of the processes of social realignment that can involve either enhanced agency for young people or further marginalisation. Connected to these intimate and family centred negotiations of 'dependence' and 'independence' are larger-scale conflicts and negotiations between opposing models and visions of 'how to act' in crisis. These are informed both by national and international debates and discourses, and by local racialised codes of 'black' and 'white' cultural ways of doing. For example, liberal notions of human rights or neoliberal modes of consumption and entrepreneurship become models with which young men articulate independence, in opposition to the obligations of kinship, informal economic practice, and family hierarchies suggestive of dependence.

However, young men who have grown in an era of external interventions and 'crisis' often work alternately and simultaneously with multiple visions and sets of social expectations. These they strategically mobilise within and around the domestic sphere, as well as beyond it. This was evidenced during the Ebola crisis, when the performance of life course ritual and family formation were pressing concerns for young men, as well as key arenas in which social tensions of the crisis were negotiated. At the same time, young men, widely recruited by the official Ebola response, became the face of a humanitarian intervention premised on bureaucratic and biomedical protocols.

The thesis contains two central, and interconnected, lines of argument. Firstly it argues for a re-examination of the 'crisis of youth' in Africa. The thesis outlines the non-linear, piecemeal, quotidian, and ambiguous ways that social mobility does take place among young men in Freetown, presenting an alternative model of social reproduction to that underscoring the widespread notion of a generation stuck in perennial youth in Africa. The thesis instead identifies a kind of coming of age predicated on necessarily ambiguous means and measures. Rather than the

more overt markers and social reconfigurations traditionally ascribed to the attainment of adulthood through a life-course model of social reproduction, this mode relies on everyday realigning of intimacies, particularly around the home and the neighbourhood. In this sphere, the registers of kinship and business, family and work, are closely entwined. The thesis therefore makes a case for the centrality of family – understood in broad and novel ways – in the lives and livelihoods of young men in urban Africa.

Secondly, the thesis interrogates the relationship between crisis and social reproduction more generally, in which novel interpretations of the meaning of 'crisis' are suggested. The central case study for this examination is the Ebola crisis, in which the thesis presents a contrasting perspective to popular and scholarly assumptions on the meanings and effects of crisis; including notably the assumptions underpinning much of the formal Ebola response, in which social reproduction was viewed as something that could be put 'on hold' until the spread of the virus was curtailed. However, rather than the crisis causing social reproduction to stall, instead it appeared to take place in accelerated rhythms, according to both novel and yet also traditional forms, particularly around life-course ritual such as baby naming ceremonies, marriages, and burials. What was particularly notable about this was the ways that these life-course events regained potency and meaning for young men, whose coming of age, as mentioned above, had been much more centred around the 'everyday' than the 'event'. During the Ebola crisis young men were in variety of ways central actors in family ritual, which marked a transition from ambiguity towards clarity in their comings of age.

Running through, and connecting, these two major lines of argument is a strand of empirical attention and analysis that takes its lead from economic anthropology. This has value firstly in that it reflects the concerns of many of the young men at the heart of the study, for whom business, work, money, consumption, exchange, and theories of distribution were overtly core concerns in their day-to-day lives. Secondly, this approach offers a powerful analytical way of connecting the macro with the micro; the political economy of crisis with the intimate experience of it. Thirdly, this approach contributes both to studies of youth in Africa as well as

global health studies as an alternative point of entry to much scholarship on these subjects.

In the following sections of the introduction, I erect some theoretical and contextual scaffolding around which I will construct my thesis and lay out its contributions. I start by examining the significant scholarly interest in youth in Africa, outlining what a family-centred account brings to the debate. I then turn to the analysis of the Ebola crisis itself, showing how my ethnographic account contributes to understandings of health crisis in Africa more broadly. In the third section, I discuss temporalities, rhythms and expectations in Africa, after which I provide some context on my fieldsite, including a historical sketch of intervention and crisis. Finally, I outline my personal engagement.

Figure 1 Map of Sierra Leone and neighbouring countries in West Africa

Youth in Africa: a return to the family

In recent decades, youth in Africa has become a major area of political and scholarly concern and scholarship, as the divide between 'adult' and 'youth' has been framed as a dominant social and political fault-line across the continent. Cruise O'Brien's formative (1996) essay, 'A Lost Generation? Youth Identity and State Decay in West Africa', sets the terrain for much of the scholarship directed at this issue. Neoliberal reforms – particularly the IMF and World Blank structural adjustment programmes in the 1980s and 90s, which aimed at stripping down the state and cutting international aid – in effect strained and severed patrimonial networks, blocking the dominant avenues for the distribution of resources on which young people depended. As a result, there was a corresponding crisis of social reproduction – or 'crisis of youth' – in which young people *en masse* were unable to achieve social adulthood through marriage and the establishment of a household, instead becoming stuck in the liminal category of 'youth' (Cole and Durham 2008, Masquelier 2005) The Sierra Leone civil war and its aftermath is a primary case study of the violent potential of this political, economic, and social reality (Hoffman 2011, Peters 2011, Richards 1996).

So how have youth in Africa responded to their predicament, and what strategies do they employ to attempt mobility when all avenues of progress seem blocked? These questions are key in cross-disciplinary scholarship on the subject. Most scholars frame youths as political and economic actors, highlighting their combination of 'productive' and 'destructive' potential (Abbink and Kessel 2004, Honwana and de Boeck 2005). Anthropologists have tended towards nuanced accounts, examining the range of ways that youth create meaning in their lives, pursue forms of social realignment, grapple with 'presentist' and uncertain temporal confines, and investigating the ways that the meaning of 'youth' is socially and culturally constituted. Studies have focused on a variety of social practices and arenas: religious practice (Engelke 2010, Janson 2013, Masquelier 2007, Meyer 2008), technology (Archambault 2017, Gilbert 2016), love and sex (Cole and Thomas 2009, Stasik 2016), and consumption and popular culture (Kringelbach 2013, Newell 2011, Trapido 2010, Weiss 2009).

Such studies reveal several important findings that I build on in this thesis. Firstly, the understanding that 'youth', rather than being a universal biological age-based category, is instead a social category. Thus in a given social context, the biological ages of those occupying the category of youth differs. And indeed, in the same social context individuals can move in and out of the category in a non-linear manner. As a social category then, youth gains meaning in a given social context through its interaction with other social categories, such as religious affiliation, gender, class, ethnicity, and race. These interactions are most clearly observed through an ethnographic lens that reveals how people in the course of social interaction in various social arenas come to take on markers and experiences of age-based status.

Therefore while anthropologists and other social scientists often consider 'youth' as an analytical category that can be identified cross-culturally, its meaning as a social category is variable and contingent. In Sierra Leone, as in other contexts across the continent, the majority of scholarship on youth has focussed primarily on male youth. This in part is reflective of the fact that in this context the term is primarily used to refer to men, typically low in status by measures of educational attainment and class. There is also an underlying assumption in much scholarship on youth that attaining adulthood for men is a fundamentally different, and often more elongated, process to that of women. For men it is predicated on starting a family and household, whereas as for women it is based on childbirth; a claim that this thesis somewhat complicates. Gender categories are understood to intersect with age-based categories in other ways too; such as with expressions of masculinity becoming entwined with political, social, and cultural performances and understandings of 'youth' for rebel fighters during the Sierra Leone civil war. Many of these fighters were uneducated rural young men and children (Hoffman 2011, Peters 2011, Richards 1996).

In my thesis I am largely concerned with the ways that economic-based social categories, activities, relationship-types, and identities intersect with social categories of age-based status, and in turn with gendered categories. In this regard

I am particularly in interested in different types of work – formal and informal – as well as practices of exchange and consumption. The primary arena where these interactions are observed in the thesis is the domestic, neighbourhood, and familial spheres, which paint a contrasting picture of masculinity to that of studies of combatants and ex-combatants, for example, in Sierra Leone. This is one where traits traditionally associated with masculinity – as evidenced, for example, by Human Right's driving in the prologue, or in showy consumption practices described in chapter 4, or through participation in front-line Ebola response work in burial teams described in chapters 5 and 7 – are balanced and reconciled with intimacies with other young men who co-inhabit each other's spaces, and expressions of care and support for sexual partners, family members, and neighbours.

In the thesis, age-based status is never fixed, but something that individuals occupy differentially at different times and in different social spheres of their lives. Such movement between categories of youth and adulthood, and the on-going negotiations of status, are, I suggest, more defining and shared characteristics of 'youth' than the stasis that the 'crisis of youth' literature suggests. Therefore, I mainly use the analytical term 'young men' to describe my primary interlocutors, most of whom are aged between their late-teens and mid-thirties; given that many are not stably identified as 'youth' or 'senior' locally. Young women are also part of this research, although a less explicit focus. The thesis reveals the ways that young women's attainment of status, while not being predicated on the same measures and expectations of young men, are equally piecemeal and everyday processes that are not, as much literature suggests, predicated simply on childbirth; not least because child-birth does not guarantee social motherhood in this context.

One of the major contributions of this thesis to the study of 'youth' is through its examination of the ways that social age-based and gender categories become both reinforced yet also reconfigured in the event of a crisis. The unexpected conclusion of the thesis is that the experience of a crisis, such as Ebola, for young men and women does not straightforwardly correspond to 'crisis of youth'. For example, formal recruitment of young men into burial teams – described in

chapters 5 and 7 – allowed for attainment of seniority through formal salaried work and prominent responsibilities during burial rites – yet equally resulted in a reinforcement of youthful masculinity through flashy consumption practices and stigmatization as front-line responders to the Ebola virus. While women risked extended marginalization during the crisis through greater confinements to the home that lockdowns, curfews, and quarantines entailed, in many instances women were either employed in the Ebola response as medical or community workers, or were able to continue informal work that they participated in – such as market trading – while state of emergency regulations made much 'men's work' more challenging to perform. Some women, such as Rachel, described in chapter 6, gained elevated bargaining positions within their family and among intimate relations during this period.

In the past decade, two dominant models of youth mobility have emerged as a focus for a great deal of scholarship. The first is the notion of 'waithood', popularised by Alcinda Honwana (2012),[1] inspired by the social movements and mass uprisings of the Arab Spring, and informed by interviews with young, often educated, Africans from across the continent. The second is Henrik Vigh's (2006) concept of 'social navigation', informed by research among male youth in Guinea-Bissau who had become attached to violent militia. Vigh was concerned in part to explain why youth so readily undertake dangerous risks involving violence.

These two models are opposed in at least two major ways: their characterisation of structure and their notion of agency. In 'waithood' the social structure in which youth are situated is rigid and static. Meaningful mobility takes place through *horizontal* mass collective action (almost a form of Marxian class-consciousness / revolution), through which new structures can be negotiated. Through 'social navigation', the structure – that is, the young men's social environment – is constantly in motion and shifting. All available escape routes from marginalisation entail, in one way or another, the joining of *vertical* patrimonial networks. Both models depict a desperate state in which diminishing resources and the

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[1] 'Waithood' is similar in some respects to Craig Jeffrey's concept of 'timepass' in his study of youth in India (2010)

consequent increasing difficulty of escaping the category of 'youth', lead to increasingly drastic, often violent measures.

With a few notable exceptions, one arena is strikingly absent, or side-lined, in these otherwise insightful models, and in other scholarship on youth. This is the domestic sphere, which, when investigated, introduces a very different perspective. While earlier studies of youth in Africa had positioned youth in structures of kinship, household economies, and life-cycle ritual and exchange (Evans-Pritchard 1951, Fortes 1949, Terray 1975, Turner 1967, MacCormack 1984, McAllister 1985, Meillassoux 1960), this aspect has been neglected in recent scholarly attention. Perhaps the focus on neoliberal political economy as a root cause of the 'crisis of youth' led to a propensity to situate male youth primarily in the public sphere, particularly in urban settings.

However, in Sierra Leone, late 20th century processes of economic informalisation and decline, rapid urbanization, high unemployment, the straining of patrimonial networks, and de-industrialisation – which have their parallels across Africa and beyond – have rendered the home and neighbourhood as arenas of great political, economic, and social significance for young men. My study, while sharing many interests with other anthropologists engaging with youth in Africa, situates my subjects primarily in their neighbourhood, family and home, which, I suggest, are today primary spaces and arenas where both coming of age and social mobility occurs. Following Johnson-Hanks' (2002) theory of 'vital conjectures' – in which adulthood is achieved in sporadic bursts rather than progressing through set stages with firm boundaries between statuses – my study emphasises the piecemeal and intermittent character of coming of age. As opposed to 'waithood' and 'social navigation', the most significant form of politics in which my interlocutors participated was neither mass collective action, nor mobilisation into dangerous fighting groups along patrimonial lines. Instead it was a more everyday, relational form of micro-politics, in which a multitude of often proximate and intertwined social relationships and expectations were carefully managed. In this arena, young people's desires to escape or rebel against the social structures that were stacked against them were inseparable from working within them; horizontal

and vertical networks too were often tightly interwoven. Young people themselves had a high degree of individual agency in self-making, short-term mobility, and the process of realigning intimacies – often themselves utilising ambiguity as strategy – which were the primary mechanism of mobility. Such realignments took place not only in everyday life but also – especially during the Ebola crisis – around key threshold moments, such as life course ritual, family ceremonies, and family meetings, which often followed the building up of social tensions, or crises, such as death or illness.

My interest is thus to embark on a re-exploration of the life course as negotiated through domestic and familiar structures. What makes this a pressing concern in my fieldsite is the meaningfulness *today* for young men in Freetown of the structures and modes that enable transformation in everyday and ritual frames. In approaching this task, I chart the ways that large-scale occurrences and forces are interpreted and configured around the home. In so doing, I build on notable scholarship in a variety of settings, which often links instabilities around the home to violent histories and the spread of capitalism (Das 2006, Ferme 2001, Geschiere 2000, Han 2012, Shaw 2002). Such interplay between family and broader political and economic structures is, of course, not new, even if there has been greater permeability between these arenas today (De Boeck 2011, Geschiere 2013).

What makes these practices meaningful today is not just their contemporary form, but how they relate to the particular history of Freetown. Practices around the home, flexible understandings of kinship, consumption of western goods, attitudes to dress, and high degrees of formality and priority attached to family ceremonies among my interlocutors, most of whom have relatively shallow family histories in the city, resemble and reconfigure earlier modes of sociality among its Krio founders (mostly freed-slaves from the Americas), and their descendants. This is evident by comparing their styles and aspirations with those in Abner Cohen's (1981) study in the 1970s, set in a very different social milieu. Freetown youth resemble Cohen's interlocutors in some ways more than they take on from their own parents.

Before exploring this historical background to Freetown and Sierra Leone, I look first at two key thematic areas of concern in the thesis. In both of these, external interventions interplay with local concerns in particular and revealing ways.

Ebola, intimacy, and global health

The Ebola virus is thought to have entered Sierra Leone from neighbouring Guinea in May 2014, soon spreading from the East of the country to the capital. Sierra Leone became one of the three countries at the epicentre of a global health crisis, as the world feared that this virus with no available cure would continue to spread. A state of emergency was declared in June, after which scores of humanitarian and international organisations were mobilized, becoming attached to local authorities in forming the National Ebola Response Centre, headed by the minister of defence. The scale of this intervention was unprecedentedly large and well-funded. Ultimately, 4000 deaths would be attributed to the virus. While most people had no direct contact with it, 'Ebola' was everywhere and unavoidable, not least because of the far-reaching and heavy-handed character of the state of emergency and humanitarian intervention.

The home, and family, represented in many ways the frontline in the fight against Ebola. For example, the virus was transmitted through care practices towards the sick and the dead that are typically performed by intimate others around the home. Homes were subjected to an array of regulations, including neighbourhood lockdowns and quarantines, while life course ritual, particularly but not only burials, was heavily regulated and restricted. The shutting of schools and colleges, daily curfews, restrictions on trade, travel and business activity, over-filling of hospitals, along with a general economic downturn, rendered the home more significant than ever for sustenance, sanctuary, and survival. At the same time, the home became a more intense site of danger, of which Ebola was just one.

The anthropological engagement with the Ebola outbreak has drawn attention to the core social conflicts that emerged during the crisis: namely, the tension between local beliefs and practices and those underlying the international

response (Fairhead 2016, Richards 2016). These tensions contributed to the breakdown or continued straining of multiple forms of 'trust': between state and citizens, between medical workers and local practitioners, and within local communities and families (Anoko 2014, Brown 2016, Martineau, Wilkinson and Parker 2017, Shepler 2017, Wilkinson and Fairhead 2017). The international response was working with a set of assumptions and priorities that were fundamentally different from what happened on the ground; it was also tainted by a complex history and an unstable state structure, which together compromised the effectiveness of the formal response in defeating the virus, and introduced additional problems. The anthropological interest in Ebola has not remained solely in the academic arena, but is bound up in the extensive engagement between humanitarian organisations and social scientists during the outbreak.

My thesis attempts to make ethnographic sense of how such social conflicts and tensions played out on the ground and were conceived locally. My interest extends beyond the small minority who were caught up with the virus itself – they have been given considerable scholarly attention – to the vast majority of those who lived through the crisis. I am also concerned in my thesis with making sense of how these tensions and mistrust can be reconciled with the significant degree of co-operation, compromise and negotiation that were in play during the crisis. This question remains largely unexamined in existing analyses.

Young men offer a revealing perspective through which to analyse the Ebola crisis. Young people were recruited into the Ebola response in heavy numbers, taking on roles such as nurses, members of official burial teams, drivers, medical workers, and sanitizers. Many had never been formally employed before. Others, who were not formally recruited, nonetheless acted informally as mediators between families and state of emergency authorities. These acts of brokerage revealed that it was not simply the case that humanitarian actors and authorities had expectations and priorities that were fundamentally opposed to those of Freetown residents. The residents were also juggling conflicting sets of expectations, and, at different times and in different ways, demonstrated significant capacities to negotiate, compromise, and adjust, as well as acknowledge and articulate grievances.

My thesis examines how the kinds of social conflicts and tensions associated with Ebola that have been highlighted in existing scholarship, are entangled with, and often subsumed within, existing social tensions surrounding family life, the home, the state, and established responses to crisis. The thesis forwards the observation that processes of social mobility among young men were not fundamentally distinct from the processes of dealing with 'crisis'. Rather, they were one and the same process. This involved, at its core, the 'realigning of intimacies'. Flexible social practices, and continued prioritisation of life course rituals, allowed this process to continue – and in some cases accelerate – despite the challenging conditions. This contrasts with the notion that 'crisis' entails the halting or slowing down of processes of social reproduction. While Ebola was 'exceptional', it was made meaningful in locally familiar ways. Furthermore, for many young men, 'social death' proved to be a more pressing concern than the risk of actual death.

Beyond providing ethnographic context to enhance scholarly understanding of the Ebola crisis itself, my thesis also engages in the broader investigation of the relationships between epidemics and the home in Africa and beyond. Scholarship on responses to AIDS show how health crises create, but also uncover, social tensions along familiar fault-lines, such as race (Fassin 2007), sexuality and gender (Hunter 2010), intimacy (Henderson 2011), and growing social inequality (Farmer 2004, Smith 2014). In relation to AIDS in Sierra Leone, which has never reached the scale of other countries on the continent, Benton argues that intervention reinforces its exceptional status, and in doing so, reproduces global hierarchies (Benton 2015). Ebola too held exceptional status, often at the expense of more common, and more curable, illnesses and causes of death, yet 'Ebola' outstripped these as a meaningful signifier on the ground. Through 'Ebola' Sierra Leoneans reflected on, and in some cases reconfigured, their relationships with and expectations of the state, the international community, and the home and family; 'local' culture and society were placed in sharp-relief by the intervention.

Expectations, temporalities, and cross-rhythms

Much recent anthropological work on Africa has investigated, in one way or

another, the social and cultural effects of what might be termed the failure of the post-colonial modernist project. In Ferguson's (1999) book, *Expectations of Modernity: Myths and Meanings of Urban Life on the Zambian Copperbelt*, we witness the 'reversal of history', as what once looked like a bright industrialized future gives way, through shrinking trade and a debt crisis, to a rejection by the modern global community and a return to the village. Such neoliberal disassembling of state apparatus is a continent-wide experience, and raises questions about shifts in the ways people think and act in 'times of crisis'. For Mbembe and Roitman, the subjective experience of crisis is directly connected to the proliferation of authoritative structures, urban decay, and lack of agreed upon protocols, such as in legal disputes or bureaucratic engagement (Mbembe and Roitman 1995). In her recent critical examination of *anti-crisis (2014)*, Janet Roitman observes that it is almost impossible to write about Africa without invoking 'crisis', which has become, in her terms, 'an enabling blind spot for the production of knowledge' (Roitman 2014:14). These literatures point to a view of Africa that is constantly in 'crisis'; where 'crisis', rather than the exception has become the norm.

An alternative way of analysing 'crisis' has been to see it as a selective label through which certain interventions are made possible, rather than signifying any kind of 'objective' disorder (Goldstone and Obarrio 2016). At the heart of such uses of 'crisis' are assumptions about markers of 'normality', 'order', and stability', which, if not visible, generate fear and justify intervention. In many instances, such assumptions or 'expectations' come from Western centres of global power, and often act to reinforce global disparities in wealth and power. This line of argument was made famous by Naomi Klein (2007) in her book, *The Shock Doctrine: The Rise of Disaster Capitalism*, in which she outlines the neoliberal strategy of 'shock therapy', whereby crises and disasters are manufactured or exploited as opportunities to promote unpopular free market policies and deregulation in the interest of elite accumulation. Such anti-state interventions can also create material opportunities on the ground, as demonstrated in Hoffman's analysis of the post-Fordist modes of production and profitability that underscored rebel movements in Sierra Leone and Liberia (Hoffman 2011).

The notion of 'crisis' as closely connected to intervention, often in ways that are antithetical to state structures, chimes with contemporary trends in humanitarianism, which are steeped in anti-politics, and structured around the temporalities of 'emergency' or 'relief' (Fassin and Pandolfi 2013). As Calhoun points out, 'Emergency focuses attention on the immediate event, and not on its causes. It calls for a humanitarian response, not political or economic analysis. The emergency has become a basic unit of global affairs' (Calhoun 2013: 30). In this context, there are ever shrinking 'horizons of expectation', as concern for 'rights' become concerns for 'needs', and infrastructural and state bio-politics gives way to design-oriented market solutions (Redfield 2017). Taking inspiration from Walter Benjamin, scholars, including famously the philosopher Giorgio Agamben, have similarly charted the ways that the state of 'exception', or emergency, has instead increasingly become the 'rule'. Thus, even crisis as 'intervention' does not escape the problem of exceptionality, in large part, in Africa, because of a consistent anti-state bent.

Ebola itself does not fit neatly into either vision of crisis; and it is here that my thesis makes a contribution to existing paradigms for interpreting crisis. Ebola was certainly largely defined by an external intervention enacted in large part by Western-based organizations quite obviously motived by self-interest, whether understood in terms of global health security (preventing the spread of Ebola beyond Africa), or in more subtle ways connected to funding structures in the world of humanitarianism and epidemiology. Such a mode of structural analysis is powerfully argued by Ismael Rashid and Ibrahim Abdullah in their recent edited volume (2017): *Understanding West Africa's Ebola Epidemic: Towards a Political Economy.* However, what is missing from this perspective is firstly a full appreciation of the character of the Ebola response itself, which involved the erection of health infrastructure and bureaucratic apparatus that made it differ significantly from the kind of anti-state neoliberal interventions associated with the shock doctrine. Equally needed is a perspective that gives colour to the ways that the crisis was experienced, interpreted, enacted, and rendered meaningful locally by ordinary people living through it.

What did Ebola mean for young men and those around them in Congo Town? How did their hopes and aspirations become entangled with crisis? And what do these perspectives tell us about crisis? Scholarship on youth in political economies of crisis have tended to highlight their experiences of social stagnation and boredom (Mains 2007, Jeffrey 2010); the kind of 'enforced presentism' often associated with marginal people (Bourdieu 2000, Day, Papataxiarchis, and. Stewart 1999). Despite this, or perhaps because of it, the future in Africa is a major preoccupation in recent anthropological investigation (Cooper and Pratten 2015, Goldstone and Obarrio 2016). Much scholarship has taken its inspiration from Guyer's (2007) essay, 'Prophecy and the near future: Thoughts on macroeconomic, evangelical, and punctuated time'. Taking as a starting point her fieldwork conducted in Nigeria during the 1990s under structural adjustment and military rule, she outlines a global shift in which the near future – as well as the near past – has become evacuated, disconnected from the present and from the long-term imaginary. At the same time, emerging development discourses and corporate based development strategies position the globally marginalized as 'the future' (Dolan 2012), producing entrepreneurial subjectivities in line with what Appadurai labels 'the capacity to aspire' (2004). These shifts and tensions are apparent in West Africa's emergent 'post-postcolonial' period where, as Piot summarizes, 'a diffuse and fragmented sovereignty is replacing authoritarian political culture; tradition is set aside and cultural mixing looking down upon; Africanicity is rejected and Euro-modernity embraced; futures are replacing the past as cultural reservoir' (Piot 2010:16).

Anthropologists have developed sophisticated analyses of hope and aspiration in what has become something of sub-field within the discipline. Much of this work takes its lead from formative analysis by Vincent Crapanzano (2003), in which he reflects on how hope is less individualistic than often assumed, and rather becomes meaningful socially. Such a view is developed in analysis that stresses the interactions between social life and individual self-understanding. As Long and Moore outline, 'The social life of achievement is an ongoing trajectory that rolls forward over time, as the self comes to be understood in new ways, as new relations are forged, and as old relations transform in character' (Long and Moore

2013:5). While hopes, aspirations, and achievements can integrate individuals into social groups, equally, and indeed often, they can sit in tension with each other. Scholarship on hope and aspiration in contemporary Africa, especially among youth, has pointed to the despairing mismatch between expectations and realities. Such expectations are often understood as structured by globalization and capitalist fantasies of individual success calibrated in material or monetary terms, which do not correspond with what is materially possible (Di Nunzio 2015, Turner 2015, Weiss 2009). Alternatively, analysis points to the ways that individual hopes and aspirations of various sorts come into conflict with collective, family or community-oriented values and aims (Schielke 2009). This can provide the sense of being 'stuck' – not only in time – but also in place; such as in Ethiopia where young men's desires to migrate cannot be realized (Mains 2007), or, for youth in Zambia, who live their lives 'stuck in the compound' (Hansen 2005).

In this thesis I present an analysis of aspiration and hope that builds on these findings in several ways. Firstly, my study interrogates how both individual aspirations and those of families are manipulated and reconstituted through time through the careful process of 'realigning of intimacies', often taking place around economic activity, family politics, and life-course ritual. In this version, individual and collective aspirations are simultaneously antithetical as well as mutually constitutive and productive. As Cooper points out, the family in Africa has long been a site of crisis due to social, economic and political changes, which creates space for new ways to 'fix' the family (Cooper 2012). The protagonists in my thesis are not just victims of a political economy that has severed predictable expectation and replaced it with a more fantastical regime of expectation. Rather, my study highlights the agency of individuals to juggle, manipulate, and creatively play with temporal expectations, often in contentious and even coercive ways. During my fieldwork, it became clear to me that aspirations and expectations, such as those surrounding business partnerships, friendships, temporary domestic relations, and romantic relationships, greatly exceeded material realities. While there were over-riding expectations that even the best conceived plans were unlikely to be realized in Freetown, these plans and aspirations nonetheless held significant currency in structuring social relationships and material exchange, often generating significant

medium and long-term outcomes. Mismatch between competing sets of expectations was a source of considerable day-to-day uncertainty, punctuated sooner or later by moments of alignment or reconfiguring, often at formal family meetings or around life course events. Thus in this setting, spending time at home or around the family, and the disputes and frustrations that characterize social life in the sphere, are not interpreted at face value, so to speak, but rather such frustrations and contradictions are seen as part and parcel of everyday processes of social mobility and coming of age.

The thesis demonstrates how the uncertainties and resolutions at play in this micro-social arena mapped onto competing temporalities and expectations at the level of political economy and large-scale humanitarian intervention. What makes this ethnography particularly revealing is the relatively sudden shift in political economy during the crisis. While neoliberal intervention has resulted in the deconstruction of state apparatus which, according to those discussed above, has rendered 'crisis' and 'emergency' as on-going experiences in Africa, the Ebola crisis saw a heavily infrastructural and bureaucratic (i.e. state-like) intervention that, I suggest, reversed this trend. In other words, while 'impermanence' has become the general norm in African settings, here the temporary state of emergency had an infrastructural and institution-like 'permanence' to it, working according to almost Weberian principles and ideals of rationality and bureaucratisation.

The thesis then develops our understandings of the ways that aspiration and hope interact with such a crisis. In this regard, the thesis builds on studies emphasizing how those caught up in conditions of uncertainty and crisis aspire and hope for a 'normal' or 'sane' life, rather than a future good (Asad 2003, Berlant 2007, Zigon 2009). Hage has pointed out the value often ascribed in the contemporary world to 'waiting out the crisis' and thus the corresponding 'heroism of the stuck' (Hage 2009). These observations certainly resonate with the perhaps surprising 'normality' and at times mundantiy of the crisis for residents of Congo Town. However, what my ethnography demonstrates is the ways that 'normality' is in itself a malleable and contested concept for my interlocutors, especially so during the crisis when competing notions of social order came into play: 'white' and

'black'. These competing ideas of 'normal' are seen to structure and become structured by aspirations, hopes, and achievements, thus providing another dimension to scholarly engagement with these topics.

My thesis describes actors grappling constantly with alternative and competing – yet in practice blended and brokered – temporal expectations, registers, and rhythms. During the Ebola crisis, Freetown residents were called upon to prevent the spread of the virus and sudden losses of life, thus aligning themselves with the dominant humanitarian temporalities of 'emergency' (Calhoun 2013: 30, Fassin and Pandolfi 2013) and 'immediate future' (Redfield 2011), and with the values of predictability in biomedical and bureaucratic protocols under the state of emergency. Yet these expectations had to be reconciled with, for example, novel monetary flows, including formal employment opportunities that brought unusually regular pay-days; enduring familial obligations, such as the performance of funerary rites; and the on-going processes of family formation. In many instances, young men's social practices hold ambiguous temporal meanings. For example, showy consumption practices known as 'bluffing', discussed in chapter 4, are, to use Bloch and Parry's modalities, at once 'short-term' and 'long-term' exchanges. Another case study, discussed in chapter 6, concerns the periods of extreme volatility on which the processes of enduring family formation are often predicated.

The notion of competing, and culturally determined, temporal expectations during the Ebola crisis was not novel for my informants. For them, these expectations were coded in local categories of 'black time' and 'white time', the former indicating a sense of flexibility depending on social circumstance, and the latter indicating a more abstracted notion of punctuality. The ethnography in this thesis reveals that these were not irreconcilable – competing rhythms could be adhered to – yet the result often lacked defined resolution.

A useful analogy for the interplay between these temporal categories is the musical concept of 'cross-rhythm', which happens to be generative principle in many West African musical styles (Chernoff 1979, Thompson 1979). Typically, there is a

regular series of accents, over (or under) which a contradictory, often syncopated and stressed, pattern is played. Taken individually, each element is predictable and regular – although one is more metronomic than the other – yet together they create a tension in in rhythms that is not momentary but in a permanent state of contradiction, never aligning or coming into sync. The mix is meaningful, and deeply beautiful, but without an ending, there is a sense of unresolved flux.

The fieldsite: Congo Town

Congo Town owes its name to early settlers who came indirectly from the Congo, via slave ships leaving coasts adjacent to Sierra Leone that were intercepted by British after the slave trade was banned. As Fyfe explains, 'The Congo people who, it is said, preferred to live by the waterside, left their hilltop at New Cabenda and followed the pretty stream dignified as the Congo River down to Whiteman's Bay where in 1816 they bought from a Maroon woman a site for a new home, Congo Town (Fyfe 1962:120). The neighbourhood is in Western Freetown, the more established part of the city, which in recent decades has also become the home to 'slums', or 'subaltern cities' (Abdullah 2002), along the Congo River. Congo town is built along the side of the valley of the Congo River Valley, which feeds into Whiteman's Bay, where locally built wooden boats used for trade and transport along the coast are docked. On the other side of the valley is the now crumbling Siaka Stevens stadium, built by Chinese contractors in the 1980s. The neighbourhood abuts Congo Cross, a large roundabout on Main Motor Way, the primary road that runs along the Freetown peninsula. Near Congo Cross is the local police station, a petrol station, a covered produce market, and the Congo Town cemetery.

Leading into the cemetery is Cemetery Road, the only paved road in the immediate neighbourhood. It was apparently paved shortly after independence (the paving programme must have stopped at the cemetery gates) and still features old colonial street lampposts. The lamps had been dysfunctional for many years until, during my fieldwork, in an initiative led by Congo Town Development Committee (a collection of local 'stakeholders', including tribal, religious, political, and youth representatives), cheap Chinese bulbs were inserted that were connected to local

homes rather than directly to the national grid. The other streets in the neighbourhood were rocky and with many large pot-holes that filled with water during the rainy season. It was a source of frustration to many residents that even the 'Honourable' (parliamentary member) who lived on one such road had been unable to secure state resources to pave it. Instead the task was undertaken in small pothole-filling initiatives led by unemployed neighbourhood youth and local sponsors.

Figure 2 Map of Congo Town (Map data Google 2017)

The neighbourhood streets were not merely the means of getting in and out of the neighbourhood, they were also spaces of business and socialisation in themselves. Sitting on chairs outside shops and food-stalls, people would 'keep time' (hang out). Mechanics used corners for repairing vehicles. Children played street games, including football with makeshift goals made of rocks. Women would get their hair

'planted', often on a weekly basis, in makeshift street salons, or by friends and sisters. Most homes did not have kitchens; cooking would take place on the veranda, or the street itself. In the less day-to-day frame, the streets were also the key spaces where seasonal and national festivities were marked, as well as family rites of passage. In December, streets held their own carnivals, in which large sound-systems were hired to play through the night. Secret societies would hold masquerade performances on street corners, often unannounced. In this multi-faith neighbourhood, religious festivities also took place on the street. On 'pray day' (Eid), public spaces such as football fields would be packed with worshippers wearing newly tailored clothes. New Year and Easter involved processions behind the local *debul* (masquerade 'devil'), who was a kind of a neighbourhood mascot. Weddings and funerals also involved processions through the streets – the more prominent the family the bigger the procession, which in some cases included marching bands and convoys of jeeps. Baby-naming ceremonies, locally named *pulnador* (literally 'take outside') were, by definition, held on the street outside the home.

The neighbourhood comprised a range of built structures. Dotted around were some of the distinctive two-story *bod os*, the wooden Krio architectural style inspired by town houses in Louisiana and South Carolina. Other family compounds were built of cement blocks in a more contemporary style. Many homes had become increasingly populated and subdivided, as younger generations found it hard to build independent households elsewhere. Alongside family households were several nearby schools, a church and a mosque (reflecting a roughly even split in the neighbourhood in religious affiliation), numerous small grocery shops selling household goods, small bars, cookery shops (prepared food), cinemas (for watching football games), tailors, carpenters, a small water purifying factory, a car mechanic, a male and female secret society base, and 'long-benches', where primarily young men would gather and hang out.

I spent much of my time circulating through these various spaces, often accompanying or going to meet friends and neighbours. Many of my meals consisted of portions of the daily 'pots' that were offered to me by the neighbours

who cooked them; like many other young people, I did not eat in a stable house. Leaving the neighbourhood to travel elsewhere was typically a lengthy process that involved greeting scores of neighbours. If I went for a few days without stopping by my acquaintances, I was criticised when we next met: *yu los pa me* (you've hidden yourself from me), they would say.

A further driver of social circulation was the irregular electricity supply; it was sometimes out for weeks, and was rarely regular for more than a few days. Since a significant portion was hydroelectrically generated, it was most regular in the rainy season. Different areas of the neighbourhood were connected to different power lines, which meant that, especially after dark, people would move between homes to charge phones, keep cool with fans, watch television, and listen to music on stereos.

The elevated part of the neighbourhood contained a combination of more established family compounds alongside more temporary structures, called *pan bodi* constructed of metal sheets. However, along the contours of the valley the proportion shifted in favour of temporary structures and poorer households, or those of recent immigrants or younger generations. Access to these required negotiating steep rocky paths, or dilapidated colonial era stairways that had originally led to the dock. These lower-down areas had become increasingly packed in the post-war years, when the population of Freetown tripled in size, initially through the influx of a combination of people escaping fighting upcountry and those looking for economic opportunities, proximity to family support networks, and out-migration opportunities. While Congo Town residents were once primarily Krio, today this ethnic group is a minority, far outnumbered by those from autochthonous Sierra Leonean tribal backgrounds, many of whom are relatively recent migrants to Freetown.

The land in this part of the neighbourhood was generally owned by families that were well-established in the area; several of Krio background were the first to secure property ownership in the city. The river-bed was likely to be squatted land owned by the state. Those who built on state land faced the threat of eviction; the

state periodically made efforts to clear out what were deemed 'slum' settlements. In June 2015, I witnessed a large-scale city-wide effort of dispossession, especially close to the beach areas, allegedly to promote tourism. Another risk faced by these residents was their proximity to the waterline during the rainy season, which every year would result in casualties and destruction of property, necessitating many grassroots acts of rescue and much repair work. The state also played its part. During the rainy season of 2015, many who lost their houses to flooding were temporarily resettled in the national stadium and given aid supplies, made possible by the humanitarian resources floating around for 'Ebola'.

As this description demonstrates, Congo Town has had a certain permanence as a site of refuge since its early settlement, yet at the same time it has a deeply unstable and impermanent character. It is a place where the boundaries between friends, rivals, business partners, debtors, creditors, family and housemates are fluid and shifting. Equally porous are the borders between domestic and public, sacred and profane, and quotidian and ceremonial space. Class structures are reflected in the lay of the land, but the proximity and flows of social life between these areas defies straightforward class analysis. There is a strong community ethos, and a large range of forms of association and membership, with numerous cross-cutting structures of authority. Yet these conditions, alongside tight-knit living, lead to frequent complaints that 'politics is ruining this country'; 'there is too much *congosa* (gossip)'; and even '*congosa* kills'.

This characterisation of life in Congo Town bears some notable resemblances with a burgeoning literature on the African city (and mega-city), much of which has similarly placed youth as its central protagonists (de Boeck and Plissard 2006, Nuttall and Mbembe 2008, Simone 2004). For across the continent are similar patterns of mass-migration, state decay, proliferation of authorities, and crumbling urban infrastructure. Thus African cities are rapidly growing while centralized provisions to manage them deplete. Scholars have broadly aimed to understand firstly how such cities actually function as cities given these circumstances, and secondly, what kinds of social institutions, socialites, and cultural forms emerge in these novel social and spatial environments.

While scholars have approached these questions differently, the pictures they paint of African cities have certain notable commonalities. They have, what Nuttall and Mbembe (2008) gloss as a, 'spectral quality'. They appear as apocalyptic environments, yet also places of remarkable cultural and social innovation and improvisation; two sides of this same 'spectral' coin. Simone's much cited concept of 'people as infrastructure' (Simone 2004), and perhaps less famous concept of 'cityness' (Simone 2010), capture the innovative, flexible, open, and provisional social practices and regimes of sociality in African mega-cities, such as Johannesburg. Behind these ideas is the interplay between dynamism and mundane regularity, which reflects in part a dialogue between formal hegemonic mappings, and the informal forms that exist in the gaps opened up by declining formal institutions. De Boeck's characterisations of the African city – specifically Kinshasa – share some of these qualities. His work stresses the power of the invisible; the blurring of public and private arenas; and the fragmented assemblage of ideas of what a city should be.

Where this thesis departs from such characterisations of the African city is in its long-term ethnographic centring on a set of residents of the Congo Town neighbourhood. From this vantage point, the picture of city life that emerges is more structured and grounded. While Freetown as a whole is a city in transformation, many of its inhabitants' experience of it, I suggest, is mediated by the institution of the family, and by what Fortes (1969) terms 'neighbourliness': social relations connected by spatial proximity, suffused with values of kinship; similar to what has recently been described as 'urban kinship', paying attention to the micro-political facets of urban relatedness (Bjarnesen and Utas 2018). The young men at the heart of this study might at times resemble the hustlers and improvisers inhabiting the African mega-city, yet much of their social lives centre around the less glamorous, desperate, and dynamic arenas of family and domestic life. Thus their shifting positionalities are grounded in the relatively stable intersecting social structures of kinship, the household, and neighbourly relations. This thesis' account of the Ebola crisis in many ways reinforces this picture, contrary to apocalyptic media renderings of the Ebola epidemic. In many ways this crisis reinforced, rather than further eroded, the boundaries between 'public'

and 'private' that de Boeck and others note as being so blurred in the contemporary African city. The Ebola crisis entailed a new regime of flows and circulations in the city, experienced through quarantines and lock-downs in the neighbourhood, in which, by contrast, the private and public became at times very clearly articulated separated domains, and road-blocks and regulations on travel represented a re-assertion of centralised authority.

Figure 3 Congo Town residents inspecting flooding in the Congo River Valley

A short history of intervention and crisis in Freetown and Sierra Leone

This section gives a brief sketch of the city and the country, outlining historical threads that resonate with the primacy ethnographic data discussed in the thesis. A key tenet of this history is foreign intervention, ranging from the slave trade, to Freetown's unusual history as a place of return, to the place of Freetown in British colonialism, the more recent history of structural adjustment and post-war liberal intervention and peace-building, and mostly recently the Ebola state of emergency. History did not simply repeat itself with Ebola, but responses to Ebola were, I suggest, informed in various ways by repeating historical patterns. As political historian David Harris notes, 'it is not rare to have an outside interest

endeavouring to influence or being used at key moments in Sierra Leonean history'
(Harris 2013:6). Those outsiders who intervened encountered significant
obstacles on the ground – in the form of armed uprisings and repeated epidemics –
but also openness to brokerage and compromise in cases where outright coercion
was impossible and undesirable.

Brokerage has long been an avenue for social mobility in Freetown, involving
shifting and transformative elements of identity. The thesis points to ways that
modes of brokerage, transformation, and mediation that were enacted during the
Ebola crisis recall historical strategies and practices in Freetown, which
fundamentally shaped the character of both the formal Ebola response as well as
local responses. Conflicts and tensions between local and foreign expectations and
interests – and the resultant instabilities that come with them – were at once
brought to the fore and reignited during Ebola, at the same time as a this history
and the particular sets of practices that have emerged around it, were a 'resource'
through which to make interpret and negotiate crisis and intervention in locally
meaningful ways.

Pre-colonial Sierra Leone is thought to have been a relatively isolated region of
thick forests and Atlantic coastline, which for a long time separated it from other
kingdoms and the spread of Islam. The country's name is a variation of *Serra Lyoa*
(Lioness Mountain), coined by the Portuguese explorer, Pedro de Sinta, in 1462,
with reference to the shape of the mountains along the Freetown Peninsula.
Portuguese contact with the region escalated in the late 15th century; by the mid-
16th century the region had become well-integrated into the Atlantic System, in
which Britain was the dominant player. The region became a major site of
extraction of slaves, which operated out of slaving castles such as the well-known
Bunce Island, from which the primary direction of travel was the plantations of
North America (Opala 1985).

Alongside this developed an internal slave trade in the interior. This was part of a
process of local social transformation, as Walter Rodney's (1970) formative study
demonstrated, inextricably linked to the external trade that had interacted with

coastal societies for a much longer period. Change in the 16ᵗʰ Century was also driven by the Mane invasions, although it seems that they were motivated in large part by a growing market for slaves. The Mane-occupied region of Sierra Leone was eventually divided into distinct kingdoms that remained in a more or less on-going state of war. The spread of Islam brought more invasions; Sierra Leone continues to be evenly divided between Muslim and Christian identification, and between two major ethnic groups, the Temne and the Mende, which have been politically dominant for most of the post-colonial period.

In 1807, the British slave trade was banned after significant pressure from a growing abolitionist movement – considered the first modern humanitarian project – in which the establishment of Freetown was a key element. The land was settled initially by 400 or so former slaves from London with land bought from a local king by the Committee for the Relief of the Black Poor. Freetown proper was established after meetings between the African American, Thomas Peters, abolitionists in London, and members of the Sierra Leone Company. This resulted in a second wave of settlers, known as 'black loyalists'. Many of these people came via Nova Scotia, after escaping from plantations in Virginia and South Carolina and fighting for the British in the American War of Independence. Subsequent waves included Jamaican Maroons and a piecemeal migration of black British colonial subjects, particularly those who had fought in the Napoleonic wars. Freetown, with its sizeable natural harbour, became a Royal Navy base for intercepting slaving operations, and many further 'recaptives' from along the Atlantic coast were brought there. These migrants and their descendants – along with other migrants to Freetown from upcountry who associated with them – became collectively known as the Krio, the name of an ethnic group and the lingua franca of Sierra Leone today, which is an English-based Creole. A socially significant distinction between 'country' people and the Krio (city people) remains to this day.

The British Crown Colony of Sierra Leone was established in 1808, with Freetown serving as the capital of British West Africa. Throughout the 19ᵗʰ Century, the colony expanded from Freetown and its immediate vicinity into the interior. These British- and Krio-led treaties, trade agreements and military operations were

aimed at shoring up commerce. By the late 19th century, Britain faced increasing competition with France over regional influence: part of what became known as the 'scramble for Africa'. In 1896, the British established a Protectorate, which encompassed much of what is the country today. This, despite its name, utilised forceful and coercive measures. Few tribal authorities subjugated themselves to the British willingly, most offered armed resistance, and many were replaced with a network of 'Paramount Chiefs', which exemplified the British approach to indirect rule. A house tax was instituted, which was met with an armed uprising led by Bai Bureh in the 'Hut Tax War', which is depicted on today's 1000 Leones note.

As Reno argued in his analysis (1995) of contemporary corruption and state politics, the development of the 'shadow state' dates to this period, when informal political and economic arrangements that compromised stated colonial protocol were tolerated and encouraged as a means of brokering stability and order. This tension between the 'state' and 'shadow-state' remains in place, in a different guise, today.

Armed resistance was not the only obstacle that the British faced in enacting their colonial designs. Fyfe's (1962) colourful 800-page 'History of Sierra Leone' is dotted with a litany of accounts of deadly epidemics, for which the mosquito-ridden marshes and jungles around the Freetown peninsula were a natural breeding ground. It is no coincidence that the expression 'white man's grave' was coined in Sierra Leone. For the year 1859, Fyfe notes:

> One disease after another broke out – fever, yellow fever, measles. Smallpox ravaged the villages [around Freetown]. At least 500 died in seven months. The doctors fell ill, Dr Bradshaw, the Colonial Surgeon, with yellow fever – from which, a rare case, he recovered. Only one Army Surgeon was left to tend the sick. The forty-two European deaths (half the European population) included both bishops, the Roman Catholic priests, and the headmaster of the Grammar School and his wife. Only one senior official died, Smyth, the Colonial Secretary, of smallpox. It was in this terrible year

that the vultures or turkey-buzzards are said to have first come to Freetown where they have since been so conspicuous. (Fyfe 1962:296).

There were other major yellow fever outbreaks in 1859, 1884 and 1897. Options to drain the swampy regions at the turn of the century were discounted, with the Colonial Office finally opting to move Europeans to the hills, which were served by a newly built railway line. The most recent epidemic of smallpox was in 1968-9, which, as with Ebola, was transmitted through burials (Hopkins et al 1971).

The Colony – comprising Freetown and its immediate surroundings – and the Protectorate, its hinterland, were separated only by an invisible boundary that was crossed regularly. Yet each had its own unique legal and administrative system, and these coexistence arrangements remained in place until only a decade before independence. Colony residents were subjects of the British Crown and therefore required to abide by English law, whereas Protectorate residents were subject to the customary law of native courts and the improvised justice administered by the Frontier Police. Protectorate taxes were introduced along with foreign rule, whereas this occurred in the Colony almost a year after Freetown was ceded to it, and with exemptions. While slavery was outlawed in the colony in 1787, it remained legal in the protectorate until 1927 (Ferme 2004). Finally, in relation to land tenure law, the Colony operated with English concepts of freehold interest, while those of the Protectorate were rooted in customary principles (Asiama 2006:222).

Throughout the 19th and 20th centuries, the positions of the Krio shifted radically. In a manner reminiscent of earlier brokers between European traders and local populations, the Krio positioned themselves as intermediaries between the British and locals, and as 'interpreters of Western culture to other Africans' (Harris 2013:13). Their position was based in large measure on affinity to British colonial culture and education, finding expression in forms of property ownership, English-sounding names, Western dress, American architectural styles, and Christian practice. However, as the 20th Century progressed, the Krio found themselves on the receiving end of increasing racism and competition from white colonial

officials. The wane of Krio political dominance was underpinned by the birth and extension of a 'patron-client' system, in which the state acted as middlemen, and the population as clients. This system became increasingly politically and economically integrated in the decades following independence (Keen 2005). The Krio lost their politically elite status to native ethnic groups, but retained control of economic niches in the capital, and were influential members of Freetown's professional and civil society. They also earned wages from the British, for example, from a British air base on the peninsula that operated during the Second World War (Cohen 1981).

In 1951, after much contestation and resistance from the Krio community, a new constitution was drafted in which the Protectorate and Colony were united. The 'skewed development' (Keen 2005:8) under the British did not alter substantially after independence, in which the 'shadow state' (Reno 1995) premised on patrimonial principles continued to thrive, despite, and because of, growing international pressures to reform. The colonial period was followed by almost two decades of what was in effect a one-party state, from 1973 until the military coup in 1992. In 1979, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) negotiated an economic stabilization plan, pressuring the government to reduce state spending, with major cuts made in areas of development, health, and education. The country went through a process of economic collapse, with huge shortages of staple foods, such as rice (Peters 2011). The patrimonial system, faced with limited resources, collapsed. 'Big men' began to prioritize their own interests, and to privilege short-term security – supplying imported to rice to clients such as the army and police – over long-term survival through providing jobs and supporting the education of loyal subjects (Richards 1996).

This sowed the seeds for the decade-long civil war, which began in March 1991 with an attempted overthrow of the government by the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), a youth-based rebel group supported by Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia. Large areas of the mining districts were seized. This allowed for a separate military coup, in which a 26-year-old junior officer became President. With pressure from the international community, including sanctions on

trade, this regime, while popular among many youth, was overthrown. The underpaid military proved unable to contain the RUF, which fought a stealthy guerrilla war, operating out of camps in the rainforest. With pressure from the IMF to cut government expenditure, the use of external mercenaries by the government proved unsustainable. After a failed peace accord, the war persisted, and eventually reached Freetown with bloody consequences. This paved the way for a British and Nigerian led 'liberal intervention' in which the rebel forces were driven out of the capital.[2] The RUF came under increasing financial pressure as trading links to Liberia had become strained, and signed a peace accord in 2001.

The closing stages of the war and its aftermath saw a UN sponsored Disarmament, Demobilisation, and Reintegration programme, the deployment of UN peacekeepers, and a high-profile peace-building and reconciliation process. This co-existed with a proliferation of NGO activity, with issues concerning youth a priority, given its central role in the war. In 2007, a relatively peaceful general election was held in which there was a much-celebrated peaceful transfer from the SLPP party to the APC party, led by Ernest Bai Koroma, who remains president today. Political discourse across both parties is based on shared neoliberal visions of economic development (through foreign investment), anti-corruption, human rights, and youth economic participation, which is reflected in a host of civil society and informal youth-based organisations. Yet there is widespread dissatisfaction with the political process, with continual reports of 'corrupt' practices, political infighting, and a disconnect between the political discourse and the reality on the ground, where state-sponsored development projects, increasingly out-sourced to Chinese companies, are regarded as superficial and short-term, and in which the majority of the country's natural resources continue to be signed off to foreign investors in short-sighted deals. Popular personal engagement with the state, such as through its legal and bureaucratic institutions, often requires bribes: a phenomenon reinforced by the underpayment of government workers.

Fieldwork and personal engagement

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[2] The rebels got as far the Congo River, the opposing side to Congo Town.

Continuities and shifts in focus

My research is informed by seventeen months of ethnographic fieldwork from October 2013 to September 2014 and March 2015 to September 2015, in Freetown. When I first arrived, I stayed in Congo Town with Foday, to whom I had been introduced by my brother, Jacob, who spent two years in Freetown working in Sierra Leone's foreign ministry. Foday was a taxi driver and aspiring recording artist. For 9 months, we shared a bed in his small 'room and parlour' in the Congo Town valley, before I moved to stay in a family compound close by in the neighbourhood.

My original PhD research proposal was an economic-anthropology-inspired study of young men who work as taxi drivers, a popular profession for youth in the city, with its post-war population boom and its increasingly young demographic. In the early stages of my fieldwork, I spent my days with drivers, some of whom were my neighbours in Congo Town, and others that I got to know through their involvement with the Sierra Leone Commercial Bike Riders Union (BRU), with which I was also working. When I was not with drivers, I was in my neighbourhood, spending time with young men and their families, friends, lovers, enemies, and neighbours, to whom I had increasingly become socially connected. All the while my Krio was rapidly improving through 24-hour exposure, and I was taking detailed fieldnotes on everything that came up.

Gradually, the balance of my research began to shift towards life in the neighbourhoods where these young men lived: their families, and young women, assumed greater prominence. Building relationships with the bike riders had proved a slow and gradual process, but I was now getting a much richer perspective on life in the neighbourhood, where I was becoming integrated into a very rich and close-knit social network, through day-to-day exchange of food, conversation, attending important family events and festivities, and generally becoming personally involved in the life projects of my friends and neighbours. This focus felt reflective of urban life in a context with very limited formal

employment; for young people, especially, much of day-to-day life was spent in the neighbourhood, an integral arena to 'start from'.

A second shift in focus was brought by the unanticipated Ebola virus outbreak. I first came across reports of the virus from a neighbourhood WhatsApp group in which I participated. I had at first written it off as 'fake news', which was not uncommon on these threads. For Freetown residents, the virus remained distant for many months, and for a long time the veracity, and extent of the virus remained questioned and hotly debated. However, 'Ebola' soon become inescapable, as the nation's borders began to tighten, commercial airplane companies stopped flying, an extensive set of far-reaching bylaws and protocols, restrictions and regulations, were formalised under the state of emergency, and humanitarian organisations poured in. In a matter of months, Sierra Leone was at the heart of a global health crisis.

From my perspective, my greatest fear was getting stuck in the country if things got significantly worse. Throughout the summer months of 2014, this felt like an increasingly legitimate cause for concern, not because I had encountered Ebola victims personally, but because leaving the country was getting more challenging. After close consultation with and assistance from my supervisors and department, I decided to leave in mid-September 2014 until it felt safe enough to return, which ended up being 6 months later. I booked a ticket on a connecting flight via Marrakech, operated by Royal Air Maroc, which, in an act of solidarity (so I was told), had committed to continuing its operations by request of King Mohammed IV.

By this time, I had been reporting on the crisis from Freetown. Back in the UK, I became involved in two initiatives that were set up to co-ordinate anthropologists providing assistance to the formal Ebola response: the UK-based Ebola Anthropology Response Platform, and the US-based Ebola Anthropology Initiative. This involved several activities. One was email-based consultation with those involved in the Ebola response, which in my case included organisations such as the UN and UNICEF. In most cases this amounted to writing briefings – typically

produced collectively – on themes such as burial practices, livelihood strategies, mobilisation of youth, and under-reporting of cases. I aimed to forward the concerns, views, and priorities of my friends and neighbours in Congo Town, which I hoped might mitigate against the destructive potential of heavy-handed humanitarian intervention. While I felt encouraged that anthropological insights were on some level being considered, I felt uneasy about the requirements to reduce cultural and social complexity to bullet-point-based briefings, as well as the assumption that seemed to underlie the official response that 'culture' was 'local' and relatively static. The atmosphere of 'crisis', or 'mayhem', as one development professional described it to me, allowed agencies to make consequential decisions too quickly. While I was in London, I was regularly in touch with my interlocutors via social media and phone calls. However, I was keen to get back to the field as soon as it seemed safe to return.

In March 2015, I returned for a final 6 months of fieldwork. The state of emergency was still in full effect, even if cases of the virus in Freetown were decreasing. Several of my interlocutors had become mobilised in various ways in the Ebola response. One of my close friends, Peter, a motorbike taxi driver and university student, had become attached as a bike rider to one of the official NGO- and Ministry of Health-run burial teams that were established during the crisis to perform all burials. He invited me to meet the team he worked with, and after obtaining the necessary permissions from relevant authorities, I would spend about a day a week or so with the team. The rest of the time I continued to document the lives of my existing interlocutors, in my neighbourhood and beyond, carefully charting life and death in the time of Ebola.

Fieldwork and ethics

My primary fieldwork method was participant observation. I also conducted semi-structured interviews, primarily with people connected to my research interest but whom I did not encounter regularly: political authorities in Congo Town, bike park executives, and administrators at the NGO who managed the burial team I followed. In addition, I collected family histories, primarily from the families that

feature recurrently feature in my thesis, and I took photographs regularly, primarily on the smartphone that I carried around with me.

As is common with ethnographic-centred research, my fieldwork took on a fairly formless character. Much of my time was spent in the neighbourhood, circulating between an increasing number of contacts I had come to know, particularly my neighbours and the families who 'adopted' me. As my Krio improved, and our relationships developed, these interactions became more fruitful. Those with whom I had developed particularly close relationships, or with whom I had prior connections via my brother, soon became my key interlocutors. I would often spend much of the day with these primary interlocutors, participating in many aspects of their lives; in the home, preparing food, at family events, meals, visiting friends, work (especially the taxi drivers that I knew; one, Alhassan, even taught me to drive). I also attended religious services and festivals, visited offices, courts of law and police stations, went to the beach, and hung out at bars and music venues. Many of these interlocutors became my close friends; or perhaps it was the other way around. I would write fieldnotes on a daily basis, but worked flexibly around the rhythm of activity on the particular day. I soon learnt that evenings were a time to socialise, so sticking to a regular schedule of writing in the evenings was impossible.

My research methodology thus involved following a relatively fixed set of interlocutors – most of whom knew each other – on a recurring basis for the duration of my fieldwork. In the course of this process I became embedded in this dense social network, gaining my own perspective on events as they unfolded, while simultaneously recording the interpretations of my interlocutors, which in turn guided me in my process of integration. Thus the majority of the data recorded in my fieldnotes involves my own personal reflections and observations interweaved among the conversations that I had with of those around me, often in which these very same events were discussed. The thesis itself is structured in a way that closely reflects this approach. Broadly speaking the thesis moves forward in time – although not strictly – with the first three chapters covering in principle the period of my fieldwork before the height of the Ebola outbreak, and

the second half covering the crisis itself. Throughout the thesis, however, we see many of the same characters appear. Much of the ethnography in the thesis details interconnected events and processes that unfolded during the course of my fieldwork. This provides, I suggest, a particularly powerful and nuanced means through which to chart and interpret the continuities and transformations that social life during Ebola entailed.

This empirical and theoretical approach to fieldwork takes significant inspiration from the work by the anthropologists, who following Max Gluckman, became known as the Manchester School. Many of those in the school examined processes of modernity and urbanization in Southern Africa in their research (Epstein 1958, Gluckman 1971, Mitchell 1966), some of whom were connected to the Rhodes-Livingstone Institute. These anthropologists were not aiming to discover the social system that governed and reproduced order in a given society, as had become structural-functionalists orthodoxy, but rather aimed to understand, and document, change. The methodology developed in order to answer such questions was the 'extended case-study method', also known as 'situational analysis'. This method relied on rich ethnographic recording of the 'event', with a full acknowledgement that social processes and actors are in a continual state of flux. Through this, one could gain an insight into the social forces at play guiding change and transformation. The method thus relied on dialectic relationship between ethnography and analysis (Evens and Handelman 2008).

There are many ways in which the social context, as well as theoretical interests, of my research project fit particularly well within the methodological tradition of the Manchester School. Firstly, the location of my fieldwork in an urban centre; particularly one that has in recent decades experienced significant population influx. It is notable that this methodological approach of the extended case-study has been applied less overtly to West Africa than in Southern and Central Africa. Secondly, the social flux experienced by young men at the heart of this study, in which individuals move between multiple positionalities in their 'comings of age'. The method is particularly well equipped to pick up on and theorize such shifts. Thirdly, this flux extends to the social field more broadly during the Ebola crisis.

The fine-grained ethnographic method paints a more nuanced picture of continuities than might be initially expected.

Fourthly, and linked to this point, are firstly the conceptual links between the 'event' or 'situation', and 'crisis', which this thesis attempts to in multiple ways theorize; secondly, the contention of the thesis that the Ebola crisis was not an aberration from normality, but instead was uncovering and revealing of deep-rooted forces – such as the 'cross-rhythms' described above – and in particular for young men, productive and generative; and thirdly, the ways that the thesis connects attention to the micro-social processes with the macro, in this case dynamics of a neighbourhood with the the political economy of a global health crisis. These were central concerns of Gluckman and his followers. As Kapferer summarizes: 'a major point that Gluckman stresses is that in crisis – in the situation as crisis as specifically in events that constitute concentrated and intense dimensions of overall crisis of the situation – that the vital forces and principles already engaged in social action (or taking form in the event itself) are both revealed and rendered available to anthropological analysis' (Kapferer 2008:122). Thus this thesis is in part a testament to the enduring usefulness of the extended case study method in the study of the contemporary world.

My close relationship with my interlocutors raised several ethical questions that I grappled with throughout my fieldwork. In introducing myself to people, I would explain that I was doing research, and give them an outline of what the research entailed, enquiring as to consent. However, I soon learned that maintaining social relationships, through which I was accessing my data, came with significant expectations, not least material support. While this is a prominent feature of all close relationships in Sierra Leone, I discovered that my position as a white man often led to amplified expectations, which in many cases I could meet. A key concern was how my privilege was impacting on my relationships and the nature of the data I was collecting. As time went on, I learned to discern what felt like 'reasonable' requests for assistance, and in turn what it was reasonable for me to ask of others. My transition from an outsider to an insider, which was sometimes described as a racial transformation by my friends and neighbours, at times made

this an easier task, but at the same time, my position as both a white foreigner and a Congo Town resident was a cause of uncertainty in this area. I often felt as though I was reconciling being a 'good' person by local standards (which I was constantly learning and assessing), and performing what I felt comfortable with, and what others expected me of me, as a foreigner.

My solution was to help out as much as possible in non-material ways such as household tasks, health and safety measures (for example. setting up a hand-washing station), and skill sharing (such as IT, English language, writing, reading, musical tuition). I tried to provide material assistance when it felt 'right', which meant particularly among those I was close to, or living with. My deep entanglements with those around me was sometimes a cause of internal tension; the most personal exchanges were those that felt most pressing to record as fieldnotes. Living in close emotional, material, and physical proximity to my interlocutors was a source of personal tension and uncertainty, as well as a source of conflict in relationships, where I sometimes perceived hostilities that were indirect and unspoken, yet troubling. These feelings, I would discover, were extremely instructive in interpreting the social world of my interlocutors. Ultimately I knew, and reminded my interlocutors, of my reason for being there; those who came close to me were always willing and enthusiastic participants in the project. During my fieldwork, I made sure to gain appropriate permission from relevant gate-keepers, which often included not just the people I was working closely with, but also the authorities above them: officials at the NGO and bike park, family elders, and local political authorities.

During Ebola, personal safety was a considerable concern. While I was in the country, I monitored carefully the daily reports of Ebola cases and their location. When Ebola entered Freetown, I returned to London until the virus had become more contained. The only ways of catching the virus were through close bodily contact and exchange of fluids with the sick and dead. During this period, I refrained from all body contact, and carried around hand-sanitizer, which I would apply regularly. I washed my home regularly with chlorinated water, and I did not eat meat. Even though I was following a burial team, I felt safe, yet nonetheless

took precautions, such as keeping a significant distance when they were physically handling a body. However, the burial teams were well-trained and equipped, and as such were not at risk of contagion. Throughout my fieldwork I adhered closely to the LSE Research Ethics policy.

Chapter outlines

The thesis broadly moves between a focus on life immediately before the Ebola outbreak (in chapters 2-4) to life during the outbreak (chapter 5-7). A central task of the thesis is to chart ethnographically how the flows of life before crisis folded into those of crisis. This not only theoretically extends our interpretive capacity to make sense of 'life during Ebola', but conversely 'life during Ebola' sheds light on life in Sierra Leone, and contemporary Africa, more broadly, revealing both deep-rooted and perhaps more immediately contemporary social dynamics. However, the events that unfold in the thesis do not always sharply fit into these two phases, and move between them; as do my own critical reflections, as well as those of my interlocutors, which allow us to make sense of what was going on. In rough parallel to these temporal flows are expanding thematic shifts through a series of nesting spheres: starting with the intricacies of specific home and domestic spaces, and ending with deliberations on how these relate to the broader political economy. As with the temporal narrative, this is not a linear journey. We see returns to the home, neighborhood, and the realignments and negotiations of intimacies throughout. These movements, reversals, accelerations, overlapping, and interweaving threads, in space and time, are crucial to the central ethnographic and analytical ambitions of the thesis. While coming of age is broadly a journey out of the home – from dependence to independence – in this context, it is a far from linear one.

Chapter 2 centers on three case studies from Congo Town, that take place in the two most common young men's domestic settings: in family compounds, and in smaller structures that are typically shared with other young men. The case studies all concern conflicts, contestations of status, and resolutions between more junior and more senior people, which demonstrate the ways in which status is

asserted and reconfigured on a day-to-day basis. These cases also reveal the fundamental ambiguities that surround the home and young men's place in it. The home is both a space of meaning and mobility for young men as well as danger and decay, and, in an interlinked way, it is a space where relations are defined by registers of kinship as well as business; registers that are both in conflict yet also heavily intertwined in a context where domestic spaces are central arenas for livelihood procurement as well as familial status formation for young men.

Chapter 3 steps outside the home onto the street, centering on taxi driving, which is one of the most popular occupations for young men in Freetown, yet one fraught with social and corporeal dangers. It identifies two major models of professional status that young men channel: unionism and entrepreneurialism. The chapter situates these two models in two distinct, yet intertwined, social networks that drivers are embedded in, and through which working relationships are structured: the Sierra Leone Commercial Bike Riders Union (BRU), and the family and neighborhood. The chapter demonstrates how both networks, and the ideals according to which work is structured in each, position young men in contradictory sets of relations and drives. These contradictions boil down to complex and multifaceted relationships with, firstly, the neoliberal state, and, secondly, with familial structures. Both are united and entangled, not only in ways that drivers move between each network in practice, but also in the ways that their actions appear to simultaneously work against and within 'oppressive' structures, and in turn reproduce them. However, the channeling of performative repertoires of unionism and entrepreneurialism, and the social bonds that are forged and negotiated in the process, allow for meaningful, yet volatile, mobility to take place.

Chapter 4 examines the popular showy consumption practice among young men, known as 'bluffing', revolving around Western consumer goods. The practice is valued in morally ambiguous ways: understood as both 'fake' and 'false' at the same time as valued as almost a necessary feature of being a socially accepted young male in Freetown. The chapter untangles the social and economic 'logics' behind this practice, in which those who partake in it are carefully positioning themselves in relation to family hierarchies and neighborhood networks in both

subversive ways, and yet also in keeping with established, yet reconfigured, means through which status has historically been asserted in Freetown. While showy consumption practices, with reference to British aesthetics, were historically attributed to the Krio – reflective of their often elite economic and political positionalities in the colonial and nascent post-colonial context – today bluffing, often inspired by the aesthetics of transatlantic urban youth culture, is reflective of a much more informalised political economy that young 'country' (i.e. non-Krio) men are marginally positioned in. In considering its ambiguous moral and symbolic qualities, as a form of both long-term and short-term exchange, as well as collapsing distinctions between 'local' and 'global', the bluff represents a powerful commentary on the ambiguous nature of coming of age in Freetown today.

Chapter 5 turns to an explicit examination of the Ebola crisis, through an analysis of the performance of burials. While most of the city's residents had no contact with the virus, 'Ebola' was inescapable, due to the onerous state of emergency regulations imposed by national and international authorities. All burials, regardless of the cause of death, were to be performed by newly established official teams operating according to unfamiliar biomedical and bureaucratic protocols. Burials became emblematic of the crisis through presenting a conflict between local practices and novel procedures, which was coded locally in a complex racial language of 'black' and 'white', recalling a long regional history of violent integration into the Atlantic World. Building on longstanding anthropological discussion on the relationship between 'good' death and social order, the chapter explores how burials became sites around which opposing 'orders' were experienced, negotiated, and reconciled in locally meaningful ways.

Chapter 6 describes the rocky and non-linear process of family formation in Freetown, centring on the case of a young couple in Congo Town, whose child-birth coincided exactly with the height of the Ebola state of emergency. The chapter analyses the ways that the challenging and disruptive, yet equally enabling, conditions of crisis became entangled with on-going life projects of young men and women living through it. The prioritisation and pressing pursuit of family formation in adverse circumstances represented in itself a powerful and revealing

local response to 'crisis'. The realignment of intimacies inherent in this process, relying on the management and harnessing of social instability, served as both a means of building long-standing social structures, as well as maintaining and reconfiguring networks of support during hard times. Existing flexibility of social practices surrounding family formation, which is a challenge even in 'normal' circumstance, became a resource through which social reproduction was forwarded, and accelerated, in times of crisis.

Finally, chapter 7 turns to the political and economic dimensions of crisis, ethnographically centering on the experience of a 3-day lockdown in Congo Town, and returning to the working life of the burial teams. The chapter explores the interaction between the protocols and authoritative structures of the state of emergency and humanitarian intervention with established social routines and responses to 'crisis' in Freetown, through which residents were presented with contradictory, yet neither unfamiliar, sets of social expectations. While some of these tensions centred around practices that risked transmission of the Ebola virus – such as care and burial practices, which have received the most scholarly and humanitarian attention – the chapter describes how a wider set of tensions and divergent visions pertaining to social, economic, and political life complexly mapped onto these fault-lines, often in ways that challenge analysis of the crisis that pits 'local' culture squarely against 'foreign' humanitarian culture. Central to the analysis is the phantom state that emerged during the intervention, that was in some ways more concrete than the real state, but seemingly only for as long as the crisis itself. The chapter demonstrates the ways in which crisis can be productive of 'normality' and vice versa.

Chapter 2. Home truths: care and danger around the house

In November 2014, the first Ebola case was reported in Congo Town. A sick man came from upcountry to stay with a relative in a nearby neighbourhood. He was seeking treatment and care in town, a common practice in normal circumstances. The man died, presumably from Ebola, and shortly afterwards the daughter of his relative, his primary carer in the house, became sick. Her mother rushed her to her father's house, in Congo Town. The move was explained to me as a means in part of avoiding the *congosa* (gossip) of neighbours – she would be safer in another neighbourhood. Particularly during the early stages of the Ebola outbreak, people feared being falsely diagnosed as Ebola positive, and then being contaminated, either intentionally or accidently, while receiving treatment. The young woman died at her father's house, which was subsequently quarantined by the authorities for 21 days, the incubation period of the virus. No-one was permitted to enter or to leave. Fortunately, there were no other deaths in the house in this period, which caused some doubt as to whether she had had Ebola in the first place.

During the Ebola crisis, in which the home became the front-line in the fight against the virus, people were caught in a cruel double-bind. On the one hand, the crisis had the effect of increasing dependence on those 'close' to them. This was in large part due to the economic fallout experienced during the crisis, along with the effect of onerous state of emergency regulations such as lockdowns, travel restrictions, and curfews, which hit livelihoods heavily and severely restricted mobility. The home became, in an exaggerated sense, a site of refuge and sustenance during these hard times. At the same time, however, it was at home that people were most vulnerable to catching the virus. Care practices towards the sick and recently dead, often performed around the house, were the most potent means through which the virus was transmitted between people. Ebola meant that intimate others could suddenly be transformed into deadly enemies. Harbouring a sick person ran the risk not only of catching the virus, but also of severe legal penalties and household quarantines.

What struck me about the relationship between Ebola and the home was not, as might have been expected, that it presented a radical shift in the dynamics of the house – the transformation of the home from a site of safety and stability to one of danger and volatility – but rather the very familiarity of the interplay between these opposing forces, and the resulting sense of ambiguity. Throughout my fieldwork, I observed how, just below the surface of seemingly convivial and close relationships, long-harboured tensions often lurked. I was struck by the high level of generosity and care, and the willingness for poor households to accept new residents. At the same time, though, I learned that such gestures were seen as potentially harmful and exploitative, and that just as strangers could become kin, so too could kin become strangers, and friends readily become enemies. The dependence that many of my neighbours had on those around them was a source of vulnerability as well as strength; suspicion and secrecy were the other side of the coin of trust and reliance. In this light, Ebola in the home felt like an intensified and alarmingly physical manifestation of an enduring and deep-rooted dynamic that was all too familiar in Freetown.

In this chapter, I outline how these dynamics played out for young people in Congo Town, with reference to three case studies that provide a representative overview of domestic settings in the neighbourhood. The first outlines life in what was called a room and parlour, a small two-room house in which several young men lived together, including me for the first nine months of my fieldwork. The second was the family compound where I lived for the second half of my fieldwork. And finally, I outline a contest of over property between an uncle and his nephew, also neighbours of each other, after the death of owner. All three case studies reveal the deep ambiguity that surrounds relationships in and around the home. In particular, there is a recurring fault-line of tension between young people and the people who are looking after them, or those who are expected to do so. These same figures were often simultaneously seen to be 'holding them back'. The status of young people in this context was highly unstable, but instead of being assigned a junior status, their position was negotiated and contested on a day-to-day basis in unspoken, gestural, ways, punctuated by occasional explicit negotiations. The desire for social mobility and progression often involved conflicting desires; the

young people concerned simultaneously wanted to come closer and be accepted and promoted within the home, and to leave altogether.

Instability and ambiguity centred on the home has attracted scholarly interest in Sierra Leone and beyond[3]. Mariane Ferme's (2001) ethnography of a Mende village in the east of the country, *The Underneath of Things: Violence, History, and the Everyday*, provides a rich and compelling examination of the ways that a violent history has produced a 'hermeneutic of suspicion' (Ferme 2001:7), a central organisational principle and cultural trope around which ambiguous social relations and institutions are structured. For Ferme the materiality of everyday life is shaped by these unstable historical processes, which are in turn reproduced through shifting modes of interpretation and forms of concealment. In a parallel way, Veena Das, working in the wake of the violence of the Partition in India, demonstrates how such traumatic events work their way into everyday life in the family and community; social worlds that become infused with 'doubt' (Das 2006).

Others have located this ambiguity less directly in the legacy of violence – although this is often the backdrop – and more in the ways that the outside world comes to restructure relations within the home. Rather than home being a site of trust and protection from the outside world, as has often been understood in classic anthropological scholarship and beyond, the home itself becomes a site of danger. For Geschiere, witchcraft in Africa is a powerful discourse on the way that relations of intimacy hold malevolent potential. Witchcraft, or the 'dark side of kinship', thrives 'at the interface of intimate relations within the house and the outside world, dangerous but also promising' (Geschiere 2013:16). The external forces of the outside world are broadly the forces of modernity: the state and the market (Comaroff and Comaroff 2013, Geschiere 2000). This process is also richly demonstrated in Han's ethnography of care in an urban slum in Chile, where 'state intuitions and economic precariousness are folded into people's intimate relations, commitments, and aspirations' (Han 2013:17).

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[3] It does not seem coincidental that Sierra Leone provides a spring board for Jackson's (2011) existential claims that ambiguity in social relations is definitive of what it is to be a human being. Jackson concedes that material scarcity in Sierra Leone makes secrecy and suspicion particularly prominent.

In this chapter, I build on these explanations and approaches, while remaining attentive to the specificities of the Freetown context, especially the ways that my interlocutors themselves interpreted and analysed the ambiguous sets of relations that they found themselves in around the home. While a history of violence, largely unspoken, forms the backdrop, it is not the central strand of my analysis in this chapter. Equally, witchcraft, as identified in Geschiere's work, is a force at play in Freetown, and one that is understood to transmit through channels of intimacy, and is often interpreted as expressions of jealousies and conflicts around the home. While witchcraft does feature in this chapter, and throughout the thesis, it is not an explicit analytical focus. Rather, my attempt to focus on the more visible, although nonetheless ambiguous, arena of interpersonal dependencies and tensions – and their relation to a broader political economy – hopes to shed light on conditions that analysis of witchcraft in Africa is often concerned with.

In this chapter, taking my interlocutors' preoccupations as a starting point, I focus on the ways that economic forces that are not necessarily informed by violence ambiguously reconfigure, constitute, and become structured by kinship-based relationships around the home. In Chile, according to Han, credit – readily available to the poor under the neoliberal imperative – is used to 'make possible' existing regimes of care; this has parallels in many other contexts where markets have been liberalised (James 2014). In Sierra Leone, on the other hand, credit is not readily available from banks or even loan sharks. Instead, for many young people, family and neighbours become the most promising sources for finding – often informal – work, and obtaining money and property, even if there is competition over these resources. In many instances, however, these prospects and expectations remain just that, prospects and expectations, in a context where business plans and possibilities vastly outnumber genuine sources of income. Nevertheless, though elusive or projected, they are highly formative in structuring domestic relations.

My case studies and analysis foreground a complex interplay between two competing yet highly intertwined registers, through which domestic relationships

are structured and statuses reckoned. The first is the register of kinship. The second is what might be termed the register of business. These two registers were reflective of two sets of terms that people would draw upon in referring to and greeting one another. One set were kinship terms, such as 'bro', 'sister', 'auntie', 'uncle', 'pa' and 'ma'. The other set were professional names, such as '*bra*' (male boss), '*sisi*' (female boss), '*grandjon*' (from French-speaking Guinea), 'senior man', 'boss man', 'manager', and *bor bor* (apprentice / house boy). Most relationships built around the home can be, and indeed are, understood according to both these registers, which become mutually productive and destructive: kinship is a route for business opportunities, and business relations are locally productive of kinship. Conversely, business relations can sever and strain kinship ones, and vice versa. However, the inclination to view a relationship alternately through the lens of kinship and business relations produces two distinct vision of the relationship, of participants' motivations and the morality of their actions. This, I suggest, gets to the heart of the ambiguity in the home. Examined through the kinship lens, a young person doing housework looks like the fulfilment of a familial obligation. Seen through a business one, it could be interpreted as exploitative, unpaid labour. While analytically, of course, these two registers of relationality around the home are heavily entwined – and thus problematic to distinguish – paying close attention to the particular ways that each register, and the sets of expectations associated with it, is mobilised, as well as the ways in which ambiguity itself is often actively promoted, is revealing of the dynamics of the home.

Room and parlour

For the first half of my fieldwork I lived in a room and parlour (a two-room house) located near to the base of the Congo River valley around which the neighbourhood was built. The house was built by Foday, a man in his mid-twenties, on land that belonged to his deceased grandfather's only living wife. Foday had a lease-hold agreement, according to which the property would return to his grandfather's wife after a certain number of years or he would pay her rent. Given that the land did not belong to Foday's own (recently deceased)

grandmother, his move to build on the land was controversial and the source of some resentment in the family.

Foday was a taxi operator and a recording artist. He ran a small recording studio – located in the front room of the house – which he would typically operate at night when electricity was more reliable than in the day. I shared the bed with Foday. In the parlour, when recording had stopped, slept Umaru and Sam, two male cousins of Foday's. Umaru, slightly older than Foday, was a comedian. He presented a weekly comedy radio programme, although this work had not yet translated into financial reward. Umaru and Foday had a very intimate and close friendship, which they described as 'brotherhood'. Sam, a few years younger than Foday, was the *bor bor* (boy) of the house, who had come to stay with Foday after his father had died; Foday's father had asked him to teach Sam to drive.

While all three were cousins, and roughly the same age, their relationships and their reasons for living together extended well beyond these familial connections. Foday had hundreds of cousins. Umaru and Foday had met at the funeral of an elder within the family, and their relationship soon became a close-knit one; they became collaborators in the shared project of gaining traction in Freetown's entertainment scene. Umaru and Foday were also bound together through a close friendship that involved daily acts of tactile (never sexual), playfulness, sharing of clothes and food, and attending church, family and professional events together.

The relationship between Foday and Sam was initiated by Foday's father, but took on a life of its own. Sam had expected Foday to become his 'boss' and 'big brother', and to initiate him into the driving business by teaching him how to drive and then employing him as a driver. From Sam' perspective, coming close to Foday, and working around the house, was a way of encouraging Foday to take him under his wing and give him the tools to earn a living. On a day-to-day basis, he performed household tasks such as cleaning the house, washing clothes, and collecting items from the shops. Foday sometimes gave him portions of food – that he himself often received from family and neighbours – and he provided him with a floor to sleep on. This was a common arrangement for young people moving into a household; a

roof over their head was conditional on either contributing money (if they had an external income) or working 'for' the house.

These relationships, while involving acts of care, mutual support, and intimate proximity, were unstable. Umaru and Foday's relationship became increasingly strained. While Umaru, as a more senior and well-connected person in the entertainment business, was in many ways a desirable partner for Foday, he soon began to look like something of a liability; Foday was investing much more in the relationship on a day-to-day basis. The difficulties were compounded when Umaru, after driving a motorbike that Foday had bought (in exchange for his car), left the keys in the ignition and the brand-new bike was stolen. It also appeared that so much proximity was itself a cause of tension.

The relationship between Sam and Foday was full of resentment and animosity. Sam ultimately lived in the house for three years, during which time he was never taught to drive: something he saw as a condition of his being there. Lessons were still held up as a possibility whenever Sam brought the subject up, but were continually pushed back. Increasingly Sam felt that he was being exploited, that his work around the house was for no benefit, and his junior status of *bor bor* was becoming cemented and further reinforced. Sam once said to me, 'We should be working together as brothers, so we can develop, but he doesn't take other people's problem seriously'.

These grievances were rarely expressed explicitly to the person in question (in this case Foday), but were enacted indirectly around the house, which was the stage on which the relationships between, and the relative statuses of, the actors themselves were constantly re-negotiated. Sam stopped helping out so much in the house, and Foday started doing much more of his own cleaning. Equally, Sam would accept Foday's offers of food much less regularly, finding food instead among other neighbours and friends with whom he had close relationships, independent of Foday. On one occasion Foday, Umaru, and I were sharing a plate of rice and cassava leaf and fish stew prepared by one of our neighbours. Foday called out to Sam, who was sitting on the veranda listening to music, 'Come let's

eat'. After a few loud shouts, and no response from Sam, Foday, frustrated, exclaimed, 'He does this too much, this is the last time that I am going to offer him food'. For Sam, these gestures demonstrated that he was not entirely reliant on Foday. For Foday, they signified that he owed Sam less. Eventually Sam started spending nights elsewhere, though leaving his clothes at Foday's as a marker that he still had a place there. In one tense moment, Foday moved his clothes from their usual spot when he was cleaning the place, sending the signal that Sam no longer had a place in his home. Eventually, after three years together, Sam moved out to stay with a friend elsewhere, in a relationship similar to that between Umaru and Foday.

Sam was obsessed with finding a place of his own. He told me once, 'If I move out I believe I will be able to progress more if I am on my own'. He had attempted to negotiate with the same grandma in the family to build on a small plot of land near to Foday's, but this proved challenging given the complexity of family politics and his relatively distant connection to the family compound (where none of his nuclear family lived). It was interesting to me that Sam seemed to see having his own place as a means to an end, a way of getting on in life more generally, rather than an end in itself. The lack of a place of his own was not the consequence of having no regular employment, but, as he described it, almost the reason for it. The logic became clear when Sam explained to me that, 'Foday would respect Umaru more if he had his own place, at his level, he should have his own place'. This exemplified a paradox that was central for many young people like Foday and Umaru – getting on required at one and the same time living under the protection of close support figures, and being independent from them.

I suggest that many of the ambiguities and tensions around the home can be connected to the interplay between kinship and business-oriented modes of relatedness. Foday and Sam were cousins of the same age-set, but in their projected business relationship, Foday was Sam' boss, which relegated Sam to Foday's junior in the house. The terms of their relationship fluctuated ambiguously according to these two measures. A changing working arrangement in the home led to a renegotiation of their roles and statuses. Although Sam did not learn the

trade through which he had hoped to gain an income, he demonstrated an ability to survive without Foday. This was an empowering act of maintaining self-esteem and the basis for negotiating a more favourable status within the home. For much of this time, Foday was simultaneously looking after Sam and holding him back; the home was on the one hand a means of surviving and a source of opportunity and, on the other, an unwelcome and threatening space.

Family compound (Mafembe)

For the second half of my fieldwork, I transferred to a room and parlour of my own, attached to a family compound only a few hundred meters from where Foday lived. The family compound belonged the Bangura family. I was particularly close to James, the oldest son in the family, who was friends with Foday (although their relationship was rocky). In the main house in the compound, which comprised three small bedrooms, a bathroom, living-room, and veranda, lived James's father, Jonathan – who grew increasingly frail during the course of my fieldwork – and his four children, of which James was the oldest. Jonathan's wife Rachel also lived in the home, with her three children. In attached homes lived several other relatives, including James's uncle and aunt and their daughters, and his great-uncle. During my stay, several occupants came and went, giving the extended household a shifting character.

The house structure was representative of a typical family compound in Freetown. Unlike Foday's room and parlour, the kinship structure was more formally hierarchical, with several generations represented in the household reflecting an idealized authority structure. In practice, however, hierarchies in the home deviated significantly from this model, with roles continually being renegotiated. Jonathan, a chef, was designated as head of the compound. According to the strict kinship system, though, the most senior man in the compound was Mohammed, nicknamed *Bois* (boy), a son of Mami Mefembe, whose name the compound bears today. Mami Mefembe had arrived from upcountry in the 1950s and acquired the land, initially to establish a women's initiation society; this still existed during my fieldwork, though in a much less prominent form. Mohamed had never married,

had not been educated, and did not hold a steady job (he was an occasional labourer). He had several children, but many of them were estranged from him. As a result, his seniority within the family was significantly reduced. Jonathan was frail during the time that I was staying in the compound, and he died shortly after I left. His wife Rachel had taken over some of his jobs as a chef, and had also taken over many of the key decision-making processes in the household, another mark of seniority. James, also a chef and waiter, became more involved in managing the house at this stage, and took over as head of the household alongside Rachel when his father passed away. Uncle Samuel, a distant relative and thus lacking any claim to the land, did not attempt to replace Jonathan as head of the household, but as an esteemed school teacher, held seniority and respect within the compound.

Beyond the decision-making level, hierarchies within the home were performed on a day-to-day basis through various overt enactments of a chain of command. One notable example entailed senior people 'sending' junior people to the shops to buy something for themselves or for the house. This activity could only be performed this way round; sending a more senior person would be seen as highly insulting. For people who were closely positioned in terms of status, sending each other was a semi-humorous activity through which to attempt to assert seniority. Another example involved the distribution of the daily pot of rice and *plasas* (sauce) that was cooked in the home. The more senior people in the home would have their own portions set aside, often with larger quantities of meat or fish, in ways reflective of practices across the continent (Whitehead 1981). It was their responsibility to pass down portions of food to the more junior members of the household.

These practices represented everyday means by which status was reckoned and hierarchies reinforced, at the same time as they reconfigured and challenged idealized kinship structures, and allowed for neighbours and strangers to be incorporated into the home. For example, food was often shared with a wide range of people beyond those who lived in the home. Food-sharing was understood to build relatedness and establish people's connection to the house. As one friend told me, 'your base is where you eat'. The passing down of food could reassert

hierarchies, but food could also be shared in less hierarchical or more humbling ways. Equally, professional and kinship status terms were used broadly and flexibly. In many cases, they were also used aspirationally; as a way of asserting desired dependence on someone, or aspired superiority over another. Kinship terminology was much more commonly applied to those not formally related than to those who were. Thus, it was broadly possible to become attached to the family compound and to become family, as I learned first-hand when my neighbours called me 'uncle Jonah', 'my son', 'my brother', and sometimes, jokingly, 'my husband'.

Figure 4 Filling up buckets at the communal compound tap

One such long-time resident was Zainab, a young woman who I came to know as James's sister. I discovered much later that she was not formally related to the Bangura family. She was the long-time, long-distance, girlfriend of James's first cousin, Victor, who James had grown up with in their native village. James was particularly close to her as a result. Victor had been living in Ghana for several years, where he was training to become a Catholic priest, which created some ambiguity about the status of his relationship with Zainab. There were expectations of celibacy, of course, but Victor did not seem intent on adhering to this 'religiously'. Zainab slept in a room that she rented immediately adjacent to

the main family compound. She often did her cooking separately, which gave her a degree of independence. She was studying, as well as working at a hotel in town as a receptionist (at one point she juggled two full-time jobs at separate hotels). She had incorporated herself into the family beyond her relatively fragile connection through James's cousin, in large part by contributing to family expenses – she made especially generous contributions to family programmes such as weddings – but also by attending family events and being a respected and caring figure in the compound. For much of the time that I was in the compound, Zainab took care of two children from the Bangura family whose mother had passed away and were waiting to be transferred elsewhere. These activities strengthened her position within the family, and she was regularly called to family meetings where decisions were made. However, her connection to the family was never entirely stable. In the physical absence of her boyfriend, she kept local boyfriends without letting it be widely known; a common practice, yet nevertheless somewhat looked down upon. These relationships involved not only companionship, but also shared income from which the family benefitted. At the same time, though, Zainab's other relationships challenged her position in the house.

Others who entered the household did so with much less success and acceptance than Zainab. For example, Rachel's niece, Kadiatu, a young woman in her mid to late twenties, came to live with us for a few rocky months. Rachel had taken Kadiatu under her wing; her mother, Rachel's younger sister, did not have the resources to look after her. In addition, Kadiatu had borne four children to various partners and was unable to look after them. Rachel explained to me that she hoped the compound would provide Kadiatu with a stable environment until she was able to settle down herself. A condition, presumably unspoken, of Kadiatu living in the compound was that she would contribute to daily household tasks such as cooking and cleaning. While her kinship connection to the house was more direct than Zainab's, and she was older, her lack of external income (she had neither a job nor financially supportive partners) made her manifestly lower-status within the home. She was tasked with household work alongside the children and teenagers in the house, with one of whom she was sharing a bed. Before Kadiatu's pregnancies, Rachel had previously been sponsoring her education. An expectation

associated with Kadiatu's living in the house was that Rachel would pay for her to continue her education, or to do a course such as in cookery. But Kadiatu saw this as a false promise, similar to Foday's promise to teach Sam to drive, that was dangled like a carrot on a stick while she cooked and cleaned in the house; a practice that often goes hand-in-hand with fosterage (Schrauwers 1999).

The relationship between Kadiatu and Rachel became increasingly fraught, and tension came to the head over several issues. The first was that Kadiatu would leave in the evenings, sometimes coming back very late, and sometimes spending the night elsewhere. During this time she started seeing Umaru, and would sometimes spend the night with him on the floor of Foday's parlour. Rachel saw this as irresponsible, and worried about Kadiatu. On some occasions Rachel would spend the night on a chair on the veranda, waiting for her to come home so that she could unlock the gate. Another tension surrounded a failed business venture. Rachel had loaned Kadiatu money to start a business whereby she would buy fish from fishermen and sell them directly to households. What happened instead, according to Rachel's plausible reports, was that Kadiatu borrowed fish from market traders downtown on credit, and sold them on without significant profit, while spending a great deal of Rachel's seed money. She was slowly repaying Rachel's loan, but she soon found herself in debt to the fish seller downtown, as well to Rachel, who ended up forking out more cash to bail Kadiatu out.

An underlying tension between Rachel and Kadiatu was the nature of their relationship, which proved unstable and contested. Rachel regarded Kadiatu as her daughter while she was living in her house and sponsoring her education and business projects. But Kadiatu did not regard Rachel as her mother, and thus did not feel that she needed to obey house rules such as coming home early and working around the house. During one heated argument that took place outside the house, Rachel cried, 'If your child does not act correctly you will feel it', a statement that got straight to the heart of the matter: the ambiguity in their relationship. When Kadiatu came close to Rachel she at one and the same time became a family member and a business partner. Their relationship was structured around work and a business project, and this had strained their familial

connection. Finally, Kadiatu left the house leaving her tensions with Rachel alive and unresolved. After many months of indirect tension, Kadiatu came to 'beg' Rachel. This was a formalised process whereby she would apologise verbally and physically lower herself; bending on her knees at the climax of the ritual (although this was performed semi-jokingly in this case, to the amusement of all parties). The meeting was formally witnessed by several neighbours and significant family members, and chaired by the pastor of the Pentecostal church that James, Umaru, Kadiatu, and Foday attended. During the course of the meeting, grievances were openly expressed. The pastor talked about how this was an opportunity to 'start again'. At one point, he told Rachel, 'You are in fact the mother, this is your child', thus clarifying the underlying tension, as well as astutely drawing direct attention to the root cause of the problems. By confronting this issue, and through Kadiatu's lowering herself and accepting her junior position as Rachel's 'daughter', their tension was finally resolved. Interestingly, though, this seemed possible only once Kadiatu was no longer living in Rachel's house.

These stories from the family compound reveal themes similar to those that surfaced in the room and parlour, even if they emerged from a different starting point. Unlike the room and parlour, which embodied a horizontal arrangement between cousins, the family compound hierarchy corresponded to an idealized vertical kinship structure. In practice, however, the family compound demonstrated a great deal of flexibility and room for negotiation in the processes through which hierarchies were established, and relatedness and kinship forged and broken.

These processes involved a complex weaving together of business- and kinship-based registers, through which status was never entirely secure. The character of the relationship was asserted and contested on a daily basis, albeit with significant moments when roles were formally acknowledged, such as after the death of an elder (when a successor needs to be identified: after Jonathan's death, James was chosen as the formal successor, although in practice he worked closely with Rachel and his uncle in managing the household), or at a family meeting like the one to resolve the conflict between Rachel and Kadiatu. The ways that these two registers

were weaved together was a source of ambiguity, a means of being elevated and included as well as being brought down and excluded.

Mohammed, though senior in formal kinship terms, was junior in economic status. His attempts to convert his seniority in the family into an economic seniority, by claiming ownership to areas of the land purchased initially by his mother, had been unsuccessful. He lost out to Mr. Wright, a prominent resident whose claim to the land was weaker, but whose influence enabled him to win in court. Partly as a consequence of this, Mohammed – by now an elderly man – was nicknamed 'boy'. Although Zainab's formal connection to the family was weak and her position never permanent, she had been successful at becoming 'kin' by contributing to household and family projects. For Kadiatu, the opposite had been the case; work in the house felt exploitative and demeaning, and her failed business arrangement with her aunt resulted in a suspension of their relationship. When their relationship was finally reconciled, it was possible only by the reinforcement of Kadiatu's subservient position to Rachel, and an acknowledgement of Rachel's maternal role in Kadiatu's life.

Life in the household therefore revealed that material exchanges and business plans were both the means through kinship relationships could be constructed, and the means through which they could be severed and strained. Between these two extremes was a great deal of day-to-day contestation and tussle. Daily exchanges, such as the sharing of food, the delegation of household tasks, and monetary contributions to household expenses, were the means by which positions in the household were asserted. All this took place in a complex framework involving division of labour and organization of the chain of command. Much of the drama that occurred in the house on a day-to-day basis emerged when people were seen as not acting according to their place, for example when someone was reluctant to perform a task requested by someone else.

By the same token, however, kinship- and household-based relationships were a major arena in which business opportunities and working arrangements played out. This appears to have intensified the ambiguity that surrounded relations in

the home, especially given the two models of relatedness that were at play. At the same time, it introduced unstable economic relations into the domestic space, as evidenced by Kadiatu and Rachel's failed business venture and their troubled kinship relations.

The Cole compound: land disputes

My third case study in this chapter centres on a land dispute between an uncle and nephew, both of whom lived on the compound adjacent to Mafembe. I had grown close to the nephew, Brima, during my fieldwork. He was in his 30s, and worked as an intelligence officer at the local police station, which was a steady job, but badly and unreliably paid. Brima was a significant figure in the neighbourhood. He often acted as an informal mediator between residents and the legal system; they would come to him first when they were considering taking a legal issue to court. Brima lived in a small room and parlour with his wife, Ami, and their two young children. The land he lived on was owned by his father, who died during my fieldwork. It was divided into several units containing homes similar to Brima's, as well as a much larger multi-storey compound that had been built by his uncle, Andrew – a former police officer – and Andrew's wife, Caddie. Andrew had made a significant amount of money when he worked as a police officer at the airport and became involved in the illegal cocaine business. He had ultimately served prison time for this and had been dismissed from the police force, but was nonetheless an established member of the community and family. The family compound and attached land was divided roughly in half. Andrew lived primarily off rent that he collected from the compound, as well as from a small grocery store that Caddie ran from the ground-floor of their house. Until Brima's father's death, Brima collected rent from one half and Andrew from the other. At the end of the compound was a garden, where Brima and others grew vegetables for cooking and, sometimes, selling on.

Brima's father, who had lived in his native Kambia district in Northern Sierra Leone, died in September 2014. He held the documents for the land, which were in his name. According to Brima, his father had intended to hand over the documents

to him as his wife's oldest son (although he also had children with other women), but he had not got round to putting Brima's name on the document. Brima would have had a stronger claim to the property if he had been able to access the documents, but in a cruel twist of fate (as reported to me), his father had been buried rapidly by the Ebola burial teams – who were tasked with performing all burials during the outbreak – with the documents still in his pocket. As a younger brother of the owner, and a long-time resident of the compound, Andrew also had a strong claim to the land, and to becoming head of the compound. Such tension over competing claims between siblings and children was a common fault-line in land disputes in Sierra Leone.

The conflict blew up when Andrew began collecting rent from the whole property, rather than just the side from which he had collected when Brima's father was alive. Brima felt under increasing pressure to leave the property. His half-brother, Alfred, who shared the same father, was being groomed by Andrew to replace Brima as the property's 'caretaker'. But Brima saw this as the same, ultimately manipulative, form of 'care' that he too had received from Andrew.

Andrew had helped bring Brima into the police force and, as Brima put it, he 'gave me my first Guinness stout'. Brima's indebtedness to and respect for his uncle were interwoven with feelings of betrayal and resentment. All this was crystallised for Brima when Andrew spoke to him at his father's funeral. 'I distinctly remember him saying, "I will look after you now". It was an ironical statement'. The event of death brought to the fore competing interests that had been suppressed beneath the convivial surface of everyday life shared by neighbours in an extremely close-knit social environment. Brima had taken on a nurturing role with Andrew and Caddie's daughters, regularly helping them with their schoolwork and giving them lunch money. Likewise, Brima and his wife Ami's daughter, Aisha, went regularly to Andrew and Caddie's to play and eat.

For Brima, the conflict was a test of pride, dignity, and resolve. Andrew and Caddie did 'not have mind' (found it unimaginable) to tell him directly to leave. Instead they employed indirect means to make it intolerable for Brima to stay, thereby

forcing him and his family to depart by their 'own' volition. This approach, I was informed, was 'a typical African way'. Brima was convinced that Andrew and Caddie wanted to prove that he could not survive without collecting the rent from the houses: 'They wanted to see me suffer'. He believed that they cut off his electricity connection by contacting someone from the National Power Authority, through another neighbour who worked there who had similarly distanced himself from Brima. He was sure too that Caddie was targeting him and his family through occult 'fetish' rituals, although – as with the electricity being cut off – this was indirect and impossible to confirm. Brima isolated himself, not socialising with his neighbours as he normally would have done. He started building a small house on the outskirts of town, where he had bought land and had been planning for a while to build. He did not intend to give up the fight by leaving, but the knowledge that there was to be a place where his family could 'live in peace' and 'keep things to themselves' was a source of comfort to him. It also proved that he could survive and thrive without collecting the rent. His emotional states during this period seemed to me to correspond closely to the progress on the house. Each stage that was completed gave Brima more confidence, marking the transition from being socially reclusive and cut-off to engaged in the community as normal. The relationships he had with Andrew's daughters were also key in overcoming the hostilities. Andrew's oldest daughter came to Brima's to appeal him to become close again with her family, claiming that they were acting in a different mind because they had eaten a salad prepared by Andrew's former wife, which had 'changed their minds'; in other words, the salad had been poisoned. Brima remained cautious about letting down his guard and reconnecting. 'Trust takes a long time to build back', he told me, not least because he feared that exposing himself further to them would enable them to take advantage of him again. He feared that Caddie's call to perform a *sara* (ceremony) with his daughter Aisha, after she was ill, to protect her from witchcraft, was in fact a means of attacking her and them, of 'coming close' with bad intentions. In turn, Brima felt aggrieved that the close and supportive relationship that he had built with Andrew and Caddie's daughters had not been acknowledged.

As a form of ceasefire, Brima and Ami went to 'beg' formally to Andrew and Caddie, in the presence of Mr. Barrie, a respected community elder and a prominent member of the local mosque. Although Brima believed that he was in the right, as the less senior person, it was his responsibility to apologise to his uncle. Andrew was upset about bad language that Brima had used against him, and claimed that Brima had spread the rumour around the family that Andrew had killed Brima's father. The session was an opportunity for Brima to voice his grievances against his uncle, and some measure of peace was achieved. The issue over ownership of the compound was not resolved, and Andrew continued to collect the rent, but the 'bad feeling in the heart' was ameliorated. Shortly afterwards, Brima told me that 'dignity is more important than money'. A key marker in this process for Brima was his ability to celebrate his anniversary with his wife Ami, which he had been delaying. The big sound system blasting out the latest Nigerian Afrobeat music was a proud message to Andrew and Caddie that he was continuing his life rather than suffering. He was able to send them and his other neighbours food and drinks from the party, and to come close to them again. It did not seem coincidental that it was during this semi-public celebration that Brima and Caddie were able to talk at length, in the middle of the 'dancing area', and visibly air what they had been holding inside. It was a public gesture that exchange was being resumed and kinship reconstructed, in stark opposition to the preceding months of ambiguity and secretiveness, when indirect hostilities as the primary means of communication.

This case study connects to many themes similar to those identified in the cases above. We see parallels in the competing claims to seniority within a kinship system, which come to the fore through conflicts over rights to land. Brima has a claim to the land as the eldest son of his father, who was the legal owner, and Andrew also has a claim as the owner's younger brother. Alternative measures of seniority, beyond kinship, similarly come into play, and these prove to be the trump card; in this case Andrew is a more established figure and can get his way.

As with the other cases outlined above, the ambiguities can be connected to competing notions of relatedness, which prove complex to reconcile. This case

illustrates particularly clearly how entangled economic and kinship spheres are around the home. On the one hand, the residents of the compound are neighbours and family members, who live deeply connected lives with high levels of mutual care and support. This is illustrated by the way that the two couples – Brima and Ami and Andrew and Caddie – looked after each other's children, taking on in various ways the responsibility for raising them. This was the relationship that Brima himself had with his uncle Andrew, who has acted in many ways like a father to him. This form of relatedness extended to the other neighbours, who were pivotal characters in each other's lives, socialising and sharing on a day-to-day level, and being key figures in family events, such as Brima and Ami's engagement party at which the neighbours were the main guests. These characters position themselves as familial figures, but at the same time, the familial and domestic space also functioned as an economic sphere in which relationships were characterised in economic and monetary terms. The compound is a site of production, with land used for growing food, and also of commerce, with several informal enterprises running in the area, and relationships around the home are also structured through monetized tenancy agreements.

I am not suggesting that these registers are inherently contradictory. The anthropological record shows, of course, the prevalence of kinship as an organising principle for economic activity, particular in non-state societies, as well as in 'informal economies' (Hart 2000). Equally, as Guyer's (1994) historically grounded research on exchange in Atlantic Africa demonstrates, there is a long regional history of status recognition intersecting complexly with registers of exchange based on contradictory logics, in which 'marginal gains' are secured through strategic positioning at the interface of registers. What seems to mark this social setting as particularly unstable is a high degree of ambiguity, and thus tension, between kinship and economic registers, which are both understood as distinct and yet are highly entwined and mutually constituting.

For Brima, the ambiguities were experienced as a kind of Jobian trial, in which his dignity and respect was on the line. He felt attacked from within and from without by invisible or semi-visible forces – his electricity supply tampered with; his

children and his brother manipulated; and witchcraft/poisoning (which involves similarly 'indirect' modes of intimate warfare). Brima's own interpretation of these events did not, however, focus on his ejection from the compound for material profit. He thought rather that Andrew and Caddie wanted to 'see him suffer'; to humiliate him in front of his neighbours; to demonstrate that he could not 'stand alone'. When the issue was finally resolved, Brima was content, even though he was no longer collecting rent, because he had proved to his neighbours that he could support himself. This suggests that financial gain or loss was less significant for Brima than what either said about his own status and his relationship to those around him (a parallel with Sam and Kadiatu who appeared more concerned with their 'status' than material opportunities). The engagement party was significant because he was able to show his neighbours that he was a 'man', not a youth, reliant on his father or uncle, and thus his self-esteem was somewhat maintained. By the same token, however, the means by which normal relationships could resume depended on Brima's formal apology to his uncle and aunt, much as Kadiatu apologised to Rachel. Similarly, his position as his uncle's junior nephew was, for the time being, reaffirmed.

All the cases in this chapter have in common a relationship between a senior and a junior person, connected both by kinship and by various kinds of working relationships within and beyond the domestic sphere. In all cases, the exact nature of the relationship remains ambiguous. All are relationships of genuine mutual support and care, but all feature deep-harboured tensions and resentments, especially on the part of the junior partner, who feels exploited and 'held back'. The double-edged dynamic surrounding care was particularly evident in the case of Brima and his uncle. Andrew had partly raised Brima and helped him to achieve his current position. His uncle promised to look after him after his father died, which even at the time seemed threatening to Brima. This may be because 'looking after' him – formalising his dependence on him and supporting him – risked making him junior, thus lowering his status and his quality of life.

In the end, however, Brima did not want to leave the compound, even if it meant accepting his uncle's seniority and his dependence upon him. While Brima was putting a lot of energy and resources into building a house on the outskirts of

town,[4] where he could 'live in peace', his actions suggested that he did not want to leave unless absolutely strictly necessary. He had a plan to rent out the new house if he did not move there himself. I found this revealing of a dilemma common to many of the young people I had come to know in Congo Town. They experienced a strong desire and drive for independence, which often meant leaving the home or the neighbourhood, but at the same time they desperately wanted, and often desperately needed, to remain connected. These competing desires found expression in the complex dual dynamics surrounding crucial relationships of care and support, and in experiences and conceptions of 'home' as places of both security and protection and instability and danger.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have examined the complex and ambiguous dynamics surrounding the home in Freetown, focusing particularly on the positions of young people in various representative domestic situations. The Ebola virus and crisis rendered the home a site of both sanctuary and support, yet equally a site of corporeal danger in dramatic and cruel ways. However, in light of this chapter, these dynamics are remarkably consistent with the on-going dynamics of the home. For young men and women in such a context where land is hard to come by, as are sources of income, the home and family is the most promising route for personal mobility, as well as, in practical terms, a place of shelter, food and emotional sustenance. At the same time, the home is a dangerous space where junior statuses of 'youth' can be prolonged and reinforced.

Building on anthropological examinations of ambiguity in the home, which have been attributed to histories of violence (Das 2007, Ferme 2001), and the effects of state and market forces (Comaroff and Comaroff 2013, Geschiere 2008, Han 2013,

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[4] During my fieldwork, a new highway opened up connecting the Western part of Freetown to the road out of town. It bypassed central and East Freetown, traversing a mountainous part of the peninsula, beyond the old Krio villages settled by the early settlers. This opened up a significant amount of land, which, while off the grid and not easily accessible given the lack of connecting roads off the highway, could be bought relatively cheaply.

Hansen 2005), I have examined how individuals themselves understood the ambiguous sets of relations in which they found themselves entangled, and the contradictory ways through which young people go about gaining status in Freetown. I have suggested that it was the interplay between business-oriented and kinship registers, and the corresponding lenses through which the actions of others are examined, that accounts for this ambiguity and tension. In many instances, this ambiguity was promoted both by young people and those upon whom they relied, becoming at the same time a strategy to enhance mobility, a means of subordination, and a site of unfulfilled expectation.

This chapter thus introduces some of the central arguments of the thesis. Firstly, it highlights the everyday ways that statuses are reckoned and reconfigured around the home; in particular through the entanglements of work with family networks. This is a notable contribution to analysis of coming of age in Africa, through presenting an alternative model of social mobility for young men and women in relation to family to that of a life-cycle model of social reproduction, in which status is reconfigured around ritual. This chapter therefore challenges 'crisis of youth' narratives by suggesting that even if social reproduction is not available to many young people in traditional ways, coming of age is nonetheless taking place within family networks through other, less overt, means. Secondly, the chapter highlights the ways that individual aspirations and expectations, and those of family, come into dialogue with each other; and the parallel ways that understandings of relatedness are reconstituted in the process. This account highlights how individual and collective aspirations are simultaneously antithetical as well as mutually constitutive and productive, and how individuals creatively manage different sorts of expectations in negotiating their own positions within and around the home. In the next chapter, I turn to an examination of the ways that young men's work and mobilities are structured beyond the home, in the taxi driving industry. However, we similarly see family, neighbours, and idioms of kinship as key in structuring this work; as well as a forms of social mobility that rely on negotiating contradictory sets of expectations and registers of sociality.

Chapter 3. Entrepreneurialism and unionism: contradictory modes of professional status for young men working in informal transport

On the 11th of September 2015, a week before leaving the field for the last time, I received a disturbing call from Human Right, the taxi driver introduced in the prologue. The previous night he had been involved in a severe accident on his motorbike, and was in desperate need of medical attention. A traffic policeman standing by the side of the road had attempted to stop him. Human Right swerved out the way, but was pulled off his bike by the policeman. He came flying off and landed on an iron rod, which penetrated his groin, narrowly missing his testicles. Despite this, Human Right had spent the night in a prison cell. It was his third accident in a matter of weeks.

Human Right, as he was popularly known, was a young man in his thirties, although he had the appearance of someone much younger. He had worked on the streets in transport since he was 14 years old, when he dropped out of school because of financial hardship that confronted his parents. He worked initially as an apprentice on a *poda poda* (minibus taxi). This was a common route to becoming a driver; it was expected that the operator or driver would teach the apprentice to drive on the side. For many years now, Human Right had driven taxis owned by others, and he had taught many others to drive, inducting them into the taxi business along the way. The previous summer, he had bought his first taxi, but it was in such poor condition and required so much maintenance, that it turned out to be a bad investment.

Human Right's family lived in the East End of Freetown, but he had been living intermittently in Congo Town for many years, where he had worked for several taxi owners. He would typically stay with his 'apprentice', known as Balloon Burst, who had a small room near his family compound in the area. However, this arrangement was proving increasingly unsatisfactory; Balloon Burst often shared

the space with his *wef* (serious girlfriend) and their baby daughter. Human Right moved back to stay with distant relatives in the East End, and sold his car for very little. He bought two motorbikes that he operated as taxis, known as *okada*. Both were in poor condition, and a series of messy and long-unresolved exchanges ensued, involving his mother, who ran a rotating credit association with church-going female friends, and his uncle. While Human Right had a reputation for his overly confident and speedy style of driving, he had never had an accident in a car. On a motorbike, however, his luck was much worse.

Balloon Burst and I travelled across town, where we met Human Right, along with his distraught mother, father, and sister, outside a small local pharmacy. At such moments of crisis, I had often witnessed the strong obligations for family and friends to 'come close'; to be visibly present, sympathetic and supportive. But it was not just Human Right's close family and intimate friends who had rallied around him; he had received the support of other *okada* riders, particularly committee members from the local 'bike park', representatives of the Sierra Leone Commercial Bike Riders Union (BRU). This group had entered the police station to negotiate his release from police custody and to demand justice on his behalf. The police issued a report that technically entitled Human Right to medical compensation, but the bureaucratic procedures seemed too long-winded to enact, in part because the capacity of the formal hospital network had been so overwhelmed by the Ebola crisis. The family, knowing that an immediate full payment would not be necessary, decided to go to the local pharmacy to have the wound stitched up and get painkillers. Human Right was stoical, and did not show signs of his pain. We discussed ways that he might prosecute the policeman. This seemed challenging without money and without continued support from within the police force and from the BRU. We also discussed arrangements for Human Right to come back and stay in Congo Town again, given that his return to the east had been so ill-fated and seemed likely to get worse as pressure mounted.

Human Right's accident exemplified some of the many dangers entailed in making a living on the road: the overt presence of the state, in the form of police abuse, as well as its absence in other ways; and the risk of road accidents on poorly

maintained, overcrowded streets – all risks that were compounded by the pressures drivers faced to make 'fast money' to pay off debts and make a profit. Conversely, Human Right's crisis also exemplified the support networks into which he, and many others in his position, were integrated and embedded. These comprised two social networks that constitute the central focus of this chapter. I suggest that each network represents contrasting models through which young men attempt to gain professional status in their projects of social mobility.

The first network is the Sierra Leone Commercial Bike Riders Union, which emerged from the conjoining of smaller regional associations when the bike riding industry took off in the post-war years. This was a youth-based association with branches throughout the country. It operated according to a hierarchical, state-like model, with an associated set of performative repertoires: biannual elections, ID cards, membership fees, internal fines, and its own security force. The BRU represented a 'political' avenue for gaining professional status through membership of an association governed, in theory, by bureaucratic and hierarchical organisational principles on the one hand, and, on the other, by values of horizontal camaraderie, solidarity, and 'brotherhood'. As Human Right explained to me when explaining the differences between commercial bike riders and regular taxi drivers: 'when you are with an *okada* then other *okada* people know you are one in the same, they don't differentiate, I can go to any bike park in town and spend time there'. A primary task of the BRU was to protect its members from police abuse, which was a defining struggle of commercial bike riding in Freetown during my fieldwork. This involved a complex combination of resistance, partnerships formed with the state and, in my analysis, replicating the state in its own terms.

The second network comprised neighbourhood-based kin and friendship linkages. While most commercial bike riders were members of the BRU, union membership and participation was much less common for regular taxi drivers. Their professional activity was structured instead through these informal social networks, through which drivers found cars to drive commercially, and where money was typically raised for investment in driving businesses. In contrast to the

BRU, the professional status of taxi drivers was more 'economic' than 'political', informed by the ideals and effective performances of 'entrepreneurialism'. Here, drivers and taxi owners styled themselves as hustlers and businessmen, utilising a language of 'bosses' and expansive 'futures'. Their businesses, however, were necessarily embedded in an array of messy and complicated arrangements with family, neighbours, and friends, which were at odds with the notion that entrepreneurialism would provide a 'way out'. Young men desired to escape through business the complex relations deemed to hold them back, yet these relations were the very means by which they could gain acceptance and status within these family-based economic networks.

These two networks were overlapping in various ways. Individuals such as Human Right moved between them as they switched to and from taxi driving to bike riding, and many bike riders were also integrated into neighborhood and family-based informal economic networks alongside the BRU. However, the two occupations, and the social networks into which they were embedded, were clearly understood as distinct on the ground. They represented contrasting models through which young men could gain professional status; each model had its own contradictions and tensions, even if individuals occupied them both simultaneously.

This chapter examines these two networks and their corresponding sets of ideals and performative repertoires, which are interrogated in the light of contradictions entailed by membership to both. In the case of *okada* riders, this contradiction lay in BRU's ambiguous relationships with the state. In the case of taxi drivers, it lay in the blurry boundaries between entrepreneurial aspirations and the expectations of family and neighbourhood membership. Both reveal a fundamental contradiction that young people face in attempting to progress in life in Freetown: their powerful desire to escape and resist a system 'stacked against them' had to be reconciled with their equally powerful desire to be accepted and work within this system. To push this paradox even further, my primary case studies reveal that resisting or escaping these structures involved working closely with and through them, and in the process, further embedding in, and reproducing, them.

In both cases, I suggest, these tensions can be understood as local responses to what might be labelled neoliberal political economy and development discourses. First, in the ways that neoliberal imperatives have reconfigured the relationship between informal associations and a stripped-down state, as well as affected the internal constitution of associations themselves, at the same time as state actors become increasingly reliant on these associations and 'corrupt' informal economic practises. And secondly, in the proliferation of development and capitalist discourses that promote business as a primary means for young people to achieve social mobility (Cross and Street 2009, Dolan & Johnstone-Louis 2011, Elyachar 2002).

In the course of this chapter we see what appears to be a more benign, and more socially integrated, version of the type of 'shadow state' identified in influential analyses of the African state (Bayart 1993, Bayart, Ellis & Hibou 2001, Reno 1995). The chapter reveals the ways that the tensions between 'formal' and 'informal' workings are felt and reconciled in many sectors of society, which might in other analyses all be considered to operate within the imperatives of the informal 'shadow state'. This tension, and the way that it maps onto modes of sociality, is key to making sense of local responses to the Ebola state of emergency – discussed primarily in chapter 7 – which represented at once a radical shift in the character of the state, at the same time as slotting into a familiar framework.

In addition, what emerges ethnographically is a dynamic picture of the 'marginalization' of youth in contemporary Africa, in which there are fuzzy and shifting boundaries between patrimonial and horizontal networks, between acts of resistance and complicity, and between understandings of the statuses and categories of 'youth' and 'adulthood'. Building on the insights of chapter 2, this chapter shows how it remains possible for young people, on a day-to-day level and in temporary ways, to achieve meaningful mobility through these social networks and in relation to these political and economic categories of status. Equally, the contradictory and performative aspects involved in these forms of work cannot be reduced by calling them self-defeating or confused. As was revealed after Human

Right's accident, it was representatives from these networks that assembled by his side when he was in greatest need. This, in turn, is revealing of established social responses to 'crisis' in Sierra Leone; which is revealing when interpreting responses to and tensions at play during the Ebola crisis, as will become evident in the second half of the thesis.

Sierra Leone Commercial Bike Riders Union

For the first few months of my fieldwork, I noticed a striking character riding around on a motorbike – sometimes driving and sometimes a passenger. He looked as if he had stepped out of an old photo of the American Black Panthers. He was dressed from head to toe in elaborate and immaculate outfits comprising military-style caps and hats, black shoes or boots so shiny you could see your reflection in them, black sunglasses, shiny buttons, an ID card holder around his neck, and a badge that read 'chief inspector of okadas'. He looked subversive, cool, and rebellious, while resembling at the same time a military official-cum-civil servant. I eventually got talking to this man and discovered that he was famous among the city's commercial bike riders (*okada*), and was popularly known as Councillor.

At the time, Councillor was campaigning for the upcoming biannual bike park elections. Bike parks were administrative units of the Sierra Leone Commercial Bike Riders Union, as well as physical locations where bike riders, known as *okada*, would meet. There were about thirty bike parks in Freetown, and Councillor was running to become chairman of one of the largest, known as Upgun, located by a major roundabout in the East End of Freetown, close to where Councillor lived. Councillor won by a landslide; during his campaign he had managed to register to the union a large number of bike riders from across town, enabling them to vote for him.

Councillor's arresting appearance – a mixture of the two extremes of conformity and non-conformity – was matched by his way of conducting his role as chairman of the bike park. Councillor carried around a briefcase, sandwiched between him and the handlebars of his bike as he wove through traffic, often whizzing onto

narrow pedestrian back-alleys to avoid traffic police and checkpoints. His briefcase held certificates, paperwork, pens, stamps, tape, tickets (sold daily to members to collect money), and shoe polish. He held impromptu meetings with members of his committee in roadside cafes and bars, where he would set up a make-shift office, carefully unpacking and placing the contents of his suitcase on a table or bench. Councillor's appeal to his supporters and colleagues appeared to be his blend of being 'one of them', a street-savvy former rebel turned bike rider, and an 'official' able to use his influence and charisma to bail them out of prison cells and their bikes out of police custody, or advocate for his bike park among stakeholders and at union meetings. Councillor was also criticised, however, when the balance seemed incorrect. He was sometime labelled 'too civilian' (i.e. not official enough), and therefore lacking influence, and at others criticised for forgetting his 'brothers' at the bike park as he advanced his personal development among officials.

Figure 5 Make-shift bike park office

Councillor's own self-contradictions embodied those faced by the BRU and its members in general. They faced a combination of explicit targeting and abuse at the hands of the state, and neglect. They responded both by gaining acceptance through partnerships and informal working arrangements with the state, and by aligning themselves to a country-wide, hierarchical yet youth-based organisation with collectivist tendencies that created spaces away from the state.

Motorbikes have been used as a means of rural transport in Sierra Leone for decades, but the growth of the commercial industry can be traced to the closing stages of the civil war, most notably the disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) programme that was enacted between 1999 and 2004 by the Government of Sierra Leone with support from the World Bank and a variety of NGOs. The programme, which reached 72,000 combatants, involved exchange of weapons for money, and skills-training in such areas as carpentry and engineering. By far the far the most popular profession to emerge from the programme, however, was informal commercial bike riding, as many ex-combatants invested their packages in motorbikes.

Initially the business operated primarily from towns in the north and east of the country, near to the border with Guinea, from which bikes were imported. In the first decade of the 21st century, it expanded rapidly to all major towns in the country, as primarily uneducated migrants travelled to urban centres in search of work. In 2005, commercial bike riding took off in Freetown, and has since expanded considerably. Initially major towns and urban districts were represented by their own associations; three formed in Freetown itself. In 2006, these were amalgamated to form a Freetown-wide association named 'One Brother' (kinship idioms were plentiful among such associations). In late 2007, after meetings in Makeni, the economic centre of the Northern District of the country, an interim national-level association was established in which bylaws and a constitution were drafted. In 2010, this became an officially recognised association.

Okadas are essential to the day-to-day functioning of the city of Freetown. The boom in population in recent decades has not only seen many young men seeking work, but also a considerable demand for urban transport. Given its infrastructural limitations in relation to its population size, motor-bike taxis are particularly effective in Freetown. They can weave through congested traffic and reach the increasingly populated mountainous off-the-grid areas of the Freetown peninsula. Yet, despite this, bike riding is widely perceived as undesirable. As my friend James

told Human Right after one of his accidents; 'Bike riding is not a real profession'. By this he meant that, given the risks involved, it was not a long-term career.

Today, the BRU is a nationwide hierarchical structure. At the top sits the president and an executive committee, who operate out of the central office, located in the building adjacent to the head office of the Department of Road Transport. Below this are four countrywide regional committees, which sit above district-level committees. Finally comes the bike park committees. Elections are typically held every two years. Alongside these structures sit the Bike Monitoring Officers, nicknamed 'taskforce', the BRU's militant wing. The taskforce became a more visible presence during my fieldwork; they were issued with blue uniforms. They were responsible both for disciplining bike riders from within, and, as representatives of the BRU, for providing a direct interface with traffic police. This was manifested in groups of traffic police and BMOs gathering at the corners of junctions, marking the boundaries of where bikes could legally operate. This made them seem like national border guards with two equivalent sets of authorities.

The BRU secured funding in four major ways. First, there was annual registration, amounting to 50,000 Le per year, after which riders were issued with an ID card that allowed them to vote in elections. Second, daily payments of 1000 Le were taken from riders in a ticketed system at the bike parks, which, as well as being administrative units of the BRU, were also physical spaces where riders parked and congregated between shifts. A proportion of these tickets filtered up to the three higher levels of the union. A third means of raising money was through internal fines, issued by the Bike Monitoring Officers, for misdemeanours such as failure to wear appropriate clothing or safety gear. Finally, there was external funding from 'stakeholders' such as political sponsors. This was particularly remunerative when politicians needed support around elections (Enria 2015). It also came from NGOs looking to invest in youth-development initiatives or to recruit riders for their own projects. The latter happened on a large scale during the Ebola outbreak, when many riders were recruited in the formal Ebola response, for example to join burial teams.

The relationship between the BRU and the state has fluctuated and been transformed throughout the association's history. The violent insurgency of young rebels, many of whom turned to bike riding, represents one extreme on the spectrum. At the other extreme is the active promotion of bike riding as a valuable form of youth employment that took place under the administration of former president Tejan Kabbah. The Traffic Regulation Act, signed in 2007, included sections on safety standards for bikes, and initiated the option to formally license bikes as commercial vehicles, with distinctive number plates. A few years later the BRU became an officially recognized organization. As the relationship with the state deteriorated, however, measures of recognition such as licensing and regulation came to serve as means of targeting bike riders.

During my fieldwork, the state operation to clear bike riders from the downtown area, effectively severing bike riders the East from the Western parts of Freetown, used increasingly stringent measures, such as the deployment of military police, armed with large batons,[5] at major junctions. The fines and bribes that police routinely imposed on riders – either to avoid arrest or to facilitate the release of a rider or a bike – had increased about ten-fold in the past few years. More senior officials in the police department and legal system expected a certain number of drivers' cases to reach their 'level' (i.e. to be taken to the station, and the court, rather than settled at the roadside), which would in practice require greater payments to reach informal settlements or formal bail charges. Given that many were unable to pay the escalating costs at each level, reaching roughly $100 for bail at the court level, the result was that the city's police cells, courtrooms, and prison were full of bike riders who had committed, at the most, minor offences.

Bike park executives were expected to use their influence and connections with police and other officials to negotiate on behalf of their members Councillor visited police stations most days to negotiate the release of bike riders, in the process of which he developed close relationships with several officers. Through these

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[5] After the Ebola 'state of emergency' was lifted, the former head of the National Ebola Response Center was appointed as the lead figure on this operation. This gives an indication of the scale of this operation as a government agenda.

connections, bike park executives would get tip-offs in advance of police raids, allowing riders who did not hold drivers' licenses or owned unlicensed bikes, to leave the scene. Bike parks would also hold official partnership meetings with police representatives and political stakeholders, which demonstrated that working together was an official part of the agenda of both groups.

Such relationships were not restricted to the executive level. It was common for bike riders to develop informal relationships with police officers, who offered them protection at police stations, or let them pass checkpoints unobstructed. In some cases, this was based on prior connections, often through neighbourhood or family networks. In other cases, it was fostered through special payments, referred to as *bora* and *ajo*, names that refer to respectful gifts and fines traditionally made to elders.

Some riders chose to evade the police altogether, which required taking back roads and alleys to avoid traffic police, or pretending not to be an *okada* at all, by registering bikes as 'private' rather than 'commercial' (they have different coloured license plates), or by dressing like commuters or (especially after the Ebola outbreak) medical workers to avoid police harassment.

Tensions between bike riders and authorities has been foregrounded in earlier studies of bike riding in Sierra Leone. Peters (2007) discusses how solidarities that formed between ex-combatants, mostly from rural areas but now living in towns, provided the infrastructure for the motorbike driving associations under which many drivers operate. According to Peters, associations 'fight a war' for their members, no longer through armed conflict as during the civil war, but through the means of trade unionism, aiming to protect drivers from corrupt police and traffic authorities, and from exploitation by bike owners (Peters 2007:19). Menzel (2010) developed this analysis to consider the 'double-edged qualities' of motorbike taxi driving, whereby the potential for individuals to create livelihoods, and collectives to support their ambitions, is threatened by public stigmatisation of drivers for being dangerous, as well as by the potential for political 'big men' to recruit drivers for violent campaigning, reinforcing ex-combatant statuses and involving risks.

This analysis is echoed by Burge (2011), who elaborates on the discursive means by *okada* riders are socially 'contained' and their marginality perpetuated.

These studies emphasize specific connections between bike riders and former rebels, which can be seen as explaining their continued stigmatization. The data I collected on the BRU and bike riders and Freetown in 2013-15, however, suggests another way of thinking about the positionalities of bike riders and the BRU. It indicates that their relationship with the state was defined not only by marginalization and stigmatization, which generated in turn feelings of bitterness and the desire to resist and fight back, but also by a powerful desire to be accepted by the state, to form partnerships with it, and to replicate it in strikingly performative ways. For its part, the state, in legal and illegal ways, demonstrated a reliance on bike riders and their income.

Fluctuating and often tense relationships between the state and informal transport has been identified in studies of the subject in a variety of contexts. This suggest that the phenomenon is inherent in informal transport, beyond its specific history in Sierra Leone. In Uganda, bike riding represents a model of development that stands in stark opposition to the dominant, yet unobtainable, modernist visions and aesthetics favoured by city-planners (Rollinson 2013). This suggests that the visibility of informal transport, and its reliance on state infrastructure, makes it particularly challenging to the state. The tense relationship between informal transport and the state could also be connected to the extent that many cities depend on informal transport for proper functioning. In Bangkok, motorcycle taxi drivers' mastery of the streets enables them to cause blockages as much as enable circulation this was apparent in their position as key actors in major civic protests (Sopranzetti 2014).

The complex relationship between bike riders and the state might also be connected to the effects of neoliberal structural adjustment and marketization, which have elicited similarly contradictory responses in relation to informal associations in many different contexts. Meagher's (2010) research in Nigeria demonstrates that intense liberalization and formal institutional neglect since the

1980s eroded institutionalized practices and relations of trust within enterprise networks. These became in turn increasingly unstable and exploitative, shifting towards weaker ties and more individuated networks, often formed along exclusionary lines of identity. A major factor in this downward turn is the failure of associations to forge productive relations with local and state governments, which have themselves been weakened and deconstructed over the past few decades. As Hart and Hann point out, 'Under a neoliberal imperative to reduce the state's grip on "the free market", manifested in developing countries as "structural adjustment", national economies and the world economy itself were radically informalized' (Hart and Hann 2011:151).

Yet in other contexts, however, neoliberal conditions have not necessarily weakened informal associations; rather the opposite trends have been observed. In South Africa, liberalization of the markets was seen to encourage increasing formality – according to customary and novel models – in informal economic associations, protecting members from the dangers of the spread of capitalisms, and at the same time allowing participation in it (James 2015, Krige 2014). In addition, neoliberal development agendas globally often encouraged the forging of 'public-private' partnerships (Elayachar 2002), or have indirectly relied upon, and thus even promoted, informal economies (Cross 2010). Studies have highlighted how individuals in different strata of society were inserted into roles of creative 'brokerage', in which conflicting ideals and organizational logics are blended and blurred, often through charismatic performance (Bear 2011, Pratten 2008, James 2011).

Such opposing trends in neoliberal political economy – informalization yet also elements of associational formalization, an impetus for associations to form partnerships with the state as well as severing of such relationships, as well as the re-emergence of forms of brokerage - are pertinent in the case of the BRU. The BRU's fluctuating relationship with the state is not just a product of historical shifts between modalities, however; these modalities currently co-exist. This became clear to me in an interview I conducted with Ibrahim Tula, the secretary general of the Western Region of the BRU:

In the current phase of this bike riding operation, harassment has become a usual practice of the Sierra Leone police. Whenever there is the law and those who break the law, there will always be a conflict. The police from their point of view say that they are managing the transport area. On several occasions we have met with the police, sometimes we have them as stakeholders, so they will be able to tell our membership how to comply with the law, because we are greatly disadvantaged by the government. We license our bikes, now they threaten us to insure them [to pay additional sums].

But what do we expect from the government? For them to maintain the roads, that is one. Two, for them to organise skills training for riders, because that is part of social cooperation between the government and the bike riders union. We do not have adequate training. We have found out that most of the things that the police pounce on us for is a result of ignorance. And the system of getting them [licenses] from government department is very poor. Even if you don't know how to ride you can get a license if you pay for it, so because of that you cannot read road traffic signs. And because of that police will just implement the law, but they forget to correct their mistakes, as a government, they just implement the law, so most of the time the boys can fall, and when the boys fall, there will always be conflict, there will always be threat, there will always be discouragement.

Therefore, we as stakeholders can step in, and when we step in it can be noted to them, but they need the follow up on their part. This is always the tension between us and the police. And again, there are times we can go and say 'let's sit at a round table and discuss', and we can all agree, but when it comes to implementation they go beyond the mandate that we give them. And when perhaps we ask questions, they say we are just a union. That is the tension.

But honestly our boys have negative parts, because we are youths, we as a union have challenges, the youth organisation that you have formed, most of the youths came from various backgrounds, regions, societies, communities, so in order to get them how you want them is different from when you have given birth to a child and you want to train them, and they are all youths, all able youths. It is difficult to control, right? Sometimes we do our own moral sensitisation, we can call everyone into a meeting so when they meet the riders we can tell them that this is the system.

So, the issue of police and bike riding, the relationship is not stable. It is a fluctuating system, it can go on and off, it fluctuates. So we still have to do more, the government needs to do more to challenge the law enforcing department. That is what I have to say about us and the police. But we as youth, we have serious problems. Someone can go buy a bike and not have a license, and you the rider want a livelihood. So you will take that risk, and when you take that risk, you will go on the street, and the police apprehend

you, you feel bad, you feel offended, although you have done everything, but just because the police stop and don't want to let you free they will extort from you, unless you give them something [money]. So those conflicts arise. We have our own negative part, they have their own negative part, but their negative part is worse than ours.'

Ibrahim's account is analytical and level-headed as an assessment of the relationship between the bike riders, the BRU, and the state. In this statement, he reflects on core contradictions that make their relationship so ambiguous and multi-faceted. The state, in his analysis, embodies the contradiction of both attempting to 'develop' the city through clearing out and regulating reckless bike riders, yet at the same time does not, or cannot, to provide viable alternatives in the form of an effective urban transport system. It is this failure that keeps the bike riders in business. Furthermore, the police, who are under-resourced, are strongly incentivized to supplement or source their income from payments from bike riders. If bike riding was not deemed dangerous and illegal, and thus subject to (often unobtainable) road safety standards and restrictions on areas of operation, the police would have less scope for demanding money from them. Perhaps Ibrahim was correct when he said that this is why the state resists providing training for bike riders, many of whom are recent young migrants to the city and in genuine need of it. It thus falls to the BRU to train its members, but all too often their attempts are unrecognised and undermined by the state.

This complex mutual reliance and antagonism between bike riders and the state corresponds with some patterns identified in the above literature on the effects of neoliberal reform. While the regulatory capacity of both formal and informal sectors becomes eroded and tense, strong mutual dependencies form between them. The police become reliant on bike riders for their income, and riders and the BRU become reliant on often-informal partnerships with the police and the state to continue their programme of resistance.

This mutual reliance manifests itself in a degree of equivalence between the BRU and the state, evident especially in the BRU's remarkably state-like structure and performative repertoires. At one level, these seemed to compensate for the feelings of neglect and alienation that many bike riders experience in relation to the state;

they provided a substitute. Many bike riders I met did not have national ID cards, and thus could not vote in national elections, but they did have BRU ID cards and voted in their internal elections with great vigour and enthusiasm. The BRU had welfare programmes that included funding and support around accidents, such as hospital bills and funeral costs. For many riders, welfare support from the state was unimaginable, while that from BRU was concrete and easily attained.

At the same time, the BRU took on disciplinarian aspects of state governance. Some bike park offices had demographic information about their members pasted on the wall: ages, region of origin, contact details, and head-shots. Overtly displayed, this resembled a state-like form of governmentality of monitoring and data collection. The BRU's disciplinary tendencies were exemplified most vividly by its Bike Monitoring Officers, who, did not simply resist state violence on behalf of their members, but actively reproduced it. The BMOs were an increasingly visible presence throughout the course of my fieldwork, particularly those attached to the Upgun bike park run by Councillor. One of Councillor's first initiatives after winning the election was to buy the BMOs new blue uniforms that looked strikingly like police uniforms. The BMOs often apprehended riders who were not wearing appropriate clothing or safety gear, confiscating their bikes until fines were paid. The union's hierarchical structure mirrored the state legal system, in which unresolved matters were taken up to a higher level. Instead of being escalated from the police station to the court, unresolved issues in the BRU were escalated from the bike park to the central office, where, as in the formal legal system, fines would typically increase and hearings become more formalised.

Two main justifications for the BMOs were offered to me by BRU members and officials alike. First, that they were preferable to the police; by disciplining riders less severely and punitively than the state, the BMO helped them to avoid the state's harsher penalties. Second, as revealed by Ibrahim's statement (above), the BRU shared the popular notion that many of their bike riders are uneducated, wild, young, country folk, in genuine need of training and discipline. While others have noted disciplinary and marginalizing discourses emerging from the side of state (Burge 2011, Menzel 2011, Peters 2007), it is significant that the BRU itself plays

an active role in reproducing these discourses, even as it appears to resent and resist them.

Taxi driving and 'entrepreneurialism'

Taxi driving in Freetown was organized around a strikingly different set of ideals, social networks, and performative registers from that of bike riding, yet it too contained contradictory elements. Rather than presenting themselves in state-like guises, taxi drivers identified with 'entrepreneurialism', often styling themselves as hustlers and businessmen. Very few, if any, of the many taxi drivers that I met during my fieldwork were members of any driving association or union. Their markers of status were not overtly aligned to membership of a collective, but aligned rather to values of capitalist individualism. Human Right's very name signifies the values of individual rights. Like many other taxi drivers, Human Right aspired to be not a 'councillor', but a 'boss'.

Drivers routinely blasted American rap and Jamaican dancehall music from their taxis, which were often equipped with large sound-systems with heavy bass speakers in the boot. In these songs, artists narrated rags to riches narratives, sparing no detail of the extravagant life-style that being a boss affords. Taxis themselves were often kitted out with flashy decorative features, seemingly inspired to new heights by the 'pimped up' vehicles in hip-hop music videos: flashy rims, shiny paintjobs and stickers. In Sierra Leone, taxis typically have slogans on the back, often a religious phrase, or an aspirational phrase such as 'No condition is permanent', 'Freekick *na* goal' (free-kick is a goal), 'Beyond expectation', or 'Honest labour'. When drivers like Human Right were at work, it seemed that they were indulging at times in the fantasy of romanticized masculine freedom that came with fast-living and fast-money on the road, and of being 'self-made'.

Figure 6 A poda-poda and a taxi (with Human Right and his father)

Human Right aspired to build a fleet of taxis; this would allow him, in his words, to 'become somebody' and reach 'the next level'. In our conversations, he would sometimes map out to me timelines of when this could happen – when, based on his daily earnings, he would have accumulated enough from one car to buy the next. These aspirations and idealized timelines were, however, sadly disconnected from the reality in which Human Right operated. In a strictly economic sense, they did not usually allow for additional costs such as the maintenance that old vehicles require, and fluctuations in the cost of fuel. They also assumed that money could be safely stored away until an accumulation was complete, but this never seemed possible or even desirable; he had to live.

In another way, entrepreneurial and individualistic aspirations were at odds with the messy and complex neighborhood and kinship based networks in which Human Right and his fellow taxi drivers lived, and around which their work was structured. Human Right was embedded in two such networks, located in two distinct areas of town. The first was the neighborhood in the East End of Freetown where his nuclear and several extended family members lived. The second was Congo Town area, in the west, where I had come to know him. He did not have family in Congo Town, but was a familiar face around the neighborhood, having

worked for local taxi owners in the area; buying a taxi was a popular informal investment in Freetown, and several were located there.

East End

In relation to his family in the East end, Human Right was both committed and resentful. He held a particularly strong grudge against his father, who was indirectly responsible for his having taken up driving in the first place. Before the war, his father had a good job working for an international shipping company at the Freetown docks. According to Human Right's narrative, however, instead of prioritizing his family, he had lived an indulgent lifestyle. When Human Right was young he remembers his father's reluctance to contribute 'chop money' (daily household food expenses), let alone save money for his children. As Human Right would phrase it, 'I was not given any foundation'. After the war, Human Right, aged 14, stopped attending school – his parents were unable to afford the expenses – and had taken to the streets to work as an apprentice in a *poda poda* (minibus), a common way of entering the transport business.

Human Right often talked about a deep vein of misfortune that ran through his family. (This came to mind when I interviewed his father. He, like Human Right, considered himself to have been let down in his turn by the uncle who had brought him to Freetown and supported him for a time, yet ultimately denied him an inheritance. Human Right's father attributed this to the fact that he had not been initiated into the 'secret society' in their home village.) Human Right was critical of the way his father was raising his sisters. His older sister had given birth out of wedlock, and his father refused to continue seeing her. He equally resented the way that his younger sister was not being properly disciplined; she was being put through school, but had started seeing boys. Human Right was concerned that she should not become pregnant like her sister, and blow the opportunity she was getting, which was not much better than his own. After witnessing some arguments on this matter, it seemed to me that Human Right was frustrated that he was not taken more seriously in the family decision-making process.

Despite these tensions, Human Right remained committed to his mother, father, and sisters. He attended church religiously every Sunday – he was a committed and passionate Christian – after which he spent the day with them. When he was working, he would make every effort to visit his family, often making contributing to household expenses. When I first met his family, they were staying in a slum-like area in a very dilapidated shelter. However, after falling out with their landlord, who felt aggrieved when they stopped offering him portions of their daily cooking, they moved to a house very high up on a mountainside in a newly settled area that was much cheaper and cleaner. Human Right's mother was disabled and struggled to get up and down; so Human Right frequently took long diversions from his working day, when he had a car available, to assist her. The car often incurred minor damage from the rocky road.

Human Right's multi-faceted relationship with his family was bound up with his own working and business arrangements as a taxi driver. Family networks had proved his best bet for accessing seed money for his business plans. He had borrowed money from a rotating credit association that his mother ran, in which the other participants were primarily church-going ladies. He had an uncle in Freetown who had invested with him in a motorbike. Finally, as already mentioned in the prologue, he had a relatively established uncle who lived in Canada, who had provided some financial assistance in the past. Human Right for many years had been expecting him to send money to his family, which he hoped they would invest in a new *poda poda* that he would operate on their behalf.

These relationships were also a source of tension within the family. Human Right had remained in debt to his mother for the money he had borrowed, which strained her relationship with her church-going friends. He felt that his uncle in Freetown had not contributed appropriately to their joint business ventures, in which he felt that his own expertise as a driver (his uncle was primarily a baker) was not taken seriously enough. While his uncle in Canada was a constant source of hope for the future, it sometimes seemed as though this was a 'castle in the sky', unlikely ever to materialize.

The events surrounding Human Right's series of accidents illustrated the complex entanglement of business and family relations, and the affective ambiguities and tensions that emerged from it. In the months leading up to the accident, Human Right had returned to bike riding after many years of taxi driving, and was staying with family back in the East End. Shortly before his most severe accident, which I described in the introduction to this chapter, he had returned to Congo Town, where he had been staying on and off for many years. We spent part of the day together at this new residence, during which I received a call from his mother who wanted to check that he was okay. Human Right explained to me that she had a dream recently, in which a large group of boys had come to their house asking for her husband and for Human Right. She had been able to fend them off, but she was concerned that they would find him elsewhere. The dream was alarming on several levels, not least the ways that it echoed events of the civil war, during which Human Right and his family had fled and hid from the RUF as they entered Freetown. On another level, it speaks to Human Right's mother's concern for her son's wellbeing, and her conflicted part in it; he was riding a beat-up motorcycle, attempting to raise money as soon as possible to pay back his debt to her. The money she had lent him was a gesture of support and love, but at the same time it placed him in potentially fatal danger on the streets. After the terrifying episode she had predicted in her dream had transpired in the form of the accident, she was there by his side at the pharmacy arranging his medical treatment, pleading to the pharmacist that he should dress the wound, despite the fact that they did not having the full payment required at hand.

Human Right's desire to fulfill his entrepreneurial ambition of building up a transport business and becoming a boss involved both strained and volatile working relationships with members of his family. It also involved taking the risks so often fetishized in capitalist ideology: in this case, they were of the life-threatening kind. Taxis and motor-bikes circulated at a fast pace among drivers and owners. Human Right had initially bought a taxi, but it required so much maintenance that it had set him back. He eventually sold this taxi and bought two motorbikes, both in bad condition in themselves, only one of which was

operational. Becoming an owner and 'boss' entailed getting deeper into debt to his family, and placing himself in greater personal danger.

Congo Town

The other major avenue through which Human Right had found work was through a series of relationships he had forged on the other side of town from his original family home in the East End; the Congo Town neighbourhood to which he had just recently relocated. According to my calculation, Human Right had worked for at least six taxi operators in the neighborhood. In addition, he had developed working relationships with many other young taxi drivers, who would often informally distribute work amongst themselves, unbeknownst to their employers. Typically taxi drivers were employed on a day-to-day basis. After coming to pick up the car, they would be expected to provide 50,000 Le (about $10) 'master money' per day, as well as to cover their fuel allowance (although this was often negotiable). Any extra they would keep for themselves. Taxis would typically circulate the city on routes between major junctions, a trip between each of which would yield a 1000 Le payment by the passenger. Most taxis would load 4 passengers at once. In some instances, cars would be chartered for personal journeys, as with most taxis in the UK, but in most cases they functioned more like mini-bus taxis elsewhere in the continent. This generally created conditions in which taxi drivers were incentivized to drive quickly to maximize personal profit – the more often they circulated, the more quickly they made money. The alternative was to drive on worse roads, where shorter distances and less traffic typically earned drivers more money in less time. The major downside to this was that the car was subject to more wear and tear. The informal working agreements between owners and drivers often stipulated that small repairs were the responsibility of the drivers, while the owners covered larger ones.

Owners often attempted to strike agreements that would incentivize drivers not to drive at the expense of the vehicle. These informal agreements are familiar in informal economic economies, where there is no 'legal contract' to formalize the partners' shared interests (Hart 2000). One way was to get a 'guarantor', often a

senior or established figure in the community whose authority both parties respected, who could vouch to the owner on behalf of the driver and vice versa. Another approach was a 'clause' indicating that the driver could gain something if he worked satisfactorily. For example, Human Right struck an arrangement with Foday, whose taxi he drove, that once he had paid Foday a certain amount, he would be given the car. At the time, Foday was renting a small 'pan body' (room made from of iron), while he was getting ready to move to a slightly larger place. Foday had promised Human Right that he could take over the room when Foday left.

However, neither of these expectations panned out, and the driving arrangement broke off – a familiar situation for Human Right. Foday claimed to be unhappy with how Human Right had been treating the car, and wanted to hold him responsible for a malfunction in one of the windows. Human Right was not willing to pay, and Foday took that matter to the police, through a personal connection at the police station. Human Right ended up spending a night in a cell. From Human Right's point of view, the window episode was blown out of proportion as an excuse for Foday to terminate their arrangement in such a way that he would not have to fulfill Human Right's reasonable earlier expectations. This was especially distressing for Human Right because he had been dipping into his profits by treating Foday's car with particular care, and by ensuring he provided the 'master money' in full every day, regardless of how the day's work had gone.

Needless to say, drivers had their own ways of 'taking advantage' of their employers. This often occurred through arrangements made illicitly and unbeknownst to the taxi owners. For example, taxi drivers routinely recruit fellow taxi drivers, mainly friends from the neighborhood, to take over the operation of the car – effectively inserting themselves as intermediary bosses. These 'second' or in some cases 'third' drivers would be expected to provide a larger 'master money' rate. This was sometimes achieved by creating an additional shift in the day, undertaken by a different driver. Sometimes drivers would take several cars in a single day, and find other drivers to drive them simultaneously. The result was that drivers had the potential to make more money than the taxi owners

themselves, as well as to effectively become 'bosses' ('owners' of the means of production), even if they were in reality gatekeepers who did not legally own the taxis they were 'managing'.

For Human Right, the Congo Town neighbourhood was more than a working environment; he simultaneously built close relationships on the side – even if these emerged in the first instance from 'work' – and became socially integrated. He formed a particularly close relationship with Balloon Burst, who became known as his 'apprentice'. Balloon Burst had been Human Right's side-man when he operated a *poda poda* in the neighborhood. As apprentice, he was responsible for collecting fares from customers and organizing seating. As was often expected in these relationships, Human Right was giving Balloon Burst driving lessons that would take place when they had a few moments between shifts on a quiet road. The two were very close friends and 'brothers': Human Right became a familiar face in Balloon Burst's family compound, where he would often eat meals. Balloon Burst lived in a small 'pan body' near to the family compound, and Human Right would often stay there for extended periods of time, giving it the quality of 'home' for him. This arrangement gave their relationship a degree of ambiguity; Human Right's 'seniority' over Balloon Burst at work was challenged by Balloon Burst's seniority in the domestic sphere as Human Right's host in the area.

Like Human Right's relationships with his nuclear family and the East End, his relationships in his other primary network, Congo Town, had their own complexities. They represented a valuable means of support and livelihood, not to mention as residence, but they were also a source of volatility, conflict, and exploitation, often centered around unfulfilled expectations. As a consequence, these relationships took on a fairly unstable form, falling prey to bitter fallings out that strained and even severed them. From the perspective of poor young men like Human Right, taxi driving was a frustrating enterprise through which entrepreneurial aspirations and dreams remained unfilled. At the same time, though, the volatility inherent in social relations lent itself to a form of rapid and genuine social mobility.

The complex economic arrangements and divisions of labour blurred Marxian–style boundaries between the 'workers' and the 'owners', predicated on command over the means of production. Human Right, and other drivers like him, could become the 'boss' for that period of the day when they were in possession of the vehicle. Since they were able to accumulate 'fast money', they could also spend like a boss; Human Right often splurged quite indiscriminately. They could – illicitly – employ other drivers to work 'for them', while the car was in their hands, which made them a 'boss' in another way. They could also use the vehicle for their own purposes, as Human Right often did when he performed errands for his family. In other instances, the relationship between the owner and the worker was complicated by the fact that, in terms of driving, the owner might be the driver's 'junior'. This was the case with Foday and his brother Alhassan, both of whom owned vehicles that Human Right had driven, yet both of whom Human Right had helped teach to drive and brought into the driving work.

The relationship between drivers and owners was also rendered fluid by the pace at which vehicles circulated between them. Established owners often aimed to sell on their vehicles to drivers with limited means; these cars were often in poor condition and required major repairs. The result of this was that drivers like Human Right would become car owners for short periods, sometimes at the same time as driving for other owners to raise funds to repair their 'new' cars. All this helped align taxi drivers, albeit in a certain mediated fashion, with the models of entrepreneurialism with which they identified. Taxi driving offered the kind of mobility associated with capitalism, not quite in the 'individualised' way identified with entrepreneurialism, but rather in relation to others. Through taxi driving Human Right could 'become somebody', which he often expressed to be his primary aspiration in life. In this case, he could become, for limited periods, a 'boss', even if at the end of the day he would transform back into to a 'poor boy'. Staying with Balloon Burst and working for several taxi owners and drivers in the area enabled him to earn a basic livelihood and become a member of the Congo Town community. He was also able to support his family through contributions to daily expenses and the use of his driving skills, giving him some degree of mobility within his family.

However, these markers of mobility were fragile, and threatened to cement his junior status through his continuing dependence on others. This reflects, I think, a fundamental tension. On the one hand there was Human Right's entrepreneurial aspirations to rise above and escape from social relationships in the neighborhood and his family in which he was marginal or junior, and on the other there was a social reality in which these networks were the only means available him to do so. Without them, he could not gain access to capital or a means of production. Attempts to build a business required working and further entangling himself in the very set of social relations from which he was trying to escape. Human Right himself expressed this very clearly: 'there is family in the good way and family in the bad way'. The family in the 'bad way' was manifested a history of bad luck and circumstances, of jealous elders holding back those below them, as was the case with his father and his uncle. 'Good' family was a source of hope and opportunity, which Human Right associated with his mother, who thought 'positively about his future'. Despite his entrepreneurial stylings, his bonds with his family were significant, and it was in this domain that he wished to be respected. He wanted to do his family proud, even when he felt skeptical about whether they deserved it, and it was his family that came to his side after his accident, when he was most in need.

As with the complex relationship between the BRU and the state, these tensions too should be viewed in the context of the spread of capitalism promoted by the forces of globalization, and in that of contemporary development discourse as enacted in Sierra Leone. A key tenet of 'neoliberal development discourse' is that capitalism and market solutions are a vehicle out of poverty (Dolan & Johnstone-Louis 2011, Elyachar 2002, Rapley 1999). Entrepreneurialism had thus been promoted in the global south in a form that, as anthropologists have noted, can in some cases strain and sever social relations (Meagher 2010) and in others advance existing social projects, albeit in ways that run risks and accumulate debt (James 2014). Taxi driving in Sierra Leone exemplifies the ways in which business enterprises become entangled in social structures, particularly the family, neighborhood, and associational networks.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analyzed two networks into which young men working in informal transport in the city were integrated, corresponding to two models through which they sought to achieve upward mobility professionally. The first was the motor-bike taxi driving union, which was structured according to a hierarchical, institutional, state-like, model. The second was taxi driving businesses, which were aligned, in principle, to ideals of entrepreneurial enterprise. The chapter showed how both networks, and the ideals according to which they were structured, faced contradictory social realities that lent ambiguous qualities to the actions of participants. In the case of the BRU, officials and members resisted oppression from the state, while seeking state acceptance. Consequently, the BRU took on elements of the state, including disciplinary modes of governance, and overt performances of state-like authority, at the same time that riders and officials operated according to collectivist and rebellious tendencies that can be traced to the BRU's roots in the RUF. In the case of taxi driving businesses, drivers had to reconcile desires for 'self-making' and individual mobility according to a capitalist framework with a social reality in which businesses were embedded into neighborhood and family networks that rendered these ambitions unreachable in their idealized forms.

The chapter has revealed some of the parallels between the character of each network and the position of youth in them. On one level, both networks in practice are overlapping, as demonstrated by Human Right who moved between them. It was after a time of 'crisis' – a traffic accident – that each network converged to fulfill the duties of support and 'coming close' that gave the BRU a familial character. This familial character of the BRU extended beyond this. It was apparent in the use of kinship idioms, such as 'brotherhood', as well as expectations of patronage and support that young riders expected of their elders, as well as conversely payments from drivers to the union, which were sometimes labeled *bora*, the term traditionally given to respectful gifts given by youth to elders. Equally, the disciplinary qualities of the union, in particular the introduction of the Bike Monitoring Officers – who gave recognition to the fact that

many riders were young and undisciplined – certainly echoes parental roles. The result, however, was a mutual reliance, in both cases, between individuals and groups that equally were antagonistic.

With reference to studies beyond Sierra Leone, I have suggested that these models, and the contradictions they embody, can be connected to the place of informal transport and informal associations in neoliberal Africa, which I suggest is missing in existing analyses of Sierra Leone that have tended to situate the profession purely in the post-war peace-building context. In other settings in the 'global South', the forces of neoliberalism both weakened relationships with and increased reliance upon the state. They have resulted in internal structures that were at once weaker more formalized. The BRU, with its fluctuating relationship with the state and organizational structure, represents all of these dynamics simultaneously, resembling the kind of performative brokerage that neoliberal conditions have been seen to encourage in a range of settings. Entrepreneurial stylings can also be understood with reference to the proliferation of contemporary development discourses that are pervasive in Sierra Leonean political discourse and in NGO-speak, which has seeped into all strata of society. They also reflect the influence of popular culture, particularly urban music from across the Atlantic. Yet these ideals correspond with a reality in which it is impossible to build businesses without family and neighborhood networks that are the most reliable sources of investment capital.

These contradictions do not trap young men in conditions of stasis, as might be expected. Rather, the networks and models I have described above enable meaningful progression and mobility, as well support and a sense of belonging and community. Drivers have the opportunity to become bosses, and thus achieve further integration into family and community networks, just as union members become part of a state-like structure in which they are accepted. The affective and performative elements of taxi driving and the BRU are not, I think, as misguided or fantastical as they might seem, but efficacious and meaningful. Even if their ideals remain unfulfilled, they allow drivers to gain a meaningful professional status and

a recognized position in social in terms that are not merely dictated from without but also forged from within.

This chapter thus builds on the insights of the previous chapter through its presentation of social mobility predicated on negotiations between contradictory sets of social expectations and aspirations. It also presents a version of status negotiation for young men that does not centrally rely on life-course ritual, but on other more everyday modes, even if the family remains central; as in the case of taxi drivers such as Human Right, and in the familial idioms of relatedness employed by bike riders that evoke horizontal and vertical type relations. In the next chapter I turn to another arena of economic life for young men: consumption. This builds on this chapter through continuing the examination of the ways that performative assertions of status intersect with economic-based identities and negotiations of dependency and independence around the family and neighborhood.

Chapter 4. 'I'm a young man, I like to bluff': consumption, ambiguous exchange, and the performance of status

In November 2013, the second month of my fieldwork, I was invited by Alhassan to accompany him on a trip to a garage on the other side of town, where he was going to have some work done on his taxi. Alhassan is one of my closest contacts in Sierra Leone; I spent a great deal of time with him during the course of my fieldwork. Alhassan's family compound was close to where I stayed in Congo Town, and for the first 9 months I lived with his brother Foday, with whom Alhassan shared a father. The purpose of Alhassan's trip to the garage was primarily cosmetic; to smooth over some scratches and dents on the side of the car, and apply fresh blue and yellow paint, the markings which indicate that his Nissan Sunny was a working taxi. Alhassan conveyed a sense of urgency about getting the work done, leaving me little time to get ready after his early wake up call. The day before, he had received $250 from an American for whom he had worked in Freetown. Although the American had returned to the United States, he remained a patron figure for Alhassan. Alhassan had requested the money as a matter of urgency to fix his broken car, the primary source of his livelihood, despite the fact that – in my eyes at least – the car was operational. We arrived at the dusty garage in the morning and stayed until after dark. Wedged between the road and the back of a petrol station, the garage was divided into sections assigned to specialists such as mechanics, sprayers, and fitters, who operated with some degree of independence. The arrangement appeared chaotic at first glance: abandoned cars, apparently beyond repair, were littered around; the ground was muddy and wet with oil; and boys were running around, who, I later discovered, were responsible for collecting litter. Attempting to make sense of the place, I wondered whether the chain of command could be discerned according to appearances, particularly the degrees of dirtiness. The *bor bor* (young/low status boys) picking up litter were clearly at the bottom of the pyramid. They were noticeably thinner than most of the others at the garage, and certainly dirtier. Above them were the specialists, who seemed in most cases to be older. The sprayer with whom Alhassan worked was wearing white clothes that were astonishingly clean, given the environment in which he worked. The drivers and

vehicle owners too were mostly young men of similar ages; they were noticeably the cleanest. My tentative theory was disproved, however, when Alhassan pointed out the manager of the garage, who was directing the *bor bor*. He was an older man wearing old and dirty clothes.

Alhassan closely oversaw the application of putty to flatten out some of the scratches and dents, and then the spraying and painting; he also participated in cleaning the car, which took several hours. In addition, he bought, seemingly spontaneously, several decorative accessories for the car that some men operating around the garage were selling and installing. These included chrome-looking hubcaps (made of plastic), metallic stickers for the front and back windows, and mats and seat covers. Alhassan commented that the car looked 'new again'. At the point of payment, after the items had been inserted, although a fixed price had not yet agreed on, Alhassan revealed that he did not have enough money left, and asked me to lend him some. I gave him the additional money uneasily, in part because these extra items, and the paint job to some extent, appeared to me to be far from 'necessary' purchases. This prioritisation of seemingly superficial work became still more puzzling to me during the subsequent weeks, when Alhassan was barely able to operate the taxi because he did not have money for fuel.

This provided a springboard for numerous discussions on the topic, during which various answers emerged to explain why Alhassan had spent this money at the garage. The primary reason was that 'the money [or at least part of it] was there'. Obtaining this quantity of cash was rare, and holding onto it was equally challenging. There was a risk that the money could just 'disappear' through everyday expenses such as paying back debts, satisfying requests/claims from family and friends, and forms of personal enjoyment such as food and sex. Spending money on the car, by contrast, was visible, concrete, and to some extent enduring. The visibility of the work – unlike structural repairs on the car, for example - was key. The car immediately caught the eye of Alhassan's neighbours, family, and friends, particularly those with whom he hung out every day on the local 'long bench' (hang out spot), and where he often parked his car when in the neighbourhood.

A further explanation offered by Alhassan was that decorations are 'attractive to the customer; when they see them they want to take the car, that is why we buy them'. This did not correspond with my experience, which is that pretty much anyone would get in any taxi going in the right direction with a spare seat. It seemed much more important that the car was attractive to his friends than that it appealed to unknown customers. In addition, Alhassan had offered to teach me to drive a few weeks earlier, which I was keen to do, but he had wanted to fix the car first to make it look decent. Alhassan explained: 'I'm a young man, I like to bluff...I want a nice car'.

Alhassan's desire to bluff was not exceptional, but rather the rule for many young people in Freetown, and across the continent. Despite living in a poor urban area where there was no running water connected to most homes, electricity was sparse, and in which the vast majority of people were not formally employed, most young people around me dressed well and used smartphones, which they were regularly upgrading (or, at times, of necessity, downgrading). They would acquire shoes, clothes, televisions, stereos, games consoles, DVD players, vehicles, watches and jewellery at an equally fast pace. Learning how to discern the subtle gradations in the quality of these, often flashy, goods, as well as how to participate in bluffing to an appropriate extent, was key.

My misinterpretation of the relationship between division of labour and dress at the garage, and my surprise at Alhassan's spending choices, revealed the flaws in some of my assumptions going into the field. First, I had assumed that in a context of 'poverty', practical items would be valued over those that appeared primarily symbolic or aesthetic; and that, in the case of business, priority would be given to investing in what might most directly bring in profit (in this case fuel). Second, I assumed that in a setting so often characterised in the literature as patrimonial and hierarchical, those at the top of the ladder would be the best dressed. While these assumptions proved to be incorrect, similar perspectives were held simultaneously by those who worked according to alternative logics, including the bluffers themselves. While bluffing was a way that young people 'masked' their

precarious positionalities, bluffing was often also the marker of this very predicament. It thus revealed their 'actual station'; young, unemployed or irregularly employed men bluffed the most. Although enthusiastically practiced by Freetown's youth, bluffing was often found morally wanting, and labelled, negatively, as 'false life'. As Alhassan explained, 'some people will dress up like they are big men, or they have stuff, but they don't have anything, when you look into their backgrounds there is nothing'. And as another friend told me: 'when you see somebody who is dressing a certain way you know if it fits or not'.

Figure 7 Posing for a photo

I soon realised that bluffing, with all its ambiguities, was a powerful commentary on the predicament of young people in Freetown, as well as an agentive expression of self-making. In a context where enduring transformation of status was so difficult to obtain for the people I worked with, many of whom were caught in a predicament often labelled the 'crisis of youth', a plethora of visible changes were performed and embodied on a day-to-day basis. This backdrop is helpful in contextualising my interlocutors' lives and their immense preoccupation with status, which I think can be understood partly as a response to the struggles and anxieties they faced. As I discuss throughout my thesis, however, their activities and their corresponding understandings challenge some of the core premises of

that 'crisis of youth'. My interlocutors were not simply victims of a political economy in which they were marginalised, but also active constitutors of their own statuses, with bluffing being a key example.

In this chapter, I start by situating bluffing in Sierra Leone in a body of literature that examines parallel consumption and self-styling practices on the continent. Broadly speaking, scholarly interest has centred on untangling the modern and traditional features of these practices, attempting to understand how and why they are meaningful in Africa. In this case, I suggest that bluffing represents an adaptation, and also an inversion, of established Freetown practices through which elite status in the city has historically been articulated. I turn next to a discussion of the social and economic environment in which bluffers operate in Freetown, where a bluff can be understood simultaneously as a wasteful and present-orientated practice, and a genuinely efficacious economic strategy. In the chapter's final section, I consider what the ambiguous moral qualities of the bluff, as a form of both long-term and short-term exchange, tell us about the nature of coming of age in Freetown today.

Bluffing in Africa: traditional or modern, local or foreign?

Practices akin to bluffing have caught the attention of anthropologists working in variety of African contexts. Such work builds on a history of theoretical engagement with mimesis, understood both as a form of colonial subjectification through which racial hierarchies became self-enforced (Fanon 2008 [1952]), and as means of resistance, critique, and empowerment (Stoller 1995). An important feature of many of such mimetic and consumption practices is their international or Western character, in both colonial and post-colonial settings. This has led to a divide in analyses of these practices. Friedman, in his 1994 study of Congolese *sapeurs* – men who dress in elaborate elegant outfits influenced by Parisian style – sees such mimesis of modernity as a tradition that can be situated within local cosmologies of magic and religion, as well as mirroring local political organisation in their associations. Cole's (2004) study of young women in Madagascar similarly locates sophisticated individual consumption of foreign goods as a novel means of

self-making in context where family structures no longer provide a satisfactory means of resource distribution, drawing at the same time on a long tradition of playful and sexual self-fashioning on the island.

Ferguson (2006), by contrast, argues that such mimetic practices can be understood as purely political statements that claim global membership and citizenship, a mode of analysis that echoes Richards' (1996) characterisation of consumption practices among young rebels in Sierra Leone's civil war as a means of becoming 'modern'. Weiss (2009), building on this line of argument, thinks they represent a fantasy that comes to life in the cracks of local limitations and global possibilities. Equally, for Masquelier (2016), young men who dress up in Niger are actively rejecting locally understood adulthood, opting instead to extend their status and lifestyles as youth, from which they have more to gain. Newell convincingly turns the puzzle on its head in *The Modernity Bluff* (2012), situating the bluff in the context of the moral economies of criminals in Abidjan, which challenge understandings of a singular or authentic modernity – modernity itself is a bluff – and the clear-cut distinction between 'real' and 'fake'. The ability to bluff or 'fake' well is an authentic marker of young men, who align themselves with global markers of status while at the same time securing their place in the local networks of bluffers and criminals upon whom they depend to make ends meet.

Bluffing in Sierra Leone involves an interplay between many of these dynamics. Indeed, it is its multi-layered symbolic (and economic) value that gives it, I suggest, its strength and ambiguity. The 'modern' and 'foreign' character of the bluffs in question are a significant component; in almost all cases I encountered, 'bluffing' was concerned chiefly with prestige items that originated overseas. In a context where most young men see out-migration to 'white man countries' as one of the only viable ways of achieving enduring social mobility, it is not surprising that objects sourced from these locations are desirable. The prestige, I suspect, is not simply the fact that objects have come from overseas, but that they locate the player in coveted international social networks. A number of these objects themselves facilitate the maintenance of these networks, such as computers and

smart phones, or, like televisions, stereos, and DVD players, offer a portal to that world.

At the same time, following similar observations in many of the studies reviewed above, the precedent of these objects can be found in local tradition. As Jackson notes of the Karanko of Northern Sierra Leone: 'the modern imperative to migrate (or remain existentially impoverished) has its origins in an older imperative. For well-being has always been, in the Kuranko social imaginary, a matter of bringing the vital forces of the wild into the precinct of the village – which means transgressing the symbolic boundaries that separate the secure space of the home from the unknown and the beyond' (Jackson 2011:44). It is notable that coming of age rituals in rural Sierra Leone, as in contexts across the continent, involve leaving the village and going into to the bush – a magical arena of shape-shifting – before returning home transformed. The 'beyond' clearly is potent, as in the case of bluffers for whom the beyond of overseas (i.e. Europe or America) had not been breached, yet its 'vital-forces' are nonetheless accessible.

In Freetown, however, the picture of what is from 'there' and what is from 'here' is complicated by the city's cosmopolitan history as a settlement for overseas migrants and colonial administers, and a central seat of British colonial operations in the region. In Freetown, historically practices akin to bluffing – dressing up in Western styles mixed with performative and elaborate aesthetics – is associated most strongly with the Krio, the descendants of the black British colonial subjects who had founded the city (and those who identified with or had been incorporated into this ethnic group). During the colonial period, the Krio positioned themselves as intermediaries between the British colonisers and the native tribes. This involved taking on some of the aesthetics of the colonisers, which became defining features of the ethnic group. One colonial account refers to the Krio as 'trousered Africans' (Fyfe 1963). Another manifestation of the practice was the taking on of English names, which themselves have been attributed with an elaborative quality akin to bluffing. As activist and academic Walter Rodney writes in his famous book, *How Europe undeveloped Africa*, 'In Sierra Leone, the white cultural influence went back to the 18th century, and Sierra Leone Creoles stood out even from the rest of

miseducated black people. The Creoles were not satisfied with an English Christian name or even with one European surname: they had to choose two European surnames and connect them with a hyphen' (Rodney 1972:73). Taking on aesthetics of Englishness was a way not only of highlighting their proximity with the colonisers, but also of differentiating themselves from natives.

After independence, the Krio maintained an elite status as a professional group, following a retreat from politics as the autochthonous Temne and Mende tribes became politically dominant. In Abner Cohen's study (1981) of the Krio (Creoles) in Freetown, a culture of elaborative performance, which he terms 'the dramaturgy of power', plays a central role in maintaining their status as a professional class of teachers, doctors, lawyers, and civil servants.[6] Family ceremonies, such as lifecycle rituals, were crucial moments when the elaborative performances took place around which Krio society is structured. Cohen's description of a funeral in his chapter on the 'cult of the dead' calls attention to how many of the hundreds of attendees gathered outside a church wore pristine black suits and ties, with a few even in bowler hats. In Cohen's analysis, what might be termed 'bluffing' is highly integrated through family ceremonies into establishment culture and family hierarchies. It is also collective in nature. He notes:

> It is essentially in this last respect [defining the extent and limit of family relationships] that the extensive and intensive Creole family ceremonials should be understood. To put it bluntly, your 'family' consists of the person who come, with presents and contributions in hand, to eat, drink, and dance or grieve in your ceremonials. If a relative fails to come to a succession of your ceremonials without an acceptable excuse, then to all intents and purposes that person ceases to be a member of your family. If, on the other hand, a mere 'friend' were to participate frequently in your ceremonials, he would in due course become a 'cousin', as it is not too difficult within such a kinship system to discover an appropriate link…But, as it is impossible for any man to activate, keep alive, and exhaust all of his potential kinship relationships, some relatives gradually lose touch with him, and fade out of his ceremonials. Others may pick a quarrel over one or another of the many

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[6] The Creole case study clearly aligns with Cohen's enduring theoretical interest in the interconnections between symbolism and power, most famously discussed in his 1972 book, *Two-Dimensional Man: An Essay on the Anthropology of Power and Symbolism in Complex Society.*

issues that bedevil family relationships, and cease to participate. (Cohen 1981:68)

It is striking how much Cohen's observations resonate today, less with the Krio than with those less educated autochthonous 'country people' who migrated to Freetown as labourers, and their descendants – now the majority in Freetown. In many ways, the roles have reversed. Krio families have a reputation for being private and being less showy with their wealth. As the often-quoted Krio parable puts it: '*if yu yams wet, for kohba am'* (If you have white yams, a sign of wealth, you should hide them).

Today, it is the 'country people' – especially youth such as Alhassan, who moved to the city from his home village in his early teens – who are most closely associated with 'bluffing'. This represents a significant demographic shift that gets to the heart of what justifies categorizing their behaviour as 'bluffing' (that is, what is deceptive about it). For the Krio in Cohen's study, elaborative performance 'accurately' reflected their elite position in society; it became part of the reproduction of a professional class, and was grounded in significant wealth that came from property ownership in the Freetown peninsula. The groups associated with bluffing in my study were not likely to be people with stable sources of income, property ownership, or formal employment prospects. While 'bluffing' would take place among my interlocutors at collective rites of passage – working through established family hierarchies – it would also take place beyond this sphere, in a much more individual and anti-hierarchical ways. As my experience at the garage indicated, those who dressed up the most were often those lower down in hierarchies. While the Krio referenced British aesthetics, reflective of their often elite and formalized economic and political positionalities in the colonial and nascent post-colonial context, today bluffing, often inspired by the aesthetics of transatlantic urban youth culture, is reflective of a much more informalised political economy that young 'country' men are marginally positioned in.

Freetown's historical context is, I suggest, key to understanding the role of the bluff today. In reference to the above literatures, bluffing is at once an inversion and rejection of local hierarchies and practices, in favour of 'global membership',

as outlined by Ferguson and Masquelier. At the same time, its meaning derives from a long history of performative practices in Freetown. In other words, the call for 'local membership', and the bid to become 'citizens' of Freetown according to established cultural practices of elaborative performance, involves taking on overtly 'white', or foreign, elements. While land ownership and civil service jobs might be inaccessible to 'bluffers', dressing up and elaborate consumption practices are possible. This represents a more Bourdieusian mode of class alignment through consumption and 'taste', rather than a Marxian notion of class defined by economic relations. The ambiguity of the bluff is a crucial component; it symbolically aligns young people on the one hand with the here, now (and the past to some extent), and on the other hand, with the beyond and the future. Yet it does not allow full-membership to either network, but rather connects 'bluffers' to others involved in 'bluffing'. That is, it further cements their place as 'youth' in Freetown, in as much as it represents for many the only available route to social mobility.

Bluffing as an economic strategy

The bluff in Cohen's study of the 1970s Krio involved maintaining elite status, but nevertheless in my study it still held economic efficacy, even if the economic reality was very different. Whereas performativity and dressing up among the Krio in Cohen's study was a means of being accepted into a formal economy of professional life, underpinned by significant and valuable land-holdings in Freetown among the ethnic group, 'bluffing' among Freetown youth today enables individuals to participate in precarious informal economic networks and, at significant risk, to realign patronage relationships in their own favour. The bluff was considered a wasteful and misleading strategy, but at the same time, in ambiguous ways, it was efficacious.

Criticisms of 'false life' and wastefulness, as might be expected, tended to be levelled by elders, who scorned the habits of youth who could neither attain independence and self-sufficiency nor contribute to family expenses. Such criticisms were regularly conveyed to me by Auntie Alice, an important patron

figure in my neighbourhood. Auntie Alice was from a Fula background: a non-native tribe with a mercantile reputation in Sierra Leone and across West Africa. Auntie Alice employed many young men – nearly all of whom were members of the local mosque that she was prominent member of – in her various businesses, which included a water purification, packaging and distribution factory that she ran on the ground floor of her compound, just opposite Alhassan's family compound. Alhassan was one such young man: he had worked for Auntie Alice as the driver of a delivery van, and still occasionally drove her personal jeep. She continued to be a patron to Alhassan, although she lamented the fact that he generally ignored her advice. She was especially critical of his failure to save money. She had opened a bank account for him, but he invariably came up with urgent excuses to withdraw the money. Equally, he was not keen to follow up her suggestion that he could save money by investing in her business, through which she would give him a small return on the profits, as well as a means of securing the initial sum. Instead – in her eyes, and to some extent in his – Alhassan would spend his money, 'pretending to be a big man', keeping many girlfriends, buying clothes, renting a room and parlour instead of saving to buy land and build his own place. In addition, he normally hired other drivers to work his taxi – for which he paid, largely, by raising funds from patrons abroad. These hired drivers tended to drive it recklessly, thus decreasing its value. Additionally, hiring them meant that the business yielded less profit than if Alhassan had driven the taxi himself. Auntie Alice saw this as absurd: only a big man ought to hire a driver in this way. All in all, the bluff or 'false life' that Alimany pursued was what allowed him to enjoy life in the here and now, rather than securing his future, as elders like Auntie Alice felt he should.

Alhassan's bluffing was also scorned by James, his now retired father, who had expected that Alhassan would provide for him in his old age. James had worked as a driver in Freetown for many years, but he had now returned to his native village. Alhassan was raised in this village, and had come to Freetown as teenager, eventually learning to drive and taking on some of James' clients, including some expats, a few of whom had continued to support Alhassan after leaving the country. On several occasions when Alhassan had money in his hand, James had

attempted to 'come inside', claiming that resources coming from his patron figures should go through him. For example, when Alhassan was raising money to buy land to build his own house, James called a family meeting to pressure Alhassan to buy the land in James's name, on behalf of the whole family. James had never managed to build his own family compound in Freetown, instead occupying one of the double rooms in the now dilapidated compound built by his father. However, as Alhassan bitterly explained to me, 'he does not feed me, I want to stand alone'. Alhassan considered himself to be, or aspired to become, a man in his own right.

Alhassan's take on what he owed his father derived in large part from his feeling that his father had not raised him well. Alhassan was an illegitimate child, whose mother had no lasting relationship with James. He was raised in the village and received no formal education, unlike James' children with his current wife (including Foday, with whom I lived for part of my field work), who were all raised and schooled in town. Instead Alhassan's early years were spent helping around the house and the adjacent farmland, and hunting in the bush. In addition, Alhassan felt that James had exhibited extreme impatience in teaching him to drive, and therefore Alhassan had to resort to learning 'himself' on the streets by becoming an apprentice, and to seeking patronage elsewhere, such as with their Freetown neighbour Auntie Alice. Alhassan thus felt that he did not owe his father a great deal, though he would still contribute to James's travel expenses when he travelled to Freetown, and he had recently bought him a generator for the house in the village. While Alhassan wanted to 'stand alone', he remained closely integrated into his family, who supported him in many ways, including raising his own illegitimate son in the extended family compound in Congo Town.

While Auntie Alice and James' criticisms of Alhassan's bluffing were seemingly accurate – it was hard to deny that it was wasteful to spending cash on highly visible consumer goods when money was hard to come by and Alhassan had not built his own 'foundation'– their criticisms were not coming from neutral places of observation. Auntie Alice's criticism was in part informed by a knowledge that Alhassan's bluffing was extending his dependence on her. If Alhassan desperately needed something, Auntie Alice knew that she would feel strongly obligated, as a patron figure, to help him out, and moreover that Alhassan could make a strong

case for her support in cases when her money could provide the solution for a practical problem, such as a mechanical issue with the car. Conversely, Alhassan would have found it challenging to ask Auntie Alice for funds to finance bluffing. James's criticisms of bluffing came from the opposite position, as someone who wanted greater material support *from* Alhassan. By spending money on bluffing, Alhassan was not supporting James in the present, as well as equally failing to participate in long-term investments such as buying land. According to the logic of family hierarchies, Alhassan's participation would have strengthened James's claim to be a beneficiary.

One strength of the bluff as an economic strategy for young people was its very ambiguity. The bluff played a key role in an on-going negotiation between Auntie Alice and Alhassan about what they owed each other. Alhassan often complained to me that Auntie Alice did not reward him sufficiently for services that he performed for her. For example, during the Ebola crisis, Alhassan had connected her with an NGO that was looking to hire jeeps to transport humanitarian workers and medical staff, at a very favourable rate. Auntie Alice initially paid Alhassan a modest (in his mind) fee to drive the jeep but, after a few months, Alhassan gave up, frustrated that he was not receiving a bigger cut given that he was the *sababu* (the link). By bluffing – through 'wasteful consumption' – Alhassan was covertly forcing Auntie Alice's hand, at some risk, to provide support for him when he needed it. This would not have been the case if he had continued working for her as regular employee, or if he had saved the money for an inevitable 'rainy day'. In short, bluffing was a means of extending a mode of dependence on her that he found favourable – she was not his employer but his patron. In the case of his father, rather than the bluff reinforcing Alhassan's dependence, the bluff was doing the opposite; it became a means of asserting his independence. If Alhassan had spent his money less 'wastefully', such as on land, or had saved it in a bank account, James, as his father, would have had a strong case to make claims on it.

Part of the financial efficacy of the bluff lay in a broader economic logic that I had heard professed in a variety of settings: in Sierra Leone, a context of extreme economic volatility and decline, saving money was an unwise economic strategy.

This view was not simply promoted by the young bluffers themselves. In a sermon at a service at a local church in Congo Town, the pastor preached the message that there is no point in waiting all your life saving up money and not eating or living well, since by the time you are ready to buy your house you will be dead. Or as a local tribal chief told Alhassan, 'let your money suffer before you suffer', a line Alhassan seemed to enjoy quoting.

The challenge in accumulating cash was compounded by the ambiguity surrounding money in an environment with high levels of indebtedness to kin, friends, and neighbours, and almost limitless potential for claims from the people around you. A person who had money in his possession for long would be subjected to claims for debts to be repaid, or for the fulfilment of familial or friendship-based obligations for support during 'rainy days'. The ambiguity surrounding money created a powerful sense that it was not 'real' unless it was spent. The bluff was often a means of realising and making material what in an abstract form was ambiguous and without inherent value. Spending money on desirable consumer goods was thus an efficacious means of reserving money for personal future use; consumer goods, at least in theory, were in high demand and could be liquidated quite easily. This proved to be the case with Alhassan's car. While prioritising spending his money on decoration and maintenance, the car had become unworkable, yet perversely this maintained the value of the car, which, through not being run regularly as a taxi, was sold for a good price. Alhassan knew that his support network was deep enough that he could survive for some time without income from the taxi, for example by sharing the food of friends, neighbours and family, and by buying essentials on credit. .

To further complicate this social picture, the most common source of consumer goods was from friends, family, and neighbours. One of the 'greatest' deceptions of the bluff was not that it involved flashy showing off that masked a 'true', much grimmer or less extravagant reality. It was rather that bluffing involved displaying items that were not wholly in the position of those who sported them. As I came to realise, one reason why my friends and neighbours could obtain consumer goods at so fast a pace was that often they did not own them, at least not fully. In some

instances, my interlocutors would buy items outright, often from shops downtown, but this was exceptional. It was much more common for people to obtain goods from their friends and neighbours, typically involving piecemeal and contested arrangements. A common arrangement among people who lived together or near each other involved simply borrowing an item.

What complicated matters was that these same networks were the channels through which consumer goods were often purchased. People rarely paid the full amount for something up-front in these situations; rather objects were paid for in instalments. These arrangements bound friends and neighbours in uneasy relationships of (frequently contested) debt. The fact that they involved friends and neighbours provided a measure of security; a large pool of mutual contacts – on whose favourable reputation both parties depended – could act as witnesses in case of disagreement. By the same token, however, it was precisely these multi-layered d social inter-connections that allowed those who obtained items to avoid paying for them in full. I witnessed dozens of such cases. In general, those obtaining items would point to reasons why they should not pay the full amount, often after using the item for several months. In some cases, they claimed that that item was not in the condition that had been promised. In other cases, the buyer would claim that the seller owed them something else, which itself had not been settled. Given the thickness of sociality in Freetown, this happened a lot. In yet other cases, there would be an unspoken sense that full payment was rendered unnecessary by the strength of the social connection between buyer and seller, and that this was more of a 'borrowing' relationship than a commercial one. This approach risked the significant straining or even severing of the relationship in question. I attended a number of formal meetings called by participants to resolve such conflicts, some of which resulted in police reports and legal charges or participants avoiding each other for significant periods of time while things cooled down.

For most young people in Freetown, it was close to impossible to avoid participating in these exchanges. They were caught in a 'catch 22', not least because the ability to borrow money was often predicated on participation in

bluffing. Bluffing made it easier to borrow money from others, not just because you were 'fooling' them into thinking that you were better off than you were, but also because items that could be liquidated and sold on served as collateral and provided reassurance that funds could be made available if needed. During the negotiation processes of such financial arrangements, people often pointed to assets in their possession, such as televisions, jewellery, phones, or cars, claiming that they would or could sell them, in order to make a more convincing case to the creditor. In this sense, bluffing was the only game in town for many people, but it was also a gamble; a person's social relationships and reputation were at stake.

A revealing counter-point to the catch-22 of bluffing was the story of James's cousin, Tikay, who came from the provincial town of Bo to live in the Bangura family compound shortly after I moved in. The reason for Tikay's transfer was his appointment as a health and safety officer at a major international mining company based in Freetown; by local standards, his salary was sizeable and unusually reliable. I was struck by how little Tikay engaged in flashy bluffing practices, even though his potential seemed greater than that of most of his peers. He once explained to me that, while most young people in town engage in 'false life', he preferred to 'lay low'. It struck me that this was a kind of anti-bluff, possible and desirable only because he had a reliable income and did not need to engage in the messy world of neighbourhood bluffing. In fact, he had much to gain by abstaining, which may be why he maintained a reserved and private 'Krio' disposition.

Bluffing: short-term or long-term exchange?

As the above section demonstrates, the bluff's ambiguity is key to its efficacy as an economic strategy for youth in Freetown. In this section, I expand on the morally ambiguous dimensions of the bluff, with reference to its temporality as a form of exchange and its place in practices of the family and home. I suggest that while the bluff is subversive and morally problematic, it facilitates meaningful 'long-term' exchange in accordance with established mechanisms of social reproduction. The difficulty of assessing the morality of the bluff comes in part from the challenge of

determining its limits in Freetown today, where lifecycle ritual itself has been characterised as a form of bluff.

The analytical connection between morality and temporal registers of exchange was forwarded by Bloch and Parry in their influential edited volume (1989), *Money and the Morality of Exchange*. This book identifies a cross-cultural pattern of two opposing 'transactional orders', each with its own temporalities and moral valuations, and the existence of specific acceptable and non-acceptable means of conversion between orders. The first transactional order comprises exchanges 'concerned with the reproduction of the long-term social or cosmic order'. The second is 'a "sphere" of short-term transactions concerned with the arena of individual competition'. Each transactional order is ascribed with its own moral valuations:

> While the long-term cycle is always positively associated with the central precepts of morality, the short-term order tends to be morally undetermined since it concerns individual purposes which are largely irrelevant to the long-term order. If, however, that which is obtained in the short-term individualistic cycle is concerted to serve the reproduction of the long-term cycle, then it becomes positive (Bloch and Parry 1989:24).

Bloch and Parry give numerous case studies of conversions, or transformations, characterised as 'cooking' in the household, or 'drinking' and 'digesting', or consumption at events, such as marriages, whose ultimate goal is the continuity of the social order of the household and community. There is risk of moral admonition if these conversions do not take place, or worse still, if resources from long-term cycles are siphoned off for individual gain. This is not to say that the short-term register is without positive value: 'cultural recognition is also explicitly given to a cycle of short-term exchanges associated with individual appropriation, competition, sensuous enjoyment, luxury, and youthful vitality' (Ibid: 24), yet such transactions must remain subordinated to the long-term cycles if they are to be deemed morally acceptable.

The bluff sits uncomfortably or ambiguously within this powerful paradigm. At one level, the bluff actively inverts the moral valuations of the transactional orders; the

short-term register is given value over the long-term one. Criticisms by elders like Auntie Alice and James of the 'false life' of bluffers can be understood as challenging such an inversion. Instead of investing in the enduring social order as mediated through the structures of the household and its associated hierarchies, resources are directed towards individual projects with a more immediate pay-off, through the wasteful consumption of items that would soon be rendered meaningless and out-dated. In this sense, the bluff is seen to prioritise short-sighted and present-oriented reward over investments with longer-term value. And worse, bluffing could present additional barriers to making such long-term investments: for example, through the debts that could be accrued to facilitate bluffing, or through the increasing demands of family and friends that bluffing could encourage. As Alhassan complained to me once, 'when you buy something expensive here, like a car, people do not think you have spent all your money on it, they think you will have more money'. The ultimate consequence might be the severing of relations within these important networks. In other instances, bluffing could lead to taking on new responsibilities, such as additional sexual partners and the corresponding heightened risk of childbirth. At times, the conversion was from the long-term to the short-term order, which Bloch and Parry identify as the most morally scorned. It was common for people to divert stockpiles of money set aside by families and households for emergencies, important family events, or investment in property or business, and spend it on bluffing instead.

At another level, the bluff *is* a means of participating in the long-term transactional order. As outlined above, the bluff has genuine financial efficacy. In a context where holding on to money is extremely challenging – in part because of existing debts to and financial demands from kinsmen or neighbours – spending money on desirable goods was a way of saving it. Equally, as outlined above, the bluff could increase a person's chances of receiving money, goods, and opportunities from others, as well as perhaps improving his chances in legal disputes[7]. The bluff masked the often-precarious social position of the bluffer and the messy details of

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[7] For many of my friends, dressing up as a 'big man' was a strategy for engaging with legal and state institutions in order to secure preferential treatment. If there was a settlement to be made in a police station they might pull up in a borrowed jeep, and wear suits or Africana clothes often donned by political 'big men'.

how the objects in question had been acquired in the first place. Bluffing became part of a performance of the kind of 'watershed' moment of transformation alluded to above: one that was recognised and given value by large strata of Freetown society. While the bluff might strain certain networks, such as those linking households and families, it also solidified relations and allowed the renegotiation of social standing, particularly among peers, who played an important role in determining status and the capacity to get by. The bluff could enable someone to benefit from these networks, with an aim of reinvesting in the more established long-term, transactional order. Because it facilitated engagement with several collectives, bluffing was not necessarily the domain of increased individualism, as might be expected if it was a 'short-term exchange' in Bloch and Parry's model. The value of the bluff was predicated on collective acknowledgement, in an almost fetishized way. It thus represents a means of converting from the short-term to long-term transactional order, and vice versa. It can be considered simultaneously wasteful and present-oriented, and meaningful and future-orientated. It is as individualistic in its orientation as it is collectivist. It is the subject of moral admonition, and at the same time the source of allure, praise, and envy.

The challenge of determining whether bluffing is a long-term or short-term exchange is further complicated by the place of lifecycle ritual in the 'long-term'/'short-term' system. In classic anthropological wisdom, rites of passage such as marriages, even though they involve a seemingly presentist focus, are nonetheless considered long-term exchanges because they have far-reaching and long-term consequences for the organisation of social reproduction. Dressing up for rites of passage events such as weddings, graduations, baby naming ceremonies, and funerals is a central aspect of neighbourhood and family life in Freetown. These events are particularly significant because they are the collectively sanctioned means through which transformation of status occurs. There is a strong sense of obligation to 'show face' at these events, and to be dressed appropriately. This requires acknowledgement of the hierarchies of the household and family, which are formalised through the enactment of the ritual. For example, the central ritual moment of an engagement/marriage is the ceremonial distribution of money by the groom's family to the elders in the wife's

family. Through the acknowledgement and agreement of these elders, who represent the established family collective, the long-term transformation of the married couple's status is signified. I regularly encountered instances of family members, including fathers and sons, who were no longer on speaking terms, allegedly because of failure to show up at an important family event. It was common for participants to get tailor made-clothes, such as the matching *ashobi,* that would be made by people close to the couple. The announcing of the material for the *ashobi* was a key moment in the wedding proceedings, typically taking place a few months in advance, and indicating that the wedding was 'really happening'. Sometimes these forms of dressing up would be labelled bluffing, particularly if they involved flashy clothes. People often spent large amounts of money on these occasions – in fact there was a strong obligation to do so – and this kind of spending was not typically questioned as problematic or wasteful.

Significantly, most bluffing was performed outside these occasions, during day-to-day life. Indeed, the bluff entailed treating the 'everyday' as though it was an 'event'. It involved spending money on display, but not for formally and collectively acknowledged reasons such as a wedding or a funeral. Thus the bluff became dangerously potent. The bluff gained visibility not simply through refusal to 'dress up' for the right occasions, therefore bypassing and undermining established family hierarchies, but by exploiting the value of dressing up in the framework of the 'everyday' frame. This inverted the proper ritual order between heightened moments of ritual and normal life, and was thus regarded as rebellious.

Yet the bluff may have penetrated deeper than this, redefining not only the positions of young people in social and family structures, but the very mechanics of these structures. As many of my interlocutors told me, marriage itself has become a 'bluff' in Freetown today, a key part of 'false life'. This was memorably explained to me by Mohammed, a city council worker for whom Alhassan was temporarily driving while his car was being fixed. We were sitting in the garage chatting, across from the carcass-like chassis of a yellow Hummer, still relatively shiny, but without wheels or an engine, that had seemingly been abandoned in the garage. No-one was working on it, and it did not look as though it would be repaired any time

soon. This sparked a conversation about 'maintenance' and bluffing, which got to the heart of the 'false life' criticism. Mohammed said that 'Life is at levels. I want to build a house, have money, buy a fine car, but maintenance is the key. Like in marriage, if marriage was a one-off payment then everyone would be married, but maintenance is the issue'. By this he meant that achieving the next level makes no sense unless you can maintain at that level. The person who bought the hummer had enough for the purchase but not enough to keep it running, and so the whole thing was lost. This reminded me of many cases I heard about where married couples spent all the money collected from relatives and friends on the wedding ceremony and reception, leaving none to maintain their new household. Unlike the Krio in Cohen's study, where ceremonies were key to the long-term material security of their participants, it is often the case now that a ceremony can mask, or even jeopardize, the long-term material (in)security of the couple in question.

The modern imperative in Freetown for large weddings ceremonies, often named 'white weddings', is opposed to the logic of the local customary or 'country' marriage that centred on an 'engagement' ceremony at which the bride price was paid and symbolic goods exchanged between families. The 'white wedding', which would normally follow this in a church or mosque, and then a reception hall, far outweighed the cost of the bridge price,[8] even though locally it was seen to hold less significance legally (in a customary sense). What made the marriage binding was the agreement and exchange between families, while the 'white wedding', I was often told, was a celebration and means of blessing the marriage. Yet those who wanted to get married faced enormous social pressure, and potential for stigma and resentment, if the 'white wedding' was not performed at a satisfactory scale[9].

In this light, then, 'bluffing' in the everyday underscores the extent to which the everyday is a significant arena in itself, disconnected from and in some ways

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[8] In one wedding of a close friend, the bride price was about 1/25th of the total cost of the wedding

[9] Responses to the prohibitive expected costs of weddings have become a major topic of scholarship on Africa in a variety of contexts (James 2014, Janson 2013, Masquelier 2005, Solway 2016).

threatened by lifecycle ritual – the opposite of Cohen's observations among the Krio in the 1970s. This reveals the precariousness of the lives of many young people today, when the established means through which social transformation takes place in relation to the home and lifecycle are no longer achievable. This is not just because many people cannot afford to marry, but because marriage itself becomes a 'bluff' and devoid of long-term meaning when it cannot be backed up by a level of material security, or 'maintenance'. On the one hand, the 'bluff' can be read as a 'fantasy' of social mobility and transformation that masks a true reality in which the 'bluffers' do not have the capacity to engage in more enduring transformations, and are still dependents. On the other hand, the bluff draws attention to the fantastical nature of marriage itself as a means for transformation.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analysed the practice of bluffing, a defining consumption practice for young people in Freetown that is mirrored across the continent. While the bluff is steeped in far-reaching symbolism, especially for those who look to the 'more developed' world for their own personal development, I have situated the practice in the Freetown context. I have charted the ways that bluffing builds on established practices in the city – historically associated with the Krio – but is now associated with recent migrants to Freetown, or their descendants, most of whom are young and unestablished. While a simplistic reading of the activity might dismiss it as wasteful and uneconomical, I have demonstrated the ways that it holds social and economic efficacy in this rather different Freetown context, even as risks reproducing the marginality experienced by many of the city's young inhabitants. .

The ultimate power of the bluff lies in its ambiguity. On the one hand, it is a rebellious, anti-authoritarian act, in which young people favour personal transformation over participation in established family structures. On the other hand, the bluff represents a complex strategy in which young people's positions in these structures are reconfigured, and at times even strengthened. On another level, the bluff demonstrates the broad desire of young people to escape the

structures and predicaments that constrain them, even as they try to work within them. This might be interpreted at the level of place: bluffing, oriented to the 'beyond', is a call to escape Freetown, while still being an established way of becoming embedded in the city. Either way, the bluff ensures that the marginality experienced by young people is not simply imposed from without; rather, the young people themselves become architects of their own identities.

As highlighted by the preoccupations of Alhassan and many others, the bluff is a 'mask' that reveals as much as it conceals. The concept of the bluff and 'false life' offer a powerful commentary on the status of young people and social reproduction in Freetown today. In this commentary, the bluff has come to redefine the form and structures through which social reproduction takes place, and the lay of the land in a city whose defining characteristics are the pervasiveness of economic informality and impermanence. This became clear when a major highway construction project on the peninsula, undertaken by Chinese contractors hired by the state, became popularly labelled 'cosmetic development', reflecting the widely held assumption that the road, while looking good now, would not last.

This chapter builds on a central line of argument throughout the first half of the thesis, through further highlighting the ways that social mobility ambiguously occurs through often unspoken and everyday negotiations of the terms of relationships, centring around the family and neighbourhood, and taking place around, broadly speaking, economic activity. The next chapter begins the second half of the thesis, in which those we have met in the opening chapters experience life during the Ebola crisis.   What we see is, in many ways, a shift from social mobility taking place in the 'everyday' to taking place around the collective 'event', as life-course ritual becomes reignited with new and old meanings, and prioritised. This then leads to new directions in thinking about 'crisis'.

Chapter 5. 'Black' and 'White' Death: Burials during Ebola

In 2014-15 screens around the globe were inundated with images of Sierra Leoneans in full body protective suits and masks, carrying corpses on stretchers to be buried – scenes resembling an apocalyptic science fiction film. These were the front-line troops deployed to defeat Ebola, a 'mysterious' and deadly virus with no known cure that emerged from the depths of the rainforest borderland of Guinea, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. The virus is thought to have entered Sierra Leone following the May 2014 funeral of a traditional healer, who had been working with Ebola victims from Guinea. Ebola would go on to claim the lives of close to 4000 Sierra Leoneans. Ebola captured the world's imagination with nightmarish fears that it would spread like the plague. The result was an intense and expensive intervention involving scores of international governmental and non-governmental organizations. A state of emergency was declared in Sierra Leone on 30th July 2014, followed by the establishment of the National Ebola Response Centre, headed by the Minister of Defence.

For many months after the initial outbreak, Ebola felt oddly distant. Yet there was a powerful and familiar sense of foreboding. The civil war had emerged from the same region in the east of the country, eventually hitting Freetown to devastating effect. In July 2014, the first cases of the virus were reported in the capital city. 'Ebola' was deadly yet ambiguous. Its symptoms closely resembled those of familiar diseases, such as malaria. In my neighbourhood several possible Ebola cases were identified, leading to the quarantining of their family households. But they were contested by many residents, not least because the virus did not spread in Congo Town. However, the increasingly onerous measures enforced under the state of emergency were felt by everyone. School and colleges were shut down. Gatherings of over ten people, travel, and business activity were highly restricted. There were daily curfews at 6pm, and regular 'lockdowns' lasting several days. Getting by during these hard times entailed accepting and negotiating new laws, procedures, bureaucratic structures, and dangers, and reconciling them with established practices and routines of social life and death. When people in Sierra

Leone spoke of 'Ebola', they were often referring not to the virus, but to these challenges.

Since the corpses of Ebola victims are highly contagious, there was considerable risk of transmission during funerals, through ritual body washing and contact between mourners. Not surprisingly, then, burial was perhaps the heaviest and highest profile arena of regulation. Regardless of the Ebola status of the deceased, all burials were to be performed by official teams at designated cemeteries. During the early stages of the outbreak, bodies were left in the street and mortuaries overflowed. In response, burial teams were established, staffed primarily by young men working under the auspices of the Ministry of Health and international NGOs. The teams were trained and equipped to perform all burials according to an unfamiliar, bureaucratically-informed biomedical paradigm featuring clinical management and strict procedures oriented towards safety and efficiency. This soon presented a new challenge, accentuated by the pressing social obligations that surround death in Sierra Leone: the speed and efficiency of these burials interfered with the enactment of customary rituals. It was in relation to deaths - the majority of which were not caused by the virus during the Ebola crisis - that I most often heard reflections on Ebola's cruelty and the suffering it caused. While, as mentioned in the previous chapters, attitudes to life-course ritual have shifted in character, it is notable that burials remained a particular pressing arena of social obligation and significance; while flexibility is often demonstrable, such shifts appear more contentious and more heavily reflexively analysed. Burial teams made significant efforts to allow for local cultural practices and enable some flexibility. Yet still some people tried to avoid these regulations altogether, choosing to perform illegal 'secret' burials, in co-ordination with established authorities such as the police, city council and military (as opposed to the novel burial teams), though still at risk of a hefty punishment.

The difficulties Ebola imposed on performing ritual invites reflection on the relationship between the enactment of funerary rites and the continuity or disruption of social order. In Sophocles' Antigone, the protagonist attempts illegally to perform an honourable burial for her brother - the disgraced loser of

Thebes' civil war - against the orders of her uncle, King Creon. The ensuing disorder is characterized as a disease, tragically wiping out Creon's family, and threatening social order at large: 'the entire city is gripped by a violent disease' (Sophocles, *Antigone* II.114). Anthropological analysis of 'good' death, following Hertz's (1960 [1909]) Durkheimian analysis of second burials, has emphasized the close relationship between the performance of proper post-death ritual and the maintenance and reproduction of social order. This is achieved through exerting ritual order in the face of abrupt and unpredictable biological death, and harnessing the regenerative potential of ritual to compensate for the loss of individuals by reinstallation in the collective consciousness (Bloch and Parry 1982).

Many have questioned the neat conceptual relationship between 'good' death and social order. Just as it is problematic to attribute discrete beginnings and endings to funerary ritual, so is it problematic to assume that they can restore full social order (Seremetakis 1991:48). Studies have emphasized that, while African death presents a seemingly greater unravelling of the social fabric than death in the more individualized West, the outcome is often not 'regeneration of life' in a cohesive sense. Rather funerary practices become sites of contestation and negotiation between competing social and religious groups and authorities (De Boeck 2009, Posel and Gupta 2009, Smith 2004, de Witte 2001), serving as occasions 'for the (re)production and the (un)making of both solidarities and hierarchies, both alliances and conflicts' (Jindra and Noret 2011:2). Funerary practices, and social orders, are far from static and singular on the continent. Significant shifts, including greater diversity in form, have been linked to the processes of colonial and post-colonial political economy, the influence of Islam and Christianity, urbanization, migration, technological development, and notably the AIDS pandemic (Chabal and Daloz 1999, Geschiere 2005, Henderson 2011, Lamont 2011, Meyer 2004, Page 2007, Peel 2000, Ranger 2011, van der Geest 2006). What social order is re-established after death in contexts with turbulent histories, and what part do funerary practices play?

Funerary ritual and social order appear particularly interdependent during periods of social unrest and disorder. In war-time, for example, practical challenges arise in relation to the performance of burial rites, and in reconciling 'mass death' with existing categories of death (Kwon 2006). Yet burials can be powerful mechanisms for establishing new orders. Funerary rituals and memorialisation practices are propitious sites for political claims made during or after periods of upheaval. Dead bodies are powerful symbols of historical depth and continuity (Hallam & Hockey 2001), yet, lacking their own 'voice', are ripe for manipulation in the service of political claims and narrative construction (Verdery 1999), and for propagating illusions of permanence and stability (Scheele 2006).

During the Ebola crisis, the regulation and transformation of mortuary practices were principle aims of the international response rather than merely collateral challenges. Burials constituted a defining experience of life under the state of emergency. They brought to the fore the core social conflict of the Ebola crisis: local beliefs and practices versus international ones. This tension has been highlighted in studies of the Ebola crisis. Fairhead (2016) emphasizes the dramatic breakdown of fragile 'social accommodations' between 'cultures', recalling a violent regional history. Richards (2016) shows how the adaptability and ingenuity of local culture, particularly at the rural village level, was undermined by the international response, which chose not to support local responses and acknowledge their complex workings. This tension is seen to have encouraged the breakdown of multiple forms of 'trust' (Anoko 2014, Brown 2016, Le Marcis 2015). Despite community engagement initiatives and some use of ethnographic insights in the response, 'local' culture was widely framed as an inconvenient and backward obstacle to the elimination of the virus.

Little detailed anthropological attention has so far been paid, however, to how this conflict was understood on the ground, or to the complex ways in which it played out, especially for the overwhelming majority of Sierra Leoneans who did not encounter the virus directly, but whose lives and deaths were nonetheless hit heavily by 'Ebola'. This chapter explores how burials became the sites in which crisis and disorder were most acutely experienced and evident, yet around which

new social orders, practices, and hierarchies were forwarded and reconfigured. Such processes involved complex compromise, adaptation, and negotiations among a variety of actors and authorities, established and novel, who in shifting ways represented alternately official and local responses.

In Freetown, the conflict between state of emergency protocols and existing local practices was coded in the racial language of 'black' and 'white'. These terms are quotidian reference points in Freetown, representing primary, yet complex, categories through which cultural norms, values, and practices are understood. During the crisis these categories were both destabilized and yet took on heightened explanatory value. Broadly speaking, the 'Ebola' burials performed by the burial teams constituted 'white' death, in which all bodies were to be treated equally and burials performed efficiently and safely. Opposed to this was customary burial, or 'black' death, in which burial practices vary according to the status and religion of the deceased, and in which the proper enactment of funerary ritual is a pressing social and religious obligation. Temporal flexibility and improvisation are often key to the performance of rituals in Freetown's unpredictable environment. Yet although 'secret' burials were more aligned to 'black' death, the boundaries between the categories were blurred and porous. 'Secret' burials were more private than most Freetown burials, and required extensive bureaucratic navigation along paths different than those established during the state of emergency, incorporating some safety protocols. In the case of the burial team, the face of the 'white' system was not white foreigners, but primarily young black Sierra Leonean men who, as formally employed 'gatekeepers' of the state of emergency, experienced a rare opportunity for social mobility.

In Sierra Leone, these racial categories recall a long history of violent integration into the Atlantic World. Beginning in the early sixteenth century, Sierra Leone became a major site of extraction for slaves sent to the Americas. Freetown was established in 1792 by immigrant 'free persons of colour' and 'black Londoners' after the British ban on the international slave trade, although slavery within Sierra Leone was only outlawed in 1928 (Lovejoy & Schwarz 2015). The

descendants of these founders, who were joined by waves of recaptive slaves and migrating black British colonial subjects, became known as the Krio, discussed in the previous chapter. The Krio as an ethnic group came to be seen as simultaneously and alternately 'black' – through their historic link to slavery, diaspora, and colonial racism – and 'white' – through their sometimes elite status in Freetown, secured through identification with British imperial institutions and culture; including the dressing-up practices discussed in chapter 4. While the Krio positioned themselves as 'interpreters of Western culture to other Africans' (Harris 2013:13), through which their elite status in the colonial administration was at times secured, such positions equally led to racist resentment by white authorities. While the Krio, as already mentioned, are now a minority in Freetown, their history is key both to the formation of non-essentialized local understandings of race, and in providing an enduring model of brokerage, mediation, and transformation between 'black' and 'white', which became starkly evident during the Ebola crisis for a variety of actors, as this chapter will go on to illustrate.

This chapter examines the ways in which Freetown's history came dramatically to life during the Ebola crisis, when residents were yet again faced with reconciling conflicting cultural paradigms, this time in the context of an epidemic and powerful international intervention. Around burials, characterized as an 'arena of social contestation, a space where heterogeneous and antagonistic cultural codes and social interests meet and tangle' (Seremetakis 1991:15), racial categories, ritual practices, and understandings and performances of 'order' took on hybrid forms. 'Black' and 'white' notions of 'order' were simultaneously distinct and opposed – particularly as idealized references – yet in 'practice' overlapping and at times complementary, thus representing a locally meaningful framework through which the crisis was understood, experienced, and negotiated.

Obligations and obstacles

On the afternoon of the 6th of August 2015, I received a text message from James, my close friend and the oldest son in the family I lived with in Congo Town.

Anty Marie's condition is bad she has been admitted at the hospital in the isolation ward at cottage

Marie, a charismatic and worldly woman in her late 30s, was James's step-mother's sister. She had come to live with us a few months earlier, after her marriage to a German citizen of Sierra Leonean origin, with whom she had become pregnant. She was preparing to join her husband, referred to as 'the German', in Europe; a task complicated by the Ebola crisis; Freetown's German consulate had stopped issuing visas. For Marie, the obstacles she faced reflected not only the stretching of bureaucratic channels by the regional and global crisis of Ebola, but also jealousies among her extended family and neighbours in Freetown. As she explained to me, 'You know black people, we have black mind'. It was because of these jealousies that she had moved from the house where she had been living to stay with us in the family compound of her sister, Rachel. Marie had been unwell for several weeks. While her illness did not seem serious, it was persistent. Helped by Rachel, Marie sought medical attention, but their efforts were fruitless. Finally she collapsed and was taken to the Cottage hospital in Freetown's old Fourah Bay area. The city's medical system was overstretched by Ebola; many patients were either refused admission, or resisted going for fear of being (mis)diagnosed as Ebola positive. A few hours after James sent his text message, he called to tell me that Marie had died in hospital.

I went straight to the hospital, feeling that it was expected of me; I had often observed the importance of friends and family 'coming close' at times of crisis, such as after Human Right's accident on his bike. I met James, his uncle (an elder in the family compound), his cousin, his step-brother, and a neighbour who worked as a technician in the hospital. The group was attempting to make arrangements for Marie's burial. Their efforts centred on gaining access to the body so that they could perform the burial themselves; this was illegal under the state of emergency. Regardless of the deceased's Ebola status, all burials during the state of emergency were to be performed by official teams at the NGO-managed Waterloo Cemetery in Eastern Freetown, established to bury the city's dead during the time of Ebola. Consultations with the mortuary staff made it clear that illegal access to the body

in order to perform a 'secret' burial - still common for families with the right connections and able to make sufficient payments - was out of the question. The body was still in the isolation ward and therefore difficult to access, especially after a recent dispute between the medical and mortuary staff over the distribution of payments.

We returned to the hospital the next morning. The test results were negative for both Ebola and Malaria. There were further negotiations with hospital staff over whether Marie's body could be dressed and perfumed before the burial team took her. A family friend and former nurse at the hospital had volunteered to perform this duty, dressed in Personal Protective Equipment (PPE). The request was refused on the grounds that the 'white doctors would not allow it'. Instead, the body was put into a standardized body bag, carried to the white jeep used by the burial team to transport corpses, and taken to the Waterloo Cemetery

We arrived at the cemetery before the team (they had other bodies to collect on the way), Hundreds of mourners were waiting to witness burials. When our team came, we were called into the cemetery by a young man wearing tinted blue sunglasses and a tight matching vest and shorts made of 'africana' fabric. He looked as though he had stepped out of an Afrobeat music video, but was responsible for the challenging task of co-ordinating the mourners, burial teams, and cemetery staff. The young men in the team, some of whom I recognized from my research, lowered the body into the pre-dug plot assigned to Marie. Taylor, Marie's elder brother, had bought a wooden mesh, which was placed over the body bag (there had been no time to make a coffin) so that dirt was not cast disrespectfully directly onto the 'naked' body. After a short negotiation with the burial team supervisor, the body bag was opened so that the family could take one last look at Marie's face. Marie's twin brother, a filmmaker by trade, was recording the proceedings closely, partly for Marie's husband in Germany. The 8 or so mourners huddled together, taking photos on their smart phones. With no pastor available, and uncertain how to proceed in this unfamiliar and unusually institutionalized environment, James, a chef by profession, spontaneously took the lead. He recited the Lord's Prayer, stoically declaring, in the manner of a cleric at the graveside, that 'God marks our

time to die for a purpose that we don't know or understand'. A metal sign was erected with Marie's personal details, including the plot number, to make it easier for the family to locate the grave in future.

When we got back to the compound, Marie's sister, Rachel, served us large plates of groundnut soup with fish and rice, which she had prepared for those who would come to *tel osh*, share their sympathies. The people who had been at the cemetery reported what they had witnessed. They spoke of the horror and cruelty of Ebola: long rows of freshly dug graves; the arrival of the burial team with 13 bodies (a figure regularly quoted in the compound in the coming weeks), all children apart from Marie; and, perhaps most powerfully, the grave of a young woman which was being filled in with no mourners present. James admitted that this was what finally brought him to tears. At the same time, their reports sounded notes of admiration. The orderly running of the cemetery, involving independent co-ordination between grave diggers and the burial team (without family involvement), and the measured neatness in the arrangement of plots, were by turn unfamiliar and impressive. Taylor, Marie and Rachel's older brother, presented Rachel with a bag containing the white shawl and perfume he had bought in the hope of being able to dress Marie. This served as the necessary evidence that he had tried his hardest to bury their sister according to established norms.

Rachel reflected later that 'Ebola means that you don't feel it when somebody dies, they do it [the burial] so quickly, but then you will sit down and remember them, imagine about them'. This profound comment seemed to crystallise the 'cruelty' of Ebola, when the pressing and emotionally charged obligations surrounding death became entangled with the imposing presence of the novel biomedical order honed to eliminate the virus. The immediacy of the Ebola crisis, and present-oriented pressures to 'fight' against it, were difficult to square with the 'enduring' feeling of obligations surrounding 'good' death in Sierra Leone, in which the deceased's eternal fate lay in the balance (Little 1954, Richards 2015, Spencer 2015). When, soon after hearing that Marie had died, James's cousin asked fearfully whether she might have had Ebola, he was sharply criticized by other family members for expressing self-concern at an inappropriate time. It was not

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that the risk of catching Ebola was not taken seriously – many of those in the compound were taking precautions against it and were critical of those who did not – but that fear of infection was considered temporary and individual compared to the obligations that arose from the death of a close family member or friend. As a friend put it, 'In Sierra Leone we care about the person more once they have died than when they are alive'.

There was a powerful atmosphere of unresolved anxiety in the compound in the weeks after Marie's death, reflecting the 'incompleteness' of her life – her pregnancy and planned migration to Europe – and the uncertainty about the cause of her death. This was compounded by the 'incompleteness' of the funerary rites. Burial teams were tasked with performing burials on the same day that the body was collected, which created significant time pressures for mourners. Muslim burials in Freetown are typically performed soon after the death, following the ritual washing and wrapping of the body in a *lapa* (sheet), and a procession from the local mosque or house of the deceased to the cemetery. Christian burials often take place weeks after the death, leaving time to prepare a coffin, *kasanka* (special clothes for the corpse), badges with pictures of the deceased, personalized service booklets, and food and drink. A *wekin* (vigil) is usually held the night before the burial, followed by a church service in the morning and a procession to the cemetery, often involving uniformed bands. At times, bodies are transported from Freetown to natal villages for burial in family plots alongside (prominent) ancestors. Restrictions on gatherings made Muslim memorial services – typically on the 1st, 3rd, 4th, and 40th days after the death – challenging to perform. The handling of corpses was prohibited for risk of infection, and this precluded the ritual washing of bodies, performed at home or in mortuaries, as well as the ceremonies conducted by 'secret societies' (initiation societies) after their members pass away.

In Sierra Leone, the treatment of the dead – including those responsible for performing key tasks and manner and locations in which burials are performed – are closely connected to the status of the deceased. Burials are key means through which claims to land are made, especially in rural contexts, and it is through

respectable burial in the presence of elders that the link between the ancestors and the living is maintained, and blessings for the community secured (Jackson 1977, MacCormack 1984). Funerals and memorial services are also important opportunities for family meetings, at which disputes are voiced and settled in the presence of elders and stakeholders. Negotiations often included the care of dependants of the deceased and distribution of the deceased property. Burial teams, however, were trained to be blind to the status of the deceased and their families, ensuring the use of the same body bags, the same cemetery, and the same treatment for all. Thus Ebola was seen to present a greater challenge in some cases than in others.

This did not, however, preclude adaptation, often improvised on the ground. Marie's mourners' attempted to negotiate certain allowances at the Waterloo cemetery, and afterwards in the arrangements for memorialisation. Immediately after her burial, Marie's family started planning a memorial service – adapted from Muslim '40 days' ceremony – which would be less hampered by regulation than the burial, allowing the family to mark Marie's death in a more fitting manner. For several weeks after the death, 'the German' had been uncommunicative, and did not readily contribute to expenses that the family were incurring. During this period rumours, albeit hotly debated and contested, circulated in the neighbourhood and beyond that 'the German' had visited Freetown every few years, each time becoming attached to women who died soon after. In these narratives he was transformed from a well-meaning 'white' European citizen who could help the family, to a 'black' *ritualist* (someone who uses witchcraft to sacrifice others for personal profit).

The difficulties surrounding Marie's burial did not render it meaningless or void of 'order', even if a 'good' death, as customarily measured, was not achieved. The burial was rather performed according to the protocols of an all-encompassing bureaucratic system, which dictated that every person who died, whether or not they were among the close to 4000 Sierra Leoneans who succumbed to Ebola, was buried as if they had contracted the virus. Although Marie tested negative, she was nevertheless buried as if she had Ebola, and thus became a victim of 'mass death'.

Instead of a family plot or a local cemetery, where her body would have been interred alongside family or community members of previous generations, Marie was buried among people who had in common only that they had died during the time of Ebola. The number assigned by the burial team indicated statistically, and spatially in the neat rows of the recently established Waterloo cemetery, where Marie fell in this 'mass death'. The 'community' in which she was buried did not mirror the one in which she had lived, but rather the time and circumstances of her death. The alternating expressions of praise and horror I heard from my fellow mourners at the cemetery reflected the recognition of the foreign and temporary 'order' of the state of emergency, and, at the same time, the awareness that it was a form of 'disorder' – an obstacle to the typical, albeit varied, ways of dealing with death in Sierra Leone.

Since Marie died in hospital, her family had no choice but to work with the Ebola authorities. In many other cases, families simply failed to report a death to the burial teams, preferring to perform burials themselves. Although referred to as 'secret burials', prohibited under the state of emergency and punishable by heavy fines and arrest, these funerals were not inevitably deemed 'illegal'; they resulted from negotiations with established bureaucratic and legal structures that were often perceived to carry more weight than new Ebola authorities. The 'secret burials' too were highly structured, with built-in – though far from watertight – safety measures. By means of permission, assistance, and documentation from authorities such as the Freetown City Council (who issued Ebola-free death certificates), the police and their post-mortem teams (who often administered their own Ebola tests), mortuary workers, ambulance drivers, and the military, it was possible for mourners to perform burials themselves, at places and times of their own choosing. Negotiating with these gatekeepers typically required large payments (roughly US$400) or high-level connections, so they were undertaken primarily, though not exclusively, when people of high status died. In my neighbourhood, local representatives of the City Council became experts in managing 'secret burials'; management of the local cemetery was already a primary task. Their most prominent project, conceived before but executed during and after the crisis, was erecting a wall around the cemetery, in part to prevent

street youth from congregating there. Their authority and their connections to the city's existing bureaucratic institutions, the local community and the cemetery, meant that Council members were well positioned to broker 'secret' burials.

While the burial teams were criticized for performing burials too hastily, the 'secret' alternatives could be too slow. In June 2015, I attended the burial of Rachel, a nurse, and prominent member of a local Pentecostal church in Congo Town, who had reportedly tested negative for Ebola. Her body was being kept in the mortuary of a military hospital not too far away. Her husband, a teacher in a local girl's school, had planned to perform the burial the previous day, when a large number of mourners had gathered at the hospital for a service, but he was unable to secure all the necessary documentation in time. The next day, after receiving permission and making arrangements with Council representatives for the grave to be dug in the local cemetery, Rachel's body was transported, effectively in disguise, from the mortuary to the cemetery gates in an ambulance, with military personnel accompanying as an extra security measure. The Christian practice of a *wekin* (vigil) the night before the burial at the house of the deceased was abandoned, and – inverting the usual practice – a church service was performed after the burial, without the body present. Some local young men volunteered to carry the coffin to the grave, after purposefully donning the disposable blue medical gloves that were handed as an Ebola-inspired safety precaution. The ambulance hurriedly left the scene. As the body was lowered into the ground, uniformed girls from Rachel's husband's school sang a hymn. Before they had finished, the volunteers had already begun helping the regular cemetery gravediggers to fill in the grave, hoping to speed up the job. As the crowd – mostly dressed in black and white – was dispersing, a local fixer collected money to tip gravediggers and cemetery staff. The remaining mourners stood by, carefully observing the filling in of the grave, and the collecting and counting of the money. In the heat of the midday sun, it occurred to me that the gravediggers, volunteers, and witnesses were performing two stressful tasks: burying a loved one, and 'burying the evidence'. The burial was improvised and hybrid: informed by 'enduring' obligations of customary funerary obligations, yet adapted with respectful reference to the biomedical norms

introduced by burial teams, as well as genuine acknowledgement of the risks of infection and punishment for illegal burial.

'Safe and dignified burials'

The regulation of burials, deemed key sites of Ebola transmission, was a top priority in the Ebola response. The Ministry of Health and NGO-run burials teams were mobilized to perform all burials at official cemeteries. As a friend told me, 'now if anyone is sick they treat it like Ebola'. For home deaths, family members were required to call '117', an emergency service that would co-ordinate with a burial team stationed in the vicinity to collect the body within 24 hours. If the death occurred in a medical facility, as with Marie, staff would co-ordinate with the team. Freetown was divided into 4 bases, with about 20 teams serving the city. The teams were initially managed by the Ministry of Health and Sanitation, but in October 2014, many of the responsibilities of managing, recruiting, training, and funding were handed over to NGOs.

Each burial team had 12 members with a variety of roles: drivers, stretcher-bearers, chlorine sprayers, navigators, and a team supervisor, although roles were often interchanged informally on the ground. They operated two white jeeps, one for the personnel and equipment, and one for the bodies. The teams consisted primarily of young men, from various Sierra Leonean tribes, in their 20s; team supervisors were sometimes older. Formally, all members of the team were paid the same rate (roughly US$100 per week), regardless of role. A separate government-run documentation and swab team followed the burial team on motorbikes; their responsibility was to conduct Ebola tests on the corpses, which would be processed within 42 hours, and to collect data concerning the deceased and surviving family, the nature of the illness, and the reported cause of death. Since burials were performed before the result of the Ebola test was processed, the body was handled only by trained specialists who would dress in a new set of PPE for each body collected, and were sprayed with chlorine immediately after the body had been placed in the jeep. If the result was positive, a separate team, including members of the police, quarantined for 21 days (the incubation period of

the virus) the house where the person had died. Initially, in the latter part of 2014, burial teams were faced with a backlog of cases, and bodies were regularly left in streets. By early 2015, after more funding, training, and new management, the burial teams became proficient at performing their duties 'like clockwork', according to the expatriate manager at the Irish NGO responsible for managing the burial team I followed. The team supervisor, a sweet fatherly figure, told me proudly that no burial team members had died of Ebola in Freetown.

Figure 8 Members of a burial team getting prepared to pick up a body

The burial teams made admirable efforts to perform 'safe and dignified burials' (their slogan) in consultation with mourners. They attempted to give family members time to pray safely over bodies, they permitted up to 10 mourners to be present at the cemetery during burials, and they often facilitated requests that would not impede safety, such as agreeing to dress or wrap the body in ways requested by mourners. Burial teams could be convinced to drive past the churches where funeral services were being held on their way to the cemetery. Team members often exchanged private telephone numbers with the families of the deceased to facilitate mutual updates; at the same time informal mediators from the community's side emerged to facilitate communication between the burial teams and mourners.

Despite these efforts, the burial teams acquired a reputation for being hard to negotiate with. This was in part because their members were often 'unknown' to the families of the deceased. Given the widespread practice of working through or making personal contacts, this lack of familiarity challenged established methods of dealing with authorities and bureaucratic entities; no channels or *sababu* (connections) were in place to facilitate negotiation. Another factor was that, once the responsibility for administering wages was transferred from the Ministry of Health to NGOs, burial team members were paid more reliably and at higher rates than most had ever experienced before. They were thus less open to bribery, and more likely to stick to their SOP, than other officials. When they were willing to take the risk of diverting from these procedures, it was for members of their own family or community - not necessarily in return for direct payment but mindful of the obligations towards closely connected people. But this kind of responsiveness could carry harsh penalties. As my burial team supervisor told me when it emerged that a colleague had illegally performed a burial in an unofficial cemetery - a transgression for which he was ultimately dismissed - 'that's fine to help the community, but the community won't pay you 500,000 Leones ($100) a week'. Their tendency to be impervious to bribes and special pleading was one source of the popular antipathy towards the burial team and accusations of immorality.

Tensions surrounding the activities of the burial teams were heightened by the fact that the majority of members were youth, many of whom, in the team I followed, had previously held employment as bike riders, some attached the bike park discussed in chapter 3. Their marginality was invoked by complaints that burial teams were drunk, high, disorderly, or disrespectfully dressed. Management of the dead by young men, while potentially dangerous and stigmatizing, was equally an empowering act. By comparison, in Kinshasa the taking over of cemetery management by youth was viewed as a radical statement of protest against the authority of elders, ancestors, and the state (De Boeck 2009:246). In this case they were also the beneficiaries of formal employment for the first time, which was being used in a variety of ways: saving money to buy land and vehicles, for school or college fees, or for migration programmes; investing in informal businesses; supporting family and friends through hard times; and living 'big' while they good,

visibly consuming imported technological goods and flashy clothes. Employment conditions were also a source of anxiety; no-one knew when their jobs would end. The country would be declared Ebola free 42 days after the last detected case of Ebola, a measure determined by the World Health Organisation. The fact that burial team members were benefitting from 'Ebola money' was a source of criticism. The strongest criticisms, however, were mobilized against political elites accused of siphoning off for personal use the considerable sums that were entering the country, yet not participating in the dirty, risky work on the ground.

Following Durham's (2000) characterisation of African youth as 'social shifters', it seems significant that many of those entrusted to act as mediators between the state of emergency and the public during the crisis were young men and women, who were perhaps especially capable of juggling and undergoing the necessary transformations between numerous positionalities – high and low, and 'black' and 'white'. Striking transformations were performed on a daily basis, as the team's pristine white jeeps rolled up to the location where a body was to be collected, and the stretcher bearers and swab team started donning fresh PPE at the back of the jeeps until they were fully masked. They would then perform the duties of burial team, which included not only collecting the body, but also, at times, participating in Muslim and Christian prayers. The body was placed in one of the vans, the PPE was removed, and the boys were back on the road. Lively conversation, banter, and light-hearted argument resumed until they reached the Waterloo cemetery that afternoon, the PPE was once again donned, and bodies were carried to pre-dug graves. The PPE facilitated their transformation from black men to racially ambiguous experts, masked in a uniform of the 'white' world. Their adherence to professional protocol temporarily positioned them as 'white' actors who would not work through established 'black' networks and conventions where the elite and well-connected could bend the rules in their own favour. Perhaps it was not coincidental that many used their hefty post-Ebola redundancy pay for migration programmes after the crisis ended.

'Black' and 'White' death

Tensions between local practices and expectations surrounding death and those imposed under the state of emergency were often framed by my interlocutors in terms of 'black' and 'white' – racial categories through which cultural norms and values are complexly coded in Freetown. The 'black system', also called 'African', referred to notions of local culture, while the 'white system' referred to foreign, western culture. In the 'white system' people are seen to act according to fixed principles and cannot be convinced to alter their professional responsibilities. The burial teams were formally trained to adhere to this ideal, which included treating all dead bodies and mourning families the same, regardless of age, status, or personal connections. In the 'black system', by contrast, people are seen to show bias towards some over others, particularly their 'own people' (family, friends, community), and sometimes those more senior, or those who offered money that trumped professional responsibilities. The 'white' and 'black' systems were, for most of my interlocutors, both positive and negative, often depending on the positionalities of the actors involved. The 'white system' was at times admired as principled, fair, and necessary for 'development', and the 'black' as backwards, selfish, and self-destructive. Yet at other times the alternative evaluations were made: the 'black system' indexing enduring values such as tradition, care, and respectability, as well as adaptability and resilience, and the 'white' of greater material and temporary value, or (although rarely thus articulated), as oppressive and cruel. During the Ebola crisis, these opposing moral evaluations became starker than usual. The 'black system' was represented in a dominant discourse in the Ebola response as an obstacle to eliminating the virus. As the burial team supervisor once told me: 'culture is the problem here'. Yet for many the positives were just as strongly felt – particularly in terms of traditional commitments to care and support which were crucial during hard times.

The 'black' and the 'white' categories represent contrasting temporal orientations, a recurring reference point throughout my fieldwork. 'White time' referenced an abstract ideal of events occurring in a pre-determined and predictable manner that was often at odds with the reality of life (and death) in Freetown, which

necessitates operating in 'black time'. Through the 'white' lens, this might be seen as 'being late', but through the 'black' lens it signalled adherence to an implicit sense of the 'right' time, which factored in the juggling of social obligations, as well as the endless practical obstacles – broken down cars, unavailable funds, sudden illness or death – that Freetown residents routinely navigate. Burials are a heightened case of this, where the temporal consequences include the 'eternal' fate of the deceased and the most 'enduring' of social and ritual obligations, yet volatile circumstances require flexibility and adaptability 'in the moment'. As death in the time of Ebola made plain, the clockwork of 'white time' - while exemplifying Weberian bureaucratic order - presented a form of cruel impersonal disorder; a metronomic punctuality opposed to the comforting rhythm of activity typically associated with 'good' death.

Alongside the discursive mobilization of the categories of 'black' and 'white' by my interlocutors, they took on embodied forms. As Fassin points out, 'The body is precisely where the three dimensions [of race] are articulated: the violence of racialization is exerted, experienced and performed though the body' (2011:428). In Sierra Leone, the body is a primary site where the country's traumatic history of slavery holds enduring meaning, in day-to-day movements through historically embedded landscapes, and in ritual (Ferme 2001, Shaw 2002). Bodily performance and embodied memory escapes the limits of discourse. Not only are they particularly suited to making sense of violent and traumatic histories, but they also allow for flexibility and ambiguity beyond what is discursively possible. The centrality of the body in funerary ritual, both of the dead and the living, may explain why burials were key sites for reconciling the 'black' and the 'white'. Burials are powerful moments when transformations of embodied identities take place, in large part through the enactment of 'techniques of the body' (Mauss 1973), such as the socially meaningful acts of washing, dressing, and burying the corpse.

With 'black' death, the body was recognized as member of a family and community. It would both gain safe passage to the world to come through religiously informed ritual and receive a final claim to status among the living. 'Secret' burials aimed to

achieve this through their attempts to adhere to existing practices and to work with established, though now marginalized, bureaucratic and authoritative channels. With 'white' death, the body was hazardous material requiring specialist training to handle and dispose of safely, in order to protect the corporeal world from the further spread of Ebola. Burials performed by the burials team constituted the dead as part of a cruel 'mass' death, in large measure because of their strict adherence to uniform, biomedically informed procedures that treated all the dead as 'Ebola' victims, regardless of their cause of death.

While these categories referenced idealized cultural practices, as well as individual and collective identities, the boundaries between the 'black' and the 'white' were in practice blurred and shifting, in part because of their embodied as well as discursive character. Many actors in the ethnography transform or mediate between them, taking on features of both. This was evident in the daily transformations of the burial team described above. The gatekeeper of the Waterloo cemetery, and by extension the 'white' system, dressed not in the uniform of a recognizable official but in the style of a *raray boy* (street youth). The permanent hospital staff who would not allow access to Marie's body because of the 'white doctors' were thus aligning themselves with 'white' institutional professionalism over 'black' influence through personal connections. The Congo Town representatives of the city council brokered 'secret' burials, similar to pre-Ebola burials but adapted for the crisis. Perhaps even 'the German', the gatekeeper of the connection to Europe of Marie and her family, was transformed from a 'white' European to a 'black' representative of Freetown's illicit underworld. The balancing of 'white' and 'black' systems is required to varying degrees of all Freetown residents on a daily basis. During this period of crisis and the resulting international stranglehold, however, the 'black' and 'white' were more in evidence and more volatile than usual.

Transformation and mediation between ambiguous racial categories have a long precedent in the region's violent integration into the Atlantic system, and notably in Freetown among the Krio, the decedents of the city's freed-slave founders. Shaw has convincingly demonstrated that the historic transformations and upheavals of

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slavery resonate to the present day: 'the development of a landscape of terror and capture; the exchange of commodified people for important money and goods; and the growth of new kinds of leaders whose power and wealth were derived from this exchange' (2002:11). Freetown has continued to serve as an unstable global hub in the post-colonial period, where the balancing of 'black' and 'white' systems is of continued significance. The civil war saw the rise of NGOs, humanitarian interventions, and international peace-building initiatives, along with the proliferation of human rights and development discourses. Yet rather than eliminating distinctions between the 'black' and the 'white', as universalist discourses might be expected to do, these categories have in some senses been pitted against each other. Benton has argued that humanitarianism in Sierra Leone reinforces racialized non-equivalence in the valuations of human life (Benton 2016). Other analyses have highlighted the ways that human rights discourses can become locally meaningful in ways antithetical to what was intended by the international organizations that promote the discourse (Ferme and Hoffman 2004), in some cases facilitating the resurgence of local 'ritual knowledge' over the hegemony of Western education in the context of economic failures (Shaw 2002:23).

Analyses of the Ebola crisis have similarly highlighted the conflict between local culture and foreign norms (Fairhead 2016), or have shown how local culture was largely neglected by the international response (Richards 2016), thus reinforcing rather than blurring the fault-line between the two. Taking into consideration how this conflict was locally framed and enacted with reference to the 'black' and 'white' categories, I suggest that the Ebola crisis was on the one hand understood as a clash between two distinct cultural systems or social 'orders', but that on the other hand, hybridity, brokerage, and creative movement between these systems was both possible and locally meaningful, albeit far from symmetrically so given the sizeable muscle and coercive potential of the well-funded state of emergency. For example, the burial teams, which aimed to facilitate 'dignified' burials, formally incorporated customary ritual into their procedures, alongside some degree of informal flexibility and accommodation on the ground. Equally, 'secret' burials became much more bureaucratically informed than usual, incorporated safety

protocols, and were often performed more quickly and in a lower key than they might usually have been.

Recognition of both categories, and brokerage between them, are long-standing mechanisms for forwarding political claims in Sierra Leone. Death and burials are key moments when statuses and hierarchies are destabilized and constructed, which were in a particular state of flux during the crisis. As Hallam et al. point out: 'The body in death highlights the passage of time, the inevitability of physical transformation, and thereby acts as a powerful reminder that the self is subject to change' (1999:4). This chapter has highlighted how such claims to status became subsumed within the larger social and symbolic orders of the 'black' and 'white', both of which were reignited with potential for making claims during the period of national crisis. Their low status as youth enabled burial team members to promote themselves as gatekeepers of the 'white' system in which established hierarchies and preferential treatment were eroded by a powerful human rights discourse that demanded the equal treatment of all bodies. Such claims had the backing of the state of emergency. 'Secret' burials, facilitated by established connections and resources that higher-status families were able to mobilize, allowed the authority of the 'black' system to trump the novel laws and protocols of the state of emergency.

Conclusion

In this chapter I have described burial practices during the Ebola crisis, which I have suggested is revealing of local experiences and responses to crisis, in which life course ritual was central, and in which young men played a major role. Equally, burials during Ebola are revealing of the relationship between 'good' and 'bad' death and social 'order' and 'disorder', that has defined anthropological discussion on the topic. They suggest that they are indeed related, which becomes particularly clear during times of crisis and disorder. During Ebola, their relationship could not have been more overt: the regulation of burials was a principle concern of the international response, and challenges surrounding funerary rites were a defining experience of the crisis for Freetown residents. It

was through imposed 'Ebola' burials that the 'disorder' of the Ebola virus was contained, yet it was those same practices that constituted those who received them - a far greater number than those who died of the virus – as part of the 'mass death' of Ebola. Significantly, however, Freetown residents were not working with a singular notion of 'order' or 'disorder', but drawing on the two registers of 'black' and 'white'. It was not simply that 'white' order represented disorder in local understandings, although the conflict was acknowledged in this language; rather, both simultaneously represented 'order' and 'disorder' for local residents. Buried beneath these normative tensions was a conflict between, on the one hand, the new authorities and protocols of the state of emergency, and, on the other, established authorities, connections, and bureaucratic channels. Navigating this disjuncture became a key characteristic of living through the crisis, which came to the fore when pressing obligations, such as those surrounding, death, came into play. The continuity of social life, through the performance of on-going practices in negotiation with familiar authorities, social networks, and temporal expectations had to be reconciled with the dangers of Ebola and the novel regulations and structures of the state of emergency.

These challenges, however, were not entirely unfamiliar. Securing 'good' death is never straightforward in Sierra Leone's unpredictable and volatile environment, where flexibility in the performance of ritual is a necessity. Securing a 'good' life is an even greater challenge. By virtue of the close-knit nature of family and community life, not to mention widespread material scarcity and lack of adequate medical facilities, death is always close at hand. Tensions, conflict, and controversy are often present at funerals, along with the recognition that things might not go according to plan. Equally, Sierra Leone's long history of reconciling 'black' and 'white' is a source of considerable scope for the fluidity, hybridity and creative brokerage through which new orders were forwarded. Ebola did not introduce the racial coding of 'culture', but triggered a highly developed system of classification that is a constant reference point in Freetown. Ebola did, however, inject these categories with renewed meaning and potency, in part because the categories of 'black' and 'white' were so evidently in dialogue and conflict in 'real time' during the crisis. Burials became a primary interface between Freetown residents and

these competing systems, and thus were both emblematic of the crisis at large and reflective of the continuing challenges of life and death in post-colonial Africa.

The mobilisation of and complex fluid character of the 'black' and 'white' categories, outlined in the chapter, represent emic ways through which many of the sets of social tensions between sets of expectations and registers discussed throughout the thesis were understood and articulated. The tensions between 'kinship' and 'business' registers discussed in chapter 2 relate to these categories in revealing ways. As do articulations of 'formal' and 'informal' economic registers discussed in chapter 3. Equally, the complex interplay between 'global' and 'local' aesthetic styles, and 'long-term' and 'short-term', in chapter 4, map onto these racial categories, each with their own temporal expectations and implications in status formation. In many instances these oppositions share an idealised, often discursive form, with a reality that is much more fluid, embodied, and mutually constituting. The nature of this interplay, I suggest, is very important in understanding how family and intimate politics entail very careful management of what is 'said' and what is 'done'. These interrelations return in chapter 7, and finally in the conclusion in a more explicit discussion of their relationships and the broader analytical significance of it. This chapter additionally outlines the ways that the Ebola crisis entailed great attention and contestation around life-course ritual, around which young men occupied central roles. This is much less present in the first three chapters, in which the 'everyday' is the dominant arena of sociality and social mobility for young men. This point is reinforced further in the next chapter, where we examine the events surrounding another life-course ritual, a baby naming ceremony. The productive relationship between social reproduction according to a life-course model and crisis – a central argument of the thesis – is thus further explored.

Chapter 6. Life-course ritual and the realigning of intimacies during Ebola

It was the evening of May 17th, 2015, in Congo Town. The state of emergency had been in effect for almost a year. A weariness surrounding the Ebola crisis was taking hold in the capital. The city had witnessed a steep rise in cases in late 2014 and early 2015, when new clusters of cases were popping up regularly in different neighbourhoods. This created a degree of panic; it was hard to predict where and when a new case would emerge. By now, however, the rate of Ebola transmission was on the way down. Every evening there was an announcement of the number and location of new cases and the number of deaths countrywide. I had listened to the announcement with some neighbours who had gathered for an ad-hoc 'bachelor's eve' celebration; one of the group was getting married the next day. At that point, several days had passed with no new cases identified locally, but the daily announcement brought the unwelcome news of a handful of new cases upcountry. The state of emergency – through which hosts of stringent regulations had been implemented, most notably travel restrictions, curfews, and lockdowns – was set to be lifted after 42 hours had elapsed with no new cases coming to light. This measure, established by the World Health Organisation, amounted to double the 21-day incubation period of the Ebola virus. The clock had been reset.

The party was taking place on a much smaller scale than might normally have been expected. Gatherings of more than ten people were illegal under the state of emergency, but by now the common practice of bribing the police had become a standard way of bypassing this law. But the groom, like many others during the crisis, was extremely short of money. Our neighbours had made a collection for a crate of locally brewed Guinness. Someone who worked for the National Power Authority had used his influence to secure electricity for our area – never a certainty and often a rarity – so we would have light and could dance to an RnB, Afrobeat, and Reggae playlist put together by James, described in chapter 2 and 5. James, usually the first to dance and crack a joke, was uncharacteristically quiet and contemplative, sitting by himself on the veranda. Another neighbour explained, 'James is feeling the effects of Rachel being close to giving birth'.

Rachel and James, a couple in their mid-20s had been together for about two years, and Rachel had become pregnant in the summer of 2014, shortly after the declaration of the state of emergency. She was studying business management and finance at college, but the college had been closed until further notice during the Ebola crisis. Rachel also ran several informal businesses, including an *esusu* (rotating credit association) among mostly female market traders, and a very small store selling household goods that she had set up in partnership with James. James had been out of work since September 2014, when the restaurant he worked for stopped operating because of the crisis.

Our neighbour was right. As James and I arrived back at his family compound, Rachel was sitting on the veranda of the house belonging to James's uncle and auntie, Samuel and Jane. The two of them were both standing close by, alongside two of Rachel's close female friends from the neighbourhood. Rachel was in severe pain, and her feet were very swollen, meaning that she could barely walk without assistance. A few hours earlier, she had gone to the NGO-run maternity clinic where she had registered earlier in her pregnancy, but they told her that she was not close enough to delivering and sent her home. James suggested going to the Connaught hospital – one of Freetown's main hospitals – but this idea was rejected. Rachel had attempted to enrol in its maternity ward several weeks earlier, but had not found the process easy; the state hospitals were severely overstretched during the epidemic, and were also deemed hotspots for Ebola transmission. Instead, Rachel and her friends headed to Rachel's family compound, a few hundred meters down a steep path into the valley, where her mother was preparing for a traditional *sara* (small ceremony) that aimed to bring about an auspicious delivery. They had decided to go to a local *mami*, an old lady and former nurse, who would deliver the baby at her home, using a combination of western procedures and customary methods. James and Jane were particularly unhappy about this option. James told us, 'they do not have much faith in that family, Christians do not make *sara'*. Jane agreed: 'we wait for God to intervene'. Rachel's family were Muslim, although Rachel had started attending church with James's sisters. I asked if God was intervening now, and they laughed. Samuel advised James against interfering

further: 'this is women's business'. The tension and uncertainty weighed heavily on us all, exacerbated by the fact that this was Rachel's first birth. According to Auntie Susan, 'If you have more experience you can give birth at home, but if you panic you may need a caesarean and they can't be trusted to do that'. James went to his pastor to pray privately with him, as is routine for fathers before childbirth. On Jane's instruction, and against her husband's advice, we called a friend in the neighbourhood, a taxi driver, who drove Jane and me to the *mami*'s house on the other side of the valley, which was experiencing a blackout at the time. The *mami* was frail and it seemed as though she had been drinking that evening. From Rachel's swollen feet, she had deduced that she would require special treatment, and was therefore was prepared to refer her to the formal medical authorities. Jane fetched Rachel from inside, and we walked her back to the car, where they drove back to the clinic. Rachel was once again turned away, despite being in severe pain and feeling as though she was ready to deliver. The following morning, a neighbour of Rachel's – who was married to James's adopted sister – took Rachel back to the clinic where she was finally admitted. James was still unhappy to be out of the loop.

Later that same day, James and I met Rachel at the gates of the clinic, carrying their new-born baby boy, who would be named Moses. The clinic was publicized as free for patients, but Rachel was forced to make an informal payment before she could be discharged, just as she had made a similar under-the-table payment to be registered. We returned back to the neighbourhood with the baby, stopping first at James's family compound, then on to Rachel's compound. The neighbours crowded around the baby, telling the couple *tenki* (thank you). The baby was taken to a room where Rachel and James had arranged for him and Rachel to stay, near to her family. Despite her earlier dismissive comment, Auntie Susan performed a *sara* of rubbing salt and leaf around the umbilical cord so that it would fall off in 3 days, and the baby was washed. Food was served, prepared by Rachel's mother and neighbours.

The National Ebola Response Centre, which comprised national and international authorities involved in the large-scale humanitarian intervention, had introduced a

series of rules and regulations that defined the state of emergency, as outlined in the previous chapter. These rules and regulations threatened to put life 'on hold' as they restricted and undermined social routines and practices, particularly in the domestic sphere. Not surprisingly, then, the 'Ebola' state of emergency was experienced particularly intensely at moments of transition in the lifecycle, such as birth and death. The state of emergency operated on the basis that eliminating the spread of Ebola was an absolute priority shared by all, and that, once this objective had been achieved, normal 'stable' life would continue.

This assumption, was, however, sharply opposed to the experience of many people who were living through the crisis, for whom biological and social continuity seemed more crucial than ever. The tension between continuity and stasis was particularly evident around bodily transformations such as illness and lifecycle processes, exemplified by pregnancy in this case. Rachel's pregnancy was not an outlier; the number of pregnancies reportedly increased significantly during the crisis, reflecting the closure of schools and widespread boredom among young people. Rachel and her loved ones were experiencing a crisis requiring medical attention, yet established procedures and operations such as those associated with childbirth were much more challenging than usual. The state hospital where she had initially sought medical attention did not admit her, and the NGO clinic at which she had enrolled was overstretched. More generally, the higher charges required to use medical facilities put them out of reach for people who, through loss of work, were harder up than usual. Public transport was not operating at night, and travel in and out of the city was restricted. All these were obstacles to formal healthcare. The country's healthcare system was experiencing a huge influx of money, but rather than strengthening its existing, ailing infrastructure, this extra funding was directed towards Ebola with projects such as temporary Ebola holding and treatment centres and ambulances dedicated to those suspected to be infected with the virus, and its victims. All the while, the country's main maternity hospital was on the brink of collapse. A significant number of the country's doctors had died from the virus, and there were crackdowns under state of emergency regulations on the smaller clinics and pharmacies where people typically went for treatment or medication.

On top of all this, perhaps paradoxically, there was greater resistance than usual to using formal healthcare facilities; they were now seen as hotspots for the Ebola virus. Stories circulated of people misdiagnosed as Ebola positive and admitted to isolation wards where contact with family was prohibited, or where they caught the virus from 'real' Ebola victims on the ward. More sinister stories reported nurses deliberately injecting patients with the Ebola virus. These stories built on long-standing suspicions surrounding nurses as witchcraft practitioners, and on theories that Ebola was being spread intentionally to secure continued aid funding, which was being siphoned off by elites and others for personal use[10]. Another reason for avoiding formal medical care during the time of Ebola was the risk it carried of stigmatization within the neighbourhood.

In this chapter, I examine the case study of Rachel, James, and their new-born baby Moses, to try to understand how the Ebola crisis affected attempts to start a family. The chapter shows how the processes of social and biological reproduction could not be put 'on hold'. On the contrary, they were pressing priorities, in part because the very networks and relationships that are established and maintained in the process of family formation are at the same time key to day-to-day survival during times of crisis. Yet these challenges surrounding pregnancy, birth, and social reproduction in a time of Ebola were not always radically different from those faced in 'normal' circumstances in Freetown, where material scarcity is widespread, medical infrastructure weak and de-developed (Robinson and Pfeiffer 2015), birth outside stable family structures common, and a range of social beliefs and practices co-exist. Family formation within urban neighbourhoods, such as Rachel and James's, were characterized by a high degree of connectivity. Intimate relationships were fraught with tension and uncertainty, not least because partners often had numerous overlapping connections that required a careful politics of adjustment. Realigning intimacies was a defining feature of family formation - an on-going, protracted and 'crisis-ridden' process - into which, this chapter suggests, the tensions emerging from the Ebola crisis became subsumed and incorporated.

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[10] Similar anxieties and suspicions have been identified in a variety of contexts, particularly surrounding vaccines (Leach and Fairhead 2007).

Another aim of this chapter, which has been relatively consistent throughout the thesis, is to further our understanding of male youth in Africa through contextualising them in relation to the perspectives and actions of women around them; through which a complex picture of gender emerges. While gendered expectations often appear to conform to overtly patriarchal tropes – which undoubtedly hold powerful sway in this context – such a reading has the potential to mask some of the nuances of gendered roles and relations in practice. Throughout the thesis we have seen female figures who have held authoritative positions in matters of family politics and business, and in the furthering of their personal projects. However, expectations that women invest in existing household structures as opposed to young men, who often spend outside of them – a cross-cultural pattern – nonetheless hold some currency; even if gendered divisions of labour in relation to 'public' and 'private' sphere appear increasingly eroded. In this chapter we see both sides of this coin simultaneously; we see how expectations set confines through which male and female actors act, with seemingly marginalizing consequences, yet equally how actors themselves manoeuvre within these confines to further their own aims. This was particularly evident through the ways that Rachel's business projects became entangled with her and James's projects of family formation during a particularly unstable episode in Freetown's history. This chapter, in turn, aims to contribute to the insights from studies of African working women that have centred heavily on women themselves (Clark 2010, Hann 2013), by placing men and women on a relatively even footing.

James and Rachel continued…

James and Rachel had known each other for many years, and started going out in 2013. Their families lived close to each other in Congo Town. They were both in their mid- to late-twenties, and, from their teenage years onwards, had both spent much of their lives in the neighbourhood. As result of living near each other in a close-knit neighbourhood, they had many mutual friends and family. Rachel lived with her frail mother, whose immediate neighbours were Aisha (James's sister by adoption) and her husband Kei. Kei and Aisha were major figures in the homes of both James and Rachel's families. Kei operated a small car mechanic business; most

days he could be seen lying under rusty cars, or directing a team of apprentices near the entrance to James's family compound, where he parked the cars. As an authoritative male figure, Kei acted as an uncle to Rachel, whose father lived upcountry. Aisha had inherited the role of head of the women's secret society, established in the 1950s by the matriarch (Mami Mafemebe, discussed in chapter 2) of James's family who had initially settled in the area. As a result, Aisha split much of her time between the compounds, where she was often a key figure in both. Foday, a long-time friend of James's and of his cousin Umaru (all of whom we met in chapter 2) – they all attended the same church – lived very close to Rachel. James and Umaru regularly ate food prepared in Kei and Aisha's house. This increased after Umaru began sleeping with Kadiatu, the niece of James's step-mother, Rachel, which as described in chapter 2, was the source of some tension between and within the families.

Early in their relationship, James described Rachel as his 'best friend', and often sang her praises to me. He had her number saved in his phone as 'my wife', and they would often, somewhat jokingly, text each other, calling each other names such as, 'the father of my child', or 'the love of my life'. Rachel was very entrepreneurial. She set up a small shop in a makeshift room adjacent to her mother's veranda, selling everyday household items such as canned food, biscuits and sweets, mosquito repellent coils, powdered milk, tea, and soap, which she would buy downtown in bulk. Rachel would go once a month to the *luma*, a produce market out of town, where she would buy palm oil and rice to sell, both to stock her own shop and sometimes also on behalf of her father who had a small farm out of town.[11] James, who worked at a restaurant and guesthouse in a nearby neighbourhood, would spend much of his free time between these places of business. Rachel ran several *esusu* schemes (rotating credit associations), each with slightly different financial structures (varying sums, and varying intervals of collection and distribution). Rachel's mother had a stall in the local food market, and many of her fellow market women were in Rachel's *esusu*. James had invested several hundred dollars in her shop, and equally Rachel had recently contributed

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[11] This became much harder once *luma* were banned under the state of emergency, and travel out of town became more challenging.

to James's sister's wedding expenses, both of which bound them together as a couple looking towards a shared future.

On several occasions, however, Rachel expressed to me a concern that she wanted James to think more about their future. She wanted him to get better at saving money, and not to waste it on drinking and 'cheap popularity', by which she meant hanging out with friends who were not 'serious about the future'. She convinced him to join an *esusu* scheme, to which he paid 10,000 Leones a day. Rachel feared that James was spending money on other women. He in turn complained that she was overly jealous and suspicious, but Rachel told me that it was the wasted money that concerned her most.

It was true, however, that James was seeing other women. It is common in Freetown for men and women to have numerous simultaneous sexual relationships. Many Sierra Leoneans must reconcile an ideal of monogamy – a mother giving birth after marriage, and living with her husband, the father of her child, in a stable home – with a reality in which most children are born out of wedlock, most young people do not have their own stable homes, and many people are conducting numerous sexual relationships simultaneously.

Rachel wanted to build a household with James but, growing up in Freetown, she knew all too well that men could not be relied upon; she once explained to me how important it was not to become too dependent on men. However, Rachel had to reconcile her desire for self-reliance with her desire to be a wife. As she explained,

> 'when you are from a poor family, you need to find money in different places because men will let you down if you don't. But if you have money they will treat you better, and will have to listen to you, as you won't be so reliant on them. When I was growing up I didn't know how to cook, I would just go to school and come back and not help around the house, just sell market goods. It is only now, because of James, that I have learnt how to cook and keep the home'.

Rachel's pregnancy, in this respect an untimely one, coincided almost exactly with the declaration of the state of emergency, which became a marker of collective crisis for Sierra Leoneans. It signaled that anyone was at risk of catching the Ebola virus, and that the rules and regulations of the state of emergency were inescapable. From a grassroots perspective, though, it often appeared that personal experiences of the Ebola crisis did not represent a singular or monolithic period of upheaval, rupture, or danger, but were rather marked by a series of small, inter-connected crises. On the one hand, the Ebola crisis was a humanitarian crisis of global proportions, but on the other it felt domestic and intimate.

Both James and Rachel experienced significant financial strains that coincided with the pregnancy and the declaration of the state of emergency. In response to travel restrictions in and out of the country, as well as daily curfews on business activity during the crisis, the restaurant and guesthouse where James worked closed its operations; James lost his job and received little financial compensation. Rachel experienced her own financial crisis as the *esusu* (rotating credit associations) that she ran dramatically crashed. One figure she quoted was that she found herself in 9 million Leones ($1800) debt, as money she owed to her clients could not be paid back. One client threatened legal action, after which Rachel ran away for several days, not telling her family or James where she had gone. In addition, the small grocery store that Rachel and James ran together struggled during this time, in part because the *luma* -- the monthly produce markets on the outskirts of Freetown where Rachel usually bought produce in bulk – were banned under state of emergency regulations.

Rachel and James were unmarried when Rachel got pregnant. James, in particular, was keen to arrange a marriage, so that the birth of their child would mark the establishment of an honourable family. However, this was no easy task, especially now that money was harder to come by. James attempted to *lay kola* for Rachel. This represents the 'traditional' or 'country' method of marriage, where the husband and his family give a bride price and other symbolic and monetary gifts to the bride and her family at an engagement ceremony. The initial meeting between the families, however, was not fruitful. James complained that Rachel's family were

being unreasonable in asking for too much for the bride price, not taking into account the crisis, or the ways that he had previously supported Rachel. Some of Rachel's friends were also critical. As one female friend put it, 'they should not treat her like meat for sale, that is old-fashioned thinking'. Rachel's family also failed to offer to prepare food for the engagement ceremony, a traditional obligation of the bride's family; James was a 'stranger' entering the household and therefore in need of being hosted. James called a family meeting (with his family), seeking advice about to whether he should attempt to renegotiate, but his father advised him strongly against making another offer, since that would bring shame on his family. Rachel told me later that she had not wanted her family to offer to prepare food for the event, even on a modest scale. She feared that this would lead to even greater embarrassment down the road when they failed to mobilize the resources required to put together a marriage programme on the grand scale considered appropriate for such an event. The Ebola crisis was not regarded as an excuse to halt the quest for family formation; lifecycle rituals, key to the process of social reproduction, were subject to the same expectations as before the crisis.

By the time Rachel gave birth, as described above, James and Rachel remained unmarried, and there were no wedding plans in the pipeline. This contributed further to the instability around Moses's birth and its immediate aftermath; parental roles and responsibilities were not clearly defined. Perhaps for this reason, Rachel and James organized a large-scale *pulnador* (baby naming ceremony), which was performed two weeks after the birth. Traditionally this ritual would have been performed a week earlier, symbolising the new arrival's first outing and introduction to the community. A name would be given to the baby during a ceremony that was often administered by an elder or a religious leader. According to this tradition, James and Rachel arranged a small ceremony a week after the birth, administered by James's Uncle Samuel. But they also spent an additional week arranging a much bigger public ceremony. This was challenging not just because of their financial situation, but also in legal terms; state of emergency bylaws prohibited gatherings of more than ten people. Using connections with the local police station via a friend and neighbour, James was

able to secure a uniformed police presence at the ceremony, thus giving it the required semblance of legality.

Hundreds of people were invited, including significant figures such as James's former boss at the restaurant and guesthouse, who made a financial contribution. James was relieved that the relationship had not died; in fact the *pulnador* had proved to be a vehicle for keeping it alive. Rachel invited members of the Muslim youth group to which she had belonged. Many of the guests were mutual friends and neighbours from the neighbourhood. The programme took place in an open space behind James's family compound. He and Rachel erected a tarpaulin, under which the official proceedings took place. They rented chairs, which were carefully arranged in neat rows around the small square. Fresh ginger ale was served to the guests while they were waiting for the ceremony to start. The ceremony was overtly Christian; proceedings were led by the pastor of a church that James had recently started attending. Hymns were sung, verses from the Bible read, and the pastor delivered a sermon, during which he commented that childhood should be taken more seriously in Sierra Leone, given that people are 'once an adult, but twice a child'. He noted how parents often start to neglect children after a few years, and commented disapprovingly on the fact that many Sierra Leoneans have children out of wedlock, as was the case for Rachel and James. He added, however, that God would judge the parents according to the way that they raised the child. This was a welcome and comforting message. The sermon was followed by the official naming of the baby, who Rachel held in her arms as guests came and placed money in her lap, as was customary. Afterwards, food prepared by James's sisters and step-mother was served on disposable plates. It was the type of food, often named 'white food', that was typically served at wedding receptions: jollof rice, noodles, prawn crackers, and balls of beef. All these features of the ceremony – the food, the religious aspects, and the scale – were more reminiscent of a Christian wedding ceremony than a typical *pulnador*.

The fact that the baby naming ceremony resembled a wedding was not coincidental; it seemed to me to be a self-conscious substitute on the part of Rachel and James, motivated by their desire to present a positive public image as they set

about starting their own family. Their emphasis on the *pulandor* in these adverse conditions exemplifies how lifecycle ritual and family formation after birth were prioritised during the Ebola crisis. Indeed, they were arguably more significant, especially when viewed from a long-term perspective, than the relatively temporary concerns of the Ebola crisis. In the short term, the Ebola outbreak represented an urgent danger, and the state of emergency a major obstacle, but in the long term, challenges around family formation seemed for many more pressing and more enduring.

Indeed, as the *pulnador* demonstrated, these long-term concerns were inseparable from the day-to-day challenges of getting through the crisis. The *pulnador* was a powerful mechanism that helped secure Rachel, James and Moses's place in a social network and support community. At a time when James and Rachel had limited income, securing these relationships was more important than ever; these are the very networks and relationships required for survival at times of crisis. This proved to be the case for Rachel and James. Many of those invited to the ceremony became actively involved in raising Moses and in supporting Rachel and James through Ebola and beyond.

The positive public image projected at the *pulnador* was not, however, an accurate reflection of the relationship between James and Rachel, which had become fraught and tense as the pregnancy progressed. At one point, James said he wanted to break up, and expressed his disappointment in her in a strikingly legalistic manner. He spoke of the 'four occasions when she has let me down', referring to the times he had bailed her out of financial troubles, or she had shamed him in some way. He seized Rachel's computer as a kind of collateral, which angered her. He also said that he wanted to 'marry the child', a way of claiming rights over the baby according to a traditional process, although this had to be reconciled with state-based legal rights that mothers have over their children for the first seven years of their life. But James's aggressive actions succeeded in convincing Rachel to show emotion and speak apologetically to James and his family members, thus signalling that they were back together and that their commitment stood.

The liminality that James and Rachel encountered as a result of her pregnancy was spatial as well as temporal. For Rachel, it had become clear that, as a pregnant woman in a relationship with the baby's father that was both committed and precarious, there was no 'right' place for her. During this period, she moved between three locations, none of which proved satisfactory. Sometimes she stayed with her step-sister in Waterloo, on the outskirts of Freetown. This was a cause of anxiety for James, who did not trust Rachel's step-sister's intentions, not least because Rachel's very presence there indicated that she, Rachel, did not trust him to look after her and the baby. The physical distance meant that he did not know what was going on with Rachel. James once told me, 'I don't know about in Europe, but in Africa "step business" is always conflict. When there is the same mother but different father…each sibling are looking out for themselves'. This corresponded with Rachel's complaints that her step-sister had not been interested in looking after her during her pregnancy. Rather, she and her husband wanted Rachel's assistance in running the shop in which they worked and lived. James suspected that keeping Rachel close was a strategic way of stalling on repaying the money that Rachel's step-sister had borrowed from them. As a result of all this, James worked hard to find somewhere in the neighbourhood for Rachel to stay while she was pregnant, and where she and the baby could eventually live. After lengthy negotiations, they found a room of her own close to her family compound, but this, too, had its complications. When James spent time there with Rachel, which included sleeping together, her family expressed their unhappiness that the relationship was not more official, or, to put in in more material terms, that they had not been compensated as generously as they would have been if the engagement been official. The problems were exacerbated when Moses became ill and started sleeping badly in the month after Eid. It had been noted that babies often became ill in the area in which Rachel's room was located. A year or so earlier, another baby had died there, having been eaten by a witch, as it was explained to me. And Rachel's family were in an on-going conflict with their own landlord, giving their situation an added sense of precarity.

At this point, Rachel moved up to James's family compound, exchanging rooms with James's cousin, who did a swop by moving down to where Rachel had been

living. James, Rachel, and Moses all slept in the small room, just big enough to fit a single bed. The responsibility for looking after Moses was shared among the women and children of the house, especially Rachel, James's step-mother, his aunt Jane, and his younger siblings. The intimacy and support inherent in this environment did not, however, lead to a trusting and stable relationship between the parties involved. Issues over the illegitimacy of James and Rachel's child and the lack of formality in their relationship persisted. Rachel bonded well with one of James's sisters, with whom she was in the habit of joking and chatting while preparing food on the veranda, commenting on Facebook posts, and watching Nigerian and Indian soap operas. Yet she still felt like unwelcome visitor, someone not yet formally incorporated into the family. The relationship between Rachel and Rachel was particularly tense. Rachel was neither a stranger nor fully familiar. She was close to Kadiatu, Rachel's disreputable niece described in chapter 2. After Rachel and Kadiatu fell out, after the failed fish-selling venture, Kadiatu went to live with Foady and Aisha, who adopted one of her sons.

James and Rachel fought intensely when they were living together. This seemed to be part of an on-going, often indirect, game of chicken; a process through which the terms, and conditions of their relationship, and their responsibility and 'rights' over Moses, were constituted and negotiated. In most cases like Rachel and James's, couples do not stay together or marry after having a child together; rather the child will live in the home of one of their family members, or in a home established later by one of the parents with a future partner. One point of tension between Rachel and James was over sex. Rachel told me that James wanted to have sex with her and was pressuring her. Popular wisdom in Freetown told that breastfeeding mothers should not have sex for the first year after giving birth, which was explained as a nutritional health issue for the growing child. James, unemployed, was not sleeping with other women at this point. Rachel told me that she was also withholding from sex since it was better for their future as a stable couple. Rachel was unhappy with how James treated her now that they lived together in close proximity. He was not as forthcoming as previously with material support. This was exacerbated after James started working at his new job at a prominent NGO. Yet when, following the suggestion of his cousin, James offered to

give her a small daily allowance, Rachel rejected it, seeing it as a patronizing gesture, which would increase her dependence on him. She still earned a small income from a boy who sold household goods on her behalf, and she was keen to emphasise her self-reliance.

Having Rachel live under his eye in the compound gave James considerable power in the relationship. James knew that he had family members who could raise their child for him if Rachel left, and this further strengthened his bargaining position. Having Rachel under his roof also meant that he 'owed' her less because, structurally, he was 'bearing' her. Yet being close to James was also a position of strength for Rachel. If she left the compound, she would lose custody over Moses, although if James asked her to leave, she would be able to leave with Moses and maintain custody. Rachel's presence in the compound also restricted James's ability to form other relationships, and gave Rachel extensive inside knowledge of his family affairs and dynamics. One tumultuous evening, after careful planning during the day, Rachel took money that James had left in his room and broke his television, provoking a fight. If he hit her, she was prepared to go straight to the local police station, or the local 'family support' unit, to report a case against him that would likely result in her gaining custody over Moses. James, mindful of this, but never openly admitting that it influenced him, did not hit Rachel, although significant verbal abuse was exchanged. Instead, he used the incident for his own benefit. After checking with his contact at the local police station to confirm that Rachel had not reported a case, James reported it, together with the insults that she had directed at him. The following morning, Rachel's step-sister, mother, and Kei, came to James's compound to 'beg' to him and Rachel, that is, to make a formal apology.

Despite the tumultuous course of their relationship, James and Rachel ultimately did get married – in December 2016, with a wedding celebration even bigger than their baby naming.

Exception or the rule?

A key question emerging from the case of James and Rachel concerns the extent to which their tumultuous story of pregnancy, love, and family formation was influenced by the Ebola crisis with which it almost exactly coincided.

The liminal zone in space and time that Rachel and James occupied was in some respects emblematic of the liminality that was collectively experienced during the Ebola crisis – a period of great uncertainty, in which many day-to-day operations were challenging to perform. It is hard not to draw some direct connections between the conditions of the state of emergency and some of James and Rachel's difficulties: the overstretching of formal health infrastructure experienced by Rachel and those around her at the end of her pregnancy; James's loss of work, an indirect result of travel restrictions and curfews; and even the crash of Rachel's *esusu*, plausibly precipitated by the desire or need of her participants to 'cash out' during the crisis and by Rachel's decreased ability to source funds.

What was remarkable about Rachel and James's story is that at no point was Ebola seen as an excuse to put the process of family formation 'on hold'. This was evident in Rachel's family's unwillingness to accept a lower bride-price and, in a more covert way, in Rachel's support for this, given that they would not be able to stage an honourable wedding according to the usual high standards. The fact that public ceremonies were more challenging to perform during the crisis – not least because large gatherings were illegal – was not considered a satisfactory excuse. On the contrary, the social processes such as weddings, through which intimacies are realigned and relationships publicly acknowledged, seemed more important than ever during the crisis.

Key to understanding these responses and priorities is an appreciation of the unstable, non-linear, character of family formation in 'normal' circumstances. In Sierra Leone, children are often not raised in single households, but rather move between several different households, and between village and urban neighbourhoods, through the course of their childhood, and are raised by range of actors. This is often a result of shifting household circumstances – the death of a guardian, migrations, legal or informal disputes, and financial fluctuations. In many

cases, children are born outside a stable parental partnership. Negotiating the rights over and responsibilities for looking after the children is often a drawn-out process, which can last for year, and often involves a range of family, religious, customary, and state authorities. Typically, the formation of partnerships does not occur in straightforward ways, or at identifiable moments of transformation, such as through marriage. Rather, binding relationships are typically constructed in piecemeal, challenging, and non-linear ways, involving a variety of intermediary measures of relationship status that mediate being 'single' and being 'married'.

These fluid and flexible practices were a resource for Rachel and James during the process of forming their family. For example, while marriage was not on the cards, they were able instead to use an up-scaled *pulnador* to similar effect. In so doing, they drew on a long history of the mixing of social practices and traditions in Freetown, rather than a set of routines administered by single authoritative structures, as has been documented in rural Sierra Leonean contexts (Fanthorpe 2007, MacCormack 1984).

Such conditions are far from unique to Freetown, however, and comparative cases shed light on the dynamics at play. Jennifer Johnson-Hanks's research in southern Cameroon reveals the ways that, "rather than a clear threshold into female adulthood, here motherhood is a loosely bounded, fluid status. Contrary both to folk intuition and to the assumptions of a life cycle framework, Beti motherhood is not a stable status. Beti women who have borne children are not necessarily mothers, at least not all the time. Motherhood, instead, constitutes a temporary social status, an agent position that can be inhabited in specific forms of social action" (Jonhson-Hanks 2002:865). Becoming a mother is not achieved through the biological process of giving birth, but rather through honourable family formation, which "demands mastery of very different spheres" (ibid 870-1), including education, biological motherhood, and employment. Yet these different spheres do not follow one another in a linear manner, and can sometimes play out against one another. Pursuing education might be a mark of seniority for a woman, but it might equally undermine her status as a mother or adult and make her revert to something more like the status of 'school-girl'.

In several ways, these observations correspond with Rachel's situation. Progressing in life, a goal she explicitly stressed, required the pursuit of multiple life projects in multiple spheres: her college degree, her business ventures, her sexual relationship with James and perhaps other men, and biological motherhood. What was particularly striking about the story of James and Rachel was not just the piecemeal way that their relationship was formed – involving mastery of very different spheres representing varying and opposing social positionalities, as Johnson-Hanks emphasises - but the extent to which these varying spheres were so interconnected, often involving the same actors and characters. Rachel's business ventures were intimately connected to James, who was a major investor. Her relationship with James was connected through numerous common friends and family members, which bound them closely together before marriage was even attempted. James provided his room for Rachel to sleep in with the baby after the birth, which made Rachel even more closely integrated into his family when there were tensions with her own.

Yet all these interconnections and overlaps were sources of conflict, tension, and animosity, as well as of support; reflecting some of the dynamics, albeit in particularly amplified forms, described in chapter 2. Rachel and James's joint business ventures once symbolized their shared future aspirations, but became a focal point of conflict when, during the Ebola crisis, things collapsed. Material exchange, proximity, and sex corresponded to expressions of love in complex and often contradictory ways. When James and Rachel were living together in close proximity, they were not regularly sleeping together. But instead of being a sign of hostility or the breakdown of their relationship, this was the means by which an honourable shared future could be achieved. When Rachel was most desperately in need materially, she rejected financial support from James as a statement of independence and pride. When James was out of work, he slept less with other women, yet was also less able to forge a stable relationship with Rachel.

The numerous mutual friends and family members that James and Rachel had in common constituted an invaluable support network, but this made the process of conducting their relationship political and contentious. There was never a time

when everyone was on good terms. Rachel and Rachel had long-standing disagreements relating to the failed fish business, and Rachel did not of approve James and Rachel's eventual marriage plans until very close to the event. James and Foday, once best friends, were not on speaking terms for long stretches of time, and Umaru took on the position of Foday's closest friend. Aisha, Kei, and James, all key decision makers in both family compounds, were often at odds with each other.

James and Rachel's story reveals that the tense process of realigning intimacies was integral to the on-going process of family formation, while at the same time defining responses to, and characteristics of, the Ebola crisis. Not all the dangers facing Rachel and James were Ebola-related; they were also threatened by witchcraft, loss of status, dishonourable family formation, and losing custody over Moses. Underlying all these dangers were uncertainties surrounding overlapping and multi-dimensional intimate relationships, in which the 'status quo' was not 'stability' but 'flux'. Ebola did not create these conditions, but it intensified them by placing actors like James and Rachel in positions of greater reliance on their 'base' support network of friends, family, and neighbours, as alternative modes of security became stretched and eliminated. This was demonstrated most clearly by James and Rachel's simultaneous loss of income streams, but it was also matched in parallel affective and less material processes.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have described how a young couple attempted to start a family during the period Ebola crisis in Freetown, Sierra Leone. Rachel became pregnant at an early stage of the state of emergency, delivered during its height, and married and moved into a home with James a year after it was lifted.

Taking a leaf from the book of Gabriel Garcia Marquez, their story might be labelled 'Love in a time of Ebola', inasmuch as the virus and its associated procedures alternately intersected with and become irrelevant to, rather than directly influenced and determined, the formation of their romantic partnership

and family. In the context of an undeveloped health infrastructure and widespread material scarcity, family formation was far from being a stable process even before the virus swept through Sierra Leone, and it remains so after it died away. This suggests that Ebola did not create a radical transformation. Despite the Ebola crisis, the processes of family formation remained a priority and in many respects took on even greater significance than in normal circumstances, in part despite and in part because of the conditions of life in the state of emergency. This ran counter to the underlying assumptions about the formal Ebola response, and state of emergency regulations, in which elimination of the virus was an ultimate priority. Given that transmission occurred through bodily contact, and at gatherings, it is not surprising that the state of emergency was in tension with processes of biological and social reproduction, in which intimate contact, medical attention, and public acknowledgment through ritual are key. Yet such processes were able to continue, albeit with difficulty at times.

This chapter offers insight into why family formation remained a priority. Firstly, I have suggested that family formation remained possible in large measure because of the general instabilities that surround it in 'normal' times, and the host of flexible practices that exist in tandem with these. These then provided the tool-kit to deal with the additional uncertainties and tensions introduced by Ebola. In a different environment where social practices are more rigid and predictable, Ebola might perhaps have presented a greater obstacle.

Secondly, family formation was prioritised because it represented the most pressing, enduring and on-going concern for Freetown people. By contrast, Ebola was relatively distant and inconsequential. Many elements of the formal Ebola response relied on an idea that avoidance of death was ultimate priority – which often came across in Ebola messaging, with posters and campaign slogans including lines such as 'save your life' and 'Ebola kills'. Yet for those living through the Ebola crisis, it seemed that avoiding 'social death' was a far greater concern.

Thirdly, however, I have suggested that the very process of surviving crisis in Sierra Leone involves the same key elements involved in family formation: namely

the realigning of intimacies. In other words, not only was family formation - the prevention of 'social death' - a long-term concern that simply could not be put 'on hold', but these very processes were also integral to, and constituting, of the day-to-day experience of getting through the crisis, and building, maintaining, and realigning one's position in a support network.

This interplay between longer-term and shorter-term concerns was further complicated by the fact that the process of realigning intimacies involved a constant negotiation of expectations, often in seemingly contradictory ways. Securing the long-term future sometimes appeared possible only through short-term insecurity and tension, through which intimacies were negotiated and realigned. In this light, the social tensions that Ebola encouraged were subsumed into a continuing processes of realigning of intimacies and family formation, rather than stalling or inverting them. This, then, analytically connects life before Ebola and life during; while coming of age in normal life and in 'crisis' are seen to differ – with life-course ritual gaining new potencies and meanings for young men during the crisis – they both share a centring on relationships around the home and family, in which opposition and co-operation are often inseparable. These commonalities shed light on the meanings of 'crisis' for young men in a context like this, as something both 'exceptional', yet equally enabling for the realization of long-held aspirations.

Chapter 7. Crisis, the state, and the state of emergency

In September 2014, I returned to London for what would turn out to be 6 months away from the field. Sierra Leone and Ebola remained ever-present, however, not least because of the global media coverage the outbreak was receiving. Ebola was one of the top stories of the 2014/15 news-cycle. While Ebola was deadly, it was hard not to feel that the reporting was disproportionate. Not only was Ebola unlikely to represent the global health threat that it was purported to, but it was not even the greatest threat to the majority of those living at its epicentre. Residents of Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Guinea faced not only the more omnipresent viruses such as malaria, but many lived in conditions of material scarcity with no state-based 'safety net' to speak of.

In the eyes of the world, key factors in the spread of the virus were local ignorance of its symptoms and mechanists of transmission, compounded by mistrust of modern medicine. Locals were seen to favour conspiracy theories or spiritual explanations: in very parallel ways to perceptions of AIDS elsewhere in the continent (Henderson 2011, Hunter 2010). A major thrust of the international humanitarian response involved raising awareness of Ebola symptoms, and calling on the residents of affected countries to refrain from practices that spread it, such as body contact, eating bush meat, caring for the sick, and burying the dead. One set of Ebola messaging prevailed on people's 'selfish' instincts to save their own lives through adherence to novel protocols such as reporting sicknesses and deaths to centralised emergency services, known as '117', rather than performing acts of care themselves. Another set of messaging, by contrast, called on residents to 'come together', setting aside differences and working alongside each other for the collective and national interest. This messaging tended to invoke the language of sacrifice.

Figure 9 Public messaging: 'let's stop Ebola'

As many reports testified, however, this introduced an additional difficulty; the three states in question were unable to tackle the issue themselves. These undeveloped, or underdeveloped, states had neither the medical and bureaucratic infrastructures nor the resources to co-ordinate an effective response to the outbreak. In addition, popular mistrust of the state was widespread, as could be expected in the context of economic decline, state neglect, and recent civil war.

When I returned to Freetown in March 2015, the state of emergency was in full effect. The virus showed promising signs of being contained, but still posed a threat country-wide threat. I arrived the day before a 3-day lockdown in Freetown. By now, the rules and regulations of the state of emergency, though onerous, were familiar to Freetown residents. Thankfully none of my friends or neighbours had succumbed to the virus. The President, Ernest Bai Koroma, proposed a goal that by Independence Day, exactly a month later, the spread of Ebola would be halted. In a speech just before the lockdown he told the country:

> Everybody in every house in every community in this country is very important in our fight against Ebola. Avoid touching each other, avoid eating bush meat, avoid visiting the sick, avoid attending funerals, report illnesses and deaths to the nearest health facility or call 117. We know some of the things we are asking you to do are difficult. But life is better than these difficulties. Today the life of every one is at stake, but we will get over

this difficulty if all do what we have been asked to do. Ebola is no respecter of persons. It is not an APC or SLPP disease. It is not a disease of any political party, or ethnic group or district. Anyone who is not careful can endanger themselves and others that they love. These are extra-ordinary times, and extra-ordinary times require extra-ordinary measures.

When I arrived back in the neighbourhood, a main topic of discussion was a recent political scandal in which the vice-president had been sacked by President Koroma. A few weeks before the lockdown the vice-president took refuge in the American embassy. He announced to the global media that he was quarantining himself for 21 days (the incubation period of the virus) because one of his bodyguards had succumbed to Ebola. Global media reports lauded this act as an inspiring example of the willingness of the country's ruling elite to subject themselves to the restrictions imposed upon all Sierra Leoneans, promoting the message of 'we're all in it together'. Other reports, though, proposed an alternative narrative in which the vice-president had fled to the embassy after seeing soldiers arrive at his compound, fearing that he was about to be arrested. Given the escalating tensions between himself and the president, his fear was reasonable. It was explained to me that the vice-president's bad track record on corruption was jeopardizing continuing flows of money coming into the country from the international community, known locally as 'Ebola money'. The opposition party was planning a protest on the Sunday, but the lockdown made that impossible.

These discussions among my neighbours reflected a widespread set of theories according to which 'Ebola' was welcome, and encouraged, or even carefully fabricated by political authorities who were benefitting from the millions coming into the country to fight the virus, as well as from the executive powers offered by military rule and the state of emergency.

On the first day of the lockdown, I went to visit Auntie Alice, the business woman and local patron figure we met in chapter 4. She was filling me in on the details of the presidential political scandal as we stood on the balcony on the second floor of her house, which overlooked the local mosque. In the courtyard of the mosque were hundreds of bags of rice and containers of oil donated by the World Food Programme to local authorities, to be distributed to the neighbourhood during the

lockdown on a ticketed system. Outside the mosque, a slow-moving line had formed, populated by ever more disgruntled locals. It looked as if a fight would break out any minute. At just this point, the local authorities administering the distribution – the local councillor, police, and senior members of the mosque – locked the gates and returned home. Auntie Alice told me 'they will be back later after dark'. 'Bend bend business (corruption) works at all levels', she explained. She was not, however, unsympathetic: 'So many jobs get paid so little here, and you have to pay for transport and everything, so it is not possible to build up any other way here'. She spoke with a degree of experience. Coming from a poor family, her big break had come during the civil war, when she had informally acquired at the Freetown docks the contents of crates of donated goods intended as aid and sold them on to fellow market traders downtown. The scenes at the mosque brought her back to this time when, as she explained, the government responded to a rice shortage by buying in bulk for cheap redistribution.

Figure 10 Line outside the mosque

The authorities at the mosque were clearly working 'on commission', that is, they were seen to be handing out supplies to political favourites, or siphoning off for personal accumulation. Yet the supplies were also distributed according to the bureaucratic ticket system, in which households lower down in the valley in which

the neighbourhood stands – deemed to be poorer – were also prioritised. As I was leaving Auntie Alice's house, a young man walked by with a sack of rice on his shoulder exclaiming 'this is the first time I have benefited from APC (the ruling party) in 8 years of power'.[12] However, as Titi, a disgruntled neighbour, far from well off, living in the higher area explained, 'the system is working through *sababu* (personal connections/luck), not just through need. For some it is harder to get food than for others'. If you were not from one of the prioritised, extremely poor households lower down in the valley then your best chance of getting something was through connections.

Another neighbour, Mr. Barrie, who ran a small grocery shop near the mosque, also failed to receive a ticket. He took this criticism a step further. 'Africans, he explained, have a good face but bad heart. They do not wish well unto each other, for their "fellow man". They will have 1000, take 500 for themselves and then take another 300 from the other man's portion for themselves also'. 'White people don't work on commission'

Later in the afternoon I visited Auntie Zain's house. She lived next door during the first 9 months of my fieldwork, when I lived lower down the valley. They had received an allocation of rice and oil from the mosque, and one of her daughters, Memuna, was carefully dividing it into 4 parts, to be distributed to 3 of the immediate neighbours who had not received a ticket. This amounted to 27 cups of rice each for each household, and 2/3 of a large bottle of oil. Memuna's considerable patience in carefully dividing the portions posed a striking counterpoint to the restlessness and noise around the mosque. In fact, from this vantage point, the lockdown had something of a holiday feel. The National Power Authority had arranged that electricity, normally irregular and unpredictable, would be provided for the entire 3-day lockdown. Auntie Zain's husband, who worked long hours at a hospital and who I had barely ever seen, despite living metres away for 9 months, was around for the whole weekend. This was a feature

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[12] Receiving a monthly bag of rice is a mark of formal, often state-based, employment.

of the lockdown that others noted too: neighbours and families were forced to spend time together around the house.

During the lockdown, two powerful logics of redistribution were at play simultaneously, just as Titi had outlined to me. The first reflected a system of distribution according to the 'fairest' allocation of resources based on 'need', a measure determined by socio-economic and geographical positioning. This logic was seemingly informed by a value of 'efficient' distribution through a ticketed system of more or less equal amounts to as many households as possible, starting with the poorest. The second logic was that of *sababu* or 'commission', in which those in a position to take more, such as the gatekeepers at the mosque, did so, at the same time showing preference to socially proximate others, such as friends and family. In practice, these two distinct logics were blended, as exemplified by the mixing of methods at the mosque, and by Memuna's carefully measured distribution to her immediate neighbours, which reflected abstract equity and equivalence on the one hand, and, on the other, care for proximate others over strangers.

During the lockdown, as throughout the outbreak, I was struck by the simultaneous feelings of exceptionality associated with 'crisis', and the alarming normality; for my neighbours and friends, life was going on. The Ebola virus was surprisingly absent from conversation during the lockdown, making life seem almost normal. The president's speech which, with its calls of exceptional measures and self-sacrifice, fully embraced the moralistic language of crisis, seemed at odds with my interlocutors' discussions of recent political scandal and corruption, which felt very much like 'politics as usual'. The lockdown – an example of unusually authoritative state regulation and personal sacrifice – had a remarkably holiday-like and sociable atmosphere, albeit punctuated by conflicts such as those around the mosque. The pre-lockdown food distributions too blended the familiar and the exceptional. For those lacking favourable political connections, like the man who claimed that this was the first time he had benefitted from the present government, hand-outs from the state (of food donated by the WFP) were a welcome novelty. However, the informal distributive

logics that accompanied this bureaucratic process were a reminder for people like Mr. Barrie and Titi that normal 'corrupt' rules remained in place.

In this chapter, I tease out – with reference to the character of state, humanitarian intervention, and the popular economies of those involved in the response – some of the ways that the crisis became locally meaningful. I suggest that a key characteristic of this 'crisis' was the novel form assumed by the state in the state of emergency. From an ethnographic perspective, I then hone in on the economic and working arrangements of those employed in a formal capacity under the state of emergency, particularly the official burial teams that we met in chapter 5. This material demonstrates how team members balanced conflicting professional, personal, and social expectations and pressures, shifting carefully between formal and informal economic registers.

This chapter demonstrates the ways that people 'in crisis' get caught between conflicting models of how to act; in which the distance between models appears exaggerated. In the Ebola crisis, the fault-line was between, on the one hand, a relational model of informal redistribution and looking out for one's 'own', and, on the other, a more universalistic model of collective action, which paradoxically involved a greater degree of individualism. These two models correspond closely with the local categories of 'black' and 'white' discussed in chapter 5. The challenge of deciding which model to work through was tied up with the internal difficulty experienced by those on the ground in assessing how long the crisis would last, and thus how far 'exceptional measures' were demanded. Navigating all this required first coming to terms with a state that was novel in its workings while also operated according to familiar values. The chapter, building on narrative and theoretical threads than have run throughout the thesis – flowing between 'normal' time and 'crisis' – reveals how 'crisis' can be productive of 'normality', and equally how 'normality' can entail 'crisis'.

What made Ebola exceptional as 'crisis' was the precise form of the intervention, and the ways it was enacted, engaged with, and rendered meaningful on the ground. The Ebola crisis and its interventions deviated from both the typically

non-Weberian modalities of the state in contemporary Africa, and, at the same time, the trends in foreign intervention in Africa. Rather than reflecting recent anti-state and pro-market trends in neoliberal intervention in Africa, the Ebola intervention was, by and large, pro-state. It was heavily bureaucratic, regulatory, infrastructural, and non-market- oriented in its scope and design. The international humanitarian response, costing millions of dollars, involved scores of international organizations, but these became attached, in complex ways, to existing state structures as part of the National Ebola Response Centre, headed by the Minister of Defense.

While at times there was tension between existing state structures and the novel state of emergency structures and non-state organizations, as discussed around burials, the general effect of this complex authoritative structure was an experience of the state that differed radically from that with which most people were familiar. Yet it nonetheless represented the realisation of popular ideals of what a state *should* look like. The 'as if' had become, for temporary period of time, the 'as is'. This created a paradox in which state-like apparatus and infrastructure, usually thought of as long-term and enduring, was in place for a remarkably short, if undetermined, period of time.

The state of emergency entailed the introduction of emergency medical services, facilitated by hundreds of imported brand-new vehicles, and the introduction of '117' (the service to report illnesses and deaths). There were centralized food distributions, dead bodies were managed through a centralised service, and dozens of new (albeit strikingly temporary) clinics and treatment centres were constructed countrywide, most of them well supplied with medical equipment. There was a heightened monitoring of populations, through overt means such as health checkpoints and household checks, as well as efforts in demographic data collection. One of the furthest reaching aspects of the state during the state of emergency was the institution of 'hazard pay', discussed below, in which thousands of Sierra Leoneans received formal salaries from the state for their involvements in the response. While these features of the state of emergency represented something that appeared corresponding to a revitalization of Sierra

Leone's civil service, my ethnography equally demonstrates how these new state-like structures were informalised in ways that took on something of the character of the kind of 'shadow state' featured in much analysis of the African state (Bayart 1993, Bayart, Ellis & Hibou 2001, Reno 1995).

In the next section, I will return to the burial teams, describing of how individuals engaged in the Ebola response by working under the state of emergency navigated the simultaneous 'permanence' and 'impermanence' of the state. I will pay particular attention to the balancing and brokering that took place between formal and informal economic registers, originally introduced in chapter 3.

'Hazard Pay'

At the height of state of emergency, thousands of Sierra Leoneans were receiving regular payment from the state – known as 'hazard pay' – for their involvement in the Ebola response. Many of those mobilized were young men and women, who had never before been formally employed, and had previously received little material support from the state. One such beneficiary was Peter, a motor-bike taxi driver and a university student studying community development at Fourah Bay College. Peter was an intelligent, generous, and entrepreneurial young man that I had grown to know well during an earlier phase of my fieldwork. He was actively involved in the Sierra Leone Commercial Bike Riders Union (BRU), where he served as public relations officer at one of the local bike parks where I was doing research. As outlined in chapter 3, motor-bike taxi driving was one of the most popular professions for young men in Freetown, and, in the years after the civil war, had been introduced to the capital from rural towns, where the business was operated primarily by former rebels. However, it was a dangerous and fraught line of work. It was not uncommon for drivers to have accidents, weaving through heavy traffic, often on badly paved roads. In addition, bike riders were experiencing an increasingly tense relationship with the police, who would regularly arrest drivers, often in pursuit of bribes. Many drivers ended up in prison, unable to pay their way out.

Making a living through bike riding had become more challenging during the crisis, in part because a law was instituted according to which commercial transport was permitted to run only from 6am to 6pm each day. Partly through his involvement in the union, Peter was recruited to the Ebola response as a bike rider. He became attached to one of the burial teams, operating in Western Freetown, close to where I was living. The burials teams were established under the state of emergency to perform all burials regardless of the Ebola status of the deceased; the risk of transmission was significant when the bodies of Ebola victims were prepared for burial according to customary practices. When a death was reported to the authorities – following what was now a central byelaw under the state of emergency – the burial teams were tasked with collecting the body for the burial, which would take place later in the afternoon at the newly established Waterloo cemetery on the outskirts of town.

In Freetown, there were about 20 teams, operating from 4 bases. Each team comprised 12 main team members who performed a variety of roles: stretcher-bearers, chlorine sprayers, navigators, drivers, and team supervisors. They operated two pristine white jeeps, one for the team members and the other for the corpses. Other than the team leaders, who tended to be more senior and in some cases female, most burial team members were young men. Each burial team was accompanied by a swab conductor and a documenter, who followed their assigned burial team on two motorbikes. The swab conductor would take a medical sample, which would be delivered to a laboratory for processing as part of an Ebola test; this took a few days. The documenter would collect detailed information from the deceased's 'next of kin' regarding their family, the composition of their household, and the possible cause of death. Peter and another young man, Alhaji, were attached as bike riders to a burial team based at a beach not far from Congo Town. For the last 5 months of my fieldwork I spent about one day a week with the team.

The day-to-day activities of the burial team I followed comprised a stark juxtaposition, on the one hand, of killing time at the makeshift base on the beach through activities such as playing football, drinking, smoking, comparing updates on phones, and political debates, and, on the other, collecting and transporting

bodies for burial. This latter task involved adhering to carefully learnt safety protocol, as well as negotiating with mourning families who could be genuinely unfamiliar with these novel procedures, or actively resistant to handing over the bodies of their relatives. Weaving between these opposing activities were on-going processes of managing the often informal and improvised working arrangements that emerged around official duties and formal management structures.

I observed one case in my neighbourhood, in which the bereaved family of an elderly man refused to hand over his body to the burial team, resulting in a significant confrontation in the street outside the house. The family argued that since the deceased had been sick for a long time, and had been already diagnosed by medical workers as Ebola-free, there was no need to hand over his body to the team for testing and burial. The deceased's brother was asking for time to make arrangements for the post-burial gatherings, but – as Peter explained to me later – they had in fact intended to perform the burial themselves illegally. All this felt particularly fraught because the deceased was a prominent member of a local initiation society. The team eventually left, after Peter and the family had informally exchanged private phone numbers. The brother called a politician with whom he was personally connected to arrange to perform the burial themselves. He was advised against it, in part because '117' had already been alerted, and there could be legal repercussions. The brother then called Peter, who arranged for the team to return later that day to collect the body.

The burial teams proper, and the documentation and swab teams who were attached to them, were formally employed by different authorities. The burial teams, originally operated on a low budget by the Ministry of Health, were taken over by an assortment of well-funded international NGOs which, in addition to managing the operations of the team and payment of the workers, also arranged for intensive training courses on safety protocol and psycho-social issues for the team members. Every morning, team members were provided with a rice-based breakfast. Payday came reliably every Friday, when each team member – from supervisor to stretcher-bearer – would receive an envelope containing the equivalent of $100 (500,000 Le) in cash.

The swab and documentation teams, however, remained under the sole control of the Ministry of Health, and were paid under the centralized 'hazard pay' system, using a mobile banking service to make monthly payments. The use of mobile banking technology could be perceived as a convenience for the payees, who did not have to go to a specific physical location to receive their pay. In practice, however, as I discovered from Peter's experiences, the opposite was the case. When Peter's pay was withheld for several months, he spent many days at the administrative office attempting to appeal his case. Like most Sierra Leoneans navigating bureaucratic structures, he sought help from more senior and better-connected people, such as his team supervisor. After a lot of effort and time, Peter started to be paid again, but the lost pay was never fully recovered. Peter commented, 'Sierra Leoneans are wicked, not just the government, but all of us'.

Peter explained to me that the reason he was not being paid because the officials responsible for administering the payment system were working 'on commission'. They used several different techniques to derive personal profit. One method was to withhold simultaneously the salaries of about a dozen people in the hope that at least one of them would not make a formal appeal. Another method involved inserting fake names, known as 'ghost workers', into the pay system and accumulating their 'salaries' centrally. Another technique was to manipulate payment figures by switching currencies. For example, when a payment of $30 was required, they would pay instead 30,000 Le (worth $5).

Such manipulations and techniques were by no means limited to these state-based administrators. As time went on, administrators of the burial teams at the NGOs themselves began working 'on commission', instituting their own informal arrangements and strategies. For example, it was explained to me that when the NGO was tasked with recruiting 3 new burial teams, those responsible for recruiting hired on the assumption that they would receive a cut of the pay-package. This arrangement was practically invisible to the NGO's expatriate and non-involved local administrative staff; the new team members received their full envelopes every Friday along with the other workers and only later paid their

benefactors. As for the 'ghost workers', the team I followed operated with only 11 members instead of the usual 12 after a worker was fired for misconduct and not replaced. This former employee was apparently deeply resentful of his ex-colleagues, and Peter was only team member with whom he retained contact. I asked Peter why this man blamed his co-workers instead of the authorities that dismissed him, to which he replied, 'that is black mentality, that it is other people's faults'. In other words, it came more naturally to him to claim that his former colleagues had conspired against him, than that he had been wrongfully dismissed.

Manipulations of official employment arrangements were equally prevalent among the workers themselves. Since the work of driving, documenting cases and taking Ebola swab tests that was set aside for four people could in principle be carried out by one person, Peter and his co-bike-rider Alhaji devised ways of covering each other's shifts. Through close observation and informal instruction from the official swab conductor, both learnt how to put on and take off the Personal Protective Equipment and conduct the tests safely and efficiently. Peter, an educated university student, could do all the documentation required, while Alhaji, not formally educated, needed assistance. The official documenter had recently taken up a second job as a school teacher – a job that would probably last longer than this one – and sometimes his cousin came in to fill in. The physical resemblance between the two meant that the stand-in could use his cousin's ID card and pass for him. Originally, Peter and Alhaji agreed to switch around, each working one week on and one off. Both owned their own bikes, allowing them to make some money on the side, along with their formal monthly wages. As a bonus, the person who had worked during the day would collect the daily fuel allowance that was provided for both. This gave Peter and Alhaji an additional cash income; they struck an agreement with the manager at the officially assigned petrol station, according to which they received cash in place of their fuel allocation. The petrol station manager could then re-sell the petrol, and they fuelled their bikes at a cheaper station in the East end of town.

In June 2015, Peter needed to prepare for university exams. He also had additional family commitments; his young daughter, who normally lived with her mother's

family in their village upcountry, was staying in town with Peter now. At this point, Alhaji was doing almost all the driving, and he asked for a weekly payment of 30,000 Le, in addition to Peter's fuel money, now, given that he was doing all of the work. But Peter felt he was asking for too much and, as a negotiating tool, threatened to use the 'legal route'. This would entail paying instead the official documentor – in practice the official documentor's cousin – to cover for him. Meanwhile Alhaji was still contractually obliged to continue his own job, and would be fired if he did not comply. After long and heated negotiations, they settled on an extra payment of 21,000 Le per day and the working relationship continued. Dramatic fluctuation between antagonism and co-operation, alongside the spirited joking and teasing that blurred the boundaries between them, as well as the strategic use of official and legal protocol in unofficial, illegal negotiations, defined Peter and Alhaji's relationship.

This complex blending of and brokering between formal and informal employment arrangements was also reflected in how the burial team used their salaries. The unusual situation of formal employment and regular wages, yet for an undefined and limited period, seemed to present conflicting pressures for team members. Being formally employed was in principle very attractive to the team members, many of whom had never before received regular wages. Yet it was clear to all that their employment was temporary, as was their relationship with the NGO, and both would end once the spread of Ebola had been curtailed. The country was to be declared Ebola free 42 days after the last Ebola case. This figure – double the length of the incubation period of the virus – was determined by the World Health Organisation. There was much speculation among the anxious team members about when their employment might end, and how much, if any, severance pay they would receive. The extensive 10-week psycho-social programme in which burial team members were enrolled was geared towards eventual 'reintegration' of the team into their neighbourhoods and communities. On the positive side, this demonstrated concern for their long-term welfare, especially with regard to any stigma to which they might later be subject as a result of their proximity to the Ebola virus. On the negative side, 'reintegration' implied an eventual severing of

relationships with the NGO. Burial team members seemed strikingly unconcerned about the former, but very concerned about the latter.

Not surprisingly, many team members appeared to prioritise living 'big' while they could. As the weeks and months progressed, the workers began dressing in more fashionable, often imported, clothes, such as cool trainers and leather jackets. Many upgraded their phones, and sported flashy jewellery; representative of the practice of 'bluffing' discussed in chapter 4. The team supervisor, Mr. Kamara – a sweet and reserved fatherly with somewhat 1950s British-seeming mannerisms – did not subscribe to this flashy attitude, and determinedly wore the same chequered flat cap and loose brown suit. He was critical of the office manager who, like many of the young men, was spending conspicuously the money he accumulated so rapidly 'on commission'. Mr. Kamara already resented the fact that the office manager, who had previously worked as a truck driver, was flaunting his new-found authority over him. Mr. Kamara had been working at the Ministry of Health for many years and considered himself an expert in epidemiology, yet he was just the supervisor of an individual burial team, doing the 'dirty work' on the ground, while the manager sat in the safety and comfort of an office. Mr. Kamara once jokingly told me: 'we are existing, even you are existing, but he is *living*. He has two new cars now including a jeep, and others of them [the administrators] have bought cars too. If he was a Krio man he would eat the money carefully, but he is a country man'.[13]

In many cases, though, conspicuous consumption was tempered by other commitments and strategies. Burial team members were often required to support their families through hard times. One of the boys told me, 'I am going to give 200,000 Leones to my mother today because she has tried for me. She has also been cursed a lot today'. He was referring to the mother-based swear words directed at him by resentful friends and acquaintances. As Mr. Kamara told me when we were driving in the jeep one Thursday, the day before pay-day, and he had just received several back-to-back calls from family members: 'I'm tired with Thursdays, suddenly they all call me and tell about their problems'.

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[13] See discussion in chapter 4 or 'country' versus Krio people in Freetown.

Few, if any, of the burial team members I knew opened bank accounts. As Peter explained, 'the problem is you cannot withdraw money easily in an emergency'. However, other kinds of investments were more popular. An informal *esusu* scheme (rotating credit association) was opened with some of the team members as contributors. Some made payments on land or bought vehicles as investments; Peter bought a motorbike for his cousin to drive commercially. Peter also used his income to fund his final year of university study, and invested in a clothes business, which ultimately failed. Others invested in existing businesses, such as grocery stores, operated by friends and family, or set up their own small enterprises. A common strategy was to save money for migration programmes, typically arranged by local agents who could secure tickets and work visas, or travel visas whose holders would often overstay illegally or make asylum claims. A year after the crisis, I learned that several of the team's migration attempts had been successful.

The burial teams were in many ways the masked face of the state of emergency, and their work reflected the underlying priorities and structures of the official Ebola response. They were trained to perform their work according to strict biomedical protocols, even if allowances were made for customary ritual. Every individual and family, regardless of status, was formally subject to equal treatment. The burial teams, equipped with state of the art gear, were part of an unprecedented centralisation and bureaucratization of management of the dead. The documentation and swab teams participated in the process of mapping and monitoring populations that occurred on a massive scale during the crisis. In economic terms, the burial teams were paid a formal salary, predicated on contractual duties, and received redundancy packages when their contracts expired. All members of the main team, regardless of role, were paid the same amount.

Counterposed to these activities, however, was an array of informal arrangements that operated according to a very different logic. This became the subject of much reflection and commentary, often within a discourse of 'black', 'Sierra Leonean', or

'African' ways of doing things, which contrasted with the so-called 'white' character of the official arrangements. Ultimately, though, the informal, 'black' arrangements did not fatally undermine the work of the team, and even enabled it. As Mr. Kamara told me proudly, none of the burial workers in Freetown caught Ebola. Most of the earnings of the young workers entered the informal economy almost immediately; barely any of them opened bank accounts. Many of those involved in the Ebola response made informal earnings alongside their salaries. Peter and Alhaji, for example, converted their fuel allowance into cash, NGO managers employed ghost workers, and officials in the hazard pay office took cuts for themselves. Burial team members, as mentioned above, came up with ingenious ways of covering each other's shifts so that they could take advantage of other opportunities. Rather than respecting the logic of bureaucratic professionalism, these activities reflected a more relational logic, chiefly concerned with building and maintaining social relationships, forwarding life-projects, and living a desirable life. While these informal arrangements might seem unprofessional in character, they reflected values and concerns that were more enduring than the urgent yet ultimately transient concerns of the official Ebola response.

While there was tension between these two registers and sets of expectations, the burial team's activities demonstrated the considerable scope for brokering between them and blending formal procedures with informal arrangements. This was evident in Peter and Alhaji's negotiations, the team members' economic strategies, and the allowances made in negotiations with mourning families. The position of burial team members as brokers between the formal Ebola response, the NGOs, the state, and Freetown residents, was a source of resentment, but it was also an empowering position, especially for young people, that was widely respected and deemed important. Similar brokerage activities occurred at all strata of society during the crisis, which over time appeared to produce a kind of convergence. For example, formal NGO management structures started out in stark contrast to those of the state authorities, but the two began to resemble each other through the informal strategies such as 'commission' and 'ghost workers' that permeated them both. During the lockdown the mixing of formal bureaucratic and

informal relational modes of redistribution at the mosque and in the home reflected a similar convergence of formal and informal economic practice.

The balancing of and conversion between informal and formal economic registers have a long historical precedence in Atlantic Africa. Jane Guyer's (2004) formative study shows how West Africa's long-standing entanglement with foreign markets and influences led to the emergence of a multiplicity of value scales and economic logics, from equivalence to asymmetrical exchange determined by social factors such as status. The possibility of 'marginal gain' occurs at the transactional threshold between registers through 'conversions'. Guyer argues that the multiplicity of economic registers and performative repertoires are a product of conditions of volatility, yet, in ways that defy classic economic logic, they produce elements of stability predicated on growth. In her account of a quest for fuel during a Nigerian fuel crisis, Guyer observes that 'small shifts and recombinations of elements from different registers preserved a sense that this particular sale fell within a certain normality. This skill of improvisation in a volatile situation was based on particular logics already in place and shared at the cognitive level: logics and skills that are the often-mentioned West African qualities of flexibility and resilience' (Guyer 2004:114). As chapter 2 and 3 in particular demonstrate, such practices of conversions between registers was not unique to 'crisis'. However, during 'crisis', this chapter suggests, such registers appear more starkly opposed, while equally demands, and opportunities, to broker between them increase.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have analysed 'on the ground' political and economic dimensions of the Ebola crisis. 'Ebola' was experienced as much more than a virus, and came to signify life more broadly in the state of emergency. I have described and analysed how actors came to terms with conflicting expectations and social pressures amplified during the state of emergency, as well as how the formal Ebola response and the state were constituted, reconstituted, and entangled in people's lives. The conflicting models broadly correspond with what was understood locally as 'black' and 'white' ways of doing (see chapter 4), and correspond analytically with formal

and informal economic registers (see chapter 3). During the crisis, these categories were polarised by the tendency of the formal Ebola response to pit itself against local ways of doing things, but at the same time there was significant brokerage and convergence between them, which was central to the project of 'surviving' Ebola.

A key concern in this chapter, for actors on the ground and in my analysis, is the question of the exceptionality of Ebola in a context like Sierra Leone and, in turn, the analytical value of 'crisis' more broadly. For my interlocutors, living through the crisis involved reconciling enduring and on-going ways of dealing with the comparatively temporary concerns of crisis. These concerns were themselves informed by the logics of collective action and professionalism that underscored the workings of the state of emergency, at the same time as being informed by demands for informal economic practices that took advantage of the opportunities of 'crisis' and helped cater for the needs of those living through it. Ebola shows what 'crisis' looks like in contemporary Africa – not the 'breakdown' and 'deconstruction' of the state, as assumed by foreign economic and humanitarian intervention, but rather the rapid 'building' of state apparatus where it no longer, or had never, existed. The chapter reveals how this 'foreign' intervention became locally meaningful, in part as a realisation of a set of ideals regarding how the state should but did not look, and in part through the adjustment of these ideals to fit conditions on the ground.

In this chapter we see further linkages with previous chapters, which provide colour to the ways that young men's 'normal' lives became interwoven with the conditions of crisis. This chapter in many ways pairs off with chapter 3, with bike riders (and former bike riders) as central protagonists. It is perhaps not surprising that young men who were so active in creating their own state-like structures were particularly well equipped to operate and succeed during the state of emergency, in which such bureaucratic workings became the formal norm. Yet equally, we see how the logics of the 'bluff' remain significant markers despite broader social transformations. In the conclusion, these threads are further tied together.

Chapter 8. Conclusion

I left Freetown in September 2015. I had spent the final few weeks of my fieldwork collecting family histories, which in many cases doubled up as a way of saying emotional goodbyes to members of the families that I had lived with, who in some cases had taken me on as an adopted addition. Alhassan offered to pick me up from my room in Mafembe, and drive me in his Nissan taxi to the port – typically a 20 minute drive from Congo Town – where ferries depart Freetown for Lungi, the location of the airport. As Alhassan arrived, I was packing the last few items that I was planning on taking back to London, and figuring out what I was leaving behind; a process that involved nostalgically 'taking in' what had been my home for most of the past year. As I was scanning my eyes over the room, amidst a light patter of rain on the roof, the space appeared much more dilapidated than it had felt up until then. Despite my efforts to seal the major gaps in the roof with some sheets of aluminium roofing – with assistance from one of my neighbours who was a builder by trade – there were still some drops splashing on the floor. As we took my luggage outside, the rain started escalating; the drops on the roofs of the compound suddenly beating in double-time.

I handed the keys to Auntie Rachel, and we drove off. The roads of Congo Town had transformed into muddy streams. Alhassan, who knew the terrain like that back of his hand, fluently swerved around the major pot-holes in the road that were concealed under the water. As we reached the Congo Cross roundabout, we met heavy traffic that soon turned into a standstill. The road had become a river, with water flowing at considerable force, as evidenced by a motorbike on its side that floated past us. I was simultaneously concerned with missing my flight, as well as the thought of the damage that was being inflicted on the homes in the valley in Congo Town. The car's engine was not starting. In a flash of inspired improvisation, Alhassan steered his taxi through a petrol station by the side of the road, while I was pushing from behind, thus avoiding the traffic. Using the natural incline in the road, he harnessed the available momentum to 'jog' the engine into life. We arrived at the port in time for the final ferry, which rocked violently from

side-to-side as it crossed the passage of water, luggage flying around. I couldn't help but think about my biblical namesake.

Figure 11 On the way to the airport

As with previous times that I had left the field, I again experienced the sensation of witnessing crisis, which had unfolded around me, from afar. The social media channels that I used to communicate with many of my interlocutors were flooded with images and videos of the damage: ruined homes, streets that had turned into waterfalls, and tops of cars and jeeps poking out from the water-line. Some of those who lost their homes were temporarily re-sheltered in the national stadium, across the valley from Congo Town. The National Ebola Response Centre had redirected some of the aid resources for Ebola to this new, and seemingly more pressing, emergency.

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Taxi drivers, like Alhassan and Human Right – introduced in the prologue – were the gatekeepers to my fieldwork. Yet rather than leaving them behind as I got out of their vehicles, they guided me through the course of my whole project as I learned about their lives and the social worlds they inhabited. The thesis has set

about uncovering the ways that young men in Freetown, who have grown up in an era characterised by repeated 'crisis', come to inhabit, understand, and act in their social worlds. In addition, the thesis has charted and analysed what the actions and perspectives of young men and those around them in the build up to and course of the Ebola crisis reveals about what 'crisis' means in such a context; and how a foreign intervention was enacted and rendered locally meaningful. I have suggested that both the dynamics of 'normal' life (in this case before Ebola) are essential to understanding the dynamics of 'crisis', and equally crisis is revealing and uncovering of enduring dynamics that hold resonance beyond the particular period in question.

Breaking away from popular renderings of youth in contemporary Africa as structurally marginalised, consigned either to stasis, or living in conditions of constant instability and motion, the thesis has outlined the piecemeal processes through which coming of age and social mobility take place. While youth in Freetown face marginality, the thesis has highlighted the agency that young men have in carefully configuring and negotiating their status amidst ambiguous and contradictory sets of relations in a variety of complexly intertwined spheres: the home, neighbourhood, city, and state. At all these levels, often irreconcilable moves towards dependence and independence are complexly negotiated and balanced. Throughout the thesis, we have seen how desires to work against or escape existing structures at these various levels are inseparable from working within them, and in many cases reproducing them. The performative repertoires, economic practices, and modes of sociality enacted by young men are reflective of the ambiguity of their circumstances, as well as being productive of ambiguity.

The thesis positions the domestic sphere as a central arena in the lives of young men. Within this frame are the spaces of the home and neighbourhood, the everyday and ritual practices associated with the life course, and the range of social relations and intimacies that are implicated in these times and spaces. An ethnographic vantage point on life in this arena through crisis has revealed how on-going projects of social mobility and journeys of coming of age – which at their core involve a realignment of intimacies – become entangled with the instabilities

of crisis. Responses to 'crisis' and the forwarding of on-going life projects were in many ways inseparable, which suggests an alternative to the popular notion that during crisis social reproduction grinds to the halt (certainly the implicit expectation behind the regulations and protocols of the state of emergency and humanitarian intervention). By contrast, this thesis has demonstrated the ways that crisis can sew the seeds for mobilities and realignments, in some cases accelerating social reproduction around life-course ritual, as evidenced in particular in the chapters examining baby naming ceremonies, marriages, and burials. Thus 'crisis' for young men meant a general transition from social reproduction taking place in principle within the realm of the 'everyday' to taking place within the realm of the 'event'; and a corresponding transition from ambiguity towards greater clarity.

Thus around domestic and intimate spheres the political economy of crisis, and the defining social conflicts associated with it, are experienced, negotiated, survived, and reconfigured. Throughout the thesis we have seen the interplay between a series of competing logics and registers, each with their own sets of social expectations, temporal orientations, and notions of personhood associated with them. These logics and registers have manifested in different guises throughout. In chapter 2 were the registers of business and kinship. In chapter 3 were the informal and formal economic registers, which resurfaced in chapter 7 in something of an inverted form during the state of emergency. In chapter 4 we see tensions between 'long' and 'short' term exchanges, and the ways these complexly mapped onto 'local' and 'global' inspired consumption practices. And in chapter 5 we saw the 'black' and 'white' categories, which represent a powerful local idiom through which many of the tensions described in other chapters were articulated and acted through.

During the Ebola crisis and humanitarian intervention, conflicts between 'local' and 'foreign' culture and expectations became particularly pronounced and acute; in part because of the social practices that were understood to be causing the spread of the Ebola virus – which became subject to heavy regulation – and in part because of the political and economic lay of the land under the state of emergency.

In the ethnography we see individuals and families grappling with sets of social expectations that appear particularly polarised during the crisis. Yet, crucially, as the thesis demonstrates, Ebola did not introduce conflicts between these registers, even if they became more pronounced. Throughout the thesis we have seen how the boundaries between these distinct logics and registers are in fact not distinct but permeable and mutually constituting. Often discursive or idealised distinctions engendered in each logic are undermined by flexibility in practice. Flexible practices associated with brokerage and mediation have a long history in Freetown, and I have pointed to ways that this history was recalled and reconfigured as a response to new circumstances.

This history of course is not unique to Sierra Leone, and might usefully fit into broader work on similar manifestations elsewhere on the continent. In South Africa, such oppositions are intimately connected to the colonial encounter: 'From this long conversation came the stark imaginative dualisms—white/black, Christian/heathen, *sekgoa/setswana* (European ways/Tswana ways)—that developed on both sides of the frontier; also, the syncretisms and transgressions...that simultaneously undermined those very dualisms, dichotomies, and distinctions' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1997:7). Importantly, these oppositions did not remain fixed by the colonial encounter, but have continually been reconfigured as circumstances have changed. These African tropes of alterity and otherness are understood in this analysis as a source of empowerment, material and imaginative, for the colonised. Ethnography has picked up on these processes; in the ways that local knowledge of this encounter – as well as knowledge of parallel incorporations into the industrial, democratic, and late capitalist worlds – provide a framework for identity formation, often through series of opposed dualities (James 1999, Ferguson 1999). In Malawi, Englund, building on Vaughan (1991), demonstrates how subject formation in democracy continues to rely on objectifying others and notions of exclusive civility: 'Concepts of human rights, personal manners, styles of clothing, and the language of everyday life are all implicated in producing these distinctions' (Englund 2006:9).

Building on and incorporating insights from this scholarship, the thesis has attempted to understand how such dynamics resonate in Sierra Leone, particularly through uncovering how they play out in young men's projects of coming of age in Freetown. The thesis has pointed to their manifestation in discourses, performative repertoires, temporal and rhythmic orientations, social expectations, and economic practices, which are all grounded in the constitution and reconfiguring of social relationships around the 'domestic sphere'. In charting these interconnections, the thesis also draws and builds on Guyer's (1994) powerful insights into West African intersections between social status and practices of economic exchange, by ethnographically demonstrating how local categories of race, temporal expectations, and the rhythms and flows of social life – as well as the particular character of the state during a state of emergency – map onto the type of economic registers that are central to her analysis. The thesis demonstrates the simultaneously rigid and fluid character of tropes of alterity and imaginative dualisms in Sierra Leone, and the particular ways that they intersect with the messy details of social life.

This in turn sheds light on the place of youth in this particular location, as well in neoliberal Africa and contexts of 'crisis' beyond. A growing body of literature points to youth in Africa's practice of multiple association in intersecting arenas and networks; highlighting in turn the agency of youth in self-fashioning and self-making. In part this is seen to occur through drawing on global and local cultural forms, and in doing so, blurring the boundaries between what have been considered distinct cultures and social worlds (Archambault 2017, Cole 2004, Piot 2010, Janson 2013). In Freetown – and in the midst of a humanitarian intervention – such configurations are demonstrably multi-layered in ways that pushes this analysis further. The challenges in teasing out what is 'modern' what is 'traditional', what is 'here', and what is from 'there', proves to be particularly revealing of how a long-history of global interactions have shaped local 'culture' and social formations, and how in turn these become consolidated, and equally unravel, in the course of a humanitarian intervention.

The place of Freetown for the young men at the heart of this study is one of intense ambiguity and uncertainty. Entrepreneurial ambitions of young taxi drivers, discussed in chapter 3 – drawing in part on neoliberal development paradigms of individualism and self-sufficiency – must be reconciled with socially dense familial and neighborhood based networks that they structured in, in which increased integration is often the only way to further these ambitions. For bike riders, anti-hierarchical and anti-establishment tendencies co-exist with the replication of state-like structures in their own organizing, in part through attempts to partner with the sate. Bike riders, like Peter described in chapter 7, were, as a result, well-qualified to act as the face of the state of emergency during their recruitment into the formal Ebola response as members of burial teams. They demonstrated in turn capacities to adhere to bureaucratic protocols at the same time as practicing informal methods that allowed them to satisfy the needs of some of those around them, and in furthering their own projects.

Such ambiguity is equally prevalent in and around the home, which for young men represents both an arena of opportunity, support, and recognition, as well as a space of danger that many hope to escape from. Conflicting desires, broadly speaking, for independence and dependence, are heavily intertwined: seeking independence normally requires greater dependence, and visa versa. Equally, life in the home amounts to the navigation of deeply ambiguous temporal patterns and orientations. What corresponds to long-term and short-term exchange – the established anthropological bench-mark distinction between fleeting everyday life and the arena of social reproduction respectively – was often unclear, and seemingly inverted. As chapter 4 demonstrates, even family-sanctioned ritual can be a 'bluff'. During Ebola – a 'crisis' – ritual was reignited with far-reaching potential to forge 'orders' in the face of disorder.

Crucially, the thesis attempts to move beyond pegging ambiguity squarely on the political economy of neoliberal Africa and global health security; although these are certainly central pieces of the jigsaw. Rather the thesis is concerned with ethnographically and theoretically making sense of these ambiguities and contradictions, by honing in on how they are made sense of, and become

productive, within micro-political and intimate spheres on the ground. Rather than social reproduction being halted for young people during crisis, the thesis rather points to the perhaps unexpected conclusion that 'traditional' avenues of coming of age, in reconfigured forms, allowed for an arguable acceleration of social reproduction. This was evidenced, in different ways, around burials described in chapter 5, and in the baby naming ceremony described in chapter 6. Both rituals demonstrated how immediate conditions as well as more enduring processes were negotiated through a combination of improvisation, as well as through drawing on the efficacy and power of 'traditional' practice.

Central to my analysis are the intimate realignments that take place during crisis of different sorts, and their interconnections: a 'global health crisis' on one extreme; but equally ruptures within the home after unfulfilled expectations; an accident on a bike; a death in the family; and a pregnancy in a pressing circumstance. This analysis reveals the ways that rather than 'crisis' being an entirely external imposition, such forms of unsettling, ambiguity, and uncertainty are in themselves actively channeled and mobilized by young men and those around them. In this regard, the balancing and managing of social expectations are a strong currency for people living in conditions of material scarcity. In practice this involves careful management of what is 'said', and what is left unspoken, and equally what is 'done', and the visibilities of such actions. The rhythm of social life in this context often appears dictated by these flows of ambiguity, punctuated by moments of clarity and realignment.

Finally, it is hoped that this thesis, while ethnographically detailed, speaks to concerns that extend far beyond the specificities of Freetown, Sierra Leone, and Africa. Such potential is convincingly articulated by Comaroff and Comaroff in their article, 'Theory from the South: Or, how Euro-America is Evolving Toward Africa':

Rarely is it [the Global South] seen as a source of theory and explanation for world historical events. Yet, as many nation-states of the Northern Hemisphere experience increasing fiscal meltdown, state privatization, corruption, and ethnic conflict, it seems as though they are evolving southward, so to speak, in both positive and problematic ways (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012:113).

While the cultural case to consider West Africa part of a much larger field is convincingly articulated by Paul Gilroy (1993) in *The Black Atlantic*, contemporary global states of affairs make this project all the more convincing. Indeed, the thesis begins by telling the story of my journeys in two taxis driven by Sierra Leoneans – one living in London and the other in Freetown – whose predicaments appeared to share many parallels. This feels like a fitting place to end. Young people across the globe face precarity in their lives and futures. It is not controversial to claim that we live in an 'era of crisis'. What 'crisis' means for those whose lives have been, and will be, defined by it, is a pressing scholarly endeavor. Early anthropology often considered its subjects to be manifestations of an earlier stage in the human journey. Perhaps the opposite holds some currency today; that the lives and comings of age of young men in Freetown during a global health crisis might tell us something about where we are all going.

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