

“The Place is so Backward”:  
Durable Morality and Creative Development  
In Northern Sierra Leone

by

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## List of Acronyms

ACF	Action Contre le Faim [Action Against Hunger]
AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
APC	All People's Congress
BBDO	Bombali District Development Organization
BECE	Basic Education Certificate Exam
CBO	Community-based organization
DAAG	Disability Awareness Action Group
DfID	Department for International Development (Great Britain)
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration [Program]
ECOMOG	Economic Community (of West African States) Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
HANCI	Help a Needy Child International
HTC	Higher Teaching Certificate
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organization
MSF	Medecins Sans Frontiers
NaSSIT	National Social Security and Insurance Trust
NDA	National Drivers Association
NPA	National Power Authority
NRA	National Revenue Authority
NRC	Norwegian Refugee Council
NGO	Non-governmental Organization
NPRC	National Provisional Ruling Council
PVA	Polio Victims Association
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SALWACO	Sierra Leone Water Company
SLA	Sierra Leone Army (before 1999)
SLAJ	Sierra Leone Association of Journalists
SLPP	Sierra Leone People's Party
SLST	Sierra Leone Selection Trust
SOS	Secretary of State
TC	Teaching Certificate
UDP	United Democratic Party
UN	United Nations
WASCE	West African School Certificate Exam
WFP	World Food Programme

## **Chapter One**

### **Introduction:**

#### **Contesting moralities of consumption and development in an impoverished place**

I sat on the side of a dusty road in Makeni, Sierra Leone, one hot dry day in 2004, talking with a man named Gibrilla. He was struggling to explain why he and his wife were not managing to make enough money to look after his extended family and feed their new baby even though they were running two businesses simultaneously. From the porch of their house, located on a main thoroughfare, they sold soda and tea to people passing by, and Gibrilla also prepared and sold traditional medicines that he obtained from the dry forests on the outskirts of town. He was a well-respected healer, he said, and people admired the new mural he had painted on the side of his house to make it more inviting to people to come and “relax,” but his wife was urging him to move back to her hometown of Bo, in southern Sierra Leone. “She says we would have an easier time there, that business would be better and maybe we could send the little one to school. But I spent so much money already building this house,” he gestured to his one-room wattle-and-daub hut, “just so I could get a little bit away from my family, so I don’t have to hear their demands day and night.”<sup>1</sup> His extended family lived in his father’s house next door, a house that had not been repaired for years and now had twelve people living in it.

“So you cannot make any money here, even though your business is in demand.” It was more of a statement than a question on my part. “Well, maybe because no one has any money, they all ask me to give them a bit for free, or maybe they can bring something next time like cassava, or they just sit and groan about how they have pains but don’t have the money to pay. The place is so backward, no one has anything to start living with. And even though I have nothing, because I am the eldest living son to my

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<sup>1</sup> Throughout the dissertation, conversations that I am paraphrasing are included in the main text, while transcriptions of recorded interviews will be offset. See Appendix V for more detail.



father, I have to take care for the rest of my family as well. They expect it.” Three months later his wife Abi had her way, and on my morning walk into town I passed their little hut, closed up and abandoned, the signs taken down, the medicines gone. Gibrilla’s aunt rushed from the house next door to the street to catch me, pressing a letter into my hand and asking if I could find Gibrilla in Bo and give it to him. The family was doing badly, she said, no money for food and now no bush medicine either. Could he just send enough back for a bag of rice? As I did not have Gibrilla’s address, I could not assist his desperate aunt. She insisted that I take the letter anyway, just in case I went to Bo and saw him, maybe he would remember his family.

Though this scene took place quite early in my research, it presents a range of issues—poverty, business, family obligations, hope for the future—that govern the everyday life of residents of Makeni, the capital of the northern province of Sierra Leone. The daily act of living in grinding poverty forces people into constant confrontation with the moral behaviors expected of them, most importantly one’s obligation to contribute to the family’s wellbeing, all the while they try to “develop.” Everyone I spoke to in the town spoke of how the place was “backward” or “behind,” that they were not as “developed” as Bo, the proof lying in the state of the roads, buildings, and the inability of local children to be fully represented in the nation’s universities. “Development” in its basic sense in Makeni is the pursuit of activities that might pave the way for a better life, activities such as education or a new business, that potentially clash with one’s obligation to devote him or herself to the welfare of the family. Even minimal “development” for individuals is difficult in a place that has seen so little infrastructural and community “development”—basic amenities such as functioning clinics and schools—that there are no grounds for pursuing advancement. People spoke of wanting their businesses to “grow,” their children to “stop suffering” and their town council to “try” to put projects in place, and equally of how these things never happened; how they seemed somehow impossible in a place mutually constituted with its people as “backward.”

Ambitious people are particularly vulnerable to the trials of living in a “backward” place; like Gibrilla they feel that not only do they not have support from their families, but that other family members are expecting to be able to lean on them, and will try to keep them physically close so that they can do so. Thus are the ambitious a flight

risk to their families; even the minimally educated youth feel they have enough foundation to pursue a better life, which can only be accomplished by leaving their families behind, either figuratively or literally, and pursuing prosperity on their own. The consequences for the family when a member who could or should be earning money for their kin disappears or hordes resources for themselves are dire; hence a propensity to “pull down” people who attempt to get too far ahead and leave their dependents behind. *Pul yu doŋ sindrom* [pull you down syndrome] is the name people give to the propensity to destroy someone who attempts to succeed on their own. Parents refuse opportunities to send their children abroad, bad students bully successful students, and mass protests force the resignation of politicians whose beneficence does not extend to the people. This fear of unbridled success or un-redistributed good, of leaving others behind and pursuing “development” on one’s own, results in “pulling down” powerful or potentially powerful people at all levels of society, from the top local politicians to the promising schoolboy. In a place that is “so backward” that residents cannot be sure of finding their daily bread from one day to the next, there is little agreement as to what a “normal” town or a “normal” life is. Thus is there a constant moral struggle within individuals, families, and the community as to how one should think about and act on the present and future, as no one can be sure what either hold for the individual, the family, the community, or the nation. Rosenberg and Harding remarked that the future is a junkyard of memories one has not yet had (2005: 4). In northern Sierra Leone, what one sees more often than not in the future is, for all intents and purposes, a junkyard that one must turn into the daily business of living.

People are attempting to fashion a new “normal” out of a life that has, for the past fifty years, been anything but: mired in poverty, marginalized in the nation, torn asunder by war, and now purposely rebuilt in the same fashion by international NGOs. Obstacles to a new “normal” are many: families have been scattered by both war and opportunity, “development” such as education applied in a truncated and haphazard manner, and politicians continually place their own needs and desires above those of their constituents. Residents are creatively reworking their relationships with each other in order to “develop” in a satisfactory fashion, and in doing so are forcing the very moral underpinnings of their society to become responsive to their desire for a new “normal.”

This struggle is being replicated all over Africa in situations of social upheaval, as people strive to create satisfactory lives out of dire situations. Among Luo AIDS widows in Kenya, shared suffering has become a new form of relatedness, replacing “eroded” family ties with communities bound by the need for reciprocal care and sharing the burden of loss (Nyambedha and Aagaard-Hansen, 2007: 517-518). In the impoverished neighborhoods of urban Lilongwe, Malawi, Christians actively seek pastors and churches that they can “trust” to act as their “spiritual kin” and guide them through personal crises (Englund, 2007: 487-488). In both cases, as in Sierra Leone, people are not passive objects of poverty and circumstance, they are actively shaping better lives.

In this dissertation I examine the moral minefield of “development” in an impoverished place as it pertains to all spectrums of good that can be gained for the self, family and community—from the bare bones of resource consumption necessary to daily living, to “development” for individuals such as business or education, to community projects meant to bolster whole villages, to rampant individual consumption resulting in *borbor beLe*, the swollen belly of corrupt business people and politicians. I analyze how people rationalize morally acceptable forms of consumption and development, and how they weigh the potential advantages and problems of different approaches to getting ahead in the future with the potential that their family or community might try to pull them down to keep them from abandoning their fellows. Makeni at present is an environment that is so impoverished it does violence to basic morality, forcing people to adopt and rationalize creative forms that allow them to perhaps create a future in which they can exercise the exemplar. I argue that thinking about and acting on the future in Makeni is to ponder what actions one can pursue that might make the world “normal,” and under which circumstances the exemplary ethic—mutual obligation within the family—can be met. In a place so impoverished that people question what “normal” life is, individuals must constantly calibrate the value of any one stance towards “development,” and learn to move fluidly between “consumption” “self-development” and “community development” in order to gain the best personal advantage from each. It is only when the individual is getting ahead that s/he can think about the family. Thus do many people quietly pursue “self-development,” away from home, or cloaked in

whatever guise is necessary to avoid being pulled down, in order to begin to think about making their future better, and then including others in it.

### **Finding the moral road out of poverty: understanding modes of “development”**

The main premise of this work is that poverty is not a “normal” state of affairs, especially when it seems to deepen and intensify every year, in spite of some of the gains that were made at the end of the war. The largest problems with those self-same gains is that many, because they came through international aid organizations, were predicated on the assumption that pre-war poverty was indeed “normal”, and was thus the desirable default to which post-war reconstruction projects should aspire. This means that there is no concrete method for addressing personal poverty, and people do the best they can with the resources and networks that they have available. The notion of “development” comes into play because it is hotly contested among people who, each in their own way, struggle to make a better life for themselves while still being mindful of the ethical exemplars (see Humphrey, 1997: 25) that govern their social world. Everyday Makeni residents must make choices: to put money towards basic needs or back into business, to give requested funds to family or keep it to pay one’s own child’s school fees, to stay in a town with no opportunities or to leave one’s family behind in search of a better life, to put familial resources towards a cooperative venture that might not pay dividends. Throughout, essential concepts of morality remain intact, though my purpose in this work is to illustrate how the moral has become durably responsive to conditions of poverty. How the moral is reworked and expressed in Makeni today reflects endemic poverty and the resulting structural violence done to people and relationships, but it does not disappear. In this section I address the theoretical concerns associated with my key concepts, namely morality, consumption, self-development and community development, and analyze how they tie into questions of how people in Makeni negotiate a life and a future in a town that is so “backward” that as people struggle to find a “normal” life, they must often weigh the different consequences, to themselves and others, of their actions, and choose those that are the least damaging to themselves.

*Morality and questions of the everyday*

Social life is both rewarding and constricting, our benefits secured at the price of accepting, even embracing limitations and some pain and frustration. These rewards and punishments are epitomized by choices, and in our concomitant expectations that others will make similar choices. These choices of action, in turn, derive from others, from judgments about what the world is and should be.

Thomas Beidelman (1993: 2)

The key aspect of understanding morality in this study is judgments about “what the world is and should be” made by people everyday as they negotiate a life in poverty. Aside from Beidelman’s landmark study of the Kaguru, anthropologists have only recently addressed “morality” not just as notions of right and wrong, but as an individual’s position in and orientation to his/her social world, and the way that social world shapes social interaction. Howell (1997: 9) follows on Beidelman in expressing the idea that moral principals “express simultaneously an inherent dynamic relationship between the ‘ought’ and the ‘is’,” but notes that we cannot assume that this stance is inherently an orientation towards other people. Humphrey found in her work in Inner Mongolia that it is problematic for anthropologists to assume that the “moral” inherently implies a normal or normalized relationship with others, as Mongols do not necessarily think about others when pondering what we would consider “moral” quandaries. In Mongolia, an inherently moral stance is the ability “to adjudicate one’s actions as good or bad for oneself, whereas in the West at the very least a sympathy for others has been considered by most recent philosophers as a *sine qua non* for entering into the world of morality” (1997: 33). Thinking about the “other” is not an inherent marker of the morality of one’s actions, if the individual “can place [him]self rightly in the world,” which is a key concept to understanding how Makeni residents are now thinking about what they do and do not owe to others, a point I return to soon.

Jacobson-Widding, studying the Manyika of Zimbabwe, had first to figure out what the local concept of “moral” is, lest too much slippage occur between what she configured as the “moral” and people’s own understandings of how to behave (1997: 48). She opens up the need to touch on Foucault’s conception of morality. Foucault differentiated between the “moral code,” namely proscribed and prescribed behaviors for people within a society, and “the morality of behaviors,” namely how unique and fallible

human beings negotiate these codes, and then how they “conduct” themselves (1990: 25-26). This last aspect is key, as there are many ways to “conduct oneself” within a moral code, and still remain “moral.” Especially cross-culturally, anthropologists must understand not just what the moral code is and what moral behaviors constitute this code, but how people evaluate and negotiate these behaviors with respect to personal conduct. Let us move on to Sierra Leone, and how it does and does not resonate with anthropological concepts of the study of morality.

Zigon expresses concern that most anthropologists assume that the *is* should be as problematic a state as the *ought*; he asserts instead that people tend to be inherently moral in their everyday actions, and it is only when a problem arises that forces a question of the *ought* that people explicitly consider what is “moral” and what is not (2007: 133). From this consideration they make conscious decisions, and are usually aware that what they are doing is either moral or immoral, or can be somehow justified as the former. This is because “moral,” in Zigon’s definition, is, “to inhabit a bodily disposition, one might even say inhabit a soul, that is familiar to one’s self and most others with whom one comes into contact. It is the familiar sharedness of morality that one can speak of the good, or more appropriately, being good” (2007: 135). For this reason, he states, anthropologists would do best, in a quest to understand morality, to study “abnormal” situations. In the current environment of Makeni, we must view the actions of individuals in both lights; as they try to make good on their obligations to other people (the social exemplars noted in the story about Gibrilla, namely honoring his obligations to his family as the eldest son), and as they strive to make something of their own lives, something that might be more “normal” than their current hardship, and under which circumstances the exemplar may once again be the *is*. In this way, we must analyze morality in Makeni as the push and pull of the two: first to oblige the relationships that one has in this world, but also to make that world as normal and as good as possible for oneself. Indeed, the “normal” must be created and sustained in order for the “right” to play a role. How do we frame the *ought* when the *is* lacks any sense of the “everyday?”

In Sierra Leone, we can assume that the concept of the “moral” is, unlike in Mongolia, inherently tied to one’s comportment with and actions for and on others, as what was stressed by my interlocutors time and again was one’s “obligation” and “duty”

to be a contributing member of their families, and to take on responsibilities within the family that weaker members cannot. In Sierra Leonean concepts of personhood, life stages are defined by roles, rather than ages (see Honwana, 2005: 35), and roles are relative to each other. All adults, not just the parents, can expect deference and obedience from children, called *pikin*. Someone is considered a *pikin* until they are first thought potentially eligible for secret society initiation, around the age of ten to eleven. At this point boys become *bɔbɔ* and girls are called *titi*, and unlike *pikin*, are expected to act somewhat sensibly towards others, which means they do not receive corporal punishment from their elders. Not all girls go through initiation at a set age; especially now that most girls are in school, most of the parents I spoke to who were educating their daughters delayed initiation until they had finished at least form three, or about ninth grade. A girl becomes a woman, *uman*, once she has gone through the *bundu*, the secret society initiation, and is considered ready for marriage. A *bɔbɔ*, on the other hand, can only become a *man* once he is both in the economic position to take a wife and support her and their children. A man becomes a *big man*, or a woman a *big uman* when they can generate “wealth in people” (see Shaw, 2002: 164), by gaining dependents, clients, and people to whom they provide material support and security and who are in turn obligated to support them politically.

Especially after the war, thousands of *bɔbɔ* have left their families, either forcibly or voluntarily, have little formal schooling that they could use to find a job, have no rights to land they can farm on their own, and are increasingly prone to migration to free themselves of the oppressive labor requirements of working for their elders (see Peters, 2006: 40). Many of these young men are in no position to attempt to marry, and many pass years, no longer as *bɔbɔ*, but also not as cultural men. From this the category of “youth” has arisen, to describe any boy between the ages of fifteen and thirty-five who has not yet achieved the status of Sierra Leonean cultural manhood (see Shepler, 2004: 11). These youth have no inherent political power, not enough economic power to start a family, and no will to return to a life of, essentially, slavery under their elders (see Peters, 2006: 40).<sup>2</sup> “Youth” is a primary conceptual category in Makeni, where vernacular

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<sup>2</sup> Though there are many young women who found themselves alone in new towns after the war, with little education, few skills, and often uninitiated, they are not usually included in the Sierra Leonean vernacular

thinking has coalesced around the fact that, because it is not a group of people who fit a cultural understanding of personhood, the group, and everything the youth do and do not do in society, has the potential to be problematic.

What these youth seem to have lacked in their upbringing is the most important concept expressed in Krio with respect to how one learns obligations and deference, namely the idea of *gud trenin*; literally “good training,” which produces children who are obedient and act as members of social networks, rather than as individuals. From an early age, children are explicitly taught by their parents the proper way to interact with other people. Critical tenets of *gud trenin* include sharing food, politeness in front of elders, complying with the requests and demands of elders without complaining, and, once one has grown, knowing that one has the obligation to look after family members, especially parents, when they are old. Sanctions for non-compliance among children are severe, and often include beatings or being sent away without food if the parents *fil shem*, or are shamed by their children’s behavior, in front of others.

On one of my first visits to an elderly gentleman’s house, I had been seated with him only a moment when a crowd of children burst through the door, curious to ogle at the white person in their midst. He was immediately on his feet, shouting at them to leave, telling them that they should be beaten severely for showing such bad behavior, that their parents should feel ashamed of them. He then shut the door behind them and apologized to me, saying, “African children these days have no respect, they all lack training. This has been more of a problem since the war, but things are not normal, their parents don’t know how to bring them up.” He was not alone in his condemnation, people around Sierra Leone agree that deference towards elders has collapsed completely in the wake of the war (Archibald and Richards, 2002: 345; see also Honwana, 2005: 36-37). Especially because of the youths’ ability to survive as individuals during the war, elders now see the need to incorporate their perspectives in decision-making processes and knowledge production (see Rashid, 2006: 124).

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“youth”. Many do turn to illicit activities such as prostitution, or lowly ones such as trading small items out of boxes, but they are not considered a potential political force, therefore are not included. Abdullah reiterates several times that there were no “sisters” in the drug-laced ghettos where the lumpenproletariat hung out before the war: the violence that was the RUF was entirely a “brotherhood” (2005: 182).



He touched on a critical aspect of understanding why morality as a concept must be negotiated in Makeni currently; why Foucault's insistence on understanding "conduct" is a necessary component of understanding how it is that people behave "morally." When life is not normal, how can one define a strict set of moral behaviors? Why should parents care if their children are rude if they worry about what they will feed them at the end of the day? Though I cannot cover this in detail here, what emerged in Makeni is that what is right is sometimes not only threatening for the individual's well-being, but may also have a detrimental effect on the outcome of threatening events. For example, more than one ex-combatant that I knew in Makeni joined the rebel movement, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) when they had decided, at the point when other young people knew of an impending RUF raid on their village and were running away, to stay with old and infirm parents and look after them. When the village was raided, most of them suffered the agony of watching their parents murdered so that the young men were "freed" of their familial obligations and could incorporate into their "new" RUF family instead (see Rosen, 2007: 298; also Honwana, 2005: 41-42). On the other hand, those youth who abandoned their villages and hid in the bush for the duration of the war remained free agents, unscripted by any side (see Archibald and Richards, 2002: 346), and their parents, who were of little intrinsic interest to the RUF because they could not serve as fighters, were largely unharmed. Though it was culturally "moral" for the former to stay with and guard their parents, they could not have imagined the consequences. "I get tears in my eyes," said one, "when I think about my parents begging me not to leave them, and then it all went bad anyway." The "self" in Sierra Leone, in the exemplar, exists in his/her relation to the family and each person performs their various roles and obligations. However, what the war made clear was that those youth who survived in the bush, untouched by any warring faction, had done so as individuals. In the aftermath, they argue for their personal rights in villages and towns not as members of families, but as individuals (Archibald and Richards, 2002: 358).

The final aspect of morality in Makeni is the role *Pul yu don sindrom* plays. People refer to it as a syndrome, according to one of my interlocutors, because it is considered pathological behavior, even as the majority of people are guilty of it. It is the habit, whether concerning members of one's own family, work or school mates, or

politicians, to “pull down” to one’s own level someone who is doing too well economically, socially, or politically. It is a form of personal jealousy where because one person has more than another, instead of attempting to reach that higher level, the jealous person will instead try to spoil the other’s good fortune (see Ashforth, 1999: 231; van der Geest, 2002: 456). Sanders refers to this phenomenon as “keeping-behind-the-Joneses” (2003: 165) in his study of witchcraft practices in Tanzania. A witch’s personal dislike of modernity causes him/her to destroy the good fortune—always linked to material aspects of modernity—of another. Similarly, Robbins found in Papua New Guinea that the attitude existed among the Urapmin that if everyone had money, it would be easier to live a good life, and moral questions would rarely come to the fore (2004: xxvii).

In Makeni, as opposed to both South Africa and Tanzania, people are pulled down not just because of their perceived material fortune or their potential to gain a fortune, but also because of their potential to gain prosperity *without including others to which they are obliged*, i.e. their family, or their clients and other members of their constituency. Fortune is good, as long as it is shared out properly and benefits everyone whom it should benefit. This latter concept is flexible, depending on the person, the size of the fortune and to whom it is popularly perceived as rightly belonging, and is critical to understanding how slippery “morality” is in Makeni currently. Because the town is “backward” instead of being “normal” like the comparative standards of Bo and Kenema, people are pulled down more often because one *must* strike out as an individual in order to “develop,” with the sense that it is impossible to get ahead with the obligations that one would usually have to the rest of the family. Gibrilla, about whom I spoke, made the decision to leave Makeni before it was apparent to his family that they would need to find ways to keep him in town. After all, he had just moved next door. Gibrilla may have thought he had nothing to lose by moving, which is also the case among young people who have not depended on their parents for years; many of them are “ex-combatants” or long-term school migrants (see Nieuwenhuys, 2001: 548). Gibrilla moving was a statement of his inability and disinclination to fulfill an exemplar that he felt had been tarnished and invalidated by lack of reciprocity within his family. Movement is a common theme in this analysis: if “development” within the bounds of local conceptions of the “moral” involve people actively engaging in reciprocity in relations of physical or

emotional closeness, distance is an indicator of the testing, loss or severance of those relations. It is highlighted in every chapter: whether political money “disappears” from the community, successful merchants move to Freetown, school migrants sever relations with village kin, “ex-combatants” refuse to return to their natal communities, or successful NGO workers walk away from family disputes over their salaries; distance is an expression of the renegotiation of the exemplar.

An increasing number of children are growing up in dire poverty; many feel that their parents have not cared for them well enough to oblige them to return anything. In this sense, many youth are redefining what it means to be “kin;” namely what their obligations are to people with whom they have not shared lives for a long time (see McKittrick, 1997: 267, 286). People in Makeni have learned to “develop” on their own, and look after themselves. “*ɔlman tot in yon lod*” [all people carry their own burdens] stated one trader emphatically when I asked her if her estranged husband was helping to put their children through school, “*we di pikin den ge sɛns, den dey tot den yon lod*” [when the children have sense, they too will carry their own burdens]. She assumes that when her children are old enough to make decisions for themselves, they will strike out on their own as well.

Several of the elders to whom I put this concept were aghast at its “backwardness,” namely the barbarism of people consciously avoiding familial obligations. This idea of backwardness is a commentary on the somehow deficient morality of people who govern and inhabit a place. This state of affairs is the result of deficiencies on the part of two disparate groups of people: those colonial administrators, politicians, and civil servants who specifically failed to “bring development” in the past and present and maintain it in a working state, and the people who currently inhabit the town, and are unable or unwilling to make sacrifices in order to develop the community themselves. The residents of Makeni claim they cannot be faulted for the potholed roads, decrepit public structures, and non-functioning power and water stations, as “corrupt” past politicians could not be trusted to “do development” with public funds. Simultaneously, politicians cite the unwillingness of such “backward” people to pay utility bills, agree to taxes, or put any of their own effort into “bits” of development such as cleaning the streets and their own compounds as the greatest obstacles to the town

being “great.” There is no basis for trust among people who, for the last generation, have either been tempted or forced by circumstance to protect and think of themselves first. It is in this state of intransigent suspicion and self-interest that I begin my analysis of how people conceptualize, work for and dream about a “normal” life.

*Notes on the “normal”: distinguishing between the familiar and the optimal; the is and the ought*

By introducing the concept that morally is most explicitly revealed in situations that are not “normal,” we are pushed to ask what “normal” means, especially in the context of post-war Sierra Leone. Most of the people I grew to know over my time in Makeni emphasized how life was not “normal” before the war: Makeni lacked electricity and running water, streets were potholed, the town council was corrupt and dysfunctional, there was no one in the villages who wanted or was able to farm, and the whole country was mired in a system of “rotten” government that the RUF cadres took upon themselves to push out. Indeed, many of the former RUF combatants I befriended were adamant that the country was better off after the war because the fighting brought the plight of Sierra Leone’s people to the attention of the rest of the world, and now it was “on the NGO map” (being considered by non-governmental organizations for funding). “The world feels sorry for us now,” said one, “and see how they are thinking of forgiving our debt? It is much better than it was in the past.” Indeed, the influx of international NGOs to Makeni in the wake of the war was startling; within six months of President Kabbah declaring the war officially over, nearly two dozen major international organizations had initiated “war recovery” and “reintegration” programs in Makeni. The population too was growing every day.

Indeed, when I queried many people about what made them decide to return to Makeni, even when the town was still occupied by the RUF, many cited the fact that the town was “a bit normal,” or “a bit cool,” or even, “things were somehow normal” to describe the situation. They went on to describe this time period—from about June 2001—as one where the RUF were “beginning to see reason,” and “no one was getting killed anymore,” and “we could live a little bit comfortably with them, no one carried guns,” and it was safe to live in town even though it had not yet been penetrated by relief

organizations. Indeed, many students cited the fact that the schools were open and they could live in their old homes again as symptoms of normality, as this was a much more acceptable state of affairs than living as idle, displaced people who depended on charity. Being able to go home, even if the circumstances are not optimal, is always a bit more “normal.” We can understand “normal” in this case as connoting a historical “familiar.”

However, this discourse of war-equals-rebuilding and a “cool” occupation by the RUF as characterizing a place that is now “better” or “more normal” than it had been in the past, runs parallel to the discourse in Makeni that the familiar “normal” is not optimal; it is not what *should* be “normal” as “normal” exists in the other, politically equal provincial headquarters of Bo and Kenema. The place would be optimally normal if it had electricity, running water, functioning schools, an honest town council, etcetera, etcetera. Most of these desires are expressed in English; as though the exemplary “community development” to which people aspire are those standards set by the western world; a standard that Bo and Kenema are closer to achieving fully. Makeni lacking these things makes it “backward” not just in Sierra Leone, but in the world in general. Fehérváry found a similar practice and discourse in post-socialist Hungary, where middle-class people aspired to create an extraordinary standard of living for themselves with respect to their material possessions, which they imagined to be “normal” in Western Europe (2002: 370).

Just as morality exists in terms of the *is* and the *ought*, so does normality. This is why the narrative and practice of life in Makeni is shot through with this idea of the place, and people, being “backward.” This familiar normal, where everyday life is marked and defined by struggle, conflict, and suffering, is not taken for granted as the way life should be, or the way it is lived even in Freetown, the capital. This is specifically because the living standard had already been declining for many years before the war, with inflation, censorship, and decaying infrastructure, and, after a sharp but temporary increase during the aid boom, is one again declining now, in the wake of the aid glow. Michael Warner stated the difference between the normal *is* and *ought* most concretely; what he calls the difference between the “statistical” and “evaluative” normal:

If normal just means within a common statistical range, then there is no reason to be normal or not. By that standard, we might say that it is normal to have health

problems, bad breath and outstanding debt. One might feel reassured that one is not the only person to have these things, but the statistics only help with one's embarrassment; they say nothing about the desirability of the things themselves. It is *not* normal to be a genius, die a virgin, or be well endowed. That, again, tells us nothing about what one should want. (1999: 54)

What people in Makeni want is the “evaluative normal,” a standard or criterion of value (1999: 56). It is an exemplar. Makeni lacks not just a steady state, which people also desire as an evaluative starting point, but also the chance to “catch up” to Bo and Kenema, which it would have been able to do had it been treated fairly from the start (see Fehérváry, 2002: 371). If inflation were to slow, the price of rice to remain stable, and farming to become profitable, people would no longer have to constantly weigh their actions in terms of benefit to self versus benefit to others. Teachers could teach, politicians could govern, farmers could farm, and the optimal “normal” achieved. From here a “moral” could, as Zigon states usually occurs, be the taken-for-granted “everyday morality” that people “normally” practice (2007: 133).

*Notions of consumption: “empti bag no de tinap” versus “borbor beɛ”*

On a trip to Kamakwie, the diamond mining center of northern Bombali, I spent a day working with a local NGO employee. His employer had asked him to show me around town and facilitating my interactions with traders and miners, whom I was querying about the agricultural effects of the diamond boom. In the middle of one interview, he whispered in my ear, “*Empti bag no de tinap*” [an empty bag cannot stand] and slipped out of the hut. Rejoining me apologetically an hour later, he explained that he had overslept and not eaten that morning, and needed to excuse himself to get some food, lest he not be able to continue with the afternoon's activities for lack of energy.

In 2003, I participated in an AIDS fundraising walk through Freetown, which culminated in a ceremony on Lumley Beach, a beautiful stretch of white sand fringing Freetown and the Atlantic. The Minister of Education was scheduled to speak, but had bowed out at the last minute and sent a deputy to speak on his behalf. The man was tall and slender, dressed in a well-cut suit and had arrived in his personal Mercedes. As he took to the podium to a smattering of applause, the woman next to me commented to her

friend, “*Na borbor beɛ i ge, luk na di fayn klos!*” [He has a bloated belly, look at the nice suit!] Clearly although the deputy minister was not physically obese, his clothes and car had set him apart from the crowd as a “*borbor beɛ*”, or a man who takes more than he needs and gets “fat” on the resources meant for others.

There are clearly two distinct notions of consumption present in Sierra Leone. One is the basic consumption that is necessary to maintain the self, and by extension the family, in a working state, and the other is a greedy “eating” of resources, clearly beyond one’s personal or familial needs, which results in an obvious display for others of one’s propensity to not properly share out resources. This second notion, though morally condemned, is desirable to individuals, especially if they have suffered deprivation in the past. “Consumption,” states Hunt, “does not stand for anything beyond the moment. Instead, it only ties us tighter to the humbling effects of pleasure, rot and decay” (2005: 168). In this section I provide an overview to the extant literature on “eating” in Africa in general and its application to Sierra Leone and Makeni in particular, and how one draws the moral line (which is becoming increasingly fuzzy) between sanctioned and unsanctioned consumption of resources. In short, if money or resources are come by honestly, one uses as much as one needs and shares out the rest properly among kin, clients, and other dependents, it is morally sound. If on the other hand it is ill-gotten, such as from corrupt practices or solely through the labor of others, is hoarded for one’s self and perhaps a few family members, and produces no “development,” then it is unsanctioned, and morally bereft.

The fuzziness that occurs in Sierra Leone in particular rests on two interrelated phenomena. The first is the fact that corruption at a high level forces low-level civil servants, such as police officers and teachers, to engage in morally doubtful, small acts of corruption in order to survive and feed their families (see Chabal and Daloz, 1999: 98). The second, also outlined by Chabal and Daloz (1999: 36) is that people have a higher tolerance for conspicuous consumption among political elites as long as they allow others to also “share in the spoils.” Elites who look successful are also more likely to attract clients who believe in that success and would like a share (see Maxwell, 1998: 362). When a *borbor beɛ*’s immediate network of beneficiaries is obvious and obviously

benefiting, there are fewer people who are willing to grumble that the shares do not go “all the way down.”

Bayart wrote that African leaders practice “the politics of the belly,” bringing in metaphors common around the continent pertaining to the fact that in Africa, politics *is* eating: in Cameroon “goats eat where they are tethered,” Nigerians speak of “sharing the national cake,” political factions in Tanzania are called *kula* (eating), and the list goes on and on (1993: xvii). Bayart states explicitly that “the politics of the belly” refer to, “the idea that accumulation, opening up possibilities of social mobility and enabling the holder of power to ‘set himself up’ ... [it is] also the politics of intimate liaisons... and nepotism” (1993: xxviii). Shady business practices are another method for gaining morally bereft wealth. Barber, in her work on the petro-naira in Nigeria, found that the Yoruba see petroleum money, like other sources of money that seem to “come from nowhere,” like oil money, from which there seemed to be no tangible source (1982: 435) as “ill-gotten.” However, because they do not result from honest work they are “lacking power” (1982: 444). Only fools pursue baseless and ill-gotten money, and people pray that these fools will reap their just rewards in the end.

Though “ill-gotten” resources are acquired through political channels, they can form part of what Chabal and Daloz term “the moral economy of corruption” (1999: 99, see also Olivier de Sardan, 1999: 25). Though first noting that because it is impossible in Africa to have a working definition across the countries of what exactly corruption *is*, in essence what causes it (96-97), it is therefore more fruitful to study what corruption *does*, or more specifically, how it “works” so that it persists in a country over time, and where it breaks down. Chabal and Daloz state, “Providing the beneficiaries of graft do not hoard too much of what they accumulate by means of the exploitation of resources made available to them through their position, and provided they redistribute along lines that are judged to be socially desirable, their behavior is deemed acceptable” (99). Corruption fails to “work” in situations where redistribution does not produce socially desirable results, such as in southeastern Nigeria in the 1990s, when the police force was bought off by local gangs, who ran towns with protection rackets (see Meagher, 2007: 86). Popular reaction was the Bakassi Boys, a vigilante justice group that, before it too



deteriorated into a brutal gang, reclaimed the city from the gangs and “bad” corruption itself by bringing criminals to justice without accepting their bribes.

Contrast this with Uganda, where international institutions consistently support corruption at the highest levels by continuing aid programs even when there is ample evidence that the aid is being diverted (Tangri and Mwenda, 2006: 104). Though aid institutions threaten Uganda’s leaders with cutting off the resource supply, politicians circumvent this by setting up anti-corruption organizations to show that they are “serious” about combating corruption, and then buy them off. In Nigeria and Uganda, as in Sierra Leone, corruption “works” as long as money is flowing in and enough people are benefiting that they will support the system. When the money ceases to be redistributed in a socially acceptable manner, corruption becomes a problem, and the results can be explosive. In Chapter Two, I analyze the history of corrupt public officials in Makeni, and what resulted most recently when the town council chairman was embroiled in an embezzlement scandal.

Concerning popular reactions to mysterious wealth in Sierra Leone, Rosalind Shaw connected the ambivalence and anti-social tendencies of wealth and technology to the practice of witches. The “Place of Witches” is an invisible city that is thought to be the origin of all technological innovations in our own visible world (1997: 859). The affluence of this city stems from the witches’ theft of human lives, and witches travel to this city at night to practice their craft (2002: 202). In this world, witches act much as Europeans do: they do not share technology, or much of anything, with other people. Witches and Europeans are selfish, anti-social, and greedy; they do not stop to talk to people and they generally eat alone and live a secluded life, just like witches (1997: 859). Sierra Leoneans view witches and conspicuously wealthy in their own society as they would Europeans: they are anti-social and greedy, not sharing their resources with anyone; not even bothering to greet other people in the street. They eat alone and share food with no one, which is the ultimate act of a *borbor bele*, and of a witch.

However, unlike the witchcraft that occurs in other African countries (see Ashforth, 1999: 231; van der Geest, 2002: 456; Sanders, 2003: 165), in Sierra Leone it is not primarily used as a means to pull others down. When it is suspected as being used for personal gain, the opposite occurs. Individuals who are too comfortable with western

technology or values, or gain too much through these means are suspected as witches. They are often pulled down through ordinary means: a mother refused to send her gifted son to school in England and broke everything that he made that seemed technological, for fear that he was a witch (Shaw, 1997:860). In another case a self-professed witch in Makeni who confessed to killing her children to pay a debt to a colleague was arrested and put on trial, like any other criminal (Kamara, *Expo Times Gazette*, September 16, 1996). Shaw explains that witches are predatory by nature, and the explanations of their predation is an embodied social memory of the exploitative nature of both the trans-Atlantic slave trade and the corrupt post-modern state (1997, 857-858). Though Shaw explores the rationale behind a popular belief in the existence of witchcraft in great detail, and how it constitutes a reaction to the “failed morality” of colonial history and western technology (861), she does not fully explore the means that people undertake to battle witchcraft—and the failure of morality—in their communities, and how this illuminates a relationship and struggle between haves and have-nots. Though I do not deal specifically with cases of witchcraft in this work, it is this supposed failure of morality among the rich that I take up here, and where my work articulates with Shaw’s own.

In Makeni, one finds that the sharpening lines between the rich—of which there are a few—and the increasing numbers of poor has forced the refinement of applications of morals to what is right and proper consumption, and what is unsanctioned. Though Makeni is “backward” and “behind,” not everyone in the town is scraping single leones together to feed themselves. There are a certain number of wealthy and middle-class people in the town, and the lines between them exist in both their material possessions and their modes of livelihood. Makeni’s wealthiest people comprise political “big men” and traders in luxury goods, especially diamonds. At least seven current or past members of the town council have personal vehicles and personal drivers, although they may be old and are not always in working order, as do both Paramount Chiefs of the two chiefdoms in which Makeni lies. Political big men also have luxuries like generators, televisions, cellular phones, and businesses “on the side” for their kin. Though many of them had salaried jobs before becoming politicians: as teachers, employees of international NGOs (INGOs), and civil servants, most were not in a position to make so much money that they could afford such luxuries. As with the petro-millionaires in

Nigeria, the money of the wealthiest people has often seemed to come from nowhere: how can one find the money to open a diamond-buying business or selling cellular phones? This often makes them targets of suspicion—it is possible that they are corrupt—however the most successful “big men” retain their positions both because of their ability to conceal their activities, and because of their redistributive beneficence.

The upper middle class comprises the successful traders in goods that cross the lines of “traditional” and “modern,” and though targets of requests for patronage from people, are not as outwardly targets of jealousy or suspicion. This sector includes vendors of necessary, if disliked, items such as bulk imported rice and used clothing, teachers (those who receive regular salaries) and most INGO employees who live honestly, who draw a regular salary from which to purchase items such as a monthly bag of rice, basic medicines and pay for things like school fees (I cover this in Chapter Seven). A solid middle class comprises successful artisans: tailors, carpenters, and metalworkers who may own their own businesses and perhaps employ an apprentice or two, though their businesses are susceptible to demand. The poor are most people in Makeni: the traders of basic goods, apprenticed or employee artisans, self-employed traditional doctors (like Gibrilla) and others who sell goods from their homes. The “food-poor” (defined by the IMF as someone who lacks the money to afford at least 2,700 calories a day, June 2005a: 3) comprise everyone who cannot easily fill their basic needs: those who live “in the nick of time” or “just every day,” such as traders of small items like snack foods, village women who sell cassava from their gardens along the highway, and beggars who rely on the beneficence of the middle and upper classes. In my estimation after living in Makeni for fifteen months, for every “big man” there are forty “middle-class” people and two hundred poor and “food poor”. According to 2005 IMF estimates, 70% of residents of “urban areas outside Freetown” live below their estimated poverty line of Le2,111 per day, which includes the poor and food-poor (June 2005a: 3). However, as will become clear in Chapters Two and Three, the poor are most visible in Makeni in the ways they interact with the wealthy and middle class, such as in the market and political processes. They consume both because they have to, and in the quest to move themselves up the economic ladder, which I will address specifically in the intersections between *empti bag no de tinap* and *borbor bεε*.

However, the lines between *empti bag no de tinap* and *borbor bεε* have become blurry as individuals continually renegotiate the boundaries of acceptable and unacceptable accumulation and uses of resources in an impoverished place, where if one has resources there may simply be too many people to redistribute; or because if one has been left out of the redistribution, must resort to less than moral means to make a living. For example, it is widely known in Makeni that one of the highest-ranking police officers for the province regularly has a long-standing understanding with the police commissioner's office in Freetown that if he is allowed to take a large percentage out of the police salaries for his province, he will cover them if they too take a small percentage. What occurs locally in Makeni is that police officers who work everyday and have families to feed regularly go without their salaries, or with salaries that are delayed by months as the money is "eaten" somewhere in Freetown. One of my interlocutors had his house broken into and his cellular phone, watch, thermos, and other personal items stolen. He tried to file a police report, and was told by the desk officer that in order to file the report he would have to bring, "pens, paper, and a bit of encouragement for them! They called it a filing fee!" His outrage at being asked to bribe the officers to file a police report highlights the fact that though it is known that police officers must insist on "encouragement," or low-level bribes, in order to do their jobs and purchase food for their families, it is unacceptable to do so (see Roitman, 2001: 251). Bayart sees this type of corruption as a "matter of life and death" (1993: 238); civilians do not.

On another occasion, I went to the Catholic mission in order to have one of my regular lunches with the Cathedral administrator. His cook was ill with malaria, and he wanted us to go to a restaurant in town in order to eat. However, there was no fuel for the vehicle, and he would have to send one of his boys out to the different petrol stations to see if he could buy a gallon of fuel. One hour later, the young man returned with the fuel, and we could proceed eight hundred meters down the road to the chosen restaurant. Hungry and frustrated with the wait, I blurted out, "Why didn't we walk? It was so close!" to which Father Samura answered, "The mission is supposed to be able to look after people as Christ looks after all his children. How would it look if the administrator was reduced to walking in the sun and sweating for his daily meal?" The church, he explained to me, was transitioning into "self-reliance." The Albano diocese in Italy, from

which the Mission drew most of its funding, had warned Father Samura that as soon as the Bishop of Makeni, an Italian named George Biguzzi, retired, the mission would have to “stand by itself.” However, this did not mean that it could appear poor. As a priest, his use of resources was sanctioned because he, and the church, had to appear well off enough that they could dispatch their duties as a patron. Pious poverty is not an option.

The final area of consumption that I must touch on involves conspicuous consumption without consideration for the needs of kin, and this is occurring more and more among the youth. As not-quite-adults and yet not supported by their parents, they are severing ties from their families, often as their families cannot provide them with an education, and striking out on their own in small businesses, often times marginally legal or legitimate. Perhaps half of the young people one sees on the streets, both male and female, *blɔf* [bluff, or making too much of one’s self]: they wear western clothes and acquire technology such as tape recorders and cellular phones. Most of them spend the bulk of their earnings on “useless” technology, instead of putting it towards “development” such as school fees. They epitomize the breaking down of familial mutual obligation, because consumer goods, though obviously belying a grinding poverty, produce neither familial security in the present nor prospects for the future.

The most contentious arena of consumption versus “development” occurs with politicians, for whom there are the most resources at one’s disposal, and the largest number of people expecting to receive some benefit from these resources. They are continually negotiating a line between “eating” the money themselves, and being perceived as using the money to “develop” their families and patronage networks, a process that often occurs overseas. People who mock this politicking accuse politicians of “rampant self-development” as at some point the money should come to the rest of the community, as they, like priests, are responsible for the wellbeing of the people. This term is relatively new in the vernacular, as no anthropologist working on Sierra Leone has yet used it to describe a process of development that is divorced from social networks. I have only heard this term used in Makeni by people under the age of twenty five, most often to describe what “big people” do with the money they eat, or to describe their fellows who are deliberately choosing to forge their own “development” path—

whether through education, small businesses or other means—and forgoing any ties of mutual obligation they are supposed to have with their families.

*Self-development, or how a dearth of resources  
negates obligation to the familial good*

In his seminal article on *Olaju*, Peel presents the concept of “development,” closely linked with “enlightenment” among the Yoruba in Nigeria, as the importance of knowledge historically, well before European influence, to gaining social power (1978: 144). It is with individuals to gain this power, which, though knowledge was traditionally hoarded by the powerful, can be done through education (especially now western education). *Olaju*, especially as western education, gives individuals power in situations in which they would otherwise have none (154). However, those who are able to acquire this knowledge must spread it around to the rest of the community because “the eyes of the Ijeshas had to be open, if their society was to be transformed” (149). Thus was “enlightenment,” or being open to “development,” “a precondition for individual advance, and for communal advance principally as an aggregated effect of that of successful individuals” (1978: 150).<sup>3</sup> This is very closely paralleled to current ideas in Sierra Leone, and Makeni in particular, about “self-development,” and how it is left with the individuals to be open to the idea of developing, putting their effort into attaining it, and then the society will have to be transformed because it cannot help but do so when it is populated by so many “developed” individuals. At the same time, individuals who would wield little personal power in a situation of interlinked familiar relations, can now argue from a position of education, and thus power.

Bledsoe did considerable work on notions of “development” among Mende school children in southern Sierra Leone. She found that knowledge among teachers was considered a commodity, something that children had to earn, and not just learn, in order to “develop” (1992: 191). As parents cannot “develop” children past their own level, they will try to send them out to the wider world, to learn skills and make contacts that

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<sup>3</sup> Though Bayart (1993: 24) states that fifteen years later, in spite of the predominance of Western education, *Olaju* as “development” still “referred explicitly to the control of external resources by the monarch.”

they can bring back the benefits (1990: 76). They could only succeed with the assistance of others, such as kin, teachers, and local politicians, and thus owed their success to those others who had helped to “develop” them by giving them “blessings” such as money, social connections, and social assurances (1992: 193), in essence, according to my interlocutors, putting their “force” behind the student. Knowledge itself was a commodity owned by teachers and purchased by students through material and work transactions (182). The notion of “self-development” is explicitly divorced from a concept of “development” as resulting from one’s social network. In normal child “development” among the Mende a child, collecting “blessings” and traveling far to attend school, repays those “blessings” by returning to their village and involving their network in the benefits of development. In “self-development,” if development is done entirely by the self, then it is most importantly for the self, and benefits do not necessarily have to be shared with anyone, family or otherwise. The notion of “self-development” is used most often by people when describing (often derisively) the “rampant self-development” of the country’s leaders, and how even though they came from poor stock, now that they have risen to positions of prominence, often through their own hard work, they are feeding off more than their fair share of a reward. The other common usage is with respect to education, and how youth who are paying their own way through school are “self-developing,” and therefore explicitly owe their families less.

One memorable incident occurred in a classroom of St. Francis Secondary School, where I sat with room full of students (whose teacher had not yet arrived) to discuss education and “development” in Makeni. Several students came to the front and elaborated grandly on how difficult they were finding life in Makeni—finding enough food, finding accommodation, paying school fees—and yet dreamt about their plans to become the country’s president and ministers, doctors and lawyers, and how they strained trying to advance in such a “backward” place. One student, who had been continually at odds with the others on issues throughout the forum, suddenly stood up and stated accusingly, “You are all only concerned about developing yourselves, and this is why Makeni is so backward! If you are not willing to keep your educations here and do something here, then how can you speak about development at all?” His comment was greeted with uncomfortable silence. No one wanted to be accused; no matter if they had

traveled far from home because their parents could not help, paid their school fees themselves, worked to pay for their food and lodging, and had dreams of social advancement, that they were purely, selfishly, “self-developing.”

On the other end of the spectrum lays my research assistant, Idriss, and his interpretation of the popular song *An 'porto* (covered in Chapter Seven), in which he details how and why the musicians accuse the country's intelligentsia of failing it, a habit they learned from the colonial administrators. He explained, “the singer is trying to condemn that white people don't come here for development in the colonial period. Sierra Leone could have developed more than it had done but the people requested for independence without ripening. The handing over of the power to the Sierra Leoneans was the time the country started to depreciate due to self-development among the leaders of the country.” Here Idriss has touched upon two related issues with “self-development.” For him, the tendency to “self-develop” is related to a lack of maturity among leaders who only partially grasped the idea of “development” brought in the colonial period. He believes that the country's elite saw the good lives that the white people were leading and assumed that this was “development,” and infrastructure and technology were an almost mystical result of having a country of “developed” citizens, which of course they were not.

In addition, “self-development” also serves as an ideological screen for rampant consumption among the country's elite. Many of the country's politicians come from non-elite backgrounds, and feel that, having made something of their lives (and many did arrive at their positions more or less through honest effort) time in office is a chance to reward themselves for their successful “development.” The money a politician makes during his tenure can be invested: in homes, in European educations for his children, in the future security of his circle of kin and compatriots. This reward for “development” parallels what Barber accused the Yoruba of doing, though unreflectively, with respect to the petro-naira. She highlights the fact that in Yoruba morality plays, a man who has come by his wealth “honestly” is always involved in running a business like building contracting, where he has many employees. Others do the manual labor in his stead, and he profits. Barber states that the Yoruba cannot speak of the “real” foundations of an honest wealthy man's work, because it would be revealed as no more solid than the



“work” of scoundrels (1982: 448). Though technically honest because it is visible, it is potentially morally questionable because it is no longer the work of one’s own hand, the sweat off one’s own brow. Defending the “rewards” of office is where politicians fail morally to defend “self-development” against accusations of mere “money chewing” by their constituents, as many Makeni residents have accused town council members.

Returning to Idriss’ first point, he intimated that the newly independent nation’s intelligentsia assumed that by pushing education and other aspects of ideological “development” on the nation, that it could not help but develop as a whole, along the lines of Peel’s assessment that the Yoruba feel that when a place is populated by developed individuals, the whole will benefit (1978: 150). Many people in Makeni were emphatic that developed individuals were not enough; that they all must come together to achieve anything. One of my interlocutors could not emphasize the point enough: “Development is man centered, but it is not an individual something. People will come together and identify areas to be developed, and work assiduously to see that that area is developed. It is not an individual pursuit. So, for the development of Makeni, it lies in the hands of everybody in Makeni, otherwise it will be difficult.” He is speaking ideally of “community development”, whereby if there are enough “developed” individuals around who are willing to motivate others, then everyone in Makeni will participate in bringing development to the town and its people as a whole.

*Community development: do the “big men” have enough for themselves to consider “developing” others?*

A few years ago, the former vice president of the country, Solomon Berewa, came to Makeni on a state visit. He attended Catholic Sunday services, sitting in the front row as the guest of honor. Father Samura announced to the congregation that he would tell “an African story” as part of his sermon. It went something like this:

An African health minister went to a European country to ask for money to build a hospital. He met with his counterpart there and saw all the amazing things the country had: new hospitals, clinics, qualified doctors, specialists, and every public health program imaginable, and the minister himself had a very nice house. He asked the minister how he did all of these wonderful things, and the minister said that he spent budget money for all of these amenities to keep his people happy,

and when they were happy he used the bit that was left for himself to build his mansion. The African minister was very impressed, and was also given the grant for a new hospital in his own country. When he got home, he bought a parcel of land for the hospital, brushed it to prepare it for building, and then spent the rest of the money buying the parcel next to it and building a huge mansion for himself. A few years later, the European minister came to visit him to see how the hospital was going. And the African minister met him at the airport and escorted him to his beautiful mansion. The minister was very impressed with the mansion, and so asked to see the hospital. He was shown the barren parcel of land, and was taken aback. What happened? Well, I used the money you gave me to buy the land and brush it for building, and I used the rest to build my mansion. And when the next grant comes, then I will use it for the second phase of the hospital.

People laughed and clapped, as everyone knew the story was directed at Vice President Berewa, known for his lavish personal spending. And though he could have reacted badly to the story, Berewa remained in his seat, impassive. He later spoke to Father Samura and admitted and defended his actions: yes, he spent money on himself, but as he had grown up poor, he needed to ensure that he and his kin had enough, and then he could think about the rest of the nation; people who did not depend directly on him.

Like with *Qlaju*, in Makeni, ideas of community development are closely linked to political and personal connections that can be maintained with people outside the community (1978: 146), and in Makeni the general feeling is that the powerful politicians, like Berewa, have abandoned the town. Within the township, the moral battle that people undertake with the concept of “community development” is that when there is neither money nor resources, can even powerful people consider a “community” outside of their own immediate obligation network, especially when one strains to define the limits of that network? I contend that this is the reason in Makeni people argue so strenuously that the national government must provide “development” for the town, because, ideally, everyone ultimately falls under the protection and care of the government. The exemplary government exists only to provide for its people’s needs; therefore it is the best possible patron for “community development.” This is not necessarily true for any other network, even local governments. The latter were not fully funded by the last government, lest the councilors “chop” the money themselves.

What is this “development” that people desire from their government? In her studies of the small island of Chole, off the coast of Tanzania, Walley found that people

described their life as “the tough life” because they lacked things that the rest of the world, and even the rest of Tanzania had, like roads, schools and clinics, which embarrassed them (2003: 36-37). They hoped that the government would provide these things, but at the same time, anyone “getting a little development” in their daily lives did so for themselves, such as setting up small businesses or taking English classes (2003: 38). Like Makeni residents, “development” writ large is those massive projects, linked to a place’s position vis-à-vis the outside world, that can only be brought from the outside by donors or their own national government; whereas “development” writ small is those daily things that one can do for him or herself to perhaps “get ahead,” even of his or her own neighbors. A village of people cannot pave a road or furnish a clinic with drugs, much as they might all be in school learning English. Self-motivated “development” in a completely marginal place, can only get people so far. In order for a town, or an island, to not be “backward,” an outside force must initiate community development.<sup>4</sup>

In the 1990’s, ostensibly independent non-governmental organizations (NGOs) emerged as the main delivery apparatus for “development,” which sparked various responses from the anthropological community. Ferguson, though he is interested in how policy makers and “development” professionals and organizations apply government-driven “development,” argues that the apparatus used by international NGOs and national governments to deliver “development” projects such as the roads, schools, and clinics

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<sup>4</sup> This notion of “community development” is the idea that we encounter most frequently in the anthropological literature. It consists mainly of critiques of “Development” that emerged in post-World War II doctrine and the international apparatus devoted to “doing Development” in places like Africa. Escobar defines “development” as “intervention in the name of social change,” (1991: 659), criticizing the “development apparatus—since the 1970s also including anthropologists—for reproducing “Western-centered systems of knowledge and power in the name of post-1960’s notions of sensitivity to the grassroots” (660), even though, as I mentioned just now, people yearn for such interventions. He states in essence that “Development” is a thoroughly western concept and apparatus imposed on non-western people—purposely dismantling their old systems in the process (1995: 4)—in the name of making them better. Escobar declared that “Development” was essentially dead, because it had failed to overcome its western obsessions with modernization (1991: 21), thus destroying itself in a discourse so circumscribed that any perspective outside of such notions of “Development” could not even be imagined (1995: 39). The proof of this was the myriad “Development” projects around the world that failed on just such grounds, many of which were replaced by indigenous social movements that were helping to redefine what changes they wanted in their own communities. These changes, though initially spurred by the ill-founded though grand dreams of “Development” cannot be dismissed simply because they emerged from an arrogant western intellectual tradition that treated non-western cultures as primitive; to do so would be an equal act of arrogance. More useful is a study of what “Development” has transformed into on the ground, not grand visions but pragmatic changes—“development”—in the daily lives and practices of people who are working to selectively incorporate what they want.

desired by Walley's villagers on Chole, serve mainly to extend the apparatus of political control over an area, even as the projects themselves usually fail (1994: xiv-xv). In the same vein, Scott sees the practice of "development" for communities not necessarily ending poverty and raising the standard of living for people, but opening space for the insertion of the state into otherwise stateless areas, thus making the people more legible and easier to control (1998: 83). People who have taken the time to make themselves legible to the state in this way—through activities such as forming themselves into organizations and paying to register their intentions with the various ministries—feel that they are now part of the state's larger "network," and that they too should benefit from its largesse. They long for government "encouragement," such as roads to villages and food subsidies for farmers, as they struggle to gain assistance that they want and need from INGOs, whose programs are circumscribed by donor demands, and who attempt to dictate how material developments, such as tools and seeds, can be used and by whom. This result resonates with Clarke's contention (quoted in Fisher), that we can conceive of NGOs as "an arena within which battles from society at large are internalized" (1997: 449). In Chapter Seven, I analyze how NGOs are reinforcing and replicating both the political patrimonial structures and economic and development structures that existed before the war and were its main causes, through their inability to recognize the fact that Sierra Leone must undergo wholesale economic and political changes if it is to be stable and productive in the future. NGOs actively work against popular moves towards these changes, just as politicians who remain in control through patrimonialism resist them, in the name of their own political and economic survival in the nation.

This is where my own investigation of people's understandings of "community development" and the various organizations that practice it articulates with and advances the development discourse within anthropology. By analyzing local notions of "development," beginning with its long-standing associations with personal and familial success, to its renegotiation by individuals in the current era of poverty and lack of opportunity, to how this renegotiation—and its resulting perversions—create the current violence surrounding NGO activity in Makeni, I am reframing conceptual approaches to "development" within anthropology. It cannot be approached either as western intervention or local conceptions in isolation, nor can it be understood only through an

examination of how its institutions, such as NGOs, reflect larger societal battles over its meanings. Rather, “development” is a concept—articulated and deployed to specific purpose at every level of social action and interaction—as a means by which individuals and groups seek increased power and control and can potentially enhance the lives of those around them. This is done in culturally specific ways, and it is both a Sierra Leonean and western assumption that “development” should benefit social networks instead of just individuals. The cultural difference lies in how this is accomplished.

In Sierra Leone, “development” is interwoven in discourses of morality and the obligation for those who have benefited to enhance the situation of everyone who somehow contributed. Thus the national government—often accused of not extending “development” to everyone—has historically been in the habit of reminding people that obligations are mutual between patrons and clients. If a community wants to develop, they must do their own part; or as Bledsoe discovered, “there is no success without struggle” (1990: 70; see also Beti, 1971: 67). For example, President Siaka Stevens shamed the farmers in Bombali district (where Makeni lies) on several occasions for failing to bring their farming outputs up to the standard of the rest of the country (Anonymous, *We Yone*, January 28, 1979; Anonymous, *Daily Mail*, February 2, 1980), and threatened that the government would “pay no attention” to the district’s farmers if they did not work to raise output themselves. In an earlier speech, he said it was only the residents’ initial efforts to construct their own health clinic that made him “seriously consider” putting any government money towards it, but that in order to make the town more attractive to investment, government or otherwise, they would still need to put more effort into “self-help” (Anonymous, *We Yone*, March 20, 1977). In this respect, many people drew parallels between their own “backwardness” and that of the town; namely that because they were not “developed” by the government in the past, they could not push the development of the town in the present. This is also tied up in notions of the “normal;” as Fehérváry found in Hungary, when applied to people, the notion of “normal” meant someone who was well-behaved and civilized; and indeed that people who lived in the “not-normal” tended to act uncivilized (2002: 390), as people in Makeni also claim, as I will address more fully in Chapter Two.

People see this as abrogation of government responsibility, though the patron is refusing assistance on the grounds of client negligence as a child is shamed by his parents if he is sent away to school to “develop” and causes trouble instead of succeeding (see Bledsoe, 1990: 70-73). However, argue many farmers, how can the government expect people to “develop” their land when they have no seeds, no tools, and no labor because of the war? The United Nations recently filed a report from Makeni noting that there are thousands of hectares of good farmland lying fallow and yet also thousands of people unemployed. What is the reason for this? One farmer stated that people are not planting because of “lack of confidence,” for example if they purchase seeds using a loan, may not know if they are “three month or five month rice” seeds, and could time the planting wrong and lose the whole crop. In essence, poor farming methods and borrowed seed mean that no farmer was willing to risk bankruptcy while doing backbreaking labor for a small chance to support his family, and so people “prefer to sit idle” (UNIRIN, September 20, 2007). The government, arguing on the side of the exemplar, is ramming heads with people who argue that progress, and the resulting obligations of working together, cannot be generated from nothing. I will address this in Chapter Seven. What I need to address now is how Makeni, a provincial capital and a major regional trade center, came to be both cosmopolitan and “backward” concomitantly, and thus sits on an ideological fault line—where we must bring into question what it means to be “normal”—that makes it ideal for studying notions and practices of morality, and how I came to do this study.

### **Conducting fieldwork in post-conflict Makeni**

When I first arrived in Sierra Leone in May 2003, I intended to find a place in the country where I could best study the phenomenon of, according to a Sierra Leonean graduate student in history at Michigan, the “quick forgetting” of the war that was creating space for history to repeat itself. I intended to use as my research lens the reintegration of ex-combatants, which was viewed by the UN in Sierra Leone at the time as an unbridled success because they were being accepted as members of communities with what seemed to be minimal fuss. I settled on Makeni as the site for my study, as it had been the RUF

headquarters and was thus a natural location to study ex-combatants. When I arrived back in June 2004, the scene in Makeni was considerably different than it had been the year before, and this set the stage for the expanded historical and theoretical scope for the project. Most of the large international organizations that had conducted reintegration programs in Makeni were gone or in the process of phasing out, the UN battalion that had provided social and economic security to the town was also gone, and the town was struggling under the weight of “developing” itself in the aftermath of both occupation and aid boom. The town had just had its first democratic elections for local councils in thirty-five years, and expectations weighed heavily on the councilors to fill the economic and infrastructural holes left by the departing aid organizations. The ex-combatants that had seemed to melt so seamlessly into the social fabric a year before were being criticized for their lack of activity, the “uselessness” bred as a result of reliance on aid, and their unwillingness to put their skills and connections to work.

People were not as upbeat as they had been a year earlier: a persistent complaint about the town being “so backward,” especially compared to the other two provincial capitals, had emerged, as well as comments concerning how the town was being deliberately marginalized by the government, which blamed them for collaborating with rebels. In addition, people seemed hostile and threatening towards the township’s remaining NGO expatriate population, complaining that the whites had not brought development as they had promised, and people were struggling to find their own way when no one cared about them. This set the stage for what became this dissertation: an examination of what “development” actually means to people within the context of how they attempt to formulate acceptable lives for themselves in dire circumstances.

My research methods had to reflect a need to understand how misconceptions of “development” were causing problems in the township. I began by making my presence known in town through daily walks, from which I gained a number of interlocutors who were eager to have a chat with the “unusual” white woman who did not have a vehicle. Once I had established a base of contacts, I conducted life history interviews, let my interviews snowball as interlocutors introduced me to people they thought had interesting stories or perspectives, and began accompanying my closest friends to events both public and private. After several months of getting a feel for the town, its people and its history,

I began to concentrate on what I deemed key areas: politics, economics, education, family relations, and the same reintegration and NGO activities that had initially led me to Makeni. I decided I would frame the project as a long history of how the town and its people became “backward” and was being reinforced as such through ideas of a pre-war “normal” that should be aspired to, and what this meant for people’s personal relations and their ideas of and attitudes towards “development.” In order to understand that, I had to reach back to the earliest days of the township, when the town first evolved as a “backward” place.

### **Historical Makeni: searching for the “normal” in backwardness and opportunity**

Makeni has a particular cultural and historical identity in Sierra Leone, in that it is viewed, both by residents and by people residing elsewhere in the nation, as the most ideologically and infrastructurally “backward” of the three provincial capitals, while simultaneously being thought of as a place of opportunity because it is a trading town. A detailed illustration of how Makeni was created as “backward” is a project for another time; suffice to say now that a glimpse into Makeni’s past reveals that when a place is both “behind” the other two provincial capitals but like them in that it serves as a draw for people seeking opportunity, we must unsettle any notions that the *is* comprises some baseline “normality” of place and people. In this first section I address briefly how Makeni rose to prominence in the colonial era because it was the terminal point on the northern branch of the railroad, and thus became both a population and trading center but not a town of enduring importance to the colonial government; how its identity as a trading town is mutually constituted with the fact that the majority ethnic population in the town is Temne; and how because it was occupied for three years by the RUF rebel force, Makeni became a “place of collaborators,” thus opposed to the national project of ridding Sierra Leone of the rebels, and was therefore deliberately underdeveloped by the national government, even as it continues to attract rural people who seek opportunity.



*Temporary resources: The railroad brings economic prosperity to Makeni*

In 1895, Governor Cardew surveyed the hinterland and decided that a railroad was the best way to exploit the produce-producing regions of the south and east, and one year later the main line began construction to link Freetown to the Protectorate (Alie, 1990: 188). The decision to build the railroad was based on observations of previous governors on the trading prowess of Sierra Leoneans, which would stimulate both the extraction of raw resources for Britain, and simultaneously create new markets for finished British goods. In 1879, Governor Rowe stated, “The genius of the Sierra Leone people is commercial; from babyhood the Aku girl is a trader, and as she grows up she carries her small wares wherever she can go with safety. The farther she goes from European trading depots the better is her market... these people do more than collect the native produce, they stimulate its cultivation. Many bushels of palm kernels are collected by the native women that they may buy the handkerchief and the looking glass brought to their village by the Sierra Leone [Krio] adventurer. Had she never visited them these kernels would have been left to rot on the ground” (quoted in Kilson, 1966: 41).

The northern branch line was completed in 1916, specifically because “the railroad served productive oil palm... areas” (Alie, 1990:189). Originally extending to the town of Kamabai, thirty miles north of Makeni, the line was eventually scaled back because Makeni was the last point on the line at which transporting palm kernels was profitable for the colonial government. The town attracted people, whether they were selling palm kernels or taking advantage of traders and their families needing other services. The population of the town grew. In the 1925 census, Bombali district, in which Makeni lies, recorded the largest population of any district in the protectorate, 173,350 people, over 5,000 more than the next most populated district, Kenema (British National Archives, Box CO 267 611). Several colonial administrators noted that the people were agitating for services like medical clinics (BNA, Box CO 267 611), however because the administration was concentrating its efforts on turning Bo, in the south, into the capital of the protectorate because it was more convenient to swamp rice and tree crop production efforts, most of the local requests for development went unanswered.

As Rondinelli (1983: 57) stated in an examination of the development of secondary cities throughout the developing world, “merely increasing in population...

does not ensure that a secondary city would become a catalyst for development for a region.” Indeed, the railroad was not designed to link politically important towns, otherwise traditional seats of chiefs such as Falaba in the north and Bumpe in the south would have been considered. Rather, it was meant to extract resources from the interior that were of interest to the colonial administrators, like palm kernels and cotton, in the most efficient manner possible. Makeni was at the center of the region’s natural palm oil groves, and so grew as a population and trade center because it attracted people who wanted to take advantage of this new trade. However this trade, unlike the trade in products from the south such as cotton and tree fruits, disappeared from the colonial radar in the wake of World War II, when the need for cheap oil to run Britain’s industries and fuel its munitions plants lapsed. The town was overlooked for infrastructural developments like roads and schools that were reserved for towns, such as Bo, deemed more important to continued colonial enterprise of resource extraction and political domination. Paradoxically, the “curse” of resources in Makeni was in having a resource of no enduring importance. The town did not suffer specific cultural or local economic destruction because of a resource desired by the rest of the world, as had, for example, Ogoniland in the Niger River Delta in Nigeria (see Cayford, 1996: 184-185). Rather, any benefits that might have accrued because of the resources present in an area were nullified by the lack of consistent demand. I will address this further in a comparison between Makeni and the other two provincial capitals, Bo and Kenema, later in the chapter. Now I turn to who lives and works in Makeni.

*Who lives in Makeni? The ethnic and economic composition of a trading town*

One of the indubitable links people draw between the town of Makeni and its inhabitants is that, “Makeni is a Temne town, it is full of traders,” which, paraphrased many different ways, was stated by about 70% of my interlocutors. Many students I interviewed described the moment when the British first landed in the Freetown peninsula, which was a Temne area, as one of the first instances of Temne trading. King Tom, a Koya Temne sub-chief who ruled over the land now occupied by the Freetown peninsula, traded the land to British abolitionists in 1787 to be settled by 400 freed slaves. It is not clear that

Tom understood the contract, which specified that the land would be settled in perpetuity by the former slaves, and land disputes broke out between the settlers and King Tom's successor, King Jimmy, who burned the settlement to the ground in 1789 (Alie, 1990: 3).

Bombali district, in which Makeni is situated, is a predominantly Temne area, though the Limba tribe, which comprises about 10% of the national population, is heavily concentrated in the area (CIA Factbook on-line, 2007). Ethnic stereotypes run strongly through local people's descriptions of the residents of the town, and center prominently on the co-association of "Temne-ness" and the occupation of trading. "Temne people are traders, they like to see money," "Temne people like to argue, that way you can see that they are serious about business," "Even if a Temne cannot put food on the table, he will take out a loan to sue you if you have swindled him," were all comments on local Temne that I heard tossed around by people in the marketplace, both Temne and otherwise. The reproduction of this ethnic cliché among residents forms what Mafeje terms the misuse of ethnicity as "a mark of false consciousness on the part of the supposed tribesmen who subscribe to an ideology that is inconsistent with their material base and therefore unwittingly respond to the call for their own exploitation" (1971: 259, see also Scheper-Hughes, 1992: 170), even though in other places in West Africa, a similar ethnic stereotype persists among people that are considered to be shrewd traders and tight with their money (see van der Geest, 1997: 537).

Scott defines "false consciousness" as "the dominant ideology achieving compliance by convincing subordinate groups that the social order in which they live is natural and inevitable" (1990: 72). This false consciousness is a result of the ideology of tribalism, which Mafeje posits was created by European colonists (1971: 253). Corby (1981:325) and Kandeh (1992:86) speculate that setting up this idea of Temne-ness, as opposed to an idea of Mende-ness, where the latter is considered a natural farmer, of docile temperament and eager to learn, was a way for the colonial administration to most effectively divide and conquer the protectorate. Administrators contended that only the British could preserve tranquility among such divergent ethnic groups. As it stands today, the association between Temnes and trading is firm, and few Sierra Leoneans, whether or not they hail from Makeni, can speak of the town without mentioning the mutual entailment of tribe and trade.

Aside from the “Temne trader” and Limba minority, both of whom are considered “native,” Makeni is home to one of the most diverse cross-sections of Sierra Leone outside of Freetown. When the first secondary school was established by the Catholic mission in 1957, students came from around the northern province to Makeni to pursue their educations, and this trend intensified when the mission established St. Augustine Teacher’s College in 1964. The school was secularized and opened up to qualified students from around the country in 1980, and began attracting the majority of its students from Kono, a district in the east, because Makeni was easier to travel to than the eastern provincial capital of Kenema. Many remained in Makeni after completing their educations, married locally, and raised families.

The second major influx of people to Makeni occurred after the civil war, which ended officially with the disarmament and retraining of the final group of RUF in Makeni in 2002. Makeni was one of the national centers of ex-combatant rehabilitation and foreign aid, and people from around the north and east flocked to the town to take advantage of the rebuilding. Many had nothing left in their villages: their homes had been burned, their families were scattered or killed, their seed stock stolen or eaten. “The government just forgot about us,” answered one young man from Kono when I asked him why he moved his family to Makeni, “I thought maybe a better life would find us here.” He lived in a single room with his wife and four children, and got odd jobs as a carpenter.

From its early days as a railroad boomtown, Makeni has attracted people looking for a better life, those who have come to *sidɔm na tɔŋ*, (sit down in town), literally expressing the notion that one can do so more comfortably in the township than in any village environment, no matter how bad the conditions (see Harts-Broekhuis, 1997: 156). They have come to take advantage of regional trade, to seek a higher education, or to look for some economic activity during a post-war boom when their own villages had been decimated. All are bound together in an ethos of hope; hope that this place could provide a better future than the places and lives they had left behind, hope that their children and grandchildren could continue to take advantage of the services and opportunities that living in a provincial capital could provide. However, as the former President Stevens would point out, all of them wanted to be able to take advantage of development before they contributed to it, which is why the town is not improving, as

their villages did not recover. At the current juncture, most people's development hopes stand disappointed, and it is from their perspective that I write this ethnography. Everyone who lives in Makeni is suffering from the lack of possibility for a better life in such a "backward" place, and in the coming sections I explain why the town never seemed to fulfill its potential as a center of political, economic or social activity, from the moment the first train whistle blew, to the current juncture of post-war aid drawdown. The ten-year civil war forms a key nodule to understanding how and why Makeni is positioned as a marginal place in the country.

*The Revolutionary United Front and the Sierra Leone civil war (1991-2001)*

According to Richards (1996: xviii) the war began on March 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1991, when two small bands of men armed with AK-47s and bush knives crossed the border from Liberia at Bomaru, in eastern Sierra Leone, and at the Mano River Bridge, in southern Sierra Leone, and began attacking isolated villages. Calling themselves the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), their leader was Foday Sankoh, a photographer and former army corporal who, according to several former members of the RUF who knew him for many years, had been organizing a group of communist revolutionaries to overthrow the corrupt APC government since the early 1980's. He and several of his closest compatriots had gone to Libya for revolutionary training at the invitation of Colonel Qaddafi (Abdullah, 1997: 217). Though at the beginning the movement contained many university students who wanted to help push out "di sistem" according to Abdullah (2005: 180), most of these eventually left the moment when it became clear to them, according to one of my interlocutors who was close to the movement at the time, that Sankoh had no interest in starting in Freetown and pushing the APC out directly, but wanted to work from a rural base. Even though the APC was overthrown by a group of young army officers the following year and replaced by the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC), a coup lauded by the country and the international community for its initial honesty and successes, the RUF did not stop the fighting. Indeed, after a brief lull, it intensified.

The RUF were composed of a motley crew of educated and uneducated, mostly younger men from the villages in southern and eastern Sierra Leone. Contrary to the assertions of Peters and Richards (1998: 183) that most youth combatants chose to fight

and often did so proudly, wanting to get rid of the “rotten system,” the majority of ex-combatants I interviewed claimed they were kidnapped by the RUF from their villages, threatened with execution should they try to escape, and forced to accept “the ideology” of why the RUF was fighting. The RUF looked for people to fill every niche in their forest camps: doctors and teachers, cooks and porters, combatants and administrators. Only a small percentage of members of the RUF were actual front-line combatants; the majority were camp helpers and administrators who worked in the background.

The NPRC was unsuccessful in pursuing an end to the war, and in 1996 handed over control to the democratically elected government of Tejan Kabbah, leader of the Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP), which had been the opposition party when the APC was in power. Kabbah vowed to bring a swift end to the war, and after the 1996 Abuja Peace Accords were broken, the country swiftly descended into chaos with another coup in May 1997. Once again the army were upset by their treatment at the hands of the government; poorly paid, under-resourced, and now attacked directly by Civilian Defense Forces (CDF), the Kamajohs, that had been set up by communities around the country, and now received more direct support from the government than did its own troops. A group of lower ranks liberated the Pademba Road Jail in Freetown, setting free a group of army officers that had been imprisoned for treason for attacking the Kamajohs. They installed Major Johnny Koroma as their leader, Koroma announced that the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) was now running the country, and called the RUF out of the bush to join forces with the army and destroy the CDF.

From his position in exile in Guinea, President Kabbah convinced the Nigerian leader Sani Abacha to lead a military force into Freetown to liberate it from the AFRC. He announced that the Sierra Leone army had been dissolved, and anyone claiming to be a soldier was on grounds to be arrested for treason. Under the umbrella of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), a contingent of Nigerian forces liberated Freetown from the AFRC in May 1998, chasing them out of the town and all the way to the eastern provinces, the original strongholds of the RUF. Less than six months later a regrouped RUF/AFRC moved from the east with the intent of crossing the country. One section attacked Makeni a few days before Christmas, 1998, and occupied it as their front-line base, another moved past Makeni and directly to Freetown in order to sack the

city and take it back for the RUF. They arrived in Freetown on January 6<sup>th</sup>, 1999, and were repelled by a combined force of ECOMOG and re-trained Sierra Leonean army soldiers a week later only after crossing half the city and threatening the wealthiest parts.

The weakened RUF/AFRC left Freetown, with some going back to Makeni and points east, and others establishing a new base at Okro Hills, 30 miles from Freetown, and calling themselves “The West Side Boys.” The RUF leadership, without the West Side Boys, agreed for a small UN military force to come to Sierra Leone as one of the provisions of the Lome Peace Accord signed in 1999. In April 2000 a group of UN troops and military observers were attacked by the RUF in Makeni, which broke the cease-fire and caused the UN to withdraw much of its mission in the northern part of the country. In 2000, the British government sent small teams of soldiers to Sierra Leone to help re-train Sierra Leone army soldiers who had given themselves up to ECOMOG and wanted to join a reconstituted force. The West Side Boys captured one of their patrols that had wandered into the Okro Hills. After nearly a month of captivity they were rescued by a British Special Forces mission that annihilated the West Side Boys and set into motion the final surrender of the RUF. The UN deployed Nigerian forces (formerly deployed as part of ECOMOG) all over the country, and reintegration activities began in Makeni in earnest in 2001. When I arrived in July 2003, most of the reintegration activities were coming to an end, and the UN was phasing down its activities considerably countrywide. The last UN-sponsored reintegration programs ended in December 2003, and their drawdown was followed quickly by the drawdown of other aid programs that dealt specifically in an “aftermath” context.

There are still many questions concerning exactly why the RUF was fighting, as their initial aim of overthrowing the APC was accomplished less than a year into what turned into a ten-year civil war. Abdullah argues that the Revolutionary United Front was anything but “revolutionary,” and was merely an opportunistic emergence of a long-standing lumpenproletariat youth culture in Sierra Leone, the *rarray* boys (1997: 205; 2005: 173), who were looking for an excuse to loot and a political culture that would not crush them immediately. Richards and Peters both argue that the RUF did have ideological and political aims, and aside from the goal of pushing out not just the APC, but an entire political system rife with corruption, was comprised of frustrated

underemployed youth who were anxious to throw off the oppressive yoke of their elders that kept them from asserting their full personhood (Richards, 1996: 17-18; Peters, 2006: 15), and the RUF offered them the opportunity to make their own way in the world.

Gberie moves the involvement of Charles Taylor to the fore, stating the Taylor's interest in controlling the diamond fields of eastern Sierra Leone as part of his campaign to strengthen "Greater Liberia" and give him potential control of all of Liberia, led him to form and arm a "rebel" group that would empty the region of its local population and allow his cadres to mine and smuggle diamonds in peace (2003: 2). Along this line, a 2000 UN paper concluded that Foday Sankoh and the RUF had no political interests, aside from what control Sankoh could gain of the diamonds in order to pursue a lavish lifestyle (2000:1). For this reason, the RUF, though claiming to be political, spent most of its time "operating" in the diamondiferous eastern region, and used terror tactics against the very people it was claiming to want to liberate. The general academic confusion surrounding the methods and reasons for the RUF and the civil war are echoed in the confusion that reigned on the ground during their reign of terror in Sierra Leone. Their invasion of Makeni and subsequent occupation is marked by the grasping for explanations that followed: why Makeni? Why did they stay? And why were Makeni people blamed for this? Though it is not my project to contribute to debate about why the war occurred, I will be addressing how the occupation of Makeni formed only a part of a much longer history of "backwardness."

*Occupation, collaboration, and reintegration: laying blame and withholding development*

Cadres of the Revolutionary United Front and mutinous soldiers descended on Makeni town in the early hours of December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1998, a date that is etched into the brains of everyone who lived in the town at the time. Unable to defend themselves from the onslaught, the regiment of Nigerian troops stationed in the barracks to defend the town as part of the ECOMOG deployment (the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group) fled the town on foot. After blanketing the town, terrorizing people and laying claim to any property they wanted, the RUF declared that they would *sidom* in Makeni, making themselves comfortable in town as opposed to languishing in bush



camps “with no salt for our food, no blankets for our beds, no good shoes on our feet,” according to one former combatant, and use it as their new headquarters. As a trade center, Makeni could provide these things, even if they were looted goods. Many people who tried to flee were caught by rebels and returned to the town; others hid in the bush for months at a time, surviving on what foods they could find, like wild cassava, mangoes and small game. The RUF’s leadership declared that civilians had nothing to fear from the rebels; that what they wanted was to challenge the leadership of the country, and not its people. They remained in the town unchallenged by any military force for three years, and were only disarmed in 2001-2002 following the final enforcement of the Lome Peace Accords, when the RUF allowed the deployment of over 17,000 United Nations and British troops to the area and handed over control of the area peacefully.

During the occupation, instead of sending in troops to attempt to liberate the town, Tejan Kabbah, the president of Sierra Leone, labeled the town’s residents “rebel collaborators” and vowed that because they were rebels and not true citizens of Sierra Leone, he would not give them assistance (Anonymous, *The New Citizen*, November 25, 1999).<sup>5</sup> Instead, he vowed to bomb the town “down to the last chicken and ant” in order to rid the nation of the RUF plague. Makeni was the only provincial capital occupied by the RUF, and the only town to bear this stigma. Towns like Kailahun and Kono, which were also occupied for many years, were portrayed in the media as “victims” of war who were eligible for development funds, rather than willing collaborators, who were not (Anonymous, *Fo Di People*, December 22, 1999). In the aftermath of the war, one of Kabbah’s ministers was approached by a Makeni politician begging for food aid for the town, and answered, “I will not give aid to my enemies.” In the next three years, Kabbah remained true to the promise of his minister, and Makeni lagged behind the southern and eastern provincial capitals, Bo and Kenema, in terms of how much aid money was spent, to whom and where it went, and in the rehabilitation of infrastructure. In an illustration of just how pointed the government’s “oversight” of Makeni was, when three garbage trucks were acquired for the three provincial capitals, one member of the town council told me that Makeni’s truck was sent by the Transportation Minister to the town of Koidu, in the east.

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<sup>5</sup> See Appendix II for a discussion on the history and political leanings of Sierra Leone’s newspapers.

## **Makeni is the “most backward” provincial capital**

After a fair amount of redrawing under various colonial administrations, based on changes in population and infrastructure, Sierra Leone emerged at independence with three provinces outside of Freetown: the northern province, of which Makeni is the capital, the southern province, of which Bo is the capital, and the eastern province, of which Kenema is the capital. As it stood in April 2006, when I bade goodbye to the place after a research follow-up trip, Makeni was the only one of the three capitals not to have electricity or piped water, to lack paved roads through the center of town, to lack working latrines and wells in the schools, to have garbage scattered around the streets. Though the town had suffered numerous setbacks under Tejan Kabbah’s government (which has left office as of September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2007), most of these deficiencies occurred since the 1950’s, when it was clear to residents that the town was “not as favored” as Bo or Kenema, and not just as a result of the rebel occupation, which served as an excuse not to rehabilitate them at all. In this section I trace the historical reasons for these current inequalities, and examine how a place can be created as “backward” because it lacks a compelling resource-based argument from which to claim equality with Bo, capital of the farming region, or Kenema, capital of the diamond region.

### *Resources and religion: how Makeni became an internal margin*

Though the introduction of the railroad and the concomitant boom in palm kernel trading that occurred in Makeni meant that the place became one of the most populous towns in the protectorate, it never received the infrastructure of the other two provincial capitals. There are two main reasons for this. First, the tree crops, rice and diamonds found in Bo and Kenema required infrastructural input (mechanized agriculture and extension and infrastructure to create exclusive access to diamonds) to exploit them. In contrast, in Makeni, the railroad was the only infrastructure the administration needed to tap into palm kernels. This was because, as noted in the last section, rural women who would otherwise leave kernels that were the natural byproduct of palm fruit processing activities on the ground; could now sell them to traders at the railroad stations for a small profit. Many became middle-women for other palm fruit processors in their villages, and an

indigenous industry naturally coalesced around demand, without any additional infrastructural input required from the administrators. Second, the introduction of Islam into the region pre-dated the colony, and discouraged the administration and the first Christian missionaries, who arrived in the south with the railroad at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, from establishing schools and clinics.

We cannot examine the first phenomenon, that of resource differences between the provinces, within a strict rubric of “the resource curse,” namely a country or area suffering the poverty, conflict, and environmental degradation that follow discovery of a resource desired by international actors. In the “resource curse,” it is this extraction, rather than a dearth of resources, that causes conflict, environmental degradation, and suffering among the area’s inhabitants (see Peluso and Watts, 2001: 6). However, what has been most evident in Sierra Leone from the colonial era through to the current time is a more subtle unfolding of quite the opposite: resource extraction, though an inherently violent process, paving the way for desired improvements in local situations by encouraging the establishment of roads to markets, clinics and schools.

In the southern province, the desired products were agricultural resources, which could only be exploited to colonial satisfaction with careful attention to mechanical agriculture and agricultural extension (and boarding schools to keep children in school during the harvest season). In the eastern province, diamonds provided the impetus for a more concrete colonial investment in infrastructure and the incentives that would keep employees honest. Though the diamond scheme invariably disintegrated through smuggling and illicit mining on vast alluvial plots, the “resource curse” in the east only came into play during the ten-year civil war, which was played out largely on the eastern province’s diamond fields. Richards states that no government force was ever able to bring the war to an end because every incarnation was able to profit from protecting its own access to the diamonds (2001: 67). One reason the RUF kept its bases in the east, emptying villages through terror tactics, kidnapping the able-bodied young and chasing other people into Guinea, was to maintain private access and a private labor force with which to extract diamonds. Makeni, as a resource-poor place, was blissfully unaffected by this, and so was under no threat in the early years of the war. However, its marginal position vis-à-vis Bo and Kenema with respect to resources, and therefore with respect to

national interest, also gave the government little incentive to liberate the place once it was occupied, as there was little within the township or district worth reclaiming from the rebels. The government's lack of will to liberate a marginal, resource-poor area from an invading force in fact comprised a curse of its own, and, as the town deteriorated for years under occupation, reinforced Makeni's status as "marginal" and "backward."

Makeni's absence from Sierra Leone's development map began in the 1920's. From 1924, colonial reports describe the administration's efforts to improve swamp rice cultivation in the south, east and northwest of the protectorate (boxes CO 267 607, CO 267 611). These are the river-shot areas of the country, and the governor had decided that swamp rice was the most efficient and highest yielding variety, and therefore had to be encouraged. Makeni is located in a relatively river-less region, and people's own habits of planting upland rice, which often required significant bush clearance, though less maintenance, was frowned upon as less efficient. This was the official opinion even though Richards opines that upland rice, of which Makeni people produced in a 2:1 ratio with swamp rice during the colonial era, was much more efficient than swamp rice in terms of energy input-output, because cleared upland farms did not require as much maintenance as swamp farms (1983: 29). A rice research station was established in the northwest, and though one agricultural expert from Britain advised that an agricultural monitoring station be erected in the north to work on agricultural products that could most easily be grown there (box CO 267 629), a later expert decided that rice cultivation should be emphasized for the moment in the south and northwest, that no agricultural station was needed immediately in the north (box CO 267 630), and therefore one was never built. Bo, on the other hand, began receiving tractors, agricultural extension workers, and other amenities granted to a booming agricultural area. Bo School was established in 1906, followed closely by the protectorate's first hospital.

Diamonds were discovered in the Kenema district in 1932, about 150 miles southeast of Makeni, and within ten years the area became the center of the protectorate's booming diamond trade. In cooperation with DeBeers, the colonial administration established the Sierra Leone Selection Trust (SLST) mining corporation, with the agreement being that DeBeers would gain a 99-year lease on the diamond rights of the whole country in exchange for 27.5% tax on net profits (Reno, 1995: 47). SLST

administrators proceeded to erect much of their own infrastructure for managers and workers. The town gained roads, quality housing, an electrical station and water pipes, and merchants flocked to service the economic boom. This occurred during the worldwide depression, so the colonial administrators were eager to secure as much tax as possible from diamond revenue, and answered any demands for other infrastructure that the SLST managers had. At the same time as diamond revenue brought Sierra Leone out of a depression deficit, palm kernel exports, which had just a few years earlier comprised 71% of exports, now fell to 36%, and Makeni's fortunes fell as well (Reno, 1995: 48). Makeni had, it turned out, been doubly cursed by palm kernels: the success of their transport on the railroad meant the colonial government consistently refused to build roads linking the town to the rest of the protectorate, lest railroad profits be hurt (National Archives. CO 267 222: Minutes of Road Board Meeting, 1928; CO 267 623). In addition, several letters passed between the Governor of Sierra Leone and members of the British Parliament noted that Makeni would not receive special consideration for "outstanding" infrastructure like schools or roads just because it was a population center, even though the population was agitating for it (CO 267 623; Education Estimates for 1929). Indeed when the colonial government decided to build a new school in the protectorate, it was located only 40 miles north of Bo, "quite near" the north.

With respect to religion, Fula traders brought Islam to northern Sierra Leone in the late 1700's, converting their Temne trading partners, and Quranic education in the Islamic *madrasas* was the standard form of education for most Temne boys. Kilson states that the predominance of Islam discouraged both the colonial administration and the European missionaries from establishing schools in the north, so much so that by 1938, 80% of protectorate schools were in Mendeland, in the south and east (1966: 77). One Freetown school inspector, a Christian Krio, upon completion of his tour of the provinces, stated emphatically that the "Temnes were not at all interested in education, which accounts for their low school enrollment" (box CO 267 611, 1924 report on education).<sup>6</sup> Northern people expressed their dismay that no major schools had been

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<sup>6</sup> This inspector, CAE Macauley, was a Christian-educated Freetown Krio, and based his assessment on standards of western education: English, math, etc. Students of the *madrasas*, which taught only Arabic and the Quran, did not want to convert to Christianity, therefore were not considered "uninterested" in the education that Christian schools, and the accompanying western subjects, offered.

established in the province, so that in 1929, the administration decided to found a new college for the protectorate, “quite near” the north, so as to assuage any rising jealousy (box CO 267 623, education estimates for 1929). This trend of the north receiving educational institutions last and least among the three provinces did not waver, such that many older people in Makeni today argue that the north is “so backward” because the people were never taught to think along the lines of the white man, thus they never learned to argue for other developments that the white man could, and should, bring. These critical developments took the form of electricity and piped water, which I address in the next section.

*Water and power: the last and least bits of infrastructure*

The infrastructural construction trends that began under the colonial administration in the 1920s and 1930s did not abate in the later years of the colony and in the post-colony, when, although it had been elevated to provincial capital status, Makeni was still not as important economically or politically as Bo and Kenema. Bo and Kenema are located only fifty miles apart, connected by a paved road, and so it was relatively easy for the colonial administration to, if it brought amenities to one town, to also extend them to the other. In the early 1960’s (box DO 195 122, no date though with documents from 1963) a Commonwealth assistance document noted the payment of fees for Bo Power station and the extension of a high-voltage line to Port Loko, a town in the north that served as an important inland port. One assumes, though I was unable to locate the documents, that Kenema, being nearly 100 miles closer to Bo than Port Loko was at the time, would have already received the benefit of power lines, if not its own power station.

In 1971, the Ten-year Plan of Economic and Social Development for Sierra Leone (Carney, box DO 195 122) noted that a new dam was planned for construction on the Dodo River to supply continuous power to Bo and Kenema. This dam was completed in 1978, and since then both Bo and Kenema have had nearly continuous electrical power, with the only caveat that during the dry season they share the power over the course of the night. Makeni, though the Bumbuna River and falls were only thirty miles away, was overlooked for dam construction during the 1970’s, and since the time relied on diesel

generators to supply the town with power. Even when Bumbuna was “a matter of national urgency” because Freetown’s diesel power generators were aging (Anonymous, *We Yone*, January 22, 1986), the new dam was earmarked to provide power to Magburaka, Makeni’s the Tonkolili district headquarters neighbor, and Freetown. Bumbuna has yet to be finished, and when it is no one is sure if it will supply power for Makeni. Since the 1970’s, a steady supply of diesel could never be found and paid for, thus has Makeni been more or less continually in darkness since, even though the British government stepped in once again in 1979 to pay for a completely upgraded generator system in Makeni (Anonymous, *We Yone*, April 1, 1979). I will explore this phenomenon further in Chapter Two, where I discuss the lack of water and power in the town as co-dependent with the people’s mistrust of the honesty of their local government.

**Political betrayal and RUF brutality:  
why Makeni residents argue for progress from a marginal position**

Sierra Leone was led from 1967 to 1992 by the All People’s Congress (APC) party, a conglomerate party of northerners (predominantly Temne and Limba) and Freetown Krio (the descendants of the recaptured slaves first settled in the area in 1787), formed to counter the dominance of the mostly-Mende Sierra Leone People’s Party (SLPP). Kandeh describes the forming of the APC as “the class aspirations of disgruntled northern politicians,” among other things (1992: 91). Many Temnes within the party, according to Kandeh, were interested in a political movement that would lead to the social emancipation of northerners and the development of the region, as well as an end to their exclusion that was the result of independence-era Mende political dominance (91). The original leader of the SLPP, Sir Milton Margai, served as the country’s prime minister for the first two years after independence, and upon his death the office passed to his younger brother Albert. Unlike his older brother, whose cabinet was composed of able politicians from around the country, Albert took a strict Mende line, purging his cabinet of all Temnes and using his position to consolidate his personal power, and the development of the south and east.

In the national election of 1969, the APC, led by Siaka Stevens, seized control of the premiership and the parliament, and within a year Stevens announced his intention to

declare a republic and a one-party state. Many northern members of his parliament, including Finance Minister Mohamed Sorie Forna and Development Minister Mohamed Bash-Taqi, objected to Stevens' heavy-handed management of government, and they resigned their positions with the APC and formed a new political party, the United Democratic Party (UDP), in 1970. The party was very popular among northern people in general and Temnes in particular, who had a history of political protest.

The Temne people had a recent history of rebellion against oppressive or politically unpopular leaders, one of which resulted in the 1955-1956 "tax riots" (see Appendix II). Thousands of people across the north, protesting despotic chiefs and their abuses such as assessing damages on a man whose wife died in childbirth, to requiring subjects to work on the chief's farm with no recompense for two-thirds of a month, chased chiefs and their families out of their homes, and ransacked and burned property. Thus did the sudden political rebellion and formation of a new party alarm Stevens, who had to that point drawn his political support solely from them. Stevens promptly had the UDP leaders arrested and tried for treason, and declared a republic in 1971 while they languished in jail. On July 19, 1975, they were executed.

"From that day," stated one of my interlocutors, a founding member of the APC who had gone to jail with the executed leaders but was later pardoned, "the APC government turned its back on us. They did not care so much about people who had betrayed the party." Stevens spent the rest of his presidency, which ended with his retirement in 1985, consolidating his power in the south and the east by building the bulk of the infrastructure, and extending the bulk of his political favors, there (Reno, 1995: 110-116). Bo and Kenema received water and power under his regime; Makeni's colonial infrastructure was left essentially to languish. When Brigadier Joseph Momoh became president in 1985, Makeni residents were hopeful that they would receive new development projects, as Momoh was a native of the area (Kposowa and Johnson, *The New Citizen*, 1986). This was not to be, however, because Stevens had specifically chosen Momoh as his successor because Momoh could be trusted to maintain Stevens' personal and business interests in the country (especially his diamond interests); most of which were in the south and east. This is because Momoh owed his position as Chief of Defense Staff solely to the favors of Stevens, and dared not betray the man who made



him. In addition, Momoh was “heavily influenced by his Mende wife,” said another interlocutor. “She convinced him to develop her own areas.”

The RUF, originally a small band of Liberians, Burkinabes and expatriated Sierra Leoneans led by former army corporal Foday Sankoh, entered Sierra Leone from Liberia in November 1991, and waged a low-level war on villages and towns, kidnapping youth to augment their ranks and declaring that the “rotten system” of the APC must be driven out. Momoh himself was driven from office in 1992, when a group of young army officers, disgruntled by their lack of pay, support, provisions, and terms of service left the war front in the east and came to Freetown. They seized control of the government, announced that the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) was now in charge, and that they were going to clean up the country, both by physically beautifying and improving it and ridding it of political corruption. In 1996, in the lull in fighting that accompanied the Abuja Peace Accords, the leader of the NPRC, Julius Maada Bio, agreed to reinstate popular democracy. Alhaji Ahmed Tejan Kabbah of the SLPP was elected the new president of Sierra Leone, and power was transferred peacefully.

In his first visit to Makeni, on November 18, 1996, to a massive crowd gathered at the Wusum Stadium, Kabbah announced that because the RUF’s leadership, including its paramount leader Foday Sankoh, were from the northern province, the north should apologize to the rest of the country for the war (KR Stevens, *Daily Mail*, November 21, 1996). Many journalists (like Stevens) argued that Kabbah only meant to create “a balance of sympathy” for the rest of the country, which had been suffering under RUF threats for six years and whose young people had been accused of voluntarily joining the RUF. Others (Anonymous, *The New Citizen*, November 28, 1996; S. Fofanah, *The Vision*, November 28, 1996) declared that Kabbah, as an SLPP man, was putting his political alliances and agenda on the table, and was making it clear that as an SLPP man, he would clearly favor the south and east, which were the bases of his power, and not the north, which was the historical support base of the APC party, which, as the party of the former dictator, was not allowed to enter a candidate in the 1996 election.

When the RUF seized control of the township in December 1998, chasing the ECOMOG forces from the barracks and establishing their own brand of law and order in the town, after a few days of hiding in the bush, many residents, seeing that the town had

not been burned, returned. When Bo was attacked four years earlier, on the other hand, angry citizens surrounded and killed the small band of invaders, and drove their reinforcements back into the jungle. Kabbah declared that because the citizens of Makeni did not drive the RUF away, as had the residents of Bo (Richards, 1996: 152-154), they be “collaborating” with the rebels, helping them replenish themselves in order to strike Freetown, in order to seek revenge on the SLPP government.<sup>7</sup> Kabbah later cited the fact that so many Makeni residents were still residing in the town in spite of its rebel composition as proof, even though the few people who reported from Makeni on the situation cited starvation and “disaster” among the people who did not leave the town (Anonymous, *Fo Di People*, July 7, 1999; Anonymous, *Fo Di People*, July 15, 1999).

In 1999 the Lome Peace Accord was signed, and as a condition of the ceasefire, the RUF command in Makeni allowed the UN to send peacekeepers and military observers to set up a disarmament and reintegration center on the edge of town. RUF cadres broke the Accord by kidnapping and murdering several Kenyan UN peacekeepers in Makeni in April 2000, and Kabbah declared that there were no more civilians in Makeni. As only rebels who were clearly not interested in peace resided there, he would bomb the town “down to the last ant”, according to several of my interlocutors who listened to the radio broadcast. A helicopter gunship began bombing the town, often missing RUF positions and hitting unarmed non-combatants, and resulted in thousands of people abandoning the town on foot. Citizens complained that Kabbah had no interest in freeing Makeni, because he preferred it if the town, a real sore spot, “was no longer part of the nation” (Anonymous, *The New Citizen*, November 25, 1999; Anonymous, *Fo Di People*, December 22, 1999). The massive United Nations intervention in 2001 ended with the disarming of every combatant in Makeni, but Kabbah’s words and actions had done their damage. Because Makeni was still the RUF headquarters, it was the last to be coaxed to accept peacekeepers, and thus one of the last towns to be liberated.

Thus because it was one of the last areas to be declared “safe” for redevelopment, it was also one of the last to receive development funds from the government, which

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<sup>7</sup> The band that attacked Bo in 1994 was in fact a small RUF contingent, whereas the band that attacked Makeni in 1998 was a large conglomeration of RUF and former AFRC junta members (mutinous soldiers) that had been driven from Freetown. Freetown was attacked by another group of rebels, led initially by a former army officer and NPRC minister-turned rebel, Solomon AJ Musa.

signaled to NGOs that it was also safe to come. And most people feel that under Kabbah, the town still received the last and least bits of development, not the least of reasons being because the town was still an APC stronghold. “Kabbah holds a grudge against us,” said one student, “he feels that because we lived with the rebels that means we wanted them here. But if someone comes into your house with a gun, how can you ask them out?” Analyzing these historical circumstances, where is the “normal” in Makeni’s history? Here we reach the central question in my dissertation, namely that when ideas of what constitutes “normal” life or a “normal” place are either unknown or easily contested, that is, we lack that “everydayness” that for Zigon serves as an essential default (the *is*) for theorizing moral behavior (the *ought*), how do we theorize and analyze what it means to be a moral person?

*Theorizing moralities in the “not normal”*

Makeni is not the only town in Africa to have become the focus for a nation’s hurt and anger over a protracted civil war, and to have to come to terms with their position as victim/pariah in a nation; and perhaps creating their own versions of a more moral *is* and *ought*. In the context of understanding civil wars, Richards states, “different interests tell untruths in different ways” (2005: 11), perhaps referring to facts such as in post-genocide Rwanda, the government is deliberately rewriting history in order to portray the pre-colonial past as harmonious (see Buckley-Zistel, 2006: 133). However I would not go so far as to call the way people struggle to create a “right” after a conflict “untruths.” For example, residents of Arua, Uganda, are still coming to terms with the fact that Idi Amin Dada, the former warlord and dictator of the nation, is one of their own. Mark Leopold discovered that residents feel they are “cursed”—by their past, by their poverty, by their marginality in the nation—and elders have undertaken the process of writing a history of Arua framing the inhabitants not as perpetrators of violence in the nation, but as victims that can be incorporated into the fabric of the nation (2005: 211). On the “reconstruction” of the town, he states, “Reconstruction can be seen as more or less synonymous with the similarly vague notion of ‘development’. Especially in a politically marginalized area like West Nile, it may also involve an emphasis on local relationships

with the state: for example, inclusion in the ‘normal’ politics of the nation, rather than support for rebel activity” (213), a similar state of affairs to Makeni. For the elders, what must also be emphasized is a return to what Leopold terms “traditional norms” of behavior, while for those people who work with NGOs, “reconstruction” involves “economic improvement and social change” (214). Each had their own ideas of what people should strive for; and here is where Leopold’s work inspired my own: how do people exercise their own ideas of the *ought*?

The *ought* exists in contrast to an *is* that is, by definition of being opposed to the *ought*, somehow morally, physically, and emotionally unsatisfying. Whatever degree of discomfort people experience with the *is*, any state of being, if experienced for long enough, can become a sort of “normal”, as Fehérváry described the “everyday abnormal” of life in socialist Hungary, characterized by food shortages and state terror (2002: 372), and towns of distinctly Communist architecture that advertised the “backwardness” of Communism; it’s separation from the “normal” (379). Finnstrom describes villagers in northern Uganda who have been living with the Lord’s Resistance Army for so long that they were used to what people called “rebel scares,” where if any shooting, screaming or other loud noises occurred during the night, people would just run into the bush and hide. They had experienced lessened control over their lived situations and “the mundane became threatening” (2005: 110-111). Makeni residents feel a similar lack of complete control over their lives, which is one reason they find their situation so unsatisfying. Val Daniel, in his analysis of the on-going violence in Sri Lanka, asks how we can make sense of a life, like the highland Tamils he studied, that is trapped in the “violent present” (1996: 125). Like the Lord’s Resistance Army in Uganda, the emergence of the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) in 1983 has not shaped Tamil life in Sri Lanka for the better in the intervening twenty-four years. However, as Winslow and Woost (2006: 2) state, the inter-ethnic hatred and violent squalls that have been erupting in Sri Lanka since that time are mutually entailed with the “normal” lives that people live, as soldiers, students, factory girls, and community members. Their lives, in essence, were shaped by violence and are in turn reinforcing the nation as a violent place in which an entire generation is growing up not knowing a Sri Lanka without the LTTE. How here

can we pin down a concept of “normal,” or even, in the case of so many conflicting versions of what life should be like, an *ought*?

My task was made somewhat easier in this respect in that the war that gripped Sierra Leone and invaded Makeni was not ethnic; rather it was based on the failure of patrimonial politics to deliver basic goods to the majority of Sierra Leone’s population (see Richards, 1996: 3). The war did not create the endemic poverty under which Makeni residents continually labor, however it intensified the bases from which they feel excluded from the rest of the nation. It also forces them to argue passionately for the need for “development” not just coming from self-motivated individuals, but also from the government, which in its many guises has turned its back on the town for nearly forty years. Thus, though people argue and work for “self-development” through their own motivated attempts at gaining educations, working businesses, and re-instating familial connections, they also seek a connection with the government, their ideal patron. Government is framed in the moral discourse as the best possible purveyor of “community development,” and thus is the only initiator of the foundation that would enable all other forms of development; to bring Makeni equal with Bo and Kenema, to make what has been continually wrong, right. “There is no one to hold my hand and teach me to stand,” stated one ex-combatant, commenting on why he could not begin to try any self-development projects, “how can I help my family when I can’t do anything for myself? No one is a sponsor here [in Makeni]. We try to help each other *smɔl-smɔl* [little by little], but we need the government to bring us up.” He wants the government to establish more micro-credit schemes for youth, that way they could pool their collective resources and go into business for themselves. “We want to be self-reliant,” he said, “but for that we must rely on someone first.”

The key notion to interject and reinforce with these complaints about Makeni’s continual backwardness and why it is the government that should intervene on people’s behalf is that they believe that the government, comprised of Sierra Leoneans who know the nation’s history, would understand what people want; the essential changes that they desire in their lives to make the future bright. They believe that the government should know the difference between *is* and *ought*; between what has been an unsatisfactory situation of poverty in Makeni for the last forty years and what would make life better in

the future. Their recent experiences with INGOs that are determined to reinstitute the pre-war poverty of manual subsistence farming, that believe that trading towns are not nutritionally vulnerable, that force programs which create charity cases out of able people, proves that international aid organizations are determined to recreate a pre-war *is*, to define “normal” as what was, rather than what should be. This is a key aspect of my dissertation, and it forms a vein in every chapter.

**The conjuncture of all problems and possibilities:  
studying morality and development in Makeni**

Sierra Leoneans hold ideals as to what a person is, and in what capacity he or she function in their social networks. People are ideally tied in webs of mutual obligation with their kin and other extended social networks, where the individual succeeds because of the assistance s/he has received from others, and then repays this debt by bringing the benefits back to the kin network, for example using the salary gained from education to look after parents and other sponsors when they are old. In a town that, as an urban area and a trading center is meant to be rife with opportunity, historical and political circumstances, war, and the vagaries of international aid have created a place where endemic poverty precludes opportunities most people might have to gain a modest daily living. In this environment people struggle to create “development” for themselves while carefully negotiating the moral minefield of acceptable and unacceptable activities and networks. Often they fail in this balancing act, as occurs with many of their interactions with international aid organizations, which are unwittingly supporting a kind of structural violence. This is partly because they are injecting a very limited good—ostensible “community development programs”—for a few people for a limited amount of time in a very impoverished place and thus supporting the scramble for concealed political power that was one of the roots of the “rotten” system that they RUF vowed to overthrow. More importantly, they are specifically tailoring this good to conform to their ideas of the “normal” in Sierra Leone, for which their standard is the pre-war poverty that people are so desperate to escape. Their consistently brutal miscalculation of life as it should be, the *ought*, is not only doing little to help people escape poverty, but is reinforcing Makeni’s

historical position as “backward,” and dooming its people to a continued state of marginal neglect.

Without “development”, which would lift the oppressive “backwardness” of poverty, people are unable to look after their families and fulfill mutual obligations with others. This quagmire creates new ways of thinking such as dividing “self-development” and “community development” into discrete categories, so that one can justify what is done by the self and for the self, and what is beyond one’s realm of possibility and for which one cannot be held accountable. People have a powerful desire for change, however they are struggling to initiate it not just because of poverty, but because of the roadblocks created when their desired “normal,” the changes that would make life better and seemed possible as reconciliation and reintegration programs were being formulated, when the problems that the war resulted from seemed so glaringly obvious, fell to the wayside in aid organizations’ move to recreate the pre-war *is*. “Community development” in Makeni is a desire to work against organizations that unwittingly drive to recreate the “rotten” system in the name of rebuilding something familiar, just as the resources these organizations offer must be requisitioned in order to do so.

Especially in a “backward” trading town, individuals struggle to balance their daily consumption needs with a desire to “develop.” Many youth especially work through this tension via conspicuous consumption, through which they advertise their ability to do “development” outside of familial obligations. Simultaneously they decry similar habits among elites whose conspicuous consumption does not necessarily mean that benefits are being provided to all to whom the elite is obliged. Those who consume too much, are too talented and too likely to get ahead all on their own, or are not clever enough about disguising their “self-development” goals to the rest of their networks are pulled down by others, either through public denouncement and shame, or a removal of familial resources. This prevents the individual from succeeding without the network, which they might leave behind. To counter this, people are forging new and different bonds with others so that these ties are not broken if assistance is given.

“We are in trauma time now,” states Kathleen Stewart, “where the here and now drifts between the future making of awakened expectations and the dragging dread of lurking threats and half-remembered horrors” (2005: 325). Makeni people, in their daily

struggles to “develop” in the lingering aftermath of war and grind of everyday poverty, live and breathe this trauma. People comment all the time about how the town is “moving backward still” or is “not yet normal,” in spite of some economic gains and the population explosion that have occurred since the war, when the streets were so quiet that people could not stand to be in the town, for it was “dead, like an abandoned village,” according to one teacher who was tasked to reopen St. Francis Secondary School before the RUF had released control of the town. Zigon (2007: 133) contends that it is only when the “everyday” is challenged by a moral breakdown and people must confront the choices they have and the relative rightness or wrongness of each of these choices that the moral order itself is revealed, and from here we can come to grips with what it actually is, and this is where my study takes over.

What makes Makeni a unique and revealing study is the fact that there is no stable “everyday” or “normal” to be found, nor a past evaluative “normal” with which to make comparisons, and it is the conflation of both the “modern” and the “backward” in a swirl of trauma for people who are constantly making decisions aimed towards bettering their lives. It is a provincial capital, but it is “no better than a village,” according to some. When “everyday”-ness of the place constantly under contestations, with its massive and diverse population, infrastructural “backwardness,” poverty, and new and different ways of understanding “development” that are being worked and defined, especially after the war, finding a stable platform from which to make internally coherent moral judgments is impossible. Both those who are struggling for “development” in their familial networks and those who have chosen to abandon (however temporarily) those networks live and work in Makeni. Many came to Makeni seeking opportunity; most are mired in its grinding poverty. When swinging between a threatening, unsatisfying “normal” *is*, in some ways better and in some ways worse than before, with the best evaluative “normal” *ought* another capital town with a different history, different economic resource base and different ethnic composition, how do people ponder and act in the present in order to make the most of the future?

We can use this study and analysis to extrapolate notions of morality in societies where the “everyday” is as slippery as the actions one takes in order to survive. By specifically using concepts of “development” to understand how people struggle morally



between looking after themselves and their families when poverty precludes doing both, we can better understand what occurs both in post-disaster contexts, when families are scattered, obligations have eroded, and people attempt to put together new concepts of how to deal with their new world; and to prevent us from taking for granted that some pre-disaster context was somehow a desirable state of affairs. These worlds, both pre- and post-disaster, may seem as morally impoverished as they are physically impoverished. Everyone must make moral decisions when confronted with difficult life choices.

People that have suffered tremendous poverty over many years struggle not just with making better lives for themselves, but understanding how that “better” life could possibly be achieved, especially after a war that brought into focus the fact that there is no stable platform from which a “normal” and “better” life could be contemplated, from where it should come and to what future it should aspire. They do this even while working through the tensions inherent in the fact that much post-war rebuilding activity, as well meaning as their purveyors may be, actually enhances the inequalities extant in local power structures and reproduces the shortcomings of their society as it existed before the war, and from which people are trying to escape and move past into a desirable future. To accomplish our task of revealing the intricacies of this quagmire, we must start with the *is*, the *was* and the *may be*, and contrast them with the many versions of the *ought* that people pursue in their day-to-day lives. The lens I use here is local concepts of “development.” From here we can analyze the bases on which moral decisions are founded and where they are revealed, and from where a satisfactory reality can be imagined and thus acted on. These tasks I undertake here.

**Interlude**  
**Introducing Makeni:**  
**A stroll through the town and its people**

One first approaches Makeni from Freetown on Azzolini Highway, a highway that, when I started the research, was old and potholed, and the dusty journey took four hours. Azzolini Highway is named after the first Bishop of the Makeni Diocese, Augustus Azzolini, which gives one a first clue of the importance of the Catholic Church to the formation and growth of the town. The township itself is not visible from the highway, which cuts across its southern edge, with one only seeing the suburbs that have sprung up along the road, including the food market created by village women at the corner of Mabanta Road, one of the main routes into the town center. Carrying along the highway towards Magburaka and Kono, one passes several official institutions: St. Francis Secondary School, the United Nations guesthouse, a new luxury hotel that was opened in March 2006, the Social Security office (NaSSIT), the entertainment district on Ladies' Mile, and Makeni Teachers College.

There is a constant stream of people and vehicles on and alongside the highway, especially at the food market. Lorries, *poda-poda* (mini-buses) and taxis wait at the market to take people and goods east to Kono or west to Freetown. Across the highway is the rest stop for motorcycle taxis that offer lifts to individuals around town. Turning the corner into town at one of the gas stations, one can take a leisurely winding road into the center of town over potholed roads, past a building that once served as the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) headquarters. It is painted bright green in the party's color but now a private residence. One walks past the workshops of local tailors and carpenters, with their wares displayed in their large tree-shaded yards or on their wide verandas, past solid concrete houses often pockmarked with marks from bullets, rebel graffiti that has been scrubbed off or painted over, with people selling everything from

roasted cassava and hot tea to washing powder and bush medicines in their front yards, past an old rusted sign for a colonial-era bus station, power poles now stripped of lines. People pick their way carefully along the side of the road, erosion from years of powerful rains have left ragged concrete dropping precipitously into deep culverts, often full of garbage and detritus from the streets. There are INGO vehicles traveling this road toward the center of town, and people often hop quickly off the road if they see one coming by too fast. Both the Red Cross and the Makeni Government Hospital are on this road, and their courtyards are always bursting with people.

Approaching from Mabanta Road, one can see the center of town quite clearly; it is marked by Independence Square, a large roundabout capped by a half-built rusting edifice that was once meant to be a clock tower. The largest buildings loom over the square: some three stories high, with wide verandas and wrought-iron railings at each story, reminiscent of the French Quarter in New Orleans. Several of the buildings have been bombed, only some were salvageable and have been repainted and reoccupied. The rest have been left for rubble. One on the corner used to be Barclays Bank, it has “RUF Task Force Action Office” stenciled in red near the front door. It stands empty, and sellers of tie-dyed cloth and other luxuries have set up stands in front of it and across the street, in the shade of another bombed-out building. Some luxury businesses have moved in: there is an electronics shop, a diamond buying office, the National Lottery and a cellular phone company in Independence Square now, as well as the new Sierra Leone Commercial Bank and the PZ gas station and general store, which serves as a social focal point in the town.

Branching off from Independence Square are the town’s other main thoroughfares: Rogbaneh Road, home to the majority of the town’s luxury good shops, Station Road, which leads to the Town Hall, Post Office, several bars and restaurants and the Chief’s house, and Magburaka Road, where many of the town’s grand old homes, most now in disrepair, stand. A walk down Magburaka Road leads to the old Power Station, a rusted out hull of a warehouse that now holds nothing, as the remains of the generators were removed by the National Power Authority (NPA) in 2006, the NPA citing the fact that the people would just remove the metal and use it to their own purposes as their reason for doing so. At the bottom of Magburaka Road is Turntable, the

roundabout where the town was founded, edged on one side by the Ministry of Agriculture's small experimental agricultural plots, located on the town's best floodplain.

Back in the center of town, behind the PZ one finds the central market, bursting at the seams with people hustling to find deals on their daily needs, shouting above the din to work prices on things like rice and cassava down from their *padi*, their market friends. Moving up Rogbaneh Road, one can enter the Lorry Park, the center of the town's long-distance trade networks, home to shouting taxi and lorry drivers, a dirty patch of bare ground flanked on all sides by stalls selling wholesale goods like rice and bread flour. Walking through the Lorry Park one exits in front of the All People's Congress (APC) headquarters, in bright red and bearing the smiling face of Ernest Koroma, in 2004 leader of the opposition party, and now president of Sierra Leone. One can also see Wusum Stadium, built by the APC party in the 1970's, and home to the Wusum Stars soccer team. It stands in the shadow of Wusum Hill, a massive dark rock, covered in delicate green moss in the rainy season, and home to Wusum, a hill devil that protects the town from danger. Nestled at the base of Wusum is the rusted out remains of the Water Works, a seasonally full reservoir serving a leaky pipe under which women gather to wash clothes.

Interwoven with the main structures one finds the blood of Makeni's daily life: people milling about in front of small, often dilapidated houses, cooking, selling items like bean cakes and matches, trying to make the best of their locations. Everywhere people are trying to make some money from their skills. A walk down Station Road produces a metal recycling workshop full of energetic young men making things like toilet seats and buckets out of the scrap metal they find around town, makeshift lean-tos where deft-fingered women braid hair faster than the eye can track, small storefronts painted green where men sell basic medicines for fevers and worms, discreet benches where women scoop *poyo* (palm wine) out of buckets for eager elderly men. If a space is not occupied by a building or makeshift stall, it is being used as a kitchen garden.

Families carefully guard their rights to the small floodplains that dot the town and follow the course of its many streams. Here they plant swamp rice, surrounded on the edge of the plains by borders of groundnuts. Higher ground is piled into bunds where cassava, potatoes, yams and cocoyams are planted, intercropped with *krin-krin* and *grins*

(local greens used as sauce ingredients), okra, *pɛpɛ* [scotch bonnet pepper] and *binch* [beans]. Half-built structures protect vulnerable shoots of maize, and on the edges of town one sees small palm stands, some producing oil and others *poyo*. Many families in town have their familial roots in surrounding villages, and maintain rights to farming land outside of Makeni. My Krio teacher often spent his entire weekends at the family plot four miles away, helping his mother with the groundnuts that they boiled and sent to school with the small children. The land immediately around their house was used for cocoyams, and was kept clear of insects by their flock of chickens and ducks, which had free run of the yard. People came from all around to use their well, which produced water year-round, a rarity in this dry, dusty town.

Although the results from the December 2004 census were disputed and are again under review, Makeni is a town of about 200,000 people. Though it was originally founded by the Temne tribe in an area that is also inhabited by the Limba tribe, as a center of trade, it is now home to members of every tribe recognized in Sierra Leone. Temne is still dominant, with Temne speakers comprising about 65% of the population. The indigenous Limba comprise a further 20%, and the remaining 15% is people from elsewhere in Sierra Leone: Kono and Mandingo from the east, Kuranko from the northeast, Susu and Fula from the north, and Loko from the northwest comprising the largest minority populations. The Kono and Mandingo arrived mostly during and after the war, as they fled the fighting in the eastern districts of Kono and Kailahun that had begun in 1991 and 1992. Since the end of the war, the road between Kono and Makeni is in better repair than that between Kono and its own provincial capital of Kenema, so the Kono are also well represented among the population of Makeni Teachers College.

Walking around town one hears snippets of many languages, with the dominant language being Krio, the national lingua franca, a mix of English, French, Portuguese, Temne, Mende and Yoruba that was generated among the population of “recaptured” slaves in the colony of Sierra Leone at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Though the “pure” form of Krio, heavily laden with obscure words, metaphoric expressions, and historic references, is still spoken by the Krio in Freetown, the “upcountry” Krio that one hears in Makeni is far simpler. It is a way for people to communicate, rather than a language they embrace. Krio is rarely spoken by people over the age of sixty, however all children can

speak both their natal language (or languages, in the case of mixed households), Krio, and among the school-going adolescents and young adults, English. Krio is only used as a written language in Freetown; therefore all written communications that one sees in Makeni are in English, as everyone who can read was taught to read English. The majority of my earliest and best interlocutors were students; this is because they were confident enough to approach me and strike up a conversation in English.

Comfortable though they may have been with the nation's official language, the students were hardly the most financially comfortable people in the township. School fees were high and parents rarely able to cover them; many students worked to pay for their own fees and lived together in small rooms, sharing mattresses and meals. Often they occupied houses owned by absentee landlords; successful merchants who had moved to Freetown but let out their Makeni homes at sometimes exorbitant rates. Every room in the house would be let to a different person or people. It was not uncommon to find whole nuclear families occupying single rooms; many could only afford this type of accommodation because landlords demanded an entire year's rent up front. Most Makeni residents occupied rented accommodation as they attempted to build or rebuild houses on their own land, which they would do a few bricks and bags of cement at a time, as they could afford them. Homes went up so slowly in Makeni that the land was more productive in the meantime when used as a kitchen garden, which is why a completed home had the floor poured and the roof put up only after all other construction was done.

Makeni appears to the untrained eye to be a bustling town, but this belies the reality of the activity. "It is very lively because people are rushing to make a living," said the town council chairman one day, when I asked him how the town was managing in the wake of the aid boom, "all the activity you see is actually coping mechanisms." He pointed to a young man passing outside of his office, struggling to pull a cart laden with wood. "Do you think he would be doing this for a thousand leones or two if he could be in school? But at least he is making an honest living and has not rushed off to the diamond fields with the others." The diamond fields in Kamakwie were a main preoccupation with the town's leaders; they were concerned that the prospect of quick riches would destroy any drive the youth had to make an "honest" living.

### **Scrambling for a living: the primary preoccupation of Makeni's people**

The chairman had touched on a salient point: there were not as many youth in the township in 2004 as there were in 2003, when I had first arrived. Nearly five thousand young men and boys, by his estimation, had leapt at the rumor of diamonds in the northern part of the district, and were off seeking their fortunes. They had gone to Kamakwie, a historically Limba town in the Sella Limba chiefdom of northern Bombali district, three hours slow drive over dirt track north of Makeni, and just fifty miles from the Guinea border. Kamakwie is a town with a normal population of about three thousand people. It was a site of early missionary activity, according to one elderly Protestant gentleman in Makeni, because unlike the Temne tribe, which is predominantly Muslim, when the protectorate was opened up to Protestant missionaries at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the Limbas had not been converted from their original customs. By independence, Kamakwie had a thriving Christianized Limba community, with a large school system and free hospital run by Dr. Elizabeth Birch, the daughter of one of the earliest mission families. The gentleman was keen to note this, as he himself had traveled to Kamakwie for surgery at one point in the past. According to a former nurse in the hospital who now lives in Makeni, Kamakwie was sacked by the RUF in 1996, scattering the population and shutting down all missionary activity for good. It was liberated in 2000, a year before Makeni, and, because it was a border security concern as well as a site of rebel reintegration, was an early center of UN and NGO activity.

Kamakwie has historically been the center of a rice farming chiefdom; unlike the drier areas to the south, its topography more closely matches the littoral swamps to the west, an area considered the “bread basket” of Sierra Leone. Rumor has it that a farmer in one of Kamakwie's outlying village, working his plot in April 2004, uncovered a gem-quality diamond of multiple karats. Like the famed diamond fields of Tongo in the east, Kamakwie had alluvial diamonds, which required very little starting capital or labor to mine. Therefore, like Tongo, it attracted thousands of young men with shovels and sieves eager to make their fortunes. Their only obstacle was finding land on which to dig. The Paramount Chief, section chiefs, and a few large landholders own the bulk of the land in Sella Limba, and one must have or cultivate a personal relationship with them in order to gain permission to dig. Usually this permission was gained through personal

connections: businessmen involved in social networks with landowners. A typical mining agreement involved the landowner giving a man permission to mine on his land, in exchange for a third of the price of any diamonds found. The miner himself would get a third, and the group of boys who worked for him, called “tributors” would share the other third. This arrangement came about because only people with the connections to gain access to plots usually had the money to support a team of miners with tools, rice, and other provisions. There was no way of knowing if any one plot would produce diamonds, so people mined merely with the hope of striking it rich.

The lack of any other potentially lucrative employment in Makeni meant that, for young people who were not in school, it was their best opportunity to make any money. This was the case even though they would get perhaps one-sixth of any diamond they found, and nothing at all aside from the rice they ate if they did not. The economic situation in Makeni was so dire as the NGO boom drew down that several thousand young people took their chances with striking it rich in Kamakwie, and those lifelong miners whose fortunes in Tongo Field and other eastern minefields were waning also relocated to Kamakwie. Youth arrived in the town with nothing, offering their services to anyone who had access to a plot, whether or not the man offered them rice for their services. When I arrived in September 2004, the town’s population had peaked at 15,000 people, with new structures being haphazardly raised every day, traders flooding the town to take advantage of the need for imported food, and prices for basic items staked extraordinarily high. Some boys paid several thousand leones per night in order to roll out their sleeping mat on someone’s veranda, others who could not afford to do so would sell the shirts off their backs in order to pay for a little tobacco or marijuana to sustain them through the night as they aimlessly wandered the streets.

Every time the boom waned, news would hit the town of another fantastic find: diamonds the size of one’s fist, or five or six found in a single plot in a single day, and the mining momentum regained strength. The town’s leaders began to despair: the streams and tributaries were filling with silt from all the diamond pits, farmers had abandoned rice farming completely, water wells were becoming contaminated with feces as latrines overflowed, and the threat of water-borne diseases loomed. Miraculously, only one small dysentery outbreak was recorded, and less than a year after the Kamakwie



diamond boom started, it had ended. Young people drifted back to Makeni, most showing nothing for their time in the fields, even the successful ones. This was because, as one town elder told me, “Diamond money is not good money. It will not get you education; it will not build you a business. It will go through your hands quickly.” Much of the fortune made in Kamakwie was spent on consumer products: bicycles and radios, alcohol and nights on the town. Most of the diamonds ended up in the hands of the Lebanese diamond dealers who followed the boom from Kono and set up shops all over Kamakwie. They had a captive market in Kamakwie, and closed up shop and relocated to the perennial diamond fields just as the boom ended, in April 2005. Many of the youth who took part in the Kamakwie diamond boom, because they had seen what “the good life,” in the form of vast diamond fortunes, looked like, had lost their taste for education, and wanted to be able to partake in a consumer market once again. Many melted into the *blɔf kulcha* scene that I discuss in detail in Chapter Three: banding together in small groups of like-minded youth, engaging in small-scale enterprise in order to buy consumer goods and entertainment for themselves.

The majority of people in Makeni engage in several activities over the course of a day in order to make a living. Most of the teachers I met had after-hours occupations, whether it was tie-dying, soap-making, farming, or brewing palm wine, in order to supplement meager and often late salaries. Secondary school students who had to pay their own fees made money as domestic help, and as small-scale traders or driving motorcycle taxis. Most adults engaged in some form of trade and agriculture simultaneously, though on vastly varying scales. Those few who had the capital to trade on larger scales led less hectic, more comfortable lives, as they could conduct all their business from their storefronts, and could purchase the bulk of their food instead of having to raise it. These lives were not without risk, however. When the price of cement doubled in the course of a month and construction in the town stopped completely, the town’s two main hardware stores perched precariously close to going bankrupt. Many traders lived somewhere in between the comfortable storefronts occupied by wealthy merchants and the barely-there enterprises of matches and washing powder operated by the desperately poor. They had regular stalls, however small, and regular customers, however poor those customers were.

Makeni is buzzing with activity because everyone is working to make money; the buzz has a slightly desperate air to it, which is why tempers often run high in market transactions and other social encounters, especially at the height of the rainy season, which runs from June to November. It is during the rainy season that flooded streets become impassable muddy troughs and every passing car drenches pedestrians with muddy water, when local food supply is at its lowest level, much productive supplementary activity such as wood collecting halts, water-borne diseases and malaria are rampant, and people must move their normally gregarious public existences inside. People prefer the hot and dusty dry season, from November to April, as food is abundant, activities outside can take place around the clock, and diseases abate. In the dry season it is not uncommon to see traders along the main roads late at night, sitting by the light of a single candle, attempting to make those final sales that might carry them through shorter hours and harder times during the rainy season.

Makeni was a fascinating place to work; there was always something occurring and someone new to talk to. It is possible to work there for several years and not get a complete picture of what is occurring in this ever-lively, ever changing town. In the chapters that follow, I hope to give you a glimpse of the different aspects of life that dominate what people are concerned about, what preoccupies their lives and thoughts, and what matters to them when they think about and attempt to produce a better future. Producing a “better future” requires an analysis of the moral underpinnings of how and why the town became “backward” in the past, and each chapter illuminates a different facet of how this occurred, and how people are struggling to avoid reverting to the same state. In Chapter Two, on politics, I analyze the historical cycle of the rise and fall of politicians—and the “community development” fortunes of the town—through the dual lenses of corruption and physical decay. Successive politicians broke the covenant of obligation that existed between them and their clients, the townspeople, and failed to make good on their promises of infrastructural development in the town. This engendered a perennial lack of trust between townspeople and their governments, and results in the continual “pulling down” of politicians as they fail to meet popular expectations. Power is transferred to other individuals who, in light of the near impossibility of developing the town with no money and no popular trust, also eventually

fall. As poverty prevents mutual obligations from being filled, so is the town condemned to be “backward.”

In Chapter Three I analyze the market, the economic lifeblood of the town and the reason for its original population explosion, and also a salient example of the social negotiations people undertake in order to create and sustain both moral and economically sustainable lives for themselves in the township by solidifying social networks, providing needed goods, avoiding taxation, and also avoiding jealousy from others who may think that they are doing too well—or redistributing too little—in a town that is blanketed with endemic poverty. In the pervading jealousy that characterizes relationships between traders in an over-saturated economy, it is often both morally and physically safer *not* to succeed too well, or too obviously, in order to avoid either being pulled down, or being ejected from one’s social networks. The safety of poverty is both illustration and condemnation of the town and its people as “backward.”

Chapter Four assesses the raging debate among residents as to what activities among the youth will better move the town and its people out of their current state of backwardness, and which will provide a more solid moral foundation for youth to engage in reciprocal obligations in the future. I specifically address the lack of agreement as to whether trade or education are better socializers of youth, and therefore which would both keep the town in a peaceful state (by not giving the youth a reason nor a method with which to rise up in revolution), and pave the road towards an economically successful future in which everyone in a successful person’s network benefits. Education is a lightning rod in families as to whether a “developed” individual will feel any responsibility towards a family that made sacrifices to educate them, or whether the potential for a youth to fail in his or her education means it is a worthless pursuit. The town was historically behind the rest of the nation in education, and it is a bone in the popular throat that the rest of the country does not care to see Makeni and its people rise to their full potential.

Chapter Five moves this debate over how to train moral and economically successful people into the realm of the family, where the bonds and battles of reciprocal obligations, especially in difficult times where fulfilling obligations is a personal strain, are played out on a daily basis. Here I argue that post-war poverty has caused personal

morality to become more durable and flexible: instead of taking for granted reciprocal relations with others, individuals actively define those relationships they want to enter, and the relationships are severed when obligations can no longer be fulfilled. The idea of “self-development,” which I introduce in previous chapters as a popular moniker for those individuals whose “development” is neither supported by nor beneficial of ones social networks, means that people can define what they do for themselves—apart from obligations to social networks—as a way to keep essential morality alive, though suspended for as long as an individual is not in a position to be in obligational relations.

Chapters Six and Seven analyze issues of moral personhood as they have been molded and altered in the wake of the war by international organizations and foreign ideas of what connotes a stable and well-off society. International aid organizations, governments, and the NGOs they fund, in an effort to “normalize” the situation in post-war Makeni, set about re-doing everything they saw had been undone by the war. In the process of doing so, they created categories of people and personhood that had been altered or undone during the war—specifically with rebel combatants and victims of war mutilation—deeming them eligible for assistance and “charity,” and specifically disabled them as development-capable people in the local moral structure. This caused a backlash against other physically disabled people in the town, who were swept into the same category of charity cases. In addition, by assuming that the pre-war state was a “normal” that needed to be recreated, they consistently worked against local people’s desires for wholesale changes in society, desires that stemmed from the fact that Makeni before the war was “backward,” and it was this very backwardness that needed addressing in order for the town, and country, to not slip back into a state of war. They inserted themselves into the same local power structure—historically one that did not benefit everyone—and doled out benefits for only a few lucky people who could take advantage of them through their social structures. This is creating so much pressure on systems of social obligation that the relationship between international organizations and local people is threatening to break down completely. People are attempting to subvert the potential problems of falling out completely with NGOs by emphasizing the fact that the government, and the country’s own powerful people, should be taking the lead in repairing years of social and economic damage, and leading the country in a new direction.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Chopping Money and Vacating Progress: The desire for personal power versus the desire for a developed town**

My arrival in Makeni in June 2004 coincided with a momentous event: the inauguration of the first democratically elected town council since 1972, the year when President Siaka Stevens abolished elected councils and appointed councils of his own choosing. Under pressure from the opposition APC party and the international community, President Tejan Kabbah agreed to re-institute elected councils, and elections took place in April 2004. Three new town councils were created: Bo and Kenema elected SLPP candidates to every seat, and Makeni elected APC candidates to every seat. At the inauguration in Makeni, as each councilor was announced to President Kabbah, who sat in the Paramount Chief's throne onstage, he nodded at them, but refused to join the crowd in their thunderous applause. The ceremony was presided over by Vice President Solomon Berewa, an SLPP man widely acknowledged to be the most corrupt politician in the country.

Berewa spent nearly two hours reading through the handbook of rules and guidelines for new councils, and took care to emphasize a new requirement that council members must declare their assets at the start and finish of their tenure as councilors. "We want to make sure," he joked, "that you do not start your time in the council living in a grass hut and finish with three farms!" There was polite laughter from the crowd, though Mr. IBK, an elderly politician and former town councilor who was sitting next to me, was shaking his head. "How many farms do you think he has?" he asked me, "but in this country it is 'do as I say, not as I do'. Maybe he doesn't want anyone else threatening his money pot." IBK remarked after the ceremony that when the cabinet debated the constitution for new councils, Berewa was the only one to argue passionately to retain the Declaration of Assets, in spite of the fact that he lived much too lavishly for a mere civil servant. He made this comment as we drove through the streets of Makeni in

an old Mercedes owned by a fellow politician, who, deftly maneuvering through crowds of children in the market, added that there would be euphoria in the town for the first few months, but then we would see what really happens when the council has to get down to business and discovered all the problems they faced. “They are inheriting the debts of the last council, now the town workers will line up at their desks for their pay.”

This scene was a web of interwoven contradictions and morality plays. The president, having politically endorsed independent councils, refused to acknowledge the success of the opposition party and the shrinking of his political power. The most corrupt politician argued for transparency, politicians who accused Berewa of corruption and greed left the event in their luxury vehicles, and the new council, composed mostly of people elected because they chose to remain in Makeni during the RUF occupation, and were thus very popular, walked into work the next day and were confronted with an empty treasury, with all eyes on them to make sure they did not profit from their time in office. This event illustrated the dialectic of politics in Makeni: the push and pull between the desire, and often the need, to skim some of the council’s money for one’s own needs, and its seeming incommensurability with community development. No council in the past had succeeded in both implementing community development and remaining free of corruption scandals, and, though the people were hopeful, there were few expectations that this council would be different.

In this chapter I examine the historical circumstances that led to this political climate of hope without expectation, a sense of betrayal with little initial faith—in short, an idea of how people must make constant political ethical judgments in a place that lacks a stable “everyday.” I do this by examining the remnants that failed councils and projects left in the landscape—especially as it concerns *dɔti*, garbage—and the way these failures became mapped onto people’s attitudes and behaviors about community development. In essence, a clean town is a sign not just that the politicians are “working,” but also that the people are happy with the council’s activities. Add to this the tribulations of the Makeni town council, which, in 2006, was embroiled in a corruption scandal so enormous it threatened to bring down the APC party. I analyze how the residents of Makeni contend with and react to the personal ambitions of politicians whose self-development ambitions transform into overpowering greed, some

of whom they topple successfully because the former was not able to hide his desire for power or riches without redistributing them. However, the people often unwittingly support other politicians who, as true “big men,” are better able to conceal their desire for power and money and can thus continue to build their networks and resource bases without anyone realizing how they are operating. “Community development” is a morally ambivalent concept: it is desired by the people as the only way to bring the town “forward,” however it is often used by politicians to manipulate people to support their own causes. In addition, because “community development” projects are often façades for personal consumption, consumption is the “hidden abode” of failed community development. The townspeople’s inability to rectify the two, to their dismay, condemns the town to be backward.

#### **“Maybe they are trying”: corruption, taxes, garbage and the town council**

In most of my conversations with people, I asked, “What do you think about the new town council?” And as if by clockwork, the majority of my interlocutors would pause, consider the question for a few moments, and answer cautiously, “Well, I think maybe they are trying.” This answer—hesitant, evasive, and yet hopeful—was both a nod to the occasional signs of the council’s progress, such as a new abattoir constructed immediately after the inauguration, and also a meditation on the history of town councils in Makeni: their initial period of hard work and progress, followed by allegations of corruption and scandal that usually paralleled the town’s infrastructure breaking down, residents refusing to pay their taxes and bills, and the ousting of one or more members of the council. The council has never been free from tension between members or of accusations of corrupt practices. And yet, people turned out at the polls in droves in order to vote in new members.

The relationship between the residents and the town council is illustrated most graphically in the cleanliness of the town and the state of the infrastructure: when any town council in the past faltered, it was reflected in residents burying the town in refuse and the power and water works shutting down—a scathing moral judgment which symbolically results in the effluent of consumption, *dɔti*, literally burying development.

As any council refused its duty to look after the town, so did town residents refuse to be complicit in their corruption, and, by throwing refuse everywhere, encouraging disease and discomfort, allowed the town to slide into a state of such decrepitude that Freetown journalists took notice, and politicians in Freetown took remedial action. The one council that attempted to force the cleaning of the town, the NPRC, is remembered as a gang of tyrants who trampled on personal dignity in order to keep the town clean and operational. But because people still cautiously hoped that the council was trying before the first scandal broke, the narrative of the town being condemned to backwardness by corrupt politicians was refused as it was deployed. Just as people used the public refuse bins when they were erected, so did they challenge the council to live up to their expectations.

*Memories of bloated bellies: why residents refuse to pay their taxes and utility bills*

I had several conversations with a newspaper editor who was a native of Makeni who mentioned that even when Makeni had power regularly, people refused to pay their bills. Why this was so, however, was a mystery to him: “I don’t know, as a culture I don’t know whether the government had the machinery to collect and the ability to assess the charges. But they should pay! A mechanism should be put in place to make sure that people pay. I am sure that what they have gone through, I am sure that people will pay once electricity has come back to Makeni.”

Why do residents consistently refuse to pay for services they receive? I traced this refusal to a series of articles from 1981. In this year one Freetown reporter noticed the “sorry state” of Makeni: no water, no power, streets full of garbage (Anonymous, *We Yone*, November 25, 1981). After describing the horrible decay he saw, journalist Franklin Bunting-Davis asserted that Makeni must be the most backward town in the nation, and only the actions of a new authority figure could turn the situation around. He lavished praise on the new Resident Minister appointed to the northern province, Mr. SE Johnny (Bunting-Davis, *We Yone*, May 17, 1981). Upon his arrival, Johnny told all civil servants in Makeni that he would force them to address the town’s long-standing problems, notably the lack of water and power.



The water shortages had remained unsolved since 1977, with two other resident ministers unable or unwilling to repair the pump and pipes. According to Bunting-Davis, the “waterman” in Makeni cited a lack of fuel to run the water pump as the main reason water never flowed. The “electricity jargon” that Bunting-Davis cites as the reason the lights were never on in Makeni was due to, apparently, a lack of “acid water” for the batteries (Bunting-Davis, *We Yone*, May 17, 1981). Though the infrastructure itself was present from colonial days, no provision was made for either maintenance or supply of the infrastructure’s consumables, such as oil and fuel. We cannot know who is to blame, whether Stevens diverted fuel to other clients as part of his patronage network (Reno, 1995: 142) or whether council members squandered the budget on other things. Johnny, however, laid responsibility squarely at the feet of the council. Bunting-Davis devoted several articles to how SE Johnny was intending to solve the town’s problems by addressing the corruption in the town council:

Once upon a time, there was a Makeni town council. Today, there is nothing impressive about Makeni. With streets sunk deep in filth, dusty and rugged, with gutters emitting stench at every turn, with garbage heaps as high as Kilimanjaro... the street lamps have gone to Hades long ago and it’s no exaggeration to say that tall grasses have been marching on the houses. But it’s no more than a figure of speech except that it expresses the mood in which I am, to say that mosquitoes are virtually eating people alive, while thieves taking advantage of the darkness add to the misery of the night.

Having said all this, the obvious question is: “What is there about Makeni that one need admire?” How can people live in a town where both night and day are greeted with trepidation—all because of the Makeni town council? When that council proving the living with the view to improving the lives of the residents was set up, it was of the people—cleaning down the grass and providing among other services, clean streets, moving things, street lighting. In short, care for the town as one would care for his child. But right from it’s inception, the council appears to have been manned by money-chewers... (Bunting Davis, *We Yone*, October 11, 1981)

Bunting-Davis echoed the feelings of Makeni people in that the place is “too backward” to ever change, that successive governments had never treated residents well enough for them to develop themselves. If the town is in such a state that people are always ill and fear for their lives, they will do the bare minimum necessary to survive, and will exert no

unnecessary effort. The people are backward here because the town, run by incompetent and corrupt officials, is backward. In calling the town council members “money chewers,” Bunting-Davis exposes the heart of the problems Makeni has had with self-governance since the Stevens era. Officials regularly “chop” that which is meant to nurture their townspeople. It is no surprise that Makeni residents were recalcitrant taxpayers in the 1970s and 1980’s:

Naked corruption has had its own part to play. There are times when defaulters have been taken to court and the money retrieved, but never accounted for. For years, the council was in charge of market dues collection, but not a cent was ever accounted for. Well, actually, they had no one to account to. It had even come to a time when staff members sold their own typewriters and even the furniture. The whole system has been so encrusted with filth that no one seemed to care anymore. Ratepayers [taxpayers], knowing that the monies they paid went down the drains, openly refused to pay. (Bunting Davis, *We Yone*, October 11, 1981)

After the 1955 rebellion against despotic chiefs, the residents of Makeni were recalcitrant taxpayers. They could never be sure that the money they gave would ever be used to their benefit, which is why development was so slow in coming to the town at the end of the colonial era. During Stevens’ time in office, the “money chewing” of the council members was proof that no benefit would ever come of paying taxes, and the people stopped feeding their council members. Unlike the corruption of chiefs in the colonial era, where people were forced to pay tribute to a man whose authority they were never allowed to question, they had greater leverage of refusal under the town council, and could force it into bankruptcy even though a destroyed council intensified their suffering. At least with this outcome, no money chewing would be possible. The situation had reached a breaking point:

As far as the council members were concerned, there was nothing to ‘eat’ and so they lost interest in the council’s business. That is how the Makeni town council committed hari-kari, and an experiment in responsible local government failed. The few laborers who had been working for months with promises of pay coming in this week and that week, resolved that they must be paid every cent before the council broke apart. One afternoon, they led a delegation to the Provincial Secretary, Northern Province, Mr. SE Johnny, and let him into the secret of what has been going on. (Bunting-Davis, *We Yone*, October 11, 1981)

Though in other articles Bunting-Davis is ecstatic with Johnny's success in cleaning up the town council, forcing the infrastructure into operation and then compelling tax payment, the euphoria, the revenue collection, the transparency and the infrastructure did not last long. Was Johnny *pul im don* [pulled down] by other politicians who felt threatened by his authoritarian style? That we do not know. However, from my interviews I recorded dates of 1983, 1984, and 1985 as "the year the water stopped" again, and 1986, 1987, 1988 and 1991 as the "year the lights went out." The infrastructure limped along for a few months every year or so, when an ambitious politician or civil servant decided they would revive the town, and these efforts always failed as no one could be induced to pay for the services rendered, and the town council, regardless of how corrupt or honest it might be, incurred a debt for fuel and worker salaries. Perhaps people would never pay until they experienced the monetary benefits that accrued from having lights and water. And aside from those few individuals who had businesses in buildings hooked up to the mains, those monetary benefits were not immediately forthcoming, nor were they obvious. No price could be placed on simply having a better quality of life. It was owed. It was "normal" that people strived for.

I discovered the Bunting-Davis articles while conducting archival work, six months after my departure from Makeni. I was surprised to learn of SE Johnny's existence. Not one of my interlocutors ever mentioned Johnny in our conversations about life under the reign of Siaka Stevens, however the emotions that the era evoked for them and the behaviors it created mean that his time in Makeni is illustrative of a larger theme. People do not necessarily remember the specific APC ministers or town councils, but they share a general mistrust of the motives of government officials, most of who eventually proved to be corrupt, and avoid paying taxes if they can. The phrase, "I think maybe they are trying," coupled with people's insistence that they would not pay any taxes to the council until they had already seen positive results, is illustrative of the seemingly unrecoverable spiral of "money chewing" and suspicion precluding any community development. It is a paradox inherent among people whose poverty prevents an expansive attitude towards government: one cannot and will not pay taxes one does not have only to see the money "eaten" by politicians. One will not pay bills for utilities that are owed to the people by a corrupt council that has eaten other monies. Politicians

facing empty coffers can make no improvements in the town, and most ultimately choose to fend for themselves.

*Oppression in a beautiful town: the legacy of Cleaning Saturday*

In April 1992 a group of young Sierra Leone Army (SLA) officers fighting on the rebel war's eastern front in Kailahun drove to Freetown ostensibly to demand higher pay, better logistical support and improved conditions of service at the war front. They seized control of the State House and President Joseph Momoh, who had replaced a retiring Stevens in 1986, fled to Guinea, where he remained until his death on August 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2003. Captain Valentine Strasser, aged 26, announced on national radio that the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) was now running the country. The NPRC's aim, he stated, was to throw enough manpower and logistical support behind the armed forces to bring about a rapid end to the war, and to reform the state after twenty years of APC corruption and mismanagement. The young officers surrounded themselves with experienced politicians, even including some civilians in their cabinet, and announced they were cleaning up the country.

Most Sierra Leoneans, especially the youth, rejoiced. They saw one of their own holding the reigns of power. All over the country, they took up the call to "clean up the country" and instituted "cleaning days" in order to rid the streets of garbage and cleanse the nation of the most obvious signs of APC neglect. Diouf (1996 (2003: 144)) analyzed a similar, though more closely organized, movement of youth in Senegal, the *Set/Setal*, whose goal was to rid the country of filth and garbage, both literally and figuratively, as the physical manifestation of a fight against corruption. Diouf states that the two terms together describe a "moral cleanliness" in the face of a corrupt ruling class, designed both to rid a neighborhood of garbage but also to reform social practices, for example by banning informal trading (forthcoming 2008: 5). The movement was accompanied by youthful violence and rioting, with youths stating that they would destroy everything in the country in order to rebuild it better (6), and they began in their own neighborhoods in Dakar. In essence, it was a direct response to the degradation of the local environment, both physical and moral, due to the neglect of the powerful ruling class. Like the youth

in *Set/Setal* who projected their anger at the failures of Senegal's founding fathers to address the marginality of youth created when the city was imagined only in its colonial context (19), the youth who answered the call of the equally youthful NPRC to "clean up" Sierra Leone were responding to the APC's failure not only to keep their physical environment clean and free of *dɔti*, but also the failure of the country's ruling class to care enough about the future to address the failings of the past. Makeni had become a *dɔti boks* [garbage can], and it was up to the youth to repair years of neglect.

The call to cleaning in Makeni was answered first by students at Makeni Teachers' College, who emerged en masse every month to scrub the town's streets and drains. This voluntary exercise soon became mandatory. The NPRC designated the first Saturday of every month Cleaning Saturday, and every person, according to Mr. IBK, unless they were infirm or performed a necessary function such as nursing or policing, was expected to be out on the streets or in front of their homes, taking part in the cleaning. Cleaning Saturday is the iconic marker of good governance in Makeni; it is what people point to as the way to know if a government, either local or national, cares about the state of the town and its people. People unilaterally point to this time as the peak of the town's health and development promise, yet they remember it was also the most authoritarian rule they had ever lived under.

Cleaning Saturday therefore reveals the apparent incommensurability of democratic governance and "community development" projects such as garbage collection and street cleaning: in Makeni, residents have never had both work at the same time. This does not mean, however, that they universally rebelled against compelled cleaning. People interpreted the event, which required participation of every able-bodied person in the town on pain of arrest, as increased participation by people in the governance of their town, even though it was compelled. Unlike the forced labor for chiefs that occurred during the colonial era, Cleaning Saturday was an antidote to "laziness," as, according to one man, it forced the people to care about themselves and their town. "We all benefited," he said, "we could all take pride in our town." The youth perceived it as collective development action, even though the NPRC executed it with similar force to the despised tyrant chiefs of the past. However, every student I spoke with, when I asked about what the town was like when they were children, mentioned

that it was so much cleaner and healthier than it is today. “It was really a nice place, no *dɔti* in the streets,” said one girl. “The town was so clean, we didn’t have the flies like we do today,” said another.

A garbage-free town was a healthier place, which was argued by many people as a reason to bring compulsory cleaning back. Most of the talk that I heard about how to re-institute the cleaning day occurred during mango season. In the months of March and April, when mangos were falling off trees and people casually dropped gnawed mango pits wherever they chose, the fly population exploded and blanketed the town. Women fretted about an increase in typhoid and other food-borne diseases, as flies flitted between the rotten mangos, garbage piles and the food they prepared for their families. During this time many people took it upon themselves, cleaning mandate or not, to deal with the garbage problem. Walking down a street one Saturday, I saw a man shoveling detritus out of the culvert in front of his house, commenting loudly to passersby that, “*Wi gɛfɔ klin di plays, dɔti na bad fɔ wi pikin.*” In essence, everyone needed to help deal with the garbage in Makeni, lest all their children fall ill.

Cleaning Saturday, however, like the NPRC itself, was morally fraught and not unilaterally good. Under successive corrupt town councils during APC rule, the townspeople suffered under mounds of garbage that the councils were either unable or unwilling to remove. Under the NPRC, they were despotically compelled to clean the town. On the day I saw the man cleaning out his culvert, I was walking with a woman who said cheerfully that Cleaning Saturday was still alive, but better than it was under the NPRC because now it was entirely voluntary. When the NPRC was in power, they would make public examples of people who did not participate, often beating them in the streets. Many people cleaned out of fear, and not because they believed that it was good for the town. Such autocracy meant order, however. I cannot count the number of times when, driving through Freetown and encountering a particularly inept driver on the road, the taxi driver would comment on how things were so much better during the NPRC, when one could simply “call in the soldiers” when encountering bad drivers who were causing problems. Many was the time an unlicensed driver would be physically dragged from his vehicle and beaten in the streets as an example to others. “Fewer cars on the road then,” said one taxi driver, “and not so many road accidents.”

No government since the NPRC has imposed moral or physical force to compel people to such collective action. When Mr. IBK, in his role as advisor to the newly elected town council, put forward a proposal in 2004 to re-institute mandatory cleaning one Saturday a month, it never passed through committee. The thought of threatening arrest for people who were not cleaning was too much for most council members, one of whom told me, “We are elected by the people. How can I jail the people who put me in office?” Under the neglect of the APC, Makeni town suffered nearly unmitigated physical decline. Under the NPRC, the ever-present threat of being publicly flogged by soldiers for non-participation in improvement activities made the town a “healthy” and “nice” place to live. Governance in Makeni has never been “normal,” as people’s experiences are limited to political corruption and the freedom to suffer, or junta-like oppression in a clean town. “Development” in an undivided sense speaks to neither experience. Personal autonomy, whether or not one is pursuing “self-development” or “chop” is here also historically incompatible with community development.

*Pa Fornah’s town council: a new chairman, a new hope for community development?*

When the NPRC seized control and suspended the constitution and all political parties, they also suspended all town council operations and fired all erstwhile councilors from every council, replacing them with community members the NPRC itself appointed. There was cautious optimism about the activities of the new town council. News editor IB Kargo kept a resident reporter and photographer, Josef Lewis, in Makeni to report on all developments in the town. Lewis had many positive comments on the new town council and its appointed chairman, “Pa” Yamba Fornah. With backing from Major Sewa, Pa Fornah reported that he had repaired nearly all major roads in the township, constructed twenty bridges and culverts in the town, and established a plot of land for refuse disposal. Lewis queried Pa Fornah on the state of the council’s finances, which had been historically a target for corruption among council members. Fornah stated that the council funds were under the “control of a select committee under the watchful eye of the Secretary of State,” and assured Lewis that citizens, even the usually recalcitrant Drivers’ Union, were paying their dues in a “new spirit of cooperation” with the town

council. When the NPRC took over, the council was bankrupt and previous members had looted the council headquarters down to the last stick of furniture (Lewis, *The New Citizen*, January 10, 1994). SE Johnny's successes in turning the council around were apparently quite short-lived.

NPRC rule was a time when Makeni residents were not unified on the issue of whether their government was good or not, as people were harassed and enjoyed themselves in equal measure. The youth remember the early years of NPRC rule as the apex of Makeni's "liveliness," in spite of the fact that the town had no electricity or water supply. Unlike the adults I spoke with, who mentioned the climate of fear that dominated during military rule, the memories of the youth are dominated by their aesthetic sense of the town, which, from Cleaning Saturday, the road rehabilitation work, and refuse disposal, meant the town was "a nice place to live." When the NPRC finally agreed to democratic elections and pulled down all of their military tents, many adults breathed a sigh of relief that the town's "harassment centers" were closing (Momodu, *Concord Times*, April 10, 1996). When a tent mysteriously reappeared a few months later, residents were hysterical that the soldiers had returned, and demanded that the town council remove the tent. The soldiers, they claimed, used it as a base from which to seize goods from traders and humiliate residents (Momodu, *Concord Times*, June 11, 1996).

What the youth saw was the lighter side: the entertainment perks encouraged by the NPRC in order to keep soldiers stationary. Most of the newspaper articles coming out of Makeni at the time concentrated on the town's nightlife scene (see Chapter Two), which was heavily patronized by soldiers. As soldiers received regular salaries at the time, business in Makeni's bars and nightclubs boomed, and "people could enjoy themselves," according to one teacher I interviewed. This liveliness and spirit, encouraged by the NPRC in order to keep their soldiers content and stationary, was what the youth noted time and again went missing when the RUF occupied the town, and was so long in coming after the end of the war. Even if the NPRC was despotic, at least people could have a little bit of fun.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Bazenguissa-Ganga noted a similar phenomenon among militiamen in Cong-Brazzaville, where the ability to spend money in bars and on women, if only for a short time, was the essence of having lived a good life (1999 (2003: 94)).



The NPRC emphasis on keeping the soldiers content meant the barracks were rehabilitated before the rest of the town. Major Fallah Sewa, the Secretary of State, promised that the town would soon receive water and electricity supplies, however by the end of 1993 the only place in Makeni that had both was Teko Barracks, where a battalion of SLA were stationed (S. Kamara, *Daily Mail*, September 14, 1993; Lewis, *The New Citizen*, September 27, 1993). For the town proper, the council executed single-expenditure prestige projects, which were usually funded directly by the NPRC in Freetown. The rebuilding of the grandstands in Wusum Stadium, which cost of over Le10 million, about \$20,000, was financed by the NPRC, as was a rehabilitated Town Council building, at Le2 million (\$4,000) (Anonymous, *Standard Times Supplement*, August 22, 1994). In addition a Dutch NGO financed the construction of new teachers' quarters at the Teachers' College (Massaquoi, *Concord Times*, June 29<sup>th</sup>, 1994), and the Catholic Church launched the town's first radio station, *Radio Maria* (Bayraytay, *The Afro Times*, October 19-20, 1994).

These were solid community "development," however they "did not make us trust the council," said one man I spoke to in front of the old Town Council chambers, which had been burned by council members in 1998 to prevent anyone finding records of their double book-keeping and corruption. "They could erect the buildings but never thought that they must be looked after, no money was ever coming for maintenance. This is why the power station [the fact of providing electricity] was too much for them." The council, not thinking about their own or the town's future, catered to the *joie de vivre* desired by townspeople, and served as ostentatious distractions from the council's failure to address more serious, and expensive problems like power and water.

The town council was soon, like its predecessors, mired in revenue-collecting controversy. In spite of Pa Fornah's early admonishments that the Drivers' Union, which controlled revenue collection at the lorry park, was cooperating fully with the council's revenue collection, only six months after Josef Lewis expounded the virtues of the new council, people were grumbling that the Union was extorting money from drivers without making improvements to the park (Anonymous, *The Weekend Spark*, September 30, 1994). The rumor circulated that the Union was colluding with the town council to embezzle the money, for if the Union failed to register its dues collection with the

council's finance committee, then the money did not exist. Pa Fornah promised improvements to the lorry park if traders in the new market paid their taxes, and also the rehabilitation of the town's roads, which had never, in spite of the council's promises of repair, been fixed and were decrepit.

The traders did pay their taxes, to their ultimate detriment. In August 1995 a scandal exploded as Pa Fornah found he was unable to pay any of the council's bills in spite of the revenue collected from the market traders. When checking with the bank, he discovered that the council's treasurer had defrauded over Le2.5 million in the previous year, leaving the council bankrupt (Collier, *Unity Now*, August 10, 1995). In the wake of this scandal, the Secretary of State suspended seven council members, including Pa Fornah and the entire finance committee (Collier, *Unity Now*, September 4, 1995). By August 1996, a year after the scandal, the committee assigned to investigate the scandal had not met, though the new treasurer had increased market dues yet again, causing an astronomical increase in food prices (Bayraytay, *Expo Times Gazette*, August 5, 1996).

In January 1996, a reporter commented that the town council had no right to fine people for unsanitary compounds, as the town council toilets were so mired in urine and feces that the reporter admitted to nearly "vomiting my guts out" (Anonymous, *The New Storm*, July 2, 1996). Residents were so fed up with the lack of rubbish disposal in the town that they took to throwing their garbage at the market and piling it up in the town's thoroughfares in protest (Momodu, *Concord Times*, August 23, 1996). As they had done when SE Johnny took over, people were once again complaining about the unsanitary conditions of the town, and the council reported having no refuse lorry with which to clear the garbage, and no land on which to dump it. Apparently the truck provided by the NPRC had never been maintained, and the new council had no money with which to service it (Lans and Konoh, *Punch*, September 6, 1996). No one was sure what happened to the plot of land Pa Fornah had ostensibly secured for rubbish disposal. After a hopeful start with the NPRC, by the end of their tenure in national government in 1996, the NPRC's town council proved itself as unable to forgo money chewing for community development as had every previous council, and the town was once again mired in *dɔti*. A new national government could not prevent the council from once again drowning in its own corruption and literally being buried in its own filth, reflected in the town once

again being so “unhealthy,” “unsanitary” and covered in garbage that it was no longer “lively” or “a nice place to live.”

I pause here to visit the fate of Cleaning Saturday, through which the NPRC kept the town clean through sheer coercion. The town became bogged down in filth only after the town council’s embezzlement scandal came to light, resulting in nearly the whole council’s suspension. Because the NPRC had elected every member of the council, its failure destroyed any moral force the NPRC had to back up its physical coercion of citizens, and thus any obligation the citizens had to respond. And even though Cleaning Saturday died along with NPRC credibility, people engaged with the council as much as was necessary to survive. Traders continued to pay the minimum market dues to keep their stalls in a new market complex that had been funded by a European government, even as they were selling their wares while sitting on piles of garbage.

The NPRC, however, had failed to break the cycle of corruption that dominated local politics, which was reflected in the continued failure of development of the icons of community development. Not only was the town once again unhealthy and unsanitary, it still lacked decent roads, reliable electricity and water supplies. What it had gained was new structures: Wusum Stadium, a rehabilitated Town Hall, and a new market complex, that stood as reminders of the potential of government to develop the town, though these structures simultaneously spoke to its corruption, self-interest, and failure, and the council’s attempt to corral people into positions of increased taxability, and deflect their attention from the real issues plaguing the town. The sparkling new stadium loomed over garbage-filled streets, the market complex circumscribed traders and allowed for easier collection of market dues, and the refurbished town hall, aside from keeping records of taxation, reminded people that the councilors were comfortable. In spite of all this, the conflicted narrative of governance, “maybe they are trying” speaks to the people’s inability to give up hope completely, in spite of their inherent cynicism.

*“Maybe they are trying”:* bargaining between hope and cynicism in a narrative of governance

I observed an animated conversation one day between my neighbors, who were arguing over whether the current town council was responsible for the salaries of the town

workers who had not been paid under the previous town council, though the argument also touched on whether or not they should have been paid at all, seeing as they were sanitation workers. “*Prɔblɛm dɛn de buku,*” said one, “*ow dis nyu kownsil go trai i dɛn de no get moni?*” [There are so many problems, how will this new council do anything if they have no money?] He thought the national government should be forced to offer the new council a clean financial slate, and pay off the debts of the previous council that it had appointed. One man agreed with him, arguing that starting with debt was just setting this council up for failure, and was a deliberate act by the president to weaken local government. The other argued that without knowing the pain the town’s debt causes a council, this new council would never learn to be honest, and would fail anyway. If they paid the workers and found a way to bring the town out of debt, then they could be trusted. But could the workers? Was the lack of pay the only reason they failed to keep the town clean? “*Yu go pe yu tax dɛn?*” [Are you going to pay your taxes?] asked the first man, and the third just laughed. The very existence of this argument meant people were still passionate about having their own local government, and in spite of their cynicism and hesitance to participate, wanted it to work. But would it work if every resident refused to pay his or her taxes?

My neighbors’ argument was not resolved that day, but it illuminated the essential paradox of the Makeni town council, namely that it has never existed in a climate of either honesty or success, and though people were hopeful for the new council, they neither expected that it would succeed, nor would put themselves out of their way (by paying taxes) in order to assist money chewing by potentially corrupt politicians. They would, however, signal their cooperation with a yet untested and unproven, yet untainted, council in the meantime by participating in any developments that it offered that required no monetary sacrifices on their part. The new council initiated several public development projects in its first months, including coaxing a national cellular phone company to install refuse bins around the town. This was a project people were willing to engage with.

These bins, the first that I had ever seen in Makeni, filled up in less than a day, and even after they were full people balanced garbage on top or piled it around the base of the bins, almost as a challenge to the town council to prove that it was working. The

council chairman, having been denied a refuse lorry by the national government, secured a second-hand lorry from the Catholic Church, and the council workers emptied the bins every week, often driving around the entire town with a lorry full of garbage so that people saw they were trying. It was only a small act of cooperation, but it signaled to me that if the town council proved itself willing to try to do some community development, the community would try as well. It was an act as tentative, cynical, and yet hopeful as the narrative itself. “Maybe they are trying.”

*Doti* is a metonym for town-council relations in Makeni town: the more you see of it in the streets, the greater the tribulation in the relations between townspeople and their council, and this is usually sparked by the council failing to do their part to keep the town clean, literally and in terms of corruption. Mounds of untended garbage, often deliberately thrown by residents, is both the outcome of and protest against a failed town council. On the other hand, when residents actively use rubbish bins, they are putting their “force” behind the town council, as one man stated, to do what is right for the town. When politicians fail, the sense of betrayal in the town is palpable. This, as Scott sees it, “implies an earlier faith” in them (1990: 107), even if people are disinclined to admit it. Living in poverty, possessing a fundamental suspicion of the world in general and the town council in particular, illustrated in the mass disinclination to pay taxes, is the dominant popular motivation (see Scheper-Hughes, 1992: 516). Faith and mistrust are dialectics of discourse and action in a political environment that lacks a default state; what we would call a “normal” or everyday. In terms of Makeni’s environmental gauge of town-council relations, there are only states of more or less encouraging.

In Makeni’s history, there is just enough single-serving “community development” projects such as a rehabilitated stadium, or, in the case of the 2004 council, the erection of a town abattoir, to keep residents alerted to the fact that the council might be working, even though most of these projects are funded directly by outside donors. The long-term projects belonging to the council, however, like water and power, or maintenance of existing structures, rarely last for long; or emerge in fits and starts of different councils attempting to “develop” the town. So the rehabilitated stadium was never fitted with electricity, the new abattoir was never planned with a connection to either a well or a safe sewage outflow, and thus do all “development” projects in the town

sit uncomfortably, incongruously, in the landscape and in peoples' imaginations as unfinished, unworkable, or perhaps not-yet-decayed. "Buildings are typically made to last," stated Hunt, "they can transform a landscape for years, decades, and even centuries and outlast generations... architecture inspires visions of immortality and transcendence" (2005: 156). For better or for worse in Makeni, his words ring true. There is nothing "normal" about this situation in Makeni, where buildings are reminders of the transcendence of failure. People feel betrayed when their politicians fail to live up to their expectations, but no one puts their faith on the line so much as to pay taxes. And so successive councils inevitably fail, and buildings senesce into decay, as they could not have done otherwise.

### **Making meaning from the remnants: the landscape of failed community development**

Overlaying these small "development" successes and failures on the streets of Makeni loom larger icons of the ultimate failure of town councils, both past and present, to sustain a better quality of life for residents. The three icons I highlight below are the unfinished clock tower in Independence Square, and the rusted out remains of the Waterworks and Power Station; all of which sit like festering sores in the town's landscape; its enduring *dɔti*, enduring tributes to council—and residents'—failures to "force" development. The clock tower and utilities have failed for different reasons; the former because a criminal engineer abandoned the project and absconded with the funds, the latter because no amount of cooperation, legal action, or pleading could induce various councils, residents, and the national government to trust each other to work together. Makeni stands alone among the provincial capitals in its lack of a clock tower or working utilities, and it is these icons that fester in people's hearts when they discuss Makeni being backward. Both the residents and the people that govern them failed to push community development projects to fruition, even when endemic corruption may have had no part to play. The sabotaging of public infrastructure by the people who could have benefited from it because of an inherent mistrust in authority is a salient example of how moral choices are made, and the consequences they have, in a world where a taken-for-granted "everyday" is absent.

*Makeni is incapable of developing itself: the clock tower*

Independence Square is not the geographic center of Makeni town, but residents speak of it as the “center” of both town and the nation. Roads leading off from Independence Square, which forms a star in the commercial heart of the town, go to several other major towns: Kabala, Kono, Kamakwie, Freetown. In the past it was the location of the central market, which sprung to life to take advantage of the railroad. On the eve of independence, the market was cleared to create the new Independence Square, which was meant to celebrate Makeni’s position as a central node of the country; a full participant in the new independent nation.<sup>9</sup> Bo and Kenema both have central squares; each dominated by a tall clock tower. Makeni does not have a clock tower.

Pictures of Independence Square published along with the first shining reviews of the Pa Fornah’s Makeni town council in 1994 show a square that is garbage-free, with some well-tended shrubs to mark the roundabout’s two concrete risers (Lewis, *The New Citizen*, January 10, 1994). Today, the square is dominated by a half-built, half-rusted and worn structure, spanning the risers and creating an unpainted concrete arch over them, with garbage strewn about the base. Fifteen feet of cinderblock tower give way to rusting metal poles sticking willy-nilly out of the top; construction that was begun and never finished. This eyesore that now dominates the center of town, crowning a square symbolic of the town’s place as a gateway to everywhere else in Sierra Leone, was meant to be a clock tower.

It required a trip to the archives to emerge with this particular “factual” answer. The social truth of this construction is that it is less of an unfinished clock tower than a symbol of the town’s backwardness, its origins and purpose a mystery to most inhabitants, its most obvious feature being its lack of utility, polish, or grace. It now serves only as a wall on which to pin posters for upcoming events, or to string up political banners and policy messages. “Vote APC!” the structure urges passersby, or “Come to the reggae concert in St. Francis Hall!” Beggars sit on the broken concrete benches, and someone has built a podium on one side of it from which people can draw crowds and

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<sup>9</sup> This was a similar argument as was put forth by the AFRC in Ghana when they demolished the Kumasi central market in 1979 (Clark, 1988b: 70).

make announcements. A UN battalion planted a “peace tree” by the podium to celebrate the end of the war, and it struggles to survive amidst the rubbish that surrounds it.

Aside from the structure’s intended purpose on its conception, what occurred was the erection of an icon of the town’s failure to thrive (see van der Geest, 1997: 546), a reminder on which people to ponder how people’s efforts to bring community development were betrayed, into which they pour their dreams of what seemed possible in Makeni’s past. Several young men posited that the structure was meant to hold a nightclub, though its diminutive size obviously betrays this. Mr. IBK outlined the great plans for which the structure was conceived: it was proposed by the first town council as an integral part of Independence Square, and was meant to hold a clock, a carillon, a restaurant and bar in a massive five-story complex. It was intended to be a monument to Makeni’s emerging greatness in the new nation, he said, but the council lacked the money to finish it. Bo has a monument in each of its three main roundabouts, and a clock stands in one of them. Kenema has a massive structure, the Peace Pavilion, which was refurbished by a Bangladeshi contingent of UN soldiers before their departure in 2003. Makeni has an ugly edifice of concrete and wire that serves only as an obstacle. As Luise White reminds us, an “inaccurate jumble of events and details” presented about the past does not invalidate people’s beliefs about it, in fact they more accurately portray how people struggle to make sense of the past; in this case immense gap between people’s dreams about the potential of the town and its sad reality (2000: 4).

In 1996 the NPRC Secretary of State for the North, Lt. Col. ABY Kamara announced his intention to construct a central clock tower for the town (Turay, *Expo Times*, February 7, 1996). The aim of the clock tower, said Town Council chairman Ali Kargbo, was to create “a symbol that will enhance the prestige of Makeni in the town’s bid to twin with other cities abroad”, while Lt. Col. Kamara said that although the clock would not provide a direct source of income for the town, it would “beautify and add dignity” to it. In the midst of a war that threatened the town, immediately in the wake of a scandal involving town councilors embezzling millions of leones, and while the Secretary of State continued to fail to provide the town with electricity and water, he and the town council appealed to “intellectuals and wealthy men” in the province to challenge the “negative attitudes” he complained townspeople had, which prevented their taking



interest in contributing to the town's development (Senessie, *Daily Mail*, February 10, 1996). The project would cost Le22 million, of which he collected Le8 million from the community members he complained were so recalcitrant. The council hired an engineer from Bo, Lamin Hassan, to oversee the tower design and construction.

Construction began, and five months later came to a standstill when Hassan disappeared with Le14 million he had been paid to start construction. After erecting the pillars and the arch, he just left town. The council was unable to locate him, and the arch remains as it stands today. One reporter commented that the council could not understand why Hassan would do this, as they had provided all the material comforts they could to encourage the engineer to do a good job. He stated, "the spectacle depicts the apparent incompetence of the community with the Makeni Town Council in the vanguard to carry out major development programs in the township of the northern region headquarters" (Toure, *Freedom Now*, August 28, 1996). Critics called the arch "obstructive" and "disfiguring" to Independence Square, but because the community prayed that Hassan would return, the skeleton of the structure was never torn down.

The skeleton of the clock tower is an icon of development hope and development despair, dreams partially realized and dashed, but lingering with the thought that perhaps someone will come to finish them. It is symbolic of the town's languishing behind its sister provincial capital towns, which both have towers marking their main roundabouts. The residents still could not force progress in the town, in spite of the fact that they had momentarily set all cynicism aside and invested in it. This is proof that even endemic corruption was not okay, it was not "everyday," and yet the scar remains.

In 2004, the APC town council drew up a development plan for Makeni for the next ten years, and the rehabilitation and construction of the clock tower was a priority for council chairman, Musa Mansaray. In March 2006 Mansaray was forced to resign over an embezzlement scandal involving the disappearance of millions of leones given to the council by the World Bank for community development projects. Up to that time no progress had been made on finishing the clock tower. This monument is a testament not to the townspeople's ability to produce development, but to the town's backwardness. Every time a council scandal postpones work on the clock tower skeleton, now eleven years old, the townspeople watch their previous development efforts erode before their

eyes, and they are not encouraged to try again. This is one reason the Water Works and Power Station are also mere hulls of rusted metal, instead of working infrastructure.

*Water and power: the refusal to pay bills and the hastening of decay*

When the NPRC seized the government from the APC and forced President Momoh into exile in Guinea, it inherited a provincial capital in shambles. The new town council, with the assistance of the youth, rid the town of the most obvious signs of its deterioration, garbage, and undertaking projects like the construction of a park next to the town hall. It was good for the spirits, remarked one of my friends, however, “It was like putting lipstick on a prostitute. Everyone knew that these were not real changes.” However crude this comment may seem, it strikes at the heart of the inability of successive governments to work with the people to push fundamental community development that people craved. The mistrust between community members and government officials which was brewing before the 1955 rebellion caused an explosion of violence which lingered in the consistent refusal of residents to pay taxes to any local government. This extended to a refusal to pay utility bills under their own corrupt APC regimes, and this refusal did not abate during the NPRC regime, in spite of whatever “new spirit” had developed among citizens to beautify the community. What was the heart of this seeming paradox of demanding development while refusing pay for services rendered?

In February 1994, SOS Major Sewa had found money to re-start the water pump at the Water Works and restore some pipe-born water to Makeni (Anonymous, *Liberty Voice*, February 17, 1994). This was only partially successful, as the mains were rusted and much of the water leaked out of the pipes and was lost. The temporary re-start was “lipstick”, not fundamental rehabilitation of decrepit infrastructure. In September a newspaper reporter commented that the town was once again without piped water (Lewis, *Concord Times*, September 7, 1994). The yearly convention of National Union of Sierra Leone Students was held at Makeni Teacher’s College, and, he said, “The newly arrived delegates curse and swear because there is not a drop of water to drink let alone to bathe, all this at the peak of the rainy season!” The head of Sierra Leone Water Company (SALWACO) visited Makeni and admonished the community members that the company

would not rehabilitate Water Works and the pipes unless it received a binding agreement from community members that they would pay their bills, which began at a base rate of Le3000 (about \$2.50) per month. Residents in Bo, Kenema, and Lungi had all agreed to the rates and had been paying their bills, so Makeni residents must agree to do the same if they wanted the same services (Lama, *Daily Mail*, September 20, 1994).

As no further mention was made of piped water returning to Makeni, one can only assume that no promises were forthcoming from the people, and apparently they had cause to be suspicious. In our interview, IB Kargbo attacked the endemic corruption at SALWACO, noting that even though the company was set up nearly fifteen years ago, it had never succeeded in bringing water to Makeni. Kargbo insisted that as citizens of the country, and especially as residents of a provincial capital, they have a right to water, it is an essential development:

SALWACO is supposed to provide water for people in the regions. But again it has not happened, it has been compounded by corruption, and inefficiency, and irregularities, to the extent that the managing director has been removed. And the new managing director is trying to find his way through to see how he can start the project again. Yes, we know that SALWACO has been set up deliberately for the purposes of providing water for Makeni and other places in the regions, but the problem is lack of efficiency, this office is not efficient, and corrupt! These are some of the problems. But it should not even be an issue, a town as big as Makeni should have water supply! Any responsible government should be able to ensure that there is water there... Makeni has no reason to go about begging for water, it is their right. They are citizens of this country.

In the glow of the NPRC, community members were, however, hopeful that they themselves could return electricity to the town after a ten-year absence. Inquiries made with the National Power Authority (NPA) revealed that NPA was unwilling to commit 30 gallons of diesel per hour to run generators that had not been maintained since 1978, which would bring them minimal profit even if people paid their bills (Bayraytay, *The Afro Times*, August 31-September 6, 1994). It was therefore left with the town and the NPRC to come up with a way to bring lights back to the community, and the resulting plea to the community's wealthiest members for funds resulted in the collection of over Le8 million (Anonymous, *The Daily Mail*, September 1, 1994). Responding to the "seriousness" of Makeni citizens in returning electricity to the town, the new Secretary of

State North, Colonel ABY Kamara, told the Paramount Chief that the NPRC would “come to the town’s aid for the first three months” (Lewis, *The New Citizen*, October 6, 1994). After that, it would be incumbent on consumers to pay for diesel.

In early October 1994, the power plant was switched on, and townspeople rejoiced (Anonymous, *Liberty Voice*, October 7, 1994). The town had been “returned to a state of civilization”, was “no longer a shanty town” or “no better than a village” and no longer had to “bear the shame” of being the only provincial headquarter town without lights, according to my interlocutors. The Secretary of State for Energy and Power, Captain Idriss Kamara, traveled to Makeni for the event, and in a speech to townspeople reiterated that the only reason power had been lacking in the community was lack of diesel to run the generators. His personal intervention had provided the town with its first 2000 gallons of diesel, but after that residents were on their own (Anonymous, *Unity Now*, January 9, 1995). It was therefore incumbent on residents to pay their electricity bills, as these bills went directly to purchase more fuel. The town would be electrified month to month, as long as enough revenue was generated to feed the generators. People must, stated ABY Kamara, “show their appreciation for electricity by paying their bills” (Anonymous, *Standard Times*, December 19, 1994).

This announcement, which was subsequently reprinted in several newspapers, placed responsibility for the town’s continued electrification on the people’s own shoulders. If the town went dark once again, it was a direct reflection on the inability of administrators to collect the community’s power bills, therefore also a direct reflection of the backwardness and lack of appreciation among its residents. No similar judgments were forthcoming on Bo and Kenema, whose electricity supplies were guaranteed by the hydroelectric dam, nor were the towns’ reputations as “developed” places threatened by the inability or unwillingness of residents to pay their electricity bills. Electricity in those two towns could continue regardless of any recalcitrance to pay bills on the part of its residents. These places were not so “backward” that an inherent mistrust of politicians and political promises precluded community progress.

When I enquired with my interlocutors if they thought people in Bo and Kenema paid their electricity bills, most assumed that they did, as residents of these two towns did not have to “go around begging” for electricity in the first place. In essence, because of

the infrastructural differences between the development that had occurred in the three towns, it was impossible for either Bo or Kenema to ever seem as “backward” as Makeni, simply because Makeni still relied on diesel generators, and this was proof that the government “did not love us as much” as Bo and Kenema. However, once the generators were switched on, the responsibility for whether or not they could run continually was removed from the shoulders of the government agencies and placed squarely at the feet of the town’s residents. Makeni was the abnormal provincial capital.

The euphoria of electrification was short-lived; soon to be replaced by the cycle of suspicion, defiance, and accusations of backwardness that had so long thwarted the town’s development. By November 1995, Makeni was once again without electricity, and Colonel Kamara was threatening the bulk of the town’s residents with criminal prosecution for failure to pay their electricity bills (Anonymous, *Daily Mail*, November 22, 1995). The diesel supply was cut off, and the town was once again cast into darkness (Koroma, *Unity Now*, July 22, 1996). Few of my interlocutors could comment on why this had occurred, as the connection between bill payment and electricity supply was obvious to them. “*Probleman den day buku*” [There are many problems] said one, “*pipul den day no tros di kownsil*” [people did not trust the town council]. He linked the refusal to the scandal that had engulfed the town council two months earlier. The embezzlement scandal resulted in the expulsion of most town council members. Under the APC the town council had been responsible for ensuring the local power supply (they were also convenient scapegoats for the APC regime when infrastructure did not run in the town), and the recent failure of the council was likely the spark that caused the darkness. Failure to pay bills, like strewing garbage about, was social commentary on the failure of the council. If the council was once again stealing from the town, then the residents would get what they could out of the infrastructure before it too failed, once again.

At the same time, SALWACO was appealing to residents to pay their water bills, and was conducting campaigns in the town to “sensitize” people about the importance of piped water in preventing diseases like cholera and dysentery (Lama, *Daily Mail*, September 20, 1994). I could find no evidence in the archives of when SALWACO had re-established regular water service to the community (it was not under the managing director who had been fired during my chat with IB Kargbo), but by January 1997,

apparently it had occurred (Kamara, *Expo Times Gazette*, January 20, 1997). The water supply was plagued with the same problems of resident delinquency as had been electricity, and only three weeks after SALWACO was “commended” by residents for returning piped water to the town, once again officials had to appeal to people to pay their bills. The Paramount Chief stated that delinquent ratepayers were hindering development in the area, especially as the water equipment in the town was so old that only the prompt payment of bills could ensure its replacement. Once again people were admonished that it was up to them to prevent the town from reverting to a village state, with all the accompanying village problems like disease, and that their refusal to do so would result in the town’s once again reverting to shanty status (Kamara, *Expo Times Gazette*, February 7, 1997).

In June 1996 the Power Station was shut down for the final time.<sup>10</sup> Individuals and government institutions, including the town council, owed the NPA over Le25 million, and all efforts to collect the arrears had, according to the chairman of the council’s electricity committee, come to nothing. The committee itself, which had begun with an input of Le8 million from community members two years before, was bankrupt and had to therefore cease its attempts to collect on the bills, for lack of money with which to pay collectors (Koroma, *Unity Now*, July 22, 1996). Captain Kamara’s initial admonishment to Makeni’s residents when he re-started the town’s electricity that the town’s development rested on residents’ own backs was a self-fulfilling prophecy. Regardless of whether or not people could afford to pay their bills, there was no historical precedent for the town council to cooperate with bill collectors, especially when such demands came in the wake of yet another embezzlement scandal, thus no reason for Makeni residents to trust that their development dreams were safe with their local government. Community members, let down once again by their council, would not take the risk of committing to shoulder the burden of paying for the town’s electricity supply.

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<sup>10</sup> I use this language of finality because in March 2006, the NPA informed the town council that they would remove all remnants of power equipment from the station in order to prevent it being looted for metal. The IMF reported in January 2007 that “plans are underway to install and commission a 1MW generating plant” to provide electricity for Makeni (2007a: 58).

<sup>11</sup> They were not, in the words of many of my interlocutors, “development-minded,” even though I would assess this moral judgment of residents’ relationship to repeated council failures as a comment on the fact that no government had ever laid a foundation of a stable, self-evident “everyday” of governance that would lead to people trusting them. They had been disappointed too many times.

Why should residents concern themselves with paying bills when the most basic promise of the government of the day, an end to the civil war, had not been fulfilled? The “culture of non-payment” (Ashforth, 1998 (2003: 232); Fjeldstad, 2004: 540) described here has as much to do with a general mistrust of both the national government and the personal financial aims of the directors of the vast, veiled bureaucracies that operate the infrastructure as it does with what Scott refers to as “classic non-compliance” with authority in general (quoted in Tripp, 1997 (2003: 167)). Both Ashforth and Fjeldstad worked in Soweto, historically a politically volatile, infrastructure-bereft part of Johannesburg. People refused to pay their utility bills to a new town council that was struggling to establish itself as a legitimate political force; a very similar situation to Makeni. As Monga reminds us, the non-payment of taxes and bills is regarded in most African countries as an act of civil defiance, of “reducing the amount of national wealth that has been salted away in Swiss banks” (1995: 377). The NPA and SALWACO directors all ended their respective tenures living in large mansions in Freetown. Multiple directors have been fired from both corporations for corruption and embezzlement, and Makeni has never received the sustained supplies of water and electricity that the people were promised and feel are their due. Therefore small amounts of water and electricity were not going to pacify people, it was the least of what was owed. Though Fjeldstad refers to this as a “culture of entitlement” (2004: 540), namely the mindset that development is a right and not a privilege, in Makeni this sense of entitlement is actually a sense of fairness; Makeni *is*, by virtue of its political position as a provincial capital, entitled to be as developed as Bo and Kenema. As the arrears mounted and the utility bills became impossible to pay, people were less and less inclined

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<sup>11</sup> Indeed, a 2005 IMF report noted that the national government of Sierra Leone only paid its own arrears to the NPA in 2003 after IMF prompting, and was still in Le4.5 billion arrears to the national phone company, water company, and the airport authority (2005b: 17).

to care about paying (see Redding, 1993: 66). Huge debts, money gone missing, and the end of utilities was merely proof that the system was corrupt all along.

However, in the end it was only the residents who suffered from their civil defiance. The machinery still operated when the Power Station was closed, all the town's power lines were still intact. They seemed to taunt residents with their silence, with promises unfulfilled. Women started stripping the power lines to use the wires in their coiled baskets. With most of the lines gone, NPA workers came once again in April 2006, though this time to remove the last remnants of machinery from the Power Station because the director did not want government property looted by "local criminals." If residents blamed the government for failing to take care of them, the NPA announced that Makeni was too backward even to respect the fragments of its own failings.

***"Pul doŋ the chairman": overambitious self-development, political revenge, and stymied community development***

From June 2004, when the new all-APC town council was inaugurated, to April 2006, when I left Makeni for the last time, there was a series of power struggles between the town council and the national government, members of the town council, and a movement of ambitious young people aching for a political voice. From these struggles emerged the theme of *pul yu doŋ sindrom* [pull you down syndrome], which results from jealousy at someone's singular and unshared success (rampant "self-development"), or potential for success coupled with the suspicion that others will not share in their achievements. Jealousy and suspicion of greediness are the most potent emotions moving people to action. It is the phenomenon to which people consistently point when they talk about why Makeni is incapable of sustaining community development. "The problem", said one man, "is that whenever someone gets a little bit of power, there is someone standing right behind him who wants some of it too, and their jealousy makes them do bad things."<sup>12</sup> Though fear of the powerful can also be a reason to pull one down, the events that I describe for Makeni illustrate examples where the most powerful

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<sup>12</sup> See Appendix III for a joke illustrating "Pull You Down Syndrome." Other examples are Smith (1994: 173) in Papua New Guinea, Ashforth (1998: 231) in South Africa where people use witchcraft to limit the good fortune of their neighbors, and Sanders in rural Tanzania (2003: 164), where witchcraft is part of a social economy of "nightmare egalitarianism."



member of the council was destroyed both by the national government, which, according to residents, was exacting revenge for the SLPP's loss of control of the town, by his fellow council members and other politicians who grated against his authoritarian control of the council, and by the least politically visible members of the community, the youth, who did not share at all in the town's "development." These youth, according to some people, just wanted to prove that they had the power to do something, even if it was bad. There was gratification to be had in preventing someone from succeeding alone.

The trouble began less than three months after it took control. Struggling under the debt of previous councils, it needed to find new sources of revenue immediately. Its attempt to take control of the Lorry Park, one of the main commercial centers in the town, resulted in a power struggle between competing political and economic actors and forced the council to concede revenue-collecting duties to a Union that had lost a contract bid but refused to cede control of the park. In the end the traders and drivers had to pay taxes to two collecting bodies, commercial activity in the park suffered, and the council was blamed. Less than a year later, a new civil society movement emerged, the "half-baked youth," as their critics derisively referred to them, succeeded in bringing down the town council chairman, Musa Mansaray. Mansaray's refusal to bow to accusations that he enabled the embezzlement of World Bank funds nearly tore the APC apart, and divided the town between those who supported him and those, many of whom stood to gain in the aftermath, called for his removal. "Everyone loses," said Father Samura, explaining his take on the scandal. "Now we have a truly corrupt man running the council, and how did the community benefit from it? No one can tell me that things are better now than they were just leaving the council as it was." Even gouging corrupt members out of a council is not a prescription for development, when the main agitators only wanted a position from which to "self-develop." In Makeni's recent political history, struggles for and accusations of self-development have continually pitted residents against each other and their political leaders, and precluded any successful long-term community development. The underlying theme points to the fact that, even though it is morally unacceptable, the current climate of economic desperation means that people *are* willing to risk disapprobation and social death in the pursuit of "development," if it means life is a little more comfortable, even for a short time. However, as Berry reminds us, a "big man who

fails to satisfy his subordinates' expectations runs the risk of losing their support, and, in consequence, much of his own influence and/or wealth" (1985: 8).

*Controlling the Lorry Park: personalizing politics  
and sabotaging community development*

The term "self-development" is slippery enough that people will invoke it positively when describing actions they are taking to better themselves, and in a hostile manner when discussing the overtly self-absorbed actions of politicians who, though not so corrupt as to bring down an entire council through embezzlement, are still brash enough to take money meant for community development. And because the people themselves put politicians in positions where they could possibly take advantage, politics is personalized. Voting for and supporting local politicians is at least as much a matter of personal feelings for a person as support for their policies. In selecting councilors in 2004, residents elected only those people who had remained in the town during the occupation; people whom they felt they could personally trust to "love" the town and its people and not abandon it to pursue better opportunities. Even as they represented vastly different political policies, all fell under the political banner of the APC, which meant they were firmly "northern" oriented and personally disliked the SLPP, who had blamed the town for the war. Aside from these similarities, there was little personal or policy cohesion among the councilors. This proved problematic, as I will explore below.

All of the elected councilors had played an important role in the town during the occupation; none had run away only to return once the town was deemed safe by the United Nations. The chairman brought the first food relief to the town before it was demilitarized; another member began holding political meetings in contradiction to RUF rules right under the RUF command's noses; another sheltered and trained women who had become homeless; another worked as the liaison between RUF command and the market women, demanding on their behalf greater access to food and medicine. All of these councilors were elected by large margins, and on their shoulders rested the hopes and expectations of the community that a precedent had been set; that the new councilors had already proved their worth in times of crisis, though they must now prove their mettle in a situation more resembling stability.

The town council, however, was not responsible only to the residents who elected them; they also had to work with Tejan Kabbah's SLPP national government, whose members, according to many residents, took it personally that Makeni had refused to support them after initial parliamentary elections even though they brought about the end of the war. "The residents here reacted very violently to Tejan Kabbah refusing to develop the town," said one interlocutor, "by electing an all-APC council, they are saying they don't care to work together with the government, they still blame Kabbah for abandoning them, they don't care that Kabbah takes credit for ending the war, they will still do things their own way." Kabbah reacted to this slight when he attended the council inauguration. As each of the new town councilors was presented to him, he nodded at them, but refused to participate in the deafening applause that thundered through the town hall. After the town council was introduced, the district council, to which all chiefdoms in Bombali District elected one representative, was also inaugurated. This council contained three SLPP members, and they alone received cheers and applause from the president. This act of overt partisanship by the president portended events to come, when the town residents accused the SLPP of sabotaging the council in order to gain a political foothold in the region.

The events surround the taxation and control of the Lorry Park, the transport hub and one of the main commercial centers in the town. Market sellers in the Lorry Park pay dues to the town council, and transport drivers also pay dues in order to stage transportation from the Park. Little is known about what actually happens to the dues drivers pay to use the park once it is collected; in fact many of the market women I spoke to who had stalls in the Lorry Park complained that the dues were supposed to go in part to keep the Park clean and provide sanitary toilets for them, neither of which had occurred. The Lorry Park *dɔti* was indeed so bad that I hesitated to enter the park the first time I went to visit; it was the rainy season and the puddles were full of garbage and sewage, small children who worked for drivers picked their way carefully through the mud and tried not to drop heavy bags of goods as they went. The place, though busy, did not look like the respectable center of commerce that it was meant to be, nor was it clear that the dues sellers and drivers were paying to in some small way keep up the park were being used at all.

None of the newspaper articles I read from the 1980's that referred to the recalcitrance of the Drivers' Union to cooperate with the town council mentioned what the Union ostensibly did with the monies they collected. Drivers who used the park in Makeni but were not official members of the Union had been complaining that they were paying exorbitant amounts to park their vehicles temporarily, and were seeing no benefits from this.<sup>13</sup> A representative from the union stated that the dues were saved to assist drivers who were in accidents or sent to jail for various offenses, though no one the journalist interviewed could believe they needed so much money for court fees, when the Lorry Park itself was in horrible condition (Anonymous, *The Weekend Spark*, September 30, 1994). In the 1990's, Pa Fornah stated that he had received assurances from the Drivers Union that they would pay taxes to the town council to ensure the maintenance of the Park and contribute to the town's development. This agreement, however, collapsed under the weight of Pa Fornah's scandal, and no Drivers Union since has been openly cooperative with a town council. Many people thought that the Paramount Chief supported their activities because he received a portion of the earnings, among other sources of income (see Jackson, 2006: 106-107). Thus did the Lorry Park *dɔti*, as the detritus of unbridled consumption among dues collectors, reflect some kind of endemic corruption within the Union. In 2004 the new council attempted to change this.

The new council had inherited the debts of every corrupt and inept council to that point, and one of their first acts of business was to raise some revenue for the council, if only to pay off debts and then start from scratch. Chairman Musa Mansaray was called "manly" by one journalist with his first act, the firing of eighty "unnecessary" council workers who had been on previous payrolls as personal favors from previous councilors (Bangura, *The New Citizen*, September 8, 2004). Many of them rioted, blocking the entrance to the council chambers and demanding redundancy benefits, which Mansaray refused on the grounds that they should be paid by the central government, which was responsible for the previous SLPP-controlled councils (Tholley, *Salone Times*, February 14, 2005). Relieved of some of the council's debt burden, he then set about restructuring the town's tax base, and his first project was to gain fiscal control of the Lorry Park. The

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<sup>13</sup> Though I do not know the requirements and benefits of membership in the Drivers Union, the sense I get from my interlocutors is that it is an invitation-only organization, and invitations are based on personal and political connections.

council abolished the previous practice of allowing grandfathered organizations to maintain informal control over public areas, and put a contract out to bid for the maintenance and revenue collecting activities in the Lorry Park, with the caveat that winning organization would pay a percentage of their earnings to the council.

The events that followed emerged in my notes as a jumble of accusations, personal attacks, and political divisions with residents taking sides on the issue of what political body should control the town. The residents of Makeni, depending on what side of the political spectrum they fell, engaged in conspiracy theorizing about who was attempting, through unscrupulous means, to gain personal control of the town by manipulating the contract award. Conspiracy theory is “a diverse set of communicative practices... that prioritize agency and fetishize causality in making sense of everyday incoherence” (Silverstein, 2002: 644). Conspiracy theories provide explanations for events that have occurred or are occurring, but that necessarily take place in secret because the involved actors—politicians, drivers—are not all-powerful (Keeley, 1999: 116). Unlike rumor’s power to simply reflect and direct people’s emotions about, for example, political powerlessness or inequality, and thus intensify their feelings and behaviors, conspiracy theorizing add refining detail and causality to the event, making it resonate with a particular worldview and giving a sense of order, however twisted, to current events. This is a much more acceptable state of affairs than the alternative, namely having to grasp events as based on either “chaos or blind chance” (Tackett, 2000: 696). Conspiracy theorizing is especially common where the work of politics is opaque; as Sanders and West state, “there is truth to be found in suspicions of power, [because] power does, without a doubt, conspire.” (2003: 15). The lack of clarity in my notes highlights the opacity of political intent, and therefore the cause of conspiracy theories, surrounding the Lorry Park affair.

APC supporters claimed that SLPP supporters were deliberately blocking any APC council efforts, while SLPP supporters claim that the town council acted illegally in its contract award in an attempt to undermine the continuity of the Lorry Park administration and thus demolish any long-standing and yet-to-be-formalized power networks in the town. The exchange of theories highlights the nature of conspiracy as, first and foremost, a form of collective political behavior that aims to make sense of a

world where contemptible dealings take place behind the scenes (Hellinger, 2003: 208), or as Masco states, “patrolling everyday life for the signs of a hidden master narrative” (2005: 40). In Makeni, people were only struggling to determine which of the possible outcomes, and which possible victor, was least damaging to the development goals of the town, no matter what actions were considered politically “fair.”

The same day the council announced that the Drivers Union would have to bid for the contract to control the Lorry Park, a local man known as a staunch SLPP supporter filed a lawsuit in the district court claiming that the contract bid was an act by the town council meant to sabotage his efforts to purchase the land occupied by the Lorry Park and privatize it. APC supporters in the town claimed that the national government secretly supported the man, and some ministers allowed the case to be held up in court for over four months so that no bidding could take place. Town council members pooled their own money to fight the court battle, which meant not only that no money was being collected from the park in the interim, but the council was also being pushed into debt against its own members. After several months, Mansaray announced that the case had been thrown out of court because the judge decided that no private citizen could bid to purchase historically common land that is being used to public purpose. The “sabotage” of the weakened council did not end there.

When the contract was put out to bid, the Drivers Union lost to the National Drivers Association (NDA), a “breakaway” organization, according to the SLPP-supporting Paramount Chief. Mansaray demanded that the Drivers Union cease all revenue collection in the Park immediately so that the council could transfer this authority to the NDA. Chief Bai Seborra claimed the council acted illegally in permitting the NDA to bid, as it had only eight months experience administering lorry parks in other towns, and the national government requires that when park administration is put out to bid, only organizations with at least three years experience can submit bids, which Mansaray had complied with when he set the specifications. Chief stated that the Drivers Union is the only organization recognized by the national government to perform such a task, and that the contract bid was “merely a formality” to make formalize the control the Union had over the park. Mansaray, however, explicitly flaunted his own bid specifications when he decided to hand control over to the recently formed organization.

The chief stated that he and the national government supported the Drivers Union, who were refusing to hand over control of the park and kept their sentries at its entrances in order to carry out dues collection.

Mr. IBK threw his support behind Mansaray and the council, stating that Mansaray had chosen the less corrupt of the two organizations. His evidence was the Drivers Union “losing” so much money in the past when it worked with previous councils. Another member of the council stated that the Drivers Union and the NDA were essentially the same organization with the same qualifications, the only difference being that the NDA was recently incorporated, and the Drivers’ Union was only kicking up a fuss because they were sore losers! They demanded a meeting with the council, and invited the police and army officers to attend. A council member described the meeting thus: “We don’t want anything to happen to Makeni that would compromise the security of the town. We have just been through a brutal war and no one wants it to happen again, so we have to take active steps to ensure that this is achieved. So, what should we do as a community to keep the peace? The stakeholders decided that the council should go back and re-think their decision. The council met again, and unanimously decided again that the winning bid, that of the national association, would be honored.”

This was all complicated by the fact that the contract bid specified that the winning bid would be the one from the organization that promised, through systematizing dues collection and perhaps even raising dues, to raise the most money for the town council. In short, the council would award the contract to the organization that promised the highest percentage of its revenues from dues collected from the drivers and traders who worked in the park. Though this could have been done by increasing the percentage of revenue handed over to the council, leaving less for the Union (and its activities within the park, like cleaning); the winning bid specified that the NDA was planning to increase dues slightly. This whole process thus created instant friction between people who used the park and the council, for whom they had voted and who had promised to work in the interests of promoting business in the town. Traders and even those drivers who had been excluded from membership in the Drivers Union began to support the Union instead of the council, and every deadline that the council set for the Drivers Union to hand over

control to the council passed unheeded. In spite of this, there were no confrontations between the two. Why?

I went to the Park to investigate (the day I initially hesitated from the sheer unpleasantness of the place), and one of the drivers pointed out some young men who were standing at one of the entrances. He said, "It doesn't matter what happens because you see they are collecting dues anyway." Were "they" representatives of the Drivers Union? No, he said, they were members of the other organization. The council had stationed them in the park to collect dues. The Drivers Union was also collecting dues, but because the council did not recognize their legitimacy, they in turn paid no revenue to the council. The Union leaders were pleased with this arrangement, as they retained informal control of the Lorry Park and yet did not have to hand over any revenue to the council. The council, however, needed money, and was willing to concede control if they could make some revenue anyway, in spite of the fact that there was still no initiative to rid the park of *dɔti*. Mansaray confirmed this for me, adding, "the government has decided they are going to offer very little support to the town councils financially, so we really are on their own in terms of funding our activities."

Though this made the council look foolish, Mansaray felt they had no option except to express, in a small way, their legitimate control of the park and force money into the council coffers. However, Bayart notes that tax collection is one of the most common opportunities for public officials to practice extortion (1993: 77), and to the taxed, this looked no different. The lack of any council effort to clean the park appeared to be punishment for the drivers and traders who eventually supported the Drivers' Union because they would not raise dues. This result, like the impasse that eventually shut down both Power Station and Water Works, is a result of the incommensurability of council ambitions and revenue collection with traders and drivers so used to living under a corrupt organization that they are actually suspicious of changes that appear to result only in more money going into someone's pocket. As a result of their mistrust, and the inability of powerful people to rectify among themselves not just who should be responsible for the park, but who had the right to profit from it, resulted in the Park not only not being cleaned up, but being deliberately allowed to become further mired in *dɔti*.



This inability to enforce council supremacy over local revenue collection meant that the council took a position alongside the Drivers Union, with both organizations collecting revenue on their own behalf, and the unaffiliated drivers and traders paid dues to two collecting bodies. In Chapter Three I analyze the frustration that the traders experienced with this new arrangement, where they inevitably railed against the town council and threatened to stop paying market dues altogether unless they were relieved of their enormous tax burden. It was at this time that traders I spoke to reminisced about how much better life was under the RUF, when the chief and his dues collectors had run away, there was no town council and they were allowed to get on with their trading while paying taxes to no one. The irony of this nostalgia is that, if the SLPP government was attempting to sabotage the APC town council in order to persuade people to vote for the SLPP in the next election, they succeeded only in swinging the traders' support towards the one "governing" body in the past that had allowed them free reign, namely the RUF.

Who was it that "sabotaged" community development in Makeni during the Lorry Park struggle? The town council attempted to seize control of the park to raise urgently needed revenue for the town, and councilors claim they were blocked by a vindictive SLPP government that wanted to destroy any success the APC might have in proving the party's ability to govern, though the council had the interests of its constituents at heart. SLPP supporters see that the council, a product of the "violent reaction" that residents had to SLPP rule, was attempting to bypass convention and law to push through a contract that would reward them with the greatest income, to the detriment of the traders and drivers in the park, flaunting contract specifications and betraying those who voted for them and the authority of the national government.

The resulting impasse, in which both Union sentries and council sentries collected dues from park users, marked the end of the SLPP's supposed meddling in local council affairs, as their chosen union still controlled the park and support for the APC among traders was weakening. The finances of the council, and the councilors, were in a desperate condition when they began their own unofficial dues collection at the park. One man gave me the Krio consumption proverb, "*empti bag no de tinap.*" Though this proverb normally sanctions consumption among the working poor, in essence that a person who is not fed has no energy to stand, let alone be productive, it is also applied to

financially strapped organizations. In this case, the council was so impoverished by its political battles that it had to concentrate on feeding itself, no matter the consequences in the town, before it could think of anything else. Though this episode was not outright corruption, it is illustrative of “the evidence of the weakness of public institutions and the strength of private appetites” (Jackson and Rosberg, 1984 (2003: 29)). Here, the appetites of well-concealed big men who initiated the trouble for control over the town were briefly revealed. The appetites of the politically hungry youth, on the other hand, were not concealed, and erupted into the public space a short while later.

### *Half-Baked Youth and dreams of wealth and social prosperity*

A year after the episode with the Lorry Park, a new civil society movement, composed predominantly of unemployed young men, developed and was instrumental in pushing the townspeople to reject the leadership in the town council. Before I analyze the corruption scandal that resulted in Musa Mansaray being forced from the Town Council and the APC party, I will explore the origins and drives of this movement, the Makeni Union of Youth Groups, though its numerous critics in town called it the “half-baked youth union”. Calling a young man “half-baked” is the ultimate insult; it implies that he lacks even the foundation of *gud trenin* that would result in his full socialization as an adult enmeshed in networks of mutual obligation with adults, and also of his partial formal education of which he thinks too much. It is a comment reserved for young men, many of whom were originally school migrants from villages who, though they have completed only a little bit of schooling, reject manual labor on farms; youth that were called by colonial administrators in the 1950’s “dead end kids” (Fanthorpe, pers. comm., October 2006). They insist instead on staying in the towns and looking for salaried jobs, and while they are unemployed spend their times drinking *poyo*, smoking marijuana, and talking politics in the town’s ghettos.<sup>14</sup> They are the result of what Southall (1988: 4)

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<sup>14</sup> This phenomenon is present around the world. Peel noted that in Yoruba society, the youth who were not successful academically “were not prepared to live in rural society or work on farms” and instead moved to the urban areas looking for white-collar jobs (1978: 157). Papua New Guinean villagers talk about *rubis* youth, particularly semi-educated migrants, who do not help their villages, but instead drift from town to town, working some but mostly living off friends and kin (Smith, 1994: 227). The attribution

discusses as the paradox of “modernity” in parts of the world where it has brought few benefits to either country or city life: “The question of whether rural-urban migrants are better off in town is not a question of whether modern life has brought improvements in traditional life—which it should and could but in the vast majority of cases has not—but whether modern urban life, even at its lowest, offers more to migrants than can the modern, oppressed, exploited, impoverished countryside.” Migrants hope that urbanization automatically means “progress.” For many of these youth, the disappointment they suffer when they are unable to force progress in their lives leads to time spent conversing angrily with others in the same situation about how the government of Sierra Leone has failed them.

Most adults in the town consider these young men to be not only criminally idle and unproductive, but are concerned that they think too much of their paltry educations, and the resulting half-witted intellectual arrogance is a socially dangerous enterprise. It is one of the primary movers for political *Pul Yu Don Sindrom*, where youth who feel that their educations entitle them to mingle with educated and powerful members of society are content to bring down people higher on a ladder they are incapable of climbing themselves, and from whom they feel they will receive no benefit, as they form no part of the latter’s networks. And because their numbers are vast, they often succeed. Their tendency to *blɔf* (make too much of themselves) and wait for white-collar jobs to appear is cited by residents in arguments about their lack of shame about being consumers while waiting for self-development to find them.

The disdain that most youth have for farming is not a new phenomenon, nor were the goals of self- and community development always incommensurable among semi-educated youth. At first, the youth just wanted to participate in the offerings of the developed world, and many intended to use their training to promote community development. Michael Jackson worked in Kabala, in northeastern Sierra Leone, in 1969 on the “mystique of literacy” and how education ultimately failed the children of farmers. Though they originally engaged zealously with education in order to “help” themselves

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does not exist for girls, for whom the transition to adulthood is marked more gradually, with initiation and marriage, and is less dependent on their work status (see Cole, 2005: 894).

and their country, these children found no careers with which to do anything waiting for them at the end of their schooling.<sup>15</sup>

In my interviews with school students I was struck by the poignantly impossible gulf between their dreams and their reality. Though most were the children of farmers, they showed their disdain for farming in the zeal with which they laundered their uniforms, washed their bodies, manicured their fingernails, and, at one time, wore white gloves on their hands. Thirty years have passed, but as I leaf through the tattered stacks of paper that I have lugged around the world for so long... I read of ambitions to become a doctor, a teacher, an engineer, “to help my people,” “to help my parents,” “to help my country,” and wonder what became of these dreamers when they left school and found their hopes dashed. Of sixteen-year-old Marie Kandeh, for example, who wrote: “As we all know that education today is the key of life, anyone who does not try to be educated will be just like a slave.” (2004: 149)

Slavery was the fate of one chained to farming and with no option but to do what one’s parents said and did because the mind has not been trained to think on more important things. Researchers such as Fanthorpe (pers. comm., October 2006) and Peters (2004: 26-28, 2006: 40) have found that in the years leading up to the RUF war, children and youth in rural areas were effectively slaves to chiefs and other “big” people. They were subjected to forced labor, could not marry for lack of money, and lived under the thumb of the powerful. Education was, and still appears as, the enlightened exit for children who wanted greater opportunities. Thirty years later, opportunities to help one’s country by pursuing white-collar occupations are not present for semi-educated youth, who achieved only the first aim of leaving their villages and extricating themselves from the control of powerful elders. These are the “youth”, a nebulous category of people Shepler (2004: 11) defines as “someone who is no longer a child, but is not yet a big person.” A “big person” is defined socially as well: it is someone who has the personal wealth and social connections to marry and carry out sanctioned economic activities. Some men in this category, as the Sierra Leone National Youth Policy implies in defining a youth as anyone between the ages of 15 and 35, may never achieve these milestones of social adulthood (see Utas, 2005: 141, for similarities from Liberia).

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<sup>15</sup> See Nkinyangi (1991: 166) on how students for whom employment was always lacking are the most likely to engage in protests and riots against the government and educational policies.

These youth possess a modicum of control over the direction of their lives and a willingness to engage with a larger political world on their own terms. These youth—poor, unemployed, without prospects—are “a node of energetic discontent” in the public arena when they choose to be visible (Bastian, 2003: 77). Theirs is what Scott (1990: 19) refers to as “infrapolitics”, which Fatton describes as “a social space [beyond the visible spectrum] where subordinates develop their own discourse” (1995: 68, see also Hoffman, 2003: 297). By retreating into the town’s ghettos and holding their political conversations in a place invisible to the rest of society, the youth keep their politics below the radar, and emerge as and when they please. The potential for violence in these emergencies is omnipresent. From the first of Freetown’s *pote*, gathering places where youth smoked, drank, and talked, came the bulk of the city’s street violence. The *rarray boys*, alienated youth, who frequented these pre-cursors to the ghettos, were known for their anti-social tendencies, including murder, even when they emerged for ostensibly political reasons (Abdullah, 2005: 176-177). This situation has been replicated in many places in Africa, such as Congo-Brazzaville, where in the 1990s, the private militias of politicians were comprised almost entirely of unemployed school graduates and dropouts with ambitions of mass political mobilization (Bazenguissa-Ganga, 1999 (2003: 91)).

The ghettos themselves are spaces that define and situate the “invisible” and “dangerous” conversations and activities that occur there. One of Makeni’s main ghettos is located just off Independence Square, a stone’s throw from the town’s main business thoroughfare and near the Lorry Park. Its “big man” is a Rastafarian who calls himself “Opa” or “Father.” He told me that he arrived in town with the RUF in 1998, and “established my business” in the dark back alleys out of view of most people. The legitimate face of his business, that which made the ghetto acceptable to people during the RUF days, was the fact that he had built and maintained a public restroom, complete with washing facilities. People, especially Lorry Park traders, pay a few hundred leones to use the facilities, and therefore “they do not bother us much,” he said, offering me some *poyo* and directing me to a space where about a dozen young men were lounging, drinking and passing around a cigarette. Though Opa is not young, he defines the interface that is the ghetto: it is an integral part of public space, one that traders accept because it provides them with a service, even as they decry the activities of its patrons as

morally suspicious. Their *tɔk-tɔk* [idle talk] is dangerous, argues Abdullah, because, among the angry and poorly educated youth in the ghettos immediately before the war, it was their obsession with violence as a way to change the system that spawned the “so-called revolution” of the RUF, which used horrendous violence to compensate for lack of popular support; as opposed to a “conscious revolution” with real backing (2005: 184).

As Diouf explains, youth in Africa are a paradox. They are seen as the chief actors in their societies’ struggles against poverty and backwardness. Simultaneously, because they increasingly seize control of, in Diouf’s words, “their bodies... their behavior, their sexuality and their pleasure” as is in evidence in Makeni in their proclivities for ghettos, night clubs and penchant for fashionable clothes and accessories; their emergence in the public and political arenas is perceived as a threat to the social and moral order (2003: 3-4). He notes that in recent years, the youths’ status as the potential saviors of their nations has been eroding, and is being replaced increasingly in popular perception by the view that youth are criminally unrestrained. Though marginalized, youth in many places are determined to show their identities, “both as victims and active agents” (Diouf, 2003: 5), and they do this in most places by occupying geographies, such as the ghettos, which escape state and social control.

The primary goal of the youth in controlling their own lives is to control their work, i.e. their “self-development”; which to this point in Makeni had been mainly a matter of discussion rather than action. Though the socialists in the community (such as an agricultural community-based organization (CBO) that promotes farming as self-reliance for the youth) preach against salaried work as just another form of slavery, they have thus far been unsuccessful in convincing semi-educated youth of the merits of this route. And so the youth sit in the ghettos, idly chatting, deriding the politicians who make big promises and follow through on nothing. After 2004, their conversations turned increasingly to the failings of the town council, and most specifically its leader, Musa Mansaray. Mansaray was one of only two university-educated members of the council, and other councilors and the youth began grumbling that he was taking too high-handed an approach with the rest of the council and the town, using his educated status to run both as his personal kingdom.

Some political scientists see authoritarianism as an almost necessary component of political rule in Africa because the state is not structurally tied to society, making it impossible for a leader to exercise systematic power (see Hyden, 1983 (2003: 26)). Alexander (1997 (2003: 189)) found that at the local level in Mozambique, people wanted leaders who were “educated but not too educated, wealthy but not too rich, local but not too local” so that they could deal with people fairly and compassionately, though also intelligently and dispassionately. Similar qualities were sought among Kumasi’s traders when leaders were needed (Clark, 1994: 276). It is a fine line to tread. Necessary to the functioning of the council or not, Mansaray’s authoritarian style was socially unacceptable, and the youth acted. Their violent entry into civil society in this case is illustrative of the socially transformative power of youth, for better or for worse, when moved to enter the public sphere from the margins. Though criticized by some who thought little of their half-witted bullying of authority figures, they were lauded by many as harbingers of a new age where youth once again took center stage in shaping a desired political future, and took up the reigns of community “development.”

*Pulling down the unpopular leader for the good of the big men:  
self-developing politicians, half-baked youth and the fallen cotton tree*

I sought specifics about why Mansaray was unpopular among the youth and among other council members. One of the main reasons was because, even though the council members were not getting full salaries from the government, Mansaray was too strict with the budget and would not “loosen” his control over the money so that other council members could have some. Though no one stated directly that other council members wanted to pay themselves from the budget, it was implied that they fought for places on committees that had larger budgets. People were grumbling that Mansaray was trying to sabotage the council because he was Mende (see Fanthorpe, 2005: 44). He has a Mende father, though the senior Mansaray lived in Makeni from 1930 until his death. The proof of his disloyalty was that he had fired local council workers without paying them redundancy and was content to extract money from Lorry Park traders without pushing the Drivers Union out. Clearly he did not care about the welfare of the people. What two

years prior had been “manly” acts were now acts of an authoritarian ruler who felt no compulsion to provide public good to those under his ostensible protection.

In March 2006, news broke in the Freetown newspapers that Le85 million from the town council’s development budget, which had been provided by an international donor, could not be accounted for. Culverts that could have been built for Le5 million were recorded as costing Le20 million, contracts were awarded to contractors without being put out to bid, and contracts were paid for in cash instead of checks requiring multiple signatures (Anonymous, *The New Citizen*, February 1, 2006; Anonymous, *The New Citizen*, February 2, 2006). The APC, SLPP and Mansaray each set up their own investigating committees. According to Mansaray, none of them found him “personally wanting.” The money had gone missing, and though he was the chairman of the council while this occurred, none of the money had gone into his own pockets. Mansaray told one journalist that the accusations were a plot by “old politicians” in the APC who would gain power by forcing him out (Koroma, *African Standard*, February 7, 2006).

He steadfastly refused to step down, as he was not personally corrupt, and there were other members of the council, such as the procurement officer and the treasurer, who should take the fall before him. Both were forced out of the council, but Mansaray remained (Anonymous, *The New Citizen*, February 7, 2006). The rumors surrounding his unpopularity, namely that he was disliked because he refused to allow other council members to dip into council funds to fill their own needs, seems contradictory to this accusation of corruption; namely that he allowed other members of the council to dip into council funds full stop. Nevertheless, it resonated with a general disapprobation of politicians in Sierra Leone who, as Shaw discovered in her conversations with diviners, are castigated for “consum[ing] the foreign aid intended for the poorest people of Sierra Leone, arresting the flow of benefits which ‘big persons’ are expected to channel to their community” (1996: 39). Money was expected to flow through the council to the community, from the “biggest” person, Mansaray, through other council members, to the townspeople. What was unacceptable was that the money stopped flowing at a high level within the council (see Bayart, 1993: 233; Jackson, 2006: 107).

Mansaray’s refusal to resign was greeted with outrage. How could he be so arrogant as to claim he was not responsible for the council’s finances? Former



supporters, including IBK and IB Kargbo (the editor of *The New Citizen*), called publicly for his removal. The national leader of the APC, Ernest Koroma, threatened to expel him from the party if he did not resign, and still he refused, citing the fact that no accusations of corruption could be traced back to him, that he was, in Father Samura's words, "an honest man surrounded by thieves." At this point, community groups in Makeni joined the political fray. Mansaray was denounced by the Drivers Union and the Petty Traders Union, both of whom despised him over the Lorry Park affair. The Makeni Union of Youth Groups, composed of youth that had taken up a platform in Independence Square two years earlier to urge residents to vote for him, now used the platform to call for a sit-down strike to protest. For one day, the market was closed, no motorcycle taxis operated, and peddlers stayed home (Anonymous, *The New Citizen*, February 13, 2006). Mansaray stepped down and moved his family out of Makeni after receiving numerous death threats, though he stated that he did not resign because he was guilty, but in the interest of maintaining peace in the township (Anonymous, *The New Citizen*, February 14, 2006; Anonymous, *Awoko*, February 16, 2006; Gbenda, *Awareness Times*, April 3, 2006). The success of the strike was not simply down to the political will or persuasive powers of the youth; rather this was the last brick removed from the dam, releasing a political tide that was already in motion. As Scott states, "Events that weaken the power of dominant groups are analogous to the weakening of a dam wall; thereby permitting more of the hidden transcript to leak through and increasing the possibility of a complete rupture" (1990: 219), even though as journalist Theophilus Gbenda noted, it was accomplished through "undemocratic means" (*Awareness Times*, April 3, 2006), thus undermining the righteousness of the exercise.

According to several people, the youth turning on Mansaray had nothing to do with his honesty or capacity to run the council, rather they were reacting to rumors spread by the drivers and traders about his personal involvement in the embezzlement. The critics of the "half-baked youth" state that the curse of having a town replete with the "half-baked" is that in the absence of reliable information or the education to think critically about information, the majority of people take what they hear as infallible truth. Especially among those with no education, receiving a word about the town council chairman from someone who possesses a bit of education makes that information seem

reliable. And this is why, stated one interlocutor, Makeni is condemned to be backward. In an educational vacuum where rumor is the dominant form of information transmission, no one will ever be satisfied with the political situation. In other words, the largely partial nature of residents' education is hindering development because the people are too ignorant to engage intelligently in politics. Therefore as long as Makeni is full of the incompletely or poorly schooled or otherwise illiterate, it will keep moving backward.

His conclusion echoes the analyses of many researchers who pronounce "civil society" movements, especially in Africa, to not be "civil" at all. Ikelegbe states that many civil society movements in Nigeria have become "so parochial, divisive, divergent and disarticulate that they actually undermine democracy" often on platforms of ethnic militancy and violent confrontation with the state (2001: 1). Fatton (1995: 73) noted that the "big men" who lead movements in Nigeria seek to ally with or join the state, not to reform it, and Alexander (1997 (2003: 182)) found the same was true for civil society leaders in post-independence Mozambique. In Burundi, citizens do not trust the neutrality of civil society organizations, which are usually politically aligned and thus politically manipulative (Ngosi, 2006: 236). In Makeni, this particular movement was inarticulate and poorly informed, but through anger and force of numbers cowed the educated residents into silence and succeeded in challenging the populace to confront the council, even though it came to light that it was the big men who silently orchestrated the movement that ultimately benefited. After explaining his theory, my interlocutor encouraged me to talk with the men who had benefited from Mansaray's removal—the "old politicians"—the same men Mansaray had accused of plotting his downfall.

The Paramount Chief was pleased that the new civil society movement was so "vibrant" that they succeeded in bringing down a corrupt politician. From his perspective, any civil society movement that is able to force political changes is forcing the state to become more responsive to its people, thereby increasing its legitimacy (see Barkan, et. al. 1991: 459-460). And the new council, having seen what happened to the last incarnation of the council, is better now because it was shaped directly by the people and does not overstep its bounds. The Chief liked the fact that the new council chairman was not trying to wrest traditional powers away from the chief, as Mansaray had done (see Fanthorpe, 2005: 47). This council was finally falling in line with the reasons the

UN had initially argued for the reinstatement of town and district councils after the war, namely that they would aid “in the restoration of the beneficial role of the paramount chiefs and other native authorities” (quoted in Owusu, 1997: 139).

The Paramount Chief had been asked by the new chairman to appoint an advisor to the council among the older politicians, so that it would not go astray in the future. The Paramount Chief assigned his cousin, Mr. IBK, to this position. When I arrived back in Makeni in 2004 after a year’s absence, Mr. IBK was not speaking to his cousin because he felt that the chief, loyal to the SLPP, had deliberately sabotaged his own campaign to become an APC member of the new council. When, on my neighbor’s advice, I sought them out in the wake of the council scandal, I found them lunching together in the chief’s house. The Chief had extended the olive branch, in the form of a political appointment, to his estranged cousin, and it had been accepted.

Mr. IBK called Mansaray “a crook of the highest degree,” and a man he had never trusted, even though two years earlier, at the inauguration, IBK confided to me that Mansaray, as a highly-educated man, was the best choice to run the council, and had steadfastly stood behind him during the Lorry Park affair. When the embezzlement scandal erupted, IBK drew together his own team of investigators, who found that Mansaray was personally responsible for Le80 million of the missing money. The team asked him to repay the missing money and he refused; the APC party asked him to resign and he also refused. He said that he answered only to the resident minister for the north and that man had not called for his resignation, therefore he would not resign. IBK then discussed how under the APC party constitution, the party can call for a politician’s resignation in cases of corruption. And because Mansaray claimed that he was not corrupt, he could not be brought down under the corruption clause. Mr. IBK then revealed that he had personally organized the Makeni Union of Youth Groups and encouraged them to stage a strike. In the end he gained a position of power on the council that he was originally, and he felt unjustly, denied. He supported the new town council chairman, around whose financial activities in the council rumors were already swirling. “The other councilors do not like him,” said my neighbor, “and they will pull him down too.”

One cannot know the “truth” of what happened with the missing money, who was to blame and in whose pockets it ended up. Everyone in the town took a side on this issue; many did so simply to air grudges against a council that had taxed them, or to express their dislike of someone who was too powerful and not only not sharing the benefits with his constituents, but was forcing them to pay taxes. As Chabal and Daloz (1999: 34-35) state, politicians only succeed in Africa if they are both wealthy and generous enough to keep their positions. Those who do not appear to be credible patrons do not last long in office, even as they are openly trying to “clean up” political office and initiate development. By failing to maintain any balance in this regard, Musa Mansaray, “corrupt” or not, was not conforming to expectations that he would run the council to the direct benefit of the most people, both to other council members and the wider community, including the youth. The youth in this case, though acting in the public space, were what Diouf calls “stakes” in that other groups, in this case the “civil society” movement, sought to capture them and use them to proclaim success in the endeavor of pulling down the chairman (2005: 229).

As Fatton states, civil society’s inability to replace public goods normally provided by the state means that its members must always rely on more powerful individuals to advance their causes, and cannot, therefore, ever be a fully democratic movement: “crippled by material limitations and class impairments it constitutes at best a very uncertain substitute to what had previously been the corrupt and class-based patronage of a more profligate state” (1995: 72). In short, the youth could never overhaul the town council to represent their own interests. However, the slighted individuals who could gather enough power around themselves, especially among those people who saw no benefits under the council—the angry, unemployed uneducated youth—could force a resolution in which they regained a development foothold, namely any access to a patronage network of political elites, that they had lost when an overambitious individual attempted to flaunt the system.

Thus the youth, who did most of the work in pulling down the chairman, exercised only temporary power: they gained some political legitimacy and potential patronage for themselves, and a somewhat reorganized council for the town. Latham calls this “situational power”, because it is not hegemonic, rather it is exercised over a

brief period of time within a delimited space (2001: 82). However they achieved their victory only to transfer real political power to yet another ambitious individual, whom they still stand behind. Mr. IBK is what Goheen (1992 (2003: 102)) refers to as a “modern big man”, namely someone who uses his access to the state and knowledge of modern political processes, as opposed to more “traditional” forms of power such as control over subordinates and land, in order to increase his personal stature (see also Foster, 2002; 69). The youth thought they were acting as a “bulwark against state power”, as Barkan et. al. describe civil society movements that act to make government more accountable to the people (1991: 460). However, what they accomplished was transferring power from one non-transparent political network to another, and pinning their hopes for a better future on Mr. IBK recognizing their sacrifices on his behalf and using his position to in some way benefit the youth, his new clients (see Murphy, 2003: 69). However, as Fatton states, democracy is impossible without the empowerment of subordinate classes (1995: 89, also Monga, 1995: 375) so though they were criticized by many for using their numbers as a blunt instrument against the chairman, they did succeed in shifting the reigns of power. Thus were the youth empowered, and, no matter the outcome, strengthening the democracy they championed.

However, several of my interlocutors noted that, in spite of the youth movements’ success in reorganizing the council, they were still not powerful enough to act on their own, even against fallen big men like Mansaray. One told me the Krio parable “*Kɔtin tri fɔdɔm te, i ay pas gras.*” This translates to: when a cotton tree [a massive tree that stands as the symbol of Freetown] falls down, it is still taller than the grass that surrounds it. My Krio book explained it thus: *we a man pas yu, i pas yu. Iven in brok-don sef pas yu,* literally: when a man passes you, he passes you. Even when he has broken down he still passes you. My Krio teacher translated this as: even when a big man (either wealthy, politically powerful or morally sound) is toppled, he is still greater than the little people who are still standing. Mansaray’s supporters cited this parable as a reason they would never cease to support him. His enemies, some of whom themselves had broken down in the past, like Mr. IBK, used their positions as being “higher than the grass” to mobilize the grass to their purposes, and pull down a cotton tree. The old politicians still had supporters, and could use the public will to pull down powerful and ambitious people to

their own purposes. Thus in spite of their own desire to self-develop, the partially educated youth were merely pawns in the political game. And because Mr. IBK is now only an advisor to the council, rather than a councilor, it is uncertain how much he will be able to influence their activities, and provide for his hopeful clients. It is likely that the youth will once again become disillusioned with the political process, and when this happens they will be easy for another politician to use to his or her own purposes.

## **Conclusion**

I contest that one can elucidate political-economic state of Makeni most saliently in the physical state of the town and its infrastructure, and how residents themselves are acting on this infrastructure. When the place is full of *dɔti* and people are either defiantly doing no cleaning or even contributing to the garbage problem, one can see that their relationship with the town council is poor. The defiant decrepitude of public infrastructure such as a the Power Station and Water Works stand for the inability of successive town councils to work with residents in an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect, and reflect to the rest of the country that this relationship, its physical manifestations and the people who created it, are “backward.” Eventually the people held most responsible for these problems—almost always members of the town council—are publicly destroyed and replaced with other individuals who face the same problems, temptations, and expectations of political largesse as their predecessors.

The townspeople have been through an endless historical cycle of being hopeful about new town councils, seeing some improvements in the town, watching in horror as a corruption scandal occurs and is fueled by rumors and conspiracy theories, pulling down the ostensible culprits, and celebrating their political victory as new politicians scramble to take the place of the deposed. When most of my interlocutors condemned the town to be forever backward, they pointed to the inability of any town council, past or present, to work honestly for the development of the town as one of the main reasons. The expectation is that politicians should be different from the masses of impoverished citizens in that they should use their personal good fortune to produce development for

the community, while most people who scramble for their daily meals can only be expected to put their efforts towards *smɔl-smɔl* self-development at most.

What has happened in Makeni since independence is that politicians work for themselves, and are only different from the “little people” in that the successful politicians possess an ability to manipulate others to assist them in their self-development while concealing this particular intent. As Ferme (2001: 19) stated about Mende “big men”, their power lies in their ability to conceal their intentions, thoughts, and the meanings of their actions beneath the surface. In this sense, Mansaray and other town council chairmen of councils past were not the true “big men”, as their actions were forced to the surface. Those who forced the downed politicians to reveal themselves are the real big men, as they gained in the end without appearing ambitious to develop themselves. On the contrary, they presented themselves as community-driven. Whether the current big men are actually concerned about the community and can use their positions in government to bring the ostensibly benevolent progress people desire remains to be seen. When the politicians fail, the most obvious signs of political unrest occur, as mentioned earlier, in the market among tax-paying traders, in the protests and explosions of *dɔti*. I address traders and the market in the next chapter.

## Chapter Three

### **The market's moral mosaic: Balancing capital and moral authority**

The Temnes were a lively crowd, better traders on the whole than the Mendes, and in the mornings the center of Makeni was a hive of activity. The mammy-wagons started from the square, and above the hubbub could be heard the shrill cries of lorry boys: “Mabonto! Mabonto! Who de go?” Every Syrian trader’s verandah was lined with tailors busy working their foot-operated Singer sewing machines, while their customers patiently waited for their clothes to be finished.

JA Bull, *Palm Oil Chop*, 1944

Older people and the colonial record both remark that Makeni has “always” been a lively market center, as the population first grew with the opening of the railroad in 1916, and has attracted traders from around the country and region ever since (NAB, boxes CO 537 875; CO 267 611; CO 267 622; CO 267 649). The town is notable for attracting traders from around the country, as two of the country’s main highways intersect through it. The market is a chief metaphor for economic and interpersonal relations in Makeni, and how the current “everyday” is a world of endless financial struggle and suffering, and cannot, as it stands, creating a “normal” market that people crave, where everyone can make morally sound profit and live comfortably. In this chapter, I examine how people negotiate both the moral and economic benefits and pitfalls of engaging in trade, and how the different types of trade through which people create and enact economic relations in the town reflect a trader’s particular levels of wealth, as well as their permanence in the landscape of the town. This can be mapped through the goods they sell, where they sell them, and which authority taxes them.

I argue that the general poverty of the township is making it nearly impossible for traders to make “good,” or productive money and keep their profits, and themselves, safe. Just as people invest small amounts of capital in creating their personal permanent homes



in the township—in many cases erecting one wall at a time as the money comes—so do they yearn to be able to invest in their businesses, steadily moving up the ladder of capital investment in the business, its placement in the town, the permanence of its structure, and the personal security of involvement in insurance schemes. This is a difficult balancing act in the context of staying both respected and invisible. Successful merchants do not seek attention, because it attracts notice such as jealous competitors or unscrupulous tax collectors. The most permanent businesses, those in concrete structures along the main streets, often run by the people who own the buildings, are also the most firmly embedded in relations with the state, and often considered the most morally bereft by residents. This is because they sell luxury goods that only the rich can afford, pay taxes to a government that does not assist townspeople, and are the main suppliers of goods that are themselves not “productive” for families, and are thus questionable.

They sell the goods they can make money on: western clothes, cellular phones, and diamond mining supplies, that are purchased mainly by young people who earn their money in morally questionable ways, such as prostitution and drug dealing. Their other patrons are honest youth who are still morally suspect because they are “self-developing,” and do not return the profits of small businesses back to their families. Conspicuous consumption by the young is the signaling of desire for a “better life,” a permanence that is specifically divorced from networks of kinship obligations where small profits are divided among many; they want a life that is not so “backward” because success is stymied by the needs of too many kin. In addition, youth who live on the margins feel that because they do not earn their money in moral ways (see Utas, 2005b: 67; Voeten, 2002:11), they cannot try to use it for moral purposes. Thus are the most permanent, most capital-rich businesses interdependent with the most shadowy, impermanent transactions born of poverty (see Nordstrom, 2001: 235; 2004: 207).

Most traders try to operate on a middle ground, selling basic necessary goods out of semi-permanent stalls, the only place where they can maintain a moral high ground while still making some profit. However life is still not “normal” for traders. Most live “only in the nick of time” because the capital is not there to trade comfortably from a large stock. They pay too much tax to various government entities (who plead poverty and a need for revenue) because, they argue, being relatively poor and socially

unconnected, they are vulnerable to harassment by dues collectors. The government, including the town council, “eats” money, as I elucidated in Chapter Two, and it is a primary agony of traders to pay taxes. There are too many people selling and not enough customers, and their customers can barely afford what they sell. Traders who have the capital and connections will try to negotiate a way to sell goods from the global village, things like used clothes and donated food, on which they can make almost pure profit and morally justify their earnings by bringing needed goods into the town. However, very few people have this money and these connections.

The *ought* in the market, the exemplar for which everyone strives, is a successful business that is morally justifiable, necessary and appreciated by customers, subject to minimal tax harassment and maximum benefit from taxes they pay. The *is* makes this seem nearly impossible to achieve: a capital-rich business in an impoverished town serves only the rich and is therefore innately immoral, the scrambling for cash that occurs on the margins and in the shadows is equally morally bereft. The bulk of traders, who struggle in the middle, are caught in a market flooded with goods, patronized by few reliable customers, taxed heavily from all sides, and seeing no real benefits from a government “which only makes promises,” according to one trader. Thus does the quest for “a better life,” which everyone wants, seem an inherently dangerous venture. There is no way to “get ahead” financially without being either immoral or the target of jealousy, which is why most people work hardest to create a reliable foundation of profit in their social relationships, their customers. “Wealth in people,” one of the pillars of being a “big person” in Sierra Leone (see Shaw, 2002: 171) is the most essential component to a trader’s reliable income.

I will first outline the way the market has layers reflecting both the relative wealth of the seller and target purchaser, and layers of inclusion or exclusion from the formal economy, that define where on a spectrum of legality and legitimacy—moral and legal—different trades fall. These include luxury goods, sold along the main thoroughfares, basic goods, sold in the central market and along the highway where village women attempt to circumvent taxation, the “global” goods sold in the interstices of both markets, straddling wealth and respectability, boxes that youth can place anywhere and move at a moment’s notice, and the entertainment market, where marginal youth trade in illicit

substances and women sell the only commodity they have: themselves. I examine how people working in various different markets justify the various moral stances they take, as well as how they strive, through their relationships, to move into “better” trades, where they can make more money and achieve higher levels of respectability.

Second I address the new taxation schemes that forces traders to become visible and legible to the state, when in order to make any money from marginally profitable trades they must remain as invisible as possible. The national government introduced two formal taxation schemes concurrently: an insurance and social security scheme, and a revenue authority, aimed at incorporating all businesses into a legible and taxable structure. Traders who make small profits resisted these measures. They argue that they cannot afford to raise the prices of their goods in an already over-competitive market, nor can they afford to pay all the taxes and also feed their families. The new levels of regulation, they argue, are stifling the once lively atmosphere that made working in the town profitable. It also forces the profit margin so low that traders who used to send their children to school with their profits can now only feed their children, thus creating an aura around trading that it can only provide for basic consumption. Market trading, as a “dead-end” occupation, encourages youth to find other avenues for “self-development.”

The situation is so abnormal, according to one trader, that she is nostalgic for the days of the war, when taxes were non-existent and a trader relied on her wits and daring and could live on her profits. Traders currently want to be ignored by government, which they resent for taxing without representing. A real government would use the taxes to bring real “community development” to the town, which would attract people and make trading more profitable. Profitable trading would be mutually entailed with the “development” of the town, and then taxes and social security would be a good thing, as they would mean a trader had security in her relationship with the local and national governments. However, as I analyzed in the last chapter, there seems no way to reach the *ought*, as long as people refuse to pay taxes to councilors that “eat” their money.

### **Where there are profits: the structure of the market**

Alfred Gell described in a 1982 article a market in Madhya Pradesh, India where the structure of goods being sold reflected the hierarchical relationship of the value of the goods being sold, and also mirrored social relationships (1982: 470). The cheapest and most ordinary goods, sold by peasants, were on the outer rim, and the most expensive, an old man selling precious gems, occurred under the tree that formed the central spoke of the market (478). Though not possessing such an obvious structure as the wheel, the market in Makeni similarly maps socially “good” consumables with respectable sellers, and morally precarious goods with those who do no “good” for the town. However, the mapping is messy: the most morally and socially valuable goods, basic commodities, are sold in the less visibly prominent and densely crowded market structures, while the most morally questionable, and financially and socially expensive goods—luxury goods, conspicuously consumed goods, and nightclubs—are on the main thoroughfares.<sup>16</sup>

Like Akropong in southern Ghana, the most important aspect of Makeni’s market is that most goods sold are brought into the town from the outside and consumed locally (see Middleton, 1979: 248), because aside from the overwhelming desire for “modern” imported goods, there is simply not enough fertile farmland currently under cultivation to provide the town’s food needs. However, critically, unlike Akropong, there is little money coming in from the outside with which these goods are purchased. And like traders in Kumasi, Ghana who figure “profit” as the money made above and beyond the requirements for filling basic needs, little actual profit is made in Makeni after taxes and provisions (Clark, 1994: 314). Thus does the market reflect the town’s poverty, and not its wealth, and thus do the different trade items offered in Makeni reflect the increasingly flexible moralities that can be attached to different goods, as long as some “good” is coming from the profit to the family and their social networks.

The permanence of a trader’s presence in the landscape in turn reflects her incorporation into official taxation schemes, and therefore how much various government entities can control the person. Traders who sell things that people need, such as rice and palm oil, work on slim profit margins, and so, if they are not grumbling about taxation,

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<sup>16</sup> See Appendix I for a map of Makeni Town.

organize to protest and avoid it. The best way for a trader to make a profit without subjecting herself to full government scrutiny and taxation is to sell quasi-legal and quasi-morally-legitimate goods, from pilfered food aid to second-hand clothes, from the global market. By entering this market, traders must walk a fine moral line of bringing good to the community, lest their profits be spoiled by moral questions over the seemingly unearned nature of profits from such goods. However, by doing so, a trader can move back into fully “legitimate” trades in permanent spaces, selling goods like sandals, pots and pans, and other basic items that everyone needs and no one questions.

*The roads are paved with wealth: the façade of “community development”*

In this section I address the luxury businesses in Makeni, and how what appears on the surface to be “development,” namely the sale from Makeni’s expensive storefronts of items such as stereos and refrigerators, is providing the town with little durable good. I argue that instead, these items are both cause and effect of rampant “consumption” that people grumble is forcing the town “backward” in the wake of the war. Traders who are already wealthy, namely those that come from Freetown, open shops along the main roads that cater to the morally suspect members of the town’s population, especially diamond traders and NGO expatriates.<sup>17</sup> The townspeople themselves receive no benefit from these businesses, however the chief, the town council, and their various dues collectors do, and so support and encourage them.

Makeni’s official central market for food items and other small daily necessary goods is located off the main square, tucked down a narrow side street and spilling out across the northeastern edge of town. It is named after the previous Paramount Chief of Bombali Seborra Chiefdom, Bai Seborra Kamal II, who passed away in 1992, and was built in 1994 by the NPRC-appointed town council in order to move most of the traders into a single location where dues collectors could find them more easily (James, *Daily Mail*, January 17, 1995). However, when first walking or driving around town, this particular market is invisible; one only sees the trade that occurs on the main avenues.

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<sup>17</sup> I address why expatriate NGO workers are morally suspect in Chapters Six and Seven.

One first sees the town's luxury market at Independence Square and up Rogbaneh Road, Makeni's "downtown." Luxury goods are displayed from brightly painted storefronts in the high vehicle traffic areas; stores advertise liquor, cellular phones, appliances, and electronics. Conspicuous display is for conspicuous consumption: these stores do not cater to the majority of Makeni's people, rather they are crucially situated along paved roads in order to attract the attention of wealthy people in vehicles; the "big men" in town, the diamond dealers, the NGO workers. In 2003, when I first visited Makeni, many of these buildings were war damaged and dilapidated and only a few businesses occupied them. All of this changed within a year, when landlords, confident that war was over, refurbished buildings and put them out to lease. Many of these men, some of the town's first "big men" in the 1970's and 1980's, now live in Freetown, and either lease the buildings or have relatives run businesses for them. Most are wealthy, which is why, in the words of one man, "you don't see them in Makeni." New vendors moved into the buildings, some of them natives of Makeni who made money elsewhere during the war. There is a line of clothing "boutiques" selling the latest in hip-hop inspired clothing and jewelry, a "hardware" store selling generators, fans and refrigerators, and the competing cellular phone companies set up offices across the street from each other. The main diamond buying offices are also here.

The owners of these stores have the capital to respond to the changing tide of desire among the youth, in many ways courting less than moral behaviors. During the diamond rush in Kamakwie, every building supply store along Rogbaneh Road turned itself over to selling the tools of the trade: shovels, sieves, water pumps and small generators to run them. Vendors repainted their storefronts to reflect these new items; painting shovels alongside huge diamonds to alert would-be miners to the items, and the possible futures, available to them inside. Wealthy traders could afford to make drastic stock changes; their poorer neighbors could not. At the peak of the diamond boom, the head of the Diamond Buyers Association built his new house at the end of the business district of Rogbaneh Road; a massive two-story marble structure with a razor-wire topped wall and outdoor lights. The house, he said, was a reflection of the wealth of diamonds, and was proof that this kind of wealth is possible for ordinary men like him. In spite of the fact that few youth profited from their time in Kamakwie, many continued to seek

their fortunes in the mines in the east. The stores, however, did change. Once the local diamonds dried up the demand for mining tools from the stores ceased. Most of building fronts were painted over again, and the shops returned to selling their original wares.

The fortunes of these shops did not wax and wane along with the fortunes of the would-be miners who brought their dreams of prosperity to the counter when they scraped together their last few leones to buy a shovel and sieve. They merely profited from these dreams, and could conspicuously drop them once the diamond boom was over. “These shops make money from nothing,” commented my research assistant Mohamed, pointing to the fact that many of the headphones for sale in the electronics shop had been taken off commercial airplanes. He noted that they do not post prices on anything so that when they see a wealthy man or white person enter the shop, they can automatically charge them more.

He had brought me back to the electronics shop to demand a refund on a short-wave radio I had purchased for which the price had been doubled because of my skin color. “*Dis nɔto fayn prɔfit* [This is not good profit],” he admonished the boy behind the counter, “*Wɛtindu yu pul moni frɔn di wayt uman lek yu no gɛ shem?* [Why would you shamelessly take money from a white woman?]” He shrugged and showed me his empty palms, “*Di moni dɔn- dɔn, ah no gɛt.*” [The money is gone. I don’t have it.] In essence: easy come, easy go. The boy who made the deal had likely pocketed the baseless profit and quickly spent it on something equally baseless, like clothing. Baseless profit, which all of these stores that dealt in luxury commodities seemed to generate, was not morally acceptable (see Parry, 1989: 71; Falola, 1995: 166), but also because it seemed to generate nothing in return. No one was sweating in pursuit of goods, luxury just came off the boats in Freetown, and the profits from it disappeared. The seller who has the capital and connections to deal in imported luxuries does not have to conform to the market norms expected of traders who sell basic consumables, as maintaining their capital does not depend on maintaining good relations with customers. They therefore have much greater scope to be morally corrupt.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> This is in marked contrast to the markets in Tamil Nadu, India, where Fanselow found that the large stores tended to deal in standardized commodities with standard prices, as opposed to the bazaar, in which commodities, and their prices, were secreted (Fanselow, 1990: 255-257).

*Basic consumables, haf-haf foods, and living “in the nick of time”*

The market for daily consumables is not as prominent as those businesses that must champion the luxury quality of the goods in order to attract potential consumers. Most of the traders in consumables pay dues to the Petty Traders Union, which elects representatives to liaise with the Paramount Chief and town council and broach the traders concerns, especially about taxes, and to represent their collective interests to various government entities.<sup>19</sup> Foodstuffs that are sold in bulk, such as rice and bread flour, are sold from the Lorry Park, which was the subject of political battles noted in the previous chapter. This park is the town’s center of long-distance trade, as it caters to traders who travel to Kamakwie, Kabala, Kono, Magburaka: all either district capitals or diamond towns. Lorry park traders also cater to the drivers’ needs for things like vehicle parts, motor oil, and hot meals. This last product, which consists of plates of rice and sauce, was, when the first woman opened up a cookery shop in the 1950’s, considered scandalous because she was exchanging food for money (see Hutchinson, 1996: 162). Though cookery shops are more acceptable now in theory, as drivers need hot meals on the go, what is scandalous is that a meal that can be made for Le500 at home costs Le3000 from a cookery shop. Unless a cook can argue that she is covering her taxes, rent, and other needs, her business is morally suspect.

Lorry-riding traders, not local families, are the regular customers for the bulk rice sold in the park. They take it further up-country and sell it to shopkeepers who sell the rice cup by cup. With the Kamakwie diamond boom, many lorry drivers established the new route to cater to traders selling rice to groups of diggers, as they could make massive profits in a town where rice was so much in demand from a grossly inflated population. When the diamonds dried up, those lorry drivers and their regular traders switched once again to the route to Kono, where many of the Kamakwie miners had returned, and rice could be sold in great quantities once again.

Rice is the most important foodstuff bought and sold in Makeni, and this is reflected in its ubiquity in every corner of the town. Traders who sell different imported

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<sup>19</sup> The Petty Traders’ Union only makes itself known when market dues rise. Berry states, “as in many organizations whose primary function is to protect members’ economic interests, members do not participate actively in union affairs until those interests are threatened” (1985: 130).



varieties in bulk have shops on every main road or travel juncture—the Lorry Park, along Rogbaneh Road, along the highway—in order to take advantage of the bulk long-distance trade. Inside the central consumables market, traders who have purchased bags rip them open and offer the rice for sale by the cup. Imported rice is offered alongside local rice varieties, in their yellow and red husks, and it is clear that the latter is a luxury item. Local rice, at Le800 a cup, is nearly twice as expensive as imported rice (Le500 a cup), based on the fact that villagers do not like to sell it, and traders must venture far to find it. People take pride in being able to offer local rice to guests, as did several families with whom I dined. One restaurateur is single-handedly working to coax into being a market for local rice by serving it to the complete exclusion of cheaper imported varieties. She places her business on firmer moral ground by doing so, as she is supporting local agriculture and giving women who grow rice a steady and predictable income. Therefore, even though she sells her dishes at Le3000 each, her thriving business amongst wealthy businessmen and politicians means that the morally suspect money they possess, and that she accepts, is being deliberately channeled back into the community.

As in Ghana, the majority of traders in both daily consumables and wholesale goods are women (Clark, 1994: 1). This is a logical ladder: women often inherit market stalls from their mothers, and can invest capital over time to expand the same business—be it rice, palm oil, fish, or other consumables—into a wholesale business. Others will take their profits and move laterally into household goods, or, if they develop connections through savvy trading, the *wold makit*, the “world market” of goods such as used clothes and food aid. Those businesses that require large initial investments, worldly intellect and considerable economic and social risk, such as construction, buying and selling diamonds, and luxury goods such as appliances and electronics, are solely the province of men. Not only do women rarely have the capital or connections to enter these arenas, but it is morally perilous for their families if they choose to do so.

The most visible food market in Makeni is not part of the central market, as it is women from local villages peddling surplus tubers—potatoes and cassava—from baskets along the side of the highway. There is no market for these foodstuffs among established traders who habitually visit villages searching for precious goods such as palm oil and rice, therefore women bring them to town hoping to sell directly to consumers who

cannot afford rice. They sit along Azzolini Highway (named after the first Catholic Bishop of Makeni), on the edge of the town, on the border of two chiefdoms and therefore in an area tax collectors do not frequent. Here they wait for people walking out of town who were unsuccessful in making enough money to purchase a cup of rice, and will settle for a few cassava. The highway is also a main loading and unloading point for buses and taxis traveling from Freetown to Kono. The advantage these women have is that neither Freetown nor Kono (a diamond-mining area) can grow enough food to support their populations, and so must rely on imports from other parts of the country. Though cassava and potato are not in demand, there is still the possibility that someone traveling up or down does not have enough money for rice. When the diamond boom in Kamakwie occurred, many of these women lamented that it was too far to walk to move their businesses all the way to Panlap, the village on the other side of Makeni marking the turnoff to Kamakwie. The market for root crops would have been great, as Kamakwie stopped producing food as land was turned over to mining. Instead the women living in villages on that side of Makeni benefited from the boom.

The one crop that these women produce that is in demand in Freetown is cassava leaves. Unlike the root itself, the plant's leaf is the most common ingredient in sauces and always in high demand. It is so popular in Sierra Leone that one never sees it being sold along the highway. Women who arrive from the villages early in the morning with both tubers and leaves sell the leaves to transport vehicles going to Freetown, especially during the rainy season when the leaves grow most quickly. At this time the leaves can be sold at a huge profit, according to one woman, because the soils around Freetown are so bad that they do not grow much of anything, and Freetown people are "hungry for it." It is mostly on the leaves that village women can make a profit from their farms. This fact makes it seem odd that when people from the villages speak of needing to get their cassava to market, they are always talking about the root and not the leaves. It is taken for granted that the leaves will always be sold, especially during the hungriest time, the rainy season. Cassava leaves are often the only crop standing between village women and destitution. "We thank God for it," said one.

These women are not seeking to be incorporated into the market, which is why they purposely plant themselves on the edges of town (see the map of Makeni, Appendix

I), and attempt to dodge the chief's dues collectors that had recently taken to waiting on the highway for women coming into town. Their daily presence on the highway, selling root crops that no one wants, is a reflection of the failure of the government's interest in promoting agriculture. If they had the seed stock and labor in their villages to grow rice, they would be growing rice. If the government repaired the rice mill that is currently rusting in Makari Gbanti chieftom, on the edge of Makeni, they would not have to labor for hours to process it, and rice would be plentiful and profitable. Then "the traders would come to us," according to one village woman. This market is purposely liminal; these women are farmers, not traders, and, using their words, "it wants to disappear."

The other basic foodstuffs sold along the highway are the *haf-haf* [half-half] foods peddled by itinerant hawkers, such as mangos, fried cakes, and other snack foods be purchased by travelers.<sup>20</sup> Petty hawkers sell these snacks, as well as more elaborate *haf-haf* foods such as condensed milk sandwiches (bread coated with margarine and soaked in condensed milk), in every corner of the town where people congregate. Many stake claims to permanent spots where they sell every day, and even though no structure exists to mark this spot, other traders respect it. Women who returned to Makeni in the immediate aftermath of the war were the first to sell *haf-haf* foods outside of the schools, which re-opened under the direction of Catholic priests eager to "re-educate" children away from the war. These women specialize in small portions that children can purchase with the coins their parents give them for food. Some choose specific classrooms to patronize. The woman conducting the best business in the school in which I worked sat in front of a detached classroom on the edge of the athletic field, where she had a captive market for her bean sandwiches. Her best relationship is with Father Samura, who does not extort any money from her for the privilege of selling to the students. If she were taxed on such small profits as she made from the children, her business might be ruined.

Traders who have long-standing claims to stalls in the market inside town and can pay market dues on them peddle the foodstuffs, such as rice, that people in Makeni strive to purchase every day. The market is organized so that people selling similar goods are all in one area (as in Ghana, Clark, 1994: 7), so that prices and competition between

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<sup>20</sup> The designation "*haf-haf*" means the food, unlike a "real" meal, which is always based on rice, does not fill the stomach completely and provide strength and energy (see Carsten, 1995: 225). It can only "fool" the stomach into thinking it is full for a little while.

sellers of goods is fair, and everyone has an equal chance of having his or her goods purchased. This avoids fights between traders who might try to undercut the competition by selling from other locations, and is considered the only morally acceptable way to conduct business. It is up to the trader to establish personal relationships with customers, often giving her *padi* [friend] better deals so that they come back to her, and do not feel the need to get their goods from neighboring stalls. These market friendships are the basis on which traders can depend on a small recurring profit everyday.<sup>21</sup> Most friendships are based on relations built outside the market, however I observed many customers being coaxed to make new *padi* if they seemed indecisive about a purchase. I also witnessed an argument that exploded when one customer, in a rush to complete her shopping, bought items from a competitor when her *padi* was napping and could not be roused. “*Yu don me bad, padi!*” repeated the wronged seller, over and over, when she awoke. The matter was finally settled with the return of the goods and their re-purchase from the sleepy trader, though I do not know how long it was until she gave her *padi* “*swit*” [sweet] deals on goods again.

There are a few stalls in the main market where women sell cassava, though at higher prices than that charged by village women along the highway. It is only sold in the main market during the rainy season when rice is especially expensive, and is laid on the ground in Le500 and Le1000-sized piles. These women also sell processed cassava products like *gari*, ground and dried cassava. The main cassava seller was also peddling cocoyams, which are a delicacy and because of the lack of rain in Makeni, mature later in the year than they do in the south and the east. The cocoyams she had at the time were brought from Kono; she had met a transport truck from Kono on the highway that morning and purchased the yams off a trader who brings them, and other rain-dependent delicacies only available in the east, to Makeni at that time of year.

The food crops with the highest availability in the early rainy season, when the rice begins to run low, are the garden vegetables: pepper, eggplant, okra, corn, and the

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<sup>21</sup> This echoes Mintz’ work on Haitian *pratik*, or traders giving their favored customers lower prices (Carnegie and Mintz, 2006: 163). It is very different from the situation Clark found in Kumasi, Ghana (1994: 233), where the majority of traders reported not having any regular clients; which meant that the penalties for “interrupting” another woman’s sale, even with a greeting to the customer, were severe. It also differs from post-socialist Romania, where the relations between customers and shopkeepers are hostile and aggressive, rather than warm and friendly (Chelcea, 2002).

fruit crops banana, mango, and pineapple. These items do not fluctuate much in price from season to season, because they are either available or not, and when they are not available in the dry season there is no price for them. Mangos are so abundant in Makeni during March and April that most traders do not try to sell them. They offer them instead as signs of friendship to customers, or throw them in as a bonus to a customer making a large purchase of other items.<sup>22</sup> There are some varieties of hot pepper that are available year-round and they do not fluctuate in price, but the varieties that are available only in the rainy season are more expensive.<sup>23</sup> The one item that is put in all sauces, onions, is also the one vegetable item that does not grow locally. All the onions in Sierra Leone are grown in the Lungi area, in the littoral swamps of the northwest, so they must be imported to Makeni throughout the year. Onions are also a dry-season crop, and so are most expensive in the rainy season, when rice is also most dear. Onions are brought to Makeni from Freetown and are sold individually.

At the center of the main market are the most important sauce items, palm oil and fish. The richness of a sauce, and hence the wealth of the household, is determined by how much palm oil and fish they can afford to put in the sauce. The bright red palm oil is made in the villages from the pressed fresh fruits of the palm oil trees (different from the palm wine trees, which are tapped directly), and is sold by processors by the five-gallon drum. Palm oil is one of the main products, like rice, that market women purchase in villages. In 2003 a drum of palm oil was Le30,000, and in 2005 it was Le40,000. Like imported rice, the price of palm oil is determined mostly by inflation, and not by seasonal availability. In the market the oil is resold in various quantities, from 300ml bags to 1.5 liter bottles for Le1000 to Le5000. Like other locally produced commodities, palm oil is also much more expensive in Freetown, and many market women cultivate relationships with traveling traders in order to send the oil to the capital.

The main source of protein available is fish, which cannot be found locally. Most of it is brought in every morning from fishing villages on the Freetown peninsula. If a

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<sup>22</sup> Traders who can take their mangos to Freetown can make a fortune, because mangos do not grow abundantly in the capital. Fruit that is given away in Makeni may be sold at Le1000 each in Freetown.

<sup>23</sup> People purchase pepper by the amount that they use in that day's stew, and the spiciness of the stew is in turn measured in how much was spent on pepper. When I was recovering from malaria and one of my caretakers was helping me convalesce, he fed me groundnut soup "for strength." It was so spicy I could hardly bring myself to eat it, which surprised him, as it was only a "one hundred leones pepper soup."

fisherman launches his boat at 3 or 4 am, he can usually bring in enough fish by 6 to sell to the middlemen who bring the fish up-country, a three-hour journey from the peninsula. This means the price of fish in Makeni, where it forms the main protein source for poor people, is marked up twice by the time it is purchased in the market.<sup>24</sup> Fresh fish must be sold on the day it arrives or it goes rotten, which is why many people wait until late in the day to purchase fish, hoping they can bargain the price down. Fish that is smoked can be laid out for sale for several days before it is no longer good. The fish price fluctuates according to the perceived quality of the different types of fish. The small smoked varieties are also sold by different sized baskets, from Le1000 to Le5000. The larger single fish go for varying prices from Le2000 per fish to Le10,000 for anything large like barracuda. Expensive fish are not in demand in Makeni, according to the fish sellers, who make most of their profit on small baskets of smoked fish.

At the center of the market are a few stalls selling seed stock in small quantities. These traders sell seeds for kitchen gardens; vegetables such as corn, okra, eggplant, and krin-krin, a type of green that is a popular sauce ingredient. Traders sell seeds by the cup, and the price depends on the seed variety and the season. It is Le600 per cup for 6-month corn and Le800 per cup for 3-month corn. Both sellers also offered cobs of seed corn for Le200 each. These are the rainy-season prices, when the seeds are more expensive because it is the planting season. During the dry season, when vegetable gardens are not planted, the price goes down. Unlike rice and palm oil, whose prices respond only to inflation, the seeds for local vegetables are priced based on seasonal demand.

I asked one of the sellers when he does the best business, and he smiled and said in spite of the price difference people still purchased most of their seed at the start of the rainy season. He thought they could not bear to spend money on something they were not going to use immediately, and decided that this stemmed from the fact that during the war people were only living from day to day. People would not save seeds because they might succumb to the cries of hungry children and eat the seeds instead of saving them to plant. In addition, people, both traders and customers, who are just living “in the nick of time,” according to one market woman, could not even afford goods when they are

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<sup>24</sup> This is a similar consumption and marketing pattern as occurs with fish, the main protein source, in southern Ghana (see Shwimmer, 1979: 689).

offered at the cheaper price, and just must live in hope that they somehow come across the money for goods when they need them. The market itself is so competitive that for a trader, one needs a fair amount of start-up capital to make any profit. If you do not have the money to start with, you will never be able to get ahead.

This year, it went from 400 leones for a cup of palm oil, now it is almost 800! If you get money, you buy a lot of it at once and save it. When you sell it you can wait until the price is high. You get people who buy a lot of palm oil for 400 leones a cup, well now it is 800, and they can sell it for that but the rest of us, if we didn't have the money to buy it at 400 we have to buy at 800 and can't make money from it. You can't have a chance. My heart hurts because the money isn't there to do business. My heart strains! I don't have enough money to do business so I can keep up the house. Today I sit down at my stall and I wonder what I am going to eat today, what I am going to feed my children. RB

RB has a stall in the market, but she is fortunate that due to a long-standing friendship between her family and the Paramount Chief, she does not pay market dues to him, only the council. Patronage, as well as determining if and how much one pays for dues, also determines how and where a seller obtains a stall of her own, and women who can cultivate friendships with the right people often gain the small edge they need in order to add small amounts of capital to their businesses. It was in the fish market that a trader told me that table rights are passed down through families or are given by the chief. The traders either inherited the stands from their mothers, which she herself had, or are on a first-name basis with Bai Seboru Kasanga II and are granted a new stall or rights to share a stall with someone. Once one has a table, she has as much chance of building a business as anyone else selling the same goods, as they are all within a few meters of each other in the densely packed central market. It is up to her to cultivate the friendships that will support her. The system of table rights is not impenetrable to newcomers. If a woman who does not have table rights and has no connections with the chief wants to come in to sell her goods, she can ask a personal favor from another woman who might not be taking up all of her table on any one day, and they will make room and share. Usually the woman who is sharing the space does not mind, because she is only taxed on the amount of table space that she uses, and half the table means half the

tax paid to dues collectors. Over time, if the new woman comes back repeatedly, she can carve out her own space in the market, and pass the stall on to her daughter.

But always, market women are trying to maintain a balance between the preciousness of the commodity offered, the taxes taken and the potential profit: making close enough *padi* to maintain a steady profit without undercutting her profit too much for her friends, selling a good that will be in demand even when economic times are difficult, manipulating table size and official friendships in order to lessen her tax burden without causing jealousy among her neighbors (see Berry, 1985: 147). Most women commented that their “hearts strained” from the effort of making a small living while considering all these factors. Many pondered ways to enter the market in global goods, which, though requiring more capital and more powerful friends to enter, promised infinitely greater rewards, and a chance for a more stable permanence in the market.

*Profiting from the global village: global networks and mitigating conspicuous consumption “for the good of my people”*

The greatest profits that could be made in Makeni, and the items that put the average trader in more precarious moral positions, were those everyday items that found their way to Makeni from the outside world and displaced the market for local goods. Items like second-hand clothes, foreign canned energy drinks, and even donated food aid were considered useful and desirable items by most residents, even though it was well known that traders who offered these items had plenty of start-up capital and outside connections in order to get into these markets. These goods were mysterious because their origins and “real” value were unknown, unlike rice or cassava, therefore it was always possible that traders could be making more than fair money by selling them. It was incumbent upon traders to make transparent the public “good” of these items in order to mitigate any possibly damaging moral consequences one incurred by selling them.

Used clothes form the least morally perilous aspect of the global market, mainly because it is cheaper for people in Makeni to purchase used tee-shirts, skirts and the like than to purchase locally produced cloth and then pay a tailor to cut and hem new clothes. This is in marked contrast to Zambia, for example, where used clothes, *salaula*, are considered “distinct” and “outstanding” by people who strive to achieve a “modern” look



(Hansen, 1999: 344). Tailors and sellers of the *gara* tie dye still maintain some business, however, because there is always a demand for finery, even if people are buying it only once or twice a year. *Gara* sellers do grumble about this, which is one reason some used clothes sellers want to move into a “better” business, which I explore later. The owners of the clothing stalls traveled occasionally to the docks in Freetown and purchased clothes by the bale from container ships. They return to Makeni with the clothes, and sort through them to determine what might be sold at any one time. This is also in contrast with Zambia: while *salaula* means, literally “to rummage” in piles of clothes for something new and distinct (Hansen, 1999: 343), in Sierra Leone, cheap used clothes are displayed on hangers for easy sales; which emphasizes that the clothes are both needed by people and serve as tools for merchants to make large profits quickly. They do not, however, fill people’s desires the way *salaula* do in Zambia: if you want to be “modern,” as do the *blɔf kulcha* youth I discuss later in the chapter, you wear the latest fashions that arrive new in the boutiques, and not the old tee-shirts and skirts you find used. If you want to look respectable, you buy local cloth and visit a tailor.

Merchants of used clothes cater specifically to people’s needs. Parkas, woolen hats, and heavy pants are saved for the rainy season, nicer clothes for sale at Christmas, and so on. I questioned many of the women dealing in second-hand clothes as to the origin of them, and most of them said, “China,” as this is where most of the boats are registered. One commented on the fact that most of these clothes are given free from Western people to African people, and yet somehow when they are loaded on boats to Africa, they acquire a price. But because they are sold in bulk, like other bulk items, once broken down into parts, a large profit can be made.

Having direct access to the bales brings rewards for the trader. Every clothes dealer goes through the pockets of her wares before putting them on sale, and one usually finds currency, and sometimes bits of jewelry, inside. One clothes seller made most of her money pawning jewelry she found inside the clothes she was selling. She stated that these things were gifts included purposely with the clothes, as the previous owner was aware of how poor African people are who need other people’s clothes, and wanted to help them. Thus the ethos among clothes sellers is that the people in the west who donate clothes for Africa are very kind, and often reward the trader for her troubles, so that she

could sell the clothes to her people more reasonably. In this way she is not making an unreasonable profit from the “free” items she finds. She mitigates the morally unsound sale of found objects, and the morally questionable sale of foreign items, by passing the savings on to her customers. “*A bin gɛ wan chen las mont we a gɛ Le100,000* [I found a necklace last month that I got Le100,000 for],” said one trader, “*so mi padi we i gɛ buku pikin no go pe tumɔs fɔ di klos* [so my friend who has so many children did not pay much for the clothes she got from me].”

Clothes are not the only item for sale in the markets that were originally donated, and on which a trader may make excellent profits that need moral mitigation. Most women in the market who sell rice and local beans also have a sack of bulgur wheat and lentils for sale by the cup, and occasionally cans of tuna and sardines. The bags I saw had “Gift from [a particular nation], not to be resold” stamped on them, but clearly no one working in any official capacity in Makeni questioned the sale of these items, as no trader remarked she had gotten into trouble for selling them. These grains and pulses are not grown in Sierra Leone nor can these fish be caught off local waters; all were introduced to the nation by food relief organizations. Several of these organizations still have ongoing feeding programs in the schools and hospitals of the district, and so regularly send convoys of food up to their depots in Makeni. I once spent six months consulting for the World Food Programme (WFP) in Swaziland and Lesotho, so I had prior insight into the food loss that is expected and accepted by the organizations in the course of moving convoys around needy countries. The director of the program in Rome herself morally mitigated what she considered an unacceptable displacement of the market for local foodstuffs by aid by calling this food “lost” (Clark refers to it as “diverted”, 1994: 13, which is a more accurate portrayal of what occurs). As per standard WFP doctrine in 2004 (and as was repeated to me by the traders, who knew the figures), from the point food was loaded onto the truck in Freetown to when it arrived in the depot, “losses” of less than 5% of total tonnage were considered “acceptable” levels. Anything over 5% meant that the local staff responsible for loading, transporting, and unloading the stock would be questioned, and possibly lose their jobs. If a convoy arrives in Makeni once a month with 500 bags of bulgur for the local schools, a “loss” of twenty-five bags is ignored, and these bags appear in the market.

Several market sellers had relatives and friends who worked for hunger relief organizations and were willing to procure these items, for a portion of the profits (or, to be fair, as Nordstrom was told in Angola in 2000, “the bags fell off a truck” (2004: 215)). The sellers in turn would open the bags of bulgur and lentils (known locally as “refugee beans”) and sell them by the cup. Because they required no capital investment to purchase, bulgur and lentils were always cheaper than local foodstuffs, and always in demand. A cup of bulgur or lentils cost Le200, unlike rice and local beans, which were over twice as expensive. The traders acknowledged that the items did not come to them legally, but assured me that they were not harming the children for whom the food was intended, and they were helping people to purchase food who could otherwise not afford rice and beans. One stated that the WFP just replaces any of the bulgur that is lost (this is true), because the donor countries are always happy to supply it. This way the children are fed, the trader sells the items at 100% profit, people who cannot afford rice still have a meal better than the “hunger breakers” of cassava and potato, even though bulgur is “undignified” (see Gale, 2007: 370), and no one is in a morally questionable position. Unlike either imported or local rice, which range in price from Le300 to Le800 per cup and fluctuate regularly with inflation, the price of a cup of bulgur is a reliable Le200 to Le250. Traders feel no *shem* in selling a product that is pure profit, because they are not underselling rice traders. Everyone in the community can thus benefit from the presence of “refugee” foodstuffs.

On the other end of the moral spectrum lie the stores selling foreign luxury items in the center of town. One that balanced precariously on the moral precipice, instead of being seen by residents as undoubtedly morally bereft, was the PZ market. It thrived because it had something for everyone’s tastes: expatriates and locals, the poor and wealthy alike. A wealthy local merchant, a mysterious character named Mr. B--, who also owned the house I lived in, owned the PZ, and visited occasionally from his home in Freetown. The PZ is Makeni’s western-style supermarket and take-out restaurant, and for that reason people, especially young people, liked to go, if only to hang about the door and look inside. It offered potato chips and cookies, small electrical gadgets and canned drinks for the price of a family’s daily meal, however unlike other luxury stores, prices were always posted. A group of old men sat on the benches outside every day to people-

watch and exchange gossip, especially about the fashionably dressed people who went inside. NGO and official vehicles on their way further north or east stop for fuel and supplies, and would sometimes wander into the town and look at other stalls. The PZ turned on its generator at noon every day, and people flocked there to sit under the ceiling fans and perhaps pay Le1000 to charge their cellular phones for an hour. Beggars waited patiently outside the doors for any change a customer might give them. Often if there were multiple beggars, they would come to an implicit agreement over who would ask which customer for assistance, so there was no overlap, no fighting for charity. The salespeople did not keep them away from the entrance; they knew this was the beggars' best chance to make enough money to purchase food.

Most of the goods are not hopelessly out of reach of the average resident, and this is what makes them so tantalizing. Take, for example, a malt drink that was advertised as a nutritious energy-boost, which cost Le3500 in 2005. This is equivalent to seven cups of rice, but is not as prohibitive as, say, a stereo. Whenever I brought my first research assistant into the PZ and offered him a drink, he always chose the malt drink, and waited to drink it until we were outside the shop and everyone could see. The status that he gained from the drink and the white companion was immediate; he said his friends treated him differently knowing that he had a patron who bought him western goods and thus had the means to perhaps smooth his road out of poverty. Because he himself had not purchased it, and because he also gave the change from the purchase (which was my habit to let him keep) to a beggar outside the door, he was mediating the possible moral ramifications of consuming conspicuously while others went without. By opening a business that offered people small tastes of luxury that might be within their reach such as cold drinks or a package of biscuits, by providing beggars with a steady source of income, by attracting vehicles that might just be passing through Makeni a reason to stop and spend money in the town, the mysterious merchant, Mr. B--, was mitigating his own moral standing as a man who profited from dealing in foreign luxury.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Mr. B, and other wealthy merchants who owned businesses in Makeni but were rarely seen comprise a similar category of businessmen that Karin Barber analyzed with respect to the petro-naira in 1980's Nigeria. Though men who owned legitimate businesses were seen as morally upright, it was rarely addressed that once a businessman had reached a certain level of success, he ceased to do any labor himself, and his money seemed to come from nowhere (1982: 450).

Those traders who had social networks and/or enough capital to tap into the *wald makit* profited more from their efforts than did any trader whose capital constraints forced her to sell only those things she could acquire locally. Capital attracts wealth, as all traders know, and the only way to make a real profit right now without compromising one's moral standing is by bringing in outside goods to fill a distinct need or desire, and doing so in a way that does not cost local people more than they are capable of spending. Then a trader will be working "for the good of my people," and not just for her own profits. However many of these traders tried to move their profits into goods and physical positions in the town that would bring moral respectability, and curb any jealousy that might arise because they were making their profits "from nothing."

Many of these businesses, of non-local goods that were needed and desired by local people, were located in the interstices and on the edges of the large businesses around Independence Square, and were run by women whose moral position was never questioned. On the edge of Independence Square, in a small space that she rented next to the electronics shop, was a Hajja [a woman who has completed the Haj] who sold pots, pans, cutlery, and plastic buckets and bins of all sizes. No one questioned that she was providing a necessary good to the township, nor did they question her moral stature. Everyone knew that the shop closed daily during prayers; she would not forgo Allah in order to make more profit.

On the other side of the downtown, in a small wooden storefront, was "Sisters Enterprise," which sold imported rice by the bag. The sisters sold every standard of rice, from the cheapest "broken" rice to the most expensive "clean" varieties, and were always willing to let customers poke the bag, extracting a few grains, to test the quality and see if it was infested with weevils. They did not increase prices on bags as economic swings hit the country; rather they waited until they paid for new stock at higher prices to charge more. Their larger operating capital allowed them to do this. Theirs was a necessary, and honestly run enterprise. Most traders aspired to positions such as theirs, where there was enough operating capital to run a necessary enterprise tightly and honestly, in a storefront that was permanent, and thus not taxed by the chief (which I address at the end of the chapter). Even those youth who lived and traded on the margins of the township

aspired to this sort of permanence, though they worked towards it in what were viewed as morally suspect ways.

***Blɔf kulcha: bringing development or forgoing the family and ignoring the future?***

My assistant, normally quite reserved, arrived at my house one day wearing a pair of aviator sunglasses he had purchased for a few hundred leones at a local stall. “Idriss, why are you wearing those glasses?” “*A di blɔf!*” he laughed, removing them. “But I don’t wear them at school, the others know me too well.” He was playfully flirting with what is known in Sierra Leone as *blɔf kulcha*, namely the habit of young people, especially school dropouts, to spend most of their money on what are considered useless consumer items such as sunglasses, gold jewelry, and denim jeans. To *blɔf* is to make out to be more than one is, to strut one’s stuff even though there is no substance behind the strut. It is purely the habit of youth, as true “big men” do not need to make themselves out to be something, because they are respectable and possess personal power, and no amount of conspicuous consumption is necessary to prove it.

In this section I examine some of the visible trading/consuming habits of youth, who are often disparaged by their elders for signaling their commitment to “useless” consumer items rather than “good” money that circulates in family networks. The first is “box trading,” or the practice of setting up a small box of items for sale informally around town, where it can be packed up and moved if tax collectors come, by young people who also engage in unseemly purchasing habits such as palm wine and gold jewelry. The second is *blɔf kulcha*’s association with the nighttime trades in flesh and illicit or immoral substances such as marijuana and beer. I argue that *blɔf* has gendered meanings related more concretely to self-development and social signification than their more obvious portrayals of conspicuous consumption. *Blɔf* is both a social network of marginal young men who rely on their social bonds to initiate, maintain and grow their small businesses, and it is also a way for young women to signal their availability to wealthy or generous potential partners. In both cases, *blɔf kulcha* exists on the margins of legitimate trade and morals in Makeni, even though it supports the businesses that sell luxury items, and thus inhabit the most conspicuous positions in Makeni’s marketplace.

Thus are the visible and invisible moral margins of the town—marginal because they produce no lasting good for families or the community—mutually supportive.

*Box trading: social and economic networks for youth with few options*

One of the most ubiquitous forms of trading in Makeni is the “box trade,” which occurs everywhere in town and also in most villages. The box is any size from a briefcase to a large suitcase-sized wooden box containing shelves of cigarettes, matches, pens, hard candy, washing powder, and other small items. It can be opened and closed at a moment’s notice and moved if dues collectors are spotted. The box trader is anyone who is trying to make his way simply by “clambering aboard the good ship Enterprise,” (2000: 299) which the Comaroffs also refer to as “precocious entrepreneurship” because they are trying to make money from minimal starting capital (2000: 308). One box trader stated that he started his business with Le4000, selling individual cigarettes from his pocket. People set boxes up on their verandas, on street corners, in front of schools, anywhere on the street that is not part of an official, taxable structure (Comaroffs, 2000: 307), where there might be a sale of fifty or a hundred leones.

This is the most transient, informal type of trade, as unlike every other trade described thus far, it requires minimal amounts of start-up capital, and funds can be re-invested to top up depleted stock. Unlike the farmers who sell their stock or itinerant food sellers, they are not producing anything, and unlike traders in the official market, they are not bringing desired daily consumables from outside of Makeni. It is the most likely trade undertaken by youth who have left school and are unemployed, boys and girls alike, and, though it offers traders minimal profit and takes a long time to “grow” (see Berry, 1985: 97), became increasingly common from 2003 to 2005.

It is box trading that is most disparaged by the leaders of the community and what causes them the most despair for the future. I joined a priest friend, Father Samura, and two of his closest friends, one a priest and the other a doctor, for tea one day when box trading came up in conversation. All three were frustrated by what they perceived as the continual decline of the economy in Makeni, and what they saw as the unwillingness of people to be active participants in development projects. Father Samura was having

trouble with his development projects in a nearby village, where he was working with women to devise projects to raise school fees for their children, and would provide them with micro-credit for their undertakings. After discussing among themselves what they wanted, the women decided that they would each like to purchase boxes to sell items in their village and surrounding areas.

“You give them a box and they call it development!” Father Samura exclaimed in exasperation, “But what will ever come of it except money to replace the box of matches you just sold?” Though box trading is a way to earn quick money and perhaps feed one’s self for the day, these men see it as lacking any thought for real “development.” Those who engage in it, according to the other priest, Father Joe, are not planning for the future, they are just pleased to have a little bit of money now. A young man who *di blɔf* will use any profits on the next meal, and perhaps an evening at a bar and a bit of used clothing.<sup>26</sup> Every box that Father Joe sees along the roads is another person who does not want to do “real” work, and has failed to think further than their next meal and the evening’s entertainment. “The youth who do this trade still have a war mentality,” he said, “they only live for today, they still think there might not be a tomorrow.” This is linked to their unwillingness to engage in “real” work, like farming, where one must sweat. Money made from boxes, which is not “real” work, is less likely to be used in “real” expenditures, like family “development” (see Cole, 2005: 898-899).

If there is no future in box trading, why do the youth pursue it, and why are village women considering it “development?” “*A wan mi biznes fɔ gro,*” said one trader, “*a lek fɔ gɛ makit stɔl, a no go chop ol mi moni.*” [I want my business to grow, I would like to get a market stall, so I won’t *chop* all of my profits.] “*but a gɛ fɔ enjoj wit mi padi den o den de no go asist.*” [But I need to spend time with my friends; otherwise they will not help me.] With scarce starting capital, box traders rely on their social networks in order to get by in times when trading is bad, or when a particularly good opportunity might arise that one trader does not have the money to invest in alone. By cementing their social networks through communal consumption, be it through food, palm wine, or

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<sup>26</sup> This resonates with the Comaroffs’ claim that “youth” as a constructed category, unlike “adolescent,” implies a pre-adult with attitude; an unfinished social being unlikely to let anyone else help finish him (2000: 307). Only “youth,” and not “students,” or any other category of young person, does box trading. See also Cole, 2005: 892.



cigarettes, young box traders maintain both an economic safety net and a pool of collective resources from which to draw. By signaling their communion through conspicuous consumption of clothes, they are presenting themselves as somehow “respectable” because they can afford luxuries (see Cole, 2004: 575 and 2005: 896-897; Falola, 1995: 167). Village women, on the other hand, see a way to join a cash economy that is totally lacking in the villages (see Chelcea, 2002). Thus we cannot examine box traders as individuals merely concentrating on consuming a day’s profits, rather we must examine how as a group they are pursuing “development” through their *padi*, their “wealth in people.” Just like more “respectable” women who have stalls and depend on regular customers to get by, the youth are constructing their own networks and connections based on practical, rather than familial, terms (see Yan, 2001: 230). *Blɔf* is social signaling through conspicuous consumption.

Similar patterns of *blɔf* are found among female factory workers in Thailand, whom Mills states move to Bangkok because they aspire to a specific type of “modern” personhood, rather than because they are looking to gain material things (1997: 39). She sees it neither as false consciousness nor as “everyday resistance” to hegemonic structures, rather it is creating the conditions of modernity in one’s person necessary to attract prosperity and a bright future within a modern world (40). Similarly, young people in Makeni who *blɔf* are not merely wasting their lives and money on western clothes and gadgets, nor are they engaging only in morally bereft acts of consumption. Rather, they are “self-developing” along urban lines with the only means they have: a little bit of money and a group of equally poor but supportive friends. Quoting Yan, the youth are approaching their relationships as durable and practical networks, rather than rigid connections of ongoing obligation (2001: 230). Community leaders who berate them for living in the moment are not engaging with the fact that youth who have few economic options are quite rational in their approach to “development” as something that happens little by little.

The longer I spent studying trading and the market in Makeni, the more I understood the predicament of box traders and why they may be discouraged from trying to approach wealth and success in different ways. As one friend commented when we walked through the market, “You see Catherine, Makeni is called a trading town, but

really it is a selling town. All these women are in the market selling their goods, but who is buying them? You see the market is full of people, but not a single one is a customer” (see Sharp and Spiegel, 1985: 144). In such a dire economic climate where even the best business people make small profits, why should someone who can get a box and potentially avoid the taxes that involve having a more permanent business save money for a long time, “money that does nothing in the meantime,” according to Idriss,<sup>27</sup> for the more morally acceptable approach, when life-long traders are struggling? At least with a box they can earn enough to eat every day, and enjoy themselves a bit. In addition, through their consumption habits, they advertise to the rest of the town that they make money, are able to conduct business deals and could in the future be big men in town. By trading in transient boxes, youth also avoid interactions with the state, which is pressing in on more “legitimate” traders and destroying their profits through excessive taxation (see Clark, 1988: 6). There are no questions of legitimacy in their enterprises, which are fueled entirely toward the good of the family. The entertainment market, on the other hand, provides youth with avenues to think only of themselves.

*Greatest pleasure and greatest despair:  
the flesh market, palm wine and blɔf kulcha*

From the colonial era to the current time, Makeni has been famous around the country for its distractions, namely dance clubs, alcohol and drugs, and women, which journalists repute to be the best in the country (see Lewis, 1994; Linton, 1993 and 1994; Massaquoi, 1993, 1994). This trade thrived before the war, in spite of the dire economic circumstances in which Makeni found itself beginning with Siaka Stevens snubbing the town in the 1970’s (see Introduction). The “relaxation” culture, so named because most of the small bars, originally called *potes* in Temne, were where people went to relax, was supported during the war by rebels seeking to relax in their spare time, and is especially important to people now, as young women especially look for ways to escape a life of poverty. I have little information on why the entertainment market emerged so strongly

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<sup>27</sup> Mohamed, one of my research assistants, considered taking some of the money that I had given him for his school fees to “make a small business” over the summer, otherwise the money was “just sitting there, doing nothing.” He was anticipating that school fees would rise, which they did in October 2007.

in Makeni during the colonial era, except that its status as the town with the country's best palm wine has been written about extensively in newspapers (Massaquoi, *Concord Times*, August 10-12 1993; Lewis, *The New Citizen*, September 7, 1994). Mr. IBK mentioned that the first town council, in 1962, constructed many of the roads that exist in the town today. At that point there were only a few of the main roads that were wide enough for a vehicle to pass, and one of them was Ladies' Mile. I asked him why this road was called "Ladies' Mile." It is the location for two of the town's most popular nightclubs, Flamingos and Thinka Motel, and Mr. IBK said that since he can remember, women have always congregated there in the evenings. Though he was not clear about their activities and could not remember when Flamingos was first established, a market in pleasure has been prominent in Makeni for at least the last 45 years.

Makeni's entertainment market first came to the attention of Freetown journalists in the early 1980's, when the Makeni agricultural show became a festival attracting pleasure-seekers from around the country. "Four days before the start of the recent Makeni Agricultural Show, half the field was drunk," commented one in 1981 (Bunting-Davis, *We Yone*, February 8, 1981). "The food and entertainment stands had long sprung to life, and so the musical vortex created by scores of sound boxes sucked in all and sundry into the attractive dance sheds." He was shocked not just at the liveliness of the atmosphere, but also the mercenary attitude of the town's women. Girls as young as ten found "sugar daddies" to feed them and buy beer for them, and would "disappear behind the sheds together" later in the evening. Compared to the social order of the Bo show, Makeni was "another kettle of fish." In 1983 the show was attracting the top dance bands in the nation, and the highlight was a beauty contest for Bombali district girls. Women in Makeni won prizes, and male attention, for displays of youth and beauty, and they could also use their victories to persuade club owners to let them come and go without paying the cover charge (Anonymous, *The Oracle*, February 3, 1983).

A large number of news articles I found concerning Makeni in the early 1990s concentrated on how the residents of the town managed to spend most of their time partying, in spite of the fact that the town had no electricity and no running water (Lewis, *Concord Times*, September 7, 1994). One journalist was astounded that the clubs were crowded well beyond the curfew hour, with men struggling amongst themselves to gain

the favor of the few unpaired women in the bars (Linton, *Concord Times*, June 10, 1993). The bars are so close together along Ladies' Mile that one can walk easily between them, and in some find many older women who in other towns would be "home discharging their matrimonial duties." He declared that Makeni was good fun, in spite of the fact that the backwardness of the town meant no lights, no cold drinks, and the rather mercenary attitude of women, who, by enjoying themselves on the dance floor, would hope to attract the attention of a potential, and potentially wealthy, suitor.

Another journalist noted that in 1993 there were over one hundred *poyo* [palm wine] bars in the town, and Makeni was known as the best *poyo* town in the country (Massaquoi, *Concord Times*, August 10-12, 1993). He put it down to the large Limba population. Limbas have been the main *poyo* tappers in Sierra Leone, often to the exclusion of other activities, especially if a tapper knows he has an exclusive deal to supply a well-attended bar. The bar proprietors boasted of having several hundred customers per day, from all walks of life, many of whom spent hours consuming gallons of wine before staggering home, or, if the time was right, to a nightclub. In 1994 many more nightclubs opened, and even the town hall was used as a nightclub (Linton, *Concord Times*, June 10, 1994). One journalist, in examining how well the town was recovering from a riot and shooting incident in 1994, noted that the *poyo* bars were open again only a few days later (Massaquoi, *Concord Times*, June 21, 1994). In addition, a new club had opened and people had pressured the police to lift the curfew, which had been imposed in the wake of the shooting. And once again, women were lining Ladies' Mile making themselves available to men who were out "partner hunting" (Anonymous, *Daily Mail*, July 26, 1994). In the midst of a war, with the town in turmoil after a riot that resulted from the town turning on the NPRC, rioting in the streets and being fired on by soldiers, the *poyo* bars and nightclubs were open for business.

I believe journalists found this *joie de vivre* amazing because Makeni lack electricity, and Makeni people, being financially poorer than their counterparts in Bo and Kenema, would seem to have less disposable income to spend on pleasure. However, in my own experiences of the relative "liveliness" of the three towns (liveliness being the verb people use to describe the joy of a flourishing nightlife), Makeni is truly the pleasure capital of the provinces. My few nights in Flamingos confirmed that whoever could not

fit in the disco itself was content to let the party spill out into the street and into other nightclubs, and that the evening's activities would continue even after the alcohol ran out. In Bo and Kenema, on the other hand, the nightspots were generally quieter, with the few patrons nursing their bottles of beer around tables, conversing quietly and departing after a few rounds. No one I observed was out "partner-hunting," nor was anyone on the dance floor. Makeni is indeed the entertainment heart of the provinces.

After the return to democratic rule in 1996, a darker side to Makeni's trade in pleasure came to the attention of the press, when it surfaced that the town was also the center of the country's illegal marijuana trade. The trade had initially flourished under the NPRC junta, when marijuana farmers found it easy to bribe soldiers on the numerous military convoys that passed the town on their way east or west to transport their wares around the country. By 1996 and the re-establishment of civilian government, the trade in marijuana, along with most of the *poyo* bars, which now catered to unemployed "youth", had moved underground into parts of town known as ghettos. The ghettos were temporary shacks built in back alleys to support the trade in illegal substances, and housed many unemployed youth who flocked there to enjoy themselves. They exist in all three provincial capitals, but according to my interlocutors there are more, and larger, ghettos in Makeni than anywhere else in Sierra Leone outside of Freetown.

A journalist who uncovered the presence of these ghettos was threatened by the ringleader of one trade network, and had to involve the police in breaking open the trade in order to save himself (Lans, *The Punch*, July 22, 1996). The police conducted these raids under pressure from the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ) and from citizens who thought that the ghettos were the incubators of many criminal gangs that had arisen in Makeni (Anonymous, *The Eastern Post*, February 20, 1997). After the RUF seized control of the south and east and attacked Kabala, Makeni was one of the only towns in the provinces not under imminent threat.<sup>28</sup> Most trading in the country, including the semi-legal trade in diamonds (Joe, *Standard Times*, June 13-19, 1994; Collier, *Unity Now*, October 19, 1995), moved to Makeni, and the sudden concentration

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<sup>28</sup> Residents have many theories as to why Makeni was surrounded by rebels for five years before it was attacked. The two most common are: that the RUF command was afraid of the hill devils, one of which resided in each of the two hills around the town and protected it both magically and by warning the chief of any threats; and the other being that Makeni possessed one of only three army barracks in the country with a resident battalion.

of wealth in the area meant that the town became a target for armed robbers (Massaquoi, *Concord Times*, June 17, 1994; Anonymous, *Afro Times*, September 28-October 4, 1994). These raids on the ghettos, which occurred in the early months of 1997 (James, *The Point*, March 21, 1997), were halted when the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) junta seized control in May. Marijuana trading continued unabated once again.

*The women and youth came first: the rebels exploit trade to invade the town*

When the rebels first invaded Makeni in 1998, they were successful because they utilized two of the foundations of trade in the town: the itinerant petty trader, and women. Jackson (2004: 45) stated that Makeni residents told him that it was easy for the RUF to penetrate the town because they had been sending children in for several weeks disguised as petty traders. These children moved freely around town and mixed with high-level people unspotted, spying on them and bringing messages and plans back to their commanders. One of my friends remembered seeing several of the youth who had been trading in the town for weeks prior to the Christmas 1998 attack return with the rebels in the dead of night, armed to the teeth. All of a sudden, he said, it was clear that the recent influx of box traders in the town, which no one had questioned, was not traders who had been driven from their homes elsewhere and were trying to re-start their lives in Makeni. They had been deceived by their own assumptions that the town continued to attract traders, just because it was a trade center. Unlike Bo, which the RUF attacked directly (see Richards, 1996: 152-53), “traders” quietly infiltrated Makeni.

The rebels also utilized the existing networks of women that comprised the fabric of the town’s nightlife to infiltrate the army. At the time of the invasion, the town was being nominally guarded by a contingent of Nigerian ECOMOG forces. According to many of my friends, the Nigerians “like women too much” and frequented Ladies Mile and other entertainment destinations. It was a very bad habit, according to another, because this “addiction to women” meant that they never acted as proper soldiers. The RUF simply inserted the women in their ranks among the prostitutes who habituated these establishments, and eager Nigerian soldiers took the women back to their barracks and unwittingly spilled the details of their locations and activities to their consorts. The

women returned to the RUF bush camps the next day, and the invasion of Makeni was planned. Many women returned to the Nigerian barracks the following night, and kept the soldiers occupied while the RUF combatants crept into the town. The Nigerian base at Teko barracks, on the eastern end of town, was the first area attacked, and fell quickly. Those ECOMOG troops who were left alive ran to the town of Mile 91, southwest of Makeni, and the town, now completely vulnerable, soon fell to the rebels.

*Choices for young women: rape or rebel “boyfriend,” school or prostitution*

When the town was firmly in RUF hands, the only business that continued unabated was the trade in pleasure: wine, women, and drugs. These occurred in the ghettos that the police had been unsuccessful in closing in the years leading up to the invasion. These ghettos found a willing customer base during the RUF occupation, when *poyo* drinking and smoking were popular pastimes among the young combatants. Many civilians who remained in town found that one of the few ways they could support themselves was by continuing to bring *poyo* in from the surrounding communities and selling it to RUF members, and Flamingos and Thinka remained open during the occupation, due to the encouragement of the RUF command. One of my friends survived through the occupation by selling individual cigarettes to young combatants. One could still make a living, however small, by trading in items of pleasure.

Young women—students, traders, artisans—and not just those who had frequented Ladies’ Mile before the invasion, found that the best way to protect themselves and their families and find food, was to attach themselves to combatants. When the RUF originally invaded, rape and kidnapping were common. As one woman said, “sometimes they would just rape them in the house as they found them, or sometimes they would carry them off to the bush and get married with them.” In essence, rape was the worst that could happen. If a rebel liked a girl enough to take her along with him on a more permanent basis, she could be offered some protection, and share in the group’s meals.<sup>29</sup> In my conversation with a UN Military Observer, he said that by 2000,

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<sup>29</sup> This phenomenon has occurred throughout history. In *A Woman in Berlin*, a young journalist who lived in occupied Berlin during World War II described trying to find the highest-ranking Russian soldier she

many rebels had found girls that they liked, and taken them as “wives.” Being a rebel wife was much better than the alternative, and girls often sought rebels as companions:

A lot of the girls would actively try to find a sensible rebel as a boyfriend. Because it was much better that you have a guy who is going to look after you than you just get screwed about by a whole load of nobodies. And protection. Some of the rebels could get quite protective. If they were with a woman, they would say, “this is my girlfriend,” but more often, “this is my wife,” and she would be the only woman he was with. They weren’t actually that promiscuous.

During disarmament, according to Rosalind Shaw (pers. comm., March 2004), girls were no less averse to having ex-combatant boyfriends, especially because the latter had the transition allowances that went along with their skills training programs. Especially for civilian families trying to re-establish themselves in the wake of the war, absorbing an ex-combatant into the family was not a bad idea, as he often gave a portion of his allowance to his girlfriend to help in the house, or even for her to start a new business. Thus were girls who were using their bodies to attract men doing real “work”, as they brought real resources into the household (see Cole, 2004: 580; 2005: 899). Though mercenary, these women were never true prostitutes, and the line in Makeni today is equally gray. Mercenary activities among women never had to be pure prostitution to be the result of grinding poverty. For women with few opportunities, especially if families cannot provide school fees, their only possible respite from a life of poverty is finding men willing and able to look after them (see Cole, 2005: 897). In order to attract these men, the women spend what little income they have on nice clothes and accessories even if it means going without food. They participate in the *blɔf kulcha* in the hope of turning their dreams and appearance into something more real and permanent. As Diouf sees the often emaciated, perfumed and fashion-adorned bodies of these marginal women, they “bear the scars of their longing for ‘a good life’” (2003: 9).

The Nigerian soldiers who arrived in Makeni during disarmament as part of the UN mission were no less adverse to the company of women than their ECOMOG predecessors, and this was one of the main veins through which Nigerian UN wages flowed into the Makeni economy. One notorious Nigerian woman, known in the town as

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could to take home, as he would provide her with the best food and protection from others (2005: 189). See also Utas (2005b: 62-66) for women’s similar experiences in Liberia.



Madam Obi, served as a madam for the Nigerian contingent, sending her assistants around town to find young women willing to work for her for wages and “favors” granted by Nigerian soldiers. She ran a bar in the center of town, and even though the bar made an excellent profit among NGO workers, could make more by sending her “barmaids” around town looking for willing young girls. With families struggling to rebuild their lives and refurbish their damaged homes, a working girl could make the difference between a zinc roof and a thatch one, a wooden bed or a mattress on the floor. Though many families may have personally disliked the occupations of their daughters, the money was welcomed.<sup>30</sup> Some girls were lucky enough to find soldiers who wanted to keep them as girlfriends. This arrangement, unlike working for a madam, was a more long-term relationship resembling a traditional partnership in many respects (see also White, 1986: 260). The girl would see only her “boyfriend,” with the expectation that the soldier would give the girl money, luxuries like western clothes and makeup, and take care of any problems with her family, like a bag of rice or money for an emergency.

Most of these relationships came to an end in 2003, when the Nigerian battalion was sent home as the UN phased out military activities in the region. Madam Obi went with them, and many of these girls, both “girlfriends” and those with multiple partners, saw their reliable incomes come to an end. It was at this point that Makeni residents began to despair that prostitution was becoming rampant in the town. Few of these girls, most in the age range of 14 to 20, had obtained any skills training during the aid boom; as they had incomes and would not put themselves forward as “vulnerable” for assistance from aid organizations. Most of them had their educations disrupted for four or five years because of the war, and had no ability to return as most had not achieved a school certificate. One journalist reported on this “trade in pain and sorrow,” and sympathized with girls who worked because they had no other recourse to food and clothing (Masuba, *Weekend Spark*, date missing 2003). Though they all hoped for someone to rescue them, none were ever going to “hit the jackpot” with a rich boyfriend because the town of Makeni was suddenly so poor in the aid vacuum that no wealthy investor would even pass through, let alone invest in the place. He noted that the girls were aware that they

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<sup>30</sup> A similar ambivalence towards “working girls” existed in post-war Mozambique, where elders bemoaned the liaisons their daughters contracted with UN peacekeepers all the while many families in their villages benefited from the increased income (West, 2003: 110).

could catch HIV or other diseases, which is why most who worked the streets and clubs still hoped to find a steady “boyfriend,” rather than individual customers. Like the boys who trade out of boxes, these girls are also hoping to cultivate a situation for themselves that is more permanent and stable, however their only starting capital is their bodies, and their only trading capital is the social relations that they cement with men.

My young female interlocutors—five secondary school students between the ages of fifteen and twenty—blamed the girls themselves for falling prey to the consumption culture. One girl commented that many had become “used to” the rebel war and grew to like the money that they could get from men. Another commented that the girls also developed addictions to other things they could get from Nigerians, like cocaine, though I found no other substantiation for this allegation. Their relationships with rebels gave them status in the town, and many were not willing to lose this once the disarmament money dried up. Many left their rebel boyfriends, who, now disarmed, could not compel them to stay, and went looking for other men who could support them. The sudden disappearance of the money they had brought into their parents’ homes through the war and disarmament meant they were now under pressure to find other means to help provide for their families.

Even so, she said, many of them who found new boyfriends did not want to support their families. They wanted control of their incomes, and many moved out of their family homes. They would spend the money on useless things like clothes to attract more men, and cellular phones, a mark of status that would also serve to attract men interested in “modern” girls, even though they lived in hovels. Though Rafael states that the use of technology like cell phones in developing countries is a “paradox of being awash in the latest technology... while mired in deteriorating infrastructures,” he states that the cell phone especially “lends to its holder a sense of being someone, even if he or she is only a street vendor or high school student” (2005: 80, 81). Though Rafael sees individuals using cell phone to transcend their lives, in Makeni the sense that the ability to communicate brings one to a higher plane of modernism is absent, especially when girls are begging “top up money” for their phones from their men. They *de bluff*. But their bluffing is, according to Cole, a form of “social capital.” Girls cling to the hope that

by making themselves out as “modern” they will increase their chances of attracting wealthy men or “modern” jobs (2004: 582).

One town councilor noticed that even the girls who were attending school would often spend their evening hours at the clubs, drinking, dancing, and hoping to attract the attention of potential “boyfriends.” Her own daughter, she loathed to report, was wearing makeup to school and would slip out at night to go to Flamingos. It was as if, she lamented, the girls put no stock in their educations; it was as though they did not truly believe that concentrating on education would bring them rewards, and the only way to guarantee one’s future was by finding a man willing to support them (see Sharp, 2002: 234-235). Many, she said, grew to like the “taste of money,” and would spend more of their time at the clubs, and eventually drop out of school.

One schoolgirl commented that she had lost many of her school friends to prostitution. Many of them were hedging their bets: attending school during the day and trying to find a potential supporter at night. Most of them grew to like the material possessions they acquired, and many ended up dropping out of school. Of the over one hundred schoolchildren taking the Basic Education Certificate Exam (BECE) that year in Makeni, there were only fourteen girls. The rest, she said, were on the streets, or at home nursing the babies they had gotten as a result of their nighttime wanderings. They had taken the risk of becoming prostitutes in order to climb the social ladder and attain more permanent situations, and instead invariably and irrevocably ruined their chances (Cole, 2004: 582). If they expended too much of their effort working at night, they eventually lost any school opportunities they once had; prostitution had made the choice for them. By taking a morally corrupt road to “self-development,” many of these girls fail entirely. They are not the only townspeople who are suffering in the transition to a post-war environment where money is scarce. Morally upright traders are also suffering with the transition to “peace,” though their troubles stem from the fact that unlike the RUF, the legitimate town council and national government have begun instituting taxes. The problem with having an honest business is that it is vulnerable to what traders view as dishonest politicians and their “money chewing” schemes.

## **Taxation and security: feeding the government belly versus getting by today**

Things were better during the war because the RUF didn't bother us. We weren't paying any taxes so we could make a good profit. Now that disarmament has come, we sell, and we get something from it but the rice is so expensive now [profits make no difference]. One cup of rice last year was 300 or 400 leones, for the big cup. But now one cup is 500 leones! Ah! It is too much! If you have some money this time, you need to keep it close. FC, Lorry Park trader

According to traders, one of the main problems with the current trading atmosphere in Makeni is the oppressive taxation that traders must endure in order to be legally allowed to sell their goods. In 2004, the newly elected town council raised taxes on sellers in market stalls from Le400 per day, which they had been under the previous SLPP council (Anonymous, *Awoko*, August 13, 2002), to Le5000. The first raise in 2002, a 100% increase from previous taxes, caused a sit-down strike of all traders, as they were also being taxed daily by the Paramount Chief's own dues collectors.<sup>31</sup> Unlike during the RUF occupation, when traders kept all their profits, now every political body that needs revenue assesses a tax, and traders, as people who deal in cash, are easy targets. The Paramount Chief, town council, and the national government all take a share.<sup>32</sup> The traders are adamant that in this climate of taxation, they cannot make enough to get by, and this encourages protest, refusals, and an increasing number of traders looking for ways to slip under the taxation radar. They long for the days of the RUF, when trade was respected as the key to keeping the town fed, and traders were encouraged to conduct business as they pleased. As Clark notes, "antagonism between traders and the state arises despite, and partly because of, substantial linkages and mutual dependence between groups of traders and agencies of the state... neither can afford to ignore the other" (1988: 2). Politicians know that trade is the predominant economy in the town and that they depend on it for revenue, but as was illustrated in the previous chapter, traders also know that they depend on the government to provide a hygienic and working market.

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<sup>31</sup> Though Makeni is in two neighboring chiefdoms, because the bulk of the town, including its center, lies in the Bombali Seborra chiefdom, I am only speaking of the Paramount Chief for that particular chiefdom.

<sup>32</sup> The Paramount Chief has historically collected dues from traders as part of his general powers of taxation. The taxes he collected were used partly for ceremonial purposes, for example to entertain official guests, and also to help him solidify his position as a big person, by which he assisted needy clients with costs such as funerals. However, in the colonial era chiefs abused this power, taxing people for any reason and no reason, which was the main reason for the 1955-56 tax riots (see Appendix III).

*No unnecessary taxes: appreciating the RUF's market management*

In wartime, Carolyn Nordstrom reminds us, those people who bring in and sell necessary goods, even at a profit, are breaking down the line between peace and war, between altruism and profiteering (2004: 33). Many times these war economies, only because they are free of the nation-state, can foster peace and development (2001: 235). How do the market women see the trade that occurred in Makeni during the occupation? During her interview, FC was clear that Issa Sesay, the RUF commander in charge of Makeni from 1999-2002, was aware that an operating marketplace, wherever the goods originated, was the only thing standing between maintaining control of the town and the chaos that would result from pressing people, including his own men, into starvation. He encouraged traders to sell by eliminating market dues, providing them with looted foodstuffs his men had taken from surrounding areas, and responding to their requests for supplies or protection. The women, according to FC, were happy with this because they could sell whatever goods they obtained at the prices they set, and they were not hassled for market dues. There were not many women who were brave enough to interact with RUF commanders to conduct business at the time, she said, so those who did managed to feed their families, and had a very good relationship with the RUF command. The RUF command valued the services they provided for the community, both RUF (who had to purchase their food in town) and civilians. As Clark states, traders “value specific state relations [whatever the form the ‘state’ takes] that they feel improve enterprise survival and long-term profit levels” (1988: 6).

According to another woman, Sesay maintained the original socialist ethos that dictated RUF farming and distribution practices in the east, where everyone received food according to their needs. Even when there was very little food in town, Sesay made sure that the women had rice for their families and a little to sell to others who could afford it, and if they reported to him that they were being hassled by rebels for cassava that they had brought from the bush, he put a stop to it.<sup>33</sup> The story market women tell is that business was much better during the occupation than at any time afterward. There

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<sup>33</sup> Utas (2005b: 67) found that during the Liberian civil war, many of the goods available at smaller upcountry markets were sold by women who had connections with rebels; in essence making them looted or stolen goods. One of his informants stated that because her market was based on “blood money” her business never expanded.

weren't many goods and times were not easy, but what goods they could get they could move quickly at good prices. There was no sense of moralizing that occurred in my conversations with the women who worked the market under the RUF; for them the line between good and bad was very clear: being able to provide and sell food to other people was good, as everyone benefited from a working market. A trader who made a bit of money was encouraged to take risks to find other goods to sell, and she was sometimes the only person standing between her customers and total starvation.

As soon as disarmament came, according to FC, the town was flooded with traders and competition became stiff. The aid boom attracted people from surrounding communities, whose villages had been destroyed, to relocate to the town, and the market was awash with new traders hoping to establish themselves. The SLPP re-instituted a town council, which started collecting market dues alongside the chief's market dues, though in small amounts at first. In 2002 the market received its first big shock when the SLPP council decided to double the tax for petty traders entering from the villages from Le200 to Le400 per day because they were not making enough revenue to rebuild the town (Anonymous, *Awoko*, August 13, 2002). They did this without consulting the Petty Traders' Union, which called a sit-down strike in protest and, according to the *Awoko* writer, (*Awoko* means "come hear news" in Temne), "threatened a humanitarian crisis in the town," as selling had been effectively halted for nearly a week. Traders grumbled that this was the reason they did not vote for the SLPP, "because it is only a government like this which is so callous as to threaten their people this way," according to one woman. Disarmament looked bad: traders had to keep their prices low and competitive, they no longer had a monopoly on their customers, and they were suddenly paying exorbitant taxes. There were, at least, plenty of customers with money to be had at that time, which is no longer the case.

Once the United Nations had control of the district, in late 2001, a mission headquarters was set up on the north side of town. Along with the civilian staff sent with the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) program, there were also military observers to oversee the disarmament process, civilian police to begin the retraining of the police, and a battalion of Nigerian soldiers to patrol the town and enforce the ceasefire in and around the disarmament camps and retraining sites. All the ex-

combatants who had disarmed and were being retrained received transition allowances, and had plenty of time to spend their money in town. There was also a flood of post-war aid, and at least seven major international NGOs and donor organizations established headquarters in Makeni. They employed several hundred local staff, and started training and transition programs for hundreds of “war-affected youth,” who also received allowances for attending the workshops. All in all, this meant a flood of cash was infused into the town, through both the massive employment of local people and the profligate tendencies of Nigerian soldiers, who loved to spend money on consumables.

Though competition in the marketplace was stiffening up, there was also a large population of people with regular incomes and a desire to spend their wages. When I first arrived in Makeni in 2003, the aid boom was still in full swing and the main market was a lively place, jammed with people purchasing as well as selling. The market stalls, boxes, and mobile peddlers were making profits then, and the town looked a very different place than it did one year later. There were not yet any luxury stores in town. There was no electronics depot, no appliance store, no cellular phone service, and there were only two shops open that had generators to run refrigerators to serve cold drinks. It had the feel of a gold rush town, a similar feel of opportunistic markets that flooded Kamakwie one year later when diamonds were discovered there, and women would emerge from their homes at night to set up temporary food stands wherever the crowds were thickest. Makeni in 2003 was a boomtown.

The day I left Makeni in July 2003 was a transition point for market activities. The Nigerian battalion of over 1000 soldiers who had eagerly spent their wages in town, was replaced by a company-strong force of 100 Bangladeshi soldiers. The rumor coming from Magburaka, where the Bangladeshi company had formerly been stationed, was that this group of soldiers did not mingle with local people and saved their money to send home. In addition, three of the largest NGOs were phasing out their operations, and were planning to withdraw from Makeni by September. This meant that millions of leones would suddenly be withdrawn from the market. Simultaneously, the first cellular phone company had built a signal tower in town, and held a ceremony officially opening their first shop on Rogbaneh Road, which later became the street of high-end merchandise. At the inauguration ceremony for the cellular phone company, the Communications Minister

announced that the greatest advantage of having telecommunications in the town would be the high-end investment it could now attract (Lamboi, *The Democrat*, August 1, 2003). The wages that had been lavishly spent in the market were slowing to a trickle. However, cellular phones and other high-end investment attracted yet more high-end investment, and soon vendors selling items like refrigerators arrived, to be followed by a hotel with 24-hour electricity and rooms for Le150,000 a night.

On my return in June 2004, market sellers I had known from the year before mentioned that business was going bad, and the index they used was that Christmas had been very quiet that year. Every year business would experience a slight dip a bit before the holidays, as people saved up their money for the big celebrations, and business would boom again at Christmas and New Year. But this year that had not happened; people continued purchasing their necessary daily consumables, but never splurged. There was no money with which to make these purchases, and no celebrations took place. According to FC, the death sentence for the marketplace in Makeni was the inauguration of the new town council in June 2004. The inauguration ceremony was a jubilant affair because the APC had swept the council elections and people thought that their own party would improve the town. Talk of an APC council ushering in a new era of local works projects and development dominated the town, as the national government had failed and the NGOs were withdrawing. The new town council was expected to be especially sympathetic with the traders, as the mainstay of the Makeni economy, and not tax them heavily, if at all. The new councilors swore an oath to serve the town to the best of their abilities, and one of their first acts was to establish yearly rates of market dues for all sellers who had trading rights in stalls in the main marketplace and the lorry park.

This announcement met with a general uproar, even after the council chairman, Musa Mansaray, offered a patient explanation of the new taxes. He stated that previous town councils had left the current council in serious debt (Bangah, *The New Citizen*, September 17, 2003; Bangah, *The New Citizen*, September 8, 2004). For years the council had been made up of political appointees, who were not opposed to writing bad checks and stealing money from the council's bank account, with the result that the Makeni town council, no matter its new membership, was left with bad debts with vendors and organizations all over the country. It also had to pay the salaries of council



employees, such as sanitary workers, for which they were also in arrears. In order for the new council to start any development projects, it had to first pay off these debts, and needed to do so by taxing community members. It began with market traders.

The traders were unmoved by this plea, and many clamored to the council offices make themselves heard. FC formed the Lorry Park market women into an association, which appealed to the council that they were being taxed on too many levels already to afford to pay new taxes to the council. FC explained it thus:

The town council, they are not good, we have so many problems with them. In 1992 and 1993, we had an agreement where you only paid so much, like 200 or 300 [leones] for the whole year. We paid that. And now if you want a license from the council for yourself you have to pay 50,000 leones. I pay income tax of 10,000 leones. I am sorry that this town council has come, because the problems are so many. You also pay for the ground that you have your stall on, 60,000. So with the license, the ground tax, and the income tax I pay 120,000 leones a year. What am I supposed to eat?

Town council taxes are not the only dues traders pay. They also have market dues, which are daily tokens of respect (often Le200 to Le400) paid to the Paramount Chief. Because any stall that a woman has rights to in the central market is based on an agreement with the chief, she pays him dues of Le200 per table per day that she comes to the market to sell. These dues collectors also move around town and assess a similar tax on all itinerant petty traders they catch. One woman, who brings her wares from the village every day and sets up a temporary stall in front of the school, said that sometimes the chief's dues collectors wait on the highway so they can assess dues on any village woman coming into town who does not have a permanent stall, in addition to the taxes they are assessed by the town council. This includes all the mobile traders who come from villages and walk around town with their goods on their heads, selling *haf-haf* foods.

The taxes are so high, complains FC, she yearns to go back to her hometown of Bo, though aging in-laws keep her in Makeni. There, she says, business is much better because the SLPP town council never assessed market taxes and the town is wealthy.<sup>34</sup> She sells bulk items like rice and bread flour, and when she had a similar business in Bo,

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<sup>34</sup> This is in spite of the fact that it was an SLPP-appointed council in Makeni that first doubled the petty trader tax from Le200 to Le400 in Makeni in 2002. Each of the councils acts independently, so perhaps it was just the Bo town council that never taxed traders heavily.

people came from the mining areas and cocoa farming areas to purchase great quantities of staples to take back and feed their employees. She had regular customers who purchased at regular intervals, and because she paid no taxes she made a profit on everything she sold. I suspect that perhaps she did pay some taxes, but did not mind them as much because her profits were better. She complains that in Makeni she does not have as many *padi* who buy her wholesale rice, partly because there are not as many traders who go to Kono as there used to be. Both Bo and Kenema, being near diamond mining areas, have thriving marketplaces because there are lucrative productive businesses occurring on their outskirts. Makeni, on the other hand, thrived because it was central to long-distance regional trade, first on the railroad and then on the highways that link it to many other places in the country, and the region.

FC noted that Makeni has no foundation of production. Everyone is only doing *smɔl-smɔl* [small-scale] farming and trading, as the war scared away the Guineans and Liberians that comprised so much of Makeni's original regional trade network, and with whom most wholesale traders had long standing friendships. No one has any money and no one has a business that they are purchasing food for, so everyone only buys in small quantities from day to day and she cannot make a profit selling bulk items. Even though the town may be full of people, this does not necessarily mean that they can support a large market for goods (see Sharp and Spiegel, 1985: 144). It was only during the diamond rush in Kamakwie that people purchased several bags of rice to take to the mines with them. The phenomenon she describes is what Michael Heller calls "the tragedy of the anticommons" (quoted in Kirsch, 2006: 130). The market is taxed so heavily from so many different institutions that traders are better off not utilizing the extant market structure, as it serves as an easy way for government to tax them. This moves traders to informalize, rather than formalize, their businesses.

The traders who own businesses in permanent structures exist on a different plane of government regulation and taxation. Unlike market sellers who have stalls or trade on foot, those in permanent structures are not assessed market dues by the chief. One itinerant trader stated that this is because those traders who have storefronts are educated, and the chief's dues collectors know they cannot intimidate and harass them for excess

dues (which they pocket) the way they do the illiterate village women.<sup>35</sup> A spokesman for the market collectors refuted this, stating that the chief does not assess market dues on permanent structures because they are privately owned and therefore do not fall under his authority, which is the commons. He wants to encourage people to open businesses that provide a service for the community that they cannot provide for themselves in the market for local goods, even as many of these businesses provide luxury goods for the wealthy few and do little to boost either family or community development. Whichever the case, those in permanent structures must answer to the National Revenue Authority (NRA) and to the National Social Security and Insurance Trust (NaSSIT).

*Luxury taxes and social security in a poor, insecure place*

In 2002, the SLPP government announced that it was reinstating the social security and national tax schemes that had existed in the country before the war, and they began selecting people to run the various offices around the country. NaSSIT arrived in Makeni in 2003 and the NRA in 2005, to the general consternation of most business owners and the general population of Makeni. “How can the government sent its people here to tax us, when we do not have any money to give them?” asked one man, echoing the pervading feeling when the NRA set up its headquarters prominently near Independence Square, even though the NaSSIT manager was adamant to me that the offices were being set up equally in all three provincial headquarters, with the same tasks and goals, and Makeni was not being particularly harassed for taxes.

The talk that circulated when the NRA arrived was that it would charge people property tax if they owned their homes, rental tax if they did not, income tax on any money they made, and sales tax on anything they sold. These fears were not totally realized, as the NRA first made its presence known by assessing sales tax on all cooked food items sold from permanent structures. This affected only the high-end restaurants in town catering to people who could afford the tax. Though the rate was 10% sales tax on

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<sup>35</sup> For at least 25 years, most of people’s complaints about the town council are their misappropriation of market dues, mainly that dues are not used to improve the market structures or create amenities for traders, like toilets (Anonymous, *The New Shaft*, November 24, 1983; Bangah, *The New Citizen*, September 13, 2003; Mansaray, *Salone Times*, September 17, 2003).

hot food in 2006, for restaurants that sold their rice dishes at Le2000 or Le3000 per dish, for their customers who were willing to pay this, the tax did not deter anyone from patronizing these establishments. The owner of the most popular restaurant in town did grumble, however, that the government only took notice of Makeni to tax the place when they saw that “real” businesses were moving back in. She feels the government saw this as a sign of confidence among Makeni people that the violence would not return, and they are only “eating the profits” of the self-propelled development in the town. However, it seems that the manager of the NRA realizes that businesses located in permanent structures must have significant enough starting capital, recurring business and steady profit that they would not be injured by sales tax, and to my knowledge they have not been hurt by it.

Be this as it may, the business owners of Makeni are having a more difficult time, conceptually and in practice, with NaSSIT. And NaSSIT, it turns out, is also having a difficult time establishing itself in the north. According to the director, NaSSIT was first set up by the national government in 2002 to use social security as a concept by which they could encourage people to think about the future, which seems to resonate with traders struggling to make their businesses more permanent and lasting by moving them into permanent structures. However, our conversation revealed that the organization was struggling to establish social security in the north. No one who was recruited in Freetown wanted to try to set up the office in Makeni because they knew the level of economic activity was the lowest among large towns in the country, and with enrollment targets set at the same level for all three provincial capitals, did not want to become failures. They were also deterred by the lack of basic infrastructure in the north, which would make the working conditions uncomfortable. He volunteered because he is from the northern region and wanted to prove them wrong.

His biggest challenge since coming to the north was trying to convince people that social security was not a tax, but a way of ensuring that they had an income when they could no longer work. Not a single person, he said, believed that if they gave money to the government to keep for them that they would eventually get it back. Because NaSSIT was not a bank from where they could withdraw their money at any time, no business owners could be convinced to participate voluntarily. It was three months

before the first institution in Makeni began making social security contributions for its workers, and only one or two other businesses per month after that. The rate of registration for social security was the lowest in the country in 2004, with the bulk of contributing institutions being NGOs. The manager stated that insurance legislation of 2001 made it compulsory for formal institutions to make social security contributions for their employees, and that recalcitrant institutions could be prosecuted.

At the time of the interview, NaSSIT was just organizing its lawyers to go after businesses who were not complying with the law, and the director had been asked to submit the names of recalcitrant institutions in Makeni. NaSSIT, he said, was just about to become more unpopular as it took legal action against those institutions that did not want to pay for their employees. The director noted that the lawyers were going “by the book” in prosecuting businesses equally in all towns of Sierra Leone, whether they had high profit margins in Bo or low margins in Makeni; which he knew would make the organization even more unpopular. In spite of its local difficulties, NaSSIT was still able to build up its office using the profits from contributions in places like Freetown. By 2005 the office had three vehicles and ten motorbikes for its employees, and ran a generator 12 hours a day with air conditioning installed in every room of the office building. People were suspicious that the story that government was keeping their money safe for them was a myth, instead, look how comfortable the workers are in their suits and air-conditioned offices! It must be another case of *borbor bele*. This did not make the organization more popular with market traders, who were NaSSIT’s next target.

The director admitted that NaSSIT could not compel informal traders to join a social security scheme, and so his extension workers went through the market trying to convince people to join voluntarily and make contributions when they wanted to. He admitted that the economic situation in Makeni’s marketplace was so dire that in two years of operation only three people had joined, and he said no one else would do so unless the government was willing to give them incentives, such as matching contributions. However once again, no one believed that the national government would not do the same as the town council had done: take their money and promise benefits for it, and then nothing comes. NaSSIT, they thought, was like every other arm of government, and served only to “eat” money and grant favors to the friends of big men.

“The biggest problem with any scheme concerned with future welfare,” stated the director, “is that they do not trust us, and frankly with the performance of past governments they have little cause to do so.” However, he said, he would not let the country’s history of failing institutions be an obstacle, though he said Makeni is famous for traders especially taking a “wait and see” attitude towards any new proposition:

We have got a lot of public education, but still people are not buying. They think it will not last, so they say, “Let us just wait and see for a year or two.” Right? And you know, you have this theory about sitting on the fence, and they don’t know where to jump to! They see the other side and think, well, that’s fine for me but I don’t know what will happen if I choose that one. And if you don’t jump, we will pull your legs to come down! So that is what we are trying to do now! One thing I know this country for is setting precedents. If one person is successful with something new, then you will see others running to join [it]. They will beg you then, “Look my man, I was just joking. Help me now, I want to be part of it and I don’t mind. Just tell me all that I should give so that I will be part of it.” That day will come, but we have to work hard until then.

Suspicion is an understandable attitude, considering the political trauma Makeni residents have endured thus far. The director believes in social security, he says, especially in a place like Makeni because it is so poor and people are often abandoned to take care of themselves if they are not contributing to the family. Social security would solve all of this because elderly people could have a guaranteed income even when they are not working, and this money would be a great incentive for a family to keep them in the home. In addition, it is easier for someone whose children have left to “self-develop” to support him or herself if they have social security.

However, two of the main problems he sees are that, like countries in the western world, one is not eligible to collect on their social security until they reach the age of retirement. In Sierra Leone the age of retirement for civil servants like police officers and military doctors is 55. However, with rampant malnutrition, lack of medical care, and raging poverty, not many people assume they will live to be that old. Petty traders especially, who do not receive a steady income to the age of 55 like their civil service counterparts on whom the age of retirement was based, are less likely to contribute to a social security scheme that they are not sure they will live to see the benefits of. He said that people were most concerned about this in the north, because they lived on much

slimmer profit margins. The other problem is that employees do not understand that if they leave their job they are not eligible to receive their benefits immediately. There was an incident when several security guards who had been laid off from an NGO nearly caused a riot at the NaSSIT office demanding their “security money,” assuming that it existed to provide security during times of unemployment as well. Again, he said, people in the north cannot think on a very long timeline when they do not know where the money for today’s meal will come from.

The poverty of trading in Makeni precludes planning for a future much beyond peoples’ immediate desires to increase their business capital and move it to higher levels of profit and moral respectability. It is better to think about personal developments that might be possible on a shorter time scale than social security, which, glancing at the office, appears to be government *chɔp*, or “money chewing.” When people seek out security, they do so in their social relationships, whether it is a friendship with the chief that allows a woman to use a market table without paying dues, regular *padi* who provide a recurring income, or youth who can give a box trading friend a few leones for food if he is down on his luck, or contribute a bit to an opportunity he does not have the capital to buy into himself. In spite of all the talk about “self-development,” when analyzing the market and traders, it is clear that no one can manage alone. Everyone needs friends.

**Conclusion: the relationship between capital and morality,  
Or how poverty and excessive wealth are both morally diminished**

No matter what trade a person in Makeni is involved in, it is critical that s/he maintains a social network that supports this trade. A woman with *padi* can depend on recurring profits every day and youth who *blɔf* know that their safety net will look out for them if the box trading goes bad. Girls with no starting capital invest what little they have in clothes, makeup, and other devices to attract people; their search for boyfriends, rather than “customers” is a search for a solid social network more than it is a search for profit. More often than not they fail, and are left scarred by their search, whether with HIV or babies, that ruin their lives and chances they once had at making themselves morally respectable. These youth who have nothing are more likely to engage in the desperate enterprises of drug dealing, diamond smuggling, and the like, for which they can make

great profits, but which may ultimately go back into their networks of conspicuous consumption, lest they lose the social network that made these deals possible. Their world, unless they can somehow make the leap to respectability and “good” money that can be used as capital, is doomed to be forever morally diminished. The products they consume in the continual recreation of these networks are those sold by the luxury enterprises on the main streets, businesses that are also morally diminished not just because they sell “useless” items that provide no durable good for families, but also because they have so much starting capital that they are immune from the vagaries of local taxation and therefore do not need *padi*, or any social network, to maintain their businesses. They therefore exist on Makeni’s social and moral margins.

These businesses in storefronts that might be used by women who have enough capital to pursue legitimate and necessary enterprises, like the Hajja selling pots and pans, who serve real needs of the town’s residents. However, I argue that the national government and the town council have no interest in moving them out, even as they only serve to fuel the desperate enterprises of marginal youth. “[Extra-legal] networks become part of the political logistics of the state itself,” states Roitman, because the taxes from luxury businesses support the political project of controlling an area (2001: 253). The national government, in the form of the NRA and NaSSIT, would have no income from Makeni at all without these businesses, and so it is in their interest to support them, whatever they sell. Legitimate enterprise of those who sell basic commodities to average community members exist somewhere in between, morally upright, but generally invisible to the casual observer. As traders of every stripe attempt to make themselves more permanent, more secure in the trading landscape in the town, they must negotiate the pitfalls of engaging with the potential for moral diminishment that accompanies displaying and working with more capital in a poor place. It is somehow morally safer to remain in the middle, with one’s wealth only in relationships. Many traders do not want to subject their daughters to this kind of life, so they try to educate them instead.



## Chapter Four

### **“Makeni people are interested in business, not school:” Narrating and negotiating the best road to “development”**

The question has often been asked—is there a desire in the Protectorate for educational facilities? The answer is, undoubtedly, in the affirmative. But that desire varies in degree as far as the several tribes are concerned. The Mendes are the largest tribe in number and keenest in the desire for educational advantages. The Temnes and Susus are not at all keen on education and this accounts for the comparatively small number of schools in the northern province where these tribes are mostly to be found. The Limbas are moderately keen and the Konnos and Lokkos are now rapidly showing unusual interest in the acquisition of useful knowledge.

Mr. C.A.E. Macauley, African Inspector of Schools, 1925

Every conversation I had with people about Makeni’s backwardness invariably turned to talk about how the education system in the north was drastically behind the south and east, and this was caused mainly by residents’ own disinterest. “Makeni people are traders, they are not interested in education,” was the phrase that started many narratives of why the town and its people cannot develop. From the quote that started this chapter, this idea had taken root among administrators nearly a hundred years ago, or from the moment education was introduced to the protectorate. Why is this so, and why do people who go without food in order to pay their children’s school fees habitually invoke their own “backwardness” as a reason?

This short phrase illustrates one of the most contentious moral battlefields for Makeni residents. Business has historically been important because it nurtured the town’s growth for half a century, and serves as the primary occupation for the majority of the town’s inhabitants. However, because the town has been suffering severe economic difficulties, especially in the aftermath of the international aid boom, the meaning and value of education have been brought to the fore in debates about what it is really worth

to residents. Education might raise the family out of poverty if a child succeeds, but is it worth the proximate costs of paying to remove a child's labor contribution from the household to place one's hopes on this ultimate goal? The complex relation between people's explanations of the importance of business, combined with and assignments of blame for the town's "backwardness" and their actions, often contrary to these arguments, prompted the writing of this chapter, where I examine how the discourse and practice of education refine an understanding of what it means to be a moral person in Makeni, in light of the fact that the town seems "too backward" to support the education that is needed, desired, and, since education became compulsory in 2002, legally bound.

I argue in this chapter that though education is, like trading, part of the work of "development," it serves more important social functions than having a literate population that argue for the need for waged employment. It is a method of training the youth to be sensible, development-minded and fully socialized humans. However, there is no agreement among residents at the moment whether, because there is no employment for educated youth, it is a worthwhile pursuit. Supporters claim that an educated population can pull the town up from the "grassroots;" that even if the town is "backward" education gives them a "voice to fight with," and that educated people can always use the power that comes with knowledge. Detractors comment that especially because education does not guarantee that one has enough to eat, it should not be emphasized in a place that is so "backward" the population is not even self-reliant.

There is also the concern that the corporal punishment that is liberally used in the classroom as a way for teachers to exert their authority over students and create docile students out of them is, post-war, only reinforcing the pre-eminence of violence in people exerting their will in interpersonal relations, as it was under the RUF. This supports the contention that education is no longer socializing children properly. In addition, Makeni's youth are so "behind" those of Bo and Kenema because the education offered in the town is sub-standard, that they will have little to offer the town or nation even if they succeed in finishing secondary school. Those who do finish often leave the town because there are no jobs, for which others accuse them of only wanting to "self-develop" instead of using their skills to help bolster the town. However, in a place that has no jobs for the educated, students argue, why should they bother to stay?

The situation in Makeni is very different to that encountered by Caroline Bledsoe in Mendeland in the 1980's and 1990's. She found that Mende parents were willing to send their children far away, to the most prestigious schools and to be fostered by strangers in their quest to become "developed" individuals, even if it meant that the child underwent serious privations, and often beatings, during their time in someone else's care (1990: 71; 1992: 190). Education was then, as it is now, about creating a being with character, and this process included the student enduring physical and mental suffering as part of the process, as Bledsoe describes the Mende repeated the idiom, "no success without struggle!" (1990: 71). However, children then could only succeed if they had earned the "blessings" of others, including their parents and teachers, and it was to these people that they owed the rewards of their educations (1992: 183).

In Makeni, this system is rubbing up against the post-war problems of poverty, hunger, and privations that are not solely the provenance of character building among the young. Youth, most of whom I spoke to suffered horribly during the war (some were forced to perform menial labor for the RUF like washing their clothes, others were forced to join), see education as a privilege and are happy to work hard. However, there are debates between teachers and local NGOs as to whether corporal punishment still needs to be involved in this "privilege." Especially in primary schools, where teachers consider themselves the prime socializers of small children, corporal punishment is common. Indeed, teachers increased their use of corporal punishment after the war because they feel that small children, having known only the authority of the gun, had to have a new respect for elders and authority beaten into them. The heart of the problem in Makeni can be boiled down to a question: in the current era of endemic poverty, mass suffering and children who understand only violence, is education the best road to development, both personal and community? Or, as some traders argue, if people in the town are so backward and the education system in the town so backward that wasting time on education would get them nowhere, is it better to engage children in trade as soon as they can take direction, and thus keep their minds engaged and their bellies full?

I analyze first the history of how Makeni's education system came to be so "backward" compared to the other two provincial capitals, namely because the colonial government had less interest in the northern region than in the south and the east, the area

was Islamicized before incorporation into the protectorate, and that administrators assumed that the Temne trader was “not interested” in education. I then examine the current ideological battles that people fight over education: whether, in the current climate of poverty, education or trading is a better way to occupy and socialize possibly errant youth, and ultimately what the value of education is in a country that has nothing to offer an educated population. People argue that education will enable the country, and the town, to pull itself up to a “developed” state. However, the teaching, learning, and corporal punishment that occur inside the classroom reveal that classroom practices, instead of socializing children to live productively in society, are replicating the violence of the war. Therefore it is questionable whether peace and proper socialization are being achieved. In addition, parents who struggle to feed and clothe children whose labor their required in the fields are not certain that education is their family’s best road to “development,” especially in a part of the country that is so “backward” it cannot attract good teachers, and in a country where the government presses education on the people while neither replacing the labor parents lose when their children attend school, nor paying the teachers who are meant to educate them. Ultimately, the narrative that “Makeni people are interested in business, not in school” highlights the fact that residents’ own feelings about what it means for children to have *gud trenin*, and hence a moral bearing that involves respect for elders, respect for work, and the obligation to reciprocate for those who assisted you, in a time and place that is so “backward” that no one is sure what road will lead to economic success, are currently under negotiation.

### **A short history of why Makeni is “backward” in education**

When people state that the Makeni trader is uninterested in educating her children, they are eliding a long and complex historical explanation of why the town was last among provincial capitals in gaining primary and secondary schools (1955, as opposed to Bo School, founded in 1906) with a comment on the town’s current state of poverty. In this section, I examine the quintessential chicken-and-egg question that obfuscates a clear understanding of why people feel that the town is so educationally backward, and hence

developmentally backward: were there never schools in Makeni because people were uninterested, or were they uninterested because there were never any schools in the area?

In the first section, I examine the establishment of Catholic primary and secondary schools in Makeni, and analyze why, after the town's first school, St. Francis, was established and grew to be a nationally recognized secondary school, it currently stands as an emblem of the town's inability to educate its own children. I argue that because the school was established at the end of the colonial era, when the administration continually pled poverty with the Bishop whenever he asked for funds to expand and create boarding facilities, that unlike the boarding schools in Magburaka, Kenema, and Bo, St. Francis never achieved the permanent infrastructure that would create it in the imagination as a "boarding institution," and therefore as a school that accepts the best students from around the country. Even though students used to attend from everywhere, the school in its current state looks, for all intents and appearances, like a community school. However, as it is still one of the better secondary schools in the provinces, it still attracts students from surrounding districts, and is not full of Makeni's children.

In the second section, I analyze the trading cliché, the other reason people cite when explaining why Makei people were slow to adopt education in the past, and still resist sacrificing to educate their children. Thirty three of my interlocutors, traders, non-traders, teachers, students, and otherwise, all insisted that the reason Makeni has historically been a center of trade both nationally and in West Africa is because parents educated their children in business from a young age. Makeni traders were the most astute business people in the protectorate; economic reports sent to England during the 1920's that Makeni dispatched a heavier tonnage of food and palm kernels than any other station, as farmers came from great distances to sell their wares in Makeni (CO 267 622, Railway Department Report). Traders in Makeni "got used to having money for the business" according to one trader, and were comfortable with the logic of putting profits back into a business. "You cannot ask a trader to take thirty or fifty thousand leones from the business to send a child to school. The child should be helping you make money, not spending it! If you don't put the money back into the business, maybe it will falter, and then what will you feed your children?"

*The persistence of business ideas:  
the schools built in Makeni do not educate Makeni's children*

It is not enough... for government to provide places for primary education, if the people will not make use of these places. I now refer to primary schools in the Northern Province. It is a matter for regret to note that there are still primary school places which have not been filled... this province, like others in the country, needs doctors, specialists, dentists, radiographers, laboratory technicians, local government officials and teachers. We can never get these unless we send our children to school, because it is only after they have obtained basic education in this country that people are sent overseas to qualify for these professions. I therefore urge everybody once more, but particularly people in the Northern Province, to make it a point of duty in the interest of their province and in the interest of Sierra Leone, to send their children to school.

Prime Minister Albert Margai, 1964 SLPP convention, Makeni (box DO 223 5)

Indigents in this town, from my own observation, did not make use of the institutions. And I think: it is in their own locality, if people are to benefit from it, they should be the first people. The first part of it, people used to come from afar to acquire learning from this place. And they are here [the indigents of this town], wasting! Mr. IF, teacher, 2005

The Catholic Mission arrived in Makeni in 1950 and established primary schools for both boys and girls (Fornah, *The New Citizen*, August 10, 1992). At the time the Xavierian priests established the mission on Teko Road, there were only 200 children attending school in the northern province (Anonymous, *We Yone*, April 1, 1981). The head priest of the mission, Father Augustus Azzolini, began the St. Francis Primary School for boys and a sister school for girls at St. Joseph's Convent. In its first two years, the boys' school had 44 students and the girls' school 20 (FBCA, 1958). Father Azzolini started agitating for a secondary school in 1955, on the grounds that the Magburaka School for Boys was the only secondary school in the province and did not have enough places for all the qualified applicants, and because he did not want to just let go of the students who had been under his tutelage thus far (FBCA, 1955). He wrote a series of letters to the Ministry of Education in Freetown begging for funds with which to build the second secondary school for boys in the northern region (FBCA, Establishment of St. Francis JSS, 1955). The scheme was approved and in 1958 St. Francis Secondary School For Boys was constructed. Within the year Father Azzolini was once again asking for funds

from the Ministry of Education, this time to build boarding facilities for the students. Because St. Francis was only the second secondary school for the northern region, most qualified applicants came from towns and villages outside of Makeni. Indeed for the first five years, only 15% of St. Francis students were natives of the town, and none of them had places to stay (FBCA, series of letters from the prefecture, 1958-59). The first two requests he made were turned down, on the grounds that the school had just received a grant, and that it did not “deserve” boarding status because it lacked a single teacher with a teaching degree (Director of Education, FBCA, 1958).

An official visit to the school by a representative of the Ministry of Education discovered that the teachers were “qualified non-graduates,” that the school’s original grant had gone to finishing the school’s six classrooms, and that it should be considered for future funding (FBCA, file notes, 1958). By 1962, students were applying from all over the country, but still no funds had been released for boarding facilities. The principal, Mr. JW van Dooren, battled with the Ministry of Education to have boarding facilities built to accommodate migrant students and bring it equal with the Bo School for Boys (FBCA, van Dooren, 1962), which, from its founding, had been the most prestigious secondary school in the protectorate. The ministry continually pleaded poverty and these facilities were never built (FBCA, Minister of Education, 1962). Although it was boarding students in empty classrooms and other seminary buildings for the first few years, St. Francis never received funding for accommodation blocks and was forced, as Principal van Dooren had warned would occur, to release students who could no longer attend because they had no place to stay (FBCA, September, 1962). For this reason, it appears to community members today as simply another local secondary school, unlike its colonial contemporaries of Bo School and Christ the King in Kenema, which maintain boarding facilities, and boarders from around the country, to this day.

“Buildings are typically made to last,” states Hunt,” they can transform a landscape for years, decades, and even centuries and outlast generations” (2005: 156). Those schools in Bo and Kenema, built directly by the colonial government with boarding facilities, have, since they opened, accepted some of the best and brightest students from around the country (FBCA, Azzolini, 1958). St. Francis, which lost its boarding potential as empty classrooms filled and seminary buildings reverted to

seminary use, has taken on the appearance of another community secondary school, even though students still come from around the north to pursue educations there. They come because, according to four migrant students to whom I put the question, in the 1960's and 1970's St. Francis was known as the "Oxford of the North" because it graduated so many students who achieved O-level standard (a British university entrance qualification at the time) in European and ancient languages (see FBCA, Chairman's offering address, 1965).

Educational migration is standard for secondary schools. Sierra Leone operates on a system of two national qualifying exams, the Basic Education Certificate Exam (BECE) for secondary school and the West African School Certificate Exam (WASCE) for university entrance. Those who perform well in the BECE, after form 3, have the option of attending any school in the country. The most qualified and best-connected students go to Freetown or Bo, where the best secondary schools are located and where boarding facilities are available. Parents, for whom having a child boarding at a good school is a point of pride, often encourage good students to leave. Bledsoe (1990: 74) noted that Mende parents compete with each other to send their children to the most distant, most prestigious school.

If education migrancy has been common in Sierra Leone for at least the last seventeen years, why does the idea of "backwardness" of Makeni people find succor in the perception, held by nearly half my adult interlocutors, that these institutions fill with strangers because there are no qualified local students? Of the fourteen secondary school students that I spoke to in depth, nine of them, 64%, were from Makeni or nearby villages. This is a huge increase from the 15% of St. Francis students from Makeni in 1958 (FBCA, letter from the Prefecture, 1958). Perhaps the story that Makeni schools are full of strangers is because the town, at nearly 200,000 people (by the Town Council's estimate), is large enough to provide qualified students for a school of 2,000, such as St. Francis, entirely on its own, and yet it fails to do so, because they do not have high enough BECE scores to gain admission to St. Francis, and many outside students do.

In my conversation with the head teacher of a local primary school, she stated, "every year the numbers are increasing" of students who finish class six and are able to gain admission to St. Francis or one of the other local secondary schools (Islamic Benevolent and Makeni Comprehensive are the largest). However, though many of them



are admitted, many fewer go, because they cannot raise the money for school fees, which are significantly higher for secondary school than primary school (Le30,000-Le60,000 per year, as opposed to Le10,000). Many drop out before they begin because their parents feel they are educated enough and do not need to “waste” more money on school, according to one trader. “I finished class six, and my parents thought that it was time I stop spending their money and make some money for them in the market, so now I am here.” Of the thirteen students I interviewed in depth, each named two to three friends who had done well on the BECE and then were forced to resign their place at secondary school for lack of money, which means only about 20% to 30% of Makeni’s qualified students attend secondary school. Their parents viewed trade as more important.

*A Muslim trader’s dilemma: should one invest profits in education or a better business?*

Two of my interlocutors, both Muslim, cited the fact that the north was heavily Islamic before the Protectorate was established as a reason that northern people were never interested in education and the colonial administration was never interested in educating northern people. One of them, a former schoolteacher in Kambia district, noted that the Susu were “worst of all” in sending their children to school because they would rather have them learn the Quran.<sup>36</sup> Western education was not important; especially when one’s usual interactions were not with the western world via colonial administrators, but on trade routes to Guinea. Azarya stated that in pre-colonial Nigeria, Muslims viewed trade as an important occupation that made a positive contribution to public welfare, because the prophet Mohammed (himself once a trader) had praised traders for “enrich[ing] themselves so as to be able to help the deprived” (1980: 424). Muslims sent their children to be taught by *mallam*, teachers of the Quran. Because the *mallam* did not support them, they were forced to beg for a living until they were old enough to learn a trade (Winters, 1987: 179). Students who finished their Quranic education were deemed by their teachers to be well prepared for life and have the confidence to immediately seek

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<sup>36</sup> His theological argument supports Mr. Macauley’s contention that Temnes and Susus were the “uninterested tribes”. D’Alisera notes that the Susu people are the most orthodox Muslims among all Sierra Leonean tribes (2004: 5).

employment (180). Western education theoretically had no place in this tightly interwoven web of trade and religious education.

My interlocutors argued that in the past northerners were not interested in education because the colonial administration was discouraged by the fact that independent Quranic schools were already functioning, and there is ample archival evidence for this. The 1924 Report on Education stated that there were no government-built or supported schools in the north. Mention was made of one missionary primary school in Makeni at the time, which enrolled 41 children. It was one of only three registered schools of 57 in the protectorate that received no government grant that year. Of the other two, one was overlooked because it had burned down, and the other because it submitted no statistics on whether it was enrolling students (CO 267 611, 1925).<sup>37</sup>

In 1925 and 1926, the colonial government spent twice as much on schools in the central and southern provinces as it did in the northern province, not including Bo School, which had its own budget (Blue Book 1925, Blue Book 1926). In 1932 it spent eight times as much on primary schools in the south as the north (Blue Book 1932). What statistics cannot show is whether administrators were responding to an idea that enrollment was too low in the north to warrant additional schools. Herein again lies the main problem with understanding the driving forces in the lack of educational development in the north. According to detractors, the eventual establishment of schools in the north never changed the fact that northern people were Muslim business people who retained a business mentality and a dedication to the Quran, and herein lays an ideological conflict that persists to this day. Those who argue that Makeni people are not interested in education are essentially arguing that traders cannot think on a time scale longer than the next transaction, and education requires a long time horizon. All they see, as one interviewee put it, is that if you educate a child it will cost you money, whereas if you put them in the market they will make money for you. Education does not turn a profit, and only profit can be put towards improving the family's situation now, including that of the child. In the extant climate of poverty, this is the trader's essential dilemma.

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<sup>37</sup> There were 73 unregistered missionary schools thought to be operating in the protectorate at that time, but they refused to submit paperwork to the colonial government, and so no data officially exists on their locations, enrollments, or successes and failures. They in turn received no government funding (CO 267 611, 1925).

The students I interviewed, however, did not have a positive view of trade. They wished that their parents had supported their desire for education more: “In the north parents prefer to keep their money in other businesses than sending their child to be educated,” or, “parents here are only concerned in giving their children financial support in order for them to engage in business enterprise, by renting these Hondas [motorcycle taxis], etcetera, instead of sending them to school.” Both of these young men were Muslim with parents who traded, and both were attempting to pay for their own educations. The young ladies I interviewed were all Catholic, and 75% were living with their fathers only, which is the factor they all emphasized as the reason they were able to attend secondary school. I walked with one from my house to hers, and she pointed out all the girls helping at their mothers’ tables. She said that if a girl’s mother is a businesswoman, it used to be that the daughter would accompany her to market from the time she can first carry loads on her head.<sup>38</sup> Now parents know that they must send their girl children for at least a little bit of schooling, but once they are older, they have to struggle to stay in school if their mothers want them to finally come to market and start earning some money. Her own mother was suffering from a debilitating mental illness that kept her at home, but as her father was a carpenter, he was able to make enough money to help her with school fees.

Makeni’s status as a “backward” place for education is tied to the historical legacy of the place as a trade-dominated, largely Islamic town.<sup>39</sup> Five students I interviewed blamed the government for accepting received wisdom that Makeni people are only interested in business, so that they actively divert educational funds from the town, claiming that they would not get used to their intended ends, and exacerbate the problem. As one said:

There is a perception in this country that northerners are not serious about education. So what the government usually does when they want to send educational materials or build schools, they will divert them to Bo and Kenema.

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<sup>38</sup> In Haiti as well, most traders began as very young girls, when they accompanied their mothers to the market. However, at the time of Mintz’s research, all of them, save one, were putting their own daughters through school instead of bringing them to the market (Mintz, 1971: 259).

<sup>39</sup> In contrast, van der Geest, found the late introduction of Christian missions into his research town in Ghana meant that education, which “contributed to the success of trading,” was also slow to take hold, with the result that his research subjects were less successful traders than their educated neighbors (1997: 537).

So teachers are not encouraged to come here because they know it is behind. And graduates, when they get their teaching certificate, they don't come here. They go to Bo or Kenema or stay in Freetown because it is not nice here. AC

Some teachers cite the inertia of lack of education in a family as the main problem: uneducated parents do not provide a conducive learning environment for children, especially if they think the child should be trading and making money (see Mulugeta, 2004: 81-82). If children see their parents and older siblings trading and making money, they will want the same thing. One teacher commented that if a child's parents are illiterate traders, they never teach the child anything at home, and the child is never curious to learn. The teachers agreed that they are seeing changes in attitudes of parents in Makeni, though it is not a full conversion. They say parents have been "sensitized" to the importance of education for giving their children a future, and that many parents do make financial sacrifices to this end.

However, that is where the parental investment ends. Children attend school, but without supplies, food, or, often, shoes. Teachers complain that parents do not attend teacher conferences, do not come to school to receive their children's grades, and generally stay as far away from the school as possible. Why is this? One teacher commented that she is sure the parents suspect that a teacher who wants them to attend a school function or to observe their child will, upon the parent's arrival at school, request from the parent a financial contribution that they are unable or unwilling to make. Having sat with traders talking to them about what their days are like, it seems that they are simply time and resource-limited, and this makes paying any attention to school-going children impossible. One trader woke at five every morning to start preparing beans in order to make bean cakes. Having ground, formed, and fried the cakes, she then loaded them on a platter and walked around town selling until the last cake was gone. If she was able to sell them all, she could make Le5000, enough to buy rice and sauce ingredients for her three children, after buying more beans and oil, and perhaps set aside Le500 for their school fees. Many days she was out until six or seven in the evening, and simply did not have the time nor wherewithal to wonder how school was going. And if she has three children in primary school, at Le30,000 each per term, she would need Le180,000 per year. With an average profit of Le5000 per day, this leaves precious little

money for other school expenses such as uniforms, shoes, and supplies. The problem intensifies once the children reach secondary school, which is when many are forced to either find their own fees or withdraw.

If parents struggle just to pay school fees for their children and spend the rest of the money supporting a business that will perhaps feed the family every day, how can they invest more in promoting their children's education? I suspect that the grinding poverty that currently engulfs Makeni is preventing people both the means and the mentality to invest more, but that it is less heartbreaking for proud people to explain this problem through a historically-rooted narrative of Makeni people being traders who value profit over investment. And because people use this explanation themselves, it relieves the government of responsibility for investing heavily in education in the region, as they can claim the traders will not use it, and the vicious cycle of development avoidance continues. The current conundrum in Makeni is that traders who may desperately want to educate their children can do little more than feed them, and the must remove their children from school if they cannot afford it and require their children's labor. So when people in Makeni complain that in not educating their children the community members are not concerned about development and are not thinking about the future, the truth lies closer to the fact that grinding poverty has caused traders' profits to dwindle so badly that parents simply do not have anything more to invest.

Even if parents manage to keep all their children in school, they are not seeing any immediate benefit either for themselves, their children, or development in the town that would justify the enormous financial outlay of school fees. But because they are proud and do not want to shoulder the blame for their own poverty or Makeni's backwardness, they choose to cloak this inability to see or plan the future clearly in a language of stereotyped religious and occupational preferences. In defending a collective choice about the matter by blaming an undefined group of "Makeni people who trade," community members retain their agency and are not just victims of their own precarious financial situation. Abstracting poverty to this level means that individuals do not have to continually confront the painful reality of their inability to feed and school their own children (see Scheper-Hughes, 1992: 314). And yet they will continue to try, because if they are moving and scrambling everyday to make money and cannot take time for their

children, school is the only way that their children can learn *gud trenin* and be socialized to live as moral human beings.

**Lucrative business or expensive education:  
working for peace and community development**

A man told me one day that educated people will benefit in any environment because no one can take their knowledge and skills from them and they will always be able to do something, while another asserted that education would not feed one's children today, so why take food from their mouths when the future is not guaranteed? Although it became clear that people valued education in an abstract sense and struggled to educate their children in spite of their admonishments that no one in the area did so, what never materialized was a sense of how education was actually benefiting people in Makeni. Why then do the youth defend their need for education so vehemently? And why, even when there are no employment opportunities, do people continue to invest scarce resources in more education? Most importantly, in this section I will address the root concern that causes the contestation of school versus business, namely how there is no agreement among residents about which path will ensure the youth will be moral and peaceful human beings that will not cause the town any trouble in the future.

The narrative many people relate is that the corruption of the APC government systematically destroyed the economy and caused astronomical unemployment among the youth in the 1970's and 1980's (see Richards, 1996: 125). The youth who could not create work for themselves "just sat down idle" and "idleness is the devil's work." People who are not engaged in some kind of activity and are therefore impoverished and hungry have plenty of time and inclination to develop criminal minds and pursue activities like stealing. According to many of my interlocutors, including students, it was idle youth who voluntarily joined the RUF when it arrived in Makeni (and when the movement began, see Abdullah, 1998: 217; 2005: 185), and this same kind of youth who, if continually unengaged in activity, will cause problems now. Ten people cited an increase in armed robberies after the UN reintegration programs ended as proof that when youth are "idle" they will steal for their livings. One man went so far as to offer me a room in his own house, as he was concerned that I was living too far from the central

police station at a time when “the devil is loose among the youth.” The Comaroffs found similar narratives of intergenerational unrest in post-apartheid South Africa, where unemployed, idle youth engaged in witch-hunts where they accused their elderly targets of preventing them from finding work (1999: 287; see also van der Geest, 2002: 453). In this case the youth accused their elders of contracting with the devil to prevent them from succeeding, for which they were punished.

Either way, people in both Makeni and South Africa understand that engaging the minds and bodies of the youth is critical to community peace. This discussion highlights the fact that in Makeni there is no agreement over whether education or trade is a better way to avoid idleness among the youth, and therefore prevent potential future violence. In this section I examine the ideological struggle people undertake when choosing between business and education for their children, as the choice also seems to be between keeping children occupied and sensible today, and promoting community development in the future. The question that no one can answer is if education, with no promise of jobs at the end of the road, will actually cause more harm than good as educated unemployed youth sit and do “the devil’s work” of criminal plotting.

*“Education is better than silver and gold”, but can you trade it for food?*

The best single example of the contested value of education is the rabid popularity of the song, *An’Porto*, by the group 2+1. As I elucidate fully in Chapter Seven, 2+1 are four Temne men from Makeni, singing in Temne, who released an album in May 2004, as the flood of international aid in Makeni was draining away. The beginning of the song is in English as a white man (performed by the lead singer) introduces himself to the Temne:

White man: “Hello, I am a white man in Sierra Leone. And I am here to tell you that learning is better than silver and gold. So I need all your minerals and then you will be educated.”

Temne man: “*An’porto, yema di.*” (White man, I want to eat.)

White man, not understanding: “What?” (in KaThemne, the word *wat* means “small child”.)

Temne man (not sure if the white man meant to insult him): “*An’porto, yema di.*”

White man: “What?”

Temne man: “*Wathai woni baki gbang!*” (I am not a small child; I am a man!)

The band then launches into the song in Temne, criticizing white men coming to the country to steal resources and giving the people unprofitable education in return. This is driven home in a line that states, “They sent us to school like April the fool and moved all our minerals to a foreign land.” The song was released in 2004, during the drawdown of international NGOs, when indigenes were still heavily reliant on foreign donors. Aside from reminding people that the white man made fools of them in the colonial era, this song also illuminates the current economic crisis that is affecting the country, and Makeni in particular. Apart from the history of education in the country, 2+1 is questioning whether education can feed the people right now, or if concentrating on education when there are no guaranteed jobs at the end of the road is turning them into small children that need feeding and looking after, again by white men, though this time as NGOs. If they are concentrating on education, they are not working to feed themselves, as they would do through trade or mining.

It is a powerful critique, but is not universally deployed as a criticism of education and a defense of trade and business. One teacher told me that the opening line was taken from a Temne proverb in defense of education, which is what she was teaching her students in order to inspire them to achieve:

We are teaching them (the children) that without education, you are nothing. We ask them, “Do you want money?” They say no. “What is better, money or education?” They say education. “Why?” And then they give us examples: “When the war appeared in this Makeni town, we went to Freetown. We were saved. Those without education, they must take their hand and do lots of hard work just to get their living.” Then we give them an example about that. “You can’t be a president, or head of any council or any society if you are not educated.” So this is how we bring it to them. We ask them, “How many of you want to become a doctor?” And everybody will put his hand up. And we ask them, “How can you be a doctor if you are not educated?” Education is the basic thing. We have a proverb that goes: education is better than silver and gold. Because if you lose your money, lose your silver, lose your gold... for example from what you are doing [i.e. trade]. If you are educated, you have already got your certificate then many things will come your way. You can live on what you get from your education.<sup>40</sup> Mrs. AF

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<sup>40</sup> There is no mention in *Temne Names and Proverbs* (Bai-Sharka, 1986) of this proverb; however my research assistant Idriss mentioned a word *k'rande* that means: the person who learns will have a comfortable life.



A fellow teacher agreed that education is critical to the future, but he struggled with the daily poverty of a teacher's salary while watching his contemporaries who engaged in business earn more.<sup>41</sup> He had to force himself to preach the value of education to his students, even though his friends taunted his dedication to non-lucrative work:

We decide that we need to educate because we see what lack of education has done to our brothers [the ex-combatants], so we need to educate. Because when you tell them about education they say, "Hey man, go and take your book, I will earn my money. You talk about twenty thousand, I will earn 200 thousand, five hundred, one million." But as a teacher you are poor, you have no money. So I say, "God, please, help me with this..." and education, no one will take it from me. So I am doing it here, I am imparting knowledge to them [the children].  
SK<sup>42</sup>

At the same time, however, other teachers see that a "new spirit" for education developed in the minds of the youth after the war. One secondary school teacher told me that the students took their educations for granted before the war and therefore did not apply themselves. But after they were forced to "sit down idle" for so many years and saw how terrible were the lives of the child soldiers who had been denied education and relied on making a living by the gun, they decided en masse to take their educational opportunities seriously. He first returned to Makeni from Freetown in 2001 to re-open St. Francis, and said that students often returned to town to start school even though their parents were still in Freetown and they had nowhere to stay.

The fact of the matter is that it is extraordinarily difficult to pursue one's education in Makeni, where the schools are under-funded, teaching is erratic because unpaid teachers do not always attend school (especially if another opportunity to earn money comes their way any particular day), and there is no money to pay school fees (see Richardson, 2004: 62-63 for Sri Lankan parallels). This means that the few students who do well in the WASCE and apply to university tend to do much better than their contemporaries from around the country, because they are used to working hard. In 2003 only two students from Makeni qualified to enter university, and as of spring 2006 both

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<sup>41</sup> The absolute poverty of teachers in Sierra Leone is somewhat unusual. In Nigeria, Berry found that a single teacher's salary could support six to eight people (1985: 121).

<sup>42</sup> Mr. SK passed away in February 2005 at the age of 27 from acute appendicitis.

are in the top 10% of their class at Fourah Bay College. In 2004 only one student qualified, and he too is excelling at Fourah Bay.

However, even if these men graduate at the top of their class at Fourah Bay College, there is no guarantee that they will find employment. One of the two students who qualified in 2003 confided in me on several occasions that he is concerned that even if he maintains his high academic standards that he will still be jobless on the streets of Freetown when he finishes, and it would be a disgrace if he had to return to Makeni having failed to make something of his education. I must therefore ask the question that dogged my study of education in Makeni: why, if there is every sign that there are no waged jobs at the end of the educational road, do students still pursue their educations and set such store by their ability to succeed once they have achieved their educational goals? In essence, why is education still so valued by individuals in a place that had suffered near-complete state and economic collapse?

*The new spirit of education: personal development and national development*

Much work on Sierra Leone has emphasized the link between knowledge and secrecy (Bledsoe, 1992: 185, 190; Ferme, 2001: 29; Shaw, 2002: 125), whether that knowledge was of Islamic divination (Shaw), the history of a village landscape (Ferme) or formal education (Bledsoe). Bledsoe emphasizes the fact that western knowledge is, like other forms of knowledge, considered a commodity that the teacher “owns” and students who want this knowledge must recompense the teacher (1992: 191). The teacher can thus pass “blessings” on to the student so that they can use the knowledge to develop. All three assert that, whatever form it takes, knowledge and “development” of the individual are linked, and it is the knowledgeable, and thus powerful individuals who are the “big people” that control society. Students in Makeni are aware of the poverty in which the whole country is mired, a result of rampant colonial exploitation (as in *An’porto*) and years of post-colonial neglect, and see education and a fully developed self as the only way to be able to jump on the opportunities to create a developed town. Students are confident that education will give them the edge on any employment that emerges in the

future, therefore they must pursue as much of it as they can, accept any employment they find, and wait for the country to catch up with their skills and ambitions.

In Sierra Leone, the feeling among students is that economic collapse has not devalued education; in fact it has caused students to hoard as much education as they can to increase their chances of finding any white-collar position. This perspective is in direct contrast to many other places in Africa where unemployment among graduates is also high (see Meyer, 1999: 26). On the west coast of Madagascar, for instance, students mock their teachers, asking them why they should bother with education when jobs are scarce (Sharp, 1993: 234; and 2002: 13). Why is Sierra Leone different? I interviewed the head teacher of one primary school and asked her specifically what people do with their secondary school certificates. She answered that it is difficult to get a job with only a secondary school education, but the requirements for university are so strict they are beyond of the reach of most students. This is why many students go to teacher training colleges, where the entrance requirements are more lenient.

Enrollment is high in teacher training colleges right now not because so many students want to be teachers, but because they do not want to stop at secondary school and are not qualified to be admitted to a full university. There are five teacher training colleges in the country, one each in Bo, Kenema, Freetown, and Makeni, and one in Port Loko, which was originally for women only. A Teaching Certificate (TC) course takes three years, and Makeni Teachers' College has about 900 students working towards a TC, three hundred in each year. It is one of the largest Teacher Colleges in the country, and in total the colleges graduate about 1200 qualified teachers a year, according to the former Vice Principal of Makeni Teachers' College. It is many more than could ever find jobs as teachers, he told me, and most of them do not want to be teachers anyway.

Teacher colleges teach students that being a teacher is not so desirable. Classes were interrupted three times in my time in Makeni when teachers struck to demand payment of their salaries, and students are discouraged from choosing teaching as a profession. In fact, of the seven teachers I interviewed in depth, only three wanted to be teachers. The others had different career aspirations: nursing, law, and administration, but their exam marks were not high enough for them to do anything other than a TC.

More teacher college graduates want employment with NGOs than want to teach,<sup>43</sup> and having an advanced certificate will give them a leg up in the employment market (see Berry, 1985: 13-14 for similarities in Nigeria). Some laugh that soon one will need a university degree to be employed as a file clerk, but that position and salary is better than no salary at all.

Even students who are not qualified to attend teacher training colleges will try to pull money together for a certificate course in a subject, such as community development or journalism, that they can take at local private institutions in order to increase their employment chances. The fact that so many of these students still end up in trade occupations such as riding motorcycle taxis is a problem they place squarely at the feet of the national government. I found that people who had invested so much in their educations were unwilling to decry education's intrinsic value; it is the current economic state of the country that is worthless (see Christie and Gordon, 1992: 410 for examples from South Africa). This is the fault of the government, which has relied so much on foreign donations, especially in the aftermath of war, that it has done nothing to court international investment and bring jobs.<sup>44</sup>

Education is also valued because many people believe it will bring the country up "from the grassroots!" according to one town councilor. Essentially, if the country is saturated with educated people, it cannot help but develop itself because not only will the people demand it, they will possess the intellectual tools to initiate changes themselves. Two female town councilors stated categorically that by stressing the education of girls, the nation could not help but develop. They set great store by the mantra, "educate the girl child and you educate the nation." They know that educated women marry later, have fewer children that they are better able to raise, have better decision-making powers in their home, and are more insistent on educating their own children (see Mulugeta, 2004: 79). They feel that by educating women pressure on the failed medical system will be relieved, as educated women will be better able to take care of their children and make

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<sup>43</sup> This hope, of waged employment with NGOs, is also being criticized by 2+1 in *An'porto*, as Sierra Leone's teacher college graduates would rather work for white people than work for their own people. However this is not unusual in Africa (see Cole, 2004: 577).

<sup>44</sup> In Sri Lanka, most students outside Colombo want public-sector jobs. They believe the private sector discriminates against rural students, and none preferred rural or blue-collar jobs (Hettige, 2004: 123-124).

decisions in the home (see Blossfeld, H. and J. Huinink, 1991: 143; Russell, 2002: 55). In addition, educated women have fewer children and earn more money (see Glick, 1999: 69), which means less pressure on household food budgets and school places, and in turn better educations for their children. They are convinced that education is the only way for women to “develop” and bring their families out of poverty.

This argument is not without its detractors, as parents are concerned about their daughters’ marriageability, and this is where another battle between education and trade occurs. Many students, both male and female, stated that some parents, both father and mother, do not want to educate their daughters because they hold traditional values of sending girls to the female initiation society, *bundu*, and then marrying them off when they are adolescents. These parents feel it is better to involve a girl in trade when she is young because she can use this, and not education when she is married. Recall that I mentioned that all of the male students could name several friends whose educations were stopped when the money ran out. All of the girls that I interviewed stated that they were unique among their childhood playmates and lucky that their parents encouraged their educations, because “most of my friends are not in school,” said one. As soon as they were old enough for *bundu*, their parents married them off. On the other hand, one of the town councilors recalled that her parents sent her off to *bundu* as soon as she was old enough, but then they sent her back to school, because “my father loved me so much he wanted me to speak Krio.” She feels that the two are not entirely incompatible; parents just need to realize that an educated girl can still get married, and marry much higher up the social ladder. She herself married a chief.

However, the councilor’s experience of marrying a knowledgeable and powerful “big men” highlights another aspect of why parents may be concerned about educating their daughters: they will have to find an educated man for her. I once observed two army officers discussing which of two women one of them should marry, and the other was coaxing him to choose the less educated one, “because she will stay in the home and be content with you. If your wife is too educated, maybe even more than you, she will leave you and go looking for a man with more education.” Men fear that no educated woman is content being a wife to a husband who is less educated. Berry found that this pattern held true among the Yoruba, where educated women in her sample *always*

married a man with more education, and men married women with less (1985: 129). Educating girls might help develop the nation through developing the family, but it has little to do with altering social and economic customs surrounding marriage. Trade brings income into the home without threatening the status quo. Education does not.

However, educated women especially argue that the status quo must be threatened in order to develop the town, and education suits this purpose beautifully. Both female head teachers I spoke to educated all their daughters so that they could be independent, and not have to rely on a man. One trader, who was married at 15 and had eight children, put all of her resources towards educating her daughters after her husband died because, “I don’t want them to have to rely on a man, as I did. And I will never marry again, I only rely on myself now.” One young woman stated emphatically that she will leave Makeni, get her nursing qualification, and return to run the hospital. “And I will have my own house for my family,” she added, “as I won’t have a husband to *chop* all my money.” She views men as a resource drain, rather than a support, and believes that an educated woman can make it on her own (see Glick and Sahn, 1998: 328; Manuh, 1995: 197).

### *Education gives the nation “a voice to fight with”*

When I asked former RUF members why they felt education was important, many of them related their arguments to how a general lack of education caused the war. Some stated that the RUF succeeded for so many years because they abducted illiterate and uneducated boys from villages, and these boys were unable to make intelligent decisions about the ideology they were told by RUF commanders. They believed blindly in the ideology because they had not been taught how to think for themselves, and thought that doing something, even with a gun, was better than doing nothing. If everyone at the start of the war had had “a voice to fight with,” as one of my interviewees so astutely phrased it, they wouldn’t have had to fight with guns. The RUF succeeded because they preyed upon the fears and ignorance of the people, and the people were unable to fight back. As rural people had no voice to fight the government, they also had no voice to fight the RUF. As Sharp states, “students schooled by the state develop the most sophisticated knowledge by which to critique [the] state” (2002: 63; see also Russell, 2002: 50). If the

rural population of Sierra Leone had been well educated when the war started, so this argument goes, they would never have encouraged the RUF and it would have failed.<sup>45</sup>

On the other hand, several ex-combatants had been educated to a secondary and sometimes tertiary level, and accepted the RUF ideology because it fit in with their own ideas of why the government needed changing.<sup>46</sup> Many of these men later fell away from the RUF when it merged forces with mutinous government military troops to become the AFRC, which they said led to an increase in terror tactics, though they maintain that the RUF ideology initially resonated with their personal feelings. In this case, was it more dangerous to be uneducated or a little educated? Both educated and uneducated people willingly joined the RUF, and an equal number of both were kidnapped.

What the ex-combatants did agree on was that because education is now stressed by youth, there is a fundamental change in the way the people “fight” the government:

The people are rising, but they are doing it as a political war: student strikes for teacher wages and exams, labor rights... and the youths are rising up, etc. So it was not only the arms, people are rising up through their education, they are taking political arms against the government. The educated are doing their part to criticize this government. MS

He made this comment in the wake of a three-day student strike in Freetown, where they protested a rise in school fees without a concomitant rise in the quality of their educations. The political climate now is different from the days of the 1970’s and 1980’s, where students who rioted in Freetown to protest the APC policies were censored or expelled from school, and journalists who published papers that criticized his government were shut down.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> I heard from one army officer that when the war started people on the border were happy because they thought that Charles Taylor was doing great things to “bother” the corrupt government in Liberia and had been asking themselves “why can’t we have a war here?” He put it down to people in Sierra Leone not being “security conscious” enough to protect themselves mentally and emotionally from the RUF, and the ex-combatants put it down to lack of education.

<sup>46</sup> On September 7, 1979, the *Daily Mail* published excerpts from Qaddafi’s *Green Book* as a special supplement to the newspaper. Educated people in Freetown learned the basics of what, twelve years later, became the RUF’s guiding principals (Niblock, 1979).

<sup>47</sup> Two of my interlocutors were university student government leaders in the late 1980’s, after the APC had banned official student union governments. One of them was kidnapped by the secret police in the dead of night and threatened with execution under President Joseph Momoh’s government if he did not stop his organizing activities, and the other was expelled from Fourah Bay College and forced into exile in

Journalists and musicians are not afraid to criticize the government; unlike under the APC, under Kabbah, there are no reprisals for such actions. A rumor circulated Freetown in February 2005 that when a particularly inflammatory song called *Borbor Bεε*, which specifically targeted particularly corrupt politicians for criticism, was released, many ministers who felt they had been personally implicated demanded that the artist, a young university graduate named Emmerson, be arrested. President Kabbah demurred. He said, “Let them *blo maynd* [speak their minds]. Then they will not start another war.” Scott refers to this as the “safety valve theory,” whereby subordinate groups are allowed to air their feelings so that they do not openly revolt (1990: 177). Indeed, Emmerson was never arrested for libel; however, according to my research assistant, six months after the song was released, he was arrested on charges of stealing a video recorder. When the case went to trial, there were protests on the streets of Freetown that some ministers must have set him up. With respect to what the post-war government has done for the country’s education system, I will address that later in the chapter. Suffice to say here, people view education as *gud trenin* not just because it teaches people to think critically about the state of their country and voice their opinions intelligently, but also because, merely by the fact of occupying the mind, creates a stronger character.

*Education fend off “the devil’s work”... but trade does as well, and keeps the youth fed*

The final reason education is valued in Makeni is the cornerstone of how *gud trenin* forms a moral person in a moral community: it keeps the youth mentally and emotionally engaged and keeps them off the streets, preventing them from engaging in “the devil’s work” of criminal plotting due to idleness and poverty. Violence and crime among unemployed, uneducated and marginal youth has a long history in Sierra Leone, with the first references to Freetown’s *rarray boys*, its marginal migrants who lived by their wits, going back to 1890 (Abdullah, 2005: 175). A recovering government benefits from

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Guinea after organizing a protest on the streets of Freetown. Ibrahim Kargbo, the current editor of the *New Citizen* newspaper, operated *The Tablet*, one of the few independent newspapers to run under Siaka Stevens. Of his days writing against APC censorship he said only, “We spent some time in jail for that now and then.” See Appendix II for an expanded discussion of newspapers.



enrolling its idle youth in school, as schools are “the primary socializing instrument, [because] schools are concerned with guaranteeing stability, and this is generally understood to mean preserving... the system of authority.” (Hart, quoted in John, 1995: 115; see also Christie and Gordon, 1992: 409; and Sharp, 2002: 9).

If “idleness is the devil’s work,” then education, like trade, can maintain the peace and steer youth towards accepting authority once again. What there is no agreement on in Makeni is whether trade or education is better at keeping the peace, and whether one should be more concerned about promoting peace in the next few years or the next generation. When the war ended, as Mr. IF mentioned, a “new spirit of education” developed in the minds of the youth, and that was a response from both ex-combatants returning from the bush and former students who had lost time on their educations during the war. The latter generally found acceptance at school, as any youth who applied him or herself to education was once again a “student” and no longer an “ex-combatant.” Youth who had “sat down idle” for the duration of the war were happy to be doing anything after such a long period of inertia.

Education in the immediate aftermath of the war was not a statement about development in the country as much as it was a statement about peace and rehabilitation. It was civilized interaction in a formal setting at a basic level. The “dangerous” youth were those who chose not to return to school; many spent their days getting drunk and high in the ghettos. These ghettos, aside from being the center of the town’s drug culture, are the “uncharted borderland” where disengaged youth gathered to vent their frustrations with society, where the rest of society is afraid to follow lest they be caught up in its incivilities and illegalities (Comaroffs, 2000: 308). These are the sites of the devil’s work, and it is from the youth in this “lost generation” that future disturbances are most likely to originate (Errante and Efraime, 2006: 105). Education might be the panacea.

Today, youth pursue education and dream of better lives for their own children, while traders encourage the youth to trade and think of how they will survive in the current deteriorating economic climate. One boy stated, “If we had books we could engage our minds on great things and we would not be idle, then we could learn skills with our educations and help our own children and everything would be well.” His mother then asked, “And what are you eating tonight?” Though the present is not

“normal,” they see the town’s backwardness as no reason why they should not work on the future, while traders see no reason youth should expend energy on the future if they cannot feed themselves in the present. Many parents commented that youth who graduate still drunkenly talk politics in the ghettos because they are unable to find jobs. If they had instead started trading, they would be more satisfied. Unlike the Yoruba in the 1930’s, who viewed education as a better tool for instilling morals in one’s children than having them work for others (see Renne, 2006: 69), residents of Makeni currently worry that morality of any sort is not possible without the filling of basic needs.

*The ghettos and the angry intellectuals:  
should trade be encouraged instead of education?*

Parents worry that educated youth who are still unemployed are not only idle, but angry that they had expended so much effort to find no reward in the end. Many remain in town instead of returning to their villages because the only opportunities for waged employment are there. The town’s young, educated and unemployed people are aggregating and airing their frustrations in the ghettos. One ghetto near the Teachers’ College is frequented by hundreds of youth who sit and drink palm wine everyday, and is known by its patrons as “the house of the intellectuals,” for all the political talk that occurs. One young teacher believed that this ghetto arose after the war because there were so many frustrated students at the Teachers College who believed they would never be able to make anything of their educations, and so drifted away from classes. This trend is not new. Many of the most frequent visitors to Freetown’s *potes* [ghettos] by the late 1970’s were students at Fourah Bay College, who partook in the illicit activities of their less-educated peers (Abdullah, 2005: 179).

These youth are more dangerous than uneducated unemployed youth, because they are intelligent enough to cause more trouble, and they could rally the uneducated youth. Engaging them in trade would keep them fed and that will quiet their minds, or as Clark states, “unofficial trading preserves state institutions by defusing potential civil unrest” (1988: 9) that stems from unoccupied young minds. Indeed, when the Sri Lankan government first proposed garment export factories as rural industries in 1992, the

president stated that it would “bring discipline to the rural areas” which had been the source of a violent youth movement (Lynch, 2004: 169). Many parents feel the same.

Parents are not just ignorant educational naysayers. As Richards wrote, the organizers and original commanders of the RUF were not illiterate farmers, but “highly educated dissidents” who had been rusticated under Siaka Stevens’ rule in the 1970’s (1996: 1). Stevens was afraid of the intelligentsia undermining his authority, and so sent them, the teachers and doctors who had questioned him, to the far corners of the country where they would not cause trouble. It was these people who in 1990 formed the bulk of the RUF’s command. They were able to recruit both the educated and uneducated to their side by enticing them with “the ideology,” namely intelligent arguments about the corrupt and “rotten” system that was causing their suffering. What would prevent another group of educated, frustrated, peri-urban intellectuals from doing the same again? There is plenty for the educated youth to be angry about at the moment, and plenty of uneducated unemployed youth to rally to their sides. By not addressing unemployment, some people fear, the government is recreating the conditions for war.

Even if they do not start a war, Makeni has a brutal recent history of armed gangs of youth terrorizing the townspeople. In 1988 a gang of armed robbers attacked the Catholic Mission repeatedly until it closed its operations for a week in protest and forced the police into action (Anonymous, *We Yone*, June 21, 1988). Newspaper articles in 1994 (Anonymous, *Liberty Voice*, February 24, 1994; Massaquoi, June 17, 1994; Anonymous, *Afro Times*, September 28-October 4, 1994), 1996 (Jalloh, *The Spotlight*, March 7 1996; Momodu, *Concord Times*, June 4, 1996; Turay, *Expo Times Gazette*, September 30, 1996), and 1997 (James, *The Point*, March 21, 1997), before Makeni was occupied by rebels, report a string of robberies on local schools, cinemas, goods shops, and private residences, all committed by gangs of armed youth. Of the thieves that were eventually caught, most of them had only a few years of education, were habitually unemployed and spent their time drinking in the ghettos. In 2004 and 2005 the Catholic Mission was robbed repeatedly once again, and Father Samura spotted a few youth climbing the fences to loot the premises. If all of these youth were given some form of daily occupation, traders argue, they would have no reason to steal.

However, this does not mean that the student population of Makeni is peaceful, and, like Mr. IF mentioned, they do frequent the ghettos. The fact that the two groups overlap comes to the surface when there is any cause for young people to feel “disgruntled” with their lives or authority. In July 1996, for example, a group of St. Francis students who had done poorly on their exams attacked their teachers with weapons taken from the barracks including tear gas and grenades (according to one of my interlocutors, who was a freshman at the school at the time) when the school refused to issue their report cards without their parents present (Momodu, *Concord Times*, July 23, 1996). Sixty students were expelled, but three days later returned to the campus and threw stones at parents and administrators that had gathered for a meeting. One parent commented that these students “spent all their time smoking marijuana and had no regard for their elders or authority” (Lans, *The Punch*, July 26, 1996). Clearly even the best education that Makeni can offer is not enough to keep students out of the ghettos.

Education is valued in the current economic climate because people such as students, educators, and local government officials see it as the way to create long-term economic stability in the region, and they will go to great lengths to push an educational agenda in order to force the development of the region from the ground up, and perhaps give themselves a toe-hold in the anticipated improved economic climate. They place great value in concentrating one’s hope on a better future that they must prepare for today. The educational ideal is at odds with Makeni’s economic reality, where a lack of waged employment for graduates make people wonder what good is education if it cannot keep the stomach full and the mind turned away from criminal thoughts, and often results in failing or disillusioned youth going to the ghettos anyway? Both agree that the mind and body must be kept occupied in order to for the individual, and the nation, to progress, but they contest the most prudent means to that end.

**Inside the classroom, outside the center:  
the practice and value of education on the margins**

Intertwined with the social and moral values that can be learned from education, and the concomitant problems that we have seen, are the practice of teaching and learning inside Makeni’s classrooms. The experience of teachers and students inside the classroom is a

critical influence on how social and economic beings are formed in Makeni town, which brings us back to Mende maxim encouraging suffering that Bledsoe discovered, namely “no success without struggle” (1990: 71). In this section I analyze the teaching and learning that occurs in the classroom, and how the practice of corporal punishment in the classroom and its impact on children whose first experiences were of war and dislocation grates against older students’ feelings about how students should not have to undergo any additional “suffering” in order to succeed. It is up for debate if in fact the teachers are creating moral beings by literally beating lessons into students, or if they are creating children who are, like the St. Francis rioters, hardened to violence, disrespectful of authority and unlikely to succeed.

I argue that poverty and poor educational standards are mutually entailed, and though students struggle to “develop” through education, classrooms bereft of teaching materials and motivated educators and saturated with habitual violence can fuel more anger, frustration, and stoic desensitization to violence than they address through the simple socialization of providing an ostensibly civilizing classroom setting. This pattern occurred well before the war, and is unlikely to change now, as students who have lived through untold violence experience it not as a lesson in submissiveness to authority, but as the imposition of one person’s will on another.

*In the classroom: poverty and poor education are mutually entailed*

Does the teaching and learning that occur promote *gud trenin*, as teachers hope, and also educate them to be productive members of society? I was curious about the teaching standards, and if students were receiving educations that would equip them for salaried jobs in an improved economic climate, or if the impoverished conditions in which education occurred would preclude this. The primary school in which I conducted research was a Catholic institution founded by the Xavierian mission, though it had more Muslim students attending than Christians.<sup>48</sup> One day in a religion class the teacher

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<sup>48</sup> Due to time constraints I was only able to observe classes from class level one to six in an all-boys primary school. I decided that because people felt strongly that education-to-nonviolent-behavior was most beneficial to boys (simply educating girls at all was a goal), this atmosphere would be most instructive to understanding how classrooms condition children to peace.

asked how many students were Christian, and only eight or nine of the forty-odd students raised their hands. In spite of the student make-up, teachers instructed the children in Christian values, and students, no matter their religion, all learned the standard prayers.

The schoolyard was always a hive of activity before school, with the students set to tasks of sweeping the schoolyard, removing rubbish that had been thrown in the classrooms and on the ground the day before, and moving benches around between classrooms so that those with more students had at least a few more benches. The school day began with assembly, during which the head teacher would stand at the front of the lines of boys, leading the school in prayers and hymns before making announcements. During this time, other teachers would move among the students and whip those boys who were talking, moving out of line, or not paying attention. As soon as she finished announcements, the head teacher ordered classes to start, and the students ran pell-mell into the classrooms in order to get the best seats. There were two classrooms each for classes one through six, and class one classrooms were the most crowded, so they had the two largest classrooms, at either end of the main school compound around which the buildings formed a “C.” The three other classrooms were each divided into two spaces with a partial wall in between, and into these smaller classrooms an average of forty students were packed onto small benches in front of a chalkboard and teacher.

The school was built in the early 1960s, according to Father Samura, when education was “not emphasized in the north” and the township was much smaller, and therefore it too was relatively small. Because the school is overenrolled, according to the head teacher, they divided the day into two “streams.” There were fifteen hundred children attending a school meant to hold four hundred in 2004, so classes one through three were held in the morning, four and five in the afternoon (although there were fewer students, they were larger and not as many could physically fit into each classroom), and class six had classes all day in two separate classrooms at the far end of the dusty, sun-baked athletics field. Class time was doubled in class six because these students were preparing for their BECE exam, and needed more time in class in order to prepare.

Every day the school schedule was different, with subjects like math, Krio, English, reading and writing, social studies, religious studies and agricultural studies rotated so that every subject was taught every other day. Each stream had only four

hours of class time available, so no subject could be taught for more than forty minutes. Teachers were armed only with chalk, chalkboards, and rulers, and in the higher class levels also had textbooks and workbooks. In several of the classes I attended, the teacher had to yell to be heard, as the teacher sharing the classroom on the other side of the partition had stepped out for a few minutes, and the class had subsequently gone wild. Often one teacher had the work of merely keeping order in both classrooms while the other was away. For the morning stream, the WFP-provided lunch was served at the end of classes, and for the afternoon stream, it was served beforehand. Often in the morning I witnessed children nodding off as the end of classes drew near, many others struggled to concentrate until food was announced, at which point they pepped up considerably. This was one of six primary schools in Makeni that was filled past capacity, as no new schools had been constructed since the war to keep up with the massive influx of people from nearby villages that had been decimated during the war.

In spite of the fact that classrooms meant to hold twenty students were now holding over forty, teachers were constantly complaining of high levels of absenteeism among students, and that those whose parents were so poor that they came to school without supplies such as pens and paper and therefore could not participate in lessons, and that the rampant overcrowding that made individual attention impossible. “How can children obtain a worthwhile education under these circumstances?” several teachers asked rhetorically. In the classes I attended, the daily roll call confirmed teachers’ claims about high levels of absenteeism. For an average class size of fifty students, on any given day 20% of them were absent.

Most of these students were habitual absentees, and some teachers visited their homes to talk to their parents. Most times the parents had sent the child to work in the market that day. The majority of these parents claimed that if the money for school fees was forthcoming, the student would return to school. In other cases, the teachers sent ill-prepared students home from school to warn parents that they had to be more serious about their children’s education. One teacher sent students home if they had been warned three times to attend class with a notebook and pencil or pen. The cost of a notebook and pen, about Le3000 (US \$1), was equivalent in 2005 to an average day’s profit for a petty trader in Makeni (see Mulugeta, 2004: 82-83, for similarities in Ethiopia). Some teachers

insisted that all students attend school wearing shoes, but most of them were more pragmatic, knowing that the cost of shoeing a child can be so prohibitive for parents that it does not serve as fair grounds to deny the child an education. One teacher had her own small daughter with her everyday, and the girl had no shoes.

The standard of education children receive depends greatly on the quality of teaching proffered. Teachers varied vastly in their styles of engagement and discipline, as well as their standards of teaching, and the students responded accordingly. One teacher, who is no longer at the school, spent so much time out of class attending to her own children that her students ran wild and learned very little. When she was in the classroom, she spent two hours having them recite the alphabet in English, and then count to five. Others were so engaged with their students that they had no discipline problems at all and the students were responsive and eager learners. There was a stage in Class Three where students were meant to learn reading comprehension, and could do no work aside from what the teacher wrote on the board because none of them could find in Makeni, let alone afford, the standardized reading workbook. However, they could recall verbatim from one day to the next what they had been reading off the blackboard.

In general, the discipline standard improved, and the level of students' engagement with, and understanding of, the material increased with the number of years spent in school. The head teacher at this boys' school said that the attrition rate was between 15% and 20% every year, so for every hundred students that started Class One, by Class Six there would only be between forty and sixty. This is supported by my class counts: the two Class One sessions that I observed each had over fifty students on the roll, and the total enrollment for Class Six was fifty seven. It was not that students in Class Six were merely smarter or more educated than those in Class One, or that they were receiving more personal attention as their fellows dropped out; rather they inhabited the disposition of a "student." They were inquisitive and thoughtful, questioned each other and the teachers, and willingly studied outside of class. In the lower classes, the students were taught to memorize facts and were lashed when they strayed because the teachers felt there were no other methods available to them. As the head teacher stated,



most students who dropped out of primary school did so in the first three years; those who achieved a Class Six education were justifiably proud of it.<sup>49</sup>

The teachers as well could be proud of their students and the success they had had with them. Many of them were teaching in classrooms with only a chalkboard and chalk, working with students who were so crowded that they squeezed four onto a bench meant to hold two, with some students sitting in the windows or on the floor. Most students had not eaten before they came to school and all were struggling to concentrate. So many of the teachers had not been paid, either recently or ever (Anonymous, *Awoko*, April 16, 2003), that they too had come to school without eating. Occasionally their attention strayed and they left the classroom to attend to other activities. Most had their own children to feed and educate on salaries they had not received from month to month. I found their dedication to the goal of educating “the leaders of tomorrow” as many of them put it, frankly admirable.<sup>50</sup> When I asked them why they continued to teach when they were receiving no compensation for it, most of them responded that they, like the youth, do not want to just sit down idle. Even if they were skilled in other trades from which they could make extra income, they only did the latter as an after-hours project.

However dedicated they were, students were working against almost insurmountable obstacles to fulfill their teachers’ goal of them becoming the “leaders of tomorrow.” This is reflected in national exams results, where of the 1,500 students that are accepted to Fourah Bay College in the past three years, only three total have come through the Makeni school system. According to my neighbor, one of the two who succeeded in 2003, they were both only admitted to Fourah Bay after failing the WASCE once. He and his friend persuaded the headmaster of Makeni Teachers’ College to let them take courses there with the college students, and they took the exam again. The odds against which Makeni students are working are too great for them to succeed simply by attending and doing well in their local school. However, simply by invoking the

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<sup>49</sup> Although the head teacher could provide me with roll numbers from her own log, she no longer had any records of attendance before the war. All the paper in Makeni schools had been looted by the rebels and, she assumed, used as fire kindling.

<sup>50</sup> My experience in this school may not be representative of all schools in Makeni; as I had heard from students at St. Francis time and again that because their teachers were not being paid, they were either not attending class at all or forcing students to pay for extra lessons in order to prepare for their exams. But these lapses did not stem from the lack of will to educate.

language of a society with a definite future, in phrases like “leaders of tomorrow,” the teachers were instilling in the students a will to create that world. However, this does not change the fact that the majority of secondary school graduates are un- or underemployed, a not uncommon trend in the under-developed world (see Hart, 1976: 488-490; Richardson, 2004: 59). The teachers had done their best under trying circumstances to give the children the best education they could, instill in them some religious values and therefore some moral sense, and that was all they could do.<sup>51</sup> Whether or not these children succeed in finding full employment remains to be seen.

*Corporal Punishment: maintaining peace or replicating war?*

Education’s supporters in Makeni argue that schooling is the best way to re-condition children to live as fully social beings in a post-war environment. By observing in the classrooms, I also aimed to discover if the students are being rehabilitated from the war and “educated to peace,” in one teacher’s words, or if the violence that was habitually inflicted on students that were starting fights or not paying attention was reinforcing a view of society not as ruled by elders, but ruled by those who can get their way through physical intimidation of others. If the latter possibility is true, notwithstanding the fact that many parents beat their children (as I heard my neighbor do to her eight-year-old nearly every morning) it lends credence to some traders’ contention that engaging young people in trade is the best way to keep their minds busy and train them to be productive members of society without recreating the violent conditions, mimicking wartime, that were common experiences for Mende school migrants in Bledsoe’s studies (1990: 70-72).

Upon entering most classrooms, one’s eyes are drawn to the class rules, which are usually posted on a card next to the door. In one Class Two classroom (seven-year-olds), they were:

1. do not use abusive language
2. do not fight in class
3. always pay attention in class

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<sup>51</sup> D’Alisera noted among the Sierra Leonean diaspora in Washington DC, many parents do not care what religious affiliation their children’s school has, as long as it has one, and they can be sure that their children are praying everyday and learning some values (2004: 111).

4. do not go out without the teacher's permission
5. do not jump through the window
6. do not steal in class
7. be always punctual and on time
8. always come to school with books and pencils or pens
9. do not destroy school property like benches, tables, chairs, etc.
10. do not pollute the air in class [no passing gas]
11. do not sleep in class

These rules, which are written at the beginning of each school year based on suggestions from the students, are similar in each classroom. They reflect the values that students and teachers hold and the problems they see in the classroom. There is a preoccupation with preventing violent behavior, as is reflected in five of the eleven rules specifically prohibiting violence of some sort. One headmistress, when I asked her if primary-school-aged children had problems adjusting to school after the war, responded bluntly, "We had a hell of a time with them. They would fight, they couldn't take direction; they were really troublesome. They didn't want to listen to the teachers." Children in war-torn Mozambique had similar trouble being reconditioned to "normal" life; one psychologist recounted an incident where a boy killed his girlfriend because she wanted to stay with her parents instead of traveling with him and he found this "threatening" (Errante and Efraime, 2006: 101). The only solution he knew was a violent one.

Other teachers had similar comments on how the children, even the six-year-olds in Class One, are fundamentally different than they were before the war, but how they are not to be blamed for this. Sierra Leoneans regard children as being born without sense, a notion extant in many cultures around the world (see Kirsch, 2006: 119; Carsten, 1991: 439). They are soft and moldable, and they will imitate what they see, especially bad things. Therefore they are not to blame when they come to school with weapons and attempt to harm their companions, this is an artifact of the behaviors they learned to imitate during the war. One former child soldier, aged twelve, brought a gun with her to class as a warning to anyone who might taunt her for being former RUF. She threatened the headmistress whenever the latter asked her to leave it at home. Even children who had not been members of an armed faction solved their differences with other students by fighting, sometimes stabbing their fellows with pens or small knives, more often

initiating fistfights. None of this occurred before the war, but for children who know only war, violence is the only “normal” state (Errante and Efraime, 2006: 102).

According to the teachers, the primary students they encountered after the war have no respect for anyone, teachers or fellow students, and feel that fighting is the only way to solve problems. Some of the children are “naturally thieves,” most notably the ones who were abandoned on the streets during the war and had no other way to survive. The headmistress stated that things are improving, year by year, and that the children are happy to be at school again. She assures me that they want to be children again; the problem is that they do not know what it is that children should be.<sup>52</sup> The teachers know what children “should” be like, and they recall teaching children before the war who were cooperative, respectful, attentive, and non-violent. Their aim is to condition these students to act the same way, and they accomplish this through corporal punishment.

The seven teachers I observed and spoke to, as they assured me is true of teachers in every primary school in Sierra Leone, beat unruly students. However, because the children they are teaching now have spent their first few years seeing violence in RUF-occupied Makeni not as punishment for wrongdoing but as the aggressor getting what he or she wants, corporal punishment has different effects on the children.<sup>53</sup> Depending on their experience with violence, children are not necessarily cowed into behaving well by receiving a beating. And these beatings are no small acts of correction. Teachers arm themselves with any weapon at hand. Some use long switches that they can reach across rows of students with, others use rulers (one broke her ruler over a child’s head before teaching with it), and one had a bit of tire rubber, to which he referred as “my brother” and brought to class with him every day.

From my observations, beatings were not uniformly distributed, nor were they uniformly reacted to. If there was a fight, the teacher either punished both students or attempted to punish only the aggressor, but they were not necessarily correct in their assessment. Students who felt they were not at fault and were beaten unfairly would

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<sup>52</sup> On South Africa: “What can we expect of children who have witnessed the death of parents; who have seen people being stoned, hacked with pangas and burnt to death; who have themselves been the direct targets and victims of this violence; and who have sometimes participated in these gruesome events? In a society without children, can there be a concept of innocence?” (Ndebele, 1995: 330-331)

<sup>53</sup> One of my interlocutors was “arrested” and beaten severely by an eight-year-old RUF member during the occupation because he did not want to relinquish his bag of jungle cassava.

often initiate the next fight with their companion. Students who were whipped for various offenses—eating, talking, or staring out the window—that meant they were not paying attention, had reactions that ranged from terrified tears to stoic defiance. One Class One teacher told me outside the class that, in the first few years after the war, she could tell which students had seen or performed violence during the war: those who had no experience with or memories of violence reacted to a beating the way she expected students to react, namely frightened submission, while those who had been exposed to violence reacted to aggression with aggression, though most often the targets of their aggression was other students.<sup>54</sup>

Teachers are not immune to the effect they have on small children when they beat them, though many do so because “the temptation to solve problems with force is great.” (Field, 1995: 59) Field, who analyzed “education as abuse” in Japan in the late 1980’s, found that teachers, who were forced to conform to strict notions of classroom discipline and comportment, beat unruly students merely out of frustration. They usually singled out the weakest ones because beating popular children bred contempt among their friends, which made the classroom more unruly. She notes that with chronic punishment, “children are stripped of their innocence and adults of their authority” (60). This last point is especially salient. Corporal punishment in Makeni is likely stripping adults of their authority because children have, in large part, already lost their innocence. Therefore to look to create childhood again through beatings might be counterproductive to a “peace” agenda. One teacher assured me that beatings were “the African way” as African children were conditioned from babyhood to respond to physical punishment. Citing Field, I am not convinced that teachers were effective in translating their point to six through ten year old children, specifically that violence is the authoritative being punishing the submissive for bad behavior. I take this position even though in some classrooms the students themselves meted out punishment to their fellows. One class five teacher asked his students (aged ten) what the punishment should be for breaking the rules posted at the door, and one student said six lashes. Another said three lashes. The teacher demurred, “Let me give two, I think it is enough.” Were the students anticipating

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<sup>54</sup> I never witnessed a student who was beaten take out their aggression on the teacher. However, female teachers brought in their male counterparts to deal with particularly aggressive students who were unresponsive to discipline.

watching a companion get beaten? Many RUF commanders used torture as entertainment, and would call on their young boys to beat adult civilians in order to drive home the humiliation of the social reversal of specific acts of violence. Two of my interlocutors were beaten by members of the “Small Boys Unit” for minor transgressions such as refusing to give the small boy a cigarette, and in both cases, the boy’s commander and several others stood around and laughed. Indeed, one journalist reported that violence in school had increased after disarmament because so many of the students were ex-combatants (Anonymous, *Awoko*, January 23, 2003).

I returned to the school for a visit seven months later, and found that most teachers had deputized their favorite students. Now there were students armed with switches who were allowed to punish others they felt were breaking the rules. This action is no different from commanders choosing their favorite small boys as their punishment lackeys. It was the especially aggressive yet obsequious youth who were deputized by RUF commanders to do their dirty work, and this mindset was replicated in the classroom. Some boys were rewarded for their good behavior, or perhaps their eagerness to please, by being allowed to punish others. However, one teacher who had done this told me, it meant she could concentrate on teaching the lesson, and not have to constantly think about which boy was causing trouble.

One teacher informed me that a national NGO, Plan Sierra Leone, had started a program to end corporal punishment because it was concerned that beatings were frightening the children too much. Plan was encouraging teachers to take part in the “peace education” they were supposedly transmitting in the classrooms, as they maintained that some children, especially the youngest, were too distracted to learn because they were so afraid of being hit. He commented that the older students are used to it but the students in Class One cry when they are beaten. This illustrates that the youngest students do not need to have the war literally beaten out of them because they have no experiences or memories of aggression. Plan encouraged the teachers to find other ways to keep the students engaged in the classroom and beat them less.

Nine months later the same teachers were whipping the students in assembly with the same ferocity, and the students were reacting the same way: the youngest with fear, the older ones with defiance. The regular beating of children is not an artifact of post-

war rehabilitation, as the headmistress and several other teachers who had been teaching for over twenty years, claim that the rod was used in schools before the war and had a greater effect on the children, who were used to being conditioned to submit to the teacher's authority. What it is accomplishing now is to cement in the minds of war-affected children that violence is the imposition of one person's will on another, by which the stronger achieves authority. This may be counterproductive to efforts to use education to "rehabilitate children to peace" and is therefore anathema to education-as-foundation-of individual character building and "community development."

### **Making education compulsory: can families afford to develop?**

Nine people told me that the real change in education was in 2001, when President Kabbah announced in a radio broadcast that primary school was compulsory. They had mixed feelings about this because education requires a tremendous financial outlay, and also removes a child's labor from the family labor pool, be it farming or trade. In addition, parents receive no guarantee in return that educating their children will result in any development, either for the family or community. "I would say, "okay" if I knew my children would find jobs afterward," said one farmer who hesitated to endorse universal primary education. Many feel that Kabbah was attempting to force Sierra Leoneans to "self-develop" the country from nothing, instead of providing the economic preconditions that would enable development by encouraging foreign businesses to come to Sierra Leone and stimulate the economy. Making schooling compulsory was "free" for the government, but it was certainly not free for poor families with many children.

#### *The paradox of field labor and educated labor: can the two co-exist?*

Many of the children enrolled in Makeni schools are from the dozens of farming villages (all between a hundred and two hundred people) within two miles of Makeni, and they walk daily to attend. Like the paradox that governs a trader's decision to educate their child versus teaching them business, a similar paradox governs farming parents' decisions. One reason parents lose much of the available farm labor in their villages is because most or all of their children are attending school, per Kabbah's declaration.

However, children are often withdrawn when the parents can neither find money for school fees nor afford to lose their labor in the fields. Those who can read and write feel that they are above manual labor, and so choose to remain in the urban areas looking for waged employment instead of returning to the village. In this section I will examine the role education plays, in both the discourse and in practice, in shaping the present and future states of agriculture in the environs of Makeni.

Agriculture is not working in Makeni at the moment, according to one farmer, because the working population is much smaller than the dependents. Therefore any discussion about agriculture is necessarily a discussion about education and technology. When one walks through a village, the bulk of the population are older adults and small children, as most of the youth are either away at school or looking for opportunities in town. By making education compulsory, the government is asking farmers to remove essential child labor, such as weeding and scaring birds, from the farms. Nothing has replaced this missing labor, and harvests have suffered. Thus have village farms been left struggling: farm labor has been diverted in the name of national “development,” but the developing nation has not replaced the missing labor.

When interviewing women in the villages, I found considerable tension in their feelings about educating their children. They must sell the entire proceeds of their farm to send children to school. At the same time, parents must pay outside laborers in order to replace their missing children’s labor, and this money is rarely available. Families often discuss, in the same breath as education, the great need to adopt mechanized farming. What they are really saying is that they cannot educate their children and continue farming manually. They need larger and more productive farms to pay for education; simultaneously they need to bypass the labor demands of subsistence farming that they can no longer fill because their children are in school. There is no soft transition that can take place, education and agriculture must move hand-in-hand, or not at all. The government’s mistake was prioritizing education leaps and bounds ahead of agriculture, thus amputating the latter. So village residents struggle in this abnormal state where fields lie fallow because all the children and youth are in town either attending school or refusing to return to the “backward” villages.



Most fathers prioritized farming over school for their families. Several men said that if they could farm productively, then they could worry about putting their children through school, and not the other way around. Many are preoccupied with rebuilding the seed stock that was lost during the war, and have neither the money nor the surplus to sell in order to educate their children. Thus the children are idle in town: there are no inputs to restart the farms, thus no reason for parents to coax them back, and there is no money to send them to school. Many women viewed agriculture as a means to educating their children. The burden falls to mothers to pay school fees if they want to school particular children past the first few years of primary school, and they need independent incomes in order to do so. In one village, a group of women started a cooperative garden after the war with some donated seeds, each woman volunteered time to tend it. As the vegetables ripened, they were all sold in the market and the proceeds pooled to send their children to school. One year they had a particularly poor harvest and their seed stock disappeared. All the children had to be pulled from school, and they resented being brought back to the village to assist on the farms. Many refused to come home. As one woman said, “the children only stay and do agriculture if they cannot find a way to leave. Poverty makes children want to leave, the lack of education means they lack opportunities.”<sup>55</sup> What the women want is to be able to control their children’s futures by providing them with school fees so that they have opportunities to find employment in town, and still feel responsible towards their parents. They want “development” for their children, but loathe the possibility that the children might have—or want—to “self-develop.”

One man thought the best compromise was bringing the town opportunities into the village. “Is there a way you can provide skilled training in the village so the children don't leave? When these kids go to secondary school there are too many constraints [financial constraints of paying school fees and room and board in town]. A secondary school here would keep them in the village, and if *poyo* tappers could earn a living here they wouldn't leave. If we had mechanical agriculture the youth wouldn't leave.” What he sees is that most villages outside of Makeni lack any infrastructure, and serve only as agricultural outposts to the town, instead of being functioning villages in their own right.

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<sup>55</sup> I am paraphrasing their comments from notes that I took in Krio that were translated for me from Temne by each village’s “spokesman,” who was elected because he spoke Krio and/or English and could thus also communicate a village’s needs to any NGO or government employee that might visit the village.

This reinforces the perception that village life and farming are “backward” occupations, a perception which could be reversed if educational opportunities were brought to the village, instead of children having to leave to pursue them.

Once the youth leave the villages looking for education or opportunities in town, the familial bonds disintegrate. The loss of farm labor means that parents cannot afford to give them all the education they desire, and the distance and increased cost of living in an urban area means that youth in town are more impoverished than those who remain in the village. This in turn loosens the ties of obligation between youth and parents, as Peters (2006: 139) noted for children who had left their villages in the south in 2004. When parents can no longer act as patrons, children are no longer bound to assist them, and now many youth live a life of mutually entailed poverty and freedom from parental control in the towns. Two teachers noted this fact, and that youth do not understand that they can make money farming. Each teacher has her own farm, one a small palm plantation left to her by her late husband, the other the family farm left to her by her parents; which supplemented their income when salaries were not forthcoming. “At the very least”, said one, “if I do not get my salary this month I know I can go home and pull my cassava and groundnuts out of the ground!” The other has an agreement with *pooyo* tappers who pay her for access to her palm trees, and this money is what keeps her own children fed. They do not understand why the youth would want to sever their connections to the village, when it is from the village that they get their food and support.

Those farmers who argued that agriculture must come first also emphasized that agricultural education would return dignity to farming. One friend, who founded an agricultural CBO, pointed out that the main reason the youth see farmers as “backward” is because they cannot feed themselves, therefore they cannot know much:

Sierra Leone farmers are the poorest people [in the country]. So just imagine, something is wrong somewhere. And it is not as if [the farmer] is not farming, he is farming every year! But look at him: he is at his own farm every day and he cannot feed himself. Everyday, he looks to other people to feed him. So where now can you see his qualification of being a farmer? Something is misplaced. The soil is so rich that whatsoever crop we plant in this country will do well. You see? But the management, maybe the education [is not there]. Even farmers are not educated to the level that can help them help themselves! SM

SM, a lifelong farmer from the east, has heard farmers talked about by the youth as so backward that they have not learned through experience, and so though lifelong farmers, cannot feed themselves. The youth feel they cannot learn anything from farmers who struggle to feed their own families, whether or not they appreciate the problems with seed stock and the historical disintegration of cooperative farming (see Chapter Seven). This is why youth emphasize technology, because the Sierra Leonean farmer, using archaic means, is not proving his worth.

Farmers were divided over whether or not they wanted their educated children to return to their home villages. Not all parents want their children to be educated and return to the village to farm. Many argued for the benefits that can be gained when one has a child in the urban area that lives on wages, and they are torn between wanting their children to bring their education back to the village, or prosper with it in town. The following is a conversation held in Krio between SM, and the members of his village cooperative, concerning education and agriculture, which I recorded in one village.

AK (woman): I want the children to go to school, and not all of them to practice farming when they are adults. Let at least a few of them go and make a life in the towns, that way I will have someone to support me in the future.

IM (man): But you cannot replace the farming in a chiefdom! There is dignity in it, especially for a chiefdom that can produce its own food.

MK (man): Yes, but if your child can get an education and get a job and release himself from the burden of working in the bush, then he should do it.

MC (village head of CBO): We can bring education back to the village. I want my children to go to school, there they will learn the modern way to do agriculture. Then they can bring this knowledge back to the village and teach us all here, then the village will be producing more food. And then they can return to the town and sit in an office and make money to support their parents when they are old.

SM: <sup>56</sup> No, farming is natural work, you just need basic education to count seeds, nothing modern will help us here. If I had a farm here I would sit down there and work to feed myself, for if I is able to do this then I am a king! If I only work for wages then I am always a slave. I am a slave to the money and to my boss who

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<sup>56</sup> SM is a committed socialist and a stranger to Makeni who holds no land rights. He bases his arguments on tenets of cooperative farming he learned during the ideology training of the RUF, when he then worked a farm for many years at the Kailahun RUF base.

gives me the money. I am at the mercy of them firing me at any moment or of the price of rice increasing, and if my wages do not increase, then what do I do? But if I am a farmer I have control over all these things and can live in dignity. A farmer can feed himself any time and doesn't have to depend on anyone else.<sup>57</sup>

AT (woman): But I still think my children should go to school. It is the only way they will help themselves tomorrow.

FK (woman): But if you go to school and learn books and just come back to the village with all of this knowledge and no food, you will still die.

The multivalent and unpredictable consequences of education make it an uncertain arm of progress for villagers. They see their children leave for the towns to attend school and are not sure if they will return, and if they do, what new knowledge and abilities they will bring with them to help in the village. As FK said, it is possible that what they learn in the schools is useless in the village, and then you have spent all the money on school for nothing, as the children are not able to help themselves. Most of the parents in the village had at least one child with a partial education who decided to remain in town, and most of them are unemployed and living day-to-day. However, they still prefer this life to village life, because at least there is a chance, however small, that business opportunities will find them (see Hart, 1976: 492; Harts-Broekhuis, 1997: 111-113). Those youth whom I spoke to who want to return to a farming life will only do so if the farms are mechanized. Farming acquires dignity when it is linked to ideas and practices of “development.” The youth want to bring the dignity of town life, with its technological advances, back into the village and apply it to farming, otherwise they will not return. To return to the village is to turn away from development, as one is walking away from roads, schools, trade, and any chance the youth see for personal advancement. Education is their first road out of the village (see Christie and Gordon, 1992: 413), and they will only return if they are, literally and figuratively, riding tractors.

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<sup>57</sup> SM's tirade against waged “slave” labor resonates with Feeley-Harnik's description of people in Analalalva, Madagascar, avoiding waged labor because it is “the work of purchased slaves who worked for others with little benefit to themselves” (1991: 250).

*“Free School Fees”: the government pays lip service to education*

Overlaying the debate over the relative values of education and work, as well as whether or not education can bring peace to the present and development to the future, is the national government’s educational policies and actions. Though people espouse the importance of education and work as the only ways to improve their lives and develop their community, their efforts are shaped and constrained from the outset by a national government that advocates the value of education without funding it. One journalist calls the SLPP government “a government of explanations and promises, and not action.” The students and teachers feel the government has done nothing for education except promise big results, and explaining the problems when nothing happens.<sup>58</sup> In 2003, President Kabbah announced that he was abolishing school fees for girls (Anonymous, *Awoko*, March 29, 2003), a move that has since been supported by the IMF under the heading of “promoting human development” (2007a: 60). However, no move was made to compensate for the subsequent increased enrollment, and schools quickly went from overcrowded to woefully so, as the IMF estimated that the pupil/teacher ratio in primary schools went from 52:1 in 2004 to 67:1 a year later. Though “access” had been increased, the standard was bound to decline, and according to teachers, it did.

In addition, parents assume the government did not consider the added burden on them, who were already struggling to keep some of their children in school, and were now compelled to educate all of their children. As one child said, “The government asks parents to send all their children to school, but they can’t even feed and clothe their kids!” People feel the government thinks that compelling education will unilaterally lift the country out of poverty, without realizing that while it seems that education can solve poverty, poverty simultaneously precludes education. Most residents feel the government has no interest in addressing the gaps between educational policy and educational reality. It is in this gulf, in the midst of poverty so grinding that no one can afford to pay to support time spent in school, let alone school fees, that students and teachers struggle to

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<sup>58</sup> The APC government, for example, spent 8.5% of the national budget on education in 1988-89, down from 15.6% in 1974-75, meaning only 40% of eligible children could attend functioning schools (see Zack-Williams, 1990: 27, 28). The SLPP government, according to administrators, was doing nothing to rectify the country’s “education debt”. According to the IMF, the Ministry of Education’s budget was lower (against recommendations) in 2005 than in 2002 and 2003, surpassing only the budget of 2001 (2006: 38). It rose slightly in budget projections for 2006, but actual spending fell short (IMF, 2007a: 26).

produce an educated population. Every one of them holds strong opinions as to how government should redress these problems.

During my tenure in Makeni, the government's token gestures of support for education were rather farcical. Tejan Kabbah and his ministers visited Makeni on several occasions in 2004 and 2005, and on one of these occasions they were promoting their educational policy for girls by supplying a token number of uniforms and school supplies to girls who were present. "Kabbah claimed that educating girls is the best way to bring the country out of poverty, so he provides them with pens," commented one person. On another occasion, a representative of the Ministry of Education visited school administrators on his one visit per term to provide school supplies. For a school of 1500 students, the representative gave them one box of chalk, ten exercise books, and three lesson books. On the inauguration of the new principal of Makeni Teachers' College, the Minister of Education, Alpha Wurie, announced that the college had been upgraded to a polytechnic, which would incorporate the extant trade school in Magburaka, the Teko Veterinary School in the barracks (one licensed veterinarian and his three apprentices), the Teacher's College, and a new computer and business school that would be attached to the college. Over a year later, no action had been taken to upgrade any of the facilities to "polytechnic" status, but people had begun referring to the Teacher's College as a polytechnic. They feel that if it was declared so, then why not refer to it as such, if it does anything to raise the status of the town with respect to the rest of the nation.

People laughed derisively when discussing Kabbah's policies of "education for all" and "free education for girls." "What he means," said one, "is free school fees! What about the other costs of school, like uniforms, supplies, and food? School fees are not half the cost." Even when Kabbah moved to cancel fees for all primary school children, one critic said he did not factor in the cost of extra lessons parents must fund when the government fails to pay teachers:

Free education? The government wants all children to be in school so it recently said no school fees for all students in class one through six, instead of just free for the girls. But they do not factor in how much it costs the parents in fees for extra lessons, books, uniforms, shoes, and the like, and the children still don't get an education because classes are too large and the teachers are not paid. Education here is not free, it is costly and poor. KK

Because the government is not paying teachers on time, if at all, many at the secondary school level are forced to hold private sessions for students who can pay for them. In the school in which I observed classes, official salaries were two months late, with some teachers receiving their September salaries in November, and others who had “gone missing” off the school rosters not receiving their salaries at all. One Class One teacher had gone seventeen months without a salary, in spite of traveling down to Freetown three times with her documents to try and get her name back on the roster.<sup>59</sup> One student told me that he was paying Le50,000 for school fees every year for the privilege of being allowed to take the exam at the end, and an extra Le50,000 for the “extra” lessons in which he actually learned the material that he needed for the exams. If the teachers were not paid to teach, at least they could get paid to tutor (see Zack-Williams, 1990: 32).<sup>60</sup> Students dedicated to passing their secondary school exams paid twice: once to the Education Minister (“for his mansion in England,” scoffed one form four student) and once so the teacher can eat. They laugh that “free education” means “free for the government,” as government is freeing itself of its obligation to pay teachers. In Makeni, finding good teachers is a problem, because no one wants to go to a “backward” town.

*Can education be differentially bad between the provinces?*

If the government does not pay teachers uniformly throughout the country, would not the schools in the south and east be experiencing the same problems as schools in Makeni? Why do people in Makeni insist that they are especially disadvantaged by the current system? One student commented that the government believes that the north is not interested in education, so it diverts what funds it does dispense to schools in the south and east. But the feelings students and teachers in Makeni have about the government’s

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<sup>59</sup> All of the teachers I interviewed taught at mission-run schools; which the IMF stated in 2005 were the only schools in Sierra Leone not required to open individual bank accounts for the deposit of teacher salaries (2005b: 21). Salaries are delivered by hand to mission couriers, which makes it more likely that a salary can go “missing” before being paid to the teacher. The government reported only a four-month national teacher salary backlog in January 2006 (IMF, 2007b: 36).

<sup>60</sup> Tripp (1997 (2003: 172)) found that the practice of “tuition” was also common in Tanzania, where teachers could often quadruple meager salaries by holding extra lessons, and students, who regularly sat in classes where no teaching took place, were eager to pass their exams and were willing to pay. She concluded that a private educational system had emerged within the public school system, which is similar to the situation in Sierra Leone.

attitude towards them run deeper than the redistribution of funds for teacher salaries. Education is, in addition to being one way to achieve individual “development,” a measuring stick for assessing how well or badly Makeni compares to Bo and Kenema, because, since 1982, all schools, no matter their religious or private founding, were turned into “government schools,” with all the school’s official resources coming from the national government. Therefore, if the government is deliberately favoring education in the south and east, even through an act as small as delaying teacher salaries in the north a bit longer, then the government is deliberately favoring development in one area of the country at the expense of another and throwing that capital’s legitimacy into question. As one student said:

Sierra Leone is one of the poorest countries in the world. So in this poorest country, you find that the north is the poorest in terms of education. So I think the north here is the poorest part of the world. Because here they don’t encourage education, and of course they don’t focus on education, and that lends us lack of legitimacy. In the south and the east we have the SLPP supporters. And of course in terms of schools it’s more important that those towns have money for this. They build a lot of schools for them, they give them materials, and the teaching is effective in those areas. While in the north, well, it is just poor.<sup>61</sup> TL

If education is poor, then everything is poor, and not only will the place not develop, politically and socially it is not legitimate to the rest of the nation, as TL pointed out. Students use words like “vulnerable” and “marginal” to describe the position of Makeni compared to the rest of the nation. The exclusion they feel is most palpable in their experiences with education.

When I first traveled to Bo and Kenema, I spent the journey reminding myself to keep an open mind about what these areas would look like and not to be swayed by the insistence of Makeni residents that the other two cities were incomparably better off. My first indelible impression was that they are, and there was no way the government could deny that they did not play favorites. We did not pass a single school in either Bo or Kenema district that had not been refurbished (repainted, refurnished, repaired) whereas

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<sup>61</sup> Knauft describes a similar situation at Nomad Station, Papua New Guinea, where villagers fault poor schooling for their inability to read, while the government faults local people for not working hard enough to attract good teachers (2002: 128).



the only repainted schools in Makeni were under the control of the Catholic Mission. Schools in the south and east, aside from whether or not their teachers were being paid, also took advantage of the other amenities Bo and Kenema had to offer, such as electricity and pipe-borne water. One school we visited had a small animal corral so that students could learn animal husbandry; another in town had new benches in each of the classrooms, and only two students per bench instead of the four in Makeni. The schools had toilet facilities and new water wells, so students were working in a cleaner, more conducive learning environment than students in Makeni (see Mulugeta 2004: 84, for similarities in Ethiopia). These amenities, as well as those offered in the towns, attracted the top teaching college graduates, who were given their pick of teaching assignments. The schools, like the rest of the infrastructure of the town, could take advantage of and therefore contribute to community development. Not to mention that they had been historically at an advantage over Makeni schools, due to their favor with the colonial government. As colonial expatriate JA Bull noted:

Bo School was quite remarkable. It must have been the first of its kind in West Africa, and for all I know it could have been unique. It was founded by the colonial government as a school for the sons of chiefs, and was run most efficiently by first class British masters... It was on the lines of an English public school, and tuned out very well educated young men who today occupy positions of considerable importance in independent Sierra Leone. (n.d.)

From the beginning Bo School possessed boarding facilities and fully outfitted science laboratories, neither of which are present in any secondary school in Makeni. The lack of science laboratories in Makeni is a sore spot with students, who feel that they are being excluded completely from pursuing any career in the sciences because it is impossible for them to do practical work. One of the science students at St. Francis took me on a tour of their lab, which possessed clean white-tiled workbenches, a chalkboard, and empty cabinets. The library too was completely devoid of books. Indeed, none of the students from Makeni who attend Fourah Bay have qualified to study hard science. Nor did St. Francis, Makeni's best secondary school, have top-tier teaching college graduates at the helm, let alone "first class British masters."

Townsppeople have drawn the link between a first-class education system and community development, and why a town that is lacking one will also lack the other. Already behind in educational amenities upon independence because of the north's early exposure to Islam, which meant that as of 1938, 80% of protectorate schools were in the south and east (Kilson, 1966:77). Education in Makeni suffered further when the occupying RUF force plundered classrooms for wood and other supplies. No similar destruction occurred to in Bo and Kenema; Bo School itself survived the war unscathed. The war ended under the helm of the SLPP, the political party supported in the south and east, and educational funds were diverted to those areas. Thus did "educational development" in Makeni as dictated from the president's office actually push the town further behind Bo and Kenema, as child labor was withdrawn from the farms and market, the food supply threatened, families pushed further into poverty, and the number of unemployed young town migrants skyrocket.

*"Self-development" and how poverty precludes self-interest being national interest*

In spite of the lack of waged employment available in Makeni, education still serves as a barometer for both self- and community development in Makeni. However, there is enough slippage in conversations that occur about education to make it necessary to probe which type of development students speak of when they press the importance of education. For example, when I asked youth who were struggling to finish secondary school what they would do once they graduated, most planned to leave Makeni to pursue their careers, and only two of the fourteen professed any interest in returning to Makeni town to work and "upgrade" the township. Many had the lofty goal of being a future president or minister of education, from which post they could "force progress in the north" as one student phrased it. However, they would do so from Freetown, and not by working directly in Makeni.

Smith found similar lamentations in Kairiru Island, Papua New Guinea, where villagers blamed their lack of success with their businesses and cooperatives on the lack of unity, cooperation, and leadership in the community. They felt strongly that, in spite of the obstacles presented by their marginal position vis-à-vis the rest of the nation, that

they should still do better with what they have (1994: 158-160). One student was brave enough to mention this to his fellow students in a forum I held, and the class received this comment with discomfort. The student who accused his fellows of being unwilling to unite and return to Makeni to help the town is from the east. He said the reason the east and south are ahead of Makeni is not just government investment, but the united front the students there present to the nation; namely that they are from a particular region and will work to help that region. There is no cooperation and unity in Makeni, he stated boldly, and for that reason there would never be community development. He accused students from Makeni of not wanting to live in the town longer than they had to in order to complete their educations, after which they would work only to advance themselves. And this, he stated, is why so many local graduates of Makeni Teachers' College want to work for NGOs. They are not even concerned about the "development" of the town, as long as they are personally "developed" enough to benefit from any jobs.

The others argued that there was no reason for them to take their university educations back to the north if there were no jobs waiting for them there. Anything outside of the capital would be in Bo or Kenema, so it was easy for him to say that the students in the south and east stayed put. For these students, living in the north is a self-fulfilling prophecy: you cannot do anything to help the north when there are no positions located there from which you could provide this assistance. Therefore it is better to leave and assist later, from a position of power. They tried to boo him down, but he stood firm.

This student accused his compatriots, whatever their personal goals, of simply suffering for the lack of advantages they had from being raised and educated in the town. They had reason to complain about the town's backwardness in the present, but no commitment to rectify this in the future. He touched upon a critical question: can Makeni develop without the commitment of the youth to close the circle and bring the full benefit of their knowledge back to the town to work constructively? The youth talk about their own and the country's future, but the future of Makeni seems remarkably divorced from this discussion about hope and things being better in this unknown future with better education. Those teachers who were from Makeni and chose to return after the war even if they had a better situation for themselves elsewhere were considered remarkable, and many were the victims of ridicule from others who thought their choices crazy. Those

who say they want to help the country improve want to do so from a more comfortable vantage point than Makeni town itself. It is a discourse of “self-development”, where development is measured by one’s education and ability to get ahead economically, no matter one’s ability or will to change the world around him, and it is not singular to Makeni (see Bledsoe, 1990: 76; Peel, 1978: 141; Walley, 2003: 38).

In essence, Makeni town is too backwards for those who have managed to improve themselves to want to stay there, or to feel that even an educated population can “force” development in the town. My research assistant Idriss accused politicians of rampant “self-development” to the detriment of the nation in his explanation of *An’porto* (see Chapter Seven). It is a fine line to walk between “rampant self-development,” a polite way of referring to personal corruption or greed leading to bellies swollen with excess (*borbor bελε*), and productive “self-development” that can, eventually, help the community. Idriss once stated that development begins with the individual, and it is only when you collect a community of like-minded individuals that the community itself will develop. It is likely that the problem for development in Makeni is that this has become a chicken and egg question: who must “develop” first in order to initiate development in the second, the individual or the community? There is little of the ethos, common to other countries in West Africa, of the educated people “bringing up” their own hometown (see Peel, 1978: 141; Middleton, 1979: 246). Instead, according to several of the students present at the forum, most of the students who had graduated with fairly good results the year before had left Makeni, and did not plan to return. Several went to Bo.

From this conundrum, it is clear that the overlap between education and development is at least as much about improving the individual as it is about bringing the town out of squalor. Students are keen to develop themselves, and see the current state of the town and especially education in the town as an obstacle to that. Those parents who were interested in helping their children pursue higher education did so, on the other hand, by stating, “the children are the leaders of tomorrow.” Having lived through years of a corrupt government, followed by war, many told me their eyes were “too open” to believe that personal wealth and success would be the result of educating their children. They instead believe that an educated nation is simply better off. Most of them have limited personal experience with education, and they have faith that if their children are

educated they will automatically be better off in some sense, as anything is better than being illiterate and living in a village because you do not have any other options. If enough people were educated, the nation could not help but develop.

When adults said that members of their own community were not “development minded,” they meant that the residents are generally uninterested in working together to force infrastructural and social advance in the community, such as cooperative farms or a community library. What the youth meant when they said the same thing is that the town does not provide an atmosphere conducive to the development of the individual, and this is the result of both internal and external forces. Makeni’s townspeople are “business oriented” and therefore not supporting the education of their youth, and the national government is disabling the region by forcing children off the farm and into sub-par schools, then leaving them unemployed at the end.

Perhaps education is a synecdoche for development among Makeni’s residents because a large school enrollment is a sign of the town’s commitment to moving beyond the war. However committed the people are means little to how well provisioned the town is—with classrooms, consistent teaching, and employment upon completion—by the government. Students defend the importance of education to an enlightened society, even though some argue (Richards, 1996: 3) that advanced education may have played a key role in the initial formation of the RUF. Students also continue to pursue higher degrees even though there is nothing for them in the current economic atmosphere, which is essentially the same situation as occurred before the war. They are waiting for the day when they can benefit from a more “development-minded” environment, as they feel there is no chance for them to use their knowledge in the present.

Education has two main benefits that people profess, though in one person both can exist: the need for education in order to develop the country, and the need for education in order to advance one’s self out of the current state of poverty in which one lives, even if that impoverished environment still exists after one has advanced beyond it. The student who accused his fellows of lacking a commitment to develop their town shamed the rest of the class for, as he argued, consuming the education the town provided them, instead of using their knowledge to give back to it productively. As though education was silver and gold, students could take what they found and leave the town.

He derides this attitude as the essential component of the town's backwardness, though his companions' rejoinder to his argument is essentially that the town is too poor to generate any internal support for development activities, so why should they just sit idle? Having lived through the war they had struggled enough, having fought for and paid excessively for an education in Makeni they had struggled enough; over half the students at the forum raised their hands when I asked them if they were paying their own school fees, and half again when I asked who was paying their own accommodation, food, and tuition. Nearly all were attending extra lessons in order to prepare for their exams.

**Conclusion: what is the best way to attend to the business of living?**

Education is a contested ground on which the future of the individual, the community, and the nation is fought. It is both a means and ends of development for the individual and the nation, though because of rampant poverty people claim that they cannot even begin to use their educations, therefore these ideas exist as much in the abstract as they do in reality. People in Makeni are waging a constant battle with their poverty and uncertainty about the future in investing in education, but they are not sure if it will provide the promised ends, or whether it is just keeping otherwise idle youth off the streets in the meantime, and perhaps even conditioning them to use violence to get their way with others. They are also not convinced that education is better than engaging the youth in petty trade in order to keep them fed. Trade would accomplish the same goals of keeping them occupied, with the added bonus of keeping them fed, without instilling ideas of revolution in them, or a conditioning to violence as merely the imposition of the stronger individual's will that comes from frequent classroom beatings.

Without the government's commitment to making education work by endowing it financially, building schools in villages, and enabling economic development so that educated youth are utilized, education, especially in a "backward" part of the nation, is amputated. There is only the ethos of the town pulling itself up "from the grassroots" because it has an educated population; that perhaps the educated youth will see the need to support development in the future because they struggled with their education in the present. Makeni people hope that education will push other "development" because they

know everything will not occur simultaneously, but they know that nothing will happen unless education is paid more than lip service in the present.

So when we return to the narrative, “Makeni people are interested in business, not school,” we can dig a deeper meaning from the cliché- and conflict-laden mantra employed by townspeople who cannot seem to push individual or community “development” with either pursuit. Makeni people are interested in the business of living, of training their children well and keeping them at peace, and of any “development” they can manage for themselves. Perhaps when all of these conditions are met, they can begin to think about the wider networks of the township and its own “development.” This nurturance of and reliance on the self before any other concern is a running theme in relationships in latter-day Makeni, and I will address its effects on the family, formerly both the provider and beneficiary of development through education, in the next chapter.

## Chapter Five

### **Development and moral obligation in fragmented families: Interpersonal alliances and personal successes**

I am a widow. I prefer to live in Port Loko than here [with my family]. I can be a student there [at the teachers' college] and not have to live as a member of my family, where everyone complains. They think that because I go to school it means I have money. In Port Loko I get sympathy. I mean, look at me. I'm an old lady, by myself with no husband anymore, and I have children. I need to take care, and when I am a stranger in Port Loko, sometimes there are people who take pity on me, they can assist me with little things. But here I get only complaints.

Madam MC

What constitutes a “family” among the impoverished residents of Makeni is predicated as much on who is in a position to enter reciprocal relations with others, who cannot, and how individuals negotiate their need to look after themselves and their dependents with their obligations towards needy family members. The war exacerbated this, as people were scattered for many years, and often built new lives and obligations away from their once primary family members. Though some have reunited their loved ones in one location, others struggle with more patchwork families. The strain of building a life from scratch has encouraged many people, especially the youth, to seek their fortunes in other places, such as Freetown or the diamond mines to the north and east. At the same time, the poverty that has gripped the region since the end of colonialism has forced many families to find alternative ways of supporting themselves, and members broke away in order to “self-develop” without the burden of also supporting large families.

Ferme emphasized in her work on the Mende, in southern Sierra Leone, that the study of what constitutes kinship in Sierra Leone is complicated by the fact that domestic groups, or “households” are rarely stable over time, and rarely map neatly onto gender and generation (2001: 145-146; see also Guyer, 1981: 98). Among the Mende, the



*mawee*, or “big house” owned by the big person in an extended kin group, consists both of a women’s house and the individual houses of men in the group. Women move in and out of the big house at different times, staying with their husbands when they were not pregnant or nursing, going back to their natal villages when their husbands treated them badly, returning if their men coax them to reconcile, and generally being “free agents” who both belong to kin groups (most specifically their natal group, to which they could also claim “ownership”) but can choose freely among them as to where to reside and to whom to be obliged at any specific time (148-151). Leach found among the Kpa Mende that obligations were not always fulfilled between spouses. Indeed, one could see the state of a marriage in the state of a farm, as if there was trouble, the man would often forgo “brushing” the bush for his wife so that she could plant, forcing her to either plant only in swamps, or beg land or labor off others (1994: 76-77).

Shaw affirms many similarities among the Temne, where because polygamous marriages were common, it was a woman’s transformation from wife to mother that gave her security in the household and in her life, as her children, especially her sons, were expected to look after her when she was old (2002: 161). And as in Mende households, a woman had power to express their dissatisfaction with household relations, especially if her husband was not fulfilling his obligations to her. Women had the power to withdraw labor if they were upset with their husbands, by refusing to cook, work on the farm, and have sexual relations with their men. If they wanted a divorce they were entitled to one, and men took their protests seriously because they depended on their wives’ labor (2002: 162). Women form part of men’s “wealth in people,” and if a wife leaves, her husband is both financially and socially poorer for it (2002: 171). However, she is secure in the knowledge that she can always return to her natal home, having retained her name and rights in her lineage even after marriage. Thus is the notion of the security of a family, among both the Mende and Temne, clearly based on notions of marriages and marriage alliances being desirable but brittle, and one’s strength and security comes from one’s natal family, both parents and siblings, and children. Though the literature on kinship among the Temne is slim, the similarities in notions of belonging, obligation and conflict are similar enough among the Mende for us to assume that the notion of “family” in Sierra Leone is one firmly rooted in the security of the natal family, and the desirability

of good marriage alliances expanding one's base of social networks and potential "wealth" in other people. This wealth in people allows parents to expect that the children they have raised will be there to reciprocate and care for them when they are old, as has been the expectation in other cultures in West Africa (see van der Geest, 1998: 452). This is what family life *ought* to be like, but in Makeni we see that most people are currently dissatisfied with the state of their relations of mutual obligations. This results not just in wives leaving husbands who fail to look after them, but natal kin drawing the same lines: effectively severing relationships where obligations are not met, and specifically engaging others only for the purpose of reciprocity.

In this chapter I analyze how both of these notions have altered with urbanization and poverty and families, both natal and foster, have experienced a shift in moral emphasis over time towards individualism, competition, and voluntary rather than obligatory exchange, even as the conflicts that governed marriages and were endemic in households in the past still characterize relationships. Though people have not lost sight of what they *should* do with respect to their kinship relations, residents are thinking in terms of short-term tactics, and what (and who) will get them the things they need in the short run, which might create the opportunity to think about their kin in the future, but only if the situation changes. Honoring obligations is a luxury that most people do not have. Gluckman saw conflict as part of the allegiances of kinship, such that though conflict seems to strain the social system, over the long term it generates greater social cohesion (1973: 2). I argue here that conflict, in its most basic form of the refusal of members of natal families to assist each other, has taken shape especially sharply in light of endemic poverty and the perceived need of individuals who receive no assistance from their families to "self-develop" instead. This serves to ideologically sever the ties of obligation they have to their parents, and is bringing the notion of "family" into sharp relief, as people habitually make moral prioritizations of their own needs versus what they believe they do and do not owe to others. "Kin" is no longer taken for granted.

What is now emphasized in relationships are emotions that have always existed between people—pity, friendship, love, compassion—not always between kin, as the market *padi* relationships emphasized in Chapter Three, and not always inclusive of obligation to reciprocate. What sets them apart now is that relationships are enacted and

cemented with actions of sacrifice and reciprocity, and not the converse (that reciprocity is assumed because a relationship exists). People may assist others because they feel that in their position it is the correct thing to do, and can only hope that the other person feels the same, and reciprocates in the future. This accompanies a shift away from what Makeni people term “traditional” families, where polygamy was common and kin labor was pooled, to “town” families, where smaller units are governed less by the obligation to share and more by the fact that a relationship can be defined as good or bad based on the tendency of people to share. Reciprocity is governed by hope; hope that by helping someone, perhaps they will come to your assistance in the future. Whereas Gluckman saw conflict as cementing “social cohesion,” what I saw occurring in Makeni was the opposite: reciprocity itself, not the obligation to do so (which causes conflict) is the cement of “social cohesion.” A relationship that does not involve active giving may be dormant or dead. Like in situations of labor migration in southern Africa as far back as the 1940’s, people who have been absent from their families for extended periods of time and have formed new lives, usually “self-developed” lives, often choose to concentrate their spending on their “new” lives and families with whom they share everything, instead of on those people with whom they only share blood ties (McKittrick, 1197: 286, see also Ferguson, 1990: 32-40). Yan (borrowing from Bordieu) calls this “practical kinship,” emphasizing its “fluid and flexible nature” in practice (2001: 227). I would hesitate to use this term, as what I found in Makeni was occurring with all relationships, both involving blood ties and those that did not. “Self-development” is a moniker that defines whether or not someone feels they owe benefits to their family, but it says little about what they feel they owe other people. The latter is enacted more in terms of address, where people use family terms to highlight the closeness, or distance, in their relationships with others, and this is especially important when examining foster families.

What does not appear in this chapter in the place of a satisfying substitute for practical kinship is fictive kinship, which examines the deliberate process of creating kinship ties between unrelated individuals. Janet Carsten, for example, asserted that in Langkawi, Malaysia, kinship is not assured from birth; rather it is processual. Between both biologically related and unrelated individuals, kinship is built over time through the act of consuming rice meals from the same hearth (1997: 4). It was through this process

that she became a daughter in her fieldwork household. Similarly, Gow found in Amazonia that “being born does not automatically confer personhood,” rather, people become “real” through their involvement in acts of kinship within kin networks on the land, such as being fed “real food” grown locally, and through this process anyone can become kin (1995: 47-48). On the other end of the spectrum of fictive kinship studies are those dealing with “chosen families,” such as Kath Weston’s studies of gay kinship in San Francisco, and their challenges to “traditional” notions of kinship as “ties that endured,” by emphasizing the genuineness of chosen ties (1995: 87, 90). Though these appear to dovetail with what I am doing here, as kinship is in all of these examples a process of social creation through communal acts, I feel that here they would serve as too much of a blunt instrument of analysis. In spite of the familiarity of terms of address between individuals who are emotionally close, people in Makeni recognize who is biologically related and who is not, as this is the basis on which obligational relations are determined. Whether or not people choose to enact and reaffirm them, with whom, how, involving what sacrifices and over how long a period of time, is continually up for assessment and negotiation. It is an emphasis on active kinship. Like Carsten’s analysis of “relatedness,” it is a dynamic process, based on individuals’ daily practices of interaction that help them meet their needs (quoted in Nyambedha and Aagaard-Hansen, 2007: 518). In essence, the family provides only the original, most immediate and obvious pool for individuals to create reciprocal relationships, but it is not the only one. Those ties that individuals do have within their families are more enduring and stable because they are chosen, in patterns similar to the cooperation and conflict that mainly governed affinal relations in the past, and I investigate this notion here.

I begin by overlaying people’s own notions of what they call the “traditional” family and how and why its features are not always applicable in a post-war, increasingly urban setting. I then examine how the bonds of family are tested by emigration and education, where the exceptional family member can and often does sever ties with those uneducated members with whom there is little chance for a reciprocal relationship. Lastly, I examine fostering and patchwork families (or, as Segalen terms them, “recomposed families” (2001: 246)) where conflict and divorce are common, poverty drives people apart, and individual choices and emotions are the main tenet governing

how well a child is cared for and by whom. *Pul yu don sindrom* has emerged in family dynamics as a governing force just as strong as in politics. If family members cannot count on either obligation or emotional bonds to assure that exceptional individuals will support the rest of the family, then they pull that member back down to their level. This assures that they do not have the intellectual or financial means to abandon the family.

In addition I argue that this paradox in the moral foundation of family—hope without obligation, pulling down the successful instead of raising up the downtrodden—is caused in part by the increasingly wide chasm between the “self-developed” individuals, who left the family temporarily in order to educate themselves, and their (often) illiterate and impoverished family members, who may have nothing with which to reciprocate and keep a relationship intact. Where once the individual saw no difference in their own and their family’s fortunes, now educated and well-connected individuals can advance far beyond their family, if they can loosen the obligation to provide extensive support for their family. The temptation to “self-develop” is great, especially in the aftermath of a war in a trading town where the complete destruction of most business ventures means that there may be a single breadwinner in an extended household. The pressure on them to produce for everyone is enormous, and where their earnings might be plenty to keep themselves and perhaps their children comfortable, it does little to cater for an extended family. Thus is the temptation to take one’s earnings to advance one’s own small family great. MC was in a better position living as a student teacher and a widow with children in a strange town than she was spending her small salary on her extended family. As a widow, strangers might feel sorry for her. As part of an extended kin network, no one would. She was performing what Gale terms a “cost-benefit analysis” of the resources available to her in various places and as she inhabited various roles, and was choosing carefully in order to maximize her returns, regardless of whether or not her decision involved her kin (2007: 363).

Every kin member, depending on their financial position, possesses a different tactic for ensuring that they receive their daily needs. The financially vulnerable members must maintain strong emotional bonds with potential providers, as they have little with which to reciprocate, while simultaneously those providers may try to extricate themselves from these bonds in order to secure their own fortunes. Sending children to

school and supporting relatives who want to move abroad is a double-edged sword. A successful youth can be the stabilizing factor in poor families in times of need. Just as easily, the potential physical, emotional and intellectual distance introduced by education may preclude them wanting to support the elderly; conflicting emotions that remind us, according to Peletz, that ambivalence lies at the heart of the practice of kinship (2001: 414). Those who supported the youth in their quest for education or urban relocation remind those that they are helping that they have an obligation to reciprocate, whether or not this occurs is determined more strongly by the individual's evaluation of what they owe their kin. Thus as individuals "self-develop," so do their families attempt to persuade them that their "development" is a result of the family's efforts as well. Kinship has always been flexible in West Africa, as Bledsoe expounded in 1980, kinship "provides an idiom by which people seek to maintain or transform their relationships to others as the situation demands" (29). The fact that people in Makeni who want to enact and maintain certain critical relationships do so through sacrificial acts (like unrelated fostering, considered a huge burden in times of financial hardship) that all but demand reciprocation highlights the fact that people no longer take "traditional" family obligations for granted (as opposed to Hamer, 1982: 304), namely that the mere existence of kin is a reason for obligation. The situation currently demands that the boundaries and understandings of obligation be challenged, and connections reaffirmed.

### **The structure and obligations of kinship: why must individuals "self-develop?"**

In this section I examine the changing notion of "family" and how Makeni residents understand the differences between what they call "traditional" (and sometimes "Temne culture") families and families that exist that currently exist in Makeni, though different people described these families variously as "modern families" or "not normal families" or "town families." The implication is that family life is now as slippery as the term "family," as extreme poverty, religious conversion, and war, mean that membership is as uncertain and changing as are the bonds and obligations joining members to each other. In addition, the practice of fostering out children to distant kin in order, among other reasons, to build a child's character and strengthen kin networks (see Renne, 2003: 90-

92) has been replaced by the idea that one must keep one's children close, both physically and emotionally, in order to ensure that they feel obligated to look after a parent in his or her old age. Renne posits that the move towards reducing familial obligations to ties within the nuclear family is a trend occurring all over West Africa that is related to lower fertility (2003: 92). In Makeni, it is also related to the fact that in an environment of grinding poverty, one cannot afford, for better or for worse, tying oneself to obligations to many people, for fear that if favors are granted, they will be called in at some point. This risk needs to be mitigated or even averted, and resources channeled into a few people who must be made to know that they are in a reciprocal relationship.

*Conceptualizing the family in poverty, war, and religious conversion*

In their own words, the people of Makeni are no longer part of "traditional" families. This is both because of the war, Christianity, and poverty changing the nature of family obligations, and because the network of obligations governing subsistence farming that held extended families together in villages is not applicable in the scramble for cash that governs subsistence in the town. The "traditional" family, in residents' words, is one where the husband is the head of the house and has multiple wives who rear the children, prepare meals, and conduct all the farming activities on his land (see Bledsoe, 1980: 31; Shaw, 2002: 122). This man married according to the custom of traditional Sierra Leonean religions or of Islam, which both allowed a man to have up to six wives provided he could look after them. If a man's farm was productive, due mainly to his wife's labor, he could afford to marry another wife, perhaps purchase more land, and extend his fortune. My interlocutors talked about polygamy as a "native" custom, that, whether desirable or not, or cannot happen now because the situation is not "normal:"

My father had six wives. He used to live that polygamy life. Because of [their potential] labor, they [the men] wanted these women to do farming for them and so forth, so he married a lot of women. They do the farming for you; they do everything for you before you get your children to replace them to do these things. That's what we did normally in a native home. IBK

Polygyny is disappearing.<sup>62</sup> From all my interviews, I only spoke with one man who currently has more than one wife that he is attempting to support. The decline of the polygamous family is due to several factors. Many people who grew up in families in which the parents were Muslim or practiced traditional religions where polygamy is common have now converted to Christianity. IBK, whose parents were devout Muslims, went to a Catholic school when he was a child. He was himself converted, and urged his parents both to convert before they died, when his mother was the only surviving wife.

The marriage situation in Makeni is not “normal” for other reasons. The stress and poverty caused by the war has fragmented families, with some members killed, wives leaving husbands who cannot support them (as was also their customary right before the war, see Ferme, 2001: 90-91; Shaw, 2002: 162), land lost to neglect and migration, and lack of finances hampering men’s efforts to attain more wives to work their farms:

Our parents they are now old, at any time you don’t know what will happen, they will die and leave us here. So we have to take care of ourselves... because we were eight in number, we have lost our sister, my younger sister, we are now seven in number. Because my mother gave birth to five of us, and the balance three... my stepmother gave birth to two and the other gave birth to one. And they are divorced from my father, so only my mother is staying with my father presently. But she too is old, she cannot take care for us. AC

AC’s main concern is that because his parents are old and cannot work for themselves, let alone their children, it is up to the children to find ways to support themselves and each other. Not only will they survive once their parents have died because they are used to supporting themselves, but by notionally “self-developing” instead of relying on parents who cannot support them, it is mutually understood by his brothers and sisters that they will look after each other only as much as they are able to. This is in great contrast to “traditional” relations between related and affinal family members that are kept intact by “big” people reminding them of obligations, an exercise that is not singular to Africa (see Robbins, 2004: 20 for an example from Papua New Guinea).

Christian conversion also alters familial relationships and notions of obligation. In colonial Ghana, wealthy Ewe converted to Christianity to free themselves of

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<sup>62</sup> Polygyny declined in colonial Camaroon when men moved to cash-crop on land abandoned by the French, and women found that men could not force them to remain static (Guyer, 1995: 125).



obligations to pay for traditional exorcisms for poorer kin (Meyer, 1999: 12). I met one Christian widow who, even though she is poor, refuses levirate marriage from her deceased husband's Muslim family because her religion proscribes it:

TS: When he [my husband] was alive the family used to come to us, and he used to give them, at least when they came, some land on the farm to work. But since he is dead nobody comes. In fact nobody wants to know about the children. I am the only one that is trying my best at least to give the children a home. And it is not an easy task, really.

CB: Why doesn't his family want to help you?

TS: Well, I don't know! I really don't know. Maybe because I refused to... I refused to get married to them again, because that sometimes... this is their custom.

CB: They wanted you to marry his brother?

TS: Yeah. And because I refused to, they don't want to know about me and the children. So that is why I decided in fact maybe I will cut it from the land and then I will sell it [find money by selling her land], so that I can have a small house for me and the children to stay in.

“Cutting it from the land” describes what TS will do with her ties and unfulfilled relationships with her husband's family. By selling the land he left for her, she is also symbolically cutting the ties she had with his family, and also any rights that they may claim in that land. Using that money to buy a house for herself and her children is a symbolic transformation of her husband's wealth from his kin to her own kin. She assumes they would not try to claim a house inhabited by children “they don't want to know”. Her late husband was also a devout Christian, having converted when he was younger. His family respected his conversion, but remain true to their own Muslim teachings. Religious differences do not necessarily cause friction in families, as IBK's family is a clear example. Not only did both of his parents convert to Christianity before they died, but of his three surviving siblings, one is Christian and the other two Muslim.

In spite of the friction potentially caused by religious differences and poverty, one's natal kin are still the source of relationships that people will seek to enact when they need to. In some cases, people may choose with which set of kin to re-enact

relationships based on which might prove to be less of a financial burden. My friends Gibrilla and Abi, whom I spoke about in the introduction, are a case in point. Though they had recently put most of their remaining money into fixing up their business by hiring an artist to paint murals on the shop front and purchasing new signs, after her newborn died Abi wanted to return to Bo in order to be closer to her natal family and take part in their business, and Gibrilla, tired of dealing with the incessant requests from his family (whom it seemed never had anything to give back to him), was open to the idea. Two months after finishing the renovations on the business, they abandoned the house, left Makeni, and moved in with her mother in Bo.

Those whose kin are deceased are in a more precarious position. They are not tethered to place by kinship bonds, and though they can live where they want to and do what they want, they have no economic or emotional safety net during the present difficult times. Many ex-combatants whose families were killed face this predicament. Most of them are not natives of Makeni, but just “sit down” in the town anyway because their families are dead and there is nowhere for them to go and no one to assist them:

I just sit here now, I decided not to go back to Bumbuna [a town fifty kilometers away] because there was nothing for me there, so I just came to sit down in Makeni... and my parents aren't there, they are both dead... I don't have anything to do, no work, and no one to help me. I don't know what to do. IB

Civilians who lost their families, whether before or during the war, face similar problems:

I was a student at school, but I have no parents, they both died so I was unable to continue with school. They were not there to help me. I was fifteen years of age. Fifteen. I didn't have anyone to take care of me, so even though I was very young, I joined this work [the chieftom police force]... my mother died before I had any sense, I was so small when she left me, I didn't have sense and I didn't know anyone. If I didn't have anyone to look after me, I would have died. KM

It is more common now for people to rely on the kindness of friends and strangers, and KM was fortunate enough to have in the form of a childless older woman who recently passed away (see also McKay, 2006: 155). KM emphasized that she looked after Zainab, her caretaker, in her last years, and this was probably the main reason Zainab wanted to “adopt” KM. By taking in an orphan, there was the chance that she would have that

“security” of a caretaker in her final years. Older adults whose children were killed or kidnapped during the war are in a similar predicament, as parents rely on their children to look after them in their old age.

Children are often referred to as “insurance” for adults, as their only assets for the future, as the “African bank” where elders put all their resources and hope that they will pay out in the future. The ideal in Ghana, for example, is that old people who worked hard for their children could rest and be cared for when old, with their only responsibility being to ensure the peace and unity in the family, and giving sage advice to younger members (see van der Geest, 1998: 478). Though this is what people should strive for, van der Geest found that often old people were unkind to others and peevish with their relatives, whom they felt were ignoring them because they had nothing to offer the young, not even advice (1998: 482). Just as Ghana has experienced this shift, in Makeni the war and poverty disrupted both generational continuity and young people’s perspectives on how valuable the knowledge of the elders applies to their current situations (van der Geest, 1998: 488). People are trying to look after themselves in a situation of dire poverty, without any assured assistance from either elders or juniors. KM’s adoption was not a standard cross-generational exchange, rather it was a form of hope on Zainab’s part; hope that by taking in a parentless, friendless girl, she too would have someone to look after her. According to KM, those wishes were fulfilled.

*The new family: why parents keep their children close, why children strain to leave*

This persistent scattering of families has forced new meanings on the fostering of children, which in “traditional” families (especially among the Mende) was done to enhance the family’s chance of upward social mobility (see Bledsoe, 1990: 74, Ferme, 2001: 137). Currently, some feel it is best to keep the children you have close so that they will be more strongly bonded to you and be warmly dispensed towards looking after you. From the following excerpt, it is clear that fostering children out to relatives during this economically precarious time is not necessarily a worthwhile investment in extended family, if your own children feel so alienated from you that they will not look after you when you are old. Rather, it is best to give them reasons to reciprocate:

I am now caring for them [my children]. I have never sent them to any brother, sister, or uncle. I am caring for them, I am raising them, and I do the most [for them]. At the end of the day they will realize that, our father has done something for us. We should give back in turn. I have that hope. I have that hope. JC<sup>63</sup>

Contrast this with the older generation, including JC's own childhood. Those people who grew up before the war were able to reap the benefits of large families whose extended members were obligated to look after the young when caregivers died. Most come from large families and were assured of being taken in by a financially secure relative:

I was a little boy in the late fifties. I left D-- when my father died in 1970 because I was the last child for him, so my brother was a teacher in K—here... he was the headmaster of the Roman Catholic School in K--. So he went for me, and at that stage I was a small boy, and I joined him where he was teaching... after primary school I left from there and joined my other brothers in Monrovia, Liberia. KK

She [my aunt] cooked for me and how I put on weight! And I had time to eat a lot, so I was properly taken care of anyway. She was very sympathetic with me when I lost my mother at a very early age. And she never had a child, she is the younger sister of my father. JC

However, even the older generation is now experiencing the strain of family obligations when they do not have the means to help especially destitute family members, or if they want the opportunity to make something of themselves rather than support their extended kin and maintain everyone in a state of poverty. My friend whose tirade against her family opened this chapter is from Makeni and comes back to visit though she no longer lives there. When her husband passed away and she decided to return to school she chose a teaching college in the next district, Port Loko, instead of staying with her kin. When I asked her why, she said she would rather rely on the compassion of strangers than the burden of family. If she stayed in Makeni, she said she would receive only demands from them. By leaving, she eases the burden of demand on her, but can still return to Makeni when she needs assistance. As Gale found for many ostensible single women in Guinean refugee camps, MC is continually re-assessing the costs and benefits of enacting

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<sup>63</sup> Among the Asante in Ghana, fathers, who are increasingly involved in raising their daughters, demand more benefits from bridewealth than they did in the past, when daughters were raised by the matriline (Manuh, 1995: 196). In Itapa, Yorubaland, fathers earn great respect from their children if they make sacrifices to educate them, rather than sending them to work or as foster children (see Renne, 2006: 72).

certain relationships at certain times (2007: 363). She is a distant relative of the wife of the paramount chief, and he is keeping her money in his bank account so she can earn interest for the house she is building. One reason she was in town was to retrieve money to purchase building materials. It appears as though she is trying to keep her family distant enough to not deal with any daily hassle, but close enough to reap the benefits they can provide. In addition, by altering her status by living as a “stranger” in Port Loko, she finds it easier to make short-term, non-binding reciprocal relationships.

Men have an especially difficult time balancing their family obligations as they are expected to be providers. The first-born son knows from an early age that he must stand up and prepare to “be the man” in his family in case his father passes away. This is a position of power and almost overwhelming responsibility, especially as one seems to be in a position where one is always giving, and never receiving. When my friend Gibrilla’s older brother died unexpectedly, he suddenly became the head of the family, and decided to move out with his wife and build a small house for the two of them because he could not stand being constantly inundated with the “hassle of requests for food, medicine, money for education and everything else.” He assured me that most of the time his family members are just being lazy and will not get things for themselves that they can ask from him, even though he does not have the money. This is even though they criticize him for “eating while they watch” (see Feeley-Harnik, 1991: 205). He said that no one wants to be the first-born son unless he will be chief.

This was the main factor that influenced his decision to leave everything and move with his wife to her hometown in the south, where his family cannot reach him easily. As a man who was the second son and was only used to looking after himself and his wife, the new responsibility as the eldest put his life’s “self-development” work in jeopardy. He had paid for his own training as an herbal doctor and started a business by his own hands, unlike his brother, whose schooling had been paid for. There was no advantage to being thrust into a position of responsibility that had no accrued benefits, and so it was better that he and his wife take their lives, and their prospects, elsewhere.

### **Extending the family: the emotional uncertainty of kin living abroad**

As a foreigner walking down the streets of Makeni, I received a lot of attention from people wanting to know who I was. When the question arose of my origins, the response “I am American” often as not brought an, “Ah, I have a (brother/sister/aunt/cousin/child) in America!” This kind of conversation happened most often with middle-aged people who were fluent English speakers, and were often sat on the porch of a house they owned. Not only were they more comfortable approaching me because of this potential connection between us, but it also highlighted the elevation in status that can occur when one has extended his or her family, and thus their social security, to a wealthier part of the world. It also became clear to me that some people in particular asked me this question in order to redraw and reaffirm that connection with their loved ones overseas who had not been looking after their relatives in Makeni. It therefore highlighted the ambiguity of having relatives abroad: will they assist the family in times of need? As importantly, will their assistance help or hinder relations locally when the rest of the community is poor? Robbins found that in Urapmin, Papua New Guinea, temporary youth job migration was met with profound ambivalence by the rest of the village. People were happy that their youth would send money and “modern” things back to the village, but these acts merely highlighted the fact that their own village, and their own lives, were falling behind those of their neighbors and the outside world (2004: 102). Extending one’s kin abroad, and having a potential conduit back to one’s self, increases the ambivalence of kin relations. If one appears too comfortable in an impoverished place, they may be *pul don* by jealous people. Conversely, if one has sacrificed to send kin abroad and they do not reciprocate, that relationship is effectively dead.

*The benefits and dangers of family abroad who assist local kin: are they faring too well?*

In her work with Muslim Sierra Leoneans in Washington DC, D’Alisera found that most of her informants were intent on maintaining connections with their families in Sierra Leone, both by sending money to their extended families and, before the war, sending their children to be fostered for several years so that they would grow up knowing their African roots (2004: 48); a relationship of seemingly perfect reciprocity. What appears

as unambiguously positive support from abroad may not be so unambiguously received in Sierra Leone. Because of the steady influx of cash from abroad, some families in Makeni feel that they are put in a precarious social position. One elderly woman who is not from Makeni and feels unwelcome in the township is aware of how vulnerable she is to being pulled down because people are jealous that her daughter in England looks after her:

Pray for me for my enemies, although I don't know them. But they are around. They used to say, "She is cooking everyday and she is not working. Her children are in England and they are sending money for her! We will enter the house and kill her and burn the house." RC

She is worried that because her daughter has elevated her standard of living beyond that of most other residents, that she will become a target of jealousy and possibly violence. She is most concerned that although she has her economic tether abroad, she has no family in the town that could ensure her safety. Most people, however, happily mention when someone abroad is taking care of them:

Some [of my siblings] have died. One is a student. One was a lecturer at university, and during the war he had to leave for London. And now he is back in Freetown. And I have another brother here in Makeni... so the other ones are in America. I have A-- in America, I have S-- in America... I have a sister in America, M--, who is always helping us in terms of food and shelter. AFB

Others are fortunate enough to have a relative who not only assist them with life in Makeni, but also helped them acquire visas to go abroad themselves:

After secondary school I went to the United States, in September 1971. I had an uncle who was working at the United Nations. I wrote him a letter and said that I want to follow my studies, so he arranged my move over there. So I went there in 1971, and I stayed in Washington DC. GS

This particular gentleman married an American woman and has a daughter, and his family is still living in America. He returned to Sierra Leone in order to do something positive for his country, and is currently a Makeni Town Councilor. There are a large number of Sierra Leoneans in America with roots in the district, as was confirmed by the emergence of a development group there for people in the district, the Bombali District

Development Organization (BDDO). The Chairman of the town council traveled to the United States in 2005 in order to attend meetings with their council, which is based in Baltimore. Their goal is to raise money and apply for grants to lift the district as a whole out of poverty, though most of them also directly support family members as well. This seems to flaunt my contention that kin relations in Makeni are now determined by reciprocity, however, as I mentioned, they are also governed by the hope that by making great sacrifices in the present (such as a taxi driver in Baltimore who sends half of his net income back to Sierra Leone) they will be rewarded in the future, for example by sending children back to be fostered once the country is *kol* [cool, or in some kind of “peace.”]

The money entering the community from abroad also played a large role in assisting the townspeople during and after the war. Many people were able to leave the Sierra Leone through assistance from relatives abroad, and are now rebuilding their homes and lives with this same money. Whether a family member was willing to step in and rescue other members during the war, no matter the hardship to themselves, became a testament to their *gud trenin*, solid moral foundation, and family’s care of them, as well as their commitment to their family obligations. However, it was also governed and enacted through emotional bonds based on past sacrifices:

After I have traveled so many places in Africa [trying to get a visa to go to England], my daughter was in England and wherever I went I used to ring her to talk to her and tell her that I am in that particular country. I know that every month on the 28th she would send money for me, she would send my allowance so that I will not travel alone in another man's country. She used to support me there. She used to speak to the ambassadors: please take care of my mother; she is the only one I have. And God saved my life until I came back home, and I went to Freetown. Just after I spoke to my daughter that I couldn't, you know, get this visa, she rang the [embassy] and said, give me a visa that I should go to England. So they gave me some forms that I should send to her, I sent them home to her. And within three days the embassy phoned my daughter: the question is, do you have a place to lodge your mother? Are you able to take care of her? Are you not going to leave the responsibility in the hands of the government in England? If anything happens, are you able to send her back home? Will you please tell us where you are working and how much tax you are paying the government? You know, all of these questions, they sent to her to address before they would issue the visa. RC



Once RC finally arrived in England, she spent three years with her daughter. The daughter continues to send her money every month now that she has returned to Makeni to rebuild her life. The detail into which she goes regarding her daughter's attentiveness to her wellbeing is indicative not only of how well she was raised and on what a firm moral foundation she stands by caring for her mother in her time of need, by showing her deserving respect (see van der Geest, 1997: 551), but of the strong bonds between them. Care from relatives abroad is also evident in the recovery of the town, which, according to several members of the town council, was rebuilt more with the assistance from overseas than it was by the national government:

JC: A lot of the people who had their houses damaged were the lucky ones who had their children overseas, in the US. You know, the US played a very vital role in this war.

CB: How so?

JC: Very vital, the guys who were in the US have the biggest houses in Freetown for their parents. You know, the dollar played a very vital role. Some of us benefited that we [I] had cousins who were taking care of my family in Freetown. They would send a hundred dollars a month, or something very serious like that, something very serious...

Having your kinship network extended abroad creates the potential for a safety net in times of crisis and a way to rebuild your life once that crisis has passed if that family is doing well enough abroad that they can afford to send money. It solidifies relations between family members, as the money automatically betokens respect and "love at a distance" (van der Geest, 1997: 554). However, as Mrs. RC mentioned, it can make you the target of jealousy from your neighbors who lack such connections. There is also the danger, mentioned by JC, that a strong foreign network will cause jealousy, and a reason to *pul don* the whole town. He stated that the Secretary of State used Makeni residents' remittances as an excuse to divert town council resources to other districts:

When vehicles were supplied to [town] councils for health and sanitation, three new tippers were sent for the provincial headquarters of Bo, Kenema, and Makeni. Ours was sent to Kono. We asked why. They said that our own sons in Britain sent us a ten-tire tipper. So for the sake of equitability, since we have one they should send one to Kono, who has nothing. I said, but that is governmental.

I spoke to the director and I said that is governmental. And how many times have the people of Bo had money sent from US, from Britain... have you ever informed other people? Have you ever made it known to other people? We made ours known to our own community here that their sons and daughters in Britain sent us these things. The government should not slight us off. So I was not too happy. JC

However nefarious the actual reason for denying Makeni its vehicle, the government proclaimed that if the town was receiving so much assistance from abroad that it can fend for itself without the national government sending that which town is entitled to as a provincial capital. Kono, to which the tipper was sent, is a large population center but is not a provincial capital. It is also an area of questionable loyalty to the ruling party (until 2007), the SLPP. The people of Makeni state that the SLPP does not like them because they voted for the APC in local elections, and so instead of being equitable the SLPP is using the excuse of Makeni's strong connections abroad to curry favor with Kono and maintain their hold on power. In these instances, strong familial connections abroad created friction within the community and vis-à-vis the national government. Jealousy caused "nightmare egalitarianism" (Sanders, 2003: 164) and threats, as the parties that were not faring as well tried to pull down those who were.

*"Yu los pan mi" [You are lost to me]: Expatriates who forget about their families*

Many more people have suffered the *los* [lost] relative, namely the expatriated and uncommunicative kin member who has effectively severed their relationship. The sense of betrayal in these instances is palpable. I have spoken to more people who have been "forgotten" or "lost" by relatives abroad, than have been assisted by them.<sup>64</sup>

My elder brother, he was in the United Kingdom, he promised that I was supposed to join him there. So I worked with that expectation... but it never materialized. So of course I decided to... start mining to fill my needs. FS

In 2003, my brother [in America] sent me some cash so that I could have a house to stay in with the children. He did it. And then he promised to send something so that I will have something to manage my life. For example, he promised to

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<sup>64</sup> Feeley-Harnik found in Analalava, Madagascar, that to avoid becoming "lost" to kin after moving away, people had to continue participating in exchange networks (1991: 262).

send me the money for a generator, so I can pump water and then sell it so that I will sustain myself. But all of those things he never did. From that time up to now, once in a while I will get a card and then talk to him, but already he is always telling me that he is not well, he is not well. Until this last February, he came. Somebody told me that he was in Freetown. He is getting married. But he has not bothered with me so I will not bother with him. TS

But my aunt, I--, my aunt, that's my father's sister, she had three children, two boys and one girl... one is in Banjul, we all worked to send him there. And we don't know what he is doing, he never communicates to us. MM

These people had been continually frustrated by their relatives, who made promises that they did not fulfill and revealed that they lacked moral fiber enough even to reciprocate with kin who made sacrifices for them. Everyone is hurt by a severed connection even though they are common. As Fortes found for the Ashanti in the 1960's, civil servants preferred postings far from their kin in order to put distance between themselves and the constant requests for assistance (quoted in Peletz, 2001: 419). It is safer to sever that connection and destroy any hopes of assistance by "not caring" about the *lɔs* family member, as did PG, than to cling to the hope that this relative will return and assist them, only to be continually disappointed. Many people show this concern before their relatives travel abroad. Some do not want their family members to leave, as the chance that they will abandon their family altogether is too great:

Unfortunately my dad was disturbing me and didn't want me to go [to America to live with a family who had invited me]. He said that he would fear if that lady took me home that I wouldn't know them anymore, that I would leave and never come back, turn my back on my family. I would grow up and live in America and forget that I had a family in Africa. My father didn't allow the trip because he said that if I grew up in America I would no longer accept that this is my father. And he also feared that if I went to America I would be dead [to the rest of the family]. Because I am the elder son, he also feared this. So my mom, grandmother, and elder sister went to the police station [to stop the adoption]. CK

CK emphasized that his father's concern that he would forget about his family in Africa stems especially from the fact that he is the eldest son. His father was not willing to risk the family's future on the possibility that the son away in America would turn his back on them; that in essence as far as the family was concerned he would be dead. CK's father could not see the acts of love and incorporation that went into the offer of trans-national

adoption; rather he saw only its violence and rupture with the family in Sierra Leone (see Strong, 2001: 471). Plus, as the eldest son he was receiving the bulk of the school fees allotted to the children, and was also considered the most “responsible.” If a son had to be sent, it would be less morally and economically risky to send a younger sibling, in whom there was less “development” investment.

This fear was realized with one man who lost his daughter to his ex-wife’s remarriage. The daughter changed her name and went to live abroad. Her total abandonment of her real family was so emotionally damaging to her father that as far as he was concerned, his tie with his daughter was effectively severed:

The daughter who was S—K--, they changed [her last] name, to M--! My daughter was now the daughter that had been accepted by them. They sent her to London to do medicine. She is now a medical doctor, she is there, married to a British boy. After the death of H—[his ex-wife], later on, she contacted me. She wants to come and apologize. I said, “No, I cannot, I cannot have it. Don't destroy me twice. You were S—K--, then up to form four, you were very much matured. You knew what you were doing at the time. And I cannot be an object of ridicule for people. People see me with you and they say “oh, this man”. It’s because they see that the daughter has a house in Freetown, she has this, she has that. That's why I say, “No, forget it. I say forget it.” About two months ago she called my cousin, Dr. APG also, to persuade me that she is not very happy, they are not happy, they want to come to Sierra Leone to come and see me, to talk to me, to see how I am doing. I say, “I am doing very well, I'm fine. I say what we are worried about here is to get your daily meal. When you get that you are all right in Africa. I don't need to get all those luxuries that I used to have. Now you, you are a medical doctor, you can sit, don't worry I have other doctors here to look after me.” So that's how it ended. IBK

Mr. IBK was affected more by the fact that his daughter had allowed her name to be changed, which severed their connection in actual fact (as women, even after they marry, retain their natal surnames and family affiliations, see Shaw, 2002: 162), than by the fact that she went to live abroad. He was also concerned about the public humiliation he would suffer when a daughter who was able to look after her father had, up until that time, refused to do so, even though he had raised her until she was in Form Four (eighth grade). This put her on morally precarious ground, and because he is her father, throws into question his authority and ability to raise a child to high moral standards of honoring family obligations. Her changing her name released him of any responsibility for her

actions or obligations to bring her back into the family fold. She had chosen to sever these ties, and for him they could never be repaired. However, the misery that was apparent when he recounted this story to me reminds us that, because he reminded her that he did not need her medical expertise, that he had his own doctors to look after him, that he was subtly reminding her of the obligations she had ignored by cutting ties with him. He could have, should have been dependent on her, and happily so as it was his right, but now he had to pay for people to take care of him, and this added to his misery (see van der Geest, 1998: 459).

What is most interesting about tracing extensions of kinship abroad is that there is no continuity, no pattern, to the stories. Some look after their families in Makeni and some do not. Some maintain strong ties to their natal place and some do not. Of course there exists the problem that no one in Makeni was sure how well off their relatives in America were, but for them this had little to do with whether or not they send money. D'Alisera wrote that Sierra Leoneans in Washington DC complained that they just earned money to pay bills and there was very little left over at the end of the month to look after relatives, but they also know that their families back in Africa both would not understand this nor accept it (2004: 109; see also van der Geest, 1997: 540). A family member in America is better off than their people in Africa, and therefore they should send money (see also Bledsoe, 1980: 35). However, in reality, not all relatives abroad do send money. Those who have "self-developed" argue that their Sierra Leone relations are simply trying to tap the idea of "family values," in this case obligation, for their own economic gains, even if there is no "relationship" between them (see Creed, 2000: 330). There is therefore no discernable pattern to if parents encourage their children or other relatives to leave Sierra Leone in search of a better life. Most are hoping that their children look after them in old age, and though many years ago this was only tied to how well parents educate their children to the morality of family obligation and care for them when they are young, parents must ensure now that the child is well aware of who is putting effort into their "development."

MC and Gibrilla and Abi underscore the fact that many people move to other parts of Sierra Leone in order to escape the hassle of living with their family, whose demands may consume their money and energy. However, they may, like MC, stay close

enough to reap any benefits they may accrue from having their family around. Relatives abroad are not tied to their family in that way, because the expectation is that if they make it to a developed country they will always be better off than their kin in Makeni. The assumption on the part of relatives “left behind” in Makeni is that their departed family members no longer have an economic need for their family in Sierra Leone, so this connection is only essential in one direction; that the relatives in Makeni need the financial assistance of those abroad.

Expatriates used to “need” their Sierra Leonean relatives for obligations much more important than economic. D’Alisera noted that before the war started, Sierra Leonean parents in America worried that their children were becoming “too American” and were forgetting their African roots. For this reason they often sent at least one of their children back to Sierra Leone for a few years so that they would learn to be African. Mothers often also desired to send their daughters back in order to be initiated and therefore marriageable under Sierra Leonean custom (2004: 99). However, D’Alisera did not address if this sentiment changed after the war, when the country became so politically and economically unstable that parents may no longer desire to send their children “home.” Before the war, the relationship was more equitable, with relatives in America sending money, and relatives in Sierra Leone fostering and initiating children so that their foreign brethren are still culturally Sierra Leonean. After the war, from the perspective of Makeni people, the relationship transformed into Africa-bound family members becoming the recipients of charity, with nothing to offer in return. Research among the Sierra Leonean diaspora is necessary to discover if they feel the same.

The extension of kin networks abroad is fraught with dangerous ambiguity. It is a test of the strength of familial bonds and the moral foundation instilled in the individual to act in the interest of the family. No matter the individual’s *trenin*, once separated from the family, they may fail to reciprocate; it is always a risk. It is also an illustration of how the personal success that might result when family abroad provide assistance may cause misfortune at the hands of jealous individuals, and governments, at home. People often laugh that a rich man is only rich until his family finds out, and when you are poor your relatives do not want to think about you. This saying emphasizes the fact that, in

spite of the emphasis on familial obligation, when it comes to economic security, the only relationship that exists consists of poor relations asking for help from wealthy ones.

An examination of extended kinship networks proves that this is true especially when bonds are stretched over great distances. A rich man on foreign ground does not have to think about his poor relatives, whereas the poor relation can do nothing except think about whether or not s/he will receive assistance from abroad. This point is especially significant after the war, when the poor Sierra Leonean relation cannot even count on the expatriated individual desiring an African connection for their children that would encourage the relative to maintain cordial relations. Mutual bonds that become one-way streets are prone to being severed. Ultimately we must ask how, now that post-war poverty has strained familial obligations to the limit, families feel they should invest in the futures of their youth. What sacrifices should parents make to invest in their children, if they risk a successful youth abandoning them to poverty in favor of amassing a personal fortune elsewhere?

### **Educating the youth: the movement of children and the costs of success**

Parents want their children to be successful in life for many reasons. Some say they do not want their children to suffer from poverty as they have suffered (as farmers or traders), some say they will only feel safe if they know that their children are successful enough to support them when they are old. However, parents differ in their notions of how they will help their children succeed. Many people emphasize that because Makeni is a market town where business is the most important skill to teach your child, it is right to bring children the market place to learn business at a very young age. If you can teach your children your business, they will help you expand it, look after it when you cannot, and this is automatic security for you when you are old. A family that is successful in business can build a solid economic foundation for the future by assuring that their children are astute enough to run a business, and use it to support the parents in turn.

This is how businesses keep families together, but is dependent entirely on the whims of the market and the economic state of the country. Many adults in Makeni now see education as the only way of keeping children “safe;” essentially stating that

education is building the business of the mind. They argue that children can always use what they learned to make a living for themselves and not have to depend on the whims of a fragile economy to support them. Parents go to great lengths to educate their children and free them from the tyranny of a life scratching out a living through petty trade or small-scale agriculture, and hope that it will pay off in “social security:” children that will respect them and can consistently support them, through waged employment, when they are old (see van der Geest, 1997: 547-548). A salary is the goal, because the daily wage is not subject to the whims of the market.<sup>65</sup> However, parents know that educated children can also become arrogant. If they feel themselves better qualified than their parents, they will use their knowledge as power against their elders, either by forcing them to defer to their own wishes (see Berry, 1985: 79), or by relinquishing the relationship altogether.

In this section I highlight how morality and kinship are brought into play in the decisions of if and how to educate children. Education is a sacrifice and a gamble: it can bring kin closer together, as the emotion and financial sacrifice involved in the education of a child cements that child’s love for and obligation to the assisting kin, and it can also drive them apart as an educated child is more likely to turn his or her back on uneducated or poorer kin. Educating children is a struggle in the current economic climate where daily meals are difficult to afford. Most parents reach a point when they simply cannot afford to educate their older children and must leave them to “self-develop.” These number of youth who leave school before completion is high, and they are not educated enough to find waged work.

To many people it appears that making sacrifices for a partial education is a useless endeavor, as that person can neither find a secure job with which to assist the family, nor feels obligated to do so because the parent did not put enough “force” behind the child’s development to ensure that they are successful. This results in a sense of alienation that partially educated youth have from their parents and society: they are too educated to relate to the illiterate poverty of their parents, but not having completed their

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<sup>65</sup> Most of the salaried jobs that people wanted during my research were with NGOs. These NGOs had been phasing out their programs since 2003, and more people were being laid off than hired. Though most people I spoke with did not mention this, the NGO market was as fragile as any other, as it was subject to the whims of donor fatigue.



schooling are unable to participate in salaried employment. However, if the child is educated very little, though they will have less to contribute and give the parents no chance for social mobility (see Bledsoe, 1990: 74), the risk that they will abandon their family altogether to greater success is also lowered. So aside from the financial cost of educating a child to a certain level, the parents do not risk as much.

*The educational debate among parents:  
will the children return? Is it better if they do not?*

I am glad that the children want education. I have no man and the children don't listen to me when I ask them to stay. I can't feed them and they have no school fees so they go fend for themselves. They have better prospects in town. Maybe they will be able to pay for their own educations there. RK

I wish we had a primary school here, then the children would not have to go to Makeni to go to school. If they are in town for long enough they do not want to come home, they just forget about us here. There is nothing to keep them here, so maybe it is better for them. TK

Education brings similar potential for the severing of family bonds as does moving abroad. The risk run with education by poor families, especially those in rural areas, is that an educated child with limited prospects will turn his or her back on uneducated family and, instead of lifting the family out of their circumstances, seek his or her own success elsewhere. In the course of my research in the villages surrounding Makeni, I found that people were divided on the issue of wanting children to have the best opportunities in life, fearing that if they had these opportunities they would not return, and wondering if the children could assist their parents more from the urban centers. The youth, for their part, are bored with village life and want to engage with the rest of the world. They know that education is their best opportunity to leave, and so beg their parents to let them attend school in town. The comments of parents reflect this, as the two women quoted at the start of this section swung wildly between how they wanted to keep their children in the village, and how it was better for them to go.

Many parents fear that children who are allowed to leave the villages and attend school will bring shame on their families and damage family and village pride by denouncing their village ways as "backward." The mother RK, quoted at the beginning

of this section, is torn about whether she wants her children to stay with here or follow any opportunities they might have in town. She is already concerned that her children do not listen to her when she asks them to stay, but feels she cannot compel them to remain in the village when there is nothing for them there. However, if her children are financially successful once they leave, the chance that they will want to return to the farm to take care of their mother is slim. As van der Geest found in Ghana, the youth do not need the wisdom and skill of elders in order to get money, as now money can only be gotten through the skills of young people (1997: 550). Education essentially means that parents are relinquishing the teaching of moneymaking skills to their children themselves. Education is therefore a potential catalyst for the severing of family bonds because it weakens the ties of mutual reciprocity that parents and children have, and puts children in a hugely advantageous position to “self-develop.” This has been perceived as a problem since the days when missionaries first arrived:

This missionary, he came to evangelize at the village M--, all of the young children went there admiring this white man, as we had never encountered white people. The [missionary] man thought I was very nice looking... he called on me and said, “Where are your parents?” I told him that I was been brought up by my aunt, and he told Auntie that he wanted to take me to B--, where he was staying, because he wanted to educate me in the English schools... a friend of my aunt... took the bold step to take me to school, then I started going to school. My father was not happy with that, he wanted me to learn Arabic because it is an open secret that if you go to the white man school you will become the white man’s son and you will never be under the control of your parents again. You will be all by yourself. So after this my father did not care about me, he was not very much worried about me. IBK

There is also little agreement between parents and children with respect to whether they should encourage vocational trades like carpentry or masonry. One elder commented that parents did not mind in the past when their children left to learn these sorts of skills, as these are skills that can be used in the village. In addition, at the present time, what with the flight from villages during the war, towns, especially Makeni, are suffering from a glut of skilled workers, and work is impossible to find for villagers who have no established base in the town. Skilled youth in this position would return to a village where they have a monopoly on that market, even if they are paid in kind. However,

many skilled youth I found in the villages felt they were merely languishing there. Even with the overabundance of artisans in town, at least there were some people in town who could pay for their services:

I was trained in carpentry in the town and I have better prospects in town than here. Who has money to buy anything here?

I am a welder, and I learned this skill in town. There is no welding to do here so I want to go back to town.

I want to learn carpentry but I can't do that in the village, there is no one here to teach me and no one to buy the furniture once I complete it.

If a child is allowed to move away from the village in order to “seek out better prospects” on their own, as one mother put it, the hope lies heavily that if they are successful, they will “honor” their parents by assisting them with all their financial needs, even though the parents did not contribute to their “development.” However, if they are successful and move back to the village, the expectation is that they are signaling their willingness to support their parents entirely. This obligation weights so heavily on children that it has caused massive stagnation among ex-combatants who now refuse to return home to their natal villages, even though the war has been over for several years. “I have been away for so many years,” said one, “that I cannot go home anymore, because I should have been successful. I should have made something of my life experiences, especially with the UN [United Nations] assistance that I received.” I will address this phenomenon in greater detail in Chapters Six and Seven.

### *Choosing children to educate: emotional bonds and heavy obligations*

In the past, parents chose specific children to educate; usually the ones they “loved the best.” Several people I spoke to were educated because their parents adored them, and they speak fondly of them to this day. In other cases, children know that their parents or relatives regarded them as special and educated them to the exclusion of other children or in spite of the fact that older siblings had failed in their educations. The children, worked

hard to succeed and prove their parents correct because they never forgot these deliberate acts of love and sacrifice:

My brothers and sisters were also in school. But the sisters did not do well. And because they did not do well my father promised not to put me in school thinking that if I should go to school again I would do the same as my elder sisters. But my mother said no. She was doing tie dying. So my mother said, "I have money and let her go to school." So my mother was helping me with my schooling. And later on my father thought: okay, well how might I help? So I was very lucky to have their help. AFB

In fact I was a village girl when I started school, I was not really talking Krio when I started school. My father loved me so much, in fact I was the first one to go to school, even before my elder brother, so that I could learn Krio first. MK

Both of these women are exceptional because they are older, and were educated by their parents in the 1960's, when it was uncommon for girls to attend school. Their schooling was proof of their parents love for them and hope that their chosen children would bring honor to their families and validate the decision to educate girls. One woman is a school principal and the other a town council member, both remained physically close to their parents until their deaths, and both have educated their own daughters through university.

It was not uncommon in the past for families to only educate younger children when older siblings who worked could help pay. The older siblings in a family would help educate their younger brothers and sisters in order to boost the family honor and validate their lack of education as a sacrifice for the good of the family (see Berry, 1985: 126). They too partook in the "development" of their siblings, and would hope for reciprocal "security" in their old age:

When I was a small boy, it was difficult for me, because my father is a poor man, also my mother. It was very difficult trying to pay my fees. My mother would usually grow some vegetables, where she can get food and payment of my school fees [by selling them]. Then... I got to secondary school, I was fortunate in our area, because my people usually dig diamonds. And I was fortunate that my brothers [who were diamond miners] paid my fees. DS

But really, my childhood days were not very rosy... we came from [a place] there was nothing to live on. So it doesn't surprise you to know that I am the most educated in the family, because the early days of my parents' life [when they had my older siblings], was not too good. And when they got my elder brothers and

sisters, it is like they made their contribution to the family. So as a result, I was able to be educated: all of them were looking out for somebody they could boost up. Say, okay, this gentleman will do well, my force will be behind him so that he will go to the top and our folks will be proud of him. So that is what they did. And to date, I guess I did [succeed]. I really did not disappoint them. NK

A child who becomes the only educated family member is under vast obligation to recognize the sacrifices of the whole family, and it is the family's hope that this emotional and financial investment will pay off in a successful and generous benefactor. NK's eldest brother initially brought him to school, and passed away recently. Not only did NK, a civil servant, shoulder the cost of the funeral—a massive expense—but he is also paying the school fees for his brother's children.

In 2003, the national government made primary education compulsory for all children and abolished school fees outright for girls in order to encourage parents to educate their daughters. This could have weakened the emotional and moral bonds that originally governed the education of children because family members were legally obligated to send all children to primary school, but in actual fact it did not. Children are aware of the state of poverty in which they live, and know that their parents make huge sacrifices to educate them all, whether or not it is a legal requirement.<sup>66</sup> The longer their parents can keep them in school, the greater the love of the parents for the children.

*The risks and benefits of fostering children:  
will they be educated? To whom are they obliged?*

Though parents are willing to send their children away from home in order to improve their educational opportunities, the link between the fostering of children and education is not clear-cut. Both fostering parent and the parent giving up the child have potential problems with the relationship. For the receiving parent, Shepler states, “a child may be perceived as an asset or a burden: an asset who can work and provide for the home but a burden that costs money for school fees, clothing and food.” (2004: 15) Many times, parents or the guardian relative will refuse to send a child away or remove them from an

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<sup>66</sup> Though it is technically illegal to withhold children from primary school, the government does not enforce the law. In fact, many parents make no effort to educate their children because it is too costly and schools are too physically far for children to attend.

unsatisfactory situation if they feel that the child will not receive an education or solid enough moral guidance to complete their education:

I was born in Port Loko district in the B—M-- chiefdom in 1950. I was brought over to Makeni by my late aunt in 1962 [because] I had lost my mother at a very early age, and I was under the control of my grandmother. But she felt I would not get enough education because my grandmother would not be too strict with me. So she decided to just bring me over where she thought she could supervise me better... and she was very interested to have me continue my education. JC

Before I was six years old I was taken to Kono by one of my aunts. So I stayed with her until when I was six years, then my father told her to come with me back to Makeni so that I will be in school because she never took me to school. So I returned to Makeni and I attended St. Joseph's primary school in class one. TS [My children] are still in Freetown because before this time, no good schools were in Makeni. So the girl was attending St. Josephs' in Freetown and the last boy, he is still attending school. Today he will be taking his first paper. The girl has just completed her secondary education, having just taken the last course. That's why the mother stays with them: to make sure they will not go astray or be mistreated. She can't leave them by themselves or send them to someone else, or perhaps there would be a problem. Perhaps the girl would be pregnant by now, she would have had a child by now. IBK

However, it is just as common for parents to send their children to family members that they trust in order to advance the education of the child:

I started school in 1956, at Our Lady of Fatima Primary School in Makeni. Up to 1961 I was in that school, then I moved to Kabala Secondary School through what used to be the Common Entrance Examination [through which I qualified for a position in Kabala]. So in 1961, I went to Kabala and had to leave my family. Fortunately my sister lived up there, 12 miles from Kabala near the animal husbandry station, and I stayed with her and her husband. BST

The [youngest] one [of my children], it is his final year, he goes to school at Albert Academy, in Freetown. [He is] there with one of my sisters. She is there with her husband, so he stays with her and is a student. KB

Educational fostering still brings genealogically distant kin together, in spite of the fragmentation of households that occurred with the war and poverty.<sup>67</sup> Children do not

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<sup>67</sup> This is a contrast to the situation Renne (2003: 103) found in Nigeria, where the current trend is for adults to in-foster only children who are closely related to them, and send their own children to live with close relations as a way of ensuring the child's well-being.

forget the family member who assisted them through their education. Kin who make the investment in a youth's education may be quite strict with them to ensure that their investment pays off in the form of a successful adult who brings honor to the family:

I was a bit troublesome, but I had a very strict aunt! Very strict, and she was very interested to have me continue my education. She was very concerned, had me to school in the morning, she always had people to monitor my activities in school, she was friendly with the teachers and would ask them questions all the time: did this boy go to school yesterday? And we were very close, my teacher, she was a next-door neighbor to my aunt. So I had no way to escape school. So I was always in school, and thank god, I am what I am today, I believe she contributed a lot. JC, town councilor

Well, since I was a small boy, I was trained up by my elder brother, and he was very strict with me, always putting himself behind me to go to school. One day I refused to go to school, and he flogged me. That day, don't let that day come again, because he flogged me so that I don't know myself. So from that day I become serious about my schooling. Now I have seen the benefit of it, you see? CM, teacher

With experiences supporting both contentions, it would be untenable to argue that extended family members will always educate a child and contribute to their "development" in the hope of reaping some reward from it, as proven by the examples where children were forcibly separated from relatives who did not care about their education. Adults will educate a child to the life that they perceive to be most beneficial to both child and caretaker, and this is where emotional bonds become important. Village relatives may be interested in fostering children because they can educate them in village ways and keep them there to do domestic work and agriculture. This also strengthens their ties with town relatives, and makes it more likely that they can call on the assistance of those in town when necessary.

Parents want their children to know their relatives, both because emotional bonds are important and because it helps the family strengthen their financial safety net by casting the net wide. However, they often send children out for fostering because of temporary financial or other difficulties that prevent them from caring for their children (see also Renne, 2003: 90). Once their situation has stabilized, they want their children to

return.<sup>68</sup> Even kin who do assist with the education of family members may be concerned that there is no guarantee that an educated child will repay their moral obligation to those who assisted them, or that they will ever live to see the debt repaid. They may do it simply out of love or pity:

So during 1992, December, my husband left me. Abandoned me and my children, and I had to cope up with the children. People sympathized with me and decided to help me educate the children. And now I have a university graduate, an engineer, civil engineering. And I have another one who has completed her HTC [Higher Teaching Certificate] at the Milton Margai Teachers College, and I have another who did hotel management in Guinea. And the last two are now doing their HTCs at the northern polytechnic. With the help of my brother, my late brother, I tried to educate these children, without the help of their father. So I am very grateful to him up to this time. AFB

Though Mrs. AFB is proud of her children and grateful for the support given by her brother, he passed away before he saw any benefit from his assistance to his sister's children. And she herself suffers from the problem that may occur when educated children move away: all of her children are successful, none are in Makeni, and she struggles to maintain herself on a school administrator's salary. She is currently living in a rented house and is trying to build a home for herself. At the time of the interview, she had been able to purchase enough materials to build a single wall. With this we have revisited the essential conundrum of education: do parents educate their children for the satisfaction of seeing them succeed, or to ensure the support of the family in the future? Either way the decision is governed by elders weighing the child's character and potential against the possibility that they will *go los* [get lost], but what happens when parents are either absent or simply cannot afford to educate their children?

*An incomplete education: myriad reasons for failing to thrive*

Well, the world is very difficult for someone to go to school, and even after the war it was difficult for someone to go to school by supporting himself. When

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<sup>68</sup> The youth whose adoption by an American family was averted by his family was immediately sent to his grandmother in the village. He stated originally that his parents sent him away from Makeni because they wanted him to "know his grandmother," but what emerged was that they really wanted was him to be re-educated in Sierra Leonean ways so that his emotional bonds with his family were re-forged and he forgot about leaving the country.



your father, mother, everyone... no one is alive. There is no capital in the family; nobody will be there to support you. Then how can you expect yourself to go back to school? Then there is all this talk about free education, but in Sierra Leone there is no free education. You cannot get everything free: every day you go to school you spend money. Every day you come from school you eat food, you eat before you go to school, you take everything with money.

DS, currently unemployed

This young man is an extreme example. Both of his parents perishing during the war, but his point is valid for all students: education is not free, and there must be someone around who supports the student while he or she is in school. In most cases before the war, this was a blood relation.<sup>69</sup> Poverty and the loss of family was always a problem in Sierra Leone, which is why children have been moving between family members to attain their educations since at least the time of my oldest interviewees, in the 1950s. The deepening poverty caused by structural adjustment in the 1980s and the aftermath of the war means that money is not only more difficult to come by, but there are fewer adult kin alive who can support a youth's education. If their parents are unable to assist them, they will often seek out the most financially stable relative, who usually resides in a large town, and try to gain entrance to the secondary schools there. The youth's success in this venture is also governed by how close his bond is with that relation:

When I was a small boy I lived with my mother [in Port Loko], and she is still alive. And [my parents] brought me up to this time now, and I decided to leave them because they could not afford my education. My aunt decided to help me bit by bit... after the war, I started my schooling, but after the war things became so difficult! Even my people... what we eat is a great problem. So they cannot afford my schooling and I want to learn! You know? They are just seeing these difficulties continue to grow, so this is why I decided, well, let me go to my aunt. And when I came to my aunt, she said she will help a bit for my schooling. MH

This fostering relationship is not guaranteed simply because they are related. It is as fragile as is the relationship between any two human beings in times of difficulty. This particular youth hopes to take a regional exam that, if he scores well, would ensure him a

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<sup>69</sup> In contrast, many youth are trying to educate themselves. All five of the youth quoted in this section are students at St. Francis, the most prestigious secondary school in Makeni, and so decided to come even though they had no relatives in town. They sleep together on shared beds in rooms without other furniture. Some work for NGOs as domestic help and others work odd jobs to pay their school fees. See Sharp (2002: 116-121) for similar examples from Madagascar.

place in university. However, it is an expensive private exam, and he is concerned that if he asks his aunt for more money she will consider him ungrateful and demanding and stop supporting him altogether.

Religion is sometimes a factor in the paying of school fees, though less frequently than poverty or simple emotional distance. One of my frequent interlocutors was struggling to stay in school because his mother is Christian and his father is Muslim. His mother is raising all of the children as Christians, but his father pays school fees. As the oldest son, his father is keen to groom him to look after the family, and now that the young man is of age, his father has decided that he wants his son to be a Muslim. The son refused, and the father threatened to stop paying school fees unless the conversion happened. It did not, and the fees also stopped. The young man is now considering whether he can afford to work and go to school concomitantly.

The father was concerned that his son was becoming emotionally distant from him. This case is similar to the elder whose father turned his back on him when he went to a missionary school instead of learning Arabic and became “the white man’s son.” If his son was going to commit himself to another religion and deliberately distance himself from the father’s extended family, he was not going to invest in him either financially or emotionally, as the sacrifice was less likely to be reciprocated. As the one who pays school fees, this father needed to ensure that his emotional bond with his son was close in order to ensure that his son does not turn his back on him when he is old in favor of his Christian relatives. It is his sacrifice to pay for school, and his reward to reap.

Many people who had to stop their education did so because the main breadwinner in their family died and they had to leave school to assist with work at home. In the majority of cases, this is true for youth from villages whose father, usually a farmer, passes away. The mother does not have the money to hire a laborer to assist with the farming, so the youth must leave school and return home. This obligation is both financial and emotional, as it behooves a youth who risks his family’s financial stability by staying in town after the death of his father to return to the village. The situation is even more difficult for parents trying to support children alone after their spouse dies, as the example of TS in a previous section highlights. In several cases among my

interviewees, the kin of affines were unwilling to assist a daughter-in-law who was not from their village:

I have to do it all myself because I don't have anyone to help me educate my kids. My man's family won't help me. He was born in Port Loko and no one there or here will help me because they don't know me or my family. It is a big town and they won't accept the children of a woman they don't know.

RB, whose husband passed away eight years ago

It was consistent across the people I worked with that assistance never comes through kin who are emotionally distant from the rest of the family—who are not in consistent reciprocal relationships—no matter the physical distance. We can see from this that the foundation of familial reciprocity is still essentially intact, though it has been translated to accommodate post-war poverty, the scattering of families through the quest for opportunity, the death of blood kin, and education as the iconic marker as to whether one has “developed” versus “self-developed,” and thus what they do and do not owe to family. Parents try, through various means of nurturing and encouragement, to keep their children in bonded reciprocal relationships, so that if the child is economically successful, will have reason to repay the debt, no matter the circumstances of “development.”

**Fostering and fragmented families:  
evaluating the limits of compassion and care giving**

Fostering of children for education highlights only one aspect of how and why children move around between families in Makeni. Educational fostering requires a relative who is emotionally close to the child, has enough money to accommodate them, and is located in a large town where the child can attend a secondary school. It is a very specific type of fostering, but includes many of the same elements of care-giving and anticipated financial stability commonly involved in the majority of fostering situations in Makeni today. In this section I examine the non-education driven forms of fostering, how war and poverty have shifted the moral ground on which fostering rests so that it is less determined by the expectation of reciprocation, and more on the sacrificial investment in a relationship one hopes will become reciprocal, and how it has nurtured “created” kinship based more on shared experience and resources than biological ties.

By augmenting the poverty in which most people previously lived, the war shifted the ground on which the fostering of children takes place, with the main problem being a family unable to distribute resources to its own members is usually more reluctant to take on foster children, or to treat them as dependents.<sup>70</sup> Many children enter informal relationships with partial caregivers after they have been more or less abandoned by their families to their fates. Often, a woman with children will abandon them if she can find a man in better circumstances who wants to start a family, or families have more children than they can care for and expect that their relatives will assist them in caring for the children that they are prevented by poverty from looking after. Other times, parents will push a child out of the house in the morning and expect that they will fend for themselves. Many of these children seek out their own caregivers, and many of these partial and informal relationships become more permanent, with the initial contact of the child's need for food blossoming into a lasting relationship of mutual care and reciprocity. As Yan found in latter-day China, "friendship has proven to be more reliable and valuable than close kinship" (2001: 231), precisely because it is voluntary.

*The African bank: evaluating the limits of investment in distantly related kin*

Many parents in Makeni refer to their children as their "bank," as children, if they are nurtured, are the parents best form of "social security" when they are old (Bledsoe, 1980: 32). The notion of children as the bank in which parents put their investment is in theory strengthened and balanced by fostering, for, as the Paramount Chief related, "In Africa, if you don't have children you will soon get them because people are happy to give them to you!" This basic notion of fostering is potentially helpful to both the giver and receiver of children, as it means that the family with too many children to support has their financial burden relieved, and the family with few or no children can increase the size of their "bank" by looking after more children. This in turn increases the likelihood that one or two children, either their own or their foster children, will feel responsible for taking care of the parents later in their lives. In addition, the relationship between the giving and

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<sup>70</sup> This means the situation for foster children is even worse than Bledsoe described for Mende school foster children in the 1980's, who, even though they were abused, were at least fed and sheltered (1990: 73).

receiving families are strengthened, and they can count on each other in times of need (see also Sharp, 2002: 263-269). One man related to me that when he took his family and ran from Makeni after the RUF invasion, they went straight to a family related to his wife near Port Loko whose son they fostered, and the family took them in.

Unlike the formal arrangements in the past, where a child lived with a distant kin member for years, in the current climate of economic uncertainty, child fostering is often quite informal and, at least at the start, temporary. It is not limited to children to whom the caregiver is promised as domestic help in exchange for basic necessities and sound upbringing. Many of these relationships develop with distantly related children whom adults are assisting financially, and circumstances and compassion on the part of the caregiver turn them into full fostering relationships. With the domestic assistance provided by the child, these relationships can become very close, strengthening emotional bonds between distant family members where bonds were originally absent:

UM is the son of my first cousin... his father was coming to me for assistance, he never had anything. He wanted to marry UM's mother and he didn't have anything. I gave him the money... I gave him rice, then that man died. I saw everything over his funeral, the ceremony, and everything... one day I went out, and when I came I met UM and his younger brother... they were brought here by the elder brother of their father. I said "Why?" He said, "I have too many children, I cannot cope with them. So I'm asking that since you have started with their father, come and take over these ones." I took them over. Instead of him going into the street, I decided for him to stay and do some studies. He's taking classes, and he can write, he can read. That's how he came to stay with me. He's been with me all the time. The younger brother is still in school, he went to stay with his mother and is in training school. But he comes on holiday and I'm assisting him. These are all our extended families. We take care of our families, and he is part of the family. IBK

This relationship is already one of mutual benefit, because Mr. IBK is aging and his wife is in Freetown with their children. He has enough money to look after UM financially, and in turn UM looks after him. He cooks and cleans for him and stays in the house so that IBK is not alone, when he would be afraid of attacks from thieves who would break in to a home where an old man lives by himself. When IBK decided to invest in a diamond plot in Kamakwie, 120 kilometers north of Makeni, UM left Makeni for a month, hired the diggers and supervised their activities. There was never a point where

IBK was worried that UM would cheat him and run off with any profits, and indeed their relationship is so strong that UM returned to Makeni when no diamonds were discovered and the initial investment ran out. This fostering relationship has developed over years of mutual assistance and dependence; if either party had failed in their reciprocity towards the other, it would have ended.

Fostering can also be a temporary arrangement among family members during a crisis, when the parents need to send the children away in order to have the time and money to deal with other problems (see Renne, 2003: 96):

Well, when I was in primary school, six years, my mother came off, she went mad. She was mad from that time, so I was taken to my grandmother to take care of me, she lived in Kono, but I was only there for one year... I came back to Makeni to continue my schooling. YM

Once the situation at home had stabilized and the girl's father realized that she would not be able to continue her education with her grandmother, who did not have the financial means to assist in this way, she was brought back to Makeni. This kind of temporary fostering is common, as with the boy who was sent to live with his grandmother in the village after his parents "rescued" him from being adopted by an American family. He was finally returned to Makeni when he was 12 years old. He wanted to see his mother again, and needed to start attending school.

The limits of parental care are most often reached in the case of "recomposed" families (see Segalen, 2001: 246), where a stepchild is direct competition for resources with a natal child. Especially with polygamous marriages and cases of multiple divorces and re-marriages, children are never sure where they stand with adults, who may or may not care about them (Segalen, 2001: 262). From the following excerpt, it is clear that polygamous recomposed families are often governed by conflict, and children are often at the center of these conflicts. This means the emotional bond between adult and child is the most important aspect governing whether a child's relationship with their caregiver is positive, and therefore could be mutually beneficial for the caregiver in the future.

MM: I have a brother, because my father was married to about four wives, but the one wife, they didn't get any children. So I was with that wife, but the way she was treating me was very bad. She decided to leave my father. And the one that

is still staying with him, she is good to me. She was helping me in my schooling, she was making *kayan* [peanut butter] for me so it helped me. I got strength to read my notes. And I have so many brothers and sisters I am trying to count. I am the oldest one for my mother, I am the oldest again to my father. My mother got married to her first husband and she had two girls before she married my father. And at the present my father has now, he has himself up to five children now, three girls and two boys. She [my stepmother] came along with three girls to my father.

CB: So she had six girls and two boys?

MM: Yes. She came along with three. She gave to my father five, and she came along with three so there were eight of them. I made up number nine, eight of them and one of me. So these other parents they are just my relatives. My aunt... trained me up when I was in Makeni, I was a small boy when I was attending here at Benevolent Primary School. But my aunt died in 2002.

CB: I am sorry to hear that. But you said she trained you? Does that mean she acted like your mother?

MM: Yes, she looked after me and taught me manners. I was with my cousins and so I took them as my brothers. I am used to them [Krio expression for “enjoy their company”]. My aunt also had a maid who was close to her and had many children, and we went to all the same places. I got used to them. That’s why when people ask me about them I say they are my brothers, because I was raised with them.

As the interview illustrates, the exact relationships between people are difficult to determine, because everyone “close” within the family group, whether this is determined by blood or by physical and emotional nearness, is called kin. Those who may not be related but are emotionally closer are brought closer because of the bonds enacted when a woman “looks after” a child and trains them—calling the aunt’s maid’s children his brothers—while those who are more emotionally distant are isolated through titles meant to define and distance them, namely his stepmother who was not kind to him. Segalen (2001: 265-266) reports similar patterns of use of kinship term of address in France. She highlights the fact that, quoting Strathern, “in kinship, one is talking about the formation of intimate relationships, one is not talking about institutional or social forms of groupings or units as such” (2001: 269).

*Compulsion, abandonment and fosterage: compensating for irresponsible parenting*

In a conversation with the Paramount Chief, he described young women today as being “irresponsible” because they have children that they cannot care for because they are too poor. Especially since the war, Sierra Leonean women are negotiating several conjugal options for themselves. Many who were refugees may have entered new relationships apart from their “traditional” marriages, termed “bulgur marriages,” where both parties are able to increase their access to food aid (see Gale, 2007: 357). Many wait to see how their lives take shape in each marriage, and choose the best ultimate option; usually the one that promises lasting reciprocation. Gale (2007: 358) and Utas (2005b: 407) call this “tactical agency,” as women take opportunities to create multiple kinship trajectories as a contingency against possible obstacles and dead ends. This reinforces my claim that kinship in “abnormal” times is forced to become more flexible and more clearly defined, specifically in that people choose relationships that offer the possibility for reciprocity. However it also has occasionally dire consequences for children, especially if a woman’s choice is to let her children fend for themselves and hope that a generous individual will take them in.

In Makeni, many mothers whose resources are stretched send children out to relatives who can afford to care for them, or will just turn a blind eye to their situation and hope that the child can find a compassionate family member, friend, or stranger who will look after them. The Chief himself has three children with his wife because they decided that was the number they can comfortably care for. However, instead of having the two boys in one bedroom and the girl in another, they have two dorms with three boys in one and five girls in the other. They are fostering five children for other family members. The Chief feels he cannot say no to his family because, though it is a strain, he can look after the children to some degree where their birth parents cannot do anything for them. He admonishes his family members to be responsible and not have children they cannot care for, but it has had no effect. They tell him that poverty prevents them caring for their children, and it is not their fault. He does not want to feel responsible for a child growing up destitute, and so shelters them.

This problem of poverty-induced fosterage is widespread. Father Samura is currently using his own money to care for three children who belong to a former



employee of the Catholic mission. Times became difficult for the family when the father lost his job due to the phasing out of Vatican-supported activities. His wife found a new lover who was employed, and abandoned him and the children for a new life with money and no attachments, which is increasingly common among Sierra Leonean women (see Fanthorpe, 2005: 37). The unemployed father could not care for his children, and so came to his former employer, the Catholic Church, to beg for charity for them. Father Samura feeds the children, pays for their schooling, looks after them while the father looks for work, and pays for the family's rent. He feels obligated to do this because the church owes compassion to its former employees, just as the chief owes compassion to his destitute relatives. Among "big men" such as the Chief and Father Samura, who can draw on extensive resources, relationships are governed less by reciprocity, and more by patronage. These children that have been taken in can be viewed as clients, rather than as potential agents of future reciprocity.

The underlying feeling is that poverty is not the parents' fault; therefore the children should not be made to suffer. The moral underpinning of this decision is not so much that wealthy people are obliged to look after the poor, but individuals decide that they do not want to sit idly by while children suffer. This seems a complete turnaround to Bledsoe's contention among the Mende that suffering is good for children because it builds character and thus portends success (1990: 71). However, truly poor children, when they are unassisted, remain that way. Iliffe found in 19<sup>th</sup> century Yorubaland, a portion any community's truly destitute people were children, either orphans or those who had disabilities that made them unproductive (1984: 46), and many remained poor for the duration of their lives. Perhaps, post-war, people feel that children have been made to suffer more than their share, and should now be treated with compassion, if one has the financial means to be compassionate without thought of reciprocity.

Compassionate fostering is widespread in the post-war environment and is not limited to children to whom the fosterer is related or feels obliged to assist:

YM: I am not having my means of encouragement in terms of school. My father is still taking care of us, we are twelve in number, and taking care of our mother and another family, so we are over fifteen.

CB: Why does he care for another family as well?

YM: Because for them, their father has left their mother, and their mother cannot take care of them again because of old age. So he took them in, he is taking care of them.

This man is looking after another family even though he can barely feed his own, and his daughter must fend for herself in terms of school fees and supplies. But she still feels that it is better that he do this because at least everyone is getting something to eat. Renne (2003: 91) found in Nigeria that people accepted foster children, if somewhat reluctantly, because it was “the right thing to do” to have compassion for children in unfortunate circumstances. The problem of children in need of fostering was not a creation of the war; indeed poverty has been ongoing in Makeni for many years. So many children in Makeni were malnourished and needy before the war reached Makeni that a national NGO, Help a Needy Child International (HANCI), emerged to address the problem. It found international donor assistance and built an orphanage in Makeni in 1996 (Anonymous, *Weekend Spark*, August 18, 1996). The facility was destroyed during the RUF occupation, so the organization has had to find other ways to look after abandoned children. It now brings children who were orphaned or abandoned during the war back into their natal community to be fostered by strangers until their parents can be located or a more permanent situation can be found for them:

They are children that were left during the war... children that were abandoned by their parents. The parents just ran away and left the children! So these people [HANCI] took them and put them together. And then they called upon the people in Makeni that they need people to foster them, so we can go and sign for them. So we signed for them, they gave us their documents, and then we are with them up to a point. And some have been reunified, they have been taken to their parents. But some have lost their parents and have nowhere to go. AFB

Like YM’s father, AFB is not related to any of the children that she fosters, but she does so out of the goodness of her heart. They would suffer otherwise, and she does have some small means of looking after them because she is employed and has a place to live. Again, compassion dictates that poverty is not the fault of the children, and they should not suffer because their parents cannot or will not look after them. However, she did not know if she would continue to foster them if her financial situation changed for the

worse. Though foster parents do not want children to suffer, when there is no food and no money, their compassion for abandoned children has its limits.

*Partial and informal: children seeking their own foster parents*

The Chief, in addition to his five nieces and nephews, also looks after countless other children whose parents have essentially left them to find a caregiver for themselves. One day when I was visiting him, a girl came in and asked the Chief shyly if his cook had prepared lunch. He told her that food was not being prepared today, but gave her some money to purchase a meal. After she had left, he explained that she was one of so many children who drifted into his home to see if they could get food because their parents would tell them there is no food and send them out in the morning hungry and with no money. The Chief fed her the first time she came, and now she comes every day. He knows that soon he will be looking after her as if she is his own child. He does not know how many children he looks after in this way, but they come to him because he is kind and willing to assist. Informal relationships become formal through time.

As with created kinship elsewhere that depends on the act of relatedness through shared activity (such as commensality, see Carsten, 1995: 228; Hutchinson, 1996: 160), emotional bonds that form in informal and formal fostering arrangements can gain so much strength that they surpass the bonds that the children have with their natal parents (see Carsten, 1991: 431):

My mother is a nurse, my stepmother is a housewife and a petty trader. I am closer to my stepmother than my mother. I am more fond of her than my mother, because she brought me up. My mother was not so nice with us because she was doing her course [in nursing], and she was posted from one place to the other and she was never around. So I decided I would stay with my stepmother. BB

From the time I knew BB I had always assumed that his stepmother was his natal mother, because they adore each other and he always calls her “mom.” Similarly, all the while the chief is looking after so many children that are not his own, he is creating a family network for himself of people who love him and like to remind him of his kindness. Once he received a phone call while we were visiting from a daughter who had just

completed secondary school in Freetown and wanted to be sure that her father could attend the graduation ceremony. She is completely unrelated, though from Makeni, that he had sent to Freetown to continue her education. The chief commented that he receives nearly a phone call per day from a child he has raised or assisted who thanks him for his kindness and reminds him that they would not have been successful without his assistance. In some cases, the natal parents of these youth must go through the Chief to locate and communicate with their children, who feel they have no bond with their parents anymore and therefore do not need to speak with them. Chief in turn knows that if he suddenly finds himself destitute, he has a large network on which to draw.

Poverty has caused a shift in fostering, though I cannot be sure if the war caused this shift, or if the poverty that people speak of that engulfed Makeni before the war means this is a much longer-standing trend. People often spoke of ideal fostering arrangements: between family members and involving either temporary or permanent custody of a child given to relieve a burden on the parents (both birth parents who needed less responsibility, and foster parent who needed assistance), and usually done to bring the family members closer together through the sharing of children (see Carsten, 1991: 432). Both poverty and the war have broken up natal families, and children find new families among people in the same situation; people on whom they depend to this day, in spite of the lack of blood relation. The extreme poverty that envelops Makeni has caused fostering arrangements to stray from the ideal “traditional” inter-family arrangements to those where informal compassion between a giver and a needy child develops into a relationship of full fostering. Even though they are not related the child becomes emotionally closer to the foster parent than their natal parents. The time scale of my research does not permit me to see at this point whether these relationships develop into what people would consider more traditional relationships of familial obligation (the cared-for child looking after the caregiver when they are old), but as Mr. JC mentioned earlier in the chapter, that is the hope all caregivers have. They strive for the exemplar.

## **Negotiating supportive families: conflict and fracture in natal and foster families**

Just as emotion governs the positive bonds and sacrifices within families, so does it determine the internal friction. In both natal and foster families, friction develops between people most commonly out of jealousy and lack of perceived or fulfilled obligations between people, or simply over competition for resources, especially when more influential individuals can manipulate loyalties and resource distribution from their position of strength within the family. Many anthropologists have noted that a woman's mother-in-law has more loyalty from her son than does his wife (see Collier, 1974: 92, Lamphere, 1974: 105; Shaw, 2002: 191), and this is also common among people in Makeni, where many women have left husbands due to the mother-in-law:

So when I came back [after the war] I tried to look for his [her son's father] parents and I stayed with them for some time. But the mother, we cannot stick together. Like the mother in law is a hell of a time so I decided to come back to my parents. DB

One's own natal family is almost always more peaceful and less demanding of both daughters and sons, which is why both may return to their natal families in the case of divorce, especially if the husband is a stranger (see Ferme, 2001: 102, 148; Shaw, 2002: 191). When the families are "intact" the competition for resources between affinal relations and step relations can be fierce, and this often leads to the fragmentation of households. In a climate of intense poverty, fragmentation is more likely.

### *Divorce and remarriage: the battle between stepmothers and stepchildren for resources*

Many youth in Makeni are the children of divorce, and most spoke of divorce as the best possible outcome of the friction within their family. In most cases I recorded, the father took the children (or they were abandoned to his care) because his wife either wanted to work or remarry unencumbered. MM hardly knows his birth mother at all:

I am my father's first child. So my father and my mother divorced when I was at the age of three years. I was a small boy, and they divorced. According to my father, he said that my mother doesn't want to take control [of me], so anyway

they separated. They were making conflict everyday, almost every day. So my father decided now, we have got one child, before this child is spoiled, let's divorce and then you can get married again and I can get married again. So my father got married with a Mandingo woman, and she is with him now... my mother went back to her village... and I stayed with my father. MM

In addition to his parents divorcing, two of his sisters are also in bad marriages, and he feels it is only a matter of time before they get divorced and move back into the family house. Remarriage is only a matter of time, which is why most people have stepmothers. Most of my interviewees who lived with their stepmothers had a difficult time with them, and this usually caused them to move in search of a better situation:

TS: When I compare the life at the time, let me say from six years on to ten, eleven, twelve years, at the time when I was staying with my father here in class one, two, to four... I found life very difficult because I was staying with my stepmother.

CB: Did you have fights with her?

TS: No, I have never fought with her, but the things she did... she was so wicked. I don't even know what she felt. But when I was young she was very hard on me. She allowed me to do all the housework, even if I don't have the talent to do something she will flog me and then... when I passed out and went on holidays to K-- with my mother, there I was staying with her and her husband, she told me to not come again after the way I explained myself to her. So I was staying there with my other sisters, and I found life at least normal for me. So that made me to love my mother so much.

In a situation such as this, the stepmother has no obligation to her stepdaughter because TS was more likely to seek out reciprocal relationships with her own mother, with whom she had good relations and the opportunity of living with (see also Feeley-Harnik, 1991: 211; Carsten, 1991: 432). The fact that her husband, TS's father, was paying for her education, gave her even less incentive to be nice to TS because she was diverting money away from the household that the stepmother could put to other uses. So it is likely that the stepmother uses the unrelated child as a worker, having the child pay for his/her own education in kind, as it is unlikely if the child has another family that she will develop a bond of emotion or obligation to her stepmother.

*No emotional ties: friction in situations of paid fosterage by unrelated individuals*

As well as making fostering arrangements based on compassion and affection more common, the war also scattered families so that paid temporary fostering by unrelated adults became a necessity for many children. This is true especially among youth who attend school in a town where they have no relations, and must find a situation where they can pay for their keep in an unrelated family (see Bledsoe, 1980: 35). These situations are often conflict-ridden because the money changing hands for the upkeep of the child precludes the development of a relationship based on sacrifice or mutual reciprocity. Many children find themselves at the center of conflicts within these families, for whom they are easy scapegoats during crises:

My people, not all of them have come back to Makeni from where they are. The ones who used to help me with my educational affairs are now in Freetown. I am living in a house presently wherein at one time there was a problem... a sum of 100,000 leones [was stolen]. I was accused of taking the money. Although I denied it totally they still levied this thing to me, that I was the one who did the act. It reached a point where the man went to a sorcerer to look over matters: who stole the money? They found out that it was their son who did the act. As you know, African women, they have problems, especially with children that they have not given birth to. There are many ways that woman was mean to me. She wouldn't believe the money was taken by her children. So anyway I felt it. And she did it just to humiliate me. So, before this time, the mother told me that whomsoever stole the money is going to leave the house, and is going to repay the money, or replace it. But because it was her own son, they never said anything pertaining to that again. Anyway I was so despondent but I was consoled by my friends. They said: look, this is how life is. You have to undergo many constraints because your people are not here. You just have to bear up with the situation. And I adhered to their advice. Although the services I am rendering in that house are very great. Because they have little children who are trying to excel in education, and sometimes I take care of teaching them and tutoring them! And they did well on their exams. I am even involved in the cleaning of the house, I do a lot of things! IAB

IAB tried to create a relationship based on reciprocity with this family by doing extra work for them, but clearly to no avail. It is only the strong bonds that IAB has with his friends that keep him sane. His situation is not unusual in Sierra Leone, where fostering relationships often involve incredible hardships on children who are forced to cope in order for their parents to maintain desired social ties (see Bledsoe, 1990: 74). Unless a

fostering arrangement between unrelated adults and children is one nurtured by compassion and a mutual emotional bond, it may be governed by conflict, especially if the adult fosterer does not feel that they will gain much benefit from the relationship in the future. This means that the child is put to work to earn their keep in the present and repay their obligations while the adult can still take advantage of the situation. This was true before the war, when TS was beaten and forced to work by her stepmother, and after the war when IAB was humiliated and punished by his foster family.

*Pulling down the popular child: jealousy among children competing for limited resources*

Jealousy is another key reason for conflict in mosaic extended families and foster families. If one adult is clearly favoring a child, whether or not they are a close relation, the other children will find ways to bring that child down to their level:

One of my aunt's sons, A--, we used to fight. When we were small we used to fight with each other almost every day. I had my grandmother, who loved me, she loved me more than him. And when we would fight she was on my side, my grandmother. So that was why my cousin used to beat me mercilessly. That house in Makeni here was not my father's house, that house belonged to his own father [my grandfather]. My cousin A-- used to tell me that that house does not belong to my father so I can leave there any time. And I was a small boy so I used to cry about that because my father was not having the chance to get his own house. MM

Just as it occurs in battles for resources and patronage at the level of local and national politics, *pul yu don sindrom* occurs within families. It is both the great leveler of the playing field in a competition for limited resources, and also a characteristic "virus" that attacks the over-ambitious self-developer more generally, a theme I addressed in Chapter Two. In the family it also serves a different purpose. Kin may be concerned about other members being too ambitious, having too many close ties with elders or other members, or succeeding too well in their pursuits, because then the risk is greater that they will not "remember" the kin with whom they had less close ties, or very low-level reciprocal bonds. There is less effort and sacrifice involved in pulling them down than trying to initiate and maintain new reciprocal relations with them:



Why were my cousins not nice? Well, it was because I was so much brighter in school than them, this was the base of the problem. They had gone to school before me, and when I started my school I went and I met them and I even passed them again, I advanced before they did. MM

CK: My dad did not go to the village to his family because if he went they would kill him. This was because he was the elder son, so [my mother] did not want my dad to be in an open place so that they could take his wealth.

CB: So your father was wealthy and this caused jealousy?

CK: Yes, this is why they wanted to kill him.

CK's father had left the village and taken his wealth with him, and was using it to educate his own children. He also had a motorbike, a cellular phone, and other unimaginable luxuries. By bringing these exceptional members back down to the level of the rest of the family, the risk that they will use their success outside of the family is minimized. The fact that CK's father had purchased a motorbike for himself while his family was still in the village was proof that it had already occurred, he was therefore morally "corrupt" and unlikely to repent and spend his wealth instead on his village relatives. The same is true for Mrs. RC, mentioned earlier in the chapter, whose daughter in England supported her, causing jealousy among her neighbors. The large-scale efforts of relatives abroad caused similar jealousy among government ministers whose home areas did not receive so much assistance from abroad as Makeni, and so passed it over for development in favor of other areas. Only when success is sanctioned, monitored, and the family or other intended beneficiaries can partake, just as in politics, is it allowed to blossom fully. Especially as so many of Makeni's people are poor, it is safer, just as it is safer for traders to not parade their capital or profits around, to keep relationships at a level of initiated reciprocal obligation. These relationships can be constantly negotiated and reaffirmed, or broken as situations change.

### **Conclusion: defining a stronger kin network**

"Networks crystallize and dissolve as circumstances and purposes shift," states Rosen. "What may at one moment appear a structure of enduring quality—references to long-

standing kin ties, physical gestures redolent of immutable attachment—often proves, in the kaleidoscope of everyday affairs, to be brittle, transient, and replaceable... this does not imply a lack of sincerity or truthfulness in... social ties. Rather, it underscores the commonsense belief in the need to respond to changing conditions” (1984: 112). The moral ground of “family” has shifted in response to poverty and the physical fragmentation of families resulting from the war. Within the aegis of what constitutes a moral relationship between two individuals, familial relations have become more durably responsive to the paramount importance of individuals negotiating ways to secure “development,” whether it is through one’s own work or taking on responsibilities that might bear reciprocal fruit in the future, when familial “development” is precluded by financial circumstances. Individuals who have managed for long periods on their own feel less tied, and less obliged, to their natal families. People enter into and affirm relationships with each other through reciprocation, and not because of it. Kin relations that work well in Makeni right now appear more like firm and lasting friendships, based on and nurtured by reciprocity.

The strong pull of emotion and gratefulness that characterizes close reciprocal relations between people mean that the “axiom of amity,” in which close relations between kin are taken for granted (see Fortes in Hamer, 1982: 312) has disappeared, as has the requirement for kin who operate in a web of mutual obligations to silently tolerate the failings of their kin (see Berry, 1985: 83). Poverty has made the tolerance of failure very low, so relationships that are rocky are either addressed or severed, and sacrifices and contributions are recognized and rewarded (see Mikell, 1995: 236-237; and van der Geest, 1997: 552 for examples from Ghana). The “axiom of amity” has been replaced by ties that, when forged, are possibly more durable in times of extreme poverty. In this way, the “family” in Makeni has not deteriorated or disappeared, it has simply become more flexibly responsive to drastic social and economic change (see Creed, 2000: 334).

The exemplary or evaluative “normal” family is one of mutual obligations promoted by physical proximity of family members, perceived communal interests of work and benefit through generations, and inter-family fosterage. In these times, when relationships are not ideally “normal” because they have been scattered by war and broken by poverty, instead people choose freely to initiate relationships with each other,

which are sustained as long as the reciprocation, or the hope thereof, lasts. Relationships are forged between unrelated people who through circumstance have become emotionally closer than the individuals are to their natal kin, and whose interests and circumstances mean that they can mutually support their own and the other's "development." In this sense, poverty, war, and the emergence of "self-development" have *decreased* the ambivalence of kinship obligations in Makeni, as individuals argue that physically and emotionally distant, self-made people have little obligation to relatives who have taken minimal active "development" roles in their lives. Poverty has brought the limits of care into fine relief; individuals define their own moral consciences concerning obligation.

The relationships that do work, though seemingly more fragile on the surface than "normal" relationship, are an illustration of individuals needs to ensure their own survival, both socially and physically, in an impoverished place, while emotionally distancing themselves from relationships that are most likely to be unfruitful in the future: step-mothers and step-children, destitute children in distantly related households, children who pay their own way in order to attend schools. At the same time, by building and maintaining relationships with needy individuals they support, highly socially visible individuals, such as the Paramount Chief, can publicly maintain a moral distance from a life of perceived conspicuous consumption, while simultaneously building a base of loyal individuals who will support them in the future, especially during times of political crisis. Unsanctioned consumption, the accusations of which the Chief attempts to deflect, occurs most often in individuals who do not live solely within the confines of familial obligation and co-development, such as youth living on their own in urban areas, ex-combatants, and disabled beggars. This life may be governed by a desire to pursue individual financial success, criminal activities, or socially sanctioned consumption for those considered too morally or socially diminished to engage in active development. I address this moral battle with sanctioned and unsanctioned consumption in the next chapter.

## Chapter Six

### **Social categories and social disability: Contesting “uselessness” and transforming charity and aid into development**

Thomas was in a homemade wheelchair when I first met him, his legs in discreet braces, his wheelchair pushed by his son. He was curious about my work, and wanted me to come to the Disabled Association Action Group (DAAG) headquarters with him and learn about their programs; it was not far away. So we moved along together, taking the streets that would best accommodate his chair, his son deftly avoiding the wettest, most pot-holed areas to give his father a smoother ride. “*An’porto, yema di!*” some children screamed from the side of the road, waving at me and laughing hysterically, and Thomas scowled. “*Una go, no di kɔngosa di uman! Ah di bit una we una go fil shem!*” [Go away, how dare you taunt her! I will beat you until you are ashamed of yourselves!] They scattered to their respective homes. “I don’t like it when children are so ignorant,” he said. “They don’t need to point out that someone is different, we already know that we are. It makes life difficult enough, always having to prove ourselves.” His son pointed out that one of the wheels on the chair needed fixing; Thomas went through a mental exercise of remembering who had last borrowed his tools. “Do you fix wheelchairs yourself?” I inquired. “Oh yes,” he grinned, “I built this one myself!”

Everyday Thomas engages in proving that he is a “useful” human being who, even though his legs were paralyzed by polio, can still contribute to his family and the community, and therefore should not be a subject of taunts or ostracism. By being visible on the streets in his own wheelchair, he fights the labels that accompany his condition—that he must be a beggar, that he is a drain on his family, that God has cursed him—to prove that he is capable of producing “development” rather than being just a consumer. This idea that full moral personhood is a state of doing, rather than a state of being, flows

through all local discourse about personhood, and is intimately tied to the place of Makeni. Calling the place “backward” is an acknowledgment that “backwardness” concribes what people can do; that it defines the *is*, what Warner calls the “statistical normal” (1999: 56). By delimiting full personhood within the rubric of one’s ability to work and be “useful,” residents are defining the *ought* of personhood, or what Warner terms “the evaluative normal.” All people in Makeni, in spite of their constraints, strive for this *ought*, a state of productive activity. This is part of being a fully moral person. The disabled community in Makeni is part of a larger group of people who suffer from being morally sanctioned, though thus morally diminished, recipients of charity. For some this is because of their physical or mental handicaps. For others, though they are able-bodied and possess sound minds, they are “useless” in that they have been rendered economically impotent by training certificates denoting inferior qualifications and non-existent local networks, and must find creative ways to be fully moral and “productive.”

In this chapter I argue that disabled people (both physically and aid-disabled) in the township had their social status as “useless people who rely on charity” exacerbated by reconstruction programs funded by international NGOs (INGOs) in the aftermath of the war. Not knowing the local stigmas created by ideas of “charity”, as opposed to “development” money, INGOs (and not their national and local counterparts, which are both sensitive to these constructions and lacked the funding and power of their international counterparts that would allow them to create such notable categories, see Michael, 2004: 1) created programs that specifically defined categories of people that were eligible for assistance, based entirely on changes wrought by the war (amputee, ex-combatant): a “normal” that had been undone and needed to be addressed. The result was that INGOs unwittingly turned people within those categories—people who because they still existed as humans within social and economic networks could have been created as “develop-able” within those networks—into aid and charity cases, and thus into lesser human beings within the local cultural construct of personhood. This created a backlash for other non-war categories of people, such as polio victims and lepers, so that they too were created as charity cases instead of people who had formerly been widely known as capable of development.

Though many people who fell into these categories actively took on these designations as charity cases in order to make enough money to eat everyday in the wake of the war,<sup>71</sup> others are working through the language and activities of those same INGOs to re-portray themselves as “useful” with the potential to be “self-reliant” and possibly participate in full individual and communal “development” in the future. However they suffer from being pigeonholed variously as “money chowers,” “lazy,” and “useless” because of the categories that accompanied their conditions after the war, and many are finding it difficult to turn any money they get, which is often ideologically transferred as unproductive “charity” into useful “development”. It is these negotiations and obstacles that I examine here.

For the disabled, the charity for which they are sanctioned is essentially “useless” because it does not produce or circulate anything in the community (Barber, 1995: 208), and it creates and maintains status distinctions between giver and receiver (Zelizer, 1997: 26). Ex-combatants were recipients of aid money “that they did not use well,” according to one man, “see how so many of them sold their toolkits!” By doing so, “ex-combatants” publicly advertised their inability to use inputs that were ostensibly “development” to productive ends, which has morally diminished them and turned them into “nothing better than beggars,” according to one former RUF man, even though he states that, as they are able-bodied, no one will just give them money. In any case, beggars get so little, according to one man, that they can only take their coins and get bits of food for their families everyday. They consume, little by little, and this sets them apart from the rest of the people in town, for whom development is ideologically possible with money made in productive endeavors.

These people are Makeni’s “consumers,” and they exist in this guise because INGOs and journalists worked to make Sierra Leoneans “legible” for assistance after the war. International journalists especially defined for the world categories of people—child soldiers, amputees, rebels and refugees—intrinsically, horribly interesting because they should not exist, and thus ideologically created to be “assisted.”<sup>72</sup> Even though

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<sup>71</sup> This is a similar occurrence to Ticktin’s findings in France, that illegal immigrants will actively seek ways to become bodily ill in order to gain legal status in the country (2006: 34).

<sup>72</sup> See Voeten, 2002; Bergner, 2003; and Campbell, 2004 for examples of journalists who sought out “war victims.”

Sierra Leoneans insisted that they want to leave the war behind, some of the war's categories, like amputees and ex-combatants, doggedly persist in local practice. Organizations such as the Norwegian Refugee Council and World Vision had mandates to work with specific categories of people, and these categories exist in practice because of the physical and social infrastructure the programs left in their wake.

I begin with two illustrations of how Makeni people variously reinforce and dismiss categories. I start with the war amputees, and how the specific aid programs that ministered to them ended up hiding them, and their productive activities, from view, creating a persisting idea (both among local people and anthropologists) that they, and the war, are being deliberately rendered invisible. In contrast, "ex-combatants" are only those former RUF who still lead unproductive and socially threatening lifestyles, a rubric that makes it possible for a high level RUF commander to live peacefully and pursue productive activity. I then move to how residents delineate moral categories of productivity, from "useless" to "useful," and if and how they change when the role they played in situating people in families and communities is dissipated through visibly productive work. Persisting social categories are retained because of their linkage to concepts of spiritual status and consumption practices that produce stigma (see Goffman, 1963: 1-3); the existence of a stigma based on spiritual status means that there must also be a spiritual "normal" that can be deviated from (see Warner, 1999: 28). These conceptions are not universal, as the Christian and Muslim notions of disability and charity most common in Makeni are different, and individuals have their own feelings on whether disabled beggars deserve charity. Whether or not a disabled person is considered simply "unlucky in the eyes of Allah," as my assistant Mohamed told me, or "has fallen from God's grace", according to a priest, they bear the burden of being thought "useless," which is why their receipt of charity is morally and socially sanctioned. However, this charity goes only to remedy *empti bag no de tinap* [an empty bag cannot stand]. Beggars must consume what they receive, because charity not circulated as part of a productive exchange; it denotes only a social distance and inequality between giver and recipient (see Zelizer, 1997: 96). Therefore the money is incapable of producing "development."

I then move to a disability that is economic, rather than physical. The "ex-combatants" are able-bodied men who were disarmed and reintegrated in Makeni and

given inadequate skills training for them to find jobs. The United Nations defined a “combatant” as someone who bore arms in the war (DDR pamphlet, 2002). In order to create an “ex-combatant” the Disarmament, Demobilization, and Rehabilitation (DDR) program had to produce individuals who were non-violent and non-threatening long enough to stop the momentum of the RUF in order for the peace process to take hold. In essence, it was designed to specifically disable combatants; many of who had only ever experienced control over their lives when they had weapons, and thus some respect (see Peters and Richards, 1998: 183). The result was that hundreds of men in Makeni received sub-par training in trades and were unable to find profitable work. Most of them refuse to go home because they have nothing to offer their families, who would not understand that a man who has been away for ten years, was taken in, given money, and trained by the United Nations now has nothing to support his family with. So they remain in town with their friends, hoping to start cooperative farms, where they can fall back on skills they know are “useful,” and once again rely mostly on each other.

Finally I examine the struggles that occur between members of these groups as they fight to balance filling their daily needs for food and accommodation with the desire to break the stigma of useless/consumer and fuel all resources toward productive future development. Many blind people, for example, are adamantly opposed to their children attending school because they need their children to help them beg. Similarly, those former RUF who refuse the label “ex-combatant” are finding it nearly impossible to achieve their goal of “self-reliance” because they have no local social networks to support them and no money with which to begin farming. They are hoping to find ways back into the INGO fold, with those same INGOs who gave them poor training and left them totally unequipped to survive, in order to find a future in “self-reliance projects.”

### **Labeling people for aid and assistance: who is included under the banner?**

I first arrived in Sierra Leone in 2003, after several years being bombarded by images of horror from the war. I expected to be approached for assistance from double amputees and child soldiers scarred with RUF brands and machete marks where they had been forced to rub crack cocaine into their skin, and leered at by drunk and still-dangerous ex-



combatants, and I encountered none of these things. I spent a full two weeks in Makeni before I met an amputee, and he had lost his leg in a farming accident years before when a tree fell on him. This was the town with the largest concentration of former RUF combatants in the nation (over 4,000 by the UN's estimate; see GoSL, 2002), and yet there were no groups of drunk-and-dangerous youth hanging out on corners. Where were the people that the international press had been following?

The answer lies in a sort of inversion of what Briggs refers to as “techniques of erasure,” in modes of knowledge production and categorization that give states control over the manipulation and dissemination of statistics, and can thus “erase” people from official existence (2004: 167). In Sierra Leone what occurred was the creation and projection of categories, such as “ex-combatant” by INGOs (such as World Vision) and the government in order to make the participants in a messy war knowable and therefore administrable. During this drive to categorize people so as to administer them—a process meant to make nourishing the “bare life” qualities of humans—profoundly political subjects are created during a supposedly apolitical process (Ticktin, 2006: 35-36). In the refugee camps, this meant that “families” received food assistance, and many people engineered “marriages” for themselves in order to receive food aid (see Gale, 2007: 356). In Makeni the categories of people that are internationally recognized—child soldier, amputee, ex-combatant—do not exist as local social categories, while people possessing locally recognized designations—polio victim (*kripa*, or “creeper”), leper, blind—found little respite during reconstruction because they were not direct victims of the war. By seeking out defining features of the war's victims, the aid organizations, such as the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC), tasked with building houses for war amputees, legitimized them, and brought the legitimacy of local categories into question; as local categories did not specifically denote “victims.” They assumed, as Goffman did, that “the afflicted find others who share their affliction to be their natural group” (1963: 112), not understanding that in Sierra Leone, to specifically earmark a group for charity as opposed to visible productivity, is to disable and stigmatize them. Thus, states Ticktin, supposed acts of humanitarianism keep the suffering body intact while reproducing social hierarchies that define those suffering bodies (2006: 36).

So much emphasis was put on helping the war-afflicted that their reintegration into the community, though lubricated by aid money, has been equally hampered by their social, and often economic, differentiation. The disabled community has felt some of the aftershock of this, which is why they are struggling not to also be thought of as charity cases. Especially in the town's current state of poverty, with many of them unemployed from the time when the disabled center closed, they are now "food-poor," and do need money just to consume. These needs have hampered the disabled organizations' efforts to regain legitimacy as sanctioned recipients of development money. They must be legitimized, both in that they are *especially* poor compared to others, and yet morally sound and capable of being useful, in order to present themselves as potential producers of "development," and thus worthwhile candidates for "development money."

*INGOs work to make the town "normal:"  
are amputees being deliberately hidden from view?*

According to Foucault, governments create and define categories of people in order to make them "legible," statistically, economically and politically, and thus make them easier to control (1980: 59). As Sierra Leone's post-war, aid-hungry government discovered, new categories of people meant new INGOs willing to fund programs in the country. Amputation, as the most gruesome and terrifying act of inhumanity committed against innocent civilians, a pathological act resulting in pathological consequences, was embraced as a worthy cause by several INGOs. Aiding amputees was such a popular cause that several INGOs received funding to work on it. The most visible one in Makeni was not a medical charity; rather it was the NRC.

Makeni has three amputee villages in its environs, and yet war amputees are a rare sight around town. In fact, they are largely invisible. All amputee villages are situated outside of Makeni proper. One would initially assume that they were being purposely removed from view because no one "wanted to be reminded of war's true realities" (Nordstrom, 2004: 183). Shaw (pers. comm. March 2004) believes that the NRC was considering people's need to "forget" about the war, and making the amputees invisible would accomplish this; giving everyone the chance to develop a *kol at*, a "cool heart" and not bring the violence back by thinking about it too much. In addition, it gave amputees

a “group of fellow afflicted” to associate with without subjecting them to criticism that their very existence was preventing people from putting the war behind them.

I held this assumption until I met with the chief on whose land all of these amputee communities are built. From him a different story emerged. He said that most of the amputees in these villages are not natives of Makeni, they came to the town from villages in the east in the later stages of the war in search of medical assistance. They did not have family in Makeni, nor any familial claims to land or homes, and so were not absorbed into the fabric of the town. The NRC was willing to build accommodation for them, but again there was not enough land within the town to do so. Town lots are expensive, and no landowner gave up the potential for millions of leones of profit to donate the land to an INGO. Town lots had been the NRC’s original hope, because a central location would have made it easier for amputees to beg or find work. However, the only available land was located on the outskirts of the township, where there were at the time neither houses nor farms, and where the chief was willing to donate the land, which was relatively cheap. This meant that the amputee villages were slotted into plots where all of these conditions were met, and in most cases these villages had to be located miles from the town center. At least one of the villages is currently a full-time farming enterprise, another has an animal husbandry project the NRC helped them start, and the other is located close enough to town to make begging, if needs must, a possibility.

The amputee villages are not the embodiment of the shame of victimization; the war amputees did not deliberately remove themselves from a critical public gaze, nor were they deliberately removed for that reason, nor did they naturally seek out a community of fellow sufferers. Their current position is an artifact of aid categorization of the “abnormal” and the practicalities of building housing for people with no claims on local land. By etching the category of “amputee” into the landscape in a permanent way, the NRC created a persistent category of people who are the sanctioned object of charity, which, even if they do not need or accept charity, hampers them from being taken seriously as “development-minded,” which is why none of my able-bodied interlocutors in town believed that they were engaged in productive activity. The assistance they received after the war damages their “development” credibility. “Ex-combatants,” on the other hand, as a category of the able-bodied, have damaged “development” credibility

only in that they are specifically precluded from doing the work they were ostensibly trained to do. Otherwise they have the potential to be “useful.”

*When does an “ex-combatant” become just like everyone else?*

The attitude of all Makeni people, no matter what role they played or identities they took on during the war, is that the most important component of peace is one’s ability to get on with one’s life in the present. This makes it possible for residents who were harassed during the occupation to live alongside former rebels in relative quietude. When I started working in Makeni, the relationships between former victims and perpetrators of violence was my main preoccupation, and I would occasionally press people on this point. One man lived next door to a former high-level RUF commander and his family. I asked him casually one day about his relationship with his neighbor. “J—K—? He is just an ordinary man! He attended my father-in-law’s wake last week.” I pressed the point: “And during the war?” The question did not shake him: “Well, during the war he was a commander, but the war is over now! There are no more RUF here, and no ex-combatants either.” Socially, the “ex-combatant” category had disappeared.

Why were former RUF accepted into the community so easily? Were the victims of RUF atrocities not angry? Did they not want revenge or justice? The answer, as discovered by many researchers analyzing wars around the world and in Sierra Leone (see Lofving, 2005: 84; Shaw, 2005: 1; Shepler, 2005: 199-200; Utas, 2005a: 148) is that war’s survivors do not necessarily subscribe to an idea that war is waged by specific perpetrators against specific victims, and that the former must always be punished. In her examination of the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission, for example, Shaw (2005: 1) found that former rebels who expressed regret and wanted to reconcile with the community and live and work like everyone else were fully embraced by people even if they did not accept responsibility and guilt for their specific actions as rebels. A man who did so was an ordinary man, and no longer “RUF” or even an “ex-combatant.” Utas (2005a: 148) discovered in Liberia that many villages welcomed ex-combatants who wanted to live there, as they knew that these young men were willing to provide community security and keep away “bad elements” that would disturb their new peace.

A man who had worked for the DDR program stated that INGOs assumed that the newly rehabilitated ex-combatants would return home and begin life again in their natal villages. For reasons I will explore in detail later in this chapter, the transition was incomplete, because of sub-par training in saturated occupations, and because the time and experience spent away from their natal villages in the south and east with only their “new brothers” for company, according to several former RUF, meant most men wanted to stay in Makeni. The category of ex-combatant only exists in interactions where one is specifically disabled by the reintegration process, namely when a man attempts to find employment armed only with UN training certificates. The certificate instantly highlights the individual as an ex-combatant, but this is not the reason that employment is not forthcoming. According to tradesmen in Makeni, mainly tailors and carpenters who have been approached for work by DDR trainees, the UN certificate is worthless because it denotes inferior and incomplete training, and a man who is not local, therefore has no one to vouch for him and act as his patron if something should go wrong, like a botched job. Thus does the designation “ex-combatant” actually mean “unemployable.”

*The war shifts aid priorities: the blind and polio-stricken fight to receive assistance*

For polio victims, lepers, and the blind, their status as sanctioned recipients of aid and development money (as opposed to mere charity) was damaged by the war, which donors specifically set out to erase. The disabled had formed a visible community before the war, running training and medical centers in Makeni. According to the President of the Leprosy Association, the German Leprosy Association had run a program in Makeni from the 1970's teaching people about managing leprosy, administering drugs to infected children, and teaching the families of lepers how to design and build their special prosthetic shoes. The leprosy center in Makeni was, during the 1980's, the main center for leprosy prosthetics in the nation, and lepers in Makeni had a reputation for hard work and skillful craftsmanship. A similar Italian Christian charity, headed by a Reverend Olivani, created the Polio Victims Association (PVA) to deliver services to polio victims such as clothing, food, paying school fees for their children, and administering polio vaccines to newborns in the community (Collier, *Unity Now*, December 21, 1995).

Though Reverend Olivani left Makeni in the 1980's, his work was revived in 1995 with the establishment of the Polio Victims Development Association, a revised name that was chosen by the association members to emphasize their productive capacity. At the launch ceremony the Town Council Chairman asserted that polio victims were once again the concern of the community (Collier, *Unity Now*, December 21, 1995). The fact that the Polio Victims Association was now the "Polio Victims Development Association" denotes the emphasis on the fact that the money donated by the town council was going towards productive programs, rather than being "eaten" by the disabled. Before the RUF occupation in 1998, the center was a hub of activity, according to Thomas, who served on the board. Disabled staff ran the day-to-day activities and managed the funds provided by overseas charities to promote education and training for the disabled and their children in trades such as sewing and *gara* tie dying.

The center was destroyed by the RUF when they invaded Makeni, and overseas assistance stopped. According to several polio victims I spoke to, the war "did not concern the disabled," but as they lived in the town they were involved anyway. Many camped in the bush, eating wild mango and cassava, and remained there for the duration of the war because they were unable to flee. Some were "roughed up" by rebels, according to one who suffered beatings and harassment, but they stated categorically that the RUF did not target them for torture or murder. In fact no one could mention names of disabled who had been killed by the RUF during the occupation. They escaped the war mostly unscathed, but as the aid boom began during the aftermath, there was no assistance forthcoming for people who were not obviously "victims" of the war itself.

Many medical organizations such as MSF (Medecins Sans Frontiers, or Doctors Without Borders) and the Marie Stopes Foundation arrived to assist the war disabled, but because polio victims and lepers were not "war wounded," they did not qualify for assistance. According to their Makeni-based nurse, MSF set up clinics to attend to "immediate emergencies" such as open wounds and broken bones. She said the charities that assist the disabled in a long-term capacity do not operate in war zones because not only does "war recovery" fall outside of their mandate, but they are not insured nor logistically capable of working in emergency situations. Thomas remembers when the RUF burned the Disabled Center in December 1998. Because it had been funded by local

donations after Reverend Olivani left, there was no extant organization to rebuild the center. When aid organizations arrived in 2001, they aimed to address the immediate needs of hunger, medical emergencies, and disarmament. The disabled received no special treatment under these programs, and according to my research assistant Idriss, because everyone was suffering during this time, they just “forgot about” the disabled.

In spite of their direct exclusions from recovery aid, the end of aid caused even greater problems for the disabled community. First, the money coming into their able-bodied networks disappeared. Those whose able-bodied families were benefiting under aid programs, such as short-term micro-finance for community organizations, were managing in the first years after the war. When this ended, many families were no longer able to support their members who “only eat, and don’t contribute,” in the DAAG chairman’s words.<sup>73</sup> He said that within months of the largest donors leaving Makeni in 2003, DAAG looked like a foundling home for the disabled. Parents left their disabled children, often on the brink of starvation, on the steps of the center, because they no longer had money to care for them. The last UN peacekeeping battalion left soon after the large INGOs, and the economic situation grew increasingly dire. The chairman stated that this was when the stigma against the disabled became palpable, as the able-bodied had convinced themselves that, with no money circulating in their families, the disabled would turn to aggressive begging or even theft. Idriss confirmed this, commenting that the “overly strong personalities” of many beggars made people hostile to them.

When the end of aid forced the disabled back onto the streets, they once again became visible to the nation, but the damage of the NRC and other organizations creating a stigma around *being* disabled was done, whether or not people *acted* disabled. The DAAG chairman was listening to the radio when I visited him one day, and he commented how President Kabbah had just made a speech declaring, “We will help all Sierra Leoneans, including the disabled.” He stated that the disabled should be involved in development and community assistance anyway, and not “singled out for inclusion”

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<sup>73</sup> DAAG was officially formed as the umbrella group for the PVA, the Leprosy Association and the Association for the Blind in 2001, when none of the organizations could get funding or secure a headquarters for themselves. “Strength in numbers,” the chairman told me, and as DAAG, they were able to secure enough funding from a local NGO to pay their rent for one year.

because they specifically were not “all Sierra Leoneans.”<sup>74</sup> He stated that disabled people want to be absorbed into society, not deliberately included, and Thomas and three others I spoke to echoed this. He sees “inclusion” as part of the language of stigma, namely the new idea that the disabled cannot be a useful contributor to society through the productive activity that defines “all Sierra Leoneans,” because it defines the disabled as a people apart from “all Sierra Leoneans.”<sup>75</sup> The distinction between them and everyone else means the disabled must work twice as hard to prove their productive capacity.

**The conflation of religious charity and “uselessness,”  
or why beggars are not productive**

“I was pushed out on my own when I was old enough to beg,” the DAAG chairman told me one day, “my father said I was useless in the house, so now I could beg for my living.” According to the chairman, parents shun disabled children because they think the disabled can do no productive work, and all they do is eat. When they are pushed out to beg, they are on their own, because the money they bring in from begging cannot be mixed with “productive” money such as is gained from farming or trade. It is meant “merely to sustain their lives,” according to Thomas, because a person who gets charity should not be creating more from it than the person who gave it to them out of pity. Charity is not an investment in someone else’s “development;” it is only capable of increasing the status of the giver, who can make himself out to be a “big person” because of his ability to redistribute to beggars, like my first assistant who always gave his change from the PZ to a beggar outside the shop (see also Soares, 2005: 179).

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<sup>74</sup> This attitude, though it does not necessarily represent the whole of the disabled community, is diametrically opposed to the attitude of polio victims Renne (2006: 3) worked with in Nigeria, who from the 1980’s began to consider themselves “disabled” as a category of people to whom the state was responsible for providing training.

<sup>75</sup> Ruth Mandel stated this point elegantly when describing the “deliberate inclusion” of Turkish migrants in Germany by calling them “co-citizens,” a label that is also used for German Jews: “A simple prefix, deployed to denote innocent inclusion, instead brings attention to the fact that they are not true citizens, only ersatz, and in effect serves to further exclude them” (1995: 269).



People in Makeni possess individual religious and practical notions of what creates a deserving object of charity.<sup>76</sup> People invoke both Muslim and Christian notions of charity when explaining their position towards beggars, as well as ideas of whether a person “deserved” their disability, and whether to give charity simply because it was God’s will to do so, or because they were actually performing a service in the community and creating a public good by feeding the destitute and keeping them from harassing others. In this section I analyze the religious notions of charity that govern giving in Makeni, and how the physically disabled are working to prove, through visible activity, that they can produce and be the exemplary “useful”, and are worthy recipients of “development-minded” money, according to Thomas, and not just “pity charity.”

*Defining, assisting, and enriching the afflicted:  
Christians, Muslims, INGOs, and amputees*

When President Kabbah insisted in his radio broadcast that he would include the disabled in “development for all Sierra Leoneans,” he signaled a distance between the disabled community and the rest of the nation that runs much deeper than just considering that the disabled might be able to participate in “development.” I discovered the size of this distance when riding with Father Samura to a local village where we were conducting interviews. We passed an amputee village, and one amputee smiled and waved at us. Father Samura waved back, and then sighed, “Look at those poor people. Before the war they were whole, and now look at them: useless! And yet they have painted their houses to show off!” I asked him to explain what he meant, and he said that amputation was a sign from God of one’s fall from grace. Amputation meant that God had marked a whole individual for affliction because of a loss of spiritual status, and the afflicted was condemned to live out this life on earth in continued suffering, reduced to a life of begging for charity. Because *caritas* is inherent to Christian doctrine, they could rely on charitable Christians assisting them. However, they should have been humbled by their

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<sup>76</sup> Though I lack records of what pre-colonial or pre-Christian charitable practices were in Makeni, refer to the debate between Iliffe (1984) and Peel (1990) in Yorubaland. Iliffe calls the Yoruba “alms-giving” as people gave cowries to the poor who offered them blessings; and Peel counters that the Yoruba are happy to give “sacrifice money” to representatives of their gods.

reliance on charity, and yet all of the houses in the amputee village were painted bright pink! How could they advertise the charity that resulted from God's judgment on them?<sup>77</sup>

Idriss stated that the disabled in Makeni are also often disorderly: they shout, harass and are rude to people who do not immediately assist them; they are "hyperactive." He feels that perhaps God, sensing their "strong" personalities, disabled them physically so that they did not cause damage to their families. Thus is a disability compensation for an anti-social personality. According to my assistant Mohamed, in Islamic doctrine the disabled are merely "unlucky in the eyes of Allah." "Allah loves every human being he created," Mohamed told me, "that is why he asked us in the holy Quran to assist the disabled and the poor who may not have any thing to eat or are facing difficulties with the provision of their daily bread." *Zakat*, the third pillar of Sunni Islam (the sect of most Makeni Muslims), is the tradition of almsgiving; it is linked closely with prayer and helps to "purify" both givers and the wealth that they give (Benthall, 1999: 27). The "poor" and "very poor" are sanctioned recipients of *zakat* (30), which is collected by religious leaders at the end of Ramadan for distribution. Soares, writing about Mali, states that *sadaqa*, or individualized and informal giving, is more common in West Africa (2005: 165). Idriss and Mohamed confirmed this for me, stating that though all Muslims give, it is "up to the economic power of each man to decide" how much to give. Idriss added that giving is not religion-specific, as Muslims will give to disabled Christians, and vice-versa, but that Muslims also gave at Ramadan, "otherwise their fasting will not be accepted by Allah."

The veritable flood of aid to amputees after the war problematized local understandings of charity and consumption. My conversations with Christians and Muslims revealed that where Christians see people having fallen from grace and Muslims see lack of luck, both see the disabled as diminished and relying on the goodwill of the

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<sup>77</sup> In a study of amputees along the Thai-Cambodian border, French (1994: 82) found that Buddhists possess a similar assessment of the religious message of amputation as Father Samura's interpretation of Catholic doctrine. In Buddhist doctrine as it was interpreted in Cambodia, to be born healthy and then acquire a deficiency, such as the loss of a limb, is to experience a loss of karmic status, and therefore a drop in moral worth. People lived in such a state of destitution that no one thought a "meritorious future" that Buddhism emphasized was possible; amputees were simply "useless" human beings who could offer nothing to their families (83). Because the whole community lived in poverty and they were consuming without bringing in any resources, they were often cast out of their homes (81). They were also expected to act in morally diminished ways, such as drunk and disorderly (85).

able-bodied, to whom they are humbly thankful. The international celebrity of amputee-ism created from simple disability a battleground of moral meaning. The whole country was impoverished because of the war; people no longer had the small coins to give freely to beggars. However, the NRC, “rushed past us,” said one woman, “they went straight to the amputees and built them houses, gave them food and made their lives a bit normal again. I too lost my house, but now I am struggling because no one will help me! I was a refugee too!” She feels that she does not need to give any money to amputees, because the INGOs have already taken care of them, and will continue to do so. Where was the assistance for everyone who lost family, homes, and everything but their limbs? As Ticktin states, in this perception of humanitarian assistance, “Only the suffering or sick body is seen as a legitimate manifestation of a common humanity, worthy of recognition” (2006: 39). Those war-affected bodies that did not bear scars of physical suffering were not worthy of humanitarian aid.

Though between 40,000 and 75,000 people lost their lives in the ten-year conflict and 50,000 more were the victims of repeated sexual assault from which they suffered life-long debilitating injuries (see Taylor, 2003: 1-4), the number of people who suffered amputations is much smaller: about 3,000 to 6,000 (GoSL, 2003). Though the NRC villages are well-known to residents, the NRC, according to one amputee’s estimation, built only 330 homes around the country for amputees, or enough to house one in twenty and his or her family (Associated Press, April 5, 2006). A family needed only to have one amputee parent in order to qualify for a house, which means that the other, and all the children, could be able-bodied and considered capable of “producing” in their own right. There are three amputee villages around Makeni of 20 homes each, which means that there may only be about 60 amputees living in NRC housing in the district. Children who lost a parent to the conflict received no such consideration, nor did the country’s thousands of victims of sexual assault, many of whom were banished from their family homes and are too crippled by sexual injuries to work (Taylor, 2003: 5). However, the power of the “amputee” in international media created a space for the persistence of this category.<sup>78</sup> However, the characters and productive capacities of these people are

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<sup>78</sup> A “Google” search for the keywords “amputees in Sierra Leone” revealed over 80,000 related articles published on the web.

unknown to most Makeni residents, who do not see them on a regular basis because the villages, the closest a twenty minute walk from town, are rendered invisible by their distance. One woman imagined that NRC must fund them still, because one rarely sees them in town. She did not consider that the amputees are working, just like the other disabled who live inside Makeni town, to overcome this idea that they are “useless.”

*Negotiating for normalcy: how the disabled overcome “uselessness”*

Whatever their religious profession, the main reason the disabled are unable to “develop” is the fact that people treat them as “useless” and there is little opportunity to prove otherwise. If the disabled can prove that they can work for a living, can do more than “eat and not contribute” in the family, they can become “development-minded” like everyone else. If God marks your body and yet you manage to make ends meet, then the respect of your fellows is forthcoming. The DAAG chairman swears that God “blessed” the disabled with special skills, and this will help them overcome their disability and the stigma they suffer in the community. Similar to the attitude among Hausa polio victims in northern Nigeria, the polio victims in Makeni feel that though God had afflicted them, God will also show them the way to overcome their difficulties (Renne, 2006: 3).

Father Samura’s shock over the amputees painting their village pink may have stemmed from his disbelief that they would not be humbled by the act of charity that built their village and try to make their lives in it as invisible and unobtrusive as possible. Alternately, he may have been amazed that not only could the amputees earn enough money to purchase the paint, but managed to paint their village themselves, even in a supposedly diminished state. This is the perspective taken by the chief who donated the land on which the amputee villages are situated. On my first visit to him, he took me directly to the nearest amputee village and pronounced them the best farmers and most serious, cleanest tenants he had ever had. Unlike a typical street in Makeni, the houses were all freshly painted, surrounded by tended borders of flowers and shrubs, separated by carefully maintained drainage culverts, with no garbage to be seen anywhere and every inch of soil planted with an edible crop. There was no one in the village that I could speak with because the adults were working in their fields and the children were all

in school. The chief stated that the amputees did not believe that God had cursed them, and the fact that they survived their injuries and received aid after the war in order to recover their lives was proof of this. They never viewed the money ideologically as charity, hence their ability to fuel it into productive lives. The money had come from outside of the township; the amputees could define it as “development money,” free of the taint of “charity” that would accompany alms from residents of the town. They were not mocking someone’s pity by making it produce.

Polio victims also believe that their war experiences prove that God did not curse them. Thomas declares that not a single one of Makeni’s polio victims was killed by the rebels, while hundreds of able-bodied residents lost their lives. He says God came to their assistance during the war. God marked their bodies to save them from the rebels, to make them uninteresting to marauding youth looking for money or valuables, and this is proof that they are blessed. In addition, they have the special abilities I mentioned previously to compensate for their twisted legs. The chairman’s wife, also a polio victim, types flawlessly, and is employed as a clerk at Makeni Teachers’ College. She was similarly employed as a clerk in Freetown when the family were refugees during the war, and her job allowed them to save money to return to Makeni at the end of the war, when many able-bodied but unskilled and unemployed people did not have the same means. He himself can operate a computer and play the guitar, two skills that are rare in Makeni. His concern is that the new visual stigma of disability is enough to scare most people away before they learn that the disabled are capable of working and being “useful.” His crusade is not trying to overcome the stigma created by visible disability, but proving to the community that the disabled can work for their living.

Though people in Makeni believe firmly that God will determine the fate of individuals, there is no single interpretation as to how this occurs. This is the battleground on which the disabled fight to prove that, given a chance to move beyond charity, they can prove their mettle as “useful” people capable of developing. Able-bodied people see the disabled as charity recipients, therefore consumers, while the disabled people see that they have survived the war where many able-bodied people did not, and were “useful” enough to begin supporting their families again, proving that God believes they serve a purpose. Able-bodied people see proof of God’s grace in economic

success, which is why the disabled can prove their worth through work. There is proof of God's grace for the able-bodied all over town. Every expatriate knew where the *God Sorry For We* carpentry workshop was located, because they all thought the sign was so funny. One day, two aid workers stopped to take a picture of the sign, and did not understand why the proprietors were angry with them. I explained that the men had named the workshop in order to thank God for giving them the means to start the business, with the proof that they had used the funds for development instead of *chop*, and laughing at it was mocking God's grace and their commitment to "development." They had had a similar experience taking pictures of the storefront for *Trust in God, Walk Fast* building materials, where the owner had combined God's grace with his own industriousness to build a successful business. Though these men may feel that God has blessed them with the ability to start a business, God has not been similarly kind to the "ex-combatants," who do not own any businesses in Makeni.

#### **"Ex-combatants" versus "useful" men: molding the "useless" aid consumer**

There are hundreds of people living in Makeni who were once "combatants." Most of them are from other parts of the country; from Kailahun in the east to Pujehun in the south, most of them do not have kinship networks in Makeni. They were disarmed and demobilized in Makeni, given reintegration packages that included training in the trade of their choice, and then encouraged to return home to their natal areas. Most of them remained in Makeni, though they had neither kin networks nor paying jobs, because aid left them with "nothing to go home with" according to one man. "My family would expect me to have money for them, and I have nothing. I have seen much of this country, I have been to school, I was trained in computers, but reintegration made me a nobody. So I just stay here with my brothers." He shrugged with these words, and walked back to the house he shares with four other "ex-combatants."

However average these men are in the eyes of their neighbors, essentially that they struggle within exactly the same parameters of the *is* as other people, the fact that they have been created as "ex-combatants" by the government and international organizations is creating difficulties for them. As part of their reintegration agreement,

“ex-combatants” had to agree to the UN terms, including the caveat that they would not immediately form themselves into organizations or companies (like security firms) with other ex-combatant, lest they begin to plot revolution. Those who signed this agreement were given six months of training in a trade of their choice, though many feel that the training was just a way of “distracting us” while the UN finished the work of ending the war with the RUF’s commanders. Thus can many carpentry trainees barely hammer a nail straight. “Ex-combatants” have certificates that identify them as having been trained poorly and for a very brief time, and because most of them rely mainly on each other for friendship and support, they are caught up in a cycle of poverty: none of the “brothers” can find jobs with which to assist the others, nor can any of them return to their natal families with nothing. So they stay together and try to make a bit of a living every day, even though their continued unemployment makes them appear “useless.”

*Making traumatic attachments endure: the RUF family in times of peace*

Sierra Leoneans use terms of address such as “brother” and “sister” to refer to anyone with whom they have a close relationship. I often found myself struggling when someone talked me through their family networks, as everyone seemed to be “brother” and “sister.” What emerged is that kinship created through social bonds are just important during war as they are during peace. Created kinship is not limited to conditions of peaceful co-habitation; indeed the war left many people grasping for emotional relations with others, even under severe duress. Most of my interlocutors stated that they were among dozens of children and youth under the age of eighteen forcibly taken from their villages; often one of the boys was shot as an example to the others what would happen if they ran away. This gave the children little option but to bond with their new “brothers.” When I interviewed them, they stressed that once they realized that they might never again see their families, they formed new “foster” families with others in the same situation (see Shepler, 2004: 16; Richards, 1996: 89). As

Fanthorpe states, “the only moral communities available to these [youth] may be those of their own desperate making” (2001: 385).<sup>79</sup>

There was no resting. Everyday we were under the gun. I slept under the gun, with hunger, without my own private family. At that time I left my mother in Liberia, there was no way to take care of her. I left everybody and joined to form another family. I had my private wife [she was also captured by the RUF], though of course we were not legally married. DS

DS, quoted above, spoke of his “brothers” with whom he was stationed in the jungle. Psychologists refer to this as “traumatic attachment” (see Farber, 2000: 119). There was a pattern in all of my interviews with former RUF in which everyone related the episode of being “adopted” by a commander, often in the same breath as stating when they were “brought down” or “captured” by the rebels. Many called their commanders their “big brothers,” because the older rebels looked after them. All of them refer to the RUF’s leader, the late Foday Sankoh, as “Pa.” They called their bush camps “villages,” cherish memories of the people with whom they lived in these villages, and maintain close relationships with their “brothers” to this day:

Every time he [National Vice President Solomon Berewa] sees me, I am always frowning and he always asks me what’s wrong? Why am I wearing that frown? And I tell him that I’m not happy with what he did. The detention of our brothers, I am not happy, you see? We have over sixty of our brothers who are still detained. FS

FS is referring to the former RUF who were arrested and are in detention awaiting trial by the Special Court as of July 2005. FS was one of the original members of the RUF, and

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<sup>79</sup> Of the sixteen former RUF members that I interviewed, twelve were between the ages of ten and eighteen when they were “brought down” by the RUF, and were in their twenties and early thirties when I met them in Makeni. The other four were older, two were teachers in their early 20s when they were forced to join the RUF in the early years of the war, one was a farmer who was taken from his village just east of Makeni in 1995, the other was one of the RUF’s original members who was friends with Foday Sankoh, the leader of the RUF, in the 1980’s. Of the twelve who were under eighteen when they joined, they averaged six years of schooling. The least educated, one of the RUF’s load carriers, had only three years of school, the most educated had been a student at Albert Academy in Freetown to form five (about eleventh grade) when he returned to his mother’s village for summer vacation and was kidnapped from there. Eight were from the southern province and five from the eastern province, and three from the northern province, and the average length of time spent with the RUF before disarmament was seven years. I believe it is representative of the former RUF in Makeni who are working to be “normal.” There are many others who have gone crazy; those I did not interview.



he feels responsible for securing the release of the men with whom he worked and lived every day for ten years. Every day they spend in jail, he feels he is failing his family.

It was not only natal families that were disrupted by the war, forcing children to form new bonds. The war also shattered fostering arrangements so that children were often permanently severed from their foster family, and left without any strongly forged kinship bonds with anyone. Do they return to their natal family, with whom they do not have a close relationship, or do they try to make their own way in the world?

I grew up in a rich family, the R— family. They are now in London, they left Freetown during the occupation by the AFRC. Because of my ambition, they really wanted me to grow up seeing things that others cannot. But because of their position, even if I advanced, my family background is less than that. So [when they left I decided] it is better for me to develop my own family background than to go through the same separation again... I left and I came to the east end of Freetown... where I was born. I left there when I was a boy, so I came back to see what my family background is like. I came to see that [my family] was very disorganized. There is no one who is educated enough to push things the way that they should go. So they all love to sit around but I can tell you, there is nothing for me there... TB

TB followed a prospective job to Makeni and became friends with several former RUF members, with whom he now lives. He feels that there is no family that he knows that he can return to, so he created new bonds with people whose experiences mirror his own. This language of kinship and the forging of bonds with people who have similar experiences is a social outcome of traumatic experiences. What is interesting about the situation in Makeni is that these “ex-combatants” continue to operate as a family, even though they are no longer forced by the war to do so. Of the sixteen men that I interviewed in depth, twelve resided with at least two others among their RUF “brothers,” and two groups have formed that are attempting to find funding to start agriculture CBOs.

What would cause people who were forced together through trauma to stay together even though the war ended several years earlier? Farber states that people who have experienced traumatic violence, which shatters their understanding of the world, imprint on the trauma itself like they would to their primary attachments, their family (2000: 119). As Errante and Efraime stated for Mozambique, when a child learns to see a violent environment as “normal” [everyday], they will cling to it even in times of peace

(2006: 102). Most of my RUF interlocutors were torn from their families at a young age, many watched their parents murdered, and they were forced to stay with other youth with similar experiences. After ten years in the bush, these have become their primary attachments, and it is with these people, whom they have experienced most of the traumas that have defined their lives, that their primary loyalties lie.

The “traumatic family” is a view from psychoanalysis. In most cases, “ex-combatant” households are not visible as such, unless they are causing trouble with their neighbors by maintaining bad habits like marijuana smoking and petty theft, as was the case for one group. They are only “ex-combatants” when they attempt to find work. Their inability to find jobs in Makeni is not intimately linked with any particular stigma that they suffer because they are former RUF. Instead, it resulted from the sub-standard, incomplete training in trades that they either could not use at all in Makeni, like computer software installation, or in which the town was already fully saturated with qualified craftsmen, like carpentry and tailoring. This is another reason why I believe the men I spoke to are so emotionally close. They have developed similar ideas of how to regain economic independence in Makeni, and feel they can best accomplish this as a group. In our interviews, seven of them expressly admired the RUF’s socialist farming ethos, and hoped to recreate similar cooperative ventures, like the one started by SM and FS, who run the CBO mentioned in Chapter Four (see also Peters, 2006: 85).

#### *Occupying the ex-combatant: creating farmers through training in trade*

The stereotype that exists among Makeni residents with respect to “ex-combatants” is that they all ride motorcycle taxis for a living (see Peters, 2006: 13). This was not a derogatory comment on their lack of education or lack of kin networks that would give them access to market trades or farming land. Rather it meant that they were engaging themselves in productive activity, and when someone is busy they are less likely to make trouble, as I explored in Chapter Four. People did not concern themselves much with the activities of busy ex-combatants. They did not ask questions about their personal histories or educations, except to comment on the occasional extraordinary ex-combatant who was working hard to make something of himself, such as a friend of mine who had

been an RUF administrator and decided to go back to school to do an advanced teaching degree. He was admired for his tenacity just as the other students were.

Economic activity is important because, as I analyzed in Chapter Four, idle minds and idle hands are considered “the devil’s work,” and people who are unoccupied are the most likely to cause trouble in any community. The simple fact that ex-combatants were engaged in occupations was enough to ease the minds of most residents. However, it behooves us to understand why it is that ex-combatants are not working in the trades in which they were trained, why so many of them sold their toolkits, and why many of them long to be farmers. In this section I examine how the donor-fueled training of ex-combatants molded a group of young people who are incapable of finding employment in their chosen trades, and so are attempting to re-group, as taxi drivers but especially as farmers, in order to make a living.

In 2001 INGOs such as World Vision and Caritas were tasked with assisting the UN in demobilizing and reintegrating ex-combatants, and at first there was little agreement on what the best mode of “reintegration” would be. Is it best to return them to formal education, encourage them to farm, or teach them trades? The issue was different for child ex-combatants, who, in their reintegration programs through INGOs, adopted what Shepler calls the “discourse of abdicated responsibility” (2005: 199), namely that they did not choose to fight, rather they were drugged, forced, or were too young to know any better. Caritas encouraged children to take on the definition of “child” delimited by the Convention on the Rights of the Child, where anyone under the age of 18 “has no legally relevant agency” (Rosen, 2007: 297). Children could claim wartime “non-agency,” in Shepler’s words, which eased their re-integration into communities by giving parents new ways to think of child ex-combatants as “children” once again (2005: 205). Those who had families who wanted them back returned, and the others remained in the care centers where they were fed, accommodated, given psychological counseling (see Shepler, 2005: 206) and encouraged to return to formal schooling.

Reintegrating youth and adults was more problematic, as I mentioned “youth” and “man” are fluid social categories based on achievements rather than age. The war destroyed most chances young men had to achieve social adulthood. DDR officials had to categorize them in other ways, which, without knowing the backgrounds of the ex-

combatant, meant the category would be arbitrary. Incidentally, among academics there has also been no agreement on the social status, education levels and goals of the men who comprised the RUF (see Abdullah, 1998: 223; Bangura, 2000: 556; Peters, 2004: 7 and 2006: 17-24; Richards, 1996: 1). Richards wrote *Fighting for the Rainforest* (1996) as a counter-argument to Robert Kaplan's *The Coming Anarchy* (1994, quoted in Richards, 1996: 1). Kaplan argues that the RUF was an agglomeration of "loose molecules" of uneducated, unskilled, unemployed and frustrated youth living in a hopelessly damaged environment, and was just one example of the types of "low-level wars" that will occur in the future, as people in collapsed states with no ability to feed themselves move towards anarchy.

Richards argued that the leadership of the RUF was highly educated and possessed an ideology, and that the youth members were intelligent enough to know that they lived in a corrupt and underdeveloped country, were being excluded from global development, were justifiably angry about it, and were fighting "with their eyes open" (Peters and Richards, 1998: 183). Abdullah, on the other hand, argues that the majority of RUF came from a long national tradition of *rarray boys*, or members of the urban and peri-urban lumpenproletariat, known for their violence, anti-social tendencies, and willingness to serve as "security" for anyone who paid them (1998: 224-235; 2005: 183-184). In spite of Richards' argument that the youth not only were educated and educatable, formal schooling was not emphasized as a reintegration option to youth over the age of 12. According to the DDR Information officer, the reintegration program, designed by the World Bank, stressed vocational training because the staff assumed that concentrating on "real livelihood skills" was the best way to ease a combatant's transition to society.<sup>80</sup> Though formal education was offered to ex-combatants who wanted it, DDR would only pay for a maximum of three years of school fees, and for combatants who had no proof of having passed any classes, this would mean starting once again in primary school, which many felt was not sufficient to gain any useful knowledge (Peters, 2006: 120).

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<sup>80</sup> The NGO World Vision implemented a "social reintegration" program that included literacy and numeracy training. It used a program designed by Management Systems International (MSI), an American company that developed the modules in 1996, when the Abuja Accord was signed and reintegration was first attempted. The US government, under Clinton, had helped fund this first program, after Clinton had read Kaplan's article (Peluso and Watts, 2001: 4). Perhaps in designing the program to address basic skills, MSI assumed little education among combatants.

But to answer both Richards and Kaplan, what was the educational status of the ex-combatants in Makeni? Rosen admonishes that we cannot assume that the “youth” comprised a category that we can create as either universally forcibly conscripted or willing coverts, uneducated or educated, we must be empirical rather than normative (2007: 299). In this framework, I found that the status of ex-combatants was as diverse as the people themselves. The RUF cadres who remain in Makeni were neither a monolithic group of impoverished, illiterate farmers with nothing to lose, as Kaplan argued; nor a binary group of educated leaders who had convinced semi-educated and angry youth into fighting for them, as Richards argued.<sup>81</sup> The RUF was as complex as its members were individuals, each with different educational histories, some kidnapped and some recruited, and each forced through the bottleneck of war and reconstruction programs to leave them essentially in the same position on the other side.

The men that I spoke with on this subject were frustrated former students just as often as those youth in Makeni who had their educations interrupted by the war, with the difference that they no longer had their education documents, therefore could not go back to school.<sup>82</sup> Some had been teachers before the war; others had dreams of attending university and were studying for entrance exams when conscripted. One had been studying accounting at the University of Liberia when the country exploded into war and forced his return to Sierra Leone, where the RUF later conscripted him. The difference was, those who were forcibly recruited in the south and east and were disarmed and reintegrated in the north had none of their school documents, nor did they have anyone to vouch for their educational history.

Many of the youth in Makeni whose educations were also interrupted and were forced to “sit down idle” while Makeni was occupied, in the last three years of the war, were still adolescents when the war ended. They were known in town, still possessed their school certificates, and had no difficulty re-enrolling in their old institutions. The

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<sup>81</sup> I will give Richards the benefit of the doubt in this case, however, as he published in 1996, before the RUF arrived in Makeni and recruited locally, and before the full organization and composition of the RUF was known. I am writing from the privileged position of research conducted ten years later. My point is to more fully elucidate the RUF's membership.

<sup>82</sup> Unfortunately I had no female ex-combatants among my interlocutors. McKay (2005: 393) argued that pervasive gender stereotypes meant that the ex-combatant was socially constructed as male, meaning that females, no matter their participation, were invisible when the time came to hand out DDR packages.

RUF men, on the other hand, had multiple problems. They were far from their home schools where teachers knew them. Most of them had lost their primary school exam certificates in the course of the war, and so lacked proof that they had attended those or any schools and were qualified to return. They were also seven to ten years older than their compatriot “youth” in Makeni. Many felt they should be earning incomes to help support their parents back home, and that they had been away from school for so many years that their minds had been idle for too long to return. Some were embarrassed to tell me that they had reached form four (the equivalent of American ninth grade) before the war started, but had been in the bush for so long that they had regressed and could now speak only Krio. One went so far to say, “The war rotted my brain for school.” For these multiple reasons, returning to school was impossible, and learning trades was the only possible route to economic self-sufficiency.

This is where the reality of the RUF members’ education levels and aspirations grates against the UN’s expectations of their “ex-combatant.” Richards states that the RUF excluded people who were completely uneducated from guerilla training. Most became part of the civilian support group, as manual laborers. It was only those who had enough education and wit who could learn on the job that became guerillas (1996: 176). When the war ended, the UN did not consider the various RUF groups that had existed during the war. According to the UN’s Civil Affairs Officer in Makeni, in order to be identified by the UN as an ex-combatant one had to have a weapon with which to disarm. Among my interlocutors, some of the most, and the least, educated members of the former RUF group self-identified as G5, and had never borne arms. G5 stands for “Group Five” of the five groups in the RUF.<sup>83</sup> G5 was the largest group, and it was comprised entirely of civilian camp helpers. This group included everyone from teachers and doctors, to the “mules,” in their own words, that carried loads through the jungle.<sup>84</sup> These mules, according to Fanthorpe (2001: 364), were illiterate and considered incapable of absorbing and deploying the RUF’s ideology. The highly educated G5 members among my interlocutors had connections with commanders and were given

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<sup>83</sup> The other four groups consisted of commanders, administrators, fighters and logisticians.

<sup>84</sup> Several of my interlocutors in Makeni stated that they served as temporary “mules” for the RUF in Makeni, but as the town was occupied, they never had to move with an RUF platoon.

weapons with which to disarm and receive reintegration packages. The mules I knew were the least educated and poorly connected members of the RUF, and none received a reintegration package. Therefore, as administrators assumed that RUF fighters would be generally uneducated, some of the least educated RUF members, to whom the programs were specifically targeted, were denied access to reintegration programs because RUF commanders had not thought them clever enough to bear arms.

At the same time as they assumed a low education level for armed combatants, the social rehabilitation programs offered in the north by the INGO World Vision included only the most basic training in reading, writing, and arithmetic. The lessons taught were so rudimentary they assumed that most of the participants would have never held a pen before, nor know how to count from one to one hundred. The majority of men who had been conscripted by the RUF while secondary school students found this program insulting, especially as some of them had taught adult literacy classes in RUF bush camps. Indeed, no one among my interlocutors had participated; many scoffed that the program was worthless.<sup>85</sup> The one man who could have benefited was an illiterate mule who had not been given a disarmament package, could not prove that he was “war affected” or “displaced” by producing school documents from another district, and was thus not eligible for the program (see Gale, 2007: 360).

The DDR program offered training in trades such as tailoring, carpentry, and driving. There are as many theories as questions as to why the UN recommended these particular skills to ex-combatants who were largely from rural areas. Richards (2005: 16) believes that the UN did not really intend for ex-combatants to return to the rural areas with these skills, rather they were an “elaborate distraction” that would allow the peace process to take hold. Most ex-combatants I spoke to thought the UN was making the same assumptions as were being argued by residents of Makeni, namely that by training ex-combatants in skills they could employ themselves with immediately, they would remain occupied and fed, and idleness and criminal thoughts would not come into play. In any case, most ex-combatants did not pursue the option of returning to formal

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<sup>85</sup> In Niger, in contrast, Tuareg rebels, who were assumed to be universally illiterate and “naturally” fighters, were reintegrated strictly into the national military (Alidou, 2006: 62).

education, and decided that participating in a skills course with their friends during which they would receive living allowances and toolkits to be the most prudent course of action.

Most men I interviewed said the UN had promised to set them up in their chosen fields with tools and materials at the end of the course, and the possibility of starting a business was why most of them pursued this reintegration option.<sup>86</sup> What they found at the end was that the promised businesses never materialized. Some were given toolkits for their trades, but the UN forbid them from setting up a business with their fellow reintegrated combatants, lest they begin to plot revolution again. They were not skilled enough to compete in the marketplace in Makeni with tradesmen that had been working for ten or twenty years. Most had nothing to show for their training aside from a certificate from the UN, and all master tradesmen in Makeni knew by that time that the UN training, at only six months and taught by disinterested trainers, was sub-par, and refused to hire UN-trained people. Many would only hire youth who had been in their employ as apprentices for several years, and these boys came to them through their friends and neighbors, with whom they had long-standing relationships (see also Berry, 1985: 142-143). The DDR participants, having no local social or kin networks, poor training and, often, no toolkits, were left without any employment options.

Initially I asked people around town how the ex-combatants were managing with their skills training, many sniffed derisively that most of them had sold their toolkits, which was proof of their “uselessness.” They had received the means to develop, and they had scoffed at this and sold everything in order to buy beer. When I later discussed with these men what had happened with their retraining programs, many revealed that, “the DDR guys never burst the D.” Many showed me their DDR identification cards, and one explained that the four letters on the card, A through D, represented different stages of the reintegration program, and different allowances that went with each. “A” was the initial payment for handing over a weapon, and included basic personal items such as a bowl, blanket and soap. “B” was burst when a man started a training program, “C” when he was at the three-month mark, for which he received another allowance, and “D” as the final “graduation” from the program, which involved the delivery of the skill-specific

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<sup>86</sup> Peters, writing about reintegration in southern Sierra Leone (2006: 125), stated that ex-combatants getting toolkits was crucial to their potential to find employment because in spite of one’s training, one cannot get hired for a job without having his own tools.



“toolkit.” Those men who had not received their “toolkits” worked in the more esoteric skill sets, such as computer hardware and software, and driving. None of the drivers received their licenses, crucial for any man attempting to find work in a vehicle he does not own, and no computer hardware trainees received even a screwdriver. Though they had their certificates, “the lorry owner would not even talk to me after I could not show him my license,” said one. “I spent six months with the UN doing nothing.”

Of those who trained in carpentry, most received their toolkits. However, one stated categorically that when the training is inadequate and advertised as such with the certificates, and the market is already saturated with skilled tradesman, then you either sell your toolkit to buy food or they will bury you with it once you starve to death. He had asked for a position as a trainee with eight different carpentry workshops in town, and because he had only a UN certificate and no one to vouch for him, was turned down at every place. Peters, who conducted research in Bo and Kenema districts in the south and east, feels the DDR organizers designed the retraining programs to fail in order to retain a supply of cheap unskilled workers for the diamond mines. Rural ex-combatants could be given a “fancy” diversion from war for long enough for the peace process to take hold, but that was all they were designed to do (2006: 122-129).

Skills such as computer training, which many men in Makeni chose, were only offered in reintegration centers with a large number of top-level commanders. Peters states that the UN wanted to ensure their cooperation in the DDR process, and so offered skills that would not insult their command positions in the RUF (2006: 125).<sup>87</sup> Once the process was complete, semi-skilled, unemployed and stigmatized ex-combatants would be forced back to the diamond fields where their labor would be cheap. Hanlon, analyzing the DDR offices in Freetown, states that because the UN assumed that most ex-combatants in Sierra Leone would be absorbed into the informal sector once they had been trained, they only paid lip service to agriculture. By leaving these young men once again angry, dispossessed, and bereft of options, DDR was recreating the preconditions for war (2005: 466-467). This supports Peters’ contention that most, without skills or the

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<sup>87</sup> This situation leads me to wonder what the DDR public affairs officer meant when he told me that ex-combatants need “legitimate” income-generating activities (see Carayannis, 2006: 192).

capital to farm, would end up once again as frustrated impoverished miners, an occupation engaged in before the war by youth who could not afford to stay in school.

However, many ex-combatants, especially the older ones who had been members of the RUF when it organized agriculture in Kailahun, in the eastern jungle, did want to pursue farming, which was the occupation they knew best. They had all learned to farm as children in their villages, many had farmed during the war, and the United Kingdom Department for International Development (DfID) had enjoined many of them on cooperative farming projects designed as reconciliation exercises in the local villages immediately after disarmament. They had built relationships with the farmers in the villages, and were eager to work on projects by which they could support themselves. Coming from a farming tradition in the south and east, they said, they could still use their skills, as there could never be enough food grown in the area. In spite of the fact that, without local kin ties, they had to sharecrop the land on which they were farming, they wanted to do so. Even farming on someone else's land was better than starving to death. However, as of the end of my research, aside from the CBO that was working with a local village to encourage cooperative farming, none had started their own farms.

Even if the DDR lacked the sinister intentions that Peters espouses, it is indeed reinforcing previously extant economic conditions. No matter the intent, poor execution of the program combined with a saturated marketplace into which these semi-skilled workers were released and expected to prosper doomed it from the start, as one man who was trained in computer hardware asked, "how am I meant to use this skill in a town with no electricity?" These programs took semi-educated farmers and, assuming they were uneducated, taught them trades in a trade-saturated environment. In the concomitant absence of the ability to return to school, this encouraged those who did not immediately return to the diamond fields to return to farming to make a living. This means that aside from occupying and turning "ex-combatants" into consumers of aid money for the six months of their reintegration, the DDR program had few positive effects.

**The middle ground of "self-reliance:"  
negotiating a way from consumption to production**

I organized this chapter around the similarities between the disabled and ex-combatants in order to highlight the fact that social stigma arises in cases where individuals are perceived as producing no good for their families or community. Thus can the disabled, whether polio victim or amputee, be examined in parallel to the “ex-combatant” whose economic stigma arose alongside their creation as a category. Both groups are prevented from being even “statistically normal” people struggling in a backward place, because they are socially constructed in the wake of the war as “useless” consumers of resources, whatever the source. It is only hard work and productive activity that creates the statistical normal—that is, the average poor person engaged in marginally profitable enterprises—and erases “uselessness,” though in many cases, this activity must come money specifically earmarked for “development” rather than “charity.” The main problem with accomplishing this transition is that there is so little money circulating in the community that most people cannot think about the future, about self- or community development. One must fill one’s belly first. The term people use to bridge the gap between “development” and “charity” is “self-reliance,” by which one, though not yet capable of “self-development,” at least depends on no one else for support.

*Occupying the disabled: the battle between present and future needs*

If the work of the ex-combatant has become attempting to start cooperative farming in order to become “self-reliant,” the work of the disabled has been to convince their fellow disabled that they can use incoming money to become “self-reliant,” instead of treating it like charity. I stated earlier that the disabled were defined by their sanctioned begging, namely that even though the townspeople did not like disabled people on the streets hassling them for money, it was accepted that this was how they made their living. Amputees in the villages have gained the respect of the chief by taking the aid money the NRC gave them and using it for “development.” Other disabled people, such as the blind and polio victims, were not given special treatment after the war, and so, unlike the people who benefited from aid, must create means to make a living without an initial input of resources. The main obstacle they face is the notion now held by the able-bodied community that disabled people are not only useless, but also untrustworthy because

charity breeds irresponsibility. Disabled organizations housed at the DAAG, such as the PVA, are actively engaged in creating opportunities in order to earn the erasure of their stigma as useless, though the obstacles standing in the way of this, from both the able-bodies and their own disabled companions, are monumental.

Polio victims have lost their development center, which was burned by the RUF, and in the years after the war no other “development” organization came to help them restart it. What was the “Polio Victims’ Development Association” in the 1990s was reformed in Makeni in 2003 as the Polio Victims’ Association (PVA), and they are struggling to find donors to build a new center for them. The chairman was continually frustrated in his attempts to find money. He commented that Sierra Leonean NGOs did not want to give money to the disabled because, since they were overlooked in the aid boom and forced to resort to begging to make ends meet, “we are just seen as beggars now”. They have dropped into the ideological realm of beggar/consumer who will just *chɔp* money they are given and not use it for collective development programs, which Sierra Leonean NGOs make a distinction between, as they are development organizations and not charities. Taking productive money and making it unproductive is morally unsound practice; it is gravely stigmatized. He wonders if a high-profile disabled organization somewhere else in the country “chewed” money recently, staining every disabled organization’s reputation.

It is difficult for the disabled to overcome the supposition that they *chɔp* everything that comes their way. In Sierra Leonean discourse, the two are completely non-overlapping philosophies of money use. If one is a charity case, he categorically lacks the ability to be concerned about the future, and can only be trusted to *chɔp* everything he receives.<sup>88</sup> If one can “develop,” then all money, whether used for food or other things, is ideologically geared towards that end. This is why no one who had not visited the villages believed that amputees, who had accepted so much international aid during the war, were using the money to develop themselves; “real work” does not come

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<sup>88</sup> For a similar discussion, see June Nash’s *We Eat the Mines and the Mines Eat Us* (1993). Among Bolivian tin mine workers, there is no escape from the cycle of poverty created by working in the mines. The workers and their families only consume the wages eked out of the mines (we eat the mines), never managing to “get ahead” and develop themselves. They can only do so as long as their health does not fail due to silicosis or they are themselves consumed in mining accidents (the mines eat us).

from charity (see Zelizer, 1997: 133). This is also why the disabled are generally “useless:” a disability by its nature is assumed to preclude productive activity. One of the PVA chairman’s main causes was conducting awareness campaigns advertising the skills of his fellows among the able-bodied. He promotes their productive capacity—in essence the fact that their only social problem is not their disability, but their current lack of employment (see Zelizer, 1997: 189).

I posit that the attitude among able-bodied people that the disabled are only charity cases, which makes it nearly impossible for them to get money from national NGOs, which had formerly funded their programs, has developed as a result of being overlooked by INGOs for funding during the war. The loss of the disabled center forced the disabled out on the street, and, lacking the start-up capital to rebuild and return to productive enterprise, most turned to begging. In the eyes of the able-bodied, this slide into charity completely precludes future productive activity, their past productivity notwithstanding. Aside from the DAAG chairman, the disabled themselves have largely forgotten about what they have lost, as they must concentrate on the present. When the PVA received a large donation from a local philanthropist for a new center, most of the members wanted to *chɔp* the money, according to the chairman. He ignored them and purchased three acres of land for a new center. This caused an uproar as some members were hoping the money would be divided among them for personal use. When the chairman approached a national NGO about assisting them with construction, he was ignored, because he says someone slandered the name of the disabled community to their project manager. The manager was told the disabled were untrustworthy and would not use the buildings in the intended manner. The stigma, though new, had preceded them. The chairman, frustrated by how the actions of a few other disabled has poisoned his attempts to create development, possesses what Goffman would term “ambivalence” towards the disabled who are happy to take charity and *chɔp* all the money they receive: he is repelled by instances when other disabled “eat” money, as they are proving the stereotype—accepting the pronouncement of moral diminishment—that makes his task more difficult, but ashamed that he feels this way about his “own people” (1963: 107-108). He struggles to encourage them to work, to strive to be visibly “useful.”

The troubles that the PVA had dealing with INGOs did not end with their supposed propensity to *chop* money intended for development. Many of the gestures they got from INGOs in my time there were only offers of charity. Indeed the most well-intentioned, if naïve gestures, of organizations who had come to Sierra Leone to work on war recovery chafed against the sensibilities of the disabled, who felt they were being pigeon-holed into their status as charity cases by organizations who, once they discovered them, offered them “spare change” instead of development programs. During one PVA meeting, an argument erupted over whether or not they would accept one INGO’s offer of a coach for their soccer team. Amputee soccer had become a major draw for international journalists writing from Sierra Leone after the war,<sup>89</sup> and the PVA members were upset that other organizations were trying to jump on the bandwagon of international exposure by throwing their lot in with the disabled. Besides, some players argued, what could an able-bodied person teach the disabled about soccer that they did not already have to make up for themselves?

The chairman was arguing that any organization that wanted to involve itself with the PVA was a good thing, especially in light of other organizations’ refusal to assist them because of their reputation as “money choppers.” An international organization’s involvement with the disabled was a contested issue for polio victims because it was a tug-of-war: are they accepting charity or can they prove to the community that they are using a donation for development? In the end, the players’ objection to the coach was upheld, for their pride in not wanting to be circus clowns for international journalists, and considering the fact that the coach was just a one-time offer and that no money was likely to follow for on-going programs. Refusing international charity reinforced their sense of pride in their ideological stance towards development, and that they would only accept assistance for development projects. They then put their effort into an application for a micro-credit scheme sponsored by a national NGO.

The only organization with which the DAAG is currently nurturing a relationship is the Christ Salvation Army Charity, an organization that came to Makeni after the war in order to open a primary school for disabled students and the children of disabled

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<sup>89</sup> Dixon (*Lost Angeles Times*, 2006) stated that she was one of several journalists who had been following the Freetown Amputee Soccer Club for several years.

parents. The organization calls itself a charity, but the disabled do not mind this designation because the organization is offering them a chance for development through education. A native of Makeni who had been living in Baltimore for many years runs the program, as decided after the war to start a charity through his Catholic Church in Baltimore in order to assist disabled people in Makeni. He bought the house next to mine and moved to Makeni permanently. And, symbolically, the school was opened in a new building on the grounds of the former disabled center. The school is operated entirely on donations from abroad, but the staff is local. The idea of the school, according to the chairman of the PVA, is to get the disabled “on board” with education, because they had neither the desire to engage in it or the ability to do so in the past.

The school is free, including uniforms and supplies, and is open to disabled children and the children of disabled parents who cannot afford to send their children to standard primary schools. The school also has a disability aspect to the curriculum, to acquaint the students with the problems of being disabled, like the stigma that they or their parents suffer because they are disabled, and overcoming this through activity. “We are able, just differently able!” stated a sign in Class One. The best example to the children is the school staff, as the principal and many of the teachers are themselves disabled. Classes are small and the learning pace quick. After listening to a Class Three student read from a novel, I developed the impression that these students receive a higher quality education than do those students in standard primary schools. Unlike in standard schools, they had supplies such as workbooks and pens, and their teachers were paid directly by the charity. When classes are small, teachers are paid well and on schedule, and children are active participants in their learning, greater successes are achieved.

The principal pointed out these facts to me, though he said that the school’s biggest obstacle was the resistance of members of the disabled community itself. Disabled parents who had not received an education and still managed to live day to day and raise a family saw no value in it. The blind and wheelchair-bound parents that relied on their children to lead them around town in order to do their begging resisted most strongly. Those adults whose children are in school have no one to take them around and help them approach likely looking people to ask for alms, and so sit at home. They need their children in order to make a living, and when the child is in school, no one eats at the

end of the day. This is why, according to the principal, not only did the school need to find money to provide school lunches, they also needed to train disabled parents in income generating schemes.<sup>90</sup> Without involving the whole family of a disabled person in programs, a well-intentioned program can actually do more harm than good.

The principal stated that the school could not stand on its own forever, as they only received a certain contribution every year from the church in Baltimore, and the disabled community itself would bring it down in the end if the aforementioned needs were not met. As homebound disabled parents grew frustrated with the fact that concentrating on future development through education meant that no money came into the household every day, they would pull their children out of school. Three blind men had already done so, as they relied on their daughters to lead them around town everyday and help them to approach likely looking people so that they could ask for assistance. One of the teachers had been tasked with visiting the parents to beg them to let their daughters return to school, but had, after a week, remained unsuccessful.

The worst part, noted the principal, was that once the disabled parent had passed away, the able-bodied child would be left with nothing, as they had neither education nor a disability that would allow them to beg for themselves. In this case, the disabled could not concentrate solely on development and the future, because it precluded the survival of the family in the present. Simultaneously, ensuring the survival of the family in the present sacrificed the future for the able-bodied child, who would possess no “mark” that would sanction their begging. However because the disabled could not *chop* the school offerings in addition to using it for personal development (such as if the school provided lunches for the whole family and not just the child), they had no platform on which to begin moving the community towards self-sufficiency. It was only the will of the children to stay in school that would carry it through, according to the PVA chairman.

Disabled people in Makeni are caught in a tug-of-war to balance the needs of the present with concern for the future, and on this matter they are constantly struggling with their fellows and national NGOs who are suspicious of their intentions for aid money.

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<sup>90</sup> In Kano, Nigeria, individual members of the Physically Handicapped Association of Nigeria have raised funds to send disabled children to school to provide them with an alternative to begging both at the present and in the future (Renne, 2006). Unlike the DAAG’s drive to send able-bodied children of the disabled to school, in Nigeria, education does not conflict with the wellbeing of the family.



They need some charity in order to meet the needs of the present while planning for the future, but do not want to be additionally stigmatized by this need. It is this money that would give them the space to be concerned with the future that is “self-reliance.” One who is only able to meet his needs through charity is morally diminished because he cannot think about the future and is not “development-minded.” Because beggars are willing to rely on charity, they are perceived by those others as accepting a life of chopping money to meet their minimal daily consumption needs. These needs must be met first, as development cannot occur to the detriment of feeding the family every day, however what the DAAG chairman is so adamant must happen is that the disabled are not seen as “useless,” even if some of them are reduced to begging because no one has ever addressed their abilities and the possibility that they could “develop.” Perhaps, he mused one day, they could stop calling the money they requested “charity,” and consider it “self-reliance” so that everyone who took the money would *fil shem* if they just “chopped” it instead of using it for small enterprises, perhaps even a box. From there, they could, without the desperation that characterizes every beggar’s interaction with a potential donor, ask for “development money” to build a new center and start more training programs. In order for the disabled community to remove the stigma of “only eating, and not producing,” they must first find ways to eat food they provide themselves through “self-reliance,” and from there can think about development.

*The ex-combatants who remain in Makeni: paths to self-reliance and development*

The majority of the ex-combatants disarmed and re-integrated in the area chose to stay in the town rather than return to their home villages. The two main reasons people outside of Makeni give for ex-combatants remaining in the town are that the ex-combatants committed so many atrocities in their home areas that they are afraid to go home for fear their families will kill them out of shame for what they did;<sup>91</sup> and the people in Makeni welcomed them so they feel at home there. Many Makeni people have a different

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<sup>91</sup> Richards (1992: 5) saw that the war as “defiling and tearing up *habitus*,” making it impossible for teens who had committed atrocities to return home. Ellis (1999: 131), expounded this for ex-combatants in Liberia, whom he claims were afraid of going home because of the potential for retributions for the atrocities they had committed.

understanding of why so many ex-combatants chose to remain in the town, and it has more practical foundations. Many residents came to the town with the expectation that it would be easier to find employment in an urban environment than in the village, and the hopes of ex-combatants are no different. They refuse to return home having been away for so many years and yet failing to make anything of their lives, especially considering how they received specific self-development training from the United Nations (see McKay, 2006: 157, for a similar perspective for female returnees). The shame of having failed to succeed with their opportunities was too much to bear (see van der Geest, 1997: 540; Lammers, 2005: 623). Most fear that their families expect them to be able to provide, as they had been so favored by donors, and they are perpetually unable to do this for lack of employment. That is why they remain in Makeni.<sup>92</sup>

Those ex-combatants who left Makeni town comprised three types of people: those who had committed so many atrocities in the township that they could not stay for fear of retribution from people in town, those who had a better life waiting for them (including children or family members that could provide support) elsewhere in the country, and those who had nothing to keep them in Makeni, be that friends, job prospects, or other attachments. One ex-combatant tells it this way:

We can stay here now, peacefully. Of course in any community there must be bad people. Some ex-combatants, they are wicked. And due to their behavior during the war, most of them did not stay here. They were afraid of their shadows. So most of them went home. BD

In other words, it is the reverse of perceptions outside Makeni. The former RUF men stated that those who stayed are not the “wicked” ones who have anything to be afraid of, either from their families at home or their neighbors in Makeni. The “wicked boys” left after the DDR programs ended, but did not return home either. They went where no one

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<sup>92</sup> The ex-combatants that I know are the most articulate, sane, and confident individuals among those who remain. There are many who have gone crazy from their experiences and live in Makeni because someone has taken pity on them and taken them in. One young lady sits on her front porch in her underwear smoking cigarettes, and chases and beats any child who taunts her. Another youth works occasionally as a bouncer at the local nightclub, though he is under the control of a “brother” who took him in after disarmament when it was clear that he was not functioning soundly and could not look after himself.

knew them or their history; many are in Freetown.<sup>93</sup> The men who stay in Makeni were making friends among the local population from the time of the occupation.

Those who stayed have positive reasons to be in Makeni. With the influx of “transition” money, many ex-combatants started their own families in town. Their wives’ families were happy with their contributions, and life was good. As importantly, some of them had found employment and had no reason to return to the south, even though they knew the government, and even their families, wanted them to return home:

Someone from the SLPP came in saying that if people want to go back to their homes then they can go. So I went to Bo to see my family, and then I came back.

C: Why did you come back?

Well, I had my job in Makeni [he was formerly a security guard for an INGO].

C: Did your family want you to stay in Bo?

Yes, they even told me if I decide one day to come back to Bo that they are ready to receive me, and do I still want to stay away from them? And I said that I want to stay in Makeni because I want to achieve more. You see? Because if I stay closer to them, I will not be able to achieve everything I want to do unless I leave them out. I need to plan for myself and so I came back here. KD

Many of his friends felt the same way, and refused to move back to their natal villages because they would have to support ailing parents and families that expect them to take care of them. This expectation lies especially heavily on ex-combatants because they have had extensive experience outside of the village are considered wiser in the ways of the world than those at home, they had received government money during reconstruction, and have received skills training through which, it is assumed, they could take care of the family. Utas (2005a: 149) found a similar pattern in Liberia. However, unlike MS, most were unable to find employment, even in urban centers like Makeni. They did not leave the town because they are afraid that the same idleness combined with fewer opportunities would greet them in their villages:

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<sup>93</sup> A similar pattern was purpose-built into the new Sierra Leonean army. Those mutinous soldiers who had committed atrocities in Makeni and were re-absorbed into the new army after the war were posted to the town of Kabala, which had been successfully defended from the RUF by the army. The army has a good reputation in Kabala, and civilians have no fear of soldiers.

RS: Right now I am very concerned for my future because I don't have anyone to hold me and teach me how to stand. When you are all alone, you just sit down because you don't have the momentum to move. For that you need assistance. And time is not waiting for me, I am just getting older. I cannot wait forever for someone to find me and give me a lift.

CB: So you don't have any family or friends that can assist you?

RS: I have friends and good neighbors here in Makeni, but no one has any money to help themselves, let alone to give each other assistance. We support each other small-small when we can, but that is all we can do. No one is a sponsor here.

CB: And your family?

RS: I have family in Liberia and Kailahun, but they are all poor, and I can't go to them anyway because the cost of transport is too much. And what would I do there once I arrived? I would just be sitting down idle again.

As Utas found in Liberia, "to return in rags was not an option" (2005a: 150), so most men remain in town, hoping for a project that could first make them "self-reliant." Others have their wives and children living elsewhere but have decided to stay in Makeni so that they can "improve themselves" with the opportunities, such as schooling, that are not available elsewhere.

SM: My wife is [in Kailahun], and she is staying together with my brothers and sisters there.

CB: But you chose to stay here to go to Makeni Teachers' College?

SM: Yes, well, yes, because of the opportunity and chances for education, so that I can also get something to do, and support them there. You see, because there it is not easy. So if I was there myself... the chances I had there... it wouldn't have been easy if I had decided to go up to Kailahun. Maybe I wouldn't have the chance to even think of coming to have a higher [teaching] certificate, you see? So I believe that achievement will bring success, that I will be able to help the family better. Then we all go and sit down together in one place, we begin to look at each other at the end of the day and nothing bad will come of it [no fighting because of lack of money]. So I am fighting to place the family on a better map. So with the little better education that I am trying and establishing, I will be able to help the other younger ones that are behind.

Those who stayed in Makeni did so not out of fear of going home, but because their networks and prospects were better in a town in which they had resided for three years than in remote villages they may not have lived in for ten years. They were more comfortable with their new “families” than with their natal families. Time and experience had removed all sense of the common kinship that is created by living together, eating together and supporting each other, which they had done solely with other combatants for nearly a decade. So when they went home, it was only for a visit so that the family would not worry about them any longer.

After I did my DDR training program in tailoring, I went back to see my people here in Makeni [he was captured while mining diamonds in Kono and came to Makeni with the invasion in 1998], now that I was not with the rebels and we had all been reintegrated. They had no problems with me but they were still a little bit afraid, only because I had been away for so many years that they didn't know what had happened to me. So I had to explain everything to them about where I had been and what I had done, and then it was okay... TA

TA, along with many of the other ex-combatants who are friends, also decided to break from their families temporarily because the burden would be on them to assist financially, and at the present they cannot fill this role. With the unemployment in Makeni, they are trying to create their own opportunities so that they can have the financial foundation on which to stand, and then perhaps they will return to their natal families to fulfill their obligations in the future:

I went to visit my mother at home, and she also came to visit me one time. But what I see it is very difficult to live in my village. This is because my father, my family house was burnt down leaving my mother to usually sleep in the kitchen. And up till now I have no chance to take care of them, that is why I am far away from them, to find the ways and means that I will get somehow to see how best I can take care of them in the future, really. But for now there is no better way to do that. So what I decided is that... we are trying to regroup ourselves to start this line of agriculture. That is our present plan for now, because you see we had engaged in these things before [the war, when they all lived in farming villages]... Even in the war, as I stated we were in sector agriculture where we were feeding ourselves and our civilians and our private families. DS

DS and several others live together and trying to establish an agricultural self-reliance CBO. These men know how to farm, and with the lack of job opportunities in Makeni,

believe it is the only way they can make money for themselves and their kin. Being within range of the demands of their kin in the meantime would not further this aim, so they stay in Makeni. For many, time and distance has alienated the men from their relatives to the point where they remain in Makeni out of choice. For others, there was no reason for them to move and they remain in Makeni out of inertia. Either way, they blend into the social fabric of Makeni because they possess *kol at*, a “cool heart,” that means they are committed to living as peaceful citizens.

**Conclusion: easing into usefulness with a self-reliant *kol at***

The chairman of the Leprosy Association emphasized to me that people should not stigmatize the disabled because it should be clear that they are “hardworking, just like everyone else.” Though he cannot do manual labor because of his disease, he can be useful, as he can ride a bicycle and occasionally works as a messenger. He then emphasized that he is happy to go hungry every night if it means he can keep all of his children in school. He believes firmly, as does the DAAG chairman, that the stigma of the disabled can be overcome through proof that they can look after themselves and their families, and even develop. Though poverty is just as much an obstacle to success for the disabled as it is for able-bodied people, the disabled simply struggle with the additional burden of being thought of as diminished because disability offers the possibility of relying on charity. Immediately after the war, with their center destroyed, they did rely on charity. Like able-bodied civilians and former RUF in an impoverished environment, the disabled must think about filling the needs of the present before they can think about the future. They struggle under the added burden of the assumption that being a sanctioned beggar/consumer means they possessed a diminished moral bearing.

On my first trip to Makeni in 2003, I struggled to understand why people in Makeni did not live in fear or hatred of ex-combatants who had remained in town, which was the assumption that Western academics and organizations alike had made when it was clear that ex-combatants were not returning home en masse. I spent a lot of time talking to a policeman who lived next door to a man who had been one of the main RUF commanders. This man fled from Makeni on foot with his family when the RUF

occupied the town because the commanders had threatened to execute police officers, whose presence signaled a challenge to their authority. He stated that there were no ex-combatants in the town, and nothing to cause people continued fear or hatred. His neighbor had a family he was supporting, he participated in community events; he had a *kol at* [cool heart, free of anger or hatred]. Though his experience with his neighbor was not universal among residents, it was not unusual. A different man refused to speak to his neighbors, who he remarked were still ex-combatants because “they are still very wicked. They sit idle all day and smoke marijuana, I do not see them working. Probably they are stealing their living.” The fact that these men had not renounced the “wickedness” of their wartime habits such as smoking, that they were not productive, that there was friction with their neighbors, meant they were still “ex-combatants.” Those who struggle under honest, everyday poverty are just like everyone else. This is quite different from what Buckley-Zistel found in Rwanda, where “chosen amnesia” about the causes of the genocide meant that people could live in harmony in the present; namely that the government was deliberately re-framing people’s moral bearings so as to create harmony (2006: 134). The “ex-combatant” has not been completely erased from consciousness in Makeni; rather people can choose to inhabit certain dispositions, and be known by those dispositions and their actions to others.

What the former commander had done during the war was inconsequential to the present because he chooses to uphold the morals expected of full adults. This is not only because the war and the DDR program that had singled him out as an ex-combatant were finished, but because the man had been absorbed into the fabric of his community socially and economically. When I went to visit him, his wife, a native of Makeni, greeted me. She asked me to wait for the man a few minutes, as he was at a neighbor’s house offering condolences for the loss of a family member. He had just returned from Freetown, where he ran the RUF Party political office and worked with the Special Court to make sure his jailed compatriots had fair trials. There was no anger in his heart. He drew a salary and his family was spending that money in the township. He and his family did not threaten other residents with errant behavior evocative of wartime, and consequently were not stigmatized.

The “ex-combatants” I was friendly with who had organized themselves into cooperative farming CBOs were struggling to achieve this: though they did not practice any anti-social war-time habits such as drunkenness or marijuana smoking, their efforts to create a CBO had yet to come to fruition. Though they were committed to “community development” and “self-reliance” and undertook work towards this end in the international development milieu, they were struggling under the constraints of the fact that the ways INGOs worked in Makeni was enhancing extant power structures, to which they were not attached, and suspicious of any self-propelled development projects that might simply be a cover for “eating” development. However, because they have had so much experience with INGOs and international donors, they, more than anyone else in the community, are in a position to try to use INGO money and programs to build satisfactory futures for themselves. Though they actively critique extant structures of development for dictating the terms of their integration, doing it badly and thus disabling them, these former RUF members find that their only options for funding their own future development lie with their ability to effectively tap INGOs as a resource. However, concurrently with their efforts to work with INGOs to produce self-reliance and development, they find themselves butting heads with these same organizations. INGOs, skittish because of the violence that runs as a consistent undercurrent to bringing a limited amount of money, most of whose uses were pre-determined, into an impoverished locality where people fight to extract the most good for themselves from INGOs’ offerings, are wary of any locally produced ideas of what constitutes “development.” I address this in the final chapter.



## **Chapter Seven**

### **Doing good and doing harm: The moral ambivalence of INGO activity**

I begin this chapter with two episodes involving INGOs in Makeni that illustrate the profound ambivalence people feel about their operations in the township and district. Medecins Sans Frontiers (MSF) had been instrumental in maintaining health care services in Makeni from the time the war ended through to 2004, as their traveling midwife/nurse visited a weekly rotating schedule of clinics in Bombali district, often running an ambulance back to down to Makeni to their indomitable doctor, a tireless Burmese man who cheerfully ran Makeni's government hospital seemingly by himself. The government hospital sign had "supported by Medecins Sans Frontiers" painted over the top, and never a day went by when there weren't throngs of people sat on the front stoop, waiting patiently for a chance to take their children to the doctor, who worked mainly in the pediatric ward. However, in August 2004, word came from the MSF head office in Freetown that because Makeni was no longer in "crisis state," their mandate in the area had effectively ended and all program operations would be phased out within three months. I had a conversation with the midwife, who was exasperated by this development as she had just gotten three of her pre- and post-natal clinics in the district fully operational, and was concerned that all her efforts would fall to pieces the moment MSF withdrew and no one stayed to ensure that the Ministry of Health would continue to support the programs she had initiated, or pay the people who ran them. But then again, she mused, if MSF just shouldered the load forever, the Ministry of Health would never have any incentive to do the work that it was meant to be doing, and MSF staying would mean the mansion the Health Minister was building in England would gain a new wing.

As MSF's program officer began holding workshops on resume writing and interview techniques with the staff, and looking for new placements for some of the best

of them, word traveled quickly to Makeni residents that MSF was leaving. As MSF employed two dozen people on good salaries, there was reason to be concerned, as now not only were they unemployed, but their dependents had lost their main form of income. A mild panic hit the town with the anticipated loss of medical services. More people than usual brought their children to the government hospital in October, the month MSF was scheduled to leave, hoping that if the doctor could cure a minor illness the child had, it was better than nothing. The day the office finally closed, a member of the hospital staff took some white paint to the sign, obliterating “Supported by Medecins Sans Frontiers” and the normally dense crowd in front of the hospital thinned. It was months still until the new Catholic hospital would be finished, and everyone knew that the Catholic Mission would charge fees; what would be the medical fate of Makeni’s desperately poor? A few days later I bumped into a jubilant interlocutor, who had heard that Fidel Castro had decided to send six Cuban doctors to Makeni to assist. They arrived to great fanfare a week later, and once again a dense queue formed around the entrance to the hospital. And once again, I thought, the Ministry of Health was relieved of their duties.

A different INGO (that will remain unnamed here) ran a much smaller, lower profile operation training volunteers in the community to be leaders of organizations promoting health and wellbeing among youth and children. Only two expatriates staffed the offices in Makeni, supported by a local staff of a driver and six security guards. The expatriates were uncomfortable with their situation; not only did the main office in Freetown have problems (it was run by a doctor with few organizational skills who had asked them to cut corners and save some money for the organization if they could), they were also nervous about their living and security situations. Their house/office had no compound; it was completely exposed in the neighborhood and not an hour went by without someone coming up to a window to ask for money, food, or other resources. Their security guards were not serious; one staff member was kept awake at night by the incessant snoring of one of the men who was supposed to patrol the perimeter for prowlers. Finally they asked several officers from the local detachment of the British Army to do an official assessment of their security situation so that they could submit a report to the head office in Freetown demanding that they be allowed to find a new

compound and move, and fire all of their security guards. The report was submitted, and their request to divest themselves of staff and move house approved.

The program director came up to Makeni personally to fire the security guards, and he offered them a large redundancy package. The two staff members moved in with another expatriate who ran a different INGO and had hired her own security guards. They now had only their driver as their local staff, and a vastly reduced program since they had complied with the main office's request to end all their programs in wards of Makeni and surrounding townships that were not producing results. A few days later their former security guards started sending them letters threatening violence if they did not receive their benefits, even though those "benefits" were social security benefits due at the age of retirement. A week later, the same former guards showed up at the NaSSIT office, nearly rioting as they demanded their "security money" that the INGO had paid into the fund, complying with the new national law that they pay social security for all their employees. NaSSIT's guards dispersed them, threatening police action if they did not go home peacefully. A few months later, a debate ensued on a local radio program when the disc jockey posed the question over the airwaves if this INGO should be asked to leave Makeni because they were not doing anything good in the township.

These two episodes illustrate not only the vast power differential between the expatriate staff of international NGOs and the local people who both work for them and depend on their services, but also the profound ambivalence over what good, and bad is done in and by the community concerning INGOs working in, and based from Makeni. There is an inherent undercurrent of violence to many of the relations between Makeni people and the NGOs based there. This is partly because INGOs are the greatest bearers of resources entering African communities (see Chabal and Daloz, 1999: 22), especially after wars. It is also because local people are powerless to make changes in their own community, or government, if an INGO that is filling a distinct need decides to leave. It also occurs at the level of who can consume and use INGO resources, and there are two categories of people: the "honest" employees whose kin networks suffer when a program ends, and those whose links to big people mean that the whole network is using their access to donor funds for their own gains, the "war profiteers" (see Chabal and Daloz, 1999: 22; Nordstrom, 2001: 216-239; Finnstrom, 2006: 12-15), though in this case it is

the “post-war profiteers.” In the first group are many people like cooks and drivers who depend on INGO salaries and experience the violence of a sudden loss of income on which they, and usually many kin, depend, causing enormous pressure on them to rectify a situation that they are powerless to do anything about. On the other side are the people who, according to one of my interlocutors, are only interested in “stealing the gains of war,” the profiteers that they came by their positions through their political networks, and are taking advantage of their position with INGOs to “eat” as much “development” as they can while the money is still flowing through those channels, as they know that those channels may eventually dry up. He includes in this category both expatriates who “eat” their organization’s money by using it all on logistics such as vehicles and luxuries in their homes, and local people whose main work is to find organizations and programs from which they can “eat,” whether this is by getting funding for bogus community-based organizations (CBOs), or by embezzling funds from large INGOs.

Their habits make it more difficult for honest people who want to work with INGOs and donors to fund worthy programs in the township and surrounding villages, not only because the village people who have been victims of bogus CBOs mistrust them, but also because NGO workers do not trust people abusing their program resources that they stop programs at a moment’s notice if there is any indication that the participants are not following the rules of the program to the letter and producing the desired results. Participants are almost always jockeying to change the programs they are offered, as most programs were striving for results that would recreate the despised pre-war conditions that sparked the war to begin with. One of the main public outcomes of this cycle of power differentials, eating and mistrust is the caricaturing of white people in song. Through the airwaves come the voices of a pop group unhappy with the results of many years of dubious European involvement in Sierra Leone, and the cycles of violence that result when Europeans treat local people like fools, while teaching the nation’s powerful people to “eat” the country’s resources. This lesson that is being reproduced at the local level, as the people in the township who gained power because of the war—those who through their educations and connections were able to get jobs or funding from INGOs—are flagrantly “eating” the resources provided by INGOs but meant for the poor, and thus sabotaging any chance that INGOs’ intended beneficiaries have of dialoguing

with program directors about what would be more useful programs, thus allowing them to create programs that are actually beneficial; programs that create the *ought*.

I argue in this chapter that the relationship between INGOs and the local people who work for them—both honest people and political animals—creates a new group of residents so dependent on the patronage they receive through their jobs (or the jobs of their kin) that they are both object and subject of an undercurrent of violence resulting from the transient, intransigent, and fickle nature of INGO programs. The limited scope of INGO jobs, and the fact that one usually must be connected in order to get them, is reinforcing the highly skewed social and economic power dynamics within the township that are one of the reasons people complain that the place is so “backward,” and that they cannot trust the “big people” in the town not to “chew” money and destroy the “community development” that INGOs might bring. Some people are in such precarious positions as INGO employees that the prospect of lost employment leads them to threaten violence against the very INGOs that employ them. No INGO intends to have this effect, and often must either suspend people or programs when it is clear that some individuals are “eating” the program, thus damaging any help they were giving their participants. However, while programs are operating, they create the conditions for people who are in the position to take advantage of their resources to “eat” as much as they want, while either extending benefits to no one else, or to such a small number of people as to create either jealousy or bitterness that the INGOs are not doing anything.

Those INGOs that are perceived as unambiguously good, like MSF, are those that provide direct benefits to the community, even though the provision of these benefits usually means that a ministry may be relieved of its duties entirely. Thus do these INGOs not create “development” in the community, or any capacity for “development,” rather they feed a good to the people for as long as they are around (see Nordstrom 2004: 67). The INGOs that suffer the most problems in the township are those that attempt to build “development” capacity, and thus leave the most room for individual negotiations of who will benefit the most from this “development.” The violence occurs in the mistrust and miscommunication that occurs between expatriates and their intended beneficiaries, as they view any uses of program resources that they did not intend as a misappropriation, and cancel programs because participants are not cooperating with

their terms. This makes it increasingly difficult for the neediest, and most honest, people to work with INGOs on their own terms, and contribute to program design and implementation with their own ideas about what “development” they really need, and what would really work. Thus are those people who really want to work with INGOs and the INGOs themselves often at an impasse. There is structural violence inherent the attention paid to a place and people by powerful actors intent on creating in people a certain kind of “development”, and forcing this idea on their intended targets (see Peluso and Watts, 2001: 6). Especially if their “targets” resist, or if the “development” has unintended side effects, actual physical violence, like threats of bodily harm over lost jobs, can often result.

I begin this chapter with an examination of the INGOs themselves: what they do, where they are in the township, when they arrived and if they have left when they did so and why. I will also look at whom they employ in Makeni, and how people who have the connections and resources to acquire schooling and skills are the greatest beneficiaries of INGO employment. I then examine the phenomenon of being “based” in Makeni, namely that many organizations that have their headquarters in the township do not run any programs there, which leaves residents with the impression that in fact they do not serve any purpose aside from spending money on themselves and their lucky employees.

I move to an analysis of what my friend FS calls “stealing the gains of war”. There are many people in Makeni who were able to hop on the INGO-CBO bandwagon to consume and channel resources to their network, perhaps making themselves a bit more “developed”, though also more socially vulnerable to demands and pulling down, and often sabotaging any chance that honest people or local organizations had to initiate or sustain any development programs, whether they embezzled from INGOs directly or merely used all the money they received to start their CBOs on themselves. I follow this with an analysis of those people who are still trying to work within the confines of the INGO “development” rubric, through submitting project proposals and jumping through the logistical hoops laid by INGOs as essential conditions for participation because they outline a group as “serious.” These people are often stymied by the dishonesty of others in the chain of communication, or by the incompatible desires of project participants and the INGOs, who are suspicious of deviations from the project design.

INGO ideas of projects that need to be implemented are rarely the same as local ideas of what projects need to be implemented, precisely because of different ideas on the “normal.” INGOs unwittingly assume that the “normal” that existed before the war is the desirable that should be recreated, while local people see “normal” life before the war as “backward:” it was highly impoverished, and the result of years of decline due to various factors such as educational migrancy and mining. They strive for an *ought*, a desirable “normal” future where everything that was missing from agriculture, for example, before the war is introduced, making life the way it should be instead of the way it was. Thus they dream of things like food while they are farming, and tractors so that they can replace missing labor, which INGOs balk at as unreasonable demands that smack of people wanting to “eat” the programs. This fruitless jockeying with INGOs means that people who have been disappointed by their experiences with INGOs now dream that the government will provide them with unambiguous goods, things like roads, that require no commitment to be or act a certain way on their part, which they can use to their own ends. They believe the government should understand that they need “encouragement” to thrive, rather than outsiders telling them what is good for them.

I finish with an analysis of the pop song *An'porto*, which was released in 2004 by a local group and serves as the medium through which Makeni people air their grievances with powerful people who have stolen the country's resources, whether Europeans or their own leaders. The singing group, and those who deploy the song in interactions with INGO workers, are trying to formulate a future for Sierra Leone where not only do the resources stay in the country and are used for the benefit of its people, but that those powerful people who have grown fat by “eating” everything themselves, and perhaps even taking it overseas, return and put their skills and education to work for the good of the country. They ask, in short, that having gone through such a terrible war, that the big people take the lead in addressing the failings of the very power structures from which they benefit—patrimonial politics—and lead the country in a new direction. Aside from gaining control of the country's vast resources, people desire things such seed stocks, food for work, mechanized agriculture, and roads; things that seem unambiguously good, encourage productive activity, and allow one to plan for a future. Starting by caricaturing the *is* created by white people in the past, which white people treat as the desired default,

they are asking for an *ought* initiated by their own big people; those who know what the county could and should be in the future.

### **A landscape of aid: mapping INGOs into the social and physical spaces of Makeni**

To understand how and why INGO-inspired “development” has had such an indelible imprint on the town, we must first examine their physical and social positions in the town; not just where they are located, but when they came, under what circumstances, who was funding them, and where they conduct their programs, in order to gauge the kind of effect they have on residents’ understandings about who “does” development, who are the recipients of development, and why. In this section I also analyze the linkage that INGOs have with the powerful actors in the town, for better or for worse, and how fragile the alliances that arise around development projects may be when they do not deliver the benefits that people were expecting, or cease delivering benefits on which people depended for their livelihoods. The tension this creates is partly to do with the sudden changes INGOs can make in the local economy through injecting and withdrawing money, but also in that it highlights for people in the town just how fragile are the gains made by even educated and connected people, and how prone to falling or being pulled down are those who can no longer deliver.

#### *Locating INGOs in space and time: imprint of foreign money on the town*

There is no “NGO ghetto” in Makeni, just as there is no one area of town where wealthy people live and congregate. It is a testament to Makeni’s past wealth as a trading hub in the region that there are many large buildings around town and on its outskirts, usually owned by people who are no longer residents in the town, and always at a rent much higher than people within the township could ever afford. These buildings are habitually leased and used by INGOs, and often these buildings circulate among them as their needs and program staff changes. Walking around town, I found that the headquarters of INGOs did not conform to any pattern. They were spread out everywhere, opportunistically occupying the town’s better buildings as they found them. Buildings are also often occupied by different INGOs successively. One building that was World



Vision's headquarters immediately after the war then became the personal home of the program director for a different INGO, and had stood empty for a year after World Vision departed and before the director moved in. He had previously lived in a house that was owned by a section chief, and once he left that house too was left standing empty. When the unfortunate INGO mentioned at the start of the chapter moved house, they occupied a building that had once been the home of some of the UN mission's first expatriate staff, and had since been standing empty. Another occupies the former headquarters of Rokel Leaf Tobacco in the center of town. Their refurbishing and moving into this compound, to great fanfare, signals the sea change that has occurred in the economy of Makeni since before the war. Rokel Leaf was the largest employer of white-collar workers in Makeni until they closed their doors in 1994, and though people hoped the operation would return once it was clear that the war was over, it never did. When the INGO took over the building, it signaled to people that Rokel would never return, and if white-collar workers wanted employment, they would have to work for INGOs instead. INGOs appear to people to occupy a higher echelon of buildings that would otherwise be abandoned because no one else can afford to take them.

These buildings bear the indelible mark of being "NGO buildings" because they come with amenities, like tiled floors, en-suite ablutions, and interior kitchens, which delineate them as much too expensive for local people to rent. Most of them were built by absentee landlords like Mr. B, the man who owned the PZ, and continued to make money in Makeni even though they no longer lived there. In essence, NGOs are supporting the "big men" whose wealth allows them to own buildings in Makeni while they live in Freetown, and it does little good in the community. Landlords in Makeni can demand an entire year's rent up-front as the tenant moves in, which makes living in one of these houses especially prohibitive for local people, many of whom can only afford, if they are renting a place, to negotiate paying the rent month-to-month. These houses are known to residents, even long after an INGO may have left, by that INGO's name.

Many INGOs are also intimately associated with the conditions and characters surrounding their arrival in Makeni during or after the war. The first INGO to reach Makeni, while the town was still occupied by the RUF, was Action Contre le Faim [Action Against Hunger, or ACF]. ACF's arrival in Makeni before it was declared safe

by the UN and SLPP government had everything to do with the fact that its regional program manager at the time was Musa Mansaray, former town council chairman. Mansaray had been working for ACF for many years in different parts of the country, but as a “native born son” of Makeni felt it was his duty to try and help his hometown, and so, after many tours of the town with ACF staff from Freetown, convinced them that not only did the township need food aid, but that it was also safe to bring it. His success in convincing ACF to come to Makeni and alleviate the severe suffering of malnourished residents solidified both his victory in his town council campaign and his selection as Town Council Chairman. However, as we saw in Chapter Two, his position as a “big man” was as transient as the food he brought to the town. INGOs do not, even with the reputations they can provide people, provide enduring good.

ACF’s arrival in the town was followed quickly by MSF, bringing medical aid to the townspeople, and World Vision, which was tasked with organizing the “social reintegration” programs for ex-combatants and war-affected youth, which I described in the previous chapter. The programs run by all three were in full blossom when I first arrived in Makeni in July 2003, though World Vision was coming to the end of its social reintegration programs, which were timed to run their course concomitantly with the end of the UN’s skills training programs. As the reintegration ended, NGO tasks shifted from providing aid to people: the food aid to vulnerable people that ACF provided, and the large tents of doctors and nurses providing medical treatment that MSF provided; and transitioned to “development” programs, such as “agricultural development.” The long-term “development” programs provided by different INGOs, such as CARE, were instituted. ACF shifted its focus to programs that built farming capacity in villages that it had determined were “vulnerable,” all of them many miles from Makeni, and scaled back their direct feeding operations in town to a small center that catered for children from the whole district that were deemed “severely malnourished.”

The fallout from this decision was immense. ACF had made the shift in its programs between “post-war aid” and “development,” and because it felt that the time was ripe to make this transition, did not anticipate any negative consequences, even though all the townspeople saw was their food aid disappearing and not being replaced with anything. According to van Gog’s analysis of NGO assistance to non-combatants in

Makeni in 2003, that most NGOs in the community regarded the people they worked with as receivers of aid, with themselves as the givers. They frame themselves as the saviors of the war's victims—helpless and vulnerable people—while the recipients perceived them as “alternative players in the socio-economic field,” namely organizations that fill the holes in social and economic services left by government (2006: 82). ACF assumed that when the war was several years past, “aid” was no longer necessary. However, the people were given no indication that this new provision would cease, because nothing had replaced it. Therefore, there was no reason for it to go away.<sup>94</sup>

What did not occur with the INGOs that arrived with the war's aftermath and yet persisted, though in different guises, was any clear-cut ideological transition from “aid” to “development,” whereby aid's recipients become development's “partners” (Crewe and Harrison, 1998: 70), and those people who had grown to depend on an input had it removed. ACF expected people in the township to understand that they were moving their efforts into “development-minded” programs, now that farming and trade could begin again locally and they were not needed to merely fill that hole in the provision of food. However, because neither ACF, nor the Ministry of Agriculture, nor any other organization, had moved in the meantime to supplement the farming that had not been taking place locally, it never happened to the extent that ACF imagined, and there was resentment both among local farmers, who got no inputs, and local people who were suddenly no longer “vulnerable” (which I elucidate more fully in the last part of this section). ACF hoped the “natural flow of human activity” would take its course, according to one employee. In essence, once the town was liberated, it would naturally be flooded by opportunistic traders with food and seed for sale and farming in the area would take its natural course, without any “NGO crutches,” in his words.

The people who had suddenly lost their food aid without anything to replace it were bitter about “losing” ACF, and to this day have no kind words for the organization.

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<sup>94</sup> I found this same attitude among former food aid recipients in Swaziland when I worked for WFP. WFP had initiated an “emergency feeding program” for five years beginning in 1965 due to a severe drought in the region, and the program was extended five times for periods of five years. The “emergency” had been going on for so long, according to one teacher I spoke to, that many people believed that WFP would always be there. The year WFP decided to end these programs, because the drought had long passed, was the time a new emergency started. Swaziland had an HIV infection rate of 35%, when I was there in 2001, resulting in an explosion of AIDS orphans who depended in donated food.

Equally bitter about the fleeting comings, goings, and program changes of INGOs are their former employees, many of whom tasted temporary security, which they enjoyed, and also great networks of people who came to depend on them. This is now causing them tremendous difficulties, not just because people who were essential supports in the local economy have lost their livelihoods, but also because they feel that as former INGO employees, they should be the first to be asked to rejoin new INGOs as they arrive. Many depend on their relationships with others who still work for NGOs, which is creating a class of people who, as current or former NGO employees, are the first to be hired by new organizations. They are becoming a new class of white-collar workers who, because they owe their positions and job security to so many people with whom they must share the benefits, sometimes defend their employment violently, even if their actions counter moves made by expatriates in the name of “community development.”

*Creating new expectations and new dependencies: becoming an INGO employee*

When the staff members from the small INGO mentioned at the start of the chapter moved into a house with another INGO director, her logistician had been tasked with hiring new security guards for their house. Five of the six men he hired were friends of his, and four of them had previously worked for other INGOs in other capacities at points in the past. All was well in the compound until word leaked from elsewhere in the organization that the security guard positions were only for six months, as the INGO was planning to phase out the post of international program director in Makeni and “nationalize” the post with a member of their staff that they had been grooming for the position. The guards were worried and upset, many voiced their hopes that this nationalization would fall through, that the financial controller would not be “up to the task” of taking the job so that the INGO would keep an expatriate on board and they could keep their jobs. One’s wife had just had a new baby, and he was concerned about the fallout from her kin if he could no longer support his growing family.

This episode highlights the precarious position of both INGO expatriates and their employees when it comes to the hiring and firing of Makeni residents. Indeed, for many men who have come to depend on these jobs, the jobs themselves are more important than any “community development” that might cause the program, or certain expatriates

for whom they work, to phase out, even though every INGO director will tell you that the INGO's goal in a country is to make itself redundant. As much as townspeople will say they do not want to depend on INGOs to bring the things that government or businesspeople should be bringing, no one is happy when an INGO phases out operations and leaves formerly dependable salary earners bereft of options for supporting their social networks. INGOs fill that hole that international businesses, like Rokel Tobacco (which was a subsidy of British-American Tobacco), or Orapa Mines in Lunsar (70 kilometers west of Makeni) left when they ceased operating. INGOs are partially filling the need for white-collar employment that arose once the war caused most international organizations to close their operations, however they are facing a much larger pool of people pursuing jobs than before the war, and they can only hire them on a much smaller scale, both temporal and numerically. This is creating problems for those people whose social networks are otherwise impoverished, especially if those networks contributed to the skills they needed to get their jobs.

In July 2004, just after I had arrived back in Makeni, I estimate that there were seven international NGOs working in Makeni, with an average local staff size of fifteen. The largest operation employed upward of thirty people, the smallest, five or six. This means that only around one hundred people in Makeni were drawing INGO salaries. According to two INGO managers, they did not want to "upset the levels of average income in Makeni," and so tried to *not* pay their staff too much more than they would make in other waged positions, say as a teacher or police officer. However, wages that often sat at 50% more than the wages earned by these professionals was more than any trader in Makeni makes in a month, and those wages always came on time. The jobs had other benefits, such as medical cover for their families and meals while they worked, which meant that there was no more desirable position to have than with an INGO.

When a vacancy opens up at any organization, such as Warchild, with whom my Krio teacher Foday had applied, there are often hundreds of people who apply for the position. Warchild was hiring for a filing clerk, and Foday had just taken his WASCE exams and come first in the province, meaning he was a natural candidate for Fourah Bay College. He was short-listed for the job with two other people, but in the end lost the job to a man who, though his educational qualifications were not as good, had formerly

worked for an INGO in Makeni, and was friendly with several members of the staff. Foday could not penetrate this glass ceiling, because he did not have the social networks required to get one of the few INGO positions open in the community. When he saw that this man was suddenly inundated by demands from his wife's family, who wanted to move into the house with them, he was relieved that he had been bypassed for the job.

INGO employment was both blessing and curse. Those people who have the connections to enter this world and draw regular salaries become completely vulnerable to the demands of their kin networks, and are often under tremendous pressure to provide for them. My research assistant Idriss asked me to keep his salary for him every month so that it would be "safe" from the desires and demands of his considerable extended family and he could save money for school fees. After several months of saving, he had enough to pay for a semester at college, and was thrilled. I gave him his savings when I left Makeni, only to find out later that a week after my departure his uncle died, and his father told him that it was his responsibility to pay for the funeral, as the only wage earner in the family. Returning to my analyses of market relations and kin relations, we recall that people are now only interested in entering relationships that are defined by mutual reciprocity, and when they improve themselves they try to do so quietly and morally, like the business owner who sold bulk rice at her cost, so that they are not targets of jealousy and demands. INGO employees, and those like Idriss who also work for expatriates, put themselves at considerable moral and personal risk by earning wages, as there is no way to justify not extending the benefits to their networks, unless, like "ex-combatants" or students who are actively "self-developing," they can physically and morally remove themselves from these networks by redefining their kin relations and their earnings. By inserting a few wage earners into a largely poor place, NGOs are putting great strain on kin relations, and forcing the issue of whether people decide to cut ties with their relatives and "self-develop," or if they will be pulled down by them if their earning situation changes.

These risks notwithstanding, multitudes of people, like the students from the Teachers' College who get teaching certificates so that they have some qualification to present to an NGO, are continually disappointed that they cannot find jobs with them. I listened to a conversation between several student teachers one day, while they were

ostensibly teaching at the primary school in which I conducted research. One had just been turned down for a job at an INGO, and said that he did not see any of the INGOs doing anything of value. “They ride around in their white SUVs all day, and what do they do? What are their programs in Makeni?” The consensus was that INGOs must spend all their money on their own staff, which meant that they never hired as many local people, nor conducted as many programs in the township, as they should. These concerns resonate with much of the extant research on the “purpose” of INGOs in Africa (see Chabal and Daloz, 1999: 23); namely that politicians allow INGOs to come to a community and tell them what need they are filling, as long as a few networks of people gain some benefit. To all appearances, the INGOs are not doing anything productive.

*Creating and filling needs, creating a sense of exclusion:  
reversing figure and ground*

What is it that INGOs located in Makeni do? In April 2005, I agreed to help a friend of mine, another anthropologist, who had been tasked by ACF to train “indigenous anthropologists” to go into food-poor villages and interview people about their lives, and find out what they really needed in order to raise the standard of living in the villages. As I could not agree more with such an approach to aid, I agreed to assist with the project. After a training session in the headquarters, we all climbed in a Land Cruiser to travel to the nearest target village. It was a 90-minute drive north from Makeni. “This is the nearest food-poor village to Makeni?” I asked the other anthropologist. “Yes, we only work well out in the district where there are no markets for the farm products. We are trying to boost farming and create markets for what they produce.” I persisted, “But there are no food-poor villages any closer to Makeni?” He gave me a quizzical look.

ACF, as was true of most other international agricultural development NGOs that work in Makeni, are mandated to address “development” in the whole district. When designing programs, they choose farming villages that they consider the most “needy” and are evenly spaced around the district, so as to be both fair and representative. However, any village that is located within walking distance of a large trading town, like Makeni, is automatically excluded when the program is meant to address, as ACF’s program was, villages that have no way to get their farming produce to a working market.

These villages are not thought to be “vulnerable” because, no matter their incomes, they have “access” to food markets, which is a similar occurrence as Clark found with farming villages near Kumasi in Ghana (1994: 399). Both trading towns and the villages they serve are precluded from being considered “vulnerable” because the products are there and are circulated. It is not an INGO’s position to make sure that everyone has enough money to buy them.

On the other hand, residents of Makeni see that these large organizations are based in their township, they see that they have spent a lot of money on equipment like generators and new vehicles (see Chabal and Daloz, 1999: 23), but they do not see that they are actually doing anything in or for the people. “What are these NGOs doing that I just see them driving around every day? Are they doing any programs for the poor people here?” asked one of the market women I interviewed, as she watched several white SUVs line up at the petrol station across Independence Square from where we were sitting. Most of the “development” INGOs such as ACF and CARE, because they are working on agricultural capacity building, do not have any programs in Makeni. They are based in the township because it provides a convenient headquarters for the district, and has amenities that an international NGO requires of its offices and homes for its staff: electricity (through generators), petrol for the vehicles, gas for the stoves, and transmitting towers for cellular phones. There are mechanics they can hire in Makeni to fix their vehicles, and they can get spare parts there they would not find elsewhere in the district. So in spite of the fact that one of ACF’s villages was located a four-hour trip away, there was no question of ever moving the headquarters so that it was equidistant from the villages it served. ACF did have a feeding program for “severely malnourished children” at an abandoned hospital on the outskirts of Makeni, but like their agricultural programs, most of the children ministered to in this program were brought in from the villages in which they worked, outside Makeni. So indeed, the trader who commented on INGOs’ lack of programs in Makeni was correct; most of the “development” organizations that were left after MSF and the other crisis-oriented INGOs that ministered the war aftermath phased out did not have significant programs in Makeni, because their emphasis on development was specifically on food production. One of the most significant results from this general dislike of INGOs that feed the businesses of big



men in the town without contributing anything was when the small INGO that ran half the programs it had run a year earlier and had only one local staff member found itself at the center of a raging radio debate as to whether they should be asked to leave because they were not doing any good in the township.

To reverse figure and ground, the perception from the villages just outside of Makeni was directly contrary to that expressed by people inside the township. The six villages I visited and worked in were all located well off any main roads that served Makeni or the surrounding highways, and they *never* saw INGO representatives in their villages. Indeed because they were so close to Makeni, once the INGO emphasis shifted from aid to development, at the end of 2003, not a single INGO visited these villages to enquire if they were doing well or if they needed assistance. When I visited one of these villages with FS and the members of his CBO one day, several of the women commented to me that this CBO was the only one that still thought about them, and wasn't *lɔs*, like all of the others. The village chief then stated his theory, namely that the international NGOs only paid attention to the big towns, and did nothing in the villages, because they wanted to be where the "big people" were, so that they could have a "friendly" relationship with them. He was basically stating that villages were unimportant because the main function of INGOs was to ensure the survival of their programs, and only their relations with powerful politicians could guarantee this, a supposition supported by Chabal and Daloz (1999: 24), who believe this occurs all over Africa. This was why all international NGOs that relied on "goodwill" to achieve their programs, such as every INGO that worked in an ongoing "development" capacity, put all their efforts into making people, especially big people, happy in the townships. In spite of the fact that his contention about the purpose for INGOs (namely to keep the programs alive so that their own staff can "eat") is directly countered by NGO managers' own ideas about a successful program, namely that it makes itself redundant, the chief had hit upon a salient issue that continues to haunt INGO programs in and around Makeni to this day.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> As I did in the previous chapter, I am deliberately excluding national NGOs from this debate for two reasons. One, they are seen in a much more positive light by local people because, when they operated at full capacity in the past, they actually asked communities what they need, according to one village forum, and two, national NGOs are usually so cash-strapped that there is simply nothing for the employees to "eat" even if they wanted to. Many employees are volunteers (see Michael, 2004: 95-96).

It is often the “big people” who are best positioned to take advantage of INGO programs and donor funds, usually through their influence and connections, by either dictating some of the terms under which that program will be allowed to function, or influencing hiring decisions, or taking direct cuts from program funds. These people who “eat” from INGOs, according to FS, my friend the CBO member, are merely “stealing the gains of war” from the poor people who could really benefit from them, and are sabotaging any chance that the true intended beneficiaries of these programs have of not only reaping benefits from these programs, but even seeing them through to fruition. The manipulations, mistrust and violence that often characterize confrontations between well-meaning ONGO managers and their staff and big people over project or fund mismanagement means that INGOs do not trust any of the people they work with or for.

**“Stealing the gains of war:” how people who “eat” development programs ruin the chance for needy people to “develop”**

Southall notes that development projects funded by foreign aid have only ever succeeded in creating a more efficient exploitation of local resources to increase wealth for the elite few who are in a position to profit by them (1988:4). Examples abound. Gupta found that populist development ideas propounded by Indira Ghandi’s government in 1970’s India were co-opted by powerful rural leaders as part of their popular mobilization of farmers in order to increase pressure on the national government to ensure their farming subsidies (1997: 331). Cooper and Packard cite rural Niger, where a few citizens in a village serve as development “brokers” and use their position to appropriate resources for themselves (Olivier de Sardan, quoted in Cooper and Packard, 1997: 23).

FS, a board member for a local CBO, calls this phenomenon as it occurs in Makeni, “stealing the gains of war.” As a former RUF member, he believes that what the war accomplished was bringing the plight of millions of poor Sierra Leoneans to international attention, and thus encouraging foreign donors and NGOs to come to the nation, assist people, and address the root causes of poverty in the nation that, in his estimation, was the reason the war persisted for so long. In essence, he believes that the poverty that has engulfed Sierra Leone for decades was caused by the greed of “big people” who did not redistribute good to the entirety of their social networks and clients

as they should, rather they hoarded it among themselves. This meant there were youth who were willing converts to RUF philosophy (see Abdullah, 2005: 185), as well as civilians who, when the war started in Liberia, joked that Sierra Leone should also have a war to push out the “rotten system.” And what ended up occurring was those very same wealthy people whose unwillingness to share the wealth of the nation with the poor caused the war were the ones who had the ability to tap into rebuilding money, and distribute the “good” that was meant for the poor to their friends and kin.

Those who “steal the gains of war,” according to FS, are not just the cronies of politicians and other big men, they are also people slightly lower down on the scale, such as the INGO employees who are happy to “eat” the money the INGO provides them, and then some that it does not willingly provide, to satisfy their own “greed” and that of their social networks, who believe that they should get as much from the INGOs as they can before the latter suffer from “donor fatigue” and disappear. This pressure results in embezzlement, dishonesty among local INGO employees about resource distribution within programs and “losses” (such as the bags of bulgur that “fall off WFP trucks”), and other sorts of misappropriation that makes expatriate INGO employees suspicious and mistrustful of all local people. The end result is that the “honest poor” who could really benefit from INGO programs have their programs cancelled. Gun-shy INGOs pull programs the moment the intended recipients do not do exactly what the program officers want them to do, whether this is eating seed because they are hungry or demanding long-term commitments to help them even when programs do not initially go as planned.

*Taking from the source: the causes and consequences of embezzling from INGOs*

One of the large INGOs in Makeni was struck by a crisis early in 2005, when one of the expatriate employees noted consistent problems in the accounting books, and in the reports from the field of what the program’s intended beneficiaries were actually receiving, versus what they were supposed to be getting. She found that fifteen locally employed staff had been stealing money and resources from the program, and this had been going on for nearly a year. She reported this to her boss in Freetown, and was promptly fired for slandering the local employees. The expatriate who took over her program, after the problem became unbearable, resolved to fire the employees, hire new

ones, and begin the program again. She was warned by several other expatriates that the reason her predecessor had been fired was because the program's manager in Freetown did not want to be held responsible for a program failing outright, or for hiring and paying employees that were found to be dishonest, because not only would that arm of the program be shut down, but he would probably lose his job in the process.

Not only was she pressured not to blow the whistle by both employees and superiors, she was directly threatened by those employees she had found stealing. A few of them had threatened her directly on the streets of Makeni, and she received several anonymous letters threatening her safety and her life, if certain employees lost their jobs. The employees were desperate to keep their jobs and incomes, because the embezzlement had been both cause and consequence of immense pressure from kin for them to provide. If they were fired, *their* lives, and the lives of the INGOs' expatriates, might potentially be in danger. The affected kin would not only bear grudges against their fired relative, but also take out their anger on the cause of this trouble: the INGO manager. Keeping them in the organization, even if the embezzlement ceased, was a way of keeping the peace, even if the programs themselves faltered. At least someone was benefiting.

The pressure that some INGO employees were under from their social networks was formidable, and had dire consequences for other employees, and for the program's beneficiaries. One program officer for a small INGO was supporting his ex-girlfriend and her two children, his mother, four siblings, and their children. Though he was drawing a salary of Le300,000 a month, after everyone had their needs attended to he was consistently short of money, and always concerned about "making it up" until the next payday. He was also concerned about problems that the office in Freetown was having, as he suspected that the financial controller in Freetown was embezzling money from the organization. Letters were written to the board of directors in Europe, and they refused to fire the controller. After she cleaned out the coffers in one fell swoop and disappeared to Liberia one night with her lover (who may have been pressuring her to take all the money she could), the organization was closed for good. The program officer was out of a job, and finally left Makeni because "the palavers in the house were unbearable." Everyone in the house was fighting because there was no money, and the onus was on him to

rectify the situation, which he could not. So he relocated to Freetown, and was eventually granted a visa to the country from which his INGO was based.

Once the program was closed, all of its beneficiaries suddenly found themselves bereft. This particular INGO worked with street children, taking the orphans off the street entirely and sheltering them in the group home, taking others who were pushed out by their families every day because they had mental handicaps or physical illnesses the parents did not want to deal with, feeding them and getting them medical care. Because of one key employee's embezzlement, all of these children were suddenly without a support structure that had, over the previous three years, become necessary for their survival. A different INGO that worked on similar programs attempted to absorb some of these children, but the rest just melted back into the fabric of Makeni's streets, some stealing for their livings, others looking for new people to perhaps take them in.

Employment with INGOs is a risky gamble, because not only must one have the right connections and right credentials in order to gain employment, but also because that person, once employed, is completely vulnerable to the needs and demands of the social networks that they support, especially if their kin had a hand in getting them the skills and education that provided them with a job. The pressure to keep one's job, and even steal from that organization, is often too much for individuals to bear, and they are forced into corners. Many honest people end up stealing from their INGOs because the pressure to provide for kin is emotionally crippling. However, as far as INGO expatriates and former beneficiaries who lost their programs are concerned, they are just as guilty as those people who "steal the gains of war" because they are part of a power structure that allows them to do just that, mainly by inserting themselves into the world of donor funding long enough to "eat" what they can. Many of these people have left in their wake what FS refers to as "signboard development."

*"Signboard development" and stolen proposals: development's deliberate consumers*

After the war, a lot of development programs were earmarked. Money was sent for those programs, which were just scratch implementations, you see? Most of the money just went into their [the CBOs] pockets. That is why I say there is not much [real development], it is only signboard development. You see, a lot of signboards, when Makeni first started after the war, Independence Square was

packed with, jam-packed with signboards. But if you see what is being done, if you go to the area and say listen, what is this signboard standing here for, they will not say anything! FS, CBO member

In many of our conversations FS argued passionately that most of the local CBOs that arose in during the post-war aid boom only to “steal the gains of war,” and gave the community nothing but “signboard development” in return, namely that they erected hand-painted signboards advertising the purpose of their CBO, and that was all.<sup>96</sup>

Pertinent to this conversation, he took me on a tour of a few streets in his neighborhood and pointed out all the faded signs posted over doors and leaning against verandas. Most were for CBOs with grand plans for “development,” such as training disabled women as tailors, organizing the youth into cooperative work teams, and promoting agricultural development. Though they advertised hope for development in the community, for him they signaled only the triumph of “self-development” over community development: all FS sees are signs advertising instances where people became fat on the funding provided for local NGOs and CBOs, and then abandoned their organizations.

FS has been struggling honestly since the aid boom to keep his CBO, which promotes cooperative agriculture in several villages just outside of Makeni, running, and has been continually stymied in his efforts because of the villagers’ history with bogus CBOs, and the people further up the funding chain who “steal” programs in order to get funding themselves. FS had no kind words for Makeni’s “NGO consumers,” people who took advantage of aid to write proposals with great plans for community development, erected signs advertising their intentions, and promptly failed to do anything. FS drew a link between this mirage of “development” and the sudden influx of luxury goods into the town, objects like cellular phones, electronics, and a new bank which requires an initial deposit of Le100,000 (about US \$35 in 2005) in order to open an account. It was only those who came “to steal the gains of war” who could afford luxuries, though once firmly entrenched in the town, they became iconic symbols of personal “development” for the youth, many of whom have cellular phones that they cannot afford to make phone calls with. The youth are, in Bastien’s words, “globalization’s orphans,” who lived in a town

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<sup>96</sup> See Nordstrom (2001: 216-239) and Finnstrom (2006: 12-15) for analyses of war profiteering among the local and international aid communities in Africa.

where “development” is marked only by the increase in elite privilege, and is of no benefit to most people (2003: 70). This is one of the reasons people grumble about INGOs: they support the luxury businesses in the center of town that do no good for the town, and in fact support the morally errant consumption habits of the youth. Thus did the funding that was meant for Makeni’s poorest people actually end up enhancing the extant local political and economic power networks, doing no “good” for the town, and deepening the poverty of idealistic young people who dreamt of “developing.”

Visible on every street in the town, the signboards serve as an illustration of how Makeni is “developing” in the wake of the aid boom. From our perspective standing near Independence Square, the economic center of Makeni, I saw a faded sign advertising a youth CBO propped next to a small shop selling used cell phones and top-up cards providing instant phone credit for Le2000 for two minutes of talk time. Across the street is the Sierra Leone Commercial Bank, opened by President Kabbah in September 2003, where fewer than 1,000 people (according to the manager), in a town of over 200,000, have accounts. FS looked across the street at the bank, shaded his eyes and shook his head sadly; his CBO had “donated money” to the bank a few months previously in an effort to prove to USAID that they were a legitimate CBO worthy of funding.

When their initial funding ran out in 2004, FS and his friends used their own money to buy seeds for that year’s planting, and “then we found ourselves seriously broke.” They spent months working on a project proposal to submit to the AID director at the US embassy in Freetown; however one caveat of the application was that they had to have a working bank account into which the project funds, if any were awarded, could be deposited directly. “Why would we need the money they offer if we had so many leones lying around that we could open a bank account?” he asked rhetorically. He and his fellows managed to cobble together enough money from friends and family to open the account so that they could fill in an account number on their project proposal. They were told a month later that all the funds in that year’s cycle had been exhausted, and they would have to re-apply next year. In the meantime, their initial deposit was whittled away in the bank’s monthly maintenance fees, and the bank closed the account.<sup>97</sup> Two

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<sup>97</sup> FS did not understand or trust banks, which is common in West Africa. People are similarly suspicious of banks in the Gambia (Shipton, 1995: 265-266), and historically in Nigeria (Mabogunje, 1995: 286).

other proposals that I had helped him finish by delivering them to respective offices in Freetown had resulted in no responses at all, and he had spent several thousand leones of his own money typing and photocopying the application and getting it “professional looking,” and it all came to naught.

Not only had the CBO not gotten the funding, they had lost the money given to them by friends and family in a good-faith effort to get the program off the ground. FS was annoyed not only that AID had neglected to tell them that the program funds were exhausted, but also that he received no response from any of the other organizations to whom he had submitted proposals. He showed me what had happened to other proposals in the past when they went through “middleman” organizations such as a donor office in Freetown that collected applications for several different programs funded by their parent organization. “You see Cat,” he said, showing me a copy of one of the applications he had made, “When they get the proposal in Freetown, they look through it and see that it is very well done, that there are a lot of people on board who are committed to it and that it looks fundable, because I have checked all my figures several times. And then they just do this,” he made a motion of ripping off the top page, on which the organization’s name, address, and project location were listed, “and then they just attach their own to it.”

“They would really do that?” I asked. FS looked annoyed at my naivety. “Yes of course, you know they were put into those positions by their political friends, so that they can fund projects for CBOs in their own areas. There is no documentation elsewhere that this is our project in our villages, otherwise you know they would have at least written back to tell us that we did not get the funding for some reason or other. But we did not even get that.” Whether or not his suspicion is founded, FS’s ideas of what had happened to his project proposals reveal deeper problems that his organization is having working in villages that had brushes in the past with CBOs that received funding and produced no results. Whether the CBO members were corrupt or incompetent is irrelevant, the effect on the ground is that the intended beneficiaries of their projects not only received no benefits, but were so scarred by their experiences that they no longer trust CBOs.



*Trust is not sustained: how failed CBOs have “ruined” development for everyone*

SM: Whatever we are doing with them, even though it is their own project and it belongs to them, even so they ask us to give them something. Even at the end of the day when the foodstuffs are given to them for keeping and they take the major decisions and then they just confirm them with us, but it has gotten to the point now that they want money for everything. When we send them out to harvest, they want money. When they want to go and plant, they want us to give them money. Every little thing! And then in addition we feed them again. And we don't have money, as you can see.

CB: Why do they insist on money if they are reaping the benefits of the project?

FS: Well, in our situation, it is just unfortunate that we are coming in at a time when a lot of people have gone into most of those communities. Some of them make big promises that they don't live up to. So if anybody comes in now, they think that you are just like that man who has come and left and they will get the same results. These are most of the big NGOs in Sierra Leone, with these four-wheel drives, you see, the implementation is all on vehicles and staff, their staff. When you go to the ground, there is nothing. It is poor and at the end of the day it will not sustain trust.

When I arrived in one village in which FS's CBO was working, the villagers pled with me to find a donor to support them directly, so that they would not have to “donate” any money, and could dictate the program themselves and not be told that they had to farm a particular way. They did not want to deal with INGOs that got angry with them for eating their seed, or forced them to work on collective farms before their own farms. They also did not want to be subjected to CBOs that made big promises and delivered nothing. Many people pointed to a well that HOPE Sierra Leone, a national NGO, had sunk in the 1980s, but was poisoned by the RUF before the cadres in the area were disarmed in 2002. The well was now useless, but no NGO had come to dig a new one.

The post-war INGOs were not interested in what people wanted, according to villagers, which was tools to determine the course of their own lives. The national NGOs that had previously worked in their communities were struggling for funding; HOPE itself could do little more than provide hoes for villagers, as they were now competing for funding with organizations like ACF, which because they were international had far greater donor visibility. I believe at this point the INGOs were gun-shy: the program managers were suspicious of people asking for money to use directly, as this reeked of

the “money chewing” that was occurring within their organizations, or at the very least of villages that did not take “development” seriously, and would be open about just consuming the benefits that it provided. As I mentioned earlier in the chapter, INGOs that openly provided benefits, rather than doing “development” had no similar suspicions surrounding their goals or activities.

Before the war, according to villagers, national NGOs like HOPE came and asked people what they needed. Villagers got together and decided on their priorities, such as a new bridge so that they could get to town to trade their goods, the NGOs complied, and everyone was happy. HOPE built six wells, three bridges, three schoolhouses, and two community centers in the villages immediately surrounding Makeni. When the war started, many of those NGOs folded, and even among those that still exist, the money is tight. Instead, CBOs that were formed in Makeni using international aid money came and offered to solve their problems. According to the people in one village, several men who called themselves a CBO came to the village and promised them huge advances in agriculture: tools, seed, and even tractors. They would do this with a “good faith” promise from the villagers signaling their willingness to work on this project, amounting to a “donation” to the CBO of Le2000 per family. “Then,” said the village chief, “they just took our money and left, and never came back.” This pattern was repeated in enough villages to create suspicion and distrust among people confronted with any project proposed by a local CBO.

The people think that the CBOs just played them for fools and stole their money. This is possible. However, FS and SM explained the process of CBO funding in the wake of the war, and revealed other potential causes. When the Lomé Peace Accord was signed in 1999, DfID established an office in Makeni and announced that its major community-focused program would be to fund people who formed their own CBOs to do development work in their communities. Many people from Makeni who were interested in agriculture banded together to form agricultural CBOs, wrote proposals to DfID, and were given seed funding, amounting to about Le200,000. They started with big plans and ideas, and spent money on things like office rent, furniture, signboards, and other start-up costs. Realizing they were running short of funds, many started their programs by appealing to their target communities for support, hoping to be able to repay the debt

once they received more funding from DfID and their operations were up and running. DfID's policy, however, was not to give any additional funding to a CBO that had not produced tangible results, and most of these CBOs closed within a year of starting without accomplishing any agricultural projects in their villages.

What the villagers saw was that their "brothers," knowing that farmers would make sacrifices for a chance to develop, took their money and ran. They were embarrassed and resentful about the fact that the CBO people had taken advantage of their image as ignorant and backward. From this point, any Sierra Leonean promising community development became a suspicious character, and they are equally wary of any promises of development made by outsiders. SM and FS encountered such problems with trust when they started their activities, as the quote illustrates. The village they operate was only given food for work as long as they incorporated ex-combatants in their farming, and this only as long as the international community was funding such cooperative programs. When the CBO secretary, himself an ex-combatant, wrote to other organizations to ask for food for work once the initial input ended, the standard response he received was that the organization was not giving out food in that particular chiefdom because it was located close to a major town and was therefore not "vulnerable."<sup>98</sup>

Even without additional inputs, it was still important for villagers to stay friendly with ex-combatants. The continued friendship was their one tenuous link to the aid community. As much as it was despised, at the time it was the one source of money. Maintaining ties with an ex-combatant CBO meant maintained links with a critical marker identifiable by international NGOs, making future donations possible, because the community was still aligned with a category of people that were considered legitimate potential beneficiaries for INGO programs. However, as Peters found in Makeni in 2003, NGOs concentrated their work in cooperative farming schemes directly among the ex-combatant participants, and not the villagers, because that was where the donor money was (2006: 94). Having benefited in the past from NGOs' generosity with ex-combatants, villagers were more likely to maintain the association, and to demand their fair share directly from the ex-combatants in future projects. Thus they maintain hope for

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<sup>98</sup> Makeni was not considered "vulnerable", because trading towns are seen as centers of distribution, even if traders are prone to starvation if farmers refuse to sell during difficult times (see Clark, 1994: 399).

progress even after past projects with INGOs went sour, and there is no guarantee that they will get any INGO programs in the future.

My conversation with one expatriate INGO manager revealed that in any village in which his INGO operated, if people ate their seed stock or sold the tools they were given, the program was immediately stopped, as the conclusion was that the participating villagers were more interested in exploiting INGOs than working towards development. Therefore it was the most needy villages, those in which food and money were so scarce as to cause the sale of a hoe or bag of rice, from which INGOs would extract themselves. The continued presence of ex-combatants was the one chance these villages had of attracting funding in the future, so they continued to apply for certificates in order to be recognized. Usually another INGO would respond, and the pattern would repeat.

In this light, it is not unusual that the villages with operating CBOs demand money in order to work on the project, as they are suspicious of any organization that arrives with promises of development, and either leaves those promises empty, or leaves when the village does not cooperate exactly with their terms. The people need to know that the organization is committed to them, and not just the other way around. As one town council member put it, “I think the people in the villages are lazy to farm because they are afraid of putting themselves out there and asking for tools and seeds and the things they need. They don’t want to have to say, “thank you, thank you,” and be ashamed that they are in the debt to the NGO or the NGO won’t come back and help them again. And this fear makes them lazy to work.” People have too much pride to prostrate themselves before INGOs when they do not sense that there is a real commitment to help them achieve self-reliance.

This commitment is also tenuous, as INGOs that are wary of people not using program funds and resources exactly as they were intended, whether this actually fills a local need or not, are prone to canceling those programs. The small INGO that cut its programs in half when their list of goals were not met by most of the communities in which they worked is a case in point. Whether or not the program actually was working as intended is less important to the people involved than whether or not it is providing some benefit to them, their families and other people, especially if those people who were benefiting had contributed to the individual’s initial “development” that put them in a

position where they could reap benefits. The actual benefits of “development” may be different than those that were intended by the program, and this impasse between INGOs and the community has created a profound ambivalence towards aid, even among those people, like FS, who continue to work within the tenets set by INGOs to try to bring some good to their communities.

### **The ambivalence of being “on board” with development**

“The people in these villages, they don’t want the NGOs to come back making all these promises and telling them what to do”, FS told me, “they want to be able to take the seeds and the money and use it themselves, because maybe they trust their families to get the farming going again more than they trust these NGO guys.” He highlights ideological battle occurring in the farming villages surrounding Makeni, and it centers around the competing needs of individuals who are suspicious of aid organizations, want to be able to run their own farms using aid money, and need to “organize” officially in order to apply for this assistance and agree to farm cooperatively in order to receive it. Aid is needed, but the conditions set by NGOs who provide it are despised (see Crewe and Harrison, 1998: 69). Individuals resist being told that they must put the specific needs of their own families aside, pool their ancestral land, and share resources with others in order to receive assistance. However, the dire need for seed stock and tools in order to re-start farming means that some people and organizations, like FS and his CBO, are still willing to engage with INGOs, even as they resent being told how they must use the funds, and often struggle against the tenets set by INGOs as to what kind of farming should be created in the aftermath of war.

The critical tenet is that INGOs ask the wrong questions when formulating what kinds of programs they will implement in villages, as became clear when I sat with FS and asked him about his experiences with other INGO programs in Bombali district. INGOs are interested in how farming was occurring before the war, and designed their programs to recreate that farming, because they considered it to be “normal” farming practice. However, people in the villages want inputs that will allow them to correct all of the problems that occurred with farming in the past, failings like lack of labor, and lack

of government support to process their products and get them to market, that will create a satisfactory reality. They strive for a life as it should be, a world that will allow exemplary moral relations to occur because everyone has what he or she needs. People concentrate on the good things that will do this, like seed, tractors, and roads.

*Seed stock and “food for work:” what the farmers want NGOs refuse to give*

People have standing seed stocks by then [before the war] and this all went away [during the war]: no seeds. And it came to a time when farming came to a stop, abruptly, because farming should be a continuous process, no? It should be continuous. But if you just come and eat even the seedlings, at the end of the day there is no farming, so you have planted hunger. So that was the kind of thing that happened. Even the farming materials like cutlasses and hoes were destroyed. So... it means we have to start it over again. But the main problem is those seeds. Seed is food while the farmer is planting, then what does he plant? What to sustain the workers with? They didn't have anything to start with. FS

The story that came most often from conversations about agriculture with farmers in Makeni went thus: agriculture was impoverished before the war, ceased completely during the war, farmers need assistance in order to start farming again, and that this assistance should take the form of seed stocks, “food for work,” and mechanization. Even though neither of the latter two existed around Makeni before the war, farmers were not ignorant of the ways that they could change farming in their community to make it not only workable, but profitable, which would allow them to make the changes in their own lives, such as sending all of their children to school, that they desperately desired. They were not going to be content with receiving a bit of seed and manual tools, as this would not solve anything that caused agriculture's decline in the past, like labor shortages, or problems that exist because of the war, like a collapsed seed stock.

Farmers were not ignorant of the Food For Work programs occurring in other areas of the country.<sup>99</sup> The World Food Programme implemented Food for Work in the 1960's to provide drought relief in areas where people's daily labor did not result in an

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<sup>99</sup> At the time of my research, several international NGOs were doing such programs in the swamp rice regions of the south and northwest in order to encourage people to undertake large-scale planting. In 2003 ex-combatants who engaged themselves in cooperative agriculture with local villages received food for work, which they often shared with their non-combatant friends. The villages themselves, however, were never formal recipients of food for work.

adequate supply of food.<sup>100</sup> Farmers were set to tasks, be it farming, building roads, or constructing public buildings, for which the program would pay them in food for their families. One farmer stated that they needed the continual inputs of food rations in order to farm, a need that is mutually entailed with the replenishment of seed stock. According to FS, no one knows how long it takes to build up seed stock from nothing, as no one had ever had to do it before the war. The chief and other big men always held the main seed stock for a village, for use in times of crisis. Even in times of localized war and drought, seed could always be found, as it was transported through distant kin networks to those who needed assistance. After a ten-year war, this is no longer the case. No one has seed in reserve, either to plant or to loan. Many of the generations-old kin networks through which seed was habitually transferred were broken up, and farmers feel that they are on their own, trying to create seed “from nothing.” The farmers explained that it is a false assumption to presume that a single input of seed stock will result in sustainable farming, which was the assumption made by most INGOs who had a farming component to the assistance programs they instituted in the area after the war. This is why short-term agricultural programs failed, and why local people contest that agricultural INGOs do not really understand farming, either as it used to be, or as it should be.

One farmer explained the process. If a family is given a bag of seed rice and told to plant it, they will reserve some to eat in the meantime, as they have no other source of income, nor any food in reserve from the previous year when they perhaps lived on food aid as displaced people (as did his family). “The seed stock goes to stop the cries of your children,” he responded, when I asked him what happened to his seed. They will also reserve a small amount to save as next season’s seed in case a bad season means no returns on this year’s rice. This means much less than the whole bag is planted. Rice takes up to five months to harvest, and what is the family meant to eat in the meantime, if they do not eat some of their reserved seed stock? The family harvests their crop, and must reserve some of it to plant the next year. However, in the rainy season when it is

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<sup>100</sup> I discovered during my research in Botswana, for example, continued droughts and the failure of small-scale farming and animal husbandry in the 1980s sparked the institutionalization of food for work programs. In the late 1980s the national government created a national department called Drought Relief, through which people in villages are variously employed on programs for which they receive rations of food. In one village in northern Botswana, some men had been on drought relief for ten years, regardless of whether the rains arrived.

too wet to plant, the rice harvested the previous year has run out, and the only way the family can survive is by dipping into the small reserve saved for next year's seed.

If seed stock does not exist in quantity enough to plant a full field, feed a family for the duration of the growing season, and reserve some for the following season, there is simply not enough. The only way to build up a sufficient seed stock to keep a farming family from starving is to feed them continually for several years so that they have the energy to farm, and all the seed stock is saved as seed and not eaten in the hungry times. Seed stock programs must exist in tandem with Food For Work, otherwise the seed will be eaten. It is the only way to ensure that a village that is given a bag of seed, told to plant, and left to their own devices will not eventually consume the seed because they are hungry. Farmers were angry that the INGOs called them lazy and not "development minded" when they promptly ate the seed and asked for more. More than one village in the Bombali district was cut off from post-war agricultural aid when the seed stock that was given by one or more INGOs was never planted at all.

There is a disconnect between what INGOs want, which is harvestable crops, and what villagers need, which, aside from their desire to make farming profitable, is the energy to farm in the first place. Farmers who consumed their "development" offering because they were hungry promptly lost it, suffering accusations by their INGO providers that they were too irresponsible to run the project as it was designed. One of the farmer's sisters had married a Mende man and moved to Bo district years earlier, and their village was devastated in the war. She sent a message to him asking for seed because the INGO working in their village had cancelled the program when the "target" families split up the seed stock and fed their children.

This disconnect is echoed among INGO workers around the world, as Pigg heard from one in Nepal that the main effect of any development project is an erosion of community responsibility (1997: 280; see also Cooper, 2001: 33). INGOs like CARE expect people in their program to act as "partners" and produce development for the community, whereas residents, many of whom are trying to pay school fees for their children, work towards the potential "self-development" and "self-reliance" they can achieve by producing from development programs the "normal" as it should be. INGOs, on the other hand, do not differentiate between "self-development" and dreams of a better



future, and the mere wasteful consumption of aid that lacks obvious benefits for a community: using “seed money” for food or school fees is a blatant misuse of funds. This essential misrecognition of the moral modes of inputs continues to cause friction between INGOs and villagers around Makeni, and INGO workers are especially exasperated when farmers, having eaten their seed, then ask for tractors.

*“We need mechanization:” taking sides in arguments over how to return dignity and prosperity to farming*

The idea that mechanization will save agriculture was not introduced by INGOs. It originated from the long-term decline of agriculture in Sierra Leone due to the loss of labor, both to education and to mining (see Zack-Williams, 1990: 23). The program designs of several INGOs I will not name specifically aim to recreate small-scale subsistence farming in villages. They thus mistakenly assumed that the small-scale subsistence farming that was evident before the war was the agricultural system that had always existed, and that it is this system on which their recovery agricultural programs should be based. However, what was occurring immediately before the war was a highly impoverished form of subsistence farming, the result of years of labor drain, strained social relationships, and declining output resulting from new economic opportunities in town, in mining, and in commercial tree farming. By insisting on cooperative agriculture as a prerequisite to mechanization, INGOs were mocking villagers’ inability to provide enough labor to farm. Farmers wanted mechanization to replace lost labor, and NGOs offered them everything else. One INGO worker expressed his exasperation: “how do they think they can maintain tractors when they can’t tell the difference between two different types of rice? They don’t need tractors, they need training!” He assumed that farmers were cloaking their laziness to do manual labor by adopting what they thought would sound “progressive” to INGO workers, which was technology transfer (see Crewe and Harrison, 1998: 91, 170).

Agriculture had deteriorated to the state of small-scale subsistence before the war and caused a dire situation in which families were barely able to survive. This in turn reinforced the drive of young people to leave their villages and seek their fortunes elsewhere as, like in Ghana, youth no longer see farming as a way to make a living (see

van der Geest, 1997: 540). In addition, this dissatisfaction with the critical state of farming was one of the main reasons many young people were so angry with their poverty that they were willing to join the RUF when it first came over the Liberian border in 1990 (see Richards, 1996: 7-8). The further draining of labor, destruction of tools and seed stocks, and bush encroachment on farms caused by ten years of war have dealt crushing blows to the already fragile remnants of agriculture in Sierra Leone. Thus does mechanization seem the ultimate solution. Consider FS's passionate plea for tractors:

The rate of food production must be increased or we will forever be clamoring for food. You see? That is why, as we are talking about the working population, most of the youth are in urban centers. Because they feel the government has not created any facility that can assist them in the rural areas, like mechanization, agriculture through mechanization. You have lots of *bɔliland* [semi-permanent swamp] here. Come with twenty or thirty tractors, put five hundred idle youth on board, have a little camp for them and give them seed. Let them stay there permanently. And you will see what will be the outcome at the end of the day.

In every conversation with farmers concerning what the main obstacle is to productive farming, the answer was usually that the tools were not there to make “a big farm,” and it was only by cultivating vast tracts of land that people would consider farming profitable. It is only when farming is profitable that it is attractive to people, therefore this is the only way to get the youth to return from the urban areas, and the only way to guarantee food security in the country in the future, as it was in the past when big farms were made by every extended family. If big farms were to be made today, they would somehow have to come out of individual labor and bring in profits for that individual. As one man said, “people here like money, they like their own money, and if they farm it will be for themselves to make money.” Again, the extant poverty driving economic habits in the area mean people will usually choose to develop themselves and their immediate family, and be beholden to only them, before thinking about the community. As Feeley-Harnik discovered in Analalava, Madagascar, people were not transplanting rice in the 1970's because they were “afraid” of the work. Farming was not only difficult, but resulted in kin asking for food from the farmer, and “pretty soon, everyone has nothing together” (1991: 204), with the individual having, as FS would say, “planted hunger.”

For each individual family to “make a big farm” requires either increased labor, through hiring youth at a daily wage for several weeks or months to clear and maintain the land manually, or hiring a tractor and operator for a day to plow a large plot of land which the women from one family can work themselves. And if a family is farming mechanically, their plot becomes more attractive for youth to work on, as they have “joined themselves” with progress, in the words of one young man when explaining why he would only labor on mechanized plots.<sup>101</sup> Mechanization, it seems, is the silver bullet for all agricultural problems, be they labor or tool shortages, lack of food security, or a perceived lack of dignity in the occupation.

However, according to the town’s intellectuals, mechanization would cause more harm than good. I had a conversation one day with the Paramount Chief and one of his closest friends, an agronomist named Dr. Foday MacBailey, who had once served in the National Provisional Ruling Council, the 1990’s era government that had instituted “Cleaning Saturday.” Dr. MacBailey stated categorically that tractors and tractor plows are too heavy to be used profitably on either swamps or the *boliland* [semi-permanent swamp] on which rice is typically grown. In rice farming, the holes made for the seedlings are less than six inches deep, and the seedlings grow small fibrous roots laterally, so they never go deep into the soil and the underlying layer of gravel, into which the water drains. When the gravel layer is intact, the soil remains aerated. In manual farming, this gravel layer remains untouched as women only dig deep enough to plant the seedling.

Tractor blades, on the other hand, cut one foot deep into the soil, where they disturb the gravel layer. People still only plant the rice six inches deep, leaving the gravel layer disturbed beneath the seedlings. The problems start during the rains, after the rice has been planted. In the torrential rains that blanket Makeni during July and August, manually planted farms do not suffer as the rain can penetrate the topsoil and drain away through the gravel. Plowed fields have space between the seedling and the gravel, and water collects in this space. What soil it does not wash away it compacts into the

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<sup>101</sup> According to the IMF, the Ministry of Youth and Sports (with the assistance of the UN) has created 48 “micro-farms” around the country specifically to employ youth. However, it was not stated how many youth are employed on these farms, nor if they are mechanized or hand-worked (2007a: 46). As the IMF is also emphasizing the production of paddy (swamp) rice, (49) and I did not hear of any of these farms while in Makeni, it is possible that none of these farms are located in the Makeni area.

disturbed gravel layer, making the soil essentially useless for planting rice in the next season, as any rice seedlings planted in compacted soil drown in the next heavy rain. This is true both on the perennially flooded swampland, and the seasonally flooded *boliland*. Even though the *boliland* is hard-packed soil to begin with, making it difficult to plow and making mechanization all the more attractive, continual mechanical plowing only exacerbates the problem.

The mechanics of soil disturbance are already well known to people in Bombali district, in a hard lesson learned through alluvial diamond mining. Before diamonds were discovered in Kamakwie, a town three hours drive north of Makeni and thirty miles from the Guinea border, the area was predominantly agricultural, producing mostly swamp rice. The swamps were the first areas turned into mining pits, as the gravel layer was exhumed in order to uncover the diamondiferous layer just beneath it. Landowners eager to earn money by leasing out their land to miners stopped farming and allowed youth to dig trenches in their most productive rice farming areas in their quest to benefit from the market for precious stones.

Most farming in Sella Limba chiefdom, of which Kamakwie is the capital, ceased, and food was imported from elsewhere. Several market women in Kamakwie lamented that as soon as the diamond rush was over, their businesses were finished because there would never be good farming in Kamakwie again, as the soil was destroyed. Even if miners filled an exhausted pit with the exhumed gravel, it would never fall into the neatly productive and aerated layers in which rice farming is possible. Seedlings planted in former mining pits would either suffocate in the compacted soil or drown in heavy rains. Where mining had occurred, agriculture was precluded. Mining in Kamakwie came to a halt less than a year after it started, and Kamakwie continued to import food. However, most farmers eager to use tractors in Makeni do not believe that tractor plowing would make soil unproductive in the same way as deep alluvial mining pits. Tractors seem the cure-all that would move farms past their past and current labor poverty. However, we can see that the violence done to the agricultural environment with mining is a result of the poverty of individuals, and it results in further impoverishing that environment and the individuals who work it. There seems to be no way to break the cycle.

Dr. MacBailey went further in his condemnation of tractor farming in Sierra Leone. He stated that all the people understand is that mechanical plowing will clear a lot of land in a short period of time without requiring them to bend over and sweat, therefore it must be a sign of progress. However, they do not know that tractors were not made for tacky (high clay-content) African soil, and would require more maintenance than they do in the non-tropical soils for which they were designed. He had asked people what they would do with the tractors when they are not working their own farms, and they said they would hire them out to other villages. Apparently there was no knowledge that tractors needed intensive maintenance, for which he felt (perhaps a bit too harshly) people would be unwilling to undertake, and were also untrained to do, and in addition they would be unable to locate or pay for spare parts.

Also disregarded by villagers with whom he spoke was the price of fuel to run the tractor, which for most villages would be prohibitive. When I left Sierra Leone in April 2006, a fuel shortage had pushed the price of diesel to Le11,250 per gallon, nearly \$4.00 per gallon, at a time when the average village woman selling her rice to market women earned Le4000 (\$1.50) a day. To plow a field of several acres would cost Le100,000 in fuel alone. When Peters (2006: 96) visited an ex-combatant-led and NGO-backed agricultural project in Makeni in 2003, even with the full cooperation of all members they could not plow the land by hand in time to plant before the rains arrived. They were forced to hire a tractor to do the project's entire first year of plowing, at a cost of Le30,000 per hour (about \$13 an hour at 2003 exchange rates), plus palm wine, cigarettes, and full rice meals for the drivers. They had a budget provided by HOPE Sierra Leone at the time, which had benefited from a DfID grant for ex-combatant farm projects, but who would be able to pay for this now that the lavish aid given to ex-combatants was gone? However, the allure of tractors did not subside, because it has seized the imagination as a potential road for farmers to move past the pain and suffering of subsistence farming. The Chief commented that if he went to a village and asked the people what they want, and they said tractors, and he offered instead to send all of their children to agricultural school in America, they would accuse him of not wanting to help them. This is not that agricultural training was not desired, it was simply not as useful as

a tractor appeared to be, as having a child away for so long was also not as immediately beneficial as being able to plow a large farm and make a profit on it now.

On the other hand, SM, one of FS's fellow CBO board members, stated that mechanized agriculture is the only way to arouse people's interest in farming because it avoids the pain of manual labor. Farming, he says, is literally backbreaking, and people are not interested in suffering chronic pain or getting ill from working in the rainy season, especially since they cannot afford to walk to town to a clinic to get treatment. And there are no functioning clinics in any of the villages surrounding Makeni. In essence, poverty precludes manual labor because one cannot afford to get ill or injured. This fear of ill health, he says, also makes them lazy. If they could farm huge plots simply by sitting on the seat of a machine, it would mean less pain and more money, and they would be more likely to engage themselves in it. They would make money, and they would not be afraid to work because they are secure knowing they have enough set aside to look after any medical problems in addition to whatever else they would spend their earnings on. Though Dr. MacBailey contended that people's distaste for manual labor was the main driving force in their push for mechanization, the "laziness" described by SM, though essentially a distaste for manual labor, is also connected to the fear of the increased costs, physical, social, and economic, of manual toil.

The youth to whom I spoke were equally adamant that only mechanization could provide food security. Only machines could make farms big enough that farmers could grow enough rice to not eat the next year's seed. Only machines could create large enough potential harvests to sell the surplus and save money for other things. Most of the youth who are interested in farming are those ex-combatants whose reintegration skills training was too paltry to enable them to become artisans in town, and they are adamant that mechanization will give them the independence to farm profitably on other people's land. In addition, sitting atop a tractor will show the world that they are not useless and idle, in fact they are skilled and dignified professionals on whose shoulders rests the feeding of the nation. Dignity in agriculture is dignity for under-trained "ex-combatants." The failure of their DDR programs to make them productive skilled artisans was done deliberately to ensure docile unskilled labor for the mines (Peters, 2006: 129). What it also accomplished was creating a cross-section of society willing to join themselves to

any efforts to increase agricultural output, even if they have been told that the methods they dream of would do more harm than good. What has been doing more harm than good in the past is INGOs that are unwilling to engage with farmers on these issues, and instead just cancel programs when farmers seem unwilling to do as they are told.

Dr. MacBailey and the Paramount Chief are both in positions of relative power vis-à-vis farmers, and from this position their criticism of local ideas about what constitutes proper “development” means they have “switched sides” in the development game (see Pigg, 1997: 259). Instead of agreeing with the villagers and backing up their wishes, by talking the way development professionals talk, they are seen as no longer supporting their constituents in the battle to bring development as it is locally construed and imagined. Pigg notes that it is difficult to maintain a position as the mediating middle ground in “development” among powerful local people (259). Though it is never vocalized, they are forced to choose sides: either they support village claims on development, or they agree with the ideas and implementations brought from the outside. They can serve as powerful brokers for whichever side they represent, but it is always clear, just as with FS’s support for mechanization, which side that is. What the youth want, in their quest to be self-reliant, is to occupy a middle ground: to convince aid organizations to assist them while controlling the funds themselves, so that they can perform “development” for their intended future. What NGOs see when villagers demand this is people who want to “eat” their offerings. However, one of the other burning desires of many people who live in the villages surrounding Makeni is for there to be paved roads to their villages from the highway and Makeni. They can use these roads as they wish and answer to no one, therefore they must be unequivocally good.

*No local commitment required: getting the government to build roads*

Berry comments that even competent farmers, such as the Yoruba in Nigeria, need incentives and logistical support from outside their community in order to produce food (1985: 3). In the wake of the war, many of the national NGOs that had previously provided assistance to villages such as water wells and school buildings never returned, as the only funding they could apply for was under the rubric of ex-combatant reintegration, and not basic village development. In the environs of Makeni, that crucial

development link was replaced by the promises of the new District Council. In April 2004, people in Bombali district flooded to the polls to elect their first district councils in nearly thirty years. The candidates had come to the villages with many promises of development, and as the NGOs were not returning, all hopes of bringing farming back now lay with what farmers called “government encouragement.” Most people with whom I spoke, feeling that their efforts had all come to nothing in the interim, spoke forcefully about the need for community development that only the government could provide, as at the very least, it would not create jealousy within the community because some people were chosen as beneficiaries and others were not. It would also be more likely to reflect real needs and desires of Sierra Leoneans, rather than what Europeans thought they needed. This ethos is development *for* the community, not *by* the community; but would still have a better chance of conforming to popular wishes.

One form of “encouragement” mentioned repeatedly in forums was road building. Roads have been the key to development cited by Sierra Leoneans for many years, and are as much about “bringing development” as they are about encouraging village products to reach the market. When Michael Jackson was first told that roads would “bring development” to Koinadugu district in the 1960’s, he found this attitude almost magical, as if people thought that the mere existence of a link to the outside world would bring the benefits of that world to them. “But it is typical of human beings everywhere that when we are mystified by a phenomenon,” he wrote, “and lack the means to grasp it, we have recourse to magical thinking to provide a simulacrum of understanding and control” (2004:169). For local villagers, roads would be a material connection to the outside world that they were free to use as they desired. And this, it seems, is all it takes for development to take its natural course and flow towards the village.

There is little academic agreement if “development” occurs this way. Ferguson found that roads built for development projects in Lesotho had exactly this effect, which was the opposite of what was intended. A road built from a mountainous area to the capital was meant to create an avenue for agricultural products to flow down the mountain to the urban center, instead it created an avenue for cheap market goods to come up the valley, thus further displacing a market for local farm products (1994: 230). Gore (quoted in Clark, 1994: 211) found in Ghana that good road access correlated



strongly with higher producer prices for farm products, because farmers with better access to nearby markets have a better bargaining position with lorry drivers. It is unknown what effect roads would have on Bombali's villages, except to make travel easier and more appealing.

Creating a path to the outside world is for young men in Bombali district a chance for "self-development" as much as it is a proposal for agricultural development. Young men do not feel as strongly that the roads would bring the outside world to them, as much as it would give them ways to reach the outside world themselves. As Masquelier noted, roads are modern paths to power and status for those who know how to use them (2000: 103; 2002: 836). Hodgson confirmed this among the Maasai in Tanzania, where at one development meeting all the men argued passionately for a new road, while the women grumbled, asking "will a road feed our children and cattle?" (2001: 5) Though they themselves do not move, roads are not passive development devices. They are tools for the dreams of young men, who, by leaving their natal village, can follow them to better lives. And though in my interviews I saw the solution of a road couched in the language of encouraging women in their farming activities, it would open up more opportunities for urban migration, which is an option most often exercised by young men. As Renne noted in a Yoruba town in Nigeria, it was the men who exercised the option to leave and work as wage laborers when a road was built to their town. Agricultural connections were secondary, if present at all (2003: 21).

The result of increased access to villages would be that women have roads and transport to move their root crops (cassava and potato, farmed because they are not labor intensive) to market, and men have roads and transport through which to conduct their own business ventures, such as tree crop farming. As it stands, if a woman wants to sell her produce in town, she must carry her basket, often weighing thirty pounds, several miles to the highway food market, and then compete with several dozen other women for a few meager sales. A road and transport would mean more marketing options to choose from, and quicker transport. Men argued passionately that the government needed to "open up" their villages to the rest of Sierra Leone, and that this increased contact would encourage farming, though in truth it would mainly increase their ability to interact with the wider world, and would probably have an immediately detrimental effect on farming

as youth have greater opportunities to leave their villages and seek their fortunes in urban areas. Renne noted that road construction increased the “comings and goings” from a town, noting that young people could leave to seek employment, but often returned to the town to build their homes (2003: 41). The problem, noted by women, is that young people who leave Bombali’s villages tend not to return. Notwithstanding this, in our discussions the people earnestly believed that if they were just able to get the food to market, they would be able to sell it somehow, and bring the proceeds back to the village.

Roads are both magical and paternalistic: they hold the promise of a better life, and they are a form of “encouragement” from the government that is unilaterally good, with no strings attached, and no commitment required on the part of the recipients. I found in my interviews none of the historical ambivalence that occurs with a long history of road building through forced labor (see Azavedo, 1981: 5-6; Masquelier, 2002: 829). Though in the colonial era roads many were constructed as “Chiefs’ Roads” and relied on the Paramount Chief in an area to recruit and pay the laborers, the taint of the potential for increased exploitation by colonial administrators was absent. Indeed, it was the chiefs who were despised for forcing labor for no pay, and the chiefs who often benefited from increased goods transport, from which they could extract tax (see Alie, 1990: 212). When a road was finally constructed, it meant freedom for traders to transport their goods without paying railroad cargo, and all others determined to make their fortune. For farmers living on the outskirts of Makeni, roads are a cure-all to agricultural stagnation, and the government is the best possible organization to rescue people from the backwardness they suffer partially from being isolated from the rest of the world. With roads they could have more power and options in their own lives, and this would put them in a stronger position vis-à-vis outsiders, especially expatriate INGO workers.

People are frustrated by INGO workers, whom they see bringing no real good into the community. They air their grievances most publicly on the radio, such as the debate and call-in program on one of the local radio stations about whether the town should officially ask one INGO to leave because they appeared to be doing nothing for Makeni. The radio, aside from being a conduit for political discussions for people within the town, is also one of the main avenues for a new form of social critique: political pop songs. One of the most popular political songs to emerge in Sierra Leone when I worked in

Makeni was the song *An'Porto*, which was especially salient because a local group performed it in Temne. Makeni people were talking back to “development.”

***An'porto: confronting the violence of extraction, bargaining for a better future***

There is always music in the air in Makeni, whether it is from the ubiquitous short-wave transistor radios, or from the small market stalls where music sellers play the newest releases in order to attract curious customers. Sierra Leonean music since the war has been acutely socially aware; I had been in Makeni less than a day when I first overheard a conversation in which students were discussing whether since the release of songs such as “Corruption,” “City Life” (a meditation on urban poverty), and “Nor Touch” (a warning against stealing), musicians were taking the place of journalists in offering the most scathing critiques on the government and post-war life.<sup>102</sup> They had been encouraged, said one student, by Tejan Kabbah’s admonishment to his cabinet not to attempt to censor musicians. By letting them *blo maynd* [speak their minds] instead of censoring them, there would be less pent-up aggression that might result in further violence. Musicians were thus left to their own devices, and they began formulating out of their music devastating social critiques on the state of the country

I first noticed the effect that musicians were having on social life when I returned to Makeni for my main fieldwork in June 2004 after an absence of ten months. Instead of being greeted by curious strangers with, “*An'porto, sekay!*” [white person, hello!], as had been the case a year earlier, I was greeted with “*An'porto, yema di!*” [White person, I want to eat!] What had occurred in the intervening months, as the aid boom wound to a close and most NGOs in Makeni shut their doors was the release of a song called *An'porto* by the group 2+1. I analyze the song in detail here because 2+1 is a group of four men who are all Temnes from Makeni, and the song, sung in Temne (unlike most Sierra Leonean pop songs, which are sung in Krio to appeal to everyone) gained rabid popularity in Makeni well before it spread to the rest of the nation. The fact that it is a local sensation, and meant to appeal to Temne speakers living in the region, makes it an especially salient commentary on European-Temne relations, present and past, and the

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<sup>102</sup> This phenomenon also occurs in Niger, where, according to Alidou, singers are “remarkably sensitive to the place of orality in popular conscience” (2006: 66).

devastating consequences they have wrought among the local power elite, namely their proclivity to consume the nation's resources and enjoy themselves elsewhere.

*An'porto* is a critical commentary on the nature of foreign involvement in Sierra Leone, most prominently colonial resource extraction and the spread of missionary education, and the need to respond carefully to the consequences of colonization in order to keep the nation intact. The lyrics are both vague and pointed enough to invite people to interpret how they should support Sierra Leone in their own way, with the one obvious caveat being that Sierra Leoneans should have the knowledge and confidence to use the white man's tools for the benefit of their own country, without the white man's continued involvement. After lambasting the education brought by the white man as a cover for the theft of minerals in one verse, the artists criticize Sierra Leoneans who chose to "self develop" and then took their money and education overseas. The song provides an imaginative path to negotiating the country's relationship with white people and the problems, and benefits, of associating with them (see Schaberg, 1999: 311). 2+1 released the song in 2004, as most crisis-oriented international NGOs phased out their operations, and reminded Sierra Leoneans that white people, in whatever guise they appear, never give unambiguous good, and may create more problems than they solve. However, unlike written records, the interpretive space created in song gives people their own tools for dealing with their current troubles, and negotiating their own relationship with "development," its European purveyors, and the Sierra Leoneans who "eat" it.

*Collapsed identities, miscommunication, and self-development:  
what do white people want?*

The song, though in the beginning is specifically about miners, creates a space into which can be collapsed and critiqued all known white identities and intentions—colonial administrator, missionary, aid worker—while simultaneously giving expression to the slippage that occurs when white people attempt to communicate with Sierra Leoneans

and usually end up insulting them and their capabilities. The following is the opening lines of the song as translated and commented on by my assistant Idriss:<sup>103</sup>

First there is a conversation between a white man and a local Temne person.

The white man says: “Hello ladies and gentlemen I am a white man in Sierra Leone. I want you to know that learning is better than silver and gold, so I need all your minerals then you will be educated.”

After this speech made by the white man then the local person says: “O’porto iyemadi” and the white says: “What?” This continues between both of them twice. That is “O ‘Porto iyemadi” “What?” “O’porto iyemadi” “What?” This means, “White man I want to eat!!” The interrogative question, “what?” is rhymed with the Temne word “wath” which means “a child”. In making a final remark to the white man’s question “what?” The local person says, look: “wathai woni bake gbang” meaning “I am not a child at all but an old person.”

In his inability to understand the Temne man’s request for food in exchange for extracting resources, the white man is insulting him. Interpreted in larger terms with the aid boom, the song expresses the inherently unequal subject positions of white people and Temnes, where local people, as the recipients of money or goods, whether it is called “charity” like the Christ Salvation Army Charity school for the disabled or “aid” like CARE’s donation of cassava sticks to villages, are treated like small children who need caring for. The fact that whites assume locals are *wath* [children] is why whites assume that Temnes cannot manage their own resources, and in fact would not miss them, as long as they receive something in return. The emphasis on education implies, once again, that the Temne are small children who need schooling. The essential trickery of the white person is that he uses “development,” like education, to deflect the Temnes’ attention from his birthright: the riches of the nation.

The chorus says:

Why do the white people come overseas to the African countries where we do mining of our gold and silver? Are they here for any enjoyment, do they live in poverty, or do they have some work to do here? Why do they really, really have to come here? Then the local person says: We don’t care, it’s here we are born and do our mining.

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<sup>103</sup> I am using Idriss’ own phonetic spelling of Kathemne. Native speakers generally do not know the standardized form because they do not take the subject at school. It is an elective taken by Limba speakers, who use the “official” phonetic spellings. On the cassette cover, the song is called *An’porto*.

Sierra Leoneans were told to go to school rather than developing an indigenous mining industry, which meant that whites dictated what minerals were worth to people. This ultimately resulted in violence, poverty and suffering. This external control of minerals, and therefore the white miners and educators, were the true instigators of war, though the evil that began with white people teaching bad lessons to the indigenous class of politicians and other powerful people seems to have taken on a life of its own:

The third verse says:<sup>104</sup>

When the white people arrived in S/Leone long ago, they were best friends to the S/Leoneans whom they met and said to them that education is better than gold, silver, and diamond mining. They sent us to school like April the Fool and exploited all our minerals, moving away to their respective homes. In S/Leone, we shouldn't be in suffering but we were unknown [unknowing of the riches that our own minerals would bring us]. Frustration, hypertension [serious social tension], embezzlement, beggars, liars, highfiting [?], long and short hand [perhaps a reference to amputations during the war, when combatants were known to ask their victims, mocking tailors, "would you like long or short sleeves?" meaning, would you like me to amputate your arm at the wrist or the shoulder?], bribery and corruption, financial difficulties and hunger are so many now. As such we are so sorry [perhaps: "we are sorry that we let our minerals go when we should have been gaining wealth from them ourselves." It could also be, "we are in a sorry state now because of the war caused by our minerals." There are polyvalent meanings in the original KaThemne]

The damage done by white people did not stop with the war. Introducing education, according to Idriss, meant that some people, especially the country's leaders, top business people and intellectuals, could "self-develop," which in this case created the means for them to more efficiently consume the nations' riches. They plundered the country's resources and took their money, and their educations, overseas. They slipped off the precarious "self development" point and instead of using their wealth and means for the good of the nation through community development, instead chose to use them in the quest to consume more and distribute it only in their immediate families. This is grotesquely reproduced at the local level in Makeni, with people fighting for INGO positions because of the money they offer, and some embezzling funds. However, most often they are driven to do this by their kin, to whom they either "owe" development

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<sup>104</sup> The second verse is about the humiliation of being refugees in Guinea and thus the reason for most people to come home, and is less important for analysis here, so I did not include it.

benefits, or are so pressured by poor family that they feel compelled to take as much personal benefit from the INGOs as they can. 2+1 is asking those people who have benefited so much that they have moved overseas to stop “eating” the resources that have made them fat, and return to their nation to work for a better future:

The fourth verse says:

Wherever one is staying, be it in Europe, America, or Asia doing some big positive things and becoming so sweet like it will never be going so bad, all the time one must know in mind that he /she is a foreigner to that land. Getting someone a green card or not, all is just to teach one to contribute to their nation building and development to a shape which they need. One knows that S/Leone is the only country we should try to develop. So please, you that have swear [sworn] not to come back to S/Leone should be very aware of your home as it is just your mother land and there is no place like home.

2+1 are calling on the country’s own expatriates to return and work productively for Sierra Leone because they have the skills to do so. And unlike white people, they should have a genuine vested interest in seeing the country succeed and a working knowledge of what people want and need to actually force progress. Idriss’s own thoughts on this song include the comment that white people introduced “development” to Sierra Leone, in an incomplete form. What they showed Sierra Leoneans with their own activities was that education, one form of “self-development” was more important than mining, which Sierra Leoneans soon realized was another lucrative form of “self-development.” The white people did not take the time to imbricate either of these two concepts into development for the nation (in fact only serving to reproduce these inequalities at the local level); hence the big men only practice “self-development:”

In my own view on this music Cat, is like the singer is trying to condemn that white people don’t come here for development in the colonial period... S/Leone could have developed more than it had done but the people requested for independence without ripening... the handing over of the power to the S/Leoneans was the time the country started to depreciate up to this time due to self-development among the leaders of the country.

In the wake of all the big men taking the country’s riches and leaving to develop themselves—the typical *borbor bele* consumption considered so morally bereft that it must be cloaked in a language of “self-development”—what is left is the small men

starving and going to school, once again being confronted by the white man who calls them a small child for wanting to eat, and offers them hoes to make their farms productive. 2+1 express the idea that there is no shame in filling one's basic needs by demanding them from white people, as white people have done enough damage not only by plundering the country themselves, but also by incompletely teaching the leaders the full cycle of "development." Instead they encouraged big men like chiefs to only consider the individual, themselves.<sup>105</sup> This is one of the main reasons why INGOs that offered "aid," direct benefits to people, without involving individuals that might have their own ideas about "development," such as MSF, were never criticized at the local level, and those that attempted to tell the people how they should develop, were. However, by shifting the blame for the country's current state onto the backs of foreigners, 2+1 are effectively relieving the country's big men, its ministers and businessmen, in spite of their indiscretions, of their burden of responsibility for the war and aftermath, as they are the country's only true hope for future progress. It is left with the country's expatriates to return and fill the ranks of the big men, and it is on their shoulders that the country's development rests.

*Metaphorically disarming purveyors of "development"*

Through the song, 2+1 have created a caricature of the expatriate—aid worker and otherwise—as someone who is incapable of communicating with local people without insulting them, and whose goals (the metaphorical mining) do not mesh with people's own goals, namely addressing their hunger. At the same time, by "eating" the country's minerals, white people are responsible for teaching the country's big men how to "eat" the wealth of the country, leaving the average person with nothing to eat at all. One of my interlocutors commented that the song meant that the people are so sorry that their own leaders learned these terrible lessons from the white people, namely that if you distract the people with promises of services like school and medicine, then you can steal their resources behind their backs and live like kings, which is what the politicians do. The leaders are corrupt today because they were educated under the colonial system and

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<sup>105</sup> See Appendix III for a full discussion of "Tipay's Rebellion," the tax rebellion that occurred in the northern province in 1955-56, from which much of people's distrust of the motives of "big men" stems.



learned too well the lessons of the colonial master, which is that leaders can fool their own people the same way the white man did, and profit just as much from it.

The way people in Makeni deployed the song as a moral lesson and in social encounters with white people illustrate a profound ambivalence towards western-inspired “development” like education that is rooted just as much in encounters with expatriates in a post-war context as it is in the history of mining. As analyzed in Chapter Four, teachers deploy the “education is better than silver and gold” line in the classroom in order to inspire their students to achieve now that the war is over, even though the lead singer was mocking this phrase as part of the process of white people corrupting the country. The nine teachers to whom I spoke all firmly believe that an educated populace is the only way to cure the country of its current ills, especially corruption and poverty, if people can move beyond mere “self-development.” “I think of it this way,” said one teacher who had taught in Makeni for twenty years, “if the children remember only this line, it will mean that maybe they remember that knowledge is always better than material things.” Ultimately, by asking Sierra Leone’s expatriates to return to the country armed with their knowledge and willing to leave behind their material gains in Europe and America, this is exactly what 2+1 is hoping for.

Father Samura encouraged teachers to use the song in their classrooms as in order to teach students the African perspective on the history of minerals. He says that the rather blasé attitude towards mineral resources that the people had in the beginning of the song was a result of the fact that before the white people arrived Sierra Leoneans did not know the value of their minerals, but were happy that the white people were willing to pay them something in order to dig them. When they learned the value of their minerals social relations went bad, as the money led to corruption and in-fighting among politicians and business people as they battled for control of the minerals, all of which were sent abroad and were not used to help the very Sierra Leoneans who extracted them. These problems led to the war, and the agony of war was where you found “beggars and liars,” “long and short hand” (amputations) and eventually caused the severe hunger that the country is now experiencing.

Minerals cause hunger not just because of all the social troubles they cause in the capital, where ministers bleed off profits for personal use, but because people dig under

valuable farmland in order to mine, and it is the farmers themselves who set aside long-term food security in order to make quick money. Minerals mean starvation because both the land and the labor are involved in mining. For that Sierra Leoneans curse the white man for treating them like children, because they never learned to handle the wealth they had properly. And for this reason, they need their people who tasted the bitterness of war to remember that they are still Sierra Leoneans and have an obligation to use the education that came with mining for the good of the country.

The last critical component of *An'porto* is how people in Makeni, adults and children alike, deployed the song in social interactions with white people. Makeni was one of the national centers of aid in Sierra Leone from 2001-2004, and at one point there were over two hundred white aid workers and UN personnel in and around the township. At the time I conducted my research, the number was down to twenty aid workers, twenty UN employees, and a handful of British military advisors. I was the only white person not working in an aid context, however I still represented “whiteness.” When I walked down the street, many people greeted me with “*An'porto, yema di!*” and many of them would hold out their hands for me to give them food or money. As they were already in unequal subject positions vis-à-vis white people, they were not asking for “charity,” as a disabled person is expected to ask for it, rather they were demanding that I acknowledge a long history of miscommunication and exploitation.

Among adults, the lyrics of the song were a farcical way to interact with white people. Sometimes I encountered a chorus of teenagers who only expected me to answer, “*Wath?*” when they started the dialogue, to which end they would burst out in laughter. Sometimes women who were sitting in front of their houses peeling enormous piles of cassava or potatoes would shout out, “*An'porto yema di!*” when I passed by. I would joke with them that they must have forgotten the potato in their hand, or they must be shouting at me in sympathy because I am thin and they are not (this last response was usually greeted with hysterics). Occasionally someone would issue this greeting as a challenge, current to all the problems the township was having with INGOs, “You as a white person owe us for creating the conditions for our current troubles.” As my intentions as anthropologist became clear to townspeople, this particular greeting from adults ceased. Once, however, I witnessed a frustrated aid worker respond to the

*An'porto* greeting with “Fuck off!” before driving away in his SUV in a cloud of dust. Not only did he have no intention of recognizing or equalizing unequal subject positions, but clearly also lacked the self-awareness to see himself within the context of the history of European involvement in the area. Indeed, this white man in Sierra Leone did not care to engage with the people whose needs he was ostensibly there to fill, and he would only do so within the context of his job, and not as a human responding to requests from other humans. To me he was the man who had arrived in Makeni to “steal the gains of war.”

Whatever the scope of the interaction between local people and expatriates through the medium of song, the exchange of greetings is indicative of the need to disarm the expatriate by forcing him/her to acknowledge exactly why they were in Makeni, and the effect they are having on local social relations. White people have, with assistance of the song, become a caricature of themselves. They are not necessarily miners there to steal the wealth of the country; as Makeni people see it they have no wealth to steal. However, by bringing in a very limited amount of good, in the form of development programs and development money that they did make available inside the township, NGOs were unwittingly creating more tension in social relations between the class of post-war haves, and the large population of have-nots, and enhancing the extant structure of power relations and patrimonialism within relationships that caused so much grief for the “have-nots” before the war. The safest way for residents to morally re-define their relationship with the white aid community, transforming their need for money and resources from what could be seen as “charity” into the redress of a historical and social inequality, was by caricaturing white people in song. Thus could the white man, and the ambivalence of everything he brings, be metaphorically disarmed, and a more satisfactory, more clearly morally defined, reality created.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter I have brought the discussion of morality as it is worked and re-worked by people in their daily lives, often in dire poverty, full circle by highlighting the ways a small infusion of money into a community that is divided into a small wealthy elite and a large poor underclass reverberates for everyone who is involved, and not involved, and why. Though INGOs came to Makeni with the best of intentions, they had pre-conceived

ideas of what kind of world they were trying to create, and did not necessarily understand the social ramifications of bringing a limited amount of waged work into a township that is very poor, and in which the primary activity is trade that produces marginal profits.

By choosing a few individuals to employ, they created tensions in already strained kin and social relations, where most of their employees, having come by their skills through the assistance of their kin, now owed many people the benefits of their not-very-lucrative work. In addition, they often funded bogus local organizations proffered by the kin and friends of powerful people who had inserted themselves into this structure. The fall-out was that the intended beneficiaries of the CBOs' work, the impoverished people in and around the township, came to mistrust all organizations associated with "development." This made it infinitely more difficult for honest organizations both to work with these communities, and to get and keep funding from INGOs and donor organizations, who had been made wary of local desires and alterations to extant programs through their experiences with employee embezzlement. The programs often need altering, because they are based on the idea that the conditions that existed before the war are the conditions they should strive to recreate.

The alterations that people desire in extant programs are things they believe would create their desired future: that which was good in the past, like seed stock, and that which is perceived as providing endless good in the future, like mechanization and roads. These are things that individuals and villages feel they can control and profit from without necessarily having to involve INGOs or CBOs in perpetuity. These things they demand are a firm anchoring to a productive future, and this is what people are also demanding of the big people. They feel that the expatriates currently working in the town have no real commitment to the place and have the habit, as their predecessors had done in the past, of doing more harm than good. Foreigners cannot provide the "development" that people need; they do not understand the country well enough to even know where to begin, therefore they should depart. Those big people who have profited most from the nation in the past managed to do so because they can take advantage of the social and political networks in the country. They clearly understand how the system works, and are in the best position to change it. They have a duty to now return and serve the people that are suffering because of big people's penchant for being *borbor bελε*.

## **Conclusions**

### **Fashioning the “normal” through durable morality and creative development**

Berry notes that among the Yoruba, “preserving local structures and practices implied change” (1985: 9). In order to preserve the cultural institutions of morality, most especially interpersonal relationships and their relationship with “development,” ideas of “development” and what constitutes relationships of mutual obligation, had to become flexibly adaptable to extant poverty, otherwise they would shatter. People in Makeni have been reworking and refashioning notions of development in order to keep essential moral relations intact, for example by introducing the concept of “self-development” and the different kinds of work and networks that go with it, exercising non-kin networks, and pulling down people who may stray too far and do not reciprocate. From these negotiations, essential morality, in a more durable form, remains intact and capable of flexing to fit an ever-changing situation, even if that situation consistently reflects the structural violence of endemic poverty, or as the people call it, “backwardness.”

Morality itself has not been altered: people still hold to the exemplar of reciprocal relations between kin, that “development” is based on blessings and work from many different people, and all of them reap some reward from the “developed” individual. However, people are no longer taking their relationships, especially kinship, for granted. People are redefining their relationships with one another: basing bonds on shared experiences, explicit mutual assistance, and choice, so that kinship itself has become flexibly responsive to the need to keep local exemplars intact. We can see this most graphically as it is produced at the level of negotiating relationships with successful expatriates, successful students, and even successful NGO workers, who often find themselves in the unhappy position of trying to find the most “moral” path when confronted with a small salary and needy kin.

Within the realm of relationships, notions of “development” have become more explicit, revealing specific linkages between types of development and the expectation of sharing its benefits. Especially since the war, local understandings of what constitutes a

“benefit” of development are also being reworked. The ideological battle between education and business, for example, is both a contestation of whether the country will be able to provide salaried jobs in the future or not, and whether education or petty trade better serves the immediate goal of keeping otherwise idle youth occupied and satisfied. People who worry about which is the better route for their children are also juggling other factors: whether taxation means that trade is profitable at all, or if the trades the youth are prone to enter are more indicative of moral failings than “development-minded” activity, or if it makes sense to pay school fees for a child that may never get a job and be able to repay their debt, or even if they can be made to do so. Individuals who choose to “self-develop” rather than involve themselves in obligational relations with others face the problems associated with having no networks in their chosen residence area, or of relying heavily on the organizations, such as international NGOs, who do not come equipped to be responsive to local needs or desires, and usually resist doing so, even as they unwittingly enhance wealth differentials that they are striving to overcome, and promoting the “development” of specific individuals and their networks.

In an impoverished area, it is necessary, in order to maintain the exemplar, for individuals to defend the choices they make, and the people they do and do not include in their circle of potential beneficiaries. For people such as traders and students, the safest route is to quietly tread a path to success that is both morally acceptable in its treatment of others (such as traders who close their shops to pray, or INGO workers who take on the burdens of their kin because they are the only salaried people in their family), and not too lavish, which might be a reason for less fortunate others to pull them down. This notion also fits local understandings of “community development,” where individuals constantly assess who they need to involve in their projects and why, weighing the potential benefits of engaging in “community work” versus the work they could be doing, and benefits they could be reaping, on their own. People who are visibly, autonomously successful are easy targets to be pulled down, as they could have been sharing their benefits, but chose not to do so. This occurs on every level: politics, business, education, among INGO workers, and within families. When there are few resources to go around, anyone who is succeeding too well faces risks; people must thus both keep strong

networks of reciprocity intact in order to avoid this, succeed at a distance, or succeed as subtly and invisibly as possible so as not to arouse jealousy.

The consumption of money and resources is a necessary, though stigmatized, practice. Stigmatized because it produces no good: people are ashamed if they do not have enough money to “do development” and must instead fill their daily needs. Their anger at this kind of poverty is palpable, and people displace their anger on every entity that hampers their ability to move beyond mere coping: the town council, the national government, the sub-standard education system, expatriated relatives who disappeared, and poorly designed and stubbornly unhelpful INGO programs, to name a few. Equally deplored are the *borbor bεε* in the town and country; those who mock the average person’s inability to develop by consuming more than their fair share, or refuse to redistribute good to those to whom it is owed. Though people are constantly asking for assistance from these different entities, they resist calling this assistance “charity” because, though sanctioned for the extremely poor, it is ideologically removed from the realm of development. No one wants to be unproductive, and like *borbor bεε*, charity is unproductive. If one is reduced to levels of mere consumption to resolve *empti bag no de tinap*, it is better to cloak this in a stubborn resolve to “develop,” however the individual can negotiate that path for him or herself. Some engage in political talk, others in box trading, others go without food to pay school fees. All are searching for “self-reliance.”

“Self-development” results when individuals either consciously remove themselves from their kinship networks, either temporarily or permanently, in order to improve their lives on their own. The “ex-combatants” who lived in Makeni, self-supporting student migrants and box traders who struggle in town on their own are examples of people who are, at least for a time, choosing to “self-develop” so that they can make some small successes in their lives without being constantly burdened with requests or demands for assistance from family members, so that, as Feeley-Harnik found in Madagascar, “everyone has nothing together” (1991: 204). Many people who worked for INGOs found themselves inundated with the needs of their social networks, and often financially poorer for it. On the other hand, those people who have ostensibly benefited from “development,” whether it takes the form of INGO programs or school, feel equally disabled, whether by their reintegration training or by virtue of attending sub-standard

schools in Makeni. However they must labor with the knowledge that others, who do not even have these benefits, expect that they will be able to provide.

“Self-development” is a way to temporarily re-define the realm of whom they are obligated to assist, merely by the fact that anyone who did not assist in a person’s struggle may not partake in their success. They may also be shielded from the potential for failure and the resulting shame they would feel in front of family members. In the interim they enter strong friendships of mutual help and reciprocity, relationships that are defined by the involved people’s will and ability to help each other, though often these relationships are as brittle as people’s circumstances, and will dissolve when the reciprocity does. In many cases within families, people are not taking mutual obligation, the exemplar, for granted, and they too are defining their relationships by the reciprocity involved, though the time scale may be much longer than with friendships. Indeed, in the case of INGO workers pressured to embezzle by the needs of so many kin, there may be no time horizon present at all, because “poverty prevents it,” just as it prevents poor parents from looking after their children. In all cases, relations must be active to be intact, and people of all stripes actively seek those relations from which they may benefit.

Individuals who have barely enough to look after themselves and those few individuals with whom they share their lives are in a poor position to initiate and sustain “community development,” however the ethos remains that perhaps simply by educating all of the youth it will be possible for the township to pull itself, and the rest of its population, out of a state of backwardness. It is the residents’ inability to push successful “community development” that people usually point to when eliding the town’s backwardness with their own moral failings. Bo and Kenema are more developed not just because the government loves them more, but because the people who grow up in those environments are more “open” to doing development, and are more likely to remain in their home areas, instead of attempting to escape the town that is “behind.” Makeni cannot prosper, for example, until the townspeople trust the town council, but until the council is honest, they have no reason to do so. Young people especially now place their hopes with the national government, stating that if the government gave Makeni the push that it needed: good schools, seed and tools for agriculture, roads, and other infrastructure like working clinics, life would automatically improve, and so would Makeni’s people.



Though open to the involvement of international NGOs, people are wary of them forcing “community development” ahead of individual development, which would produce results like a cooperative agriculture project in a village where none of the parents can afford to send their children to school. They are equally wary of “charity,” which they cannot make culturally productive, and money that comes as charity is more of a curse than a blessing. INGOs especially are remiss in distinguishing the two at the local level, and this causes problems for their intended program “beneficiaries.” There must be another way, and people are looking for it.

Because the situation is not “normal,” because the place is so “backward” and seems to be sliding still after the war, ideas of what constitute acceptable “development” among individuals, versus what is unacceptable “consumption” are continually changing. Individuals negotiate acceptable moral positions for themselves, and stances vis-à-vis others—traders, tax collectors, politicians, INGO managers—in order to negotiate the best possible outcome in terms of their own wellbeing, and ultimately that of others to whom they are emotionally tied and in relations of mutual reciprocity, at the end of the day. They are thinking simultaneously on two time scales: the uncertain present, and a future that they may be able to create some control over.

What is important to emphasize about Makeni people insisting that the place is so “backward” and experiencing a systematic sharpening and refining of morality and ideas of “development” is that this implies that the extant conditions of life are not improving, even three years after the war. This means that so many of the reasons the RUF initially gained willing conscripts—namely that youth with a few years of education listened to and accepted the RUF’s ideology of needing to push out a corrupt and “rotten” system—have not changed. Therefore, as Hanlon stated so categorically, the international community has been complicit in recreating the conditions that the country found itself in when the war began (2005: 467, 472), such as lack of food security, poor educational and employment opportunities, and a low quality of life for most citizens. And though the war is officially over, the inability of the government and the international community—both governments and non-governmental organizations—to erase the conditions that produced the conflict means the country, especially Makeni, is experiencing what Uyangoda has called “negative peace” (quoted in Woost and Winslow, 2004: 202).

A mere absence of war, Uyangoda contends, does not mean that a previous conflict will never flare up again if the only accomplishment thus far has been long-term conflict management. A glance at the final chapter of the dissertation affirms this, especially as those organizations tasked with “rebuilding” the country are trying to “rebuild” it in nearly the same decrepit form, in spite of the protests of the people with which they work, in which it was immediately before the war. If we use Makeni people’s own ideas of what constitutes an exemplary “normal” life as a barometer for how well they, and the government, and INGOs, are addressing the kinds and context of peace as it is experienced in day-to-day life, we may have reason to be concerned. The desperate circumstances in which most people survive do not look like “positive peace.” However, in spite of this and the fact that ideas of morality and development are being contested and altered, sometimes radically, it is equally possible that the fact that people are negotiating “development” in creative new ways, and with these negotiations creating a less ambiguous, less ambivalent, more durable sense of what is moral, they may themselves create lasting peace in their hearts and their homes, even if their neighbors might take a dimmer view of what they do. From this personal peace people can tackle the challenges of development in their community and nation.

The country’s recent presidential election stands as a benchmark. The SLPP party, which had ruled the nation since 1996, was peaceably voted out of office and replaced by the APC leader Ernest Koroma, a former insurance broker and a native of Makeni. This may signal that Sierra Leoneans in general, and Makeni people in particular, are not willing to give up on democracy, or on the future of their nation, no matter how corrupt politicians and civil servants were in the past. Koroma vowed during his inauguration on September 17<sup>th</sup>, 2007, to wipe out corruption in the country, create food security, and generate jobs. One of his first acts was to separate the offices of Attorney General and Chief Justice of the courts, offices that had been combined under Siaka Stevens in order to cement his control of the justice system. My research assistant Idriss sent me an ecstatic e-mail from Freetown: “The people including me have the belief that this new government will provide for all the people of Sierra Leone a life consonant with freedom and dignity and a conducive physical, mental and social welfare [sic].” Sierra Leoneans have acted decisively, and remain hopeful. I am as well.

## **Understanding morality in the *is* and the *ought*; preparing for the future**

I intended with this project to enhance understandings of how people create and sustain workable lives in the aftermath (indeed, sometimes ongoing experience) of violence, trauma, and suffering by concentrating on the moral conundrums, conflicts, and decisions that occur as people engage in dreaming and making life “normal.” Unlike other studies of post-war and post-trauma reconstruction in Africa, I am not concentrating solely on social healing through mechanisms like truth commissions (see Last, 1997; Krog, 1998; Ross, 2001; Shaw, 2005), ritual (see Reynolds, 1990; Perera, 2001) or engaging in acts of the “everyday” as a means to achieve peace in the midst and immediate aftermath of war and terror (see Nordstrom, 1997, 2004; Minow, 1998). Rather, I take my cue from Leopold, who, in writing about Uganda, demurred from the “healing the social body” model that is popular for describing social healing after trauma and violence (see Das and Kleinman, 2001) because, though shot through with symbolism, it does little to address the practicalities of how people live once “peace” has ostensibly been reached, the spotlight has gone away, and “the place is still poor,” according to my neighbor. Leopold stated, “[healing the social body] did not provide a very useful framework for talking about the political and economic aspects of social reconstruction which many of my local interlocutors saw as central” (2005: 214). Extending this, I was concerned with how people struggle to create a sense of a livable everyday and dream about and work toward a better future in the aftermath of a war that disturbed a situation that was itself abnormal and difficult. I accomplished this by looking for their barometer of what a “good” and thus “normal” life is, and how they worked to achieve this.

Ovesen (2005: 22) analyzed the Khmer Rouge regime in Cambodia as only part of a much longer history of terror and abuse in the region, and I agree that we must start from a historical perspective when formulating what we feel are the “effects” of war. I refused to take for granted an idea that the lives that people led pre-conflict and pre-trauma fit some gauge of “normal,” and instead examined the long-term processes that undermined this sense in total, and through which people are still working and struggling to this day. I believe that one of the best ways to frame and understand ideas of the exemplary normal in situations that have not been “normal” for many years—indeed can never again be the same kind of “normal” as existed at various points in the past because

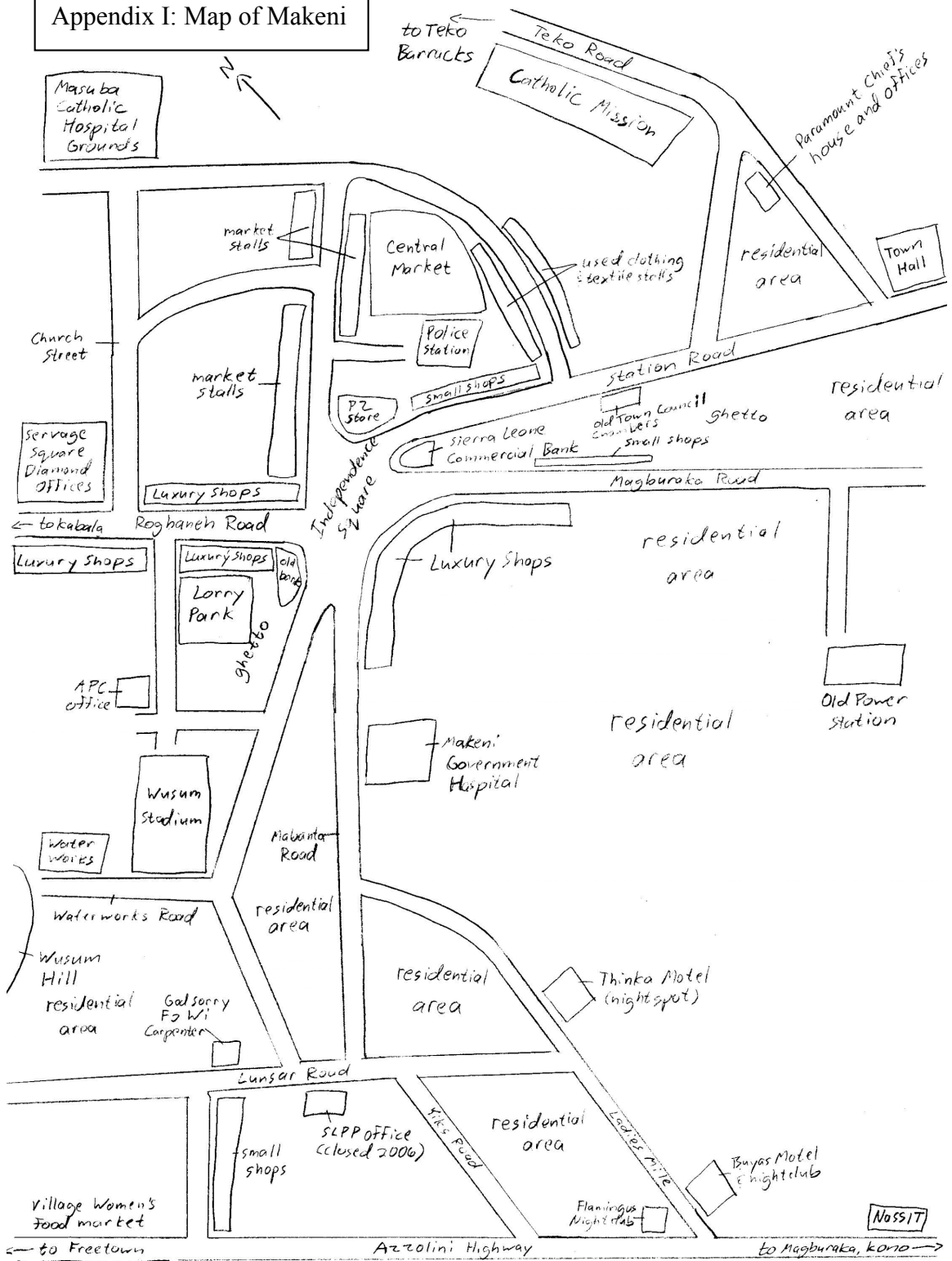
of the irrevocable changes wrought by time, colonialism, independence, structural adjustment, and other experiences of a rapidly changing world—comes through an investigation of how individuals negotiate ways to behave morally, and yet provide themselves with both immediate, and hopefully lasting, good, in spite of their obstacles.

By concentrating on the longer historical processes of how a place and people appear to themselves “backward” and morally diminished, as opposed to just the effects of war and physical and social reconstruction, I hope to have moved beyond analyzing the tortuous dichotomies of “traditional/modern,” “undeveloped/developed” and “normal/abnormal” that anthropologists often seem to fall into when analyzing situations of social, political, and economic upheaval. Again, I emphasize that by looking at how the *ought* and the *is* are contested by people everyday as they go about the business of living and providing for their networks the best they can, we can come to a better understanding of not just how and why people find their lives difficult, but how they struggle, both with each other and within themselves, to tread the path that, in the end, they feel will provide them with the most satisfying results. They do this even as they see their world as “not normal,” their neighbors as “backward,” their town as “behind.” This was the state of Makeni before the war, and it continues.

Essentially, I have analyzed how it is that people make what they deem to be moral and good decisions in a town and situation where, because the pre-war past cannot provide a foundation from which to judge, the future, and their own place in it, is entirely unknown. Especially interesting in this context is the place of the youth, and the “half-baked youth.” They occupy a liminal space of post-war hope and unease: politically engaged, lacking sufficient training to find jobs, despising the prospect of manual labor, pinning their hopes on Makeni joining a more “modern” world; so that they sit, poised and waiting to attach themselves to the world they hope will take shape, and yet only marginally able to effect this world in the present. It is critical that we learn more about these youth, as in the coming years, they—and their hopes, dreams, expectations, and ideas of the *ought*—will move from the margins to center stage as they, as their teachers have told them, become “the leaders of tomorrow.” Their experiences in the recent past have had an inexorably strong imprint on their ideas on what should be “normal” life in the future, and it is from here that we proceed.

## Appendices

Appendix I: Map of Makeni



## Appendix II Reading Newspapers in Sierra Leone

Sierra Leone has one of the longest print news traditions in Africa. The first Sierra Leonean newspaper was the *Sierra Leone Gazette*, published by the office of the governor, Charles MacCarthy, in 1817. This was a revived *Gazette*, the previous likeness of which had been out of print since 1810 (Alie, 1990: 72). The *Gazette* was published continually until independence in 1961, with the colonial government having taken over publishing by the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. According to Alie, by 1850, there were several flourishing newspapers in Freetown that were widely read along the entire West African coast. Some of these newspapers, all of which were privately owned by Krio families by the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, included *The West African Reporter*, the *Sierra Leone Weekly News*, *The Artisan*, and *The Sierra Leone Times*. According to Alie, they became the Krio people's most effective weapon against British domination, though the colonial administration did little to attempt to silence them until the 1930's (1990: 167), when war with Germany appeared imminent and it focused on quashing dissent in the colony.

The only two newspapers that survived through the colonial era to the present are *The Daily Mail* and *We Yone*. *The Daily Mail* was originally published by the colonial administration's Office of the Governor General, and when the country achieved independence in 1961, control of the paper passed to the SLPP, the party of the first Prime Minister, Milton Margai. *We Yone* was the publication of the SLPP's main rival party at independence, the APC. Both newspapers are still controlled by their respective parties, and both have the expected political slant to much of their news. Throughout the reigns of Siaka Stevens and Joseph Momoh (1967-1985), *We Yone* was supportive of everything the national government did, and rarely reported dissent. *The Daily Mail*, however, provided critical commentary of the government at this time, though often it was couched in subtle language in order to avoid censorship or the harassment of the offending journalist. The fact that most of the articles to appear in newspapers during the reign of the APC were published anonymously attests to this fact.

Publication of new independent newspapers flourished wildly with independence, though the standard of journalism between the papers varied widely. Indeed, this is still the case today, among the ten to twenty papers—of varying standard—that may publish an issue in Freetown on any given day. A cartoon published in one newspaper in 2000, illustrating that too much of anything in Sierra Leone is bad, went through a list “too many hungry police, too many diamonds, too many political parties... too many newspapers.” Most of the newspapers have had, according to the archivist Abu Koroma, definite regional, political, and ethnic slants in the past, and the trend continues today. During the republic declared by Siaka Stevens (1972-1985), the newspapers were heavily censored, and many that were critical of him were shut down completely.

I had a conversation about this with Mr. IB Kargbo, a native of Makeni and president of the Sierra Leone Association of Journalists (SLAJ). His first paper was *The Citizen*, which he stated he published specifically because “the country needed a second opinion during one-party rule”. His second paper, *The Tablet*, was a “kind of a radical group of

young people who wanted the government to understand that certain frailties and weaknesses should be brought to the fore,” for which he stated “we went to jail for that once in a while.” The offices of *The Tablet* were burned to the ground in 1982. He emerged, undeterred, and founded a new newspaper that still he publishes today, *The New Citizen*. Only journalists that were protected by the president, or worked for the party paper *We Yone* could be confident that their work would be read widely and their publishing houses remain intact. Many that were burned down were re-formed under new names. This accounts for the tremendous number of different papers represented in the bibliography, though I cannot be sure who exactly printed which paper at which time.

Kargbo cites the fact that the newspapers are widely divergent on their political views and regional orientations as a big problem; that journalists are not generally impartial in their coverage of news:

My worry is that, you only need to read the newspapers like I am doing now, to discover that the newspapers themselves are divided. There are those newspapers which are totally angry with the president and the government, like *Fo Di People*, because they believe that the government is tribal in orientation. And you have those newspapers that continue to support the government, because they think that they come from the same part as the leaders of that party. But that is not the proper way of doing things.

The editor of *Fo Di People* was in and out of jail for libel during my tenure in Makeni; in fact the previous editor of the paper had been murdered in his home one night. However this was the one newspaper that continued to publish during the AFRC junta in 1997. All other newspapers stopped, to restart again only once Tejan Kabbah was back in power. Newspapers at other points in time had definite slants to them as dictated by the government; for example during the NPRC, every week every paper had to report the corruption trials that the NPRC was holding for former public officials and military men who had betrayed the country. This halted once the NPRC was out of power.

One of Kargbo’s main aims as the president of SLAJ is to raise the standard of journalism in the newspapers by holding classes on journalistic ethics, reportage, and editorializing for all journalists in Freetown, and to persuade them not to be swayed or intimidated by politics or politicians on any side. He stated that the ethics class is the most important. In the past, for example, many newspapers had no qualms about publishing the full names and addresses of rape victims. Kargbo intends to halt this practice, and to shut down newspapers that are “clearly scandal sheets” masquerading as broadsheets, so that people can use the newspapers to enlighten themselves, rather than as pulp.

Kargbo is adamant that the purposes of newspapers are to give the public a voice; to make them “part and parcel of the body politic,” which is why he cites the fact that the newspapers are not widely disseminated outside of Freetown as a large problem. The fact that all the newspapers are written in English is not a problem, as none of the ethnic languages in Sierra Leone, nor Krio, has an indigenous writing tradition. Everyone who learns to read in Sierra Leone learns to read English. However, news about the provinces



is not widely read by people living in the provinces, it is mainly for the edification of descendants of those particular areas who live in Freetown. Before the war, when there was regular bus service to the provinces, the morning papers would be delivered to the provinces on the first bus, and the courier would distribute them around town to the different people with whom he had standing arrangements.

This still occurs today, though is more haphazard and usually the papers that arrive in Makeni are several days out of date. The only three places I regularly saw newspapers were in the Catholic Mission Rectory, at the house of the Paramount Chief, and in the Town Council Offices. In all three places there were always people who came in just to sit and read the newspapers. Some that I perused in the Rectory were two years old. Countless individuals read every copy of every newspaper that reached Makeni, and there is no doubt that they in turn related the news to other people. Between the newspapers and the radio broadcasts (there are three radio stations that broadcast in Makeni alone), I would contend that Makeni residents are very well-informed about the country, in its various constructions as interpreted by journalists and disc jockeys.

My purpose in using so many newspaper articles was twofold. First, newspapers would report on events that occurred that my interlocutors failed to mention, which gave me a point of entry to ask their thoughts and opinions on past events I felt might be key to understanding, for example, why residents consider Makeni “backward”. Second, by flipping through so many newspapers and noting what in Makeni was written about, versus what was written about in Bo and Kenema, I gained a better picture about how Makeni and its people are viewed and positioned—morally, developmentally—with respect to the rest of the nation by journalists writing from Freetown. I used articles that reported on events in Makeni: political gatherings, protests, and ceremonies, in order to mark the political climate at points in the past. I also collected articles related to controversial events, such as school riots and town council scandals, in order to elicit people’s opinions about the events themselves and reactions to what journalists in Freetown were saying.

Though I cannot directly represent the particular political leanings of every newspaper cited in the dissertation, nor the proclivities of each named journalists, I feel that by taking the advice of my original host Khadija Bah, namely “if you read five different articles about the same thing you will get all the truth somewhere in there,” I have been better able to grasp the complexities that are Makeni’s past and its people.

### **Appendix III** **“Tipay’s Rebellion”: the 1955-56 tax riots**

I cited the chiefly tax riots in several chapters as a reason Makeni people are innately suspicious of any authority figure or organization that taxes them, especially when they have reason to believe they will see no immediate benefits from such taxes. The riots, which Makeni people remember as Tipay’s Rebellion, occurred in 1955-56. Tipay was a man from Maforki Chiefdom in Port Loko district who, fed up with the exploitative rule of village and paramount chiefs that persisted under the less than close supervision of colonial administrators, and spurred on by a recent tax hike supported by chiefs, reacted violently by burning down a chief’s house. This revolt spread to the whole of the northern province, where no court messenger forces (the colonial precursor to a police force) were stationed that might deal with the rioting. This rebellion occurred, according to a memo from the Acting Governor of Sierra Leone to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, “when the district commissioners [white administrators] ceased to be presidents of the district councils and some chiefs, elected as presidents, openly called themselves the new district commissioners and abused not only their office as chief but also that as president.” The Governor called the chiefly organization in the north “less democratic” than the south, and admitted that the commissioners had allowed the chiefs to subject their people to “oppression and extortion” far longer than they should.

The administration had dealt with smaller riots against chiefs in previous years in the southern and eastern provinces, so this riot should not have come as a surprise, especially if chiefs were “more despotic” in the north. A riot in Bo district in 1949 sparked by the “obnoxious” actions of a chief, like purchasing two automobiles and building a massive house for himself, resulted in 100 people sent to trial. One year later 5,000 people rioted in Kailahun, in the east, to protest the re-instatement of a hated chief. A riot in Pujehun district, in the southern province, in 1951 began when “populist” elements attacked the home of a chief they accused of “maladministration”. The ensuing riots resulted in 101 people sent to trial in Freetown, and the “unruly” chiefdom was divided into three parts that were amalgamated with other chiefdoms (Kilson, 1966: 186-188).

The reason for the riot was the same: chiefly despotism. Fanthorpe (2001:380) states that chiefs had their rights to extract tribute and labor services from their people “enshrined in colonial law” from the inception of the protectorate, and that to disobey a chief’s orders was a criminal offense. In 1932 the Forced Labor Ordinance scaled back the level of allowed despotism established in 1905, stating that chiefs were entitled to “no more than 30 days free labor per year and no more than six days in any week.” Kilson (1966: 20) noted that aside from refusing to ban customary labor, the administration’s principal mistake was allowing the “customary labor and tribute payment” people gave their chiefs to be transformed into monetary extractions from a population incompletely incorporated in a market economy. In the coming years chiefs practiced “tax corruption” in order to build mansions and purchase automobiles; some spending upwards of £10,000 on a single residential building (54).

What emerges is that people had dutifully submitted to the whims of the chiefs and powerful elders, until this rebellion, which occurred in most towns in the northern province and involved thousands of people, resulted in several European police officers wounded or killed, three constables executed by a mob, and over £750,000 damage done to chiefly property.

One retired police officer explained Tipay's rebellion as "the original human rights action" in Sierra Leone against traditional tyrants who had been emboldened by their enhanced powers under the colonial administration:

Tipay educated the people about why they must strike, why they must riot, that it was the only option that they had. Because before the time of the rebellion, there used to be a general understanding... an understanding between the natives and the paramount chief. The paramount chiefs, mainly from the northern region, used to have what we called forced labor. When the paramount chief wanted to make a farm, he will take your land without due regard to you, not even to ask your permission. He will ask the whole chiefdom to make his farm, after which they can start their own farms. That was forced labor. The men came, they brought their own food to feed themselves while they are working for the chief, with no incentive from the chief.

And when a snake bites a relative of yours and he dies of it, the paramount chief will levy a fine to the relative that remains before that body can be buried. He would do so through the section chief, through the headman of the town. It was the headman of the town who would report to the section chief that there is a snakebite victim, and that somebody died in his village. And then the section chief will go and report to the paramount chief immediately and then he will send him off to go and levy the fine. Why did that person die of a snakebite? So the relative will pay without any recourse to anybody.

For not brushing a farm because you don't have the means or the time to finish the farm before the planting season, they will fine you. They have what they called a runner who would go around the chiefdom to inspect the unfinished farms. The owners will be listed and their names will be presented to the chief, and the chief will fine that person. If they don't pay the fine they will be subjected to harassment and may often be chained and put under the sun, under the hot burning sun, as their punishment. There were many other things.

Tipay saw it and... well, to him he knew nothing about what human rights were, but he was working on human rights indirectly. He didn't know it was against human rights, but he said this was wrong. Then he organized the people to strike. And in the strike they refused to accept the section chiefs' orders, they refused to accept the orders of the paramount chief, and even some of them would come to the paramount chief and demand money from him. They would come and demand so many things, coats, they would demand his compound, so many things, and if he didn't give them they would later burn his house. They burned

so many paramount chiefs' compounds, and a few of them ran away for safety. Some went into self-imposed exile, and to date some of them have never returned. We don't know their whereabouts.

According to my interlocutors, the rebellion was not interested in killing chiefs or their families so much as reclaiming the property that had been seized as fines. No chiefs or their family members were killed in these raids; the police officer was quick to point out that people who ransacked homes made sure they were empty before they were burned.

The tax riots altered the power dynamic between the Paramount Chiefs and their people. As one man said, "Traditionally a paramount chief is a Paramount Chief, the word paramount implies he is paramount over everything in his chiefdom. And like they saying goes, the Queen does no wrong. The Paramount Chief with us, he does no wrong. Even though he is taking people to court, he is imprisoning them falsely, he is subjecting the people to forced labor, in fact he does no wrong. There is nowhere to report him."

The riots, though not the only example of how the relationship between people and powerful authority figures in northern Sierra Leone is one of suspicion concerning their motives, and sometimes results in violence, is one of the best. It gives historical substance to our understanding of people's resistance to paying taxes and of Musa Mansaray being pulled down as Makeni town council chairman, among others.

## **Appendix IV Pull You Down Syndrome**

It may seem strange to explain the nature of the “syndrome” to which so many Sierra Leoneans attribute the problems of their nation with a joke, but I found that this was the most accurate way for me to think of the difference between what westerners consider “jealousy” and how Sierra Leoneans insist they respond to feelings of jealousy at another person’s success. An elderly business owner in Freetown relayed this joke to me.

One day God decided to come down to Earth because he saw that people were struggling. He didn’t know why and so needed to investigate and see if he could fix things one person at a time. God’s first stop was America. He touched down and saw a man sitting despondently at his front door. He came up to the man and said, “What’s wrong, Andy?” The man looked up and asked, “How do you know my name?” God said it didn’t matter, and asked Andy to tell him his problems. Andy said, “Well, I’m upset because I’m working day and night to look after my family and we can barely stay on top of the rent for this house, let alone paying bills and buying the kids all the things they want. Everyday I look over at my neighbor, who owns his house, and I want what he has.” God said, “That is a problem. What can I do to solve it?” Andy said, “Really? Well, if I had a house that I owned, just like my neighbor, it would sure make a difference.” God said, “Easily done.” And boom! Andy had his own house and was happy.

God’s next stop was England. He saw a man sitting despondently on his front stoop and went down to investigate. “What’s wrong, Simon?” The man looked up astonished, and asked, “How do you know my name?” God said not to worry, and asked him to please relate his problems. “Well,” said Simon, “You see my neighbor there? He is in the shipping business like me, but because he has his own lorry, he doesn’t have to make payments on a hire lorry and he’s earning enough to move his family out of this bad neighborhood! If I had my own lorry instead of hiring one, I could do that too.” God said this was no problem, and boom! Simon had his own lorry and was happy.

And on and on it went. God visited every country on earth and found people who were unhappy because they needed things, and he gave them these things and they were able to improve themselves and were happy. God’s last stop was Sierra Leone. He went down to Sierra Leone and saw a man sitting on the ground in front of a dilapidated mud house looking very, very unhappy. So he went down and said, “What’s wrong Ibrahim?” Ibrahim was not too astonished that this man knew his name, as everyone in Sierra Leone knows everyone else. So he just said, “Do you see my neighbor over there? Do you see that lovely cow? Every day he brings the cow out in front where we can all see and milks it. And then he gives his children the milk and they are fat and happy, and he gives his wife the milk and she is glad, and the cow is always bearing calves that he sells and makes plenty of money to keep his children clothed and in school.” So God asks him, “What can I do to make you happy?” And Ibrahim says, “Really? You will do anything to make me happy? Well then, can you kill that cow for me?” And this is the difference between Sierra Leone and every other nation on earth.

## **Appendix V Methodology**

I began studying Krio with a native speaker in January 2003 in Ann Arbor. We met several times a week and used both Krio textbooks and informal conversation in order for me to get a basic handle on the language.

I first traveled to Sierra Leone in May 2003, and spent a total of ten weeks in the country, both in Freetown and in Makeni. I spent the first six weeks in Freetown getting my bearings, meeting with and interviewing potential contacts among the government sector, NGOs, and the private sector, choosing a field site and designing a project. I also took several Kathemne lessons from an older woman. Once I had settled on working in Makeni, I took an initial research trip there for two weeks in order to meet with and seek the approval of the Paramount Chief and other town elders. The Chief introduced me to several members of his extended family, their friends and associates, and I began building a base of contacts for my main project. I conducted several interviews in Krio and English with ex-combatants, returned refugees, and older politicians before returning to Freetown in order to secure my return student visas for the following year.

I spent eight months back in Ann Arbor securing grant funding and taking my preliminary exams, and returned to Sierra Leone at the start of June 2004. I remained in Makeni until the end of July, 2005 when a series of illnesses forced me to leave the field for a period of six months of rest, thought and transcription in my hometown of Los Angeles. When I had recovered, I returned to Sierra Leone in February 2006 for a further three months of work. I spent nine weeks in Freetown working in the national archives and Sierra Leone library at Fourah Bay College, and two weeks conducting follow-up work in Makeni. I left at the end of April, and proceeded on to the National Archives in London, England, for two weeks of intensive archival research.

For my long research in Sierra Leone, I began by re-establishing contacts in Freetown. After one week in Freetown I moved to Makeni and lived in a house with several of the contacts I had made the previous year. For the first four months I spent two hours every morning taking formal Krio and Kathemne lessons with my next-door neighbor, until he was satisfied that I could both read and write Krio fluently, and get along passably in Kathemne. As a Limba, he had learned Kathemne both from his Temne neighbors and friends and formally in school, and taught me using his own schoolbooks and notes. He agreed that in such an ethnically cosmopolitan place it was more important that I become fluent in Krio than Kathemne; especially after the war with the massive influx of people from all over the country, it was socially more advisable to approach everyone in town in Krio, rather than trying to guess their ethnic heritage and tribal affiliations. All of my recorded interviews took place in either Krio or English, depending on the person's desire to either speak freely in Krio, or to practice their English. My recorded interviews are evenly split between Krio and English; the informal conversations I had with people that are often paraphrased in the dissertation also took place in equal number in Krio and English.

After Krio I would gather my notebooks and voice recorder and walk through town, talking to anyone who was interested in speaking with me, and this was how I made many of my initial (and best) contacts for the duration of the project. As I was concerned to get a representative sample of the citizenry of Makeni, it was important that I *patrol* [wander] as much of the town as possible initially so that people were used to seeing me around and felt comfortable approaching me. If I was too tired or heat-abused to walk I would take the local motorcycle taxis to a desired destination; it was important to me that I never be seen in a private vehicle, unless it belonged to a citizen of the town. Thus was I able to differentiate myself completely from the NGO expatriate population, which numbered about 20 at the time of my research, and always traveled in vehicles. None of them spoke Krio fluently; most used local employees to translate.

My initial approach to recruiting participants was voluntary approach on their part, and also a limited amount of snowball sampling. Many of my initial contacts were certain they knew several people who would be interested in talking to me, telling me about the history of the town and its people, telling me their own life stories, or generally assisting in other ways. Through my initial contacts I met some of my closest friends, including Father Daniel Samura, without whose assistance this project would have been all but impossible. I do not feel that it compromised my work in any way to be known to have such a close associate in a Catholic priest. On the contrary, what was important to people in Makeni was not which religion you professed, but that you professed some religion and publicly practice, at least on occasion. Thus was I introduced to a Catholic priest by a young man who had been initiated into the Temne Secret Society *poro*, whose father was Muslim and whose mother was Evangelical Christian. Though I ceased to be a practicing Catholic as a teenager, I occasionally attended Sunday services and several church functions. Though I made many friends through the church, only a few of my most involved interlocutors were introduced to me through Father Samura.

Once I had gained people's trust about my interest and involvement in the town, I began recording life history interviews. Many of my interlocutors were introduced to be my Idriss Conteh and Mohamed Kallon, the two secondary school students who worked at my residence as its primary caretakers. They were keenly interested in the project, one as a lifelong Temne resident of Makeni and the other as a recent Mandingo immigrant, and introduced me to my neighbors and many young people who were eager to talk about their lives. Idriss went on to serve as my primary research assistant, and he and Mohamed both continue to patiently answer questions that I pose to them over e-mail from their new base in Freetown.

I conducted full life history interviews with about eighty individuals over the course of my research, ranging from professionals like teachers, town council members and soldiers, to petty traders, students, ex-combatants (specifically former RUF members), shopkeepers, elderly people and farmers. These took the form of semi-structured interviews that occurred over a period of one to four hours. About one-third of my interviews were with women; the main imbalance occurring at the levels of ex-

combatants, soldiers and students, where females were and are still significantly outnumbered by males.

The other main imbalance in my research sample was the level of education, which I address in Chapter Four. My interlocutors were disproportionately educated, with about 70% possessing at least seven years of formal education (the national literacy rate was 30% in 1999, though may be slightly higher now; IMF report, 2005b: 41). This was a function of both the people who were happy to talk to me (those with less education were more “shy” about speaking to a white person, in spite of the fact that I spoke Krio), and a function of the fact that my “snowball” networking technique meant that educated people tended to introduce me to other educated people. Hence the disproportionate concentration of my information came from people like students, teachers, politicians, politically active youth (and ex-combatants) and their families, both from Makeni and from other places. I made a special effort to get to know petty traders, artisans, and farmers, many of whom I met through my CBO friends and through Father Samura. It was their presence during our forums and interviews that helped “shy” people feel more comfortable about expressing themselves. However I was never able to make their numbers balance with the educated members of my study; a failing that only I am responsible for.

Because so much of one’s day is spent “scrambling” to make a living in Makeni, I would give my interlocutors an average of Le5000 for their trouble, and perhaps pens or other useful items I had to hand in order to thank them for their time. Many of these interlocutors became close friends, and I would often drop by their homes or businesses to spend time chatting about life, love and hardship, and there was much of all three. From these experiences I drew the bulk of my information for the chapter on families.

From the friendships that developed from these interviews I began attending events to which I was invited and often (to my embarrassment) treated as a special guest. One friend invited me to his baby brother’s kindergarten graduation, and I was asked to extemporaneously speak on the importance of staying in school. An elder man invited me to the town council inauguration, and another to the wake of a mutual friend who had passed away. I attended school sports meets, political rallies, military demonstrations, *hajj* celebrations, Polio Victims’ Association meetings, town council meetings, music concerts, weddings and christenings, parties (both religious and otherwise), workshops held by local and international NGOs, soccer matches and development ceremonies (groundbreakings, dedications, new businesses). I hung out in and people-watched in restaurants, bars and nightclubs, on street corners and in shops, and had many interesting discussions with neighbors and friends on my front porch. My aim was to conduct participant observation in as broad a swath of Makeni as was possible.

As my comfort level and friendships increased, I began pursuing specific lines of questioning that emerge sharply in the dissertation. With respect to education, it became clear early in my stay that understanding the role of education in “development” would play a key role. I conducted an in-depth study of one particular primary school, interviewing eight teachers and both headmistresses, and conducting observation sessions



of 3-4 hours each at every class level from one to six. As a “thank you” I presented 100 kilograms of rice to the teachers as a Christmas gift, and a large bag of pens for needy students. As both of my research assistants were students at St. Francis School, they invited me to hold a forum of secondary school students after school, to which thirty students attended. They spoke with each other on different issues, debated and battled, and answered all of my questions, which I recorded and transcribed. I invited them to speak with me personally if they were interested, and about ten later arrived at my house, eager to expound on the issues they spoke on, and to tell me their own life stories. I also went to Makeni Teacher’s College, interviewed the principal and several of the teachers and students.

With respect to politics, I maintained close associations with the Paramount Chief and his cousin, a lifelong politician, whom I interviewed in depth on several occasions. Often I would take an observer position at their homes and watch as people drifted in and out, needing advice, assistance, or just a friendly and worldly-wise ear to pour their problems into. Through the chief’s cousin, a founding member of the All People’s Congress Party, I was introduced to several members of the town council, including the chairman, whom I interviewed in depth, checked in with on many occasions, and followed the various political occurrences in the town. Everyone from whom I took a life history I posed specific questions about the political situation in the town and the country, especially with respect to the workings, successes and failures of the town council. Everyone had a definite opinion on this matter, and ideas about what the town needed.

The chief also introduced me to one of his closest friends, who was a former high-level RUF administrator and student at Makeni Teacher’s College. After our life history interview, he invited me to meet his fellow ex-combatants with whom he had started an agricultural CBO after the war. I became heavily involved in understanding the mysterious inner-workings (or not, as the case was) of agriculture in the local area, as well as the many ex-combatants who were trying to start agricultural “self-reliance” projects. I held forums with about twenty former RUF members and associates concerning the UN reintegration programs, their skills training and problems with unemployment, their take on politics and education, why they were so keen to become farmers again, and how they saw farming working and not working in the area. From these forums I invited anyone who was interested in speaking to me personally to return for a one-on-one interview, and fifteen did so. I then took a trip out to one of the villages in which the CBO was working to meet with and speak to the people involved in their agricultural project, which I repeated twice over the course of six months. Aside from thanking everyone I interviewed with token money gifts, I also became an associate member of the agricultural CBO with a donation that went to purchasing seed for the next planting cycle.

The township of Makeni incorporates many villages within its official boundaries, and is also surrounded on all sides by small, unincorporated villages. Father Samura encouraged me to seek the opinions of local villagers who lived on the outskirts of Makeni, as they had a different perspective on governance and on the town’s NGO presence. With him I traveled to six different villages over the course of two weeks and

conducted discussion forums with whole villages, including men, women, “youth” and children. We would open with both Muslim and Christian prayers, and then Father Samura would introduce me to the village and speak a bit about my project, which he framed as my interest in why the area was so impoverished, and their opinions on what needed to happen in order for this to change. I posed questions in Krio, and either Father Samura or the local “translator” would translate the question into Kathemne, and people would raise their hands and answer in turn in their comfortable language. Before going to each village, Father Samura would smooth the way with several bags of rice as my “appreciation” gift for their time and words, and I followed up with water purification tablets for their wells.

In February 2005, Father Samura and I went on a road trip to Bo and Kenema. We spent a week in total, staying in the church rectories in both towns with priest friends of his, visiting people in the town and speaking informally, and touring the towns’ “development” (in the form of new buildings, old Peace Corps projects, power stations and internet cafes, orphanages and schools, bars and cafes with lights and cold drinks). I also spent one week in Kabala, in Koinadugu district in the northeast. I explored the town and spoke informally with people in order to get a point of comparison for Makeni with another town in the north that served as a district capital.

For my study of the market, I began by making some market *padi* in different occupations from textile sales, pharmacies, *haf-haf* foodstuffs, box trading, cassette sales, and generally through striking up conversations with anyone I came in contact with in the daily process of my own purchases. I spent time sitting, observing and speaking with the clientele at several of the local “relaxations” and the large PZ in the center of town, chatting with taxi drivers as they ferried me around town, and drinking soda with the proprietors of several of the town’s more profitable enterprises, such as bulk rice sales and pharmaceuticals. My research assistant Idriss led me on a more in-depth study of the market through several days of methodically mapping out the central and outlying markets, speaking with traders on the prices, origins, and sales of their goods, and getting their thoughts on everything from the “global village” to the price of rice. The traders I interviewed in depth, among those I did not meet initially myself, were introduced to me by several people: Idriss, Father Samura, and one of the ex-combatants who had worked closely with several market women to encourage the sale of basic goods during the occupation. I interviewed about ten traders in depth. The reason for the relative paucity of these interviews is due to the fact that many traders lack formal education, and as those who spoke to me explained, this makes them shy to speak to a white woman, for fear of being thought stupid. Many traders I came into contact with on a daily basis did not want to be interviewed formally.

In terms of NGOs, my associations were both formal and informal. In September 2004 I was asked by the program manager of Medecins Sans Frontiers (MSF) to accompany their midwife/nurse up to Kamakwie, the heart of the northern diamond mining boom, in order to investigate the potential problems of food shortages, cholera and dysentery in a town that had tripled in population over the course of two months. I interviewed traders,

miners, teachers, police and politicians and reported back to MSF on the possibility of epidemic disease in the town, which, thankfully, never occurred.

I also interviewed several Military Observers, Civilian Police Officers and Civil Officers who lived in Makeni as part of the United Nations mission on the successes and failures of the DDR programs and the UN's drive to free the police force of endemic corruption. These men were all expatriates who had lived in Makeni during or immediately after the demobilization and reintegration efforts, and I had them clarify for me aspects of the towns' recent history such as problems that they had with the retraining of ex-combatants, police corruption, and their honest thoughts on the successes and failures of the UN programs in the country.

One of the program directors of Action Contre le Faim (ACF) was an anthropologist who had abandoned his un-funded dissertation (among the Hmong in Cambodia) to direct agricultural programs in villages in Bombali district. He requested my assistance in training and observing local staff who had been contracted to conduct sociological and demographic surveys in ACF's target villages to see what kinds of assistance would be offered by the organization. I presented an ethnographic methodology class for the staff, and accompanied the director and staff on several field exercises in which I observed and coached them in ethnographic interviewing methods, such as asking open-ended questions.

My interactions with the DAAG and PVA began when the chairman of the PVA actively sought me out on the street one day early in my research because we were neighbors and he was curious about my work in the town. Over the course of several months I met with him regularly, attended meetings in the center, spoke with polio victims, amputees and lepers, and followed their lives and the trials and successes of the center over time. I spent two days in the school for the disabled (run by an international Catholic charity), meeting with the principal and teachers, and observing the students in the classroom.

For the final five months of my time in Makeni (due to both logistical constraints and health issues) I lived in a house with three expatriate NGO workers (representing two international NGOs) who were happy to share their day-to-day lives, successes and frustrations with me. I attended many functions and events with them, from project workshops for local NGO staff and other interested people, to sporting events and ceremonies, and I spoke informally with both their local staff and the project participants. My friendships with expatriate NGO workers precluded formal interviews, and the bulk of my NGO-related research that appears in Chapters Six and Seven is the result of informal conversations with ten people who asked that their comments be kept confidential, though not off the record.

I left Makeni in July 2005 after suffering a severe bout of typhoid, which had followed quickly on the heels of an infected wound on my leg and a corneal ulcer. There were many lines of inquiry that I had to leave dangling for the time being, to my great dismay, but I could not continue to pursue effective research in my poor physical condition. When I returned to Makeni in March 2006, I re-connected with most of my friends and

contacts and had follow-up chats with them, as well as noting all of the significant events that had occurred in the town, such as the most recent town council scandal. My neighbor who had been my Krio teacher had gained admission to Fourah Bay College, so all the while I was conducting archival research I had lunch with him everyday, bounced my findings off of him and solicited his comments on them and recent events in Makeni. My work in the archives in Freetown was dictated by the availability of resources. Many of Fourah Bay College's materials have been stored for long periods of time in musty storage rooms, and it is currently the task of five or six students to re-organize and re-catalogue everything, known as the "Fourah Bay College Records Project". I could only use what was already on the shelves and accessible to the assistant archivist, Abu Koroma. This entailed opening every unlabeled brown paper package on the shelves and sifting through it. I concentrated on newspapers; years for which there was less material I attempted to fill by going to the Fourah Bay College Library and reading through their collection as well, and then down to the National Library and doing the same. The archives had a very limited collection of colonial files, unfoliated and in delicate condition, which resulted in the majority of the information I found on the founding of St. Francis School. I project that in a year or two a re-study of the material in Fourah Bay College will reveal a wealth of new information that I was unable to access the first time around, as the archivist, Mr. Moore, anticipated finishing the Records Project by the end of 2008.

My last task was visiting the National Archives of Britain in Kew Gardens, London. I spent two weeks there opening every box the archives had on Sierra Leone. The boxes were only catalogued by year, with no information in the catalogue specifying what was in the files any more than the types of files contained therein (correspondence, reports, Blue Books, etc). This is the main reason there is very little identifying the specific materials aside from box number; some of the materials had been foliated and then re-foliated differently, so I did not try to record foliate numbers. My partner Neil MacDonald assisted me on my final day in the archives, two of the boxes were his to open, look through, and write précis on the pertinent contents, noting the file type, etc.

I would describe my research style as energetically opportunistic. I did not want to enter Makeni with a strict research methodology, as I was not yet sure in what directions my initial interests in poverty and reconstruction and leads would take, and indeed I feel that this is a strength of the final work, in addition to presenting many points for future intensive study. My main clusters of interlocutors are all represented in the chapters: politicians and their clients, traders and farmers, students and teachers, the disabled, and ex-combatants. I wanted to interact with as broad a cross-section of people as possible, so did not limit myself to any one ethnic group, religion, or natal origin. My interlocutors included people who were born in the town and those who had arrived after the war, people from the ages of seventeen to eighty, those with no education to college graduates, those who walked ten miles a day to make their livings and those who had cars and drivers. I mixed up activities throughout the course of any one day—conducting a few interviews in the morning, observing classes in the afternoon, stopping at someone's house with a few sodas for a chat, and generally making myself a known presence around

town. In addition I compiled over four hundred single-spaced pages of transcriptions from my archival work.

The form these take in the final dissertation are rigorously differentiated. Exact transcripts, whether of archival material, newspaper articles, or recorded interviews, appear as offset paragraphs, while conversations that I have paraphrased closely appear as quotes within the text. Throughout a day in Makeni I would pause to write notes and memory cues of conversations in my notebook. After a day of work, I would return home and immediately transcribe informal conversations, using my notes and to the best of my memory, directly into my laptop.

The problem this created for the final dissertation was an overwhelming sense of priority confusion, which resulted in me writing drafts of fourteen chapters initially, covering a time period from 1896 to the present. The final dissertation is comprised of the chapters I found most interesting and relevant as inroads to future study. First of all, I wanted to concentrate only on the years that the people I interacted with could remember and on which they based their assessments of the present, which is why the time periods involved in the dissertation do not extend further back in time than the late 1940's, when my oldest interlocutors were children. It is from their sense of Makeni's history that I began to concentrate on understanding just what "normal" life in Makeni was and is, and how no clear trajectory of "progress" or even predictable change, occurred. What emerges is an analysis of how people that have suffered tremendous poverty over many years in relation to the rest of the nation struggle not just with making better lives for themselves, but understanding what that "better" life is. This is especially important to understand after a war that shifted the ground on which a "normal" and "better" life could be contemplated, from where it should come and to what future it should aspire.

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