7 Invoking the State

When Adults Report Violence in Their Relationships to the Police

Most mornings Ester (17, with three children, divorced), Zainab (17, with no children, no partner), Issa (33, with one son, separated, one boyfriend), Apsatu (34, with one son, divorced), Effe (25, with four children and several boyfriends), Fatu (39, with three children, married), and Brima (48, with four children, married) meet under the shade of the mango tree in front of Papani's house, where they braid hair, sell foodstuffs, and share the news of the night. They show injuries to each other, offer advice on their treatment, voice their opinion on the 'rights' and 'wrongs' of each other's behaviour, and share strategies to 'bear and change' their husbands and partners. Until recently, the only reporting considered was to friends, family, or community.[1] That changed once Apsatu joined the group a few months ago. Not only did she report her husband to the police and later divorce him, Apsatu is also a journalist who reports on domestic violence cases heard at the Magistrate's Court. Through her work and her own case, the new laws around domestic violence have become the topic of heated debates among these women.

Such debates, decisions, and consequences regarding police reporting are at the heart of this chapter.[2] Indeed, the questions of how, when, and in which circumstances adults turn to the state to report their partners for unacceptable violence are entwined with questions of risk, opportunity, social standing, and influence. This chapter builds on Apsatu's story. It depicts her case in her words, from its reporting and its passage through the courts to its dismissal. It then discusses what happens when men report their partners to the police (of which I did not see a single case during my time in Sierra Leone). In conversation with these accounts, the chapter reflects on the factors on which convictions depend and which distinguish successful cases (economic violence and violence

[1] See Ester's and Issa's cases in the previous chapter.
[2] This chapter draws on and expands on the arguments I made in my article 'Partners as possession' (Schneider 2019a).

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against minors) from unsuccessful ones (sexual and physical violence against adults). It discusses the complex risks involved in reporting a partner to the police, which include loss of status, fines by family or community, and social exclusion. The risks of reporting are intersectional and are influenced by gender, socioeconomic background, and class. Those who consider reporting to the police consist of specific classes – usually those who work for the state or engage with state institutions frequently, as well as people who can support themselves if they lose their relationships or familial support. Such people therefore constitute a bridge between those who keep state institutions at a distance and instances where state institutions use citizens to report on other citizens' relationships (Chapter 8). The foundation for these dynamics lies in post-war legal developments around violence in relationships. Finally, this chapter builds on these findings to reflect on the notion of gender parallelism, which is a strong undercurrent of academic debates in the region. I show that gender parallelism is used as a tactic rather than accepted as an unquestioned fact – a tactic that helps Sierra Leoneans to navigate the crisis of gender relations that they are currently experiencing.

The Gender Justice Laws

After the civil war came to an end in Sierra Leone, response institutions and service providers were largely destroyed or became dysfunctional. Those that remained were confronted with the outcomes of war-time violence and were heavily influenced by IOs and NGOs, which demanded restructuring. The prevalence of sexual violence during the civil war made violence a principal concern after the conflict ended. Awareness of violence was increased by the findings of the Special Court for Sierra Leone (SCSL) and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC 2004a) as well as the research, advocacy, and awareness raising of local women's movements, NGOs, and IOs. Reports described women's and girls' exposure to violence in post-war Sierra Leone as endemic. Violence in relationships, which once had been a private matter, became a public and political concern, leading to intricate negotiations over its acceptability, repercussions, and response. As I have argued elsewhere (Schneider 2019a), five key issues were identified:

1. domestic violence.
2. the dispossession of property on the death of spouses.
3. disadvantages due to unregistered and customary marriages.

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4. matrimonial cases.[3]
5. rape.

The Law Reform Agenda prioritised these issues,[4] leading to the passing of the 'Gender Justice Laws', which included the Domestic Violence Act and the Devolution of Estates Act, which came into effect on 26 July 2007, and the Registration of Customary Marriage and Divorce Act, which came into effect on 22 January 2009. As a result of these laws, any behaviour within an intimate relationship that causes physical, psychological, economic, or sexual harm to those in the relationship constitutes a crime that can lead to conviction and imprisonment (Mills et al. 2015). Apart from criminalising all forms of violence in relationships, these laws encourage women to enter their traditional and religious marriages into the formal register. They also grant equal rights to spouses over all possessions, including property and land in the case of divorce.

As women increasingly engage with state courts through these laws, they begin to impact on women's choices. Ethnographic work can elucidate such changes and thus illuminate the relationship between policy, agency, and social change. My own study, which analyses how laws are experienced and what effects they have in practice, sets out to describe the multifaceted barriers women face in reporting. It examines how, when reporting increases, there are changes in norms as well. These not only generate new opportunities for those who feel they could not have reported previously, but also forge new constraints that prevent reporting, as we can see from the lives of the women of the Allentown community.

Apsatu: A Woman Who Reports

'I married my main love', said Apsatu, 'but he was a bad husband'. She continued:

> He beat and raped me, and he stopped me from working and seeing friends. He always said: 'You are ugly'; 'You are worthless like a dog'; 'I will beat you like a plastic bag in the wind' … Eight years it was like that until I went to the police. For us here, it goes like this. When you report to your family or community at first, they will try to settle you and tell you that you should 'bear', like with Issa … you were there, so you understand what I am talking about. But then, when you report again and again, they become aware and they will also tell the man off.

[3] For example, to lay claims regarding marriage, one must show a valid marriage certificate, which was not issued for customary marriages.

[4] Jointly organised by the Parliamentary Human Rights Commission, the Law Reform Commission, the government, and partners.

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If you then report again and again and show your injuries, they will allow you to divorce. Some think that you failed as a wife because you didn't control him very well, but they let you go.

But because I am a journalist and I always see these cases at court and believe in human rights, I went to the FSU. From there, I did a 'medical' at the Rainbo Centre. The paper said that I have bruises and marks. Because I am a mother, the broken hymen does not count. From there, I went to L.A.W.Y.E.R.S. [an NGO offering free legal representation to women and girls], and they gave me a free lawyer. When they called for my husband at the police station for his statement, luckily he beat me there, so they sent him to court. There, myself and the policewoman gave witness statements. My family did not come.

My case went on for three years. It was very difficult to go to court always, and my husband got so much worse, even beating our child. Can you imagine? But the worst thing was my family. You know, we Africans, we need the family. But they were ashamed of me. They hate me for going to the police. It is like a betrayal for them and a useless one. Because from the community they would have got money or work or something, but now … nothing. One day, after six adjournments, the judge dismissed the case. They said the evidence was lacking.

Later, Apsatu divorced her husband. She moved away from the community, where she was no longer welcome, and relocated to Allentown, where she now rents a room.[5] She resumed her work as a journalist and is now self-sufficient, supporting both herself and her child. She is convinced that had she reported the case to her community, it would have led to a faster dissolution of the marriage and to recompense for herself and her family:

But with the law, there is huge stigma, and women are usually banned from everyone. Also, no one will marry you again. But I think that we still need to report so that one day it will become normal and women do not have to put up with this behaviour anymore. The change, I think, is in our hands, but it is slow, and there is much suffering on the way.

Apsatu's lawyer told me: 'If more women report, more women will be there to support others later on, so it becomes a norm, you see'. To understand the rationale behind Apsatu's actions, we must appreciate how she perceives violence, how she positions herself within a social world that places various conflicting demands on her, and why she decided to take the route of reporting to the police. Apsatu interprets her husband's violence differently in different scenarios. When she decided to report him for beating, raping, and cursing her, and for stopping her from working and seeing friends, she described the fact that he beat her at the police station as 'lucky'. It was 'lucky', she told me

[5] So far, she has had no contact with her parents, but her sisters recently started coming to visit her.

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later, because it confirmed her testimony, and the case subsequently went to court. 'We women would never just be believed. But men's actions … men have warm hearts; they cannot hide their true selves when they are challenged, so when he beat me, his true self came out and my words did not need believing', she said. Here, Apsatu interpreted the immediate beating by her husband as possibly preventing more long-term violence and as giving her report credibility. She built on the notion that women (the tongues) are flexible whereas men (the teeth) are rigid and can neither bend nor roll nor change their shape. This makes women better at controlling and strategically using words and emotions, but it also suggests that men show their true form more because they cannot do much else.[6] Apsatu felt that it was not her behaviour, her testimony, or the medical report that made her account credible and incontrovertible, but her ex-husband's beating of her in front of the police.

Apsatu was familiar with the structures of reporting to the police and to the household and community. She was deeply aware of the risks that accompany reporting to these different institutions for her and for women in general. She was conscious that turning to the police means turning her back on family and community and that she may subsequently lose their support. Having followed hundreds of similar cases as a journalist, she was informed about the low conviction rates and the time such cases take to move through the courts. Apsatu was one of many research collaborators who referred to 'human rights' as a contemporary universal norm. Her decision to report was rooted within her approach towards and her belief in human rights.[7]

Competing Ideals of Community and Human Rights

Building on Richard Rorty (1993) and Norberto Bobbio (1996), Jane Cowan demonstrates how today's 'human rights culture' shapes 'discourse' and structures 'how the world is apprehended' (Cowan 2006: 10; see Cowan, Dembour, and Wilson 2001). Human rights, she says, are 'defining a social and ideational space, one that entails certain ideas of "self" and "sociality", specific modes of agency, and particular rules of the game' (Cowan 2006: 10). In this book, we see how the gendered views underlying human rights interact with local concepts. In Sierra Leone, this issues in frequently uttered statements such as 'today we

[6] See Chapter 4 and the discussion about warm and cold hearts below.

[7] Ton Salman's discussion of how certain Bolivians in marginal positions take calculated risks, which place them under conditions of insecurity to achieve long-term security, shows interesting parallels (Salman 2010: 23–44).

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believe in human rights', 'now there is human rights', or 'that was before we had human rights'. These mark a clear turn in behaviour and attitude towards certain practices today from a pre–human rights time. In *Stages on Life's Way*, Søren Kierkegaard (1940) describes the ethical as the expression of the universal, a stage in which all actions are undertaken publicly for the common good, and the betterment of the whole is prioritised over the self. Apsatu legitimises her decision to turn to the state as an attempt to improve the situation of women in general. This prioritisation of 'the greater good' allows her to neglect her moral obligations towards her family and community. Apsatu knows that she will probably not win a court case. However, as a standard-bearer in changing the future conditions for women in Sierra Leone, Apsatu not only decides against the needs or wishes of her family. She is also willing to sacrifice her own marriage and the moral support of her loved ones to further these human rights principles and pave the way for a future in which women will win their cases in court. Even after her divorce and after she was asked to leave her community, her belief in human rights remains unchanged.

The negotiation between accessing 'rights' that have been legally granted and transgressing community and household needs or norms complicates the clear boundaries between individualistic and sociocentric positionings. As previous chapters have shown, in Sierra Leone personal relationships and agency exist in a complicated liaison between individualistic and community-based wants and needs (e.g. Piot 1999; Jackson 2012). In *Between One and One Another*, Michael Jackson describes the 'oscillation between sociocentric and egocentric consciousness' as dialectic and therefore as presenting an inescapable ethical problem (Jackson 2012: 3). Through permanently reconfiguring their relationship to one another, these two facets of human existence engage in a dance between 'I' and 'we' whose steps are never similar but always relational in constantly changing choreographies. Building on Georg Simmel (1971), Cowan argues that 'in situations of contested ideologies/normative frameworks, methodologically individualist understanding of both rights and culture simply cannot grasp the complex, countervailing pressures, evolving situationally and historically, on individuals caught in the[se] dynamics' (Cowan 2006: 14). When deciding whether to report domestic violence to their household or community or to the police, adults in Sierra Leone must make distinct choices, balancing their individual needs and the needs of their families, partners, and social groups. If they report to their household or community, the needs of the social group will be put before theirs. But if they report to the police, they may, by following their own needs, risk the dissolution of the social group and a loss of support.

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Whether adults can safely report violence to state institutions therefore depends not just on the existence of facilities to do so and on protective laws, but also on what is normative within their social setting. Social policy and interventions must therefore take into account the settings in which they operate, consider existing norms and rules, and, if possible, collaborate with those institutions and individuals – for example, households, community leaders, traditional or religious institutions – who decide upon such matters in a given context. Turning opposition into alliances and rejection into cooperation can go a long way in making reporting safe and in offering exit strategies.

In Sierra Leone, such cooperation between the criminal justice system and other actors is rare and infrequent. Reporting domestic violence to the police is associated with complicated processes of risk-taking. Not only are conviction rates low, but within households and communities reporting threatens the reputation of both partners and families. In the view of families and communities, a woman who reports is frequently assumed to be conducting a purely selfish vendetta focussed on satisfying her hunger for revenge, hindering her family from fulfilling its role as mediator, and preventing them from receiving support or remuneration. Keebet von Benda-Beckman's analysis of diverse dispute mediation systems in Sumatra is relevant here. She distinguishes between different but overlapping scales and reaches of mediation systems. She shows how people choose between them (what she calls 'forum shopping') and how the systems themselves seek to advance their own interests ('shopping forums'): 'I shall speak of "forum shopping" here, because disputants have a choice between different institutions and they base their choice on what they hope the outcome of the dispute will be, however vague or ill-founded their expectations may be,' she says (Benda-Beckman 1981: 117).

> Not only do parties shop, but the forums involved use disputes for their own, mainly local political ends. These institutions and their individual functionaries usually have interests different from those of the parties, and they use the processing of dispute to pursue these interests. So besides forum-shopping disputants, there are also "shopping forums" engaged in trying to acquire and manipulate disputes from which they expect to gain political advantage, or to fend off disputes which they fear will threaten their interests. (Benda-Beckman 1981: 117)

In Freetown, personal, household and community interests compete. After Apsatu's case became known, the pros and cons of reporting to the police were discussed frequently during the morning sessions at Allentown.

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Police Reporting: Betrayal or Ethical Duty?

Most of the women had very clear positions on reporting to the police. Effe, for instance, maintained: 'If you are reporting somebody to the police, then surely that is the end of you. Maybe you also have done something bad before. No … police reporting: what's the use of it? There is no benefit for no one, but pain for all'. Eastina (37), a cook from Calaba Town, held a similar position:

> I cannot report somebody that is putting food on the table. It is a taboo to report my husband … My whole family and the whole other family, they will see me as an enemy … And my children will suffer because relatives who would have rendered help will not help if my husband is in jail. That would be the end of your marriage and of you being married to any other person because … news fly (*laughs*). People will go and tell: 'Ah, that lady she took her husband to police station, and now he is spending time in prison'. In Sierra Leone, men don't want to take chances. They say: 'If I mistakenly beat her or I mistakenly slap her, she will do the same to me, so that lady is off marriage' (*laughs*). And for African ladies, you know, we want to get married or be committed to be completed. Definitely!

Men's positions were similar. Diamond stated: 'The whole problem of relationships is *kongosa* [gossip]. Men and women in relationships they don't discuss with each other … But if you bring the police now, that is even worse. There is no way back from that. We all have fault, you know. If you start this nonsense, then we can all go to prison'.

For persons whose lives are lived within households and communities, seeking state intervention to address violence in intimate consensual relationships is perceived as an unwanted intrusion into privacy. This not only causes havoc for those directly involved, but also destabilises the mechanisms that are in place to curb such violence. If people start turning to the police, thereby assigning strangers to decide over matters occurring within households and communities, the strong social fabric of communities may be weakened, and community mediations may lose their power. People who report may therefore be fined by their social group. Subsequently, they may also face hardship and social exclusion. Kadie (31) commented: 'You go to police only if a stranger attacks you or maybe if you find that someone has tampered with your child. But your man? No. You can find ways to end your man, yes. … But prison? What is the use? He is just rotting when he should make good to you'. Violence, these research collaborators said, should be reported when strangers are involved. Rape should also be targeted by the state. But state institutions should stay out of bedrooms and intimate relationships, and should refrain from deciding on how partnerships should be lived.

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Others, like Apsatu, position themselves within a human rights discourse. This leads them to believe that, consequences and calamities notwithstanding, accessing these laws is a moral and ethical duty, paving the way for a future in which all matters will be decided on similar principles (see Kierkegaard 1940). For such people, those who keep the state at bay are selfish because they hinder the state's mission to advance and extend equal rights for all. What we see from Apsatu's case and the perspectives of the other women in the community is that the barriers to reporting to the police are lower for specific groups. Apsatu is a formally educated woman with a professional career in journalism that has her working in courtrooms. Knowing that if she lost the backing of her family and community, she could sustain herself and her child and relocate to another area of Freetown certainly influenced her decision to report.

She is also part of a group of people whose daily lives are intertwined with state institutions. After the incorporation of human rights principles into the legal and political apparatus, she secured a position as a journalist documenting cases related to human rights. Through her work, she came in contact with other women who hold positions as journalists, writers, activists, lawyers, and so on – women who firmly believe that the alignment of the political and legal arena with 'human rights principles' permits them to balance their roles as mothers, wives, and successful professionals within the formal sector. This signifies the presence of a 'human rights culture' as described by Cowan 'in the sense of an increasingly pervasive structuring discourse in the late 20th and 21st centuries that shapes how the world is apprehended. It also signals a Foucauldian alertness to the power and knowledge relations associated with this expanding legal and political apparatus' (Cowan 2006: 10).

In contrast, people like Eastina, Effe, Ester, and Brima, who are not part of these apparatuses and social circles, rely on their family and community as their source of income, social support, and behavioural reference point. These women are entrepreneurs in the informal sector, making a living by selling food, offering laundry services, or braiding hair. Although many of them have thriving businesses, their customer base and their social network overlap, and their financial success is contingent upon maintaining and nurturing these relationships (Chapter 3). Moreover, these women – and men like Papani or Diamond – only seldomly engage with state institutions. Their daily lives and businesses are organised around kin, neighbours, and community members. Even extraordinary events like childbirth, marriage, or sickness are managed largely 'at the margins of the state' (see, e.g. Ferme 2004), as they can call upon known and trusted midwives, community elders, and so on. When people like these seek

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support from law enforcement, it not only represents a significant departure from habitual behaviour, but also threatens the underlying pillars upon which their lives are built. Hence, gender laws and the possibility of accessing the rights they offer can exacerbate existing power imbalances across various intersecting identities.[8]

Phenomenologically, these different social positions – of alignment with family and community or with 'human rights' and thus state institutions – give rise to different life-worlds in which different institutions are imagined as comprising different values, possibilities, and constraints. This positioning, which determines outlook, alliances, and possible actions, also informs responses to unbearable violence. These positions create specific 'social pressures, leading to both constraint and compulsion' (Cowan 2006: 14), and shape lives irrevocably.

Both standpoints require determination as well as sacrifice. Cowan explains that 'engagement in social life entails being caught by, as much as caught up in, its reciprocities, such that opting out is often not an option. Speaking and not speaking, as well as taking up or not taking up particular identities, are acts framed by the imperatives of sociability' (Cowan 2006: 14). Both positions require setting more general needs over individualistic ones. If one positions oneself with the state, one may have to 'swallow' one's personal needs with regard to emotional and familial support and 'bear' losing loved ones in the process of fighting for what one believes is a 'just mission'. On the other hand, people who position themselves with their household or community must 'swallow' grievances and 'bear' whatever solution the household or community sees fit. For believers in the state, the advancement of human rights goals and laws is put before personal well-being, while for proponents of family and community it is these social groups whose needs come before their own. Hence, as Cowan recognises, the rights and duties of the two positions are 'both enabling and constraining' and 'productive (of subjectivities, of social relations, and even of the very identities and cultures they claim merely to recognize)' (Cowan 2006: 10).

Reporting Trajectories: Institutions Caught between Competing Ideals

On the side of the criminal justice institutions, these lines of alignment become blurred. State apparatuses and institutions recognise marriages

[8] This is exacerbated because private legal representation is too costly for most people. Lawyers who offer free services have heavy workloads, which makes it impossible to spend more than a few minutes before the first hearing with their clients. Mostly, legal representation is reduced to hearings at the High Court.

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and households as personal spaces – personal in that they are integrated within relational notions of personhood that involve the families and trusted social networks of the partners, but not the wider public or the state. They should therefore only be interfered with if no other solution is possible. The institutions involved have created procedures that aim at resolving such matters before they reach court. Consequently, adult reporting of violence in relationships almost never leads to a court case. Most often, the outcome is dismissal or a so-called friendly settlement, which means that the parties are urged to withdraw the case and find a solution outside the courts. As a result, the gender justice laws have largely become ineffective in mediating violence between adults.

Resource scarcity adds an additional difficulty. During my time in Freetown, FSU staff handled up to 20 new reports each day, which made proper investigations impossible. The Center for Accountability and the Rule of Law (CARL) published an assessment of the FSU, which stated:

> Currently, … there is an average of seven FSU personnel who work in two shifts per FSU station … However, a minimum of 20 officers per station, i.e. ten officers per shift, are required to have sufficient staff to handle the work load. Consequently, FSU stations are currently understaffed so that people who come to report a crime may be sent away and asked to come again on a later date. This has serious consequences for the investigation and prosecution of crimes as well as for the welfare of the victims/survivors.[9] (Center for Accountability and the Rule of Law 2015)

After making their report, alleged victims are referred by police to the Rainbo Centre, where they are treated free of charge. After having been examined, they receive a medical certificate, which is a key source of evidence should the case go to court. Then all those implicated are called together to discuss the case and establish possible solutions. This process is strikingly like community proceedings, albeit with significantly less time accorded to the process. Grievances are supposed to be aired in the space of a single hearing and, if possible, the case closed. To provide emotional support, the MSWGCA should have a social worker at hand to suggest alternatives to reporting individuals who feel unsafe going back home or who are concerned for their loved ones.[10] However, resource scarcity makes offering such alternatives impossible. Christiana Davies-Cole, former lawyer at Legal Access through Women Yearning for Equality Rights and Social Justice (L.A.W.Y.E.R.S.) and FSU trainee, explains:

[9] As I will show in the next chapter, preference is given to cases involving minors.
[10] This is also the reason for the FSUs' close collaboration with NGOs, such as Don Bosco or Save the Children, which often have temporary shelters for children.

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These women come here, hoping for change: they are battered and raped, and they fear for their lives, but almost always we have to send them back home. Shelters are only available for children. We try to send them to family members. But most people think that what goes on in a home is private. They will blame the women for going to the police, and they will never be involved in suing their own families, so these women have to go back home. It is very … tough here.

In nearly every instance, women are sent back to the households where they lived when filing their reports. Furthermore, even if cases go to court, it can take years for them to navigate through the legal system, leaving the reporting women vulnerable to escalated violence during this period. Finally, most cases are eventually dismissed. There are several reasons for this. Because of resource scarcity and reluctance to interfere, no proper investigations are conducted. In the courts, persons are treated as spouses or partners. Their subject positions are not considered those of alleged perpetrator and victim (unlike when minors are involved; see Chapter 8). When questioning witnesses, the magistrate and police ask: 'So your husband came home and then he beat you, his wife?' rather than 'So the accused came to the house and then the accused beat you?', which would be the language used in cases involving minors.

In addition, family members often refuse to testify against their own relatives. If a case is adjourned three times, such as due to a missing witness, the defence lawyer can request that the case be dismissed. Since many Sierra Leoneans have dependants to care for and regularly lack the resources to attend court, and magistrates and judges have to juggle a large volume of cases, those who appear in court are typically given a weekday when a potential hearing may take place. Thus, people come to court every week where they wait for their case to be called until they are unable to come, upon which the case is dismissed for lack of claimants. Additionally, intervening family members may prevent witnesses from testifying. A High Court judge stated:

One of the biggest problems we have is witness tampering. In these family matters, sometimes an aunt or uncle will stop the victim or the alleged perpetrator from appearing in court. Then suddenly they 'visit family in the interior' or their 'child is sick' … they are removed under some pretence so that we cannot get a hold of them, but if they don't appear in court, we have to discharge the case.

Thus, in Sierra Leone, accessing the 'rights' that the gender laws technically provide is impossible for most people, partly because of social conditions and partly because of the way such adult cases are handled in police stations and courts. Again, we see the effect of different and irreconcilable ideals of gender relations weighing on individuals who

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work in such institutions and on those who turn to them. Moreover, while men are excluded from the conversation, activists, international actors, and state institutions – those who are positioned within a human rights discourse – 'push women to access the criminal justice system' without offering long-term solutions and viable exit strategies (Porter 2013: 56). Such activists ignore the fact that 'a woman may choose to prioritize her social and economic wellbeing above the pursuit of a "just" punishment for the perpetrator' (Porter 2013: 56). They also fail to take account of the fact that the police and the courts are not able to deal effectively with such matters.

When Informal State Mediations Fail: Initiating a Downward Spiral

FSUs were strengthened in the course of the post-conflict 'human rights' processes to replace informal mediations, which were believed to be biased, with an effective, impartial, and equal treatment of cases (see TRC 2004a). But rather than establishing their services in dialogue with communities, they pushed mediation strategies to the periphery. FSU mediations mimic the format of community and household mediations in that participants are asked to present their respective positions and find a collective solution. However, the FSUs cannot spend significant amounts of time on such cases, as communities can, nor do they have the wealth of knowledge about the people involved that communities can draw on. Finally, they cannot offer reparations similar to those of communities in which people can be made to contribute. FSU mediations in their current form are an example of how ideals of universal human rights, governed through state legislation, can become counterproductive. Such processes lack consideration of context and take place without the resources necessary to provide alternative solutions to existing structures. Indeed, the police know that, because of resource scarcity and big case-loads, they cannot handle all cases effectively. What ends up happening is that the FSU encourages people to have their cases mediated within their communities, if possible.

However, if individuals are first encouraged to position themselves within a human rights discourse and asked to act in accordance with it – as Apsatu did – and then, after being put through a poor copy of what they would have faced at home, sent back to the communities and structures they were asked to turn their backs on, the risks women face increase disproportionately. If a report is made to the community first, support structures are in place (Chapter 6), but if they enter the realm of the state and then return to the community, the 'betrayal which occurred

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cannot go unsanctioned', Mamie K, another community elder from Allentown, said. These adverse effects and tremendous risks have led many to mistrust state authorities and, even more so, the police.

Reporting: A Phenomenon on the Rise and a Class Question

Notwithstanding these difficulties, more and more reports are made by adult women. I did not get to see any official statistics from before 2011 and was told that Sierra Leone did not digitally record offences statistics before then.[11] From 2011 to 2015, the reporting of domestic violence rose from 522 to 8,043 cases. In 2015, when outcomes were first recorded, 3,521 cases were investigated and 1,438 were charged (FSU crime statistics, which I was allowed to view).[12] In 2015, 43 per cent of reported cases were 'investigated', which means that they proceeded to a preliminary investigation at the Magistrate's Court. There, witness statements are heard, and the magistrate then decides whether there is sufficient evidence to send the case to the High Court. Only 17.8 per cent of cases were charged. To understand these rates better, we need to analyse 'what is being reported'. According to the Domestic Violence Act, domestic violence includes any of the following acts or threats of any such act:

(a) physical or sexual abuse;
(b) economic abuse;
(c) emotional, verbal or psychological abuse, including any conduct that makes another person feel constantly unhappy, humiliated, ridiculed, afraid or depressed or to feel inadequate or worthless;
(d) harassment, including sexual harassment and intimidation;
(e) conduct that in any way harms or may harm another person, including any omission that results in harm and either (i) endangers the safety, health or wellbeing of another person; (ii) undermines another person's privacy, integrity or security; or (iii) detracts or is likely to detract from another person's dignity or worth as a human being.
(3) An offence under subsection (1) shall be punishable by a fine not exceeding SLL 5,000,000 or by a term of imprisonment not exceeding 2 years or by both such fine and imprisonment. (Government of Sierra Leone 2007c)

[11] From 2011 to 2015, only the aggregate number of all reports made was made available to me. In 2011, 522 cases of domestic violence were reported; in 2012, 4,452; in 2013, 7,391; and in 2014, 9,157.
[12] Rape is a crime committed against non-partners and is therefore a different offence.

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Reports of economic violence – mostly concerning husbands not supporting their children – have risen starkly. Moreover, people are increasingly registering traditional marriages. Cases regarding the division of resources after a divorce or inheritance cases are common. Between adults, only cases where the physical or sexual violence is so severe that lasting injuries occur that can be unquestionably identified by doctors and described in a medical report (e.g. fractures, stab wounds, burns) have a high chance of leading to a court case. As regards emotional violence, mostly cases of *mami kɔs* are reported. The cases that have a high chance of leading to a conviction are those involving children, such as neglect or if physical violence is committed (child cruelty). The state's lenience changes drastically when minors are involved, and state resources are channelled to protect minors (Chapter 8).

Why Men Cannot Report

As I showed in Chapter 4, in conversations and interviews, both women and men explained how they 'fought' with each other using physical violence such as slapping or beating. However, when I asked if men ever report violence to the police, I was met with embarrassed responses such as 'Of course not, what kind of men would these be?' Not one of the people I spoke to in communities knew of a man who had reported his wife or girlfriend for violence to the police.

In the police stations, the same question met with laughter from the then chief of the East End Police Station, and professionals from the head office of the FSU at the CID in Freetown.[13] Except for one professional, whom I will call Dr Momo, none of them had ever encountered a case in which a man reported his wife or girlfriend for being violent to him. Dr Momo told me about this case when there was nobody else present. Leaning over from his side of the table, he spoke in whispers. He started his story with a disclaimer, referring to the universality of human rights: 'Well, you know that the Gender Acts are for equality, so anyone can report a case to us: men, women, children, everybody'. Dr Momo then continued, his voice a mixture of disbelief and sensationalism:

> For men now, this is not easy. They report when something happens to their children or maybe inheritance cases or neighbours' quarrels. Many report *mami kɔs*, like when their wife curses their mother. Then they report to show their wives that they cannot do that and to respect their mother. But reporting 'Oh, my wife beats me', that is unheard of. Society expects them to be different. Let me tell you about the only 'yes', the only case when a man reported. Ah that man.

[13] I do not name them, because I want to protect their anonymity.

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He reported his wife for battering. Yes, she was a fearful wife, strong woman, and that man was so weak, so small. When he reported, it was like he was crawling into the police station, you know, like with his penis in his hands, giving it to the investigating officer. He failed as a man not even being able to be respected in his own home. Not able to stop his wife, a woman … can you imagine? In all the hearings at the police station, everybody was laughing, and if that gets out to his community, *eh bo* that man. Of course, he was advised to drop the case before he becomes the laughing stock of the entire nation. He would have never won.

To contextualise Dr Momo's story, I turn to Pierre Bourdieu (2001). In *Masculine Domination*, he describes the construction of gender as a project of opposites within an overall conceptual world of binaries (up/down, in/out, above/below, behind/in front). Here, the idea of sexual difference is normalised (MacCormack and Strathern 1982). Gender is therefore 'onto-formative' (Connell 2005) 'in the sense that it anchors one's existence … one's sense of belonging to a community and to a world' (Mann 2014: 1). It is formative of sexual relationships between men and women. It shapes conceptions of affection, intimacy, and violence, and it generates possibilities for action. As Dr Momo's story and the metaphor of teeth and tongue show, the notion of a binary division of gender roles, responsibilities, and opportunities has led men and women to be positioned at opposite ends of the spectrum in Sierra Leone (Coulter 2009: 6). As Michael Jackson argued in his research on the Kuranko, it serves 'as one of the basic armatures for structuring all social relations' (Jackson 1977: 81 cited in Coulter 2009: 6). Indeed, notions of personhood in Sierra Leone continue to be highly gendered in a dialectic between normative assumptions and lived realities. Gendered agency is exhibited through particular ways of exercising power or producing effects that are unique to individuals based on their gender, either as women or men (Wardlow 2006). Many research collaborators based their ideas on nearly unquestioned gendered expectations, for example:

'Women and men are naturally different and have particular roles and responsibilities, with men dominating over women in all spheres of life'.

'Women have the weak and men the strong mind or that women are the weaker sex (God made Eve out of the rib of Adam)'.

'Husbands have control and rights over the bodies and sexualities of their wives. Wives need to be sexually available always'.

'Love and affection are accompanied by jealousy and social monitoring'.

'Physical and sexual violence can illustrate affection. Men who do not beat and monitor their wives may have stopped being jealous and have therefore ceased to love'.

'Wives are beaten if they have done something wrong'.

'A husband's behaviour is a wife's responsibility. Wives have the duty to "change" their husbands. A violent husband indicates a wife's failure to be a "good wife".' (Schneider 2019a)

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Such perceptions are described as traditional. However, while gender parallelism has a long history in the region, the question arises whether gendered hierarchies may be the outcome of the colonial encounter and ongoing international influences.[14] It may be that it was these encounters that brought about a sense of starkly juxtaposed and clashing viewpoints and gave rise to diverging demands (see, e.g., Cooper and Stoler 1997; Comaroff and Comaroff 2021). When trying to comprehend the threat reporting can pose to masculinity as well as femininity, we must first understand the social positioning of adult men and women within households.

Gendered Expectations That Affect Reporting

Here, the popular concept of the weak mind (women) and the strong mind (men) is particularly helpful.[15] Explaining this notion to me, Tejan (35) from Goderich says: 'A woman's mind is like a piece of paper. It is crumbled and stretched by everyone she loves, who shape its form. It has no mind on its own'. Suge explains: 'Women make you crazy, really! Men have a strong and independent mind; they make their decisions for themselves, but women, ah, they are always connected. Everyone influences them: family, friends, children … You have no say on your own'.

Suge's notion of women as the social connectors between people and as those who build their lives firmly on others recalls the metaphor of the teeth (men) and the tongue (women), where the tongue moves the food between different parts of the mouth. The concept of a weak mind, as articulated by Tejan, views women as confined to the house and emotionally reliant on their family and children. Despite their malleability and permanence, like tongues in the mouth, women are perceived to be 'the weaker sex' (Jackson 2017: 71) and hence in need of male protection. Sons are therefore required to defend and protect their mothers when they become adults and to prioritise their mothers' needs before the needs of their wives. Dr Momo's statement that men report when their wives curse their mothers is based upon this conviction. Papani explains: 'It is like a progression. As a wife, you have children and you do everything for them. Then later, they will be the ones who take care of

[14] This appears even more likely considering that while gender fluidity, multiple genders and queer relationships have a long history in Sierra Leone—evident in traditional sodalities and social formations—current public discourse blends them out. Other genders, relationships and sexual orientations are either carefully concealed behind the normative, heterosexual male-female binary or marginalized to the point that they exist beneath, rather than alongside, heteronormative arrangements.

[15] And it also relates to rigid teeth and flexible tongues.

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you'. And his wife, Aunty Kadie, adds: 'As a wife, you expect your husband to put his mother first, just like you expect your sons to put you first. You know Josephus … when Issa cursed me, he had to make a case out of that' (see Chapter 6). A man who does not protect his mother and ensure her well-being loses respect.

Men who report their wives for cursing or mistreating their mothers therefore act in accordance with their duties. 'When your wife curses your mother, either you beat her or abuse her, or you must report her for her to be told off and for everybody to see that you respect and cherish your mother and that nobody should dare to go near her', explained Lansana (38). However, in relation to their wives and girlfriends as well as their children, men are often characterised as self-centred, pursuing their desires and needs with greater independence than women. Men are considered unpredictable, not 'steady', and difficult to restrain; if someone tries to limit their freedom, they resist with great force, even if it means causing destruction in the process. From the perspective of the social union of the household, however, this means that women are regarded as the resilient foundations of their households, who prioritise the well-being of others over their own (Wardlow 2006; Wolputte 2016). In contrast, men are inflexible and egoistic. As a result, a family can withstand the absence of a man, but not of a woman, who is considered the nucleus of the home.

The Gender of the Heart

Within sexual relationships, men's actions concerning emotions and desires are often interpreted as responses to women's behaviour. The notion of warm and cold hearts plays into this as well. Common proverbs depict men as having warm hearts, which suggests that they are hot-tempered and prone to anger. Meanwhile, women have cool or washed hearts, which implies that they tend to approach situations thoughtfully and avoid impulsive actions based on affect. These notions further hold that the need to 'put their families first' has imparted to women the ability not to give in to their affects; to live with, not according to, their emotions. Because of their ability to control their emotions as well as to read the emotions of others and influence them, women's words are not easily believed (see Apsatu's case above and Chapters 4 and 6). Moreover, women are expected to 'control and change men', as men are viewed as being susceptible to the influence of strong women. As a result, women are held accountable for the actions of their partners or sons, both within and outside of the household. For instance, if a man engages in infidelity or if he is 'spoilt', the responsibility may fall on his

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female partner or mother. This means that when a woman reports her partner to the police for violence, it is akin to admitting her own failure to prevent such behaviour or accusing his mother for failing to raise him appropriately. Reporting, furthermore, provokes men's already warm hearts. During a broadcast of 'Love Talk' by Radio Galaxy, the presenter stated:

> Women should not cause problems but encourage a man. They should be neither disrespectful nor harsh to the man. Men do not appreciate women with warm hearts and women who cause palaver and *wahala*. Women have the highest responsibility for changing the men. A man's character is naturally rough and loud, and women should make them calm and help them to change. If women do not encourage their men, then men cannot be stopped from beating them and from going to the streets. The woman is greatly responsible for male violence.

Teeth and Tongue: Of Multiple Gendered Ideologies

Pierre Bourdieu's crucial proposition is that 'masculine domination' (Bourdieu 2001), as he calls it, does not depend on demonstrations of physical power because it has become an accepted, internalised, symbolic construct for men and women alike. But the Sierra Leonean case is much more complicated than this. If one followed Bourdieu, violence due to a crisis of masculinity would mean that the subconscious agreement that men are in power has collapsed, making physical violence necessary for 'domination'. By contrast, however, the lived realities of my research collaborators in Sierra Leone subvert the prevailing gendered expectations of 'dominant masculine' and 'dominated feminine', just as authors criticise Bourdieu for lacking nuance, complexity, and historical depth (e.g. Mottier 2002: 353).

As we see in Sierra Leone, the idea of masculine domination is much more than a subconscious product of history. Instead, women and men consciously reflect upon their respective positions. Women are said to be stronger emotionally and socially and to be better able to put the needs of others before their own. In Freetown, women are often the main breadwinners, the heads of their households, and the mediators of violence within communities. This position is not a present-day phenomenon but was already described by various elders with whom I conducted research and by older ethnographies alike (Hoffer 1972; Rosaldo, Lamphere, and Bamberger 1974; White 1981; Alie 1990; Day 1994; Ojukutu-Macauley 1997: 92; Coulter 2009). Among the Kuranko, Michael Jackson discusses the paradox involved in the idea that women are 'the weaker sex' while in everyday life they often feed and provide for the

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household (Jackson 2017: 17, 37). Caroline Bledsoe (1980a) observes that, although men formally hold power, women maintain considerable personal autonomy through strategic manoeuvres, thereby securing significant political and economic influence for themselves. Mariane Ferme shows how 'the division of the world between brave men and senseless women masks a cultural strategy that tends to elide these distinctions when they most matter' (Ferme 2001: 61). In her work on the Mende of the Gola rainforest, Melissa Leach describes the 'covert strategies' used by single and married women alike to acquire resources 'partly on favours from lovers' and partly through obtaining and selling resources 'from their husbands and male kin without explicit authorisation' (Leach 1994: 198).

In trying to understand the role of dominant narratives and how they align with or collide with lived experiences, I turn to the distinction that Jean and John Comaroff made between ideology and hegemony, and thus to 'the two dominant forms in which power … is entailed in culture' (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 22).[16] The way in which Bourdieu and those projecting such gendered expectations naturalise their argument seems to imply hegemony: static, taken for granted as universally true, seldom contested (see, e.g. Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 23; Bakare Yusuf 2003: 7). Yet, because gender ideals must be articulated and argued for, they present ideologies rather than a static, taken-for-granted, and seldom-contested hegemony. As Bibi Bakare Yusuf states, this 'discursive framework seeks to legitimate and reproduce certain norms of power and privilege' (Bakare Yusuf 2003: 132). However, the idea of male dominance and its concomitant metaphors remain powerful. And not only men promote and recite them; women do too. Masculine domination is used as a conscious tactic that allows people to live with contradictions and negotiate a certain freedom within seemingly rigid structures. Rather than presenting an unquestioned and taken-for-granted hegemony, masculine domination should be understood as an ideology that has to be articulated and argued for to 'legitimate and reproduce certain norms of power and privilege' (Bakare Yusuf 2003: 132; see also Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 22–3).

In Sierra Leone, state bodies and communities, for example, express different 'systems of meanings, values, and beliefs' around gender, relationships, violence and responses to it (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 24). Consequently, in the contested sociopolitical fields of Sierra Leone, different ideologies, which shape conceptions but which do not neatly

[16] This facilitates an analysis both of competing ideologies at a given moment and their developments.

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align with lived realities, confront, challenge, and influence each other (Comaroff and Comaroff 1991: 24; see also Nader 1990). In urban Sierra Leone, there is no longer one hegemonic ideal of gender complementarity (cf. Ferme 2001). Instead, there are multiple gender ideologies that aim to establish hegemony. This is captured by the notion of the teeth and the tongue, and its various interpretations. At the core of these competing ideologies today is an abrasive relationship between men and women, in which complementarity is not given but must be constantly struggled for through conflict, compromise, and, often enough, violence. Relationships today are shaped and influenced by, and often torn between, such competing ideologies of households, community and state, and human rights and development discourses. The teeth and the tongue thus provide a novel lens through which to gauge contemporary gender relations in urban Sierra Leone as well as beyond. Indeed, in the contemporary globalised world gender relations and relationship dynamics are not forged in isolation from such ideologies, nor can they split from their own histories.

Reporting as a Threat to Successful Masculinity and Femininity

In present-day Sierra Leone, there is an unspoken recognition that women possess greater emotional, social, and economic strength than men. Women are more adept at shaping the behaviour of others and of directing and managing social groups. Nonetheless, it is important for both partners to maintain the appearance of male dominance and female subordination in order to preserve social capital and retain the respect of their families and communities. This illustrates the significant influence that such gendered concepts hold in day-to-day life. In this context, the popular notion that women must be controlled so they do not 'dance on the heads of men' or 'make men their marionettes' takes on a different connotation. They need to be 'kept low' or, more accurately, be put down because they are in fact stronger. Just as women are punished more severely because they are believed to be better able to 'swallow', women's oppression is justified by a notion of superior abilities that must be contained. The result is two different cognitive spheres – the physical and the imagined – which position women's and men's roles in relation to each other differently.

The covert acknowledgement of the strength of women simultaneously makes women responsible for male violence. Male violence becomes a symbol of women's failure to 'dominate in hiding'. Thus, while women are understood to be nominally weaker, in practice they are expected to govern seemingly free-wheeling male nature. And while everyday realities

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reveal women as more capable of directing and managing social groups, they must not openly demonstrate their superior capacities. If they do, they provoke men's retribution. Men are said to be 'cornered into' demonstrating their strong role within a household by using physical force. Failure to do so leads to their downfall, not only within the home but within society (Chapters 4–6). Men are therefore coerced into demonstrating a certain form of masculinity. Apsatu explains:

> Sierra Leonean society corners men and brands them as being used by their wives if they are not strong and dominant and if they contribute to the household chores and child-rearing duties. So, to be considered a real man, you have to stop that. If men want to be given authority or a job, they might be denied that if others know that they work in the household because this is considered as them being weak and unmanly. Public shaming and exclusion is common, and especially severe by men who themselves do not want to be emasculated. Men do whatever they can to keep their prestige and reputation in society. Their violence is just part of upkeeping that image.

Aunty Kadie, Papani's wife, told me: 'It is not natural for men to do these things [household chores]; we have women for that. If I want somebody to cook and clean … I take a woman. What's the role of men, if they are not even real men anymore?' And Mr Mohamed further added: 'When you as a man do these things in the home, nobody will take you seriously anymore. You will be the laughing stock of everybody and you will never get a promotion in your job. Never ever. What kind of man can be trusted to run a business when he is not even able to run his wife?'

This recalls the literature on the 'crisis of masculinity in Africa' or the crisis of the self-made man in Europe, which interprets violence by men against women as a response to their diminishing economic and social 'domination' (see Morrell 2001; Xaba 2001; Whitehead 2002; Walker 2005; Morrell, Jewkes, and Lindegger 2012; Dunaiski 2013). This literature is valuable in understanding the complex pressures and circumstances under which men and boys negotiate their masculinity. However, it depicts these dynamics as new rather than showing their continuities. What must also be considered is the important role women play in these dynamics and the many ways in which women expect and execute violence themselves, react to violence from their (sexual) partners, and are in charge of mediating violence. A further major role is played by specific legal landscapes, institutional developments, and the discourses and interventions of activists, NGOs, and human rights organisations.

My research shows that gender parallelism is not a fact but is better understood as a tactic. To the observer, it may seem like a smooth blanket, but underneath the covert worlds of tactics obfuscate clear

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boundaries and challenge assigned roles within the social hierarchy. In Freetown, research collaborators' practices upset neat gender parallelism while still using it as a framework of reference. Moreover, as my analysis reveals, there is no longer one model of gender parallelism. Indeed, gender parallelisms or, rather, different gendered ideologies more accurately capture the current situation. In Freetown, household, community, and state ideas of gender relations are often at odds with each other, and interpersonal relationships are caught between these different dynamics. What is happening in Sierra Leone is not a crisis of masculinity but rather a crisis of gender dynamics in a gendered social and legal world. In Freetown, men and women negotiate their relationships between personal circumstances, (legal) developments, and various norms. It is through untangling these competing ideologies and irreconcilable notions of gendered personhood and gendered expectations that we can better grasp the extreme situation of men when they report domestic violence to the police.

In an earlier chapter, we came across a mother (Chapter 6) who reported her daughter-in-law for controlling her son because he changed diapers and conducted household chores. This situation was interpreted by her as the result of his having lost all control over his mind and being – an unnatural and fearful outcome of violence committed against him. In MSaw's case, the community approached it as one in which his dispositions had been muted owing to the violence committed by his girlfriend. Hence, his masculinity was suspended, and he could not be judged for his actions. Only once the woman was made to withdraw her hold over him was he believed to have acquired agency again.

Therefore, in Sierra Leone, gender and gendered practices are deeply ingrained in underlying assumptions that seek to justify and excuse behaviour and assign responsibility. Both men and women frequently described the gendered ideologies around appropriate behaviour as 'heavy'. Even though empirical reality and personal needs or desires may differ considerably from these expectations, transgressing them openly questions and threatens masculinity or femininity. Reporting is one way in which people's habits, tacit behaviours, and positioning challenge each other. And here we need to consider not only the discrepancies between world views and lived experiences, but also the possible disconnection between habits and positions consciously reflected upon. Referring to habit, to 'ordinary everyday forms of social exchange and reciprocity', Cowan shows that 'culture is more than intertwining, enduring, and contesting narratives; it also includes the very significant domain of the tacit and unspoken' (Cowan 2006: 17). 'Social symbolizations, hierarchies and exclusions', she says, 'are

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quietly and often unreflectively reproduced' and inscribed in 'the structures of fantasy of the individual unconscious' (Cowan 2006: 17).

Reporting to the police to further 'human rights' means breaking with the habitual way in which 'things are done', as Papani says. When men turn to the police to look for assistance with their relationships, they contradict ideologies that position women and men on opposite ends of emotional, affective, and intellectual traits. It makes them visible, questions them. When reporting, women risk the dissolution of the household and of their femininity, while men risk the disintegration of their masculinity. Women who report embody the fear of the feminine (discussed in Chapter 5), which threatens to make men obsolete. When they report, women may carry both the 'feminine' and 'masculine' simultaneously. On the one hand, they take charge over their decisions, thereby displaying 'masculine' independence and individualism; on the other, reporting may also be done in the interest of protecting one's children (the ultimate 'feminine' characteristic).

Men who report challenge their masculinity. They are seen as unmanly, as castrated. Bonnie Mann (2014), in her work on terrorism and masculinity in the United States, shows how many of the men she spoke to described as the ultimate horror, not the physical torture they endured, but their being stripped of their masculinity, becoming women. In Sierra Leone, however, men who report do not become women; rather, they are described as children: irresponsible, unable to take care of themselves, in need of the protection of another, of a stronger body or institution (Mann 2014). Consequently, men's turning to the police when experiencing violence, thereby acknowledging their lack of control and power, is interpreted not only as problematic, but also as the ultimate weakness. Pepemboy (52), a plumber from Allentown, said: 'That man might as well kill himself. He is weaker than a woman, that one. Imagine your wife beats you and you can't even handle it, so you run and report to the police, like a child. Oh Salone. What will happen to this country?' In many ways, reporting a woman for beating harms the masculine ideal more than enduring a public slapping (Chapter 5).

In Sierra Leone, the gender justice laws have failed to adequately consider the specific social situations and power dynamics that contribute to the subordination and responsibility of both men and women. By taking these factors into account, we can understand why women, who often bear the burden of carrying entire households on their shoulders, are hesitant to report their partners to the police. Such an action would result in the breakdown of the relationship and could lead to the loss of crucial familial support. They also explain why men do not feel able to report at all. Because there is little dialogue between the different

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ideals of gendered behaviour held by the state, the community, and the household, men and women caught between them are unable to turn to one without turning their back on the other. Hence, competing ideologies that overrule the hegemony of gender complementarity present advertisements for lived realities that are often unachievable for people whose daily lives are grounded in a different system.

In addition to the ideological and normative underpinnings, one also needs to consider the material and practical possibilities of reporting. If those who experience violence are urged to come forward and are tacitly, sometimes even openly, held responsible for further violence if they do not or cannot come forward, this adds additional burdens. The call to report must go hand in hand with political and social struggles to offer real possibilities for reporting securely and being safe thereafter. The success of efforts to prevent and respond to violence depends to a large extent on their ability to break down gendered expectations as well as their alignment with either state or community. Only if people from all backgrounds are able to report, and only if reporting no longer demands existential choices, can social policy really work to decrease violence and advance gender justice. The first prerequisite for such a development is dialogue and a thorough understanding of the local context.

The next chapter engages with the SOA and the school ban on pregnant girls and thus with regulations concerning minors. It thereby examines yet another set of gendered state ideologies that aims to overrule community principles.

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