Conclusion

This book has offered an urban ethnography in which I analyse violence within intimate relationships in Freetown, Sierra Leone; its degree of acceptance or rejection; and the ways in which it is mediated at domestic, community, and state levels. If we seek to understand real people and real situations, we must, says Michael Jackson, elucidate 'the relationship between discursive notions of violence in relationships and the lived experiences of men and women who commit, expect, and suffer under such violence; who accuse one another and who confess' (Jackson 2019: 60). In doing so, this book has sought to make three broad contributions to the anthropology of (West) Africa. The first lies in deepening studies of violence in intimate and familial contexts in Africa by presenting a new lens for understanding gender relations and perceptions of violence in urban Sierra Leone (captured in the metaphor of the teeth and the tongue). The second contribution lies in advancing scholarship on law and rights by analysing how Sierra Leone's plural legal system mediates and regulates violence and intimacy. I show how contemporary laws are responses to past occurrences (in particular the civil war and the post-war processes), present-day local concerns, international influences, and global concerns, and how this multiplicity can cause friction and adverse effects despite concerted efforts to decrease violence. Third, the book adds fresh insights into the manifold works that engage with youths ('in crisis') by showing the ways in which young people in Freetown today negotiate their relationships. In particular, I emphasise how past and present are interwoven in continuous struggles to create a better future. Instead of a crisis of masculinity, what my research has uncovered is a crisis of gender relations and relationship trajectories that people try to mediate and that they help shape in the process.

Understanding Violence in Relationships

The terms 'violence' and 'Africa' have a problematic history that requires further enquiry. Local expressions of violence cannot be disconnected

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from the structural violence inherent in international political and economic arrangements, which marginalise countries like Sierra Leone. Moreover, as this book centrally argues, violence in intimate relationships cannot be understood solely as negative. Rather, it is at the heart of understanding how social relations are produced and reproduced. Indeed, it is attempts by the state and other institutions to regulate violence and loving relationships that can trigger complex and often negative consequences. To do justice to the multi-layered expressions and consequences of violence and to develop social policies that protect and empower, it is essential to deepen our understanding of how to interpret and respond to violence, and what we consider as violence and what we do not.

Love and Violence challenges prevalent victim–perpetrator narratives by demonstrating that, in Freetown, violence in contemporary relationships is a complex phenomenon with multiple purposes. It is neither solely positive nor negative and serves various functions, such as demonstrating love or punishing a partner. This interpersonal violence exists in a country that has experienced severe violence in its (recent) history. By placing the expression, execution, and negotiation of violence within historical and geopolitical contexts, this book does not seek to localise particularly visible forms of violence in an African context. Instead, it draws attention to the larger forces of structural violence in which these contexts are enmeshed.

This book also considers women's agency and analyses the ways in which women expect and carry out violence. Moreover, depicting how love and violence enter into a complicated relationship within the moral economy broadens our understanding of love as it is lived, enacted, and experienced in this particular context.

This book neither relativises nor vilifies violence but foregrounds the multifaceted nature of its manifestations. It highlights the pain violence causes, but also casts light on the social world in which it operates and the ways in which it animates that world. It examines empirically the consequences of how violence is enacted, experienced, and responded to for personal lives, for society, and for legal and political structures. This variety of experience and interpretation, based on the various actors' social positions, is crucial for understanding the effects of law and policy and for helping develop preventive and protective mechanisms.

The book demonstrates that Sierra Leoneans consider the acceptability or unacceptability of violent practices along intersectional lines of gender (men against women), age (elders against younger people), and hierarchy (those in power / dominant people against the powerless / subordinate people). Acts of violence are, furthermore, gendered in that

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women are said to use violence predominantly against minds and men against bodies. Men are said to use violence mainly to punish, and women to bind others to them.

While acceptable incidents of violence are resolved interpersonally, unacceptable violence may be reported to the authorities and may lead to a legal case. As I showed in Chapters 3 and 6, intimate relationships are a means to create and nurture social relations. Unacceptable violence between partners is therefore not a private matter. Instead, by rupturing the moral economy, such violence provides a threat to the continuity of a relationship and so concerns other social groups involved. Sierra Leone, a country where informal labour and social and group connections are deeply entrenched, presents a context where self-interest and opportunities for individual action are intricately linked to the interests of others. The prospect of fulfilling individual needs is therefore either amplified or restricted by interactions with others as these build a dynamic relationship (see Piot 1999: 18, 120; Ibrahim 2009; Jackson 2012: 3). Agency is therefore 'domesticated' (Nyamnjoh 2001: 29), and responsibility encompasses both egocentric and sociocentric personhood, enmeshing the two and involving not only the partners, but additional actors as well. Deciding how relationships should be lived, and what should happen when violence occurs, involves the family and the community. As Charles Piot showed for Togo, 'agency thus resides not within a singular identity (within the person) but in the relations people have with another' (Piot 1999: 120). In communities and households, this interdependence and interconnectedness shapes the actions of many people and also directs the manner in which violence is mediated.

As I pointed out in Chapter 6, people often report unacceptable violence to the patrons of their relationships, usually female consanguine elder family members, their church or mosque, or their community. In the last-mentioned instance, community members, led by female elders, discuss the case cooperatively and mete out punishment. It is interesting that households and communities can preside over both male and female forms of violence while criminal justice institutions are limited to predominantly male forms of violence (Chapter 7).

As we have learned, people risk losing family support and may be fined or asked to leave their community if they report their partners to the police. Moreover, reporting usually leads to separation. Only specific groups of people feel able to report, mainly economically independent women. As Chapter 7 highlighted, men are mostly unable to report because they risk having their masculinity diminished and being considered as children, while, in contrast, women may embody both masculine and feminine traits. Women who work for the state or engage with state institutions

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tend to have the resources to be able to start a new life if this becomes necessary. They are familiar with the proceedings of the police and the courts, and often align themselves with the human rights principles upon which these institutions are based. All these barriers to reporting have important implications for policy-makers and development agencies. Scholars of political economy and socio-legal dynamics thus need to focus not simply on individuals but on families and family dynamics. In this way, they can better grasp people's experiences and possibilities within the specific situations in which they find themselves (Collins 2000).

Under state law in Sierra Leone, sexual relationships involving minors are illegal. However, they are almost never reported by those implicated since they do not consider them as a form of violence. An essential finding of the book is that community mediations are not focussed on sex (unless it is withheld). State laws, on the other hand, are primarily concerned with sex. As I have shown, through the Sexual Offences Act and the school ban on visibly pregnant girls, sex became part of the national agenda in Sierra Leone, and reporting on other people's sexual activity became a civic duty for the realisation of national goals. However, mobilising citizens to report on one another proved mainly effective with state employees, while community members whose livelihoods are based on the informal economy continue to avoid state institutions. Hence, as we have seen, 'rights discourses' that attempt to empower marginalised groups may create divisions when they meet with different normative frameworks (Cowan et al. 2001; Cowan 2006; Foblets, Graziadei, and Renteln 2017). For instance, while the law is written in a gender-neutral manner and both boys and girls below 18 are unable to consent to sex, the criminal justice system perceives men and boys in terms of the SOA as perpetrators – those who penetrate – and girls as victims – those who are penetrated – and concerns itself only with this one dimension (Chapter 8). What constitutes violence in relationships and how it should be mediated are therefore deeply influenced by gendered expectations and by 'the interaction between international human rights theory and local cultures' (Burrill, Roberts, and Thornberry 2010: 3).

Chapters 8 and 9 brought to light the drastic consequences of these regulations for young people's sexual freedom, for the formation of households, for education, for making a future, and for social relations. The book thus adds a new dimension to the study of risk factors (e.g. García Moreno, Jewkes, and Sen 2002; Capaldi et al. 2012) by showing what happens when a state adopts the language of risk – here, teenage pregnancy and rape – to justify its interventions in citizens' private lives.

The book has also focussed on witnesses, on those people who complete David Riches's (1986) 'triangle of violence'. Indeed, reporting

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cases and informing on others are the mechanisms that keep the different mediation systems alive (Chapters 6–9). In community or household cases, what is reported and informed upon is the behaviour, social standing, and level of responsibility of those implicated. When, on the other hand, adults report a partner to the police, they inform on a specific act of violence. As for cases under the SOA, it is third parties who report on sexual activity involving minors.

When Is Someone Mature?

As I have revealed, one of the main differences between the approach of criminal justice institutions and that of households and communities to mediating violence in relationships concerns the notion of maturity. At the heart of the matter are questions about how and when a person becomes an adult, when and with whom a person should be able to have sex, and when a person can and should be held responsible for their actions.

Households and communities rely on gendered socialisation. In accordance with many feminist theorists (Butler 1993; Moore 1994; McNay 2000; 2004), most Sierra Leoneans do not understand gender as a given and stable category. Gender must be achieved and embodied with great and constant care. Therefore, it is, as Holly Wardlow says, 'an action, not an essence; a process not a category' (Wardlow 2006: n.p.; see MacCormack and Strathern 1982; Coulter 2009). As I have shown, Sierra Leoneans often speak with a sense of certainty about how women or men 'are', how they 'act', 'behave', 'feel', and so on. Women and men are said to see and interpret the world differently, to have differing needs and desires, different emotional, affective, and intellectual dispositions, and different modes of executing and reacting to violence. This delicate balance is frequently disrupted and must be reset anew. Furthermore, gendered subject positions place men in positions of power and privilege, while women occupy lower positions with fewer opportunities for authority and influence. However, everyday lives clearly differ, and gendered expectations are constantly and tacitly transgressed (Ferme 2001).

Violence in relationships, I have argued, can be better understood by observing lived realities in which prevailing masculine and feminine subject statuses are constantly overturned by the constraints of lived experiences and by struggles in relationships (Chapters 3–4). Relationships and gender dynamics are both firm and fluid. Changes in relationship practices, in labour, and in social organisation have led to new forms of relationships and new ideas about love. But masculinities and femininities continue to influence the ways in which individuals are

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categorised, evaluated, respected, or dismissed based on established norms and expectations. They are embedded in, dependent on, and reinforced by the existing material and social conditions of domination and subordination. These influence people's efforts to find a partner and the way relationships are lived as well as the way they are evaluated by friends, family, and society. Publicly transgressing expectations may lead to their breakdown, and this is therefore discouraged. As Caroline Bledsoe (1980a), Carol MacCormack and Marilyn Strathern (1982), Melissa Leach (1994), Mariane Ferme (2001), and others have emphasised, the complementarity of genders is not the underbelly but the true body of social relations in Sierra Leone. Gendered differences, as well as the need for cooperation, give birth to and sustain power structures, livelihood strategies, and social life.

However, as the metaphor of the teeth and the tongue shows, this complementarity does not necessarily make for a perfect fit. What occurs in Freetown today is not a performance where two different pieces – male and female – automatically build a completed puzzle (representing gender complementarity) if placed together. Rather, both parts are 'jammed together' and need to arrive at this complementarity. The road to achieving complementarity has become rocky and difficult to navigate. Underneath the neat performance was always a messier lived reality, but the deviations were carefully concealed and did not openly challenge the picture of complementarity. Today, relationships are often visibly spiked with violence and pain. The hegemony of one idea of complementarity has been upset, men and women can no longer be placed together according to expected patterns, and different ideologies vie to become hegemonic. In Freetown today, there is no longer one puzzle consisting of two pieces, but several puzzles that have been thrown together into one box. Institutions and communities struggle to advance their own ideals of gender relations and relationship dynamics against the opposing views of other systems. And partners in sexual relationships find themselves caught between these different views.

This book has thus offered a reworking of the classic theme of gender complementarity. It argues for an interpretation of gender relations that allows for an analysis of friction. It shows too how everyday practices differ from the prevailing gendered principles, but how the principles are nevertheless held in place because of the important role they play in shaping expectations and behaviours. The metaphor of the teeth and the tongue thus serves as a novel way to examine gendered identities and gender relations in contemporary Sierra Leone.

Scholars have shown the importance of social age across Africa (Christiansen, Utas, and Vigh 2006). Similarly in Sierra Leone, after

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a *rite de passage* that makes a person a big woman or a big man, they must assume the responsibility that comes with such a subject position. Here, the book builds further on the relational nature of 'youth' as a category, by showing its gendered foundation. Whereas a man in Freetown can remain a 'youth' until an advanced age, women's youth is ended by childbearing. In the event of a pregnancy, women and girls are expected to assume the role of mothers and thus of big women, irrespective of whether, numerically speaking, they are 15 or 35 years old (Chapter 6).

Responsibility grows with seniority. In analysing household and community mediations (Chapter 6), I have shown the importance that is placed on the perspective of female elders. In both case studies presented in Chapter 6, it was elders who decided the fates of their younger family and community members. Had Ester's grandmother been on trial, it would have been difficult to discipline her. As an elder, she is at the very centre of a broad web of social relations. In Freetown, people make their mark on the world through successfully mobilising their social networks (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992). The communities I lived in were firmly based on shared responsibilities, shared labour, and mutual aid. The more senior someone was, the more weight was attached to their opinion in deciding cases.

The criminal justice institutions, on the other hand, have adopted a numerical understanding of age, maturity, and responsibility, which is seemingly separated from gendered practices. Adulthood and maturity are reached at the age of 18. Before then, people are assigned a guardian, who must ensure that they do not transgress age-related boundaries. This study has thus brought to light the consequences of two different perceptions of age in which neither system accepts the other.

Violence as Acts versus Violence as Relationships

For the criminal justice system to be effective, it must consider violence as acts: acts that can be observed and measured, in which right and wrong can be clearly assigned, and in which individuals can be constituted as perpetrators and victims. Communities and households, on the other hand, consider violence as a relationship not of physical acts but one between people. Here, individual acts of violence are almost meaningless. They are part of a much bigger relational dynamic of violence that must be uncovered. When engaged in mediation, communities and households therefore quickly move from looking at acts of violence, such as beating or neglect. Instead, they focus on the relationship between the people in question and on how they comport themselves towards each

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other and towards others, so as to determine who influences and manipulates whom.

After determining a victim–perpetrator relationship, state bodies put the burden of blame on the perpetrator and punish them. Communities, by contrast, never judge a single individual, whether right or wrong. For them, punishment is relational and different sanctions are given to those involved. Communities may say who was the main culprit, but, as Chapters 6 and 7 have shown, they do not believe in a sole culprit or in innocence. Moreover, the community immediately moves past the individual and considers the best solution for re-establishing stability within a household and the community. Sanctions are meant to reinforce and make secure the resolution that has been arrived at, while the punishment given by state institutions is aimed at transforming the transgressing individual and discouraging others from committing similar acts (Foucault 1977).

While the two models result in very different outcomes, both are shaped by power relations and unequal subject positions. Both have severe consequences. People are deeply aware of these differences and make conscious choices when deciding whether to report to the state or the community. Hence, as Keebet von Benda-Beckmann (1981) said, they shop between forums and the forums shop for them as well.

Whether institutions in Sierra Leone are rigid or pliable depends on who engages with them. The criminal justice system only intervenes in personal relationships when minors are involved. The SOA operates by decontextualising matters, considering only whether the alleged victim and accused can be inserted into a clear victim–perpetrator relationship and whether sex took place – not how and why. Here, intervention is justified as an effort to protect minors in the interest of national development. In all state cases, no out-of-court settlements are possible and no attempt to influence outcomes is tolerated.

Generally speaking, this abstraction, rigidity, and neutrality is not unusual. Globally, court procedures rely on this reductionism. However, in Sierra Leone, except for cases under the SOA, not only informal mediation systems, but also state legal institutions negotiate disputes through contextualisation. If adults are concerned, state institutions try to keep the privacy and inviolability of households and marriages intact. They seek to settle such matters and often refer them back to communities to be mediated informally. At times like these, law enforcement personnel act according to their gendered socialisation and not according to legislative prescriptions (Bierschenk and De Sardan 2014). This book therefore shows that the way in which institutions 'think' (Douglas 1986) is influenced by the perceptions of those who work in them.

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Rights and Law after the TRC

Anthropologists have increasingly turned to studying 'human rights culture' in order to understand how rights and culture interact (Cowan et al. 2001; Hastrup 2003; Cowan 2006; Comaroff and Comaroff 2016). As a result of the seminal works on the Sierra Leonean Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) by Kirsten Ainley, Rebekka Friedman, and Chris Mahony (2015) and by Rosalind Shaw, Lars Waldorf, and Pierre Hazan (2010), Sierra Leone has become a central case study for such analyses. Deborah Thomas (2012) shows how 'lawfare' – a term that Jean and John Comaroff applied to 'the use of legal means for political and economic ends' (Comaroff and Comaroff 2009: 56) – also encapsulates the aim of the TRC to promote ideals of development and empowerment by demanding legal changes. However, Kirsten Hastrup (2003) argues that lawfare, and the human rights ideals it is based upon, can have an essentialising and oversimplifying effect even if the aim is to protect minorities. Moreover, because such lawfare is mobilised 'within the realm of the transnational, its aims generally tend to target the more modest space of the nation-state' (Thomas 2012: 21). It thereby ignores historical forces by assuming that only a break from the old can help realise the desired goals.

This book has contributed in two ways to the study of law and rights. First, it focussed on domestic laws and legal reforms to prevent violence, which were largely based on the TRC's recommendations, and so it examined one of the effects of the TRC in Sierra Leone. Second, it analysed the impact of such lawfare on Sierra Leone's plural legal landscape.

In Freetown, the framing of laws around the idea of human rights succeeded in producing 'certain kinds of victims' (Ross 2003: 73), namely girls under 18, irrespective of how they perceive themselves. Additionally, it resulted in a construction of perpetrators, without whom no victims could exist. The lawfare of the violence prevention laws has therefore limited the agency of some of those citizens whom these laws tried to empower, and silenced others. In Freetown, the responsibility for such erasures is usually given to 'others'. The state blames the international community, prison guards blame the state, and lawyers and judges blame the international community.

But these human-rights-based laws did not radically reconfigure the relationship between state institutions and citizens. As Mariane Ferme (1998; 2004) has argued, laws are perceived as unfair and arbitrary by Sierra Leonean citizens because, since colonial times, their implementation has been shaped by foreign interests. After independence, reforms and legal changes continued to be based upon foreign concepts that

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rarely considered complex local realities. At the same time, they operated on the assumption that Sierra Leone was an independent state, which meant leaving their implementation and possible consequences to its institutions and its citizens. The Sierra Leonean state and its laws are thus regularly the object of others' influences. As I have demonstrated, within the country the blame for adverse effects can be shifted and reshifted until the source becomes impossible to pin down.

Antonio Gramsci (1971) described the make-up of society as consisting of two interrelated spheres: a political society that rules through force and a civil society that governs through consent. As this book has shown, in Sierra Leone the aims and objectives of development agendas and their legal enforcement lie within the sphere of the political society, while local norms, conceptions, and practices lie within that of civil society. Development and policy discourses shape public opinion to a certain extent – for example, through the languages of violence – but the contrast between such discourses, lived experiences and practical realities opens up contested spaces. The ways in which the SOA and its amendment rub against community practices bring to light differing understandings of violence, mediation, and punishment. With the power to regulate, enforce, and punish resting primarily on the side of the state, discrepancies between 'universal' concepts and local norms have significant consequences for the daily lives of Sierra Leoneans. People are governed by rules that do not reflect their norms and in which they do not uncritically believe. While communities and households are focussed on ensuring continuities through mediation, the criminal justice system enforces ruptures through punishment and imprisonment.

Like South Africa, as the Comaroffs showed, Sierra Leone has struggled in the post-war, post-Ebola era of reconstruction to 'build a democracy founded on the rule of law' (Comaroff and Comaroff 2016). In its aim to achieve human rights principles – freedom from violence, gender equality, high-quality and accessible education, and empowerment – the state has taken over the 'guardian function' for girls. This allows an individual's rights to be circumscribed in a bid to achieve human rights goals (see Foblets, Graziadei, and Renteln 2017, for similar trends in Europe). Transgressions of the rights to privacy, intimacy, and family life are justified by recourse to the language of universal human rights. This legitimises the state's claim to guardianship and the (partial) curtailment of the rights of citizenship for minors. The resulting form of sexualised citizenship has upset previous dynamics. Historically, the protective role and guardian function that the state has now adopted was held both by households and by the colonial state. While the guardian function has primarily been used by scholars to analyse attempts to

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restrict minority practices in Europe, in this book I have married the concept to studies of law, rights, and culture. The SOA and the SB have therefore provided a novel setting for a comprehensive analysis of the causes and effects of governmental interest in interpersonal affairs within the post-colonial setting of contemporary Sierra Leone.

The circumscription of personal autonomy and individual needs is not new in Sierra Leone. In relationships, persons are asked to submit to and subsume their needs under those of both their partner and of the relationship as a whole (Chapter 3). Within communities, personal autonomy is circumscribed as the elders – who mediate cases and issue sanctions – act as guardians of communities, thereby furthering the interests of communities over those of individuals (Chapter 6). However, we have seen that such authority must be earned. As Chapters 8 and 9 have shown, laws that do not reflect people's values complicate rather than improve the relationship between state institutions and citizens. The SOA has opened an arena in which competing ideas now struggle to gain the upper hand. Among the most prominent are questions around who should dictate notions of age, relationships, choice, consent, and violence. Which norms should govern sexuality? Who should be allowed to punish deviations, and which factors should determine punishment?

As we have seen, in Sierra Leone historical forms of punishment were centered on addressing the needs of those who were wronged rather than solely punishing and removing the wrongdoer. Chapters 6 and 7 revealed that many people believe that punishments should involve compensating the family and providing support to the victim. In contrast, prison sentences are viewed as exacerbating the harm that was caused, as they remove the individual from society and prevent them from contributing to society or providing compensation to the victim's family. Even after being released from prison, wrongdoers can only seldomly support a victim and their family since their sentence exacerbated their deprivation, confining their material and social possibilities and their futures (Jefferson 2014; 2016; Jefferson and Segal 2020).

The emphasis of official reporting and legal cases on only those directly involved prevent others from taking the stand and expressing their views. Because restorative justice and redistribution practices are of long standing in Sierra Leone, the state's practices of punishing through trial and conviction are not readily supported (Gibbs 1963; see also Gulliver 1979: 3–7; Pirie 2007). So far, the president has not 'earned' the position of guardian for teenage girls in the same way that households and community elders have done so. Rather, he has 'taken' guardianship because of his political position.

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Indeed, when the SOA(A) and the SB are perceived as means to restrict young people's sexuality, rather than as an attempt to prevent the rape of teenage girls, the state – and the president as head of state – is imagined as a 'vehicle' of oppression. In Chapter 9, I showed how boys who have been imprisoned for sleeping with their girlfriends construct themselves as the imagined 'others' of a law that seeks to oppress the sexual relationships of marginalised youth. At the same time, understanding the law as an oppressive instrument hinders women and girls from reporting safely and becomes yet another silencing mechanism. Hence, it seems that women and girls are silenced whether they report or not.

Youth and Crisis: A History of Continuous Ruptures

In Freetown, just as Charles Piot showed for Togo, practices 'are enacted at the interstices, and amidst the jostle of contradictory forces' (Piot 1999: 42). As this book has demonstrated, historical and biographical trajectories are important not only in appreciating state–citizen relations, but also in understanding current issues relating to violence. Read in conversation with older works on Sierra Leone, this book reveals manifold parallels and continuities. As for the mediation of violence, we must understand the deep value that is placed on continuity by communities who have been confronted with intense and traumatic ruptures throughout a long history of violent intervention and conflict.

But current academic work also highlights important ruptures. As the literature on the crisis of youth and masculinity shows (Chapters 3 and 4), men's violence in relationships can be attributed to their struggle to cope with the pressure to uphold masculine ideals among changing relationship forms and labour patterns as well as amidst conditions of precarity. Gender dynamics have been upset by historical forces and urban influences, leading to intense negotiations about women's and men's roles and responsibilities that are fraught with conflict and violence. This disturbance of gender dynamics raises questions about what it means to be a man or a woman in Freetown today. And such questions lie at the heart of many forms of violence and the complicity of those who suffer it.

However, to understand these dynamics it is important to recognise generational tensions (see Richards 1998; Diggins 2014). This allows for an analysis, not only of the way things are, but also of how they were and how they came to be. While women have historically been described as men's subordinates, very often in practice they are the main breadwinners, they direct households and social groups, execute violence too, and mediate violence in relationships. Moreover, the practices of youth in

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Freetown today are not unique to the present moment. Elders point to the existence of similar processes when they were young. Young people have always challenged elders. There have long been disputes, debates, and contestations around knowledge (Murphy 1980), power, and authority (Richards 1998). Romantic engagements have often transgressed accepted norms (Ferme 2001), and interpersonal violence has been an issue that has customarily required regulation. Focussing on the *longue durée* and on different age groups enables one to appreciate change as constantly in the making rather than as involving sudden ruptures, breakages, or endings. In this way, practices and regulations relating to violence in relationships can be analysed as historically shaped (Chapters 2–3 and 7–9). For instance, I depicted the inventiveness with which the category 'youth' is applied among young and sometimes not-so-young people in Sierra Leone as a kind of staged exceptionalism by means of which young people continually differentiate themselves from elders. This has shaped the country in the past (Richards 1998), but it has also adapted itself to contemporary issues.

Instead of being replaced, older and traditional practices are constantly reinvented as times change and new practices are introduced from elsewhere. Further, exposure to the new and previously unknown happens in the form of encounters, rather than impositions, creating a melting pot rather than an assemblage of distinct pieces. This kind of understanding allows for a historically grounded analysis of relationship practices, and the violence within them, that takes the notion of 'ruptures' seriously without giving them sole responsibility.

In Freetown, practices have undergone change in recent years. However, their foundation stones and ideals are still very much intact. Elders, for example, talk about agreement relationships (Chapter 3) and show how their own parents engaged in these, much as young people do now, though the latter explain them by reference to urbanity, modernity, consumption, and globalisation. These multi-layered incorporations, which are both self-asserting and differentiating, accompany the constant configuration and reconfiguration of agreement relationships (Piot 1999: 178). At the heart of intimate relationships and of the social bonds and alliances that they create is still the exchange of money, gifts, and goods.

During the civil war, the institution of marriage and the protective association of the family suffered. Their full rehabilitation and recovery are made difficult by contemporary economic struggles because many people continue to be unable to afford marriage. In Chapter 3, we have seen how other relationship forms have taken the upper hand. However, the later chapters have demonstrated that institutions responding to violence are still very much connected to marriage. It was usually spouses, or

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at least persons who underwent *ansa bɛlɛ*, whose cases were dealt with. Furthermore, although marriage is decreasing, traditional notions of bride price and the union of two families reappear in the notion of *ansa bɛlɛ*, which now regulates most pregnancies out of wedlock. *Ansa bɛlɛ* became important when traditional pathways to marriage were blocked. It was a creative new way to keep the protective mechanisms of family ties alive, to continue kinship and alliance bonds, and to provide children with a father and a mother. Hence, while the protective association of the family has suffered, we have seen that it is still only committed relationships, formalised through monetary exchanges, that can rely on any continuous form of protection from the household or community.

As this book has demonstrated, gendered practices, relationships, and the violence within them cannot be understood merely as post-conflict phenomena, as results of modernity, globalisation, transnational flows, or new technologies and the media. Instead, Sierra Leoneans have creatively appropriated, reconfigured, and resignified rural practices of marriage, informal labour, and social organisation, and they have enmeshed them in global influences and practices in an urban setting. In this way, they have created a new relationship model that is based on heritage and on new ideas of loving and living. *Ansa bɛlɛ* is not just the following practice in a long chronology of events, but an example of the way in which an innovative past has been critically reforged in the present. *Ansa bɛlɛ* combines past and continuing demands with aspirations while at the same time being sensitive to the practical constraints of the present. It bridges the divide between social organisation in the villages and contemporary urban sociality. Through *ansa bɛlɛ*, young people are able to conduct relationships outside wedlock but still become big men and big women.

The SOA and the SB were ratified in order to address problems like the rape of girls, teenage pregnancy, and interrupted schooling (see Chapter 8). They were responses to grassroots demands that the government take responsibility to prevent rape and severely punish rapists. They point to continuities as well because they were inspired by the problems of the civil war and the post-war moment. However, rather than offering additional solutions, they led to the breakdown of other mechanisms. For instance, they removed the protective mechanisms of *ansa bɛlɛ* for implicated persons. The SOA and SB diminished the influence and power of girls within their families and simultaneously decreased family resources. As soon-to-be mothers, pregnant girls usually become 'big women' and have an important role within the family. Their relationships make possible the unification of two families and the exchange of bride price. With their practices criminalised and their

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partners in prison, the role of these girls within the household has changed dramatically. They are unable to show a father during their pregnancy or when the child is born, and they are faced with the task of raising and providing for their child independently. It is these unstable dynamics that expose the main point of friction between internationally inspired laws and local dynamics.

Additionally, it was often explained to me that children conceived by ex-combatants were one of the most consequential after-effects of the war. Already at that time, public schools did not allow pregnant girls to attend. Women and girls with 'rebel children' were often excluded from their families and communities, and were forced into a precarious existence. These trends of stigmatisation and exclusion may very well have been continued by the criminalisation of young people's sexual behaviour through the SOA and the SB. As this study has shown, perceptions of violence in relationships as well as its mediation, regulation, and punishment are all part of broader historical developments and must be understood as such.

Of Tactics and Strategies

Throughout the book, we have seen how people act tactically towards those above them in the social, legal, and political order, and strategically towards those below them. What is of direct relevance is de Certeau's (1980; 1984) distinction between tactics and strategies for understanding how persons and institutions act towards each other (see also Vigh 2006b for Guinea-Bissau). The Sierra Leonean state, for example, seems to be obliged to operate tactically when international development aid is made conditional on legal reform. It was also pressured by TRC recommendations for restructuring programmes, which would refashion the country's image in international eyes. Hence, the post-conflict, post-pandemic state, heavily dependent on foreign aid, tactically ratified laws that adhered to these demands. Turning to its citizens, the state then became a strategic player, establishing organisations and institutions – such as the FSU, and supporting non-governmental organisations – such as the Rainbo Centre – to enforce the legal regulations it had passed.

At the same time, it undertook a strategic but less visible reframing of citizenship. Poster campaigns and national strategies presented citizens with the prospect of a bright future based on their full compliance with the laws that were passed, including the SOA(A). However, young people's navigation strategies – through debts, favours, and various relationships by which they attempt to comply with the demands of the institutions of family and community and keep a certain freedom at the same time – involve

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transgressions of the SOA and the SOAA. We have also seen how communities navigate strategically to keep their members in line and tactically to keep state interference at a minimum. These strategies of doing favours and collecting debts, and the binding obligations and relations of compulsion they create, thus stretch from the very micro-level of interpersonal acts all the way to the president's decisions. In Sierra Leone's system of weak legal pluralism, all levels of society are affected by these webs.

Two practices are of key importance in this system of tactically navigating the demands of one's superiors and the strategic demands made of subordinates: the pretence of hegemony in the face of competing ideologies, and the resulting harmony ideology. Throughout my study, a 'harmony ideology' (Nader 1990) adopted towards outsiders was clearly observable, in which persons and institutions displayed a united front to the outside, while internally they might be conflicted. This resulted in an image of hegemony. Violence, as we have seen, intensifies when this performed hegemony is unmasked as an ideology and can thus be exposed to questioning and criticism. When family and community realise that in a relationship gendered ideals have been reversed to an unendurable extent, they intervene (Chapters 6 and 7). Individuals who are seen to transgress their expected gendered roles may lose respect and agency. If communities are unable to demonstrate harmony vis-à-vis the state, state institutions may no longer respect their autonomy but find a way to intrude upon community territory.

Ethnography for Society: The Importance of Working across Academic and Policy Silos

In their book, Jennifer Cole and Lynn Thomas reiterated the importance of 'historically situated words' (Cole and Thomas 2009: 3) in carrying meanings of love. Similarly, in this book I have shown how small terminological differences are used to distinguish between vastly different forms of relationships and violence in Freetown. Communities and laws have their own respective languages. People on the ground have combined historical metaphors, legal terms, and the language of risk and rights to create their own system of meaning. However, the terms they use differ from those of state institutions and non-state agencies. Consequently, they may not necessarily understand each other. Similarly, the numerous NGOs and IOs that shape the landscape of violence prevention are often unaware of appropriate local terminologies.

Consider poster campaigns for instance by UNICEF warning of imprisonment for 'sexual abuse'. However, sexual abuse, as we have seen, is not a term used by ordinary people and, on the basis of my

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findings, I presume that not many people will feel this poster speaks to them. By contrast, while posters like the one depicting President Julius Maada Bio and First Lady Fatima Bio use the word 'abuse' as well (see Figure C.1), they pair such language with clear, unambiguous



Figure C.1 Poster in Freetown.

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terminology. The poster communicates three messages – that they claim guardianship over all Sierra Leonean girls ('our girls') and will neither tolerate violence nor sexual activities involving minors ('hands off'). Another example is rape, which is an act executed with physical force against a stranger. Posters aiming to address sexual violence committed by known persons miss their target audience when they use the word 'rape' instead of *bambrusing* or 'forcing'.

Anthropologists are often criticised for being unable to generalise their results and make them meaningful to larger audiences. However, I believe that an important contribution anthropology can make is to bring to light the worlds of meaning assigned not only to the linguistic but also to the social life of particular words in specific contexts. I hope that my work will help do just that for terms referring to love and violence in Freetown.

For years, the SB has been widely criticised as discriminatory and as exacerbating risks and hardships associated with teenage pregnancy (see Amnesty International 2015; 2016). On behalf of the over ten thousand girls who had been banned from school, grassroots activists filed a case with the ECOWAS (Economic Community of West African States) Court. In December 2019, the court ruled that the ban is contrary to basic rights and must be abolished immediately. The court also criticised the government for failing to implement measures to reduce teenage pregnancy, as called for in the national strategies for the reduction of teenage pregnancies and child marriage (see Chapter 8). The government was also ordered to begin this work immediately, not in the form of bans or punishments, but through inclusive sensitisation, awareness raising, and sexual and reproductive health education. This is a landmark decision for West Africa and for Africa in general. It seems to achieve the goals of many teachers and grassroots organisations.

However, what remains unseen and unchallenged is the drastic effect of the consent laws for young couples, for adults, and for the relationship between communities and the state. What is more, the awareness of the plight of girls makes the invisibility of boys' fates even more worrying – an effect that points to a gender bias within human rights and development discourses more broadly. The actual consequences of the SOA and its amendment are unknown and invisible to international monitoring and evaluation programmes, because reporting statistics and conviction rates are age blind and do not record the relationship between alleged victim and perpetrator (whether he is a boyfriend or stranger). Additionally, because minors are not recorded in statistics for Pademba Road, organisations and agencies are largely unaware of their existence within Freetown's adult prison population. For those who *do* know, however,

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the conviction of young lovers as rapists seems to be accepted as a form of unavoidable collateral damage on the road to achieving a 'bigger' goal.

My research speaks to the important role academics can play in highlighting the actual effects of laws and policies. I hope that this qualitative study has helped to reveal not only what the laws are and what they are 'supposed to do', but also what they 'actually do'. And in fact, conflicting views of mediation and punishment are only one of many differences between dominant narratives, 'official government conceptions and the realities of local affairs' (Moore 1986: 319), that concern violence in relationships. This ethnography has considered what is known, revealed, or discussed, and then examined the multifaceted phenomena concerning love, gender, and law that are not readily seen or acknowledged, but which underlie what is visible.

This book has also shown the importance of working across academic and policy silos. Through an ethnographic exploration of the ways violence is mediated in Sierra Leone today, it exposes the dangers that exist when development and policy actors work to 'advance' gender justice through laws and policies like the SOA and its amendment. But it has also developed a road map for how such negative consequences can be avoided or overcome: by working in horizontal partnerships with affected people, and taking seriously their expertise, while also drawing on the insights of scholars who systematically analyse the consequences of such legal and policy work.

Living with Sierra Leoneans on their terms reveals a picture in which the apparently neat dichotomies of gender and generation and the different scales of mediation are blurred. This is a picture in which women are not simply oppressed, but also act on the world they inhabit, constantly rethinking, reinforcing, or reconfiguring norms and rules. It is a world in which men are not just violent perpetrators who are always in control, but people cognisant of their weaknesses and their limits vis-à-vis women who in many instances have significant power (Groes-Green 2013). It is a world in which violence is perceived on a spectrum from affective expectation to outright rejection. And it is a world with a diverse legal consciousness. In this book, I have shown the relationship between 'universal' and 'local' norms, values, and practices about masculinities and femininities, relationships, and the role of violence in them. Through analysing the multifarious interactions between the frontstage (that which is said to be, is performed, and is visible) and the backstage (that which is underneath), I have sought to complicate such binaries, shown how relationships are lived, and demonstrated how violence, responses to it, and the punishment it incurs are negotiated in Freetown.

Overall, by analysing violence and its mediation at interpersonal, domestic, and state levels, and by marrying studies of love, violence,

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and law, I have tried to uncover the complex and contradictory pressures and influences that impact on persons and institutions as they enact, experience, and respond to violence. It is necessary to recognise and examine the tensions between episteme and experience if we are to grasp the role and place of violence in intimate relationships and comprehend why interventions so often fail to achieve their goals. Violence, as I have shown, is far from a private matter that occurs between individuals. It is not solely the responsibility of communities or the state to regulate it. Instead, it is the complex interplay, dialogue, and the tensions between these different forces that structure perceptions of violence and responses to it, and that can be made intelligible through the metaphor of the teeth and the tongue.

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