9 Perpetrators?
The Consequence of the Sexual Offences Act for Young Men

The scope and implications of the SOA and its amendment cannot be understood without examining its consequences for those young men and boys who have been imprisoned for sleeping with their girlfriends. In this chapter, I therefore draw on two ethnographic cases: those of LoverBoy (LB), aged 19, convicted for sleeping with and impregnating his long-term girlfriend, and Larry, aged 14, convicted for raping his classmate. Both were in relationships with the alleged victims prior to the ratification of the SOA and continue to be so. Neither was reported by their alleged 'victims'. I describe how they negotiate their actions, attitudes, and experiences during the term of their sentences in Pademba Road, Freetown's central prison. Prisoners convicted of sexual offences under the SOA undergo a state performance of excessive punishment. After a 'rite of terror' (Whitehouse 1996), which attempts to separate prisoners totally from any pre-prison attachments and relationships, they end up at the lowest end of prison hierarchies. Applying Michel de Certeau's (1980) distinction between strategies and tactics, I analyse how Larry and LB experience and navigate their everyday lives, how they live with or against their 'criminalised' subjectivity, and how they negotiate their position within the prison.

Some of the people convicted under the SOA, such as LB, try to assimilate to prison life. They take on the role of docile prisoners (Foucault 1977) and eventually identify with the subject position of the criminal. Others, however, resist in ways closely related to the revolt that has come to be known as the 'dirty protest' (Aretxaga 1995; see also Feldman 1991). By neglecting personal hygiene and any form of activity, they try to destroy the state's goal of re-educating them and disciplining their bodies. But their protest goes even deeper than that of the Irish prisoners whom Allen Feldman describes: it extends beyond the body and into the mind. Some prisoners within Pademba Road reject mental sanity and human behaviour to escape the state's reach as well as any attempt to shape their social being. In this way, they create a space of freedom, albeit at great cost. In Sierra Leone, prisons are sites of contestation, revealing stark disparities

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between internationally inspired norms and values, which are embodied in recent laws, and local ways and principles.

Freetowns Central Prison: Pademba Road

In Sierra Leone, formal incarceration started during colonialism in 1787:[1] At that time, abandoned slave ships were reconfigured as makeshift prisons (Sesay 2014). After several relocations, British officials founded Freetown's central prison in Pademba Road in 1914 (Sesay 2014). Pademba Road, as this male correctional centre for adults is known, was originally designed for 200 prisoners, and its capacity was later extended to accommodate 324 prisoners. When the prison population rose above 1,000 in 2013, the government initiated plans for its relocation (Sierra News Media 2013), plans that have been on hold until today. On 17 May 2017, the prison population stood at over 2,000.

There are six cell blocks in which men and boys are held: Blyden, Wilberforce, Clarkson, Howard House, Remand, and the Condemned Block. Men and boys arrested or convicted under the SOA are assigned to one of these, apart from the Condemned Block, which houses imprisoned persons sentenced to life without the possibility of parole.[2] The cell blocks are hierarchically organised and differ significantly from each other in terms of prisoner numbers, size, and facilities. In most cells, there are a few sleeping mats provided for the occupants along with a bucket that serves as a toilet. The bucket can be emptied through a hole in the floor. Most prisoners are seldom allowed to leave their cell blocks. But to those who are, sharp instruments such as hammers and knives are readily available in the workshops. This led to an incident, famously known as the jailbreak of 2010, when a group of 19–30 imprisoned persons, who were convicted of murder and armed robbery, managed to escape through the main gate after firing a pistol that caused the guards to abandon their posts and seek shelter (BBC News Media 2010).

In the years after the civil war, several ex-combatants were imprisoned at Pademba Road. As a correctional centre for adults, it officially does not house minors, who are meant to serve their sentences at Dems, a juvenile detention facility. But men and boys who received sentences above seven years are brought to Pademba Road irrespective of the crime they have committed or their age. Because most sentences for sexual offences are severe – and an accused's age is not always known and can be wrongly

[1] Descriptions of imprisonment in Sierra Leone and Pademba Road Prison draw on my article 'Degrees of Permeability' (Schneider 2020b).

[2] This will change now that the SOAA has entered into force and those convicted may now receive life sentences.

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assessed in court – many underage boys who are arrested under the SOA are eventually imprisoned at Pademba Road. Apart from convicted imprisoned persons, large numbers of prisoners are arrested for minor offences such as driving without a licence or stealing food or cheap items. Unable to pay their bail in full or produce surety, they are entirely at the mercy of a chaotic system and have to wait, often for years, to appear in court.

One of few organisations that offer frequent support to many imprisoned persons is Don Bosco. Don Bosco began its work at Pademba Road Prison in 2012. It oversees the distribution of food, ensuring its quality, and provides safe drinking water to imprisoned persons. In addition, Don Bosco has arranged for 75 prisoners from each block, except for the Condemned Block, to leave their cells from one to four in the afternoon, twice a week, in rotation, and gather in the library to pray. Afterwards they are given water and soap to wash themselves and their clothes. During this time, they are free to walk around the prison compound and interact with one another. Minor medical concerns are also looked after in the library, where injuries are dressed and medicines distributed. When I did my fieldwork, Don Bosco was building water tanks and showers so that prisoners can wash themselves more frequently. Because many men and boys are arrested without the knowledge of their families, one of Don Bosco's activities is to search for friends and relatives of imprisoned persons and inform them about the incarceration. John (in his thirties), the social worker in charge of these searches, told me: 'Mostly these families think the men have abandoned the family, gone on a temple run [the dangerous journey to Europe via Libya] or went to the city. Some live far or have children to watch, and many cannot afford to travel for only few minutes. If they come, maybe they are turned away. So mostly they leave it to God, you know'.

Levels of Totality: The Informal Prison Government

As I have argued elsewhere (Schneider 2020b), Pademba Road has a management style that blends a shared powers model and an imprisoned person control model (see Barak-Glantz 1981). The former provides imprisoned persons with certain rights to group association and a voice in administrative decision-making. In the latter, which is prevalent in Latin American prisons, imprisoned persons, frequently organised into gangs, assume control of the administration. At Pademba Road, there are inadequate resources allocated to the prison, making it challenging to hire sufficient staff to effectively manage the prison population. Consequently, the security regime has been constructed along the lines of social power, inclusion, and exclusion (Marcis 2017). Relations

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between prisoners and guards are drastically limited. As it is impossible to control the prison through policing, guards do not enter the cell blocks, which are secured with heavy metal gates. Instead, prisoners themselves are given the responsibility of overseeing their fellow imprisoned persons. These individuals, known as red bands, have complete control over the interior of the cell blocks with no external supervision and seemingly limitless authority. Red bands are commanders of a detachment of 'muscles', who carry out their instructions. Amadu (26), a close friend of Blush (in his thirties), who spent 11 years in and out of prison, explained: 'Every time they pick him up again, we are so afraid because the red bands are very fearful. Their muscles could just come any time and say "do this for me" or "I want you tonight", and then there is nothing you can do'. Ripper (23), a young man with multiple prison experiences, told me:

> Many men, they know that their life is in there, and they think they can just run the place. The power is with the red band, you know; he can simply say: 'This guy needs to be raped, this guy needs to be beaten, this guy will sit in the shit-bucket today' … and people are unable to refuse him and his will. He takes bribes for protection. If you don't pay … you…eh. Each block has a red band. There are some blocks that go along and some that fight, and people can also be exchanged between blocks.

Scarrer (in his fifties), an ex-combatant and red band, said:

> Red bands are untouchable. They rule. Because the officers are not many and very, very afraid of we the gangsters and murderers and hard criminals. No police will ever enter the cell blocks. The red bands have everything: money, cigarettes,[3] ties [marijuana]. Some can even leave the prison to go party or 'finish the job' if they just pay off a prison guard.[4]

Red bands are selected based on their social capital and their ability to mobilise, control, and evoke fear in other imprisoned persons. As a result, the most likely candidates are notorious gang leaders and imprisoned persons with life sentences. According to HungryBaller, a long-term imprisoned person in his forties, 'the guards and even the government fear them because they know that at any time they could be broken out. It is them who rule the prison, really, and they only stay inside because they want to'.

[3] One cigarette costs between SLL 500 and SLL 1,000 [GBP 0.046 and 0.09] in prison, while a whole pack can be bought for SLL 500 [GBP 0.046] in the city.

[4] This was regarded as one of the major problems during many interviews. John, one of Don Bosco's prison social workers, told me that especially imprisoned persons whose sentence is about to end or those with significant material or social resources can negotiate to be let out of prison at night so long as they are back in the morning.

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In theory, Pademba Road is an example of a penitentiary combining a prison with workshops and a medical facility. Rather than housing prisoners, it is supposed to house delinquents (Foucault 1977). Yet, given the shared model of its management style, many imprisoned persons are confined exclusively to their cells while a small group control the kitchen, food distribution, the workshops, and all other social activities. Many prisoners spend their days in the darkness of their cells, where social exclusion is total, knowing that others not only hold authority over their lives, but also have an access key to the 'outside' in the form of information, money, or power.

Ethnographies of Confinement

I hear them praying next door. Maybe 70–75 men and boys, their malnourished bodies hunched on wooden benches, repeat in whispers what the Don Bosco social worker's confident voice declares. Due to the overcrowding and differences in status, some wear the clothes in which they were arrested, others wear garments provided by the prison.

The drunk uniformed officer in front of me performs intimidation, but his slurred voice swallows the threats of his shouting and replaces them with an aura of pitiful feebleness. 'Lady!' he exclaims, and reminds me once more of the things that I am under no circumstances allowed to do: ask imprisoned persons how they are doing or how they feel, engage in conversations beyond their cases, give them any information about life 'outside', or flirt. 'You ask them the questions then you leave. Understood. These are bad men. They are in here for women cases [cases involving sexual violence]. They kill women, they torture them, they rape them. They have not seen women in a long time. You don't talk to them. You don't encourage them'. His breath is right in my face.

I sit in the library that Don Bosco opened at Pademba Road Prison. Human rights posters are fading on the wall. 'Stop child labour. Send your child to school!' reads one. The Human Rights Commission of Sierra Leone announces: 'Making rights real. Let's join in the fight against torture and impunity'. The library comprises a few bookshelves spread around a rectangular room, several tables – there is a medical suitcase overflowing with pills and bottles on one of them – chairs around the tables, and a recliner in the corner, which is used to examine imprisoned persons who are ill and provide them with medicines.

Don Bosco workers are now discussing hygiene with the men next door. And, as always, the murmurs mix with my anxiety and carry my thoughts to the journey that brought me here. During many months of research on violence in relationships, the accused were absent from this

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study. Some of the men and boys I worked with across Freetown had been accused previously and had spent time in prison, but their cases occurred prior to the SOA and were eventually dismissed.

While following case trajectories, I witnessed hundreds of cases in front of the Magistrate's Court and some hearings at the High Court in Freetown, transcribed their sessions, adjournments, and witness statements. I followed the proceedings of the FSU, visited NGOs and IOs, journalists, legal practitioners, researchers, and experts, and traced statistics and case files on these matters. I talked to the women and girls about their cases outside court and spent time with those who had decided against reporting or had withdrawn their statements.

The accused, however, were beyond reach. They were present only as fists reaching out of police trucks, or men placed at the opposite end of the courtroom, handcuffed to their fellow imprisoned persons, guarded by police officers, their eyes fixed on the floor. They stood in silence while they were charged, being asked only one question: *na so I bi or notto si I bi?* ['how do you plead?']. During witness statements held in private chambers, shut away from the public gaze, the accused were warned to keep quiet and to face the wall. In the absence of lawyers, an accused person is granted the right to defend themselves and to question the witness. In 13 months, I did not hear a single accused cross-examining the witness, as they were largely unaware of their rights and their possible fates. Upon sentencing or dismissal of the case at the High Court, the judge usually allows the accused to say a sentence or two – an opportunity that largely passes in silence.

As a result, I strongly felt that without including the perceptions, attitudes, and experiences of those accused of committing sexual offences, any interpretation would be one-sided. For months, I tried to negotiate access to Pademba Road and met with unyielding faces, angry rejections, and doors slammed shut. Finally, Don Bosco agreed to facilitate access, and, with the organisation's influence, the iron gates opened, and, after a thorough screening, I came to be seated in the library and given a pen and paper to take notes.

At the outset of my work in prison, I introduced myself to each block, explained my research, and expressed my wish to hear from them about their cases. I clearly stated that talking to me was entirely optional, had no direct benefit, neither in prison nor in court, that I would not be able to reach out to family members or loved ones, was unable to take anything in or out of prison, and that I would not appear as a witness.

To my great surprise, 53 men and boys came to talk to me. I was permitted to spend one hour with a single prisoner at a given time, and I talked to most men several times. Others voiced an interest in

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participating, but after I objected to the guard's repeated romantic advances, my access to prison was revoked and I was told I was no longer welcome. I too had become someone who disappeared without a goodbye.

As the murmuring subsided and the officer approached the door, ready to let the first man in to talk to me, I sat up straight, tightened the scarf with which I had to 'tie' my head, and pulled the loose sweater over my wrist to leave only my hands exposed. These were further conditions attached to my presence in Pademba Road: no hair, no skin.

Larry: Embodied Sense of Prison Life or Radical Resistance

A tall, lanky malnourished teenager totters on bumpy legs through the small room and sinks into the chair opposite me. Larry is 14 years old. He was convicted of gang rape and received a sentence of 30 years.[5] Separated from my gaze and presence by the small table between us, he stares at the floor. The dirt on his skin is thick like a knife, and I see on his arm signs of craw-craw – 'an itching skin disease produced by the larvae of the filarial worm causing onchocerciasis migrating in the subcutaneous tissues' (Merriam Webster 2018). Others had told me about Larry long before I met him. Many prisoners said that he is not 'right in the head'. Larry believes that he died at the police station and as a result he treats his upper body like a corpse. He rarely moves or uses his hands and arms, and does not take care of his bodily hygiene. Rather than engaging in the fight against decay, he readily allows parasites, germs, and infections to take over his body.

Larry lives in the afterlife of a social death. He has never received a visitor and has no contact with his family. Larry's refusal to use his body, his constant demonstration of purposeless decay, and his giving in to his fate terrify his companions and simultaneously evoke pity. Despite the scarcity that is everyone's plight, they reserve portions of food and utensils for him – while usually engaging in fights over them. Larry is ignored by notorious gang members and exempt from struggles over power and control. Fearing transmission of the strange disease that is Larry's, people avoid close contact with him. Larry now has a quarter of a cell to himself in a crowded cell block. Having 'died' because of exclusion, he is left spending his days in the company of no one. Without

[5] The maximum sentence of 15 years was doubled in this case because it was an alleged gang activity. However, because he is a first offender his sentence will be halved, so he will leave prison after 15 years.

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social or economic capital, without contacts, he is situated at the lowest rung of the prison's hierarchical structure.

The first 25 minutes of our meeting pass in silence. Larry does not look at me, does not initiate a conversation, and does not reply to my request for consent to pose questions. After letting the silence thicken, I tell him that this is his time and that he can decide how he wants to spend it. Even if he decides to remain silent, this hour is his. Too often, I have tried to penetrate silence that I perceived as uncomfortable in the past, not realising that in Sierra Leone keeping company does not require words. Suddenly, surprised and vivaciously lively eyes stare at me from under bushy eyebrows. With a raised chin, he orders the librarian – a young man (17) arrested for illegally renting out an apartment that belonged to his aunt overseas, who was thereafter named the Joker – to his side. The Joker hesitantly approaches, walks all the way round the table, and places himself halfway between me and Larry.

'This one', the Joker tells me, is from a village in Kailahun, the capital city of a district with the same name in the Eastern Province of Sierra Leone. Both of his parents are farmers, and he spent his time either in school or helping on their farm. After a classmate fell ill without recovering for a prolonged period, her father, the chief of the village, 'pointed' at Larry and three others, claiming that they had raped her. Larry was romantically involved with the girl, much to the dismay of her father, as Larry is from a poor family. 'But only *pikin biznɛs* [child's play]', the Joker remarks: the girl is still a virgin.

In view of its high profile and its occurrence outside Freetown, the case came to trial and conviction within a few weeks. After having been arrested in February 2016, Larry was sentenced to 30 years in prison in May 2016. Such 'interior cases' tend to be handled more quickly, with harsher sentences and less need for evidence. One person's word is often enough for a conviction. All four boys involved in the case are now in prison, each having received a sentence of 30 years. At the police station, the chief claimed that the accused were over 18 and should therefore be tried in a regular court.

In return for a bribe, the age of an accused can often be raised, or the age of the alleged victim lowered significantly at the time of reporting. While age tests are conducted in Magistrate's Courts and the High Court, they usually only take place when the authorities do not believe that an accused who claims to be a juvenile is below 18 (see Chapter 8). I have never seen an accused without a private lawyer being successful in showing that he is in fact younger or proving that an alleged victim is older. This was borne out by the case files I studied and by the testimony of expert research collaborators from the criminal justice sector. Age tests

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and birth certificates can be obtained by private lawyers, though they are costly. Nevertheless, in court what usually counts is the first police report rather than documents submitted later. The age of minors is also disguised by the fact that they should be at a different detention facility rather than at Pademba Road. Moreover, prison statistics, which routinely state that all imprisoned persons are above 18, deny the existence of minors within prison. Criminal justice personnel thus conjure minors out of existence.

In Larry's case, no medical examination was conducted on the girl and, upon appearing in court, she denied that she was the victim of any sexual violence. The Joker explains to me that Larry's family begged the mother of the girl to intervene – in fact, the whole village begged her – but she remained silent. Hierarchies of authority, age, and gender are difficult to transgress, and speaking out involves significant risks (Chapters 6 and 7).

As I got to know Larry better, it became painfully evident that he, like most men I talked to, was unaware of his legal rights. He did not have legal representation and did not know that he was entitled to ask for a lawyer. Free legal representation by the Legal Aid Board is available, if at all, once cases proceed to the Magistrate's Court or the High Court, at which stage new evidence is rarely admitted. Many imprisoned persons told me that it was in prison, after they were convicted, that they learnt from other prisoners what their crime and sentence entailed.

Especially in the beginning of my meetings with Larry, our conversation was dominated by non-verbal communication and gestures and aided by the Joker's explanations. Like many others, he was arrested without understanding what was happening. At the police station, he was beaten, intimidated, and exposed to a prolonged stay in a holding cell. He was told that he would be allowed to go home if he confessed to sexual penetration. He eventually did. And he did not see the statement that was written by the police officer in English, a language Larry does not understand.

Imprisonment as a 'Rite of Terror'

Young men held for sexual penetration are subjected to a state performance of exclusion and separation. As Larry's experience shows, many are entirely cut off from life outside prison and have no knowledge of occurrences beyond their cell blocks. Stories from outside become expensive items for trade, uncertain rumours, and mysterious phantoms. The logics of arrest, trial, and incarceration are based firmly on severance from social ties. The principle of restoration, in which punishment overcomes deviation to achieve reconciliation with norms, has been

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replaced by a 'paradigm of exclusion' (Bauman 2000). Through severing all ties with the outside world for marginalised prisoners, the 'prison complex' in Sierra Leone seeks to 'annihilate the individual as a social being' (Marcis 2017). Although goods, services, and communications are increasingly entering and leaving prisons as they become more integrated into a network of mutually influencing institutions, the majority of prisoners continue to be unable to participate in these exchanges.

Larry did not have legal representation or people to act as his advocate, and he had no way to prove his real age. His trial was held in the privacy of secluded chambers. He was one of 49 men (of the 53 I interviewed) who never received a visitor. Similar to many other prisoners, Larry is confined to his cell for six days in a row without any communication from the 'outside'. For Larry and others imprisoned for sexual offences, imprisonment is a 'rite of terror' (Whitehouse 1996). It is a performance with separation as its core: the separation of action from meaning, of the individual from the social, of internal from external control.

Larry's state is one of apathy. Larry sits in the same position for hours on end, staring straight ahead into the darkness that surrounds him in his cell. Many times, I left after the hour was up without either of us having spoken a word. Sometimes, I spoke a few words into the silence, probably to make it more bearable for me. What I learnt about him, I learnt from his fellow imprisoned persons. On only a few occasions, he suddenly turned towards me, facing me with full intensity and whispering never more than one or two sentences. What he repeated frequently were the following words: *R נכ de du natin egen. Nɛva egen* ['I am not doing anything again. Never again'].

Resisting or Embodying Punishment

Larry's case provides a strong example of 'the creation of death-worlds' in which people are subjected to conditions that turn them into the living dead (Mbembé and Meintjes 2003: 39–40). Through the use of necropolitical practices, the criminal justice system of the state has transformed Larry into a criminal subject who serves a sentence proportionate to the severity of his crime. One of the essential elements of these practices is dehumanisation, which creates a divide that severs all connections between Larry and the various spheres of the world that he was once linked to. Larry's refusal to participate in prison life and to care for his bodily hygiene can be interpreted as his identification with the subject position of the wrongdoer who needs to be punished. He is embodying prison life. Larry thus assimilates himself to the necropolitics of the state, surrendering authority over his life and death and how his life should be lived.

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At the same time, neglecting hygiene, as the dirty protest taught us (Feldman 1991; Aretxaga 1995), can also be a powerful form of resistance. Larry's non-actions may signify his withdrawal from the realm of the state's power and its attempt to discipline his body and mind. Rather than letting the state decide how he should live, he regains his agency by taking on the role of creator of his circumstances – which are circumstances of non-participation.

However, we must ask whether Larry's actions may just be a fulfilment of this oppression rather than a form of resistance to it. According to Achille Mbembé, 'under conditions of necropower, the lines between resistance and suicide, sacrifice and redemption, martyrdom and freedom are blurred' (Mbembé and Meintjes 2003: 40). Hence Larry's everyday forms of resistance, his submission and identification, are not mutually exclusive. Rather, Larry's subject positions are caught within the paradox they create.

LoverBoy: Fading Memories and Attempts at Self-Making

I met LoverBoy (LB) in 2012, when I first started research in Freetown. He then lived near Naimbana Street, and I knew his girlfriend, family, and social group well. After he met Lizzy in 2014, she became the main topic of his conversation. I heard LB's love story every time I met him. It is this story that gives him the strength and endurance to continue. Whenever he has the chance, he explains, with shining eyes, how he met Lizzy at one of his friend's club's *chillins* and 'started loving' her. LB was 19 years old, his girlfriend 16, when he was first arrested. They had been dating for about two years, when Lizzy accidentally got pregnant. Islam is very important to LB, and he firmly believes that terminating a pregnancy is a sin: 'You know, it is a gift from God, so you cannot just *pul di bɛlɛ*'. LB explains that he went to the family of his girlfriend to 'show face', that he intended to start the proceedings of *ansa bɛlɛ* to claim responsibility for the pregnancy (Chapter 3). He told me of his determination to become engaged to Lizzy and to provide a home for her and their child. But Lizzy's family objected to the union because LB was a poor young man who had not completed his education and did not have promising career prospects. Lizzy, on the other hand, went to the Annie Walsh Memorial School in Freetown, the most prestigious secondary school for girls in Sierra Leone. Angry that LB had 'spoiled' the girl's marriage prospects by impregnating her, but unable to separate the lovers and opposed to their continuing relationship, the family reported LB for sexually penetrating and impregnating Lizzy.

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LB was first imprisoned during the Ebola crisis and therefore served the first part of his sentence with other new imprisoned persons in a separate building to reduce the risk of infection. Nevertheless, prison overcrowding became a major problem during the Ebola pandemic. Courts were locked, and cases were on hold. After the pandemic, some men and boys were released without completing trial, as it was said they had already completed the sentence they might have received. LB was one of these men. He described his experience as follows: 'One day when they took me to court, the judge said I should go'. 'Did you understand what happened?' I asked. 'Oh no, but he said I should go, so I went'.

LB shared a cell with two others who refused to talk to him. He often describes the isolation and pain he felt.[6] It was the daily prayers uniting voices across the cells that gave LB a sense of community and belonging, and made the seemingly endless days bearable.

After he was released, LB's friends and family described him as a 'changed man'. 'This man was not with us. Always in his own head. Only sitting and staring, but never talking. Like he was somewhere not here', explained his brother. Once the pandemic ceased, LB's case was re-evaluated, and he was re-arrested. After receiving his indictment papers, LB was transported to and from court weekly for several months without his case being called. 'My world was like covered by the dust of harmattan, you know. I could not see anywhere. Everything was just shadows', he told me.

Whether I talked to people inside or outside prison, almost nobody trusted the workings of the law or believed in official justice. The state law and its apparatuses, first introduced by the British colonisers and now governed by international standards, was often compared to a giant impossible to overpower, but easily angered; he would furiously attack and destroy everyone provoking him. The way of resistance and struggle often lies in non-cooperation (see Scott 1985). Many accused persons remain silent throughout their trials because 'the only thing we can do is not help them sentence us', the Joker said.

Because he had heard of the 'girlfriend trap' (Chapter 8), LB advised his girlfriend not to attend court. This strategy seemed to work. After six months and three adjournments, he was sent home. After returning from

[6] While researchers increasingly foreground the problems of overcrowding or overpopulation, we must take into account that for persons who are used to having many others around them at all times, being isolated may constitute a profound horror. Lisa Guenther, for example, writes about the breakdown of meaningful experience in situations of solitary confinement (Guenther 2013: xiv).

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Pademba Road, his behaviour changed again. He was now loud and aggressive. T-Pain (22), his best friend from Kroo Bay, stated: 'He was super-violent now. And too much cursing, I am telling you. This man's language has completely changed from a gentleman to a gangster, you know. When you move with this crowd, you just lose it, you know'. LB could no longer sit still, and he started breaking promises and taking what was not his. This habit got him into trouble with his friends for whom honesty and sharing form the building blocks of their group. LB's family sent him on a course to prepare for an exam that, if passed, would qualify him for entry to college, but LB missed most of his sessions. Apart from praying five times a day, he abandoned most other commitments.

Among research collaborators, the prison was commonly understood as a place that breeds criminals, a place of rampant violence from which no one returns. According to them, experiences in prison lead to a reconfiguration of norms and an indoctrination of counter-values that harm society. 'Pademba Road is like Dante's inferno … the closest to hell. Once you enter you will never go out', said Fr. George, the director of Don Bosco. Unlike Karen Waltorp and Steffen Jensen's research collaborators who prepared each other for the possibility of imprisonment (Waltorp and Jensen 2017: 3), among those I interviewed there was an impenetrable silence around prison. It was as if those who had experienced confinement sealed off these experiences to stop the shadows of prison from encroaching on their daily lives. When prisoners return, they are violent, abusive and 'unable to feel pain with the pains of others', I was often told. Only with re-education and time can they be helped, and only if they have not been imprisoned for too long.

Notwithstanding the impressive work of NGOs and civil society institutions involved in gender-based violence in Freetown, their focus is on response rather than prevention, and on women and girls rather than men and boys. It is mostly church groups and activists that work to integrate men as champions of a new form of masculinity. To my knowledge, no organisation works specifically with men and boys who have been imprisoned under the SOA or with those who confess to be perpetrators of such violence.

After returning from Pademba Road, LB was arrested about two months later when Lizzy's family reported him anew, because he did not stop visiting her and their baby. This time, they brought Lizzy to court. There, she told the judge that LB was the father of her baby, that she was in love with him, visited him, and 'sent for him' whenever she could, and that they planned on doing *ansa bɛlɛ* as soon as he was finally allowed to return home. The judge, who called this case an example of 'the injustice this law brings', lectured the couple on the fact that she was

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legally unable to consent, that the intercourse was therefore a form of violence, and that LB must be sentenced. With a heavy heart, he committed LB to seven years in prison.

At Pademba Road, LB ended up in a cell block dominated by a red band whom he had known since childhood. This friend, who had been in and out of prison numerous times, offered to look after LB and helped him to receive the food and utensils his family sent for him.

In prison, LB began what he called 'strategising' to counter the arbitrariness of his arrest. 'Sister, where a cow is tied there it must graze', he told me. He promoted his superior education and reading and writing skills compared with those of the prison staff and the red bands. He behaved like a non-threatening person who might be a useful assistant. Combined with his friendship to the red band, these tactics enabled him to quickly become an important mediator between different areas of the prison and different kinds of people within it. He was appointed as an assistant to Don Bosco, charged with finding and calling imprisoned persons, documenting work, and so on. This meant that he was able to leave his cell block six days a week instead of the four hours once or twice a week permitted to many other prisoners. Consequently, other imprisoned persons would give him notices, letters, and questions to carry back and forth between places and people. Because he brings the happenings of the day into his cell, LB has become a cherished cell member. He is someone who brings 'life outside' and who can connect the prisoners with this world and carry their words and stories into it. But LB does not bear these 'gifts' for free. Giving and receiving information is exchanged for goods and services. While in prison, he strives to form connections and position himself in a manner that renders him indispensable to others.

However, LB misses his girlfriend and his daughter terribly. For the first few months, they continued to be his main topic of conversation: 'My woman and my baby girl. I miss am. I miss am too much', he told me whenever I saw him. After he was imprisoned, Lizzy had to move back to her family in Bo.[7] As the trip is long and expensive, she visits LB only infrequently. And when she does come, visitation time is limited to a few minutes. No matter how much LB tries to push against this process, the memory of his daughter and girlfriend fade more and more with time and everyday life in prison takes up more and more of his mind and energy.

[7] Bo is the largest city of the Southern Province and the capital of Bo District; it is about 147 miles from Freetown.

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Living Relationships through Memory

In *The Imaginary*, Jean-Paul Sartre (2004) shows how it becomes increasingly difficult to keep a relationship alive when it can only be remembered, not lived. Then memory can only feed off the old – and never create new stimulants. Sartre says:

> In every person that we love, for the very reason of their inexhaustible richness, there is something that surpasses us, an independence, an impenetrability, that requires perpetually renewed efforts of approximation. The irreal object conserves nothing of this impenetrability: it is never more than what we know of it … Thus, from the very fact of the extraordinary difference that separates the object as imaged from the real, two irreducible classes of feeling can be distinguished: genuine feelings and imaginary feelings. (Sartre 2004: 145)

LB's imprisonment has led to an annihilation of eros – erotic love or desire – and his relationship with his child and girlfriend is mainly nourished in his memory. LB has been stripped of his role as head of the household. During their short visits, he may occasionally listen to, but he is never able to influence or solve, the struggles and calamities facing his family. His failure to provide and his absence are public knowledge. The dissolution of his home serves as a symbol for the state's power to strip him of his subject positions as father, partner, and entrepreneur, replacing them with that of the destructive criminal. LB's only connection with his family is through visits that last for a few minutes every couple of months. LB's daughter is growing up in a world beyond the prison walls that he cannot access or imagine. She and Lizzy can temporarily enter part of his world while he is excluded from theirs and he needs to rely on hastily told anecdotes to create an 'imagined image' (Carlbom 2003: 57) of the lives of his loved ones. In relation to the world outside prison, he has been confined to his memory and to occasional speech acts: practical actions are impossible.

As a result of imprisonment, personal relationships transition from being based on actual presence to being imagined. They gradually dissipate and only persist in an imagined state of otherness. It is important to try to connect lives and worlds inside and outside prison, but this can only be partial because for those outside, the prison can only be imagined, never really experienced. For those inside the prison, the world outside is only alive in memory and imagination. While persons and things can cross the divide between the real and the imagined, they cannot carry the life world of the other side with them. In his relations with people outside Pademba Road, LB is in a process of social dying – a process that seems endless in its pain. It is not so much the aftermath of a social death (see Guenther 2013) that LB seems to experience; it is not a death; rather, it is a dying. It is constantly in the making, a companion (Dayan 2011: 39–70;

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Guenther 2013). But LB also experiences a rebirth. As Whitehouse (1996) shows, rites of terror foster bonds between those who experience this terror together. This social bonding then leads to the creation of strong social relations that replace those that had existed previously. Every time I saw LB at Pademba Road, he had become more and more involved with the movement around his red band, and Lizzy and his baby were pushed further and further towards the back of his mind. Lizzy had become a story that was cherished but that was far removed from his new life in the prison.

Of Tactics and Strategies: A Power Bargain

Michel Foucault (1977) describes discipline as a creative toolkit that enables power to manifest itself – for example, the power of a state and its institutions over its citizens. By means of punishment (such as imprisonment, deprivation, forced separation, or labour), systems are established to promote the overall aim of creating specific citizens and, as a result, a specific state (Foucault 1977: 135–7). While the state and its laws operate with a 'strategy', criminal justice institutions are its instruments of 'will and power' (Certeau 1984: xix). Police stations, courts, and prisons are isolating environments that follow logics of subjugation. With their rules of contact (e.g. the 'perpetrator' stands against the wall; the victim sits and speaks only when asked and only in response to questions; the public is excluded; authority resides with the judge or magistrate), these strategies determine their relations with the public and everyday life – the 'exterior distinct from it' (Certeau 1984). This allows for the creation of 'wrongdoers', who are confined within these isolated spaces of prisons. Multiple subject positions, such as father, lover, son, and friend, are negated and reduced to that of offender and victim. Moreover, the degree of communication that people who are imprisoned have with the outside, and their ability to slowly recreate other subject positions than that of offender, depends on their compliance and willingness to be 'reintegrated'. At the same time, as my ethnography demonstrates, imprisoned persons do not passively acquiesce to these practices of oppression and discipline. Instead, they employ tactics to establish their own spaces of agency within the state's strategy.

Importantly, Sierra Leonean criminal justice institutions differ significantly from how similar institutions function in the West and are conceptualised in Western narratives. Police stations, state courts, and prisons in Sierra Leone are not simply arms of the state, and their system of governmentality does not operate in typical ways. Instead, they are much more informal, opaque, and messy. With their volatility, they further

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contribute to the 'weakness' of the Sierra Leone state and heighten fear in Sierra Leoneans, for one never knows what the outcome of engagement with them will be. We have seen how courts respond differently to adults and minors, how police treat women and men differently (see Chapters 7 and 8), and how much prison life depends on factors outside official laws and rules. Structural factors add to the unpredictability of institutions. Indeed, serious understaffing and lack of resources continue to hamper the proper functioning of the criminal justice system in Sierra Leone. The inability to conduct proper investigations, the lack of forensic testing equipment, and the large imbalances of wealth alongside unequal access to legal representation all create a situation in which existing laws often disproportionately target marginalised, impoverished people, while many wealthier perpetrators continue to escape justice. Furthermore, the likelihood that wrongful convictions will be made is strengthened by the fact that the SOA enables bystanders to report cases, that only directly implicated people and eyewitnesses can take the stand in court, that cases cannot be based on thorough investigations, and that a main piece of evidence continues to be hymen testing.

In public imaginaries, prisons are frequently regarded as distinct places that are characterised by specific rules, regulations, oversight, and a particular lived experience. These perceptions lead to assessments and judgements that can be positive or negative. Prominent prison scholars reveal that treating the prison as something given and pre-understood, as a fixed entity, assumes an ontological stability that may not exist and that should be critically scrutinised instead (Armstrong and Jefferson 2017). Such scrutiny allows one to examine volatility and chaos, and a lack of oversight and control. These features matter greatly for the role and place of such institutions in wider society as well as for their operations. Leaving power unconsolidated, absent, and nebulous may be a clever way to operate power, for it cannot be challenged or attacked properly. Certainly, criminal justice institutions can be shifting places where staff changes correspond to political tides, and oversight and continuity are short-lived. As Pademba Road shows, prisons can be extremely volatile places, where accidents and quicksand create worlds of their own. Such volatility needs to be investigated and understood not as a system of order but as a structure of mess.

Rather than acting as marionettes of this 'state strategy' of volatility, as 'objects' of the state's necropower, and of the manoeuvres of their girlfriends' families, Larry's and LB's reactions to their situation, though very different from each other, can both be understood as 'tactics'. Michel de Certeau (1984) describes tactics as isolated actions made possible because an opportunity arises within a specific setting. Hence tactics are reactions to environments and negotiations of subject positions within an

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environment rather than activities enabling the creation of new environments (Scott 1985). Rather than letting the state define their subjectivity, Larry and LB create counter-positions and counter-narratives (to negotiate their situation as well as their relationship to the state and its apparatuses). LB built a life within prison and has cultivated and expanded his social network there. Larry, on the other hand, retreated from the control of the prison into a state of privacy or absence that no one can penetrate. However, these platforms are built under the umbrella of the state's strategy. LB's and Larry's tactics do not dismantle the existing system, nor do they establish an alternative system. They are micro-tactics, practices that do not alter the status quo overall, but shape the individual experience of imprisonment and of being made a perpetrator.

But not only Larry and LB act tactically. In Chapter 8, I explained how research collaborators often criticise the SOA as enabling false accusations to break up relationships and remove certain persons from society. LB's and Larry's cases provide an example of this. They describe ways in which families may tactically manipulate the regulations of the SOA to pursue their own goals. LB's case is the classic example of a consensual relationship that was deemed wrong by the girlfriend's family and that was broken up by strategically employing the laws of the SOA. Once a pregnancy occurred, it could be proven without a doubt that sex had taken place, and LB could be made a perpetrator and separated from Lizzy. Larry's case is even more extreme. Together with others, he was accused of rape without having had sex with the girl. However, in view of the law's rigidity, even though Larry's girlfriend denied the accusations and no medical certificate was issued, he was still convicted. This illustrates how her father tactically used and manipulated the SOA to his own end. The question therefore remains whether the SOA has contributed to a significant change in attitudes towards violence in relationships or whether it provides a platform for pursuing personal goals. While 'swearing' enables families to force a person to accept responsibility for a pregnancy, and 'call name' allows lovers to be fined for infidelity, the SOA allows consensual relationships involving minors to be broken up and men and boys to be physically removed from any contact with their lovers.

Furthermore, these tactical manoeuvres show how people and institutions try to manipulate aspects of different systems to promote their ideas of gender relations, sexual behaviour, violence, and punishment. If we apply this to the metaphor of the teeth and tongue, we are able to understand not only how people tacitly transgress gendered ideals, but also that what is acceptable to one system may constitute a wrong to another and may lead to severe sanctions. In today's contested landscapes, persons can easily get caught between different ideals and can be severely punished as a result.

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