MAGYAR AFRIKA TÁRSASÁG
AFRICAN–HUNGARIAN UNION

AHU MAGYAR AFRIKA–TUDÁS TÁR
AHU HUNGARIAN AFRICA–KNOWLEDGE DATABASE

AZ ELSŐ MAGYAR, SZABAD FELHASZNÁLÁSÚ, ELEKTRONIKUS,
ÁGAZATI SZAKMAI KÖNYV-, TANULMÁNY-, CIKK-
DOKUMENTUM- és ADAT-TÁR/THE FIRST HUNGARIAN FREE
ELECTRONIC SECTORAL PROFESSIONAL DATABASE FOR BOOKS,
STUDIES, COMMUNICATIONS, DOCUMENTS AND INFORMATIONS

* magyar és idegen – angol, francia, német, orosz, spanyol, olasz és szükség
szerint más – nyelveken készült publikációk elektronikus könyvtára/
writings in Hungarian and foreign – English, French, German, Russian,
Spanish, Italian and other – languages
* az adattárban elhelyezett tartalmak szabad megközelítésűek, de olvasásuk
vagy letöltésük regisztrációhoz kötött/the materials in the database are free
but access or downloading are subject to registration
* Az Afrikai Magyar Egyesület non-profit civil szervezet, amely az oktatók,
kutatók, diákok és érdeklődők számára hozta létre ezt az elektronikus
adattári szolgáltatását, amelynek célja kettős, mindenekelőtt sokoldalú és
gazdag anyagú ismeretekkel elősegíteni a magyar afrikanisztikai kutatásokat,
illetve ismeret-igényt, másrészt feltárni az afrikai témájú hazai publikációs
tevékenységet teljes dimenziójában a kezdetektől máig./The African-
Hungarian Union is a non-profit organisation that has created this electronic
database for lecturers, researchers, students and for those interested. The
purpose of this database is twofold; on the one hand, we want to enrich the
research of Hungarian Africa studies with versatile and plentiful
information, on the other hand, we are planning to discover Hungarian
publications with African themes in its entirety from the beginning until the
present day.

Where parallel worlds meet: civil society and civic agency.

Politicising polio in Sierra Leone

Diana Szántó

PhD Thesis

University of Pécs

Department of Cultural Anthropology and Ethnography

Supervised by:

Dr. Viga Gyula, DSc, professor,
University of Pécs, Institute of
Human Relations, Dept. of European Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology

Prof. Andreas Dafinger
Associate Professor, CEU, Head, Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology

2015 May

Contents

Acknowledgements

When I first thought about „going back to school" and decided to write a doctoral dissertation many years after I finished university, I hardly imagined the serious consequences this decision would imply. It led me to discover unknown areas - like disability and "Africa" - and to enstranger familiar terrains - like development and civil society. For seven years I was sailing on a sea possessing a strange geography making the distance separating Budapest and Freetown collapse. That has been a wonderful but sometimes perilous voyage and I would not have made it without those who shouldered me and those who accompanied me.

I would like to say special thanks- to my alma mater, the University of Pécs, which gave me the possibility to finish and defend the thesis in the Department of European Ethnology and Cultural Anthropology. May I say thank you also to my teachers and tutors there: Judit Farkas, Ágnes Hesz, Eszter Kisbán, Zoltán Nagy, Éva Pócs. I probably

would not have been able to finish the work without the long consultations with Gábor Vargyas, who has always been available for me and whose critical observations and researcher's insights fertilized my reflections.

Similarly, I owe a lot to my two supervisors, Gyula Viga and Andreas Dafinger. I am especially grateful to Professor Dafinger who has gone well beyond his role of external supervisor according me a number of personal consultations and giving me valuable advices not only in theoretical and methodological questions but also in practical issues, concerning the conduct of the research and academic writing. I profited a lot from the PhD colloquium of CEU he encouraged me to attend and where I learned tremendously from the discussions both with teachers and students.

I received professional advice, encouragement and inspiration from a number of colleagues. The names of all of them would not be possible to mention here. Let me just enumerate a few. I would like to start with the name of Lajos Boglar who could not accompany me personally in this voyage but his teachings on the meaning of ethnography and his vision on anthropology as an engaged science have always been a great resource for me. Senior researchers and teachers helped me with counselling and critics, amongst others: Michael Steward, Peter Niedermuller, Jacqueline Knorr, Mats Utes, John Clarke, and Mihaly Sarkany. Personal discussions and correspondence have been inspiring with friends and colleagues, amongst whom I would like to mention Anita Shroeven, Annamarie Losonczy and last but not least, Bea Vidacs, who has proven not only to be a true friend but also a patient mentor.

Despite the excellent training that I have received both formally and informally during my doctoral studies, my lacking knowledge in quantitative research would have proven a serious obstacle had not it been for two committed helpers. I would not have been able to exploit my material statistically without the assistance of Balázs Danka, who is responsible for all the statistical calculations and graphs, and without Márton Gerő, who gave me lessons in network analysis and worked on the visual representation of the networks I identified.

Field work in Sierra Leone was made possible thanks to the generous support of Handicap International. I am very grateful both to the headquarters of Lyon - especially to those who personally agreed to allow me to work as an anthropologist integrated in the Sierra Leonean mission - and to the team in the field. During the years I met several

country directors, expatriate and national staff, most of them became friends, who shared their experience and company with me. I am aware that for an international NGO allowing this space for an anthropologist is not evident and I really appreciate the openness with which they received my proposal.

I started my list of acknowledgements with those who made this research possible from Europe. The order does not reflect any order of importance. Naturally, the biggest contributors to the research are those people who accepted being „researched" throughout the years. These include workers of international NGOs, members of local civil society and a vast range of ordinary Sierra Leoneans who gave interviews to me or who agreed to involve me in their intricate stories, which became the raw material of this dissertation. It would be too long to enumerate everybody, but let me dwell at least on some of the groups: members of the CSO Human Rights Forum, a meeting place for local human rights organisations that I frequented for a year; leaders and members of different CSOs and NGOs - some of them turned from „informants" into friends for a life and the enlightened discussions I had with them, their patient guiding was instrumental not only for the success of my work but probably to my survival in the maze of "local realty".

Amongst the local organisations I must treat with a special respect the disabled organisations (DPOs) and their leaders who accorded me their time. I also would like to mention specifically one local organisation, One Family People. Their passionate work has produced an improbable musical group integrating polio-disabled musicians and hearing and speech impaired dancers. The wonderful band of „The Walpolians" did not only serve for me as a proof for my theses about the hidden talents and not so hidden resourcefulness of people with disability, I owe to their company the happiest and most liberating moments of my field work.

My work led me to discover 13 self-sustaining polio-organisations and here I would like to express my admiration to each and every one who run and maintain these structures. I hope that my admiration transpires in the pages of this dissertation.

I also would like to thank a group of friends from France, especially Denis Ramos and Ferdinando Formoso, who shared with me some moments of this extraordinary experience and helped me to document it with a camera.

Finally, I must thank those who supported me by putting up with my long absences and lack of presence during the years while I was alternating fieldwork and writing: my family, my friends and my colleagues at Artemisszio Foundation.

Introduction

Here we find no valorous empire-builders like Sundiata, no daring resistors to colonial conquest like Samory, and no heroic nationalist like Nkrumah. There are, instead, only men and women, imperfect and nearly invisible in history, much like ourselves.

Eric Silla: People are not the same

I. Theoretical underpinnings

Intentions

This book is not about disability. It is about people, „much like ourselves", fighting to survive, collectively and individually, loving, hating, playing, praying and working, people hoping for a better life for themselves, or at least for their children. In another sense, the people I am speaking about are indeed not like me - or rather, I am not like them: I do not know what it means not being able to stand up, to bear the gaze of others, to be designated as different. I am aware that for an outsider it is a big responsibility to write about disabled people. If I took the challenge, it was first of all because I felt it urgent to break down commonly shared stereotypes and to pay a due tribute to the courage, creativity and resourcefulness of those that the stranger would only know as the polio-disabled beggars of Freetown.

I also know that my angle of observation is biased. I do not want to deny the specificity of their experience, but I am more interested in what they have in common, with me, with other Sierra Leoneans, in how they participate in the common journey of humankind. My approach is close to Silla's who worked with the "leper community" in Mali and who defined his task as that of situating "the lives of a small and hidden minority within the larger patterns of the human experience". (Silla 1998)

The share of the human experience that Sierra Leone have had to assume during the past half a century is not an ordinary one, either. For the past decade it has been busy reconstructing itself after a terrible civil war. A whole country was asked to vow to forgive and forget in order to give a chance to the future. The country was ready to take

the challenge. The "international community"[1] stood up and deployed its full institutional artillery supporting the reconstruction, transforming Sierra Leone into an all-encompassing social-political experiment, with the aim of building a new system, based on the principles of Western liberal democracies. It all fit into a new strategy of Western interventionism, that of the "liberal peace building", in which expressions of aid policy and global governance got conflated. Duffield resumes the new policy as follows: "It reflects the existing consensus that conflict in the South is best approached through a number of connected, ameliorative, harmonizing and, especially, transformational measures. While this can include the provision of immediate relief and rehabilitation assistance, liberal peace embodies a new or political humanitarianism that lays emphasis on such things as conflict resolution and prevention, reconstructing social networks, strengthening civil and representative institutions, promoting the rule of law, and security sector reform in the context of functioning market economy" (Duffield 2001:4). The liberal peace is thus a complex transformative political project, emphasizing international responsibility. It became the dominant approach to treat post-conflict situations after the end of the Cold-War.

From the mid-nineties Sierra Leone became a model country for the new policy. It hosted the UN's largest and most ambitious post conflict peace-keeping missions (Chataigner:13)[2] Applying a routine procedure, the mission aimed to transform a failed state into a liberal one in the shortest time possible (Cubitt 2013:4), based on a philosophy assuming that peace, democracy and free-market do not only constitute a viable combination, but actually presuppose each other. Therefore, democratization - conceived as good governance rather than more equal distribution of power - became the first corner stone for development. The kind of democracy good governance promised was a particular one: measured by the existence of free and fair elections and by evidence of a "vibrant civil society", imagined as the totality of officially registered voluntary organizations.

---

[1] The international community is used here in the sense of Cubitt (2013:6), i.e. not as the disparate ensemble of various Global actors, but rather as a unified body with a norm and value system shared by leading Western countries, representing sufficient legitimacy and economic power to design and supervise the path of the „liberal peace".

[2] „Par sa résolution 1346, le Conseil de sécurité des Nations unies a autorisé le 30 mars 2001 l'augmentation des effectifs de la Mission des Nations unies en Sierra Leone (Minusil) de 13 000 a 17 500 hommes, ce qui en a fait de loin l'opération la plus importante des Nations Unies dans le monde au début de cette nouvelle décennie."

Through my research I strive to understand the logic and evaluate the dividends of this large-scale transformation from the perspective of the small, but no so hidden community of the polio-disabled. Understanding the internationally led liberal peace-building process as a new kind of governance, I am looking for patterns of resistance and everyday forms of agency amongst the polio-victims, many of whom live in the street or in occupied houses, surviving on begging or on different small jobs in the troubled zone of urban informality. To put it differently, persons with disability in Sierra Leone belong with a great probability to the much larger group of the urban poor. Their resistance therefore cannot be conceived only as a struggle against identity based discrimination, but also as one challenging class-based oppression. Class here is probably not the best term, as the place poor people occupy in the social stratification is less marked today by their relation to tools of production – as Marx supposed - than by their total disconnectedness from the formal world of production as a whole. However, I propose using "class" as shorthand for a particular place occupied on the social ladder, for the term has the advantage of encapsulating the idea of unequal distribution of power, allowing diverging interpretations coexist, each of them shedding light on an important and still relevant aspect of this inequality. Although the dual Marxian universe[3], dividing the society between the capitalists and the proletariat clearly does not exist anymore, (especially not in Sierra Leone), but the dichotomy separating the poor from the rich has never been as sharp as it is today,[4] (especially in Sierra Leone, where the middle layer between the very rich and very poor is infinitely thin)[5]. The dichotomy is in fact conspicuous, even if - as Gramsci demonstrated (Gramsci and Buttigieg 1992) - hegemony has the power to mystify it and make it appear for the oppressed as the

---

[3] See for example in: Marx, Karl & Engels, Frederick; *The Communist Manifesto*, (1848). (The key statement of class conflict as the driver of historical change).

[4] According to many sources growing inequalities in the world constitutes the biggest social challenge today. The success of Piketty and Stiglitz show that inequality has become a topic of interest for the non specialised public, too. However, because of the difficulties of statistical measures it is not easy to make simple statements about global inequality. Most researchers agree that inequality is growing within the nations, although some argue that inequality between the Global South and Global North is decreasing. However, not counting with China and India the picture would still look gloomy for the South.
One useful website containing a wide range of repots, tools and tables is: www.inequality.org/global-inequality/

[5] The latest Human Development Report from 2014 esteemed that 72,7%, of the population are „mulitdimensionally poor" and listed Sierra Leone along the „least equal countries in the world" along with Nigeria, Angola, Guinea-Bissau and Central African Republic.
www.sl.undp.org/content/sierraleone/en/home/presscenter/pressreleases/2014/07/25/sierra-leone-moves-one-place-up-the-human-development-index-but-inequality-and-multidimensional-poverty-still-very-high.html

natural order of things, duping them into contributing unknowingly to their own oppression by accepting the domination of a minority in whose hand the social, cultural and economic capital is concentrated (Bourdieu 1986). The result of this oppression is that in the post-modern class system[6] the lowest classes are once again entirely without social protection. Their position is not defined by their relation to waged labour, rather than by their increasing relegation to the domain of informality, situated between legality and illegality, making their claims on territorial belonging fragile. For these reasons, in the early 21st century oppression of the poor – and not only in the Global South – dominantly appears as interlinked social and territorial exclusion, where citizenship is "differentiated" (Holston 2008) between those who are fully protected and fully mobile and those whose need of protection can only be satisfied by charity, and whose access to places claimed by the rich is increasingly restricted[7].

Working with disabled people, my research necessarily talks to questions of disability, but I consider polio communities first of all as part of the many subaltern groups who suffer from oppression of this type. The twists and turns of their stories in the post war reconstruction process may help evaluate the success of the liberal peace building project in changing previously existing dynamics of exclusion. This approach is nourished by the conviction that the perspectives of the margin can bring important insights as to the nature of power and to the kind of society it promotes (Christensen 2012:21).

All in all, with my case study on polio-communities in Freetown I wish to contribute to three main fields of research: disability, post-conflict liberal transformation and civil society. First of all I propose providing an ethnographic description of the lives of people with disabilities in post-war Sierra Leone, and in this way filling a gap, hardly comprehensible in face of the conspicuous reality of disability in this country. Second, by doing so, I undertake to assess the impact of the "liberal peace" on the life chances of these very people, proposing an analysis of the nature of power

---

[6] I use the term "class", despite the considerable controversy about its relevance in post-modern societies. I believe that if classifying people according to strict occupation criteria is increasingly meaningless in our times, there seems to be still enough reason to differentiate groups of men and women on the bases of their capacity to control and to have access to various – economic, political and cultural - resources. One sort of resource that the present paper is dealing with is access to mobility, both in geographical and sociological terms.

[7] This book is about poor disabled people living in urban squatter communities in a third world country, however the form of exclusion they suffer from relate them to many other groups, not negligibly to that of the poor migrants of the South, whose possibility to freely choose their residence is as restricted as that of the squatters', for the same reasons, however with different results.

from this bottom up perspective. Third, I expect that this investigation will lead me to apprehend what margin of manoeuvre is left to the polio-disabled in this world, enlarging in this way the existing inventory of "the weapons of the Weak"[8]. Following their strategies within and without civil society - which is the only space from where their claim making is legitimized – will ultimately result in an exploration of the role of civil society in present day power structures, between backing up the powerful and supporting the Weak. Finally, because the existence of extended polio-disabled communities is a genuinely urban phenomenon, the research might indirectly talk to urban studies.

In search of power and agency

Foucault (Foucault, et al. 1991) is probably the most eloquent and certainly the most famous analyst of the nature of power. He convincingly explains how power is produced in systems of governance in different institutions and then gets trickled down in conspicuous ways to its subjects, imposing constraints on -, and containing them. Gramsci (Gramsci and Buttigieg 1992) is mostly interested in how power maintains itself by becoming common knowledge and broadly shared talk of truth, preserved by a mixture of imposition and consent, which is the essence of hegemony. Development critics often turn to these classics in order to explain how a particular regime proposing improvement becomes oppressive, often seemingly independently from the will of its actors, putting an impersonal, self-propelling machine in place in the sense of Deleuze (Deleuze and Guattari 1983). This is the narrative Ferguson (Ferguson 1994 (1990)) proposes in his *Antipolitics Machine*, in which he shows how both those who have power (development agencies), and the subjects of power (beneficiaries of development projects) are somehow victims of the same prestidigitation produced by the machine.

Paradoxically, while Foucault's critique of govern mentality appears to be the most radical of all, some later readers - Nancy Fraser is one of them - point out that Foucault's work retrospectively seem to have reinforced resentment against the omnipresent state, characteristic of neo-liberal thinking, rising progressively from the 70s. "The irony is plain –Fraser writes - whether we call it post-industrial society or neoliberal globalization, a new regime oriented to "deregulation and "flexibilization"

---

[8] Reference made to the title of the famous book by James Scott (1985): Weapons of the Week

was about to take shape just as Foucault was conceptualizing disciplinary normalization." (Fraser 2003:160) The Foucauldian perspective definitely works best in a society overregulated by a state assuming at the same time policing and welfare functions. Sierra Leone does not offer such a context. Even its policing side works haphazardly, let alone its welfare function, which is obviously hollow. Amongst the three visions of state power: the suffocating panopticon, the impersonal machine and the diffuse power emerging from the subtle interplay between the elite, civil society and the oppressed themselves, the last one – evoking Gramsci's notion of hegemony - is probably the most helpful to understand the Sierra Leonean state-society relation. Referring to Foucault here would be misleading for another reason. While Foucault's government is that of the sovereign nation state, nothing such exists in Sierra Leone. Rather, the act of governing is shared by different actors, some indeed local, but many more international. A host of institutions, bodies and agencies, all conventionally grouped under the somewhat vague category of "the international community" come together to set the direction of development policies and allocate funds to their realization. In these circumstances the Sierra Leonean government is less than fully autonomous - however it would also be a mistake to underestimate its own agency in the face of those who attempt to control it.

The social sciences have long been interested in describing the nature of power, but to compensate for the dark vision promising no redemption, some anthropologists - including Ferguson (2006) - started to look for agency where previous critics saw only power structures. Tania Li belong to the pioneers of this new quest. Her engaged ethnography distinguishes between the practice of government, which she understands as the practice of domination and the practice of politics, which for her equates with resistance and contestation. In her case studies she does not only show "the damaging effects of improvement programs" (Li 2007:2), but also points out the mobilization which is likely to follow. Others, like Scott (1985) emphasise that resistance of the weak is not always spectacular, organised or even conscious. It cannot possibly be called "mobilisation". He describes how small farmers in Malaysia challenge the powerful with insinuations, gossip, humour, avoidance – to mention only a few tools belonging to their arsenal of passive resistance. Chabal, discovering the African version of this indirect strategy of subversion, names it the *Politics of suffering and smiling* (Chabal 2009), an idea somehow reminiscent of Bayart's concept of "working misunderstandings" which

he describes as a strange mixture of collaboration and resistance (Bayart 1993:24). More recent literature in general tends to understand the relation between power and resistance in a nuanced way, disposed to find resistance, not necessarily in opposition to, but in the very core of governance (Rose 1999)

The case of the polio-disabled beggars of Freetown fits well in this frame. Disabled mendicants typically incarnate the small people, "the weak" who invariably become targets of the direct or indirect violence of power (Galtung 1996), even if – from a certain perspective -they might even appear as the accomplices of their oppressors, adopting easily hegemonic discourses, or malleably accepting their own victimhood (Bourdieu 1990). Observing them acting and talking, however reveals their strong capacity to take their destiny in their hands, against all odds, and despite the many forms of direct and structural violence imposed on them.

I have set myself the task of taking stock of their strategies of resistance, expecting in advance that I will find these not in heroic collective actions but rather in small acts of everyday subversion. My ethnography shows that I was only partially right: as I was gradually getting closer to them, I discovered both facets of their political agency: I found both mobilization (conscious, organized resistance) and insurgence (sometimes conscious but more often unconscious, unorganized, banal everyday resistance). I understand agency as a form internal liberty defying external constraints, a precondition to all types of resistance. Not all agencies are necessarily political in nature. Williams affirms that "political capability" (Williams 2004:7) is a capacity to induce change (including changing rules of the game and achieving more just redistribution of available resources). Accordingly, while agency includes emancipatory operations working on a mental, psychological or spiritual level, mobilization and insurgence have some subversive observable, material consequences in the world outside. Subversion does not suppose necessarily the overt opposition to hegemonic regimes, often it is manifest in the capacity to carve out small pockets of freedom at their core.

Hegemony builds particular knowledge systems in the defence of power. „Analytics of government...are concerned with knowledges, or *regimes of truth.* a whole regime of enunciation. ...which accords salience to particular categories, divisions, classifications, relations and identities" (Rose 1999:29). Liberty therefore supposes the production or the protection of existing counter-hegemonic "regimes of truth".

Hegemonic and counter-hegemonic knowledge systems, however, are not that easy to separate, because – as Shaw demonstrates it in her analysis of forms of resistance in post-colonial West Africa: „penetration of the dominant knowledge in the dominated life world", is happening by "active integration" on behalf of the dominated (Shaw 2002). Resistance against dominance in this case might be concealed in the surreptitious ways dominant regimes of truth are transformed in the process of their absorption in popular culture. This is the process behind the formation of any syncretic cosmologies, through untidy assemblages[9] (Latour 1993), or through "bricolage" - as Lévi-Strauss (1966) would put it – whereof bribes of dominant discourses are received and transformed into a new quality within subaltern practices.

A rich body of literature uses the metaphor of translation in order to describe the transformation process inherent in the interactions between different knowledge systems (Star 1989; Latour 2005; Rottenburg 2009; Clarke 2012). I believe, adopting the translation paradigm for the Sierra Leonean case is particularly profitable, as it allows explaining how the very place from where domination takes shape, opens space for self-liberation and agency. I refer to this process of integration entailing non recognized transformation as to „quasi translation", as opposed to Star's notion of "boundary object", a partial but working consensus between agents holding to divergent world views (Star 1989b; Star 1989). "Quasi translation" is not a form of consensus, but rather the parallel manipulation of two knowledge systems, disguising, rather than eliminating the distance separating them, by the application of an only seemingly common language. While translation aims at reducing the tension between two different languages by putting the two on an equal footing, quasi translation does not quite fulfil this function. Rather it obscures the attempts of domination and contestation underlying linguistic conventions.

Quasi translation is a form of agency I discovered and recognized in Sierra Leone not only in the polio communities but also in villages, in slums and in the street, with the consequence of making personal identities the most important sites of intercultural encounter, allowing and at the same time obscuring power struggles between the hegemonic and counter-hegemonic. Shaw - equally interested in the manifestations of

---

[9]   Assemblage in Barbara Ann Kipfer (ed.) Encyclopaedic Dictionary of Archaeology (2000), Cluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers: „a group of objects of different or similar types found in close association with one another''

subversive agency of Sierra Leoneans, which she sees taking shape against the background of several centuries of violent colonial domination - uses the notion of "personal pluralism" to indicate that heterogeneous knowledge systems tend to be integrated in one and the same person (Shaw 2002:145)[10]. I found personal pluralism widespread in all strata of society, probably attesting the fact that assemblages made in translation and counter-translation might attain preponderant proportions in the context of the "banality of power in the 'postcolony'". (Mdembe 1992:3)

The concept of translation is close to that of brokerage, another notion used frequently in the development anthropology literature (Lewis and Mosse 2006). However, while the figure of the broker has traditionally been constructed as part of the NGO elite, the metaphor of translation represents a more democratic vision, because it recognizes that basically anybody in any situation might become a translator. This vision is not only more democratic but it is empirically more in coherence with my own observations in the field, where I met several professional development brokers but I also saw that besides them, on the ground, almost everybody regularly gets entangled in translation practices. People of all walks of life become in this way momentarily brokers of meaning and of their own identities. It follows that the possibility of resistance is not so much inscribed in the position of the broker or of the dispossessed, but it is being produced as an emergent quality of the original situation which incorporates the potentials both for the successes and the failures of the normalizing efforts on state power. As I explained above, the State here should not be apprehended as a single actor, rather it should be regarded as "the name of the way of tying together…power relations" (Ferguson 1994 (1990):273;), a name connecting in Sierra Leone a large number of actors, acting on the local and international level on the production of government.

Defining civil society - a disclaimer

The growing popularity, from the early nineties of the last century, of the notion of agency in social sciences and especially in development critique brought with it two complementary theoretical questions. One question interrogated the nature of ordinary people's agency – I have developed it above. The other one asked: what are the loci and

---

[10] Shaw originally speaks about religion: „personal pluralism" is „in which a person has one official religious affiliation while maintaining another in less formal settings.", but the idea naturally expands to other domains of life.

the means available for the poor to act? The rediscovery[11] of "civil society" gave a partial answer to the second question. The conceptualization of civil society as a means of assuring control of governance from the bottom offered itself as a logical response to the problem of how to "give voice to the voiceless" - to use one of the favourite slogans of the new era which publicized itself as that of "development with a human face" (Allen and Thomas 2000). Plurality, Human Rights and democracy took the forefront of international development in this period, which coincided with the end of the Cold war, when the neo-liberal version of capitalism seemed to have defeated State socialism for good and History seemed to be arriving to its end[12]. The supposedly sharp civil society – state divide and the positive value almost unanimously attributed to the first one of the pair to the detriment of the second has to be understood in this political context characterized by a more or less overt animosity against the state.

Today it is somewhat risky to use the term "civil society" in any meaningful way because of the prolific literature and heated debates the notion has produced since the second half of the 20th century, proposing divergent, often contradictory interpretations. Habermas (1989) connects the notion to that of the public sphere, understanding the latter as an arena where a heterogeneous public deliberates on the type of sovereign it wants, bracketing - for the time of debating - its internal differences and inequalities. Habermas's public sphere is public only in as much as it distinguishes itself from the private sphere (the intimate domain of the family); it is defined as a domain separate from the state. In spite of the multiplicity of definitions, the most common interpretations insist on this mediating function, explaining civil society as an intermediary sphere - between the family and the state (Hegel), between the state and the market (Adam Smith), or between the state and society (Hobbes and Locke) (Harbeson, et al. 1994). In all these theories the role of civil society is that of an equalizer, something of a guarantor stopping the state from trespassing into a domain where it is not supposed to have any competence. For others, following a path delineated by Tocqueville, civil society is associated with the integrated quality of society. In this vein, Putnam understands civil society as made of "voluntary associations

---

[11] I use the expression „re-discovery" to underline that civil society is not a late modern invention; what is unique to the end of the 20th century is the lightening career civil society made in short time, due to which it became effectively the „third sector", not only socially but also economically.

[12] See: Fukuyama, Francis (1992): The end of history and the last man, New York, Toronto: Free Press ;Maxwell Macmillan Canada ; Maxwell Macmillan International

connecting self-serving citizens to the common good in a non-state, non-market sphere"
(Putnam 1995). The idea that the "common good", the commonweal is produced or at
least defended within the public sphere created by civil society lends the notion a civic
virtue, which is implicit in almost all theory of civil society. Civic[13] in this sense is
nothing less than the positive outcome of civil society having fulfilled its historical task.

However, with the renaissance of civil society came also some doze of healthy
scepticism. Harbeson, for example, calls attention to the dangers of "the changing rules
of the game", threatening "civil society" with being drawn simply into the private sector,
the later reframed with a strong neo-liberal connotation, as a sphere providing
protection from the excesses of the state (Harbeson, Rothchild et al. 1994:9). It is true
that even before that time, some authors refused to believe in the intrinsic virtue of civil
society, evoking the possibility of its being co-opted by the state (Gramsci), or on the
contrary, seeing it as capable of co-opting the state (Marx). Many (Clarke 2010; 2015;
Sharma 2006; 2008) suspect finally that the supposedly clear dividing line between the
state and civil society is after all not that clear in an era in which civil society is
requested to take over many welfare functions of the state. The relationship is in reality
mutual dependence rather than antagonism.

Given the terminological chaos, the safest solution would be to forget about the
expression once and for all. It is unfortunately not a viable solution for at least two
reasons. First, in a country like post-war Sierra Leone, where "civil society building"
seems to be the immediate answer to any social problem, it is on every lip, it is in every
document, it is in every policy, it is just not possible to erase it from one's vocabulary. In
other words, taking the "natives'" life world seriously implies taking civil society
seriously. Civil society is also part of the larger context of the polio communities, as
these are formally indexed as DPOs – i.e. disabled people's organizations, and as such
they take an official position in the post-war project society landscape. Second, if there is
one principle that transpires from almost all the attempts of interpretation, it is - as
Harbeson points out – the understanding of civil society as a means of harmonizing

---

[13] According to Encyclopaedia Britannica on-line civic virtue is the sum of „personal qualities associated with
the effective functioning of the civil and political order or the preservation of its values and principles" .At the
same time it is understood that the civic cannot be the product solely of individual behaviour, rather it is the
outcome of „social cooperation". Combining the two insights, I use the word in the sense of collective
manifestation of individually respected values, defining the rules of being together, allowing society to be.
http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/1916876/civic-virtue

somehow state-society relations (Harbeson and Rothchild 2009:15). In a country where - like in Sierra Leone - state-society relations have always been the Achilles' heel of politics, the civic virtue of civil society, i.e. the capacity of non state actors to organize themselves within the state into cooperative groups based on the principles of collective responsibility, solidarity and reciprocity, is in high demand - and it is also well on offer, as I will attempt to demonstrate.

For this reason, braving the frightening terminological chaos, I will assume the use of "civil society", namely, in two distinct ways: both as an emic concept and as an analytical category. In the first sense I just pick up a word that is used by those who understand civil society as an assemblage of specific types of voluntary associations – called non- governmental or civil society organizations (NGOs or CSOs[14]) - and try to understand the larger implications of this linguistic convention. As an etic term I will use „civil society", more as a metaphor than as a category, to signify something in relation with the commonweal or with the conditions of social cohesion fabricated patiently in small circles, before these conditions would spread out from these micro-arenas to society at large. In this metaphoric sense, I believe, civil and civic are indeed interchangeable and neither of them is necessarily connected to the modern Western type organizations that are called NGOs. Although I do not attribute automatically to the NGO world the virtue of being by definition civic; I do not deny that in some circumstances, some NGOs (or CSOs) might fulfil this condition. The two frames - the first that confounds civil society with established, officially registered, Western type voluntary organizations and the second equating civil society with "an orientation

---

[14] The differentiation between NGOs and CSOs is less than evident and it depends largely on local usage. There is a sense in which the two terms are interchangeable. (see for example: http://www.cn.undp.org/content/ dam/china/docs/Publications/UNDP-CH03%20Annexes.pdf – accessed on the 10th October 2014). In other contexts (Hungary is such a place) NGO is the master category and it does not correlate with CSO, but rather with the term „non-profit-organisation", including foundations and associations. In France, where the expression „civil society„ is not of standard use, „the world of associations" is differentiated from NGOs that are understood implicitly as of international scope. In the UK the legitimate generic term is „charity" – which is, almost a bad word in France. In the developmental context, CSO is the accepted inclusive form, of which NGOs are a subset. In the local setting of Sierra Leone, everyday use, as well as policy regulations makes the difference between CSOs, which are implicitly local small scale organisations and NGOs which can be local or international, with considerably more administrative constraints but more chance to participate in international development. Where were I write about Sierra Leone I tend to refer to CSOs and NGO in this sense, where the difference is of scale, of economic potential and of strictness of regulation, as well as that of distance from the international development community. When writing about the international context, I use NGO as shorthand for any non-state, non-profit organisation.
More on the subject in Chapter 2. See also: http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor/sierraleone.html accessed on the 10th October 2014)

toward the common good" (Ehrenberg 2011:15) - are interlinked but remain separate in my analysis. In order not to create confusion, I will always attempt to clarify the particular frame I am using in the different instances – or to explicitly substitute "civil" by "civic" in the text.

NGO world, NGOization and Project Society

Although the philosophical debate on the nature of civil society is part of European history covering several centuries, the definitive equation of civil society with formal organizations that are both recognized and controlled by the state is a relatively late phenomenon. Even the term NGO is recent. According to an anecdote, the expression owes its existence to a technocratic decision, rather than to any organic development[15]. After the end of the Cold war, in Africa, more generally in the Global South, and even in post-socialist Eastern-Europe NGOs became major players in disbursing aid and organizing development. This new vision of development put multiparty elections and market cantered economies as both conditions and goals of aid (Harbeson, Rothchild et al. 1994:3).

In the face of the relatively modest results of international development in reducing poverty since its official inception in the 1950s, the emphasis on the role of civil society appeared as a new hope in the 90s. Civil society - next to multiparty elections - was seen as a promise of political liberalism, while measures enhancing marketization were expected to create conditions for economic liberalism. The increased importance of civil society was part of larger project to transform the state, making it favourable to free market capitalism and to Human Rights.

---

[15] Nick Young, in a report on International NGOs in China tells the story in the following way: "NGO" is one of the silliest terms ever coined. It is confusing because it covers such a large number of quite different entities, so it is rather like describing chairs, cupboards, sofas and even television sets as 'non-table furniture'. How did such a mystifying term come into existence? The most likely answer is that a United Nations bureaucrat invented it. In UN parlance, official agencies of member states are known as Government Organisations (Gos). Back in the 1960s, when the UN started to invite other kinds of organisation to consultation meetings and events, it needed an easy way to refer to them, and settled on Non-Government Organisation (NGO). Over time, organisations that had already been established for many decades, but that had before thought of themselves as 'NGOs', began to refer to themselves in this way. The term also served as a ready-made label for hundreds of thousands of new organisations that have since been set up across the world, in what has been called an 'associational revolution.'"
Nick Young. NGOs: The diverse origins, changing nature and growing internalisation of the Species
http://www.chinadevelopmentbrief.com (accessed in December 2008)

The belief that democracy and liberalized market relations were naturally concomitant and together they guaranteed development was not new. In a previous phase of international development economic growth was believed to enhance democracy. The same idea could already be found in the theoretical foundation of structural adjustment. The only change was that now it was democracy that was (Reno 1996; Rist 2006)entrusted with the task of contributing to economic growth - on the long run, at least. Because democracy was believed to be closely connected to the presence and strength of NGOs, these effectively became framed as an army to enforce state transformation. Because international NGOs operating in developing countries served as mediators between the periphery[16] and the "global metropole" (Connell 2011) from where the idea emerged, some authors explicitly accused NGOs to be "part of transnational governmentality" (Obadare and Willems 2014:187), reviving the old project of "governing Africa from afar" (Ferguson 2006:84) in a new form.

Criticism did not spare local civil society either. The growing importance of international NGOs in local politics – the argument goes - went hand in hand with an artificial mushrooming of local organizations. INGOs needed local counterparts to channel aid (and ideas) downwards and with their demand they contributed to the creation of „a phalanx of largely urban based associations" (Ibid: 184), promoting the culture of liberal cosmopolitanism. In Africa, and in particular in Sierra Leone, the effervescence of "civil society organizations" contrasted sharply with the manifest atrophy of previous forms of social movements, trade unions and political organizations with overtly system-critical goals[17] and with the symbolic exclusion of a great variety of voluntary associations and localized collective actions from the realm of officially recognized "civil society".

Siding myself with the critics, I see in this process the NGOization of civil society, the result of which is a form of governance, producing a state-society relation best described as "project society", borrowing an expression from Sampson (2005), who first applied it to another post- Cold-War development context in the Balkans. In project society NGOs and NGO type organizations take over the lion's share of the state's tasks of

---

[16] Periphery is used here in the Wallersteinian sense: for those places which occupy an inferior (and often subordinate) position in relation to some other places, which owe their central position to the concentration of capital and technology they possess.

[17] For more details on the Sierra Leonean trade unionism see chapter 2. on NGOization

redistribution. They are in charge of a vast array of social services previously belonging to the competence of the state, now financed through short term projects. In fragile states NGOs and other international agencies provide important resources to the government, and in this way they get a chance to orient public policies. Project society - both as a redistribution system and as a political regulatory system - relies on NGOs, i.e. predominantly private (but sometimes also public) voluntary associations, by definition - as the name indicates – supposed to be independent from the State. However, through the short term project-based funding system, as well as through the legal environment of their operation, the state keeps them under control to some extent. This means that NGOs and associations can only operate in the present form as long as their original pact with the State is maintained.

Because the money on which the system is based originates largely from international donors, a second pact that keeps project society moving ties the state to "the international community", personifying the "centre" in a centre-periphery relation. This vocabulary obviously evokes Wallerstein's world system theory (Wallerstein 2004). I do not pretend to practice world system analysis in any sense, but I contend that the centre periphery metaphor is helpful in regarding Sierra Leone not as a lonely case but as part of a larger set of countries occupying similar or comparable situations in a world system, the centre of which is to be found in the West, including – still in the beginning of the 21th century - North America and the European Union.

In this world system, in the early years of 2000 the state and NGOs are in a position of reciprocal dependency. While the state has the power to control and regulate the operation of the NGOs, these are necessary because they are considered to be the depositaries of its social and democratic values. This multi-layered mutual dependence is systematically understated, veiled or denied. The fiction of independence makes it difficult to realize that top down "civil society building", paradoxically often depoliticizes potentially subversive publics or initiatives, by formalizing and increasing control on civic forms of engagement.

My own position in relation to the NGO world is unescapably ambiguous. I do not believe that NGOs are inherently good or bad. Whatever they do, they are the hostages of a system that is often counter-productive and vampirize their energy. In this system they are expected to play two contradictory roles simultaneously. First, they are

supposed to be the embodiment of civic agency resisting the state. Second, they are enrolled to substitute the state in the provision of welfare services. The first is not possible because of their dependence; the second is not surely desirable. The two are properly incompatible. This is of course a generalized statement. Many NGOs manage somehow to keep a balance between the two roles, but inevitably in certain situations they are obliged to drift to one side or the other.

Civil society as a source of resistance?

This last reflection leads me to reformulate my research questions in a way to interrogate the possibility of and the conditions for actually existing civil society taking a more political role in the transformation of society, in fighting inequalities and effectively representing the interests of oppressed groups. In other words I want to explore the possibility of finding agency and resistance within project society. This approach would have been perfectly legitimate, even banal a couple of years ago. Interestingly today it looks unorthodox, or simply naïve in the mirror of the most recent development literature.

For a while even the always dubious anthropologist community shared the enthusiasm of development experts, who took it for granted that the number and the multiplication of voluntary organizations was a sign in which one could read the level of democratization of a society. In a volume edited in 2001 on associational life in Africa (Tostensen, et al. 2001) the majority of the articles still searched for manifestation of agency within the official part of civil society, in associations belonging to the NGO world. Nonetheless, in that epoch growing disillusionment was already palpable, obliging the authors to question whether CSOs were intrinsically benevolent in nature. Ever since, the critical voices have grown stronger. Many students of development have called attention to the extraordinary vulnerability of formal organizations to being sucked in existing power structures, to their undemocratic potential; to their cultural violence, sometimes overtly supporting "the global hegemony of the Western worldview" (Rottenburg 2009:xii) and to their role in transforming democracy from a big idea into "the minimalist version of participatory government sold to the South by the North" (Comaroff and Comaroff 2012:29).

This progressive disillusionment was accompanied by a parallel rediscovery and celebration of informality (Hart 1973; Holston 2008; Kamete 2013). Li also finds agency

…" not in the moment of participation where individuals are organized into acquiescent communities but outside of the organized frame of consensus searching, "in the moments of crises" (Li 2007:225). Emblematically, in a recent book, entitled "Civic Agency in Africa: arts of resistance in the 21st century" in which the authors put the question: "How do ordinary people resist the totalising tendencies of the state and the political elite that preside over their destiny?" (Obadare and Willems 2014:13) they ostensibly search for subversive potentials outside of the scope of the officially recognized fraction of civil society. "Instead of looking for resistance where it lies in the West[18], in the formally constituted parts of civil society, it is more profitable to approach the question from the bottom up." – they contend (Ibid).

No matter how tempting it would be to follow the chaotic paths of organic resistance emerging spontaneously out of the reach of formalized institutions, my own research among the polio communities of Freetown suggests that it is problematic to oppose the informal civic and the formal civil, in Africa and elsewhere, too. It is more promising to search for agency in the intersection of these two spheres, as the life world of polio survivors also bring together two parallel universes - that of formal civil society and that of the informal squatter communities.

Disability, here and there

I believe that by now it has become clear that my interest in disability is only indirect. I am concerned with my protagonists' disability only as much as being identified as disabled matters to them. I do not take the disabled identity for granted. Rather I try to reconstruct the historical process of the formation of the disabled identity, on the collective, as well as on the individual level, by excavating the roots of engagement of disability activists and by reconstructing the history of disabled organizations. I am looking for clues to understand what the consequences of this identity are on people living with the sequels of polio. I am not working with Disability with a capital D. Rather my research concerns a very specific community, in a very

---

[18] I am less persuaded that there is such a sharp divide between the West and the Non West. It seems rather that actually existing civil society, i.e. NGOs in project society were successfully enrolled by the State to fulfil some of the welfare functions previously associated to the state, both in the Global North and the Global South.

specific place at a particular moment. My observations regarding polio-disabled people do not necessarily apply to other types of disability and to other places. The majority of people I talked to live in urban settings and if they are not totally incorporated by the disability movement and its institutional system, at least they are familiar with these to some extent. This is not necessarily the case of all the polio-disabled people in the country. I adopt Ingstad and White's posture (Ingstad and Whyte 2007:3) who note: "We do not necessarily assume the relevance of disability policy, declarations of rights, universal definitions, or identity politics for people's experience. Rather, we ask, how relations with powerful institutions, organizations, and media messages may affect their situations and their understanding of them."

The idea that disability is not self-evident might be at first surprising, but only to the extent that it seems counterintuitive to conceive that race, for example is not self-evident - a statement which does not suppose in any way that skin colour does not matter in social encounters or that racism does not have very real effects. In the same way, it is unquestionable that momentary or permanent loss or deterioration of bodily function is a fundamental experience of humankind. But from the fact that impairment is universal does not follow the "presumption that impairment is a commonly agreed condition and that it automatically generates negative reactions"- note theoreticians of disability studies (Barnes et al. 1999:16) Similarly "the idea that people's sense of belonging and relations to each other and the state may be based on a biological condition" (Ingstad and Whyte 2007:16) is not a universally shared one. Instead, this idea should be considered as a singular societal response to facts of life filtered through a particular frame of interpretation. "It is not simply that disability is a problem and programs are put in place to solve it. Rather, the "solutions" influence people's perception of what the problem is" (Ingstad and Whyte 2007:14) Silla's (1998) account of the organization of leprosy patients in Mali shows that there is no "natural emergence" of a disabled community, rather the collective is a co-creation emerging from the encounter between the strategies of the patients and the institutional frames proposed to them. In Europe, the segregating institutions, no matter how oppressive they were, produced a critical mass of people facing the same difficulties without which collective identity could not have been formed. The polio-disabled I met in Freetown have had a comparable experience. White and Muyinda (2007) also explain the emergence of the disabled identity amongst polio patients with the combination of

several factors. In their story people with polio gathered at the frontier of Uganda because of the economic facilities the border zone provided for people with disability. The critical mass was produced by the spontaneous increase of their numbers. Then, when they were accused of smuggling, they realized that their disabled identity could be effectively turned against the accusation.

Although the concept of disability is everywhere a relatively recent development, once it is there, it starts to function as a distinct "regime of truth" (Rose 1999:30) producing falsely taken for granted 'veridical discourses' which forbid all further questioning. Truth regimes are simplifications that are particularly apt to serve political mobilization from the bottom and social interventions from the top. Discourses around disability do not uniquely speak about disability; they implicitly make statements about the very essence of the person and about the desirable social order.

Veridical discourses often come in the forms of models. New models usually go to great lengths to invalidate the ones they claim to replace. As far as disability studies is concerned, all introductory books start by a more or less detailed description of the linear path leading from the outdated medical model to the presently victorious social model. In these texts it is explained that the medical model is rejected because it is seen as part of an oppression forcing control and normalization on people with disability. In narratives of the medical model – the explanation goes on - disability, conceived as a deviation from the biological norm– becomes an individual tragedy (cf. Barnes 1999) situated in the individual body.   Expert knowledge is solicited to mitigate the consequences of this tragedy by normalizing the body – and the mind. The invention of the social model was a reaction against the dependent, inferior position into which expert knowledge forced the disabled person. By contrast, the social model situates disability in the disabling environment rather than in the body. In this perspective it is not the individual impairment which exercises violence on people but the failure of society to positively respond in order to neutralize the handicapping consequences of the impairment. The goal of disability studies is to unveil the workings of this construction, much as feminist theoreticians undertook to deconstruct dominant models of gender differences.

From a theoretical point of view the model relies on a series of dichotomies. Shakespeare, another important disability studies scholar systematizes these

dichotomies in three points: 1, impairment is distinguished from disability. 2, the social model is opposed to the medical model. 3, disabled people are opposed to non-disabled people. "Disabled people are an oppressed group, and often non-disabled people and organizations…are the contributors to that oppression" (Shakespeare 2006:198)

Because of this implication, the social model is closely linked to the social minority model, which urges collective mobilization on the basis of a shared identity against the violence of being seen as different in a highly normalizing society. Disability politics is therefore described as the last one in the series of identity politics, possessing a radical emancipatory agenda. Thus, somewhat paradoxically, the sociological model encourages the formation of collective identity on the basis of "somatic markers" (Davis 2006a). At the same time it develops a discourse downplaying the biological determination and overstating the social construction. Conceiving disabled people as belonging to a minority group politicizes their socially devalued position and puts them on equal ground with other minority groups claiming equal rights. Such a strategy is efficient in transforming a social stigma into political mobilization. Incorporating the disability rights movement into the ever expanding domain of universal human rights has been the latest achievement of the minority group model, sanctioned by the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities[19].

Nonetheless, the identity politics framework of the Convention makes the whole instrument vulnerable to the inherent theoretical weaknesses of identity politics in general, and to the volatility of disabled identity in particular. "What characterizes the limitations of the identity group is its exclusivity…which contains the seeds of its own dissolution through the paradox of the proliferation of identity groups."[20] (Davis 2006:239)

Although this story is often told in a universal language, it is important to realize that the emergence of the disabled rights discourse is as localised in a specific culture as the broader discourse of human rights. Despite the fact that the UN Convention of the Rights of Persons with disabilities was first proposed by Mexico, its formulation reflects largely the dominance of Western perspectives. This should not come as a surprise,

---

[19] The drafting of the Convention was originally initiated by one State from the Global South: Mexico. It was first ratified in 2007 by 126 states. Sierra Leone was amongst the first signatories as soon as 2009.

[20] Identity politics tends to its extinction because the multiplication of „minorities" leads to the dilution of the very specificities according to which these minorities define themselves.

taking into consideration the preponderant role Western liberal societies played in laying the theoretical foundations of the movement. The international disability movement has its roots in the 60s-70s, in developed industrial societies, first of all in the USA and the UK (Barnes, et al. 1999; Barnes, et al. 2002) as well as in Scandinavian states (Ingstad and Whyte 1995). In all these countries the problems that disabled people faced rooted in the perverse side effects of welfare society, claiming to regulate whatever it perceived as social or biological deviance. Large scale totalizing social institutions: prisons, asylums and rehabilitation institutions were specialized in normalization (Goffman 1962; Foucault and Khalfa 2006). Disability politics therefore started everywhere as an emancipatory movement against institutionalization, asking for more autonomy, personal liberty and free choice. In the richest countries of the West disabled people (and their relatives) started to mobilize themselves against the uniform and oppressive living conditions in totalizing institutions and against the stigmatization that went with segregation. The moral values which the disability movement referred to: independent living, productive work and full control over one's own life - did not constitute a rupture from mainstream values of these same societies. The aims and goals of early disability movements made sense within a larger cultural value system, favouring individual autonomy, self-care, economic and political freedom and a consumerist vision of liberty of choice. Despite some ideological differences[21], the self-advocacy movement in Sweden, the American Independent Living movement and the British movement against segregation (UPIAS) all fought for more self-determination. Not only are these values not easily transferable to other regions of the world with no previous encounter with the welfare state, arguably the concerns of urban, middle class, cosmopolitan disabled activists did not necessarily correspond to those of poor disabled people, living in rural zones or in marginalized urban neighbourhoods (Barnes, Mercer et al. 1999).

The rise of the social model to the status of the official doctrine sanctioned the success of UPIAS in shaping the language of disability studies for many decades to come. Founders and theoreticians of the group (such as Paul Hung, Vic Finkelstein and Mike Oliver, amongst others) did a lot to push disability to the forefront of the global Human Rights Movement, but it was Mike Oliver who coined the term "social model" in 1983

---

[21] UPIAS had clear Marxist references while the American ILM "linked with key ideological virtues of capitalist America" (Barnes 1999: 69).

(Shakespeare 2006:198). The institutionalization of the social model reinforced the view that disability is universal and it universally leads to exclusion. The creation of Disabled People's International in 1981 was a decisive step towards the globalization of the movement.

The rupture with the medical model and the adoption of the social model incontestably opened new perspectives for theorizing oppressive relations affecting people with disability. The social model indeed meant a Copernican turn in interpreting disability, allowing disabled people to claim full rights as equal members of society rather than as patients with limited self-determination. However, no paradigm that has become hegemonic truth avoids the danger of stiffening into an inflexible ideology, taking increasing distance from the real experiences of real people. Saying this is not to denigrate the political achievements of the model. In its place and time its adoption was indeed revolutionary. Ever since, however, disability theorists from all walks of life have made serious efforts to keep it dynamic by systematically questioning its basic statements. Despite inevitable resistance[22] from older school theoreticians and activists, internal criticism makes part of the classical body of knowledge today together with the original premises.

Shakespeare, one of the key figures of mainstream disability theory, believes for example that the social model still carries the mark of "its authorship by a small group of activists, the majority of whom had spinal injury or other physical impairments and were white, heterosexual men" (Shakespeare 2006:200) Maybe not totally unexpectedly then, some of the strongest criticism have come from feminist theories (Butler 2006; Crow 1992; Morris 1991), warning that the disavowal of the physical experience of the impaired body implicit in the social model does not correspond to the daily experience of millions of disabled people, of those who know "the nightmare of the body", being "deformed, maimed, mutilated, broken, diseased" (Siebers 2006:175), a "corporality rarely imagined by the able-bodied" (Ibid:179). Denying the reality of pain, physical suffering and constraints denigrates the subjectivity of people whose social emancipation is being pursued as an aim. "The body is, first and foremost, a biological agent teeming with vital and often chaotic forces. It is not inert matter subject to easy

---

[22] See for example the debate around Shakespeare's attempt to re-evaluate the relevance of the social model: Disability Rights and Wrongs, Journal of Medical Ethics, Vol.34. No.3. (2008)

manipulation by social representations. The body is alive, which means that it is capable of influencing and transforming social languages as they are capable of influencing and transforming it." (Ibid: 180) More from a practical point of view, Shakespeare observes that "the social model so strongly disowns individual and medical approaches that it risks implying that impairment is not a problem…it can be interpreted as rejecting medical prevention, rehabilitation or cure of impairment" (Shakespeare 2006:200).

Also, as again Shakespeare points out (Ibid: 201) the concept of a barrier-free world inherent in the social model is at best a utopia, at worst, a nightmare. Its maintenance leads to frustration in the real world where not human constructed natural objects would remain barriers to people with disability even in the most perfect social system. But is such a system possible or even desirable? It is difficult to conceive a human environment where all possible types of disability could be made forgotten at the same time by applying technical, architectural and environmental solutions. Blind people's needs might turn out to be opposing to wheelchair users – Shakespeare observes. Claiming for a world totally fit for disabled people, might fuel a drift toward fundamentalist attitudes (Fougeyrollas 2010)[23], generating a form of identity politics which is "inward looking and separatist" (Shakespeare 2006:203) rather than inclusive and emancipatory.

Others (see Davis 2006:259) pointed out that the identity politics of disability creates a fictional homogeneity fuelling rather than fighting oppression of other minority groups (women, people belonging to racial and ethnic minority groups, the poor and rural disabled) within the large but quite fictional united group of "people with disability ". In this way the experiences of minorities are marginalized within the bigger group. Besides being ideologically questionable, the exclusivity given to the "disabled category" to the detriment of other possible categories falling victims of oppression constitutes also an artificial limit to the movement: "The potential for linking with other oppressed groups remains unfulfilled" (Barnes, Mercer et al. 1999) The "sacralisation of difference" (Fougeyrollas 2010:8) – on the basis of somatic markers, even if it is posited that these markers are filtered through social perception – might in this way be transformed in a tool of "depoliticisation", i.e. the emasculation of a potentially powerful political energy. The unwillingness of disability politics to question

---

[23] „Je dénonce tout autant la chasse a l 'handicapisme"que l'éloge élitistes des porteurs d certains handicaps homologués qui entraine des phénomenes culturels de dérive integriste" (Fougeyrollas 2010:8)

social and economic inequalities even within its own domain might explain why it is relatively easy for the political power to sign to it. Notably, in African politics one can notice the same preference for euphemizing large scale social problems by the use of other "biologized" categories, like "women" and "youth". As a consequence, just like women and youth groups[24], disabled groups also risk "incorporation in the political system in ways which effectively neutralize their political goals" (Barnes, Mercer et al. 1999).

Finally a strong point is made against identity politics in general, and against the identity politics of disability in particular from those who would like to chase essentialism definitely from social theory. (Davis 2006) admits that "creating unity where before there had been disunity" is a strong political move, necessary to the formation of all identity groups. At the same time he warns that pursuing identity politics to its logical consequences inevitably leads to unsolvable philosophical dilemmas. If identity politics consistently refuses vulgar essentialism, it must at a certain point turn against the "worm of essentialism" within its own core. He argues that the gradual postmodern deconstruction of previously taken for granted identities, like race, gender and sexuality should logically lead to the re-examination of the disabled identity itself. "The idea of maintaining a category just because oppressive people in the past created it so they could exploit a segment of the population does not make sense" (Ibid :235) – goes his provocative reasoning. The de-essentialisation of the disabled category might sound as the death toll of disability politics. Quite the contrary, Davis believes that it might be the starting point for a more radical politics. "Disability might turn out to be the identity that links other identities" (Ibid :233) – he affirms - having a good chance to become the leading force in new political struggles, based on the recognition that "difference is what all of us have in common" (Ibid :239).

Believing, with Davis, that present day disability politics has more to gain from its own revision than to lose, I am also convinced that bringing in the perspective from the South might be the engine of an intellectually refreshing and politically liberating paradigmatic change. My contention is that such a change is made impossible today

---

[24] Several authors warn that subordinate groups are in special risk of being co-opted, not despite, but because of their inferior position. See for example Bayar (1993:115) : "youth and women can easily integrate themselves into power blocks…but the real extent of dependence is not affected…One needs indeed to ask whether the state is not in the process of installing an 'absolute seniority' to the detriment of the 'small men' , the 'voiceless', the 'lowest of the low', as the system of social stratification closes in on itself."

because of the circular way disability is being defined in mainstream disability discourse, of the kind that is being most likely reproduced in the South. This discourse contains a logical loophole: if we define disability as a situation "when people experience *discrimination*[25] on the basis of perceived functional limitation" (Kasnitz and Shuttleworth 2001). there is little chance that any case can be discovered where disability does not meet with discrimination. As Shakespeare puts it: "It is logically impossible for a qualitative research to find disabled people who are not oppressed" (Shakespeare 2006:201). This paradox is not only intellectually unsustainable; it also weakens the practical stance of the disability movement. A collective identity, if based uniquely on discrimination is not sustainable if the aim is to eradicate discrimination. "We have to beware of the dangers of constructing a collective identity on the basis of situations of exclusion or restrictions produced by the normative cultural matrixes for not to find ourselves in the paradoxical situation where the cohesion of the collective identity is reduced in proportion of the successes of the fight" – Fougeyrollas warns (2010:27).

The circular reasoning equating disability with discrimination which holds back the theoretical possibility of reaching out for counter-examples in general, has particularly devastating effects in the South where disability activists with a Western education have a predominant role in thematising the fight for disability rights (Meekosha and Soldatic 2011)[26]. Because experts working in poor Southern countries think they know in advance what they would find on the ground, they invariably find it: mistreatment, discrimination and marginalisation. The idea that people of developed countries mistreat their disabled because of undeveloped thinking is pervasive. It resists observable counterexamples, because in this frame discrimination is not a hypothesis to be checked but a fact to be demonstrated - according to the very definition of disability. Also, it is tenacious because it fits another, previously popular - but still not extinct - topos, that of modernization theory.

---

[25]Italics mine

[26] ''Southern'' countries are, broadly, those historically conquered or controlled by modern imperial powers, leaving a continuing legacy of poverty, economic exploitation and dependence . . . The ''North'' . . . refers to the centres of the global economy in Western Europe and North America.'3 (Meekosha :1384). Meekosha uses Southern as a non acknowledged synonym for Periphery, and his argument implies that North and West interchangeably stand for the "Centre" .I adopt this vocabulary, using similarly the terms "West" and "North" as interchangeable metaphors for political, economic and cultural power unevenly distributed in geographical space.

Benedicte Ingstad calls this complex (evoking old phantasms about modernity and barbarism) the "myth of the hidden disabled" (Ingstad 1999). According to this myth the African (or indeed anybody receiving development aid) is almost instinctively mistreating his/her disabled fellow, because in his/her ignorance he/she is unable to realize the humanity of the latter. The generalized use of the myth in order to mark the development gap between the North and the South attests a conspicuous modernist bias, a secret ideological survival from colonial times. "In European history and fairy tales there are stories about people with disability that was hidden, neglected or abused" – Ingstad observes. There are also current cases of abuse of disabled people, but we do not use these to create a general picture of behaviour in Europe or the USA. From developing nations come stories about hiding, neglect and even murder of infants with obvious impairment. However, these cases are not seen as exceptions or past history, but are presented in documents from authoritative sources like WHO as a general and current problem in these countries. They are seen as "attitudes" resulting from "beliefs". The "myth of the hidden disabled" fits in the framework of what Mutua (Mutua 2002) (Cited by Meekosha 2011:1389) calls the "three metaphors" of "savages, victims and saviours" implied in Eurocentric use of human right discourses, in which human rights become what used to be development before: a marker of superiority on one side, a marker of inferiority, on the other.

Positing a priori that disabled people in the Global South are victims of their own "unsophisticated culture and believes" (Ingstad 1999) instead of applying unbiased examination to local situations is problematic at least in three different ways. First, obviously, it fuels racist condescendence and feelings of European superiority. Second, in this way, the social model, which used to be a tool for political mobilisation at its inception, loses its political potential as it appears to accuse "traditional" popular culture, rather than repressive regimes. Also, the uncritical acceptance of the original postulates of the Western born disability movement makes it impossible to ask the important question what disability rights should look like in a Southern non-welfare-state (Connell 2011:1371).

It is indeed doubtful that in countries where the majority of disabled (and non-disabled) people are deprived of safe drinking water, food safety, available medical care, possibilities of education, and the most elementary housing security, priority should be

given to claims for independent living and accessibility. Such discrepancies between the reality and the discourse explain why some radical disability theorists, like Meekosha and Connel[27] go as far as suggesting that certain uses of the human right framework in the Global South might be harmful, exacerbating problems rather than solving them.

The advantages of the ethnographic approach seem obvious. Ethnography gives the possibility to practically address all these qualms, bringing back the Southern perspective in disability politics, without idealizing it. Ingstad edited two volumes on disability and culture (Ingstad and Whyte 1995; Ingstad and Whyte 2007) of which each contribution proves that empirical and case per case investigation is vital to understand disability in different societies. These writings change preconceived ideas on so called "traditional" societies. "We have learned that in many cultures physical or mental impairment is not necessarily what determines the status and inclusion of a person in society. More important are family and kinship ties, competence in doing useful tasks for the good of the household and the ability to behave in a socially accepted manner. We have also learnt that when families are unable to cope with the care of a disabled relative it is more commonly the result of poverty, lack of support, and lack of knowledge about what can be done to improve the situation than a result of lack of love and negative attitudes" – Ingstad writes (1999). Not only do localised small scale ethnographic studies cast doubt on the validity of universalising statements about disability, they also offer sufficient safeguard against the inverse culturalist bias. Nor tradition, neither modernization explains the local emergence of disabled communities. Silla in his study on leprosy patients in Mali (Silla 1998) arrives to the same conclusion as I: disability culture is neither a foreign implant, nor a local tradition, rather the fruit of a dynamic co-creation assembling African and European notions, interpretations and attitudes.

It is indeed surprising how scarce empirical data, case studies and qualitative research are in comparison to the wealth of reports based on assumptions rather than on observations. This is a difficulty that I also faced during my research. In spite of the conspicuous presence of people with disabilities in urban settings, I have come across little research interested in the ways disabled people organize their lives and construct their collective identities in Sierra Leone. One notable exception is a volume on war

---

[27] "by concentrating on human rights, the problem (in the Global South) may be further exacerbated rather than solved." Meekosha, Soldatic 1985 :1385

amputees by Maria Berghs (Berghs 2013). The book gives an interesting overview on the principles of organisation of a particular disabled community. However, even this author shies away from tackling the question "what relevance the social model has in this context, what is its added value here?" In this way, although she finally comes to denounce the perverse effects of the disability rights frame, she fails to convincingly demonstrate how the framework acts in practice and how people belonging to disabled communities shape their strategies in response to, in accordance with, and in opposition to it. Her demonstration does not challenge the victimised identity of people with disabilities. Therefore she is unable to perceive the many ways in which the victims use their agency to cope with their situations, to defend themselves collectively against structural violence and to create "small circles of liberty" in which their identity is momentarily liberated from the spoliation caused by victimization.

Maybe the hesitation to revisit the dominant disability rights frame in the light of the observations can be explained by the sensitive nature of identity politics. Attacking its consensual foundation is conceived as risky because it easily casts its author on the side of the oppressors against whom the collective defines its identity. As for me, I am convinced that the critical re-examination of the adoption in the South of veridical discourses constructed in the North would not diminish the power of collective identity of disabled people in Sierra Leone. Quite the contrary, their identity could gain additional strength from the recognition of its own contribution to the differentiated understanding of disability across cultures. What is more, I believe that the recognition of the various resources polio collectives are able to mobilise might be an important contribution to the universal project of the emancipation of people with disabilities.

By looking for possibilities of agency and resistance within project society, I hope to be able to answer the question: what advantages do civil society, the human rights frame and identity politics offer from this point of view, where do their inherent limitations lie and how overcoming these limitations might become possible?

A few words finally on the terminology used: I am aware that in the tradition of the disability movement the terminology has prime importance. The expression "people with disability" is usually associated with the medical model, while "disabled people" is theoretically linked to the social model, although the literature is hardly completely consistent. I think I have made it clear that I do not have the intention to adhere

uncritically to any of the two paradigms; consequently I will pay less attention to the above distinction and will take the liberty to apply the two expressions interchangeably. Although I am quite uncomfortable with both of them, I do not have any another solution to the terminological problem as I have no alternative expression at my disposal. Ultimately, I must resign myself to the fact that no matter how much distance I try to take from dominant discourses, my own position is also strongly shaped by the limits which available models, words and images impose on the imagination.

Localizing global issues, globalizing local lessons

I hope my research will bear interesting contributions to the study of state-society relations in democratization processes, of civil society and of disability, but first of all it should be situated within the range of regional studies, bringing one more building block to West African research. For whatever it touches upon, my investigation is necessarily about political transformations in Sierra Leone - although from an unusual perspective: that of poor people living with disability.

Sierra Leone's modern history can be considered to be moved by two engines: the desire to catch up economically with more successful nations, and that of building the nation-state, according to the standards set by countries in the centre. By resorting to Wallerstein's opposition between the centre and the periphery I do not have the intention to imply that I have adopted fully the principles and methodology of world system analyses, but I have definitely the intention to draw on at least two major insights of this "knowledge movement"- as Wallerstein himself calls it. In a short conclusive chapter entitled "World-systems analysis as a knowledge movement" to the rich volume "Routledge Handbook of World System Analysis" (Babones; and Chase-Dunn 2012) he resumes the originality of his work, underlining the following points:

1, "The key element for me in world systems analysis is the emphasis on the unit of analysis – world-system rather than a state/society/social formation. The "world" is not at all synonymous with global or planetary but is simply meant to refer to a relatively large unit…within which there is an axial division of labour. We are talking of "a" world, not "the" world, as Fernand Braudel would phrase it."

2, The second key element for me is that "world-systems" (like all systems) are not eternal. They have lives. They come into existence; they pursue their historical

itineraries   within the framework of the rules that define and govern the system; and they eventually move so far from equilibrium that the system enters into terminal structural crisis. The crucial thing here is the argument that therefore all systems are historical as well as systemic."

I think there is definitely an advantage in not thinking about Sierra Leone as it was a lonely exotic planet commensurable only with itself. Whatever moment of Sierra Leonean history one looks at, it becomes soon evident that it is not possible to understand the historical processes without taking into consideration the complicated web of relations linking the country to different other parts of the world. Although these relations are highly diverse, until today the dominant link has always switched Sierra Leone in a system the centre of which is an alliance between Western empires (North America and Western Europe). Studying Sierra Leone and its transforming relations with its centre therefore implies studying indirectly the world system in which it is embedded. The centre-periphery relation works in this analysis as a rhizomatic pattern: the economic, political and cultural distance and domination has always characterized the relation of Freetown with the rest of the country, while the same inequality is being reproduced within the city – in Freetown without geographical implications yet – between the core, i.e. elite and the peripheries, i.e. impoverished and increasingly redundant population. "Favelizacao" or internal peripherization of the poor and working classes by limiting the access and visual presence of the slum dwelling population" (Lindsey 2012:350) is a recurrent feature of the "global urban".

It is not only that Sierra Leone is at present undergoing a social and political transition; it seems the whole system in which it is embedded is about to drift. While the peripherization of the poor is a global model to which the country wilfully subsumes, in other domains there is today a clear option to choose between adherences to competing centres. The possible outcomes of present transformation are not clear yet. While Sierra Leone is still talking an Amero-European political language, the axe of its economic development is increasingly shifting to the Middle and the Far East. These changes do not only reflect the changing emphasis in African politics, they also talk about the shifting balance of power in international politics and about the concomitant internal changes affecting Western political culture. In a way this book is not only about the

agency of poor and marginalized African subjects, but also about the crisis of project society.

II. Empiria and background(s)

Notes on the historic and political background

Sierra Leone is a small country in West Africa, surrounded by Liberia, Guinea and the Atlantic Ocean. The encounter of the people of Sierra Leone with the White Man left a traumatizing memory, which – according to Rosalind Shaw (Shaw 2002) – still lingers in local culture in the form of ritual and healing practices and images. The first European visitors were the Portuguese; their arrival in the 15th century introduced a dreary historical period: that of the Atlantic Slave trade - of which Sierra Leone became the centre, and in which Sierra Leonean chiefs became actively involved as providers of slaves. Slavery was also practiced locally, although most authors draw attention to the fundamental difference between the effects of domestic and export slavery (Alie 1990; Fyfe 1962). It is the dismal experience of the last form, switching Sierra Leone in the international trade of human bodies that had lasting effects on local versions and visions of modernity, marked by "the development of a landscape of terror and capture; the exchange of commodified people for imported money and goods; and the growth of new kinds of leaders whose power and wealth was derived from this exchange" (Shaw: 11)

The history of Sierra Leone remained entangled with slavery for centuries. International slave trade was banned by the British only in 1807 (although the practice still continued clandestinely for decades), while domestic slavery remained legal as long as until 1928. Modern Sierra Leone, as we know it today, was born out of a second encounter with slavery, in the reverse sense: freed slaves and descendants of slaves imported from London[28], Nova Scotia[29] and Jamaica were settled on the West Coast between 1787 and 1800. After 1807 "recaptives", i.e. slaves intercepted in illegal slave ships were brought back to the coasts and they joined the growing colony of Freetown, which became the centre of British colonization. Out of the mixture of different populations of African (as well as West-Indian and Asian) origin, influenced to a great

---

[28] the „Black poor" were in majority ex-slaves who had fought in the American revolution on the side of the British and received their freedom in exchange.

[29] Nova Scotia is a province of Canada, at the time under British rule, ships full of liberated Afro-American slaves were also sent to Sierra Leone, subsequently to the establishment of the Freetown colony.

extent by previous encounter with West European and North Atlantic culture was born a new population, possessing most of the characteristics of en ethnic group: a distinct language, a specific culture and a sharp consciousness of shared collective identity, based on the feeling of cultural superiority. In the new colony the Krios constituted the local elite on which the colonial administration could always rely (Cohen 1981). The British practiced a strange, half-way colonization, establishing full-fledged colonial rule only on the peninsula on which Freetown was established, while incorporating the "provinces" through commercial hegemony and by ruling on native populations indirectly, through local leaders, in principle free but in practice subjugated to the colonial administration. The administrative, cultural and symbolic dichotomy between Freetown – fully committed to Western values, and the "hinterland", preserving an ambiguous political, legal and cultural independence has survived independence and remains a distinct feature of Sierra Leone still in the area of the post-colony.

Sierra Leone remained part of the British Colonial Empire until 1961. Given its rich natural resources[30] it is supposed to be one of the world's richest countries, however, in the light of the figures it must be considered as one of the poorest ones. Its history from Independce to the outbreak of the civil war in 1991 can be resumed as a slow descent to hell. The political and economic post-independence squalor could be understood as the result of the tribulations of an unexperienced and highly corruptible African government left to itself, but rather the opposite is true. In reality Sierra Leone has never been abandoned by international forces. It has always been and it certainly still is the scene of multiple collisions between different foreign interests.

The story of its famous diamond illustrates this thesis. Indeed, diamond, first discovered in the early 1930s, has been always more a curse than a blessing. Diamond mines have always been exploited by foreign companies contributing relatively little to local welfare, except for a small circle. Official and illegal mining alike luring masses of young people with the hope of quick enrichment failed to pull the majority of them out of poverty. Diamond fuelled the decade long civil war at the end of the 20th century and until today mines often provoke violent conflicts between the local population and the management. Kono, the centre of diamond extraction, stands indeed as an emblem of the

---

[30] Of mineral resources diamond is the most famous, but other important resources include rutile, bauxite, gold and iron ore.

failed promise of mining. It is, in many respects, a visibly poor, underdeveloped district, even by Sierra Leonean standards.

Since 1982 Sierra Leone has been included amongst the world's least developed countries (LDC)[31], still occupying the 36th position in 2014[32]. It would probably be one of those forgotten corners of the world if it was not for the American film "Blood diamond" which made it sadly famous all over the world for its brutal civil war ravaging between 1991 and 2002. On a more positive tone, in the post-war era economic growth was reported at 15% in 2012; falling back by two points to 13% by 2013. The outlook of the economy was decidedly positive until the terrible backlog caused by the Ebola outbreak in the second half of 2014. Positive developments were felt in other domains, too: In 2011 the Mo Ibrahim Index record affirmed "that Sierra Leone is one of five crisis-affected countries making significant progress towards democratic governance"[33]. Optimistic views notwithstanding, the country continued to notoriously underachieve in most of the domains related to the wellbeing of its inhabitants. Life expectancy at birth stagnates around 50[34], and it has one of the world's worst indicators for infant mortality[35]. In 2012 it ranked 180th out of 187 countries by the HDI, 77% of the population was counted as poor, with 62% living daily on less than 1,25 USD. The income GINI coefficient was 62, 9%[36], picturing Sierra Leone as one of the world's most unequal societies[37]. Malnutrition in 2010 affected 300 000 children under five years[38]. In

---

[31] Least developed country is an officially attributed status by the United Nations to countries that exhibit the lowest socio-economic indicators and consequently in theory is entitled to special treatment as beneficiary of aid. As of 2014 48 countries are classed as LDCs, 34 of which are to be found in Africa, including Sierra Leone.

[32] http://www.un.org/en/development/desa/policy/cdp/ldc/ldc_list.pdf (accessed on the 9th august 2014);

[33] Sierra Leone 2011. African Economic Outlook. http://www.africaneconomicoutlook.org/fileadmin/uploads/aeo/Country_Notes/2011/Full/Sierra%20Leone.pdf (Accessed: 16.04.2012)

[34] According to Index Mundi in 2011 life expectancy at birth was 48 both for women and men. http://www.indexmundi.com/facts/sierra-leone/life-expectancy-at-birth (Accesssed 15. 09. 2014)

[35] According to Index Mundi, in 2014 Sierra Leone occupies the 12th worst position in the world with 76.64 deaths per 1000 live births
http://www.indexmundi.com/g/r.aspx?c=sl&v=29 (Accessed 15.09.2014)

[36] World Bank data show a much rosier picture with 35.4 only, but this listing still places Sierra Leone between Indonesia and the Kyrgiz Republic
http://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.GINI (Accessed 15.09.2014)

[37] International Human Development Indicators. UNDP. http://hdrstats.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/SLE.html. (Accessed: 16.04.2012)

[38] 300,000 children suffer from chronic malnutrition – UNICEF Rep. Awoko. http://www.awoko.org/2011/03/11/300000-children-suffer-from-chronic-malnutrition-unicef-rep/ (Accessed: 04.05.2012)

December 2011 Sierra Leone was included in the list of "countries requiring external assistance for food"[39] .

It all started well, however. There was a time when Sierra Leone was called the Switzerland of Africa and Freetown the Athens of Africa.[40] The strong feeling of national unity and a faith in democracy as well as in development - which characterised the change of the regime in 1961 - still lasted for a few years but below the surface the rivalry within the political elite was already undermining the state building project. Authoritarianism and state corruption were probably pre-programmed in the post-colonial political system anyhow, as the only two available models for governance were the colonial state, by definition oppressive, and the patrimonial regime[41] (Murphy 2010), the indigenous system of governance, based on clientelist networks. The combination of an authoritarian regime and economic plunder of the country's riches by a small, highly internationalized elite reached its paroxysm under the one party system introduced by Siaka Stevens in 1978. The one party rule was maintained until 1991.

Not only mismanaged by its ruling elite, some of the difficulties the new state had to face were of exogenous origin. The commercial structure inherited from colonial times making African economies serve European production with raw materials proved to be a heavy burden in an epoch where the price of raw materials was steadily falling on the international market. As the economy started to falter, the IMF proposed a stabilisation program for Sierra Leone as early as in 1966 (Rattan J. Bhatia 1969). It prescribed the reduction of the subsidies for the railways, road transport, and local authorities, the rationalization of expenditures on education and health services, the devaluation of the local currency, the reduction of the agricultural producer prices, combined with the restrictions to get new loans and the limiting of imports (Ibid: 513) – These measures seemed to have had an immediate positive effect on the budgetary imbalance. However, the positive result was to a great extent due to external factors and was largely counterbalanced by some worrisome developments: un-harvested crops and

---

[39] COUNTRIES REQUIRING EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE FOR FOOD. Global Information and Early Warning System. FAO, June 2012 http://www.fao.org/giews/english/hotspots/index.htm#SLE (Accessed: 03.07.2012)

[40] Because of the University of Freetown, Fourah Bay College, the oldest University in West Africa and because in Colonial times and shortly after Sierra Leone was a favourite vacation destination for rich Europeans, especially for French.

[41] A patrimonial political culture is based on chains of patron client relations, based on the capacity of the patron to sustain a large number of clients, who then support the patron with their work and by assuring him political support. More on the concept see. in chapter 7.

smuggling of food products to Liberia. With dropping purchase prices, rice producers preferred to give up production altogether rather than selling their produce at the reduced price. In colonial times Sierra Leone used to be a net food exporter. Within two decades of Independence not only did the country rely heavily on food importation, food production in general, and rice production in particular was deemed unsustainable. (Oakland_Insitute 2012). The country had to import rice from China. Cheap import further diminished the chances of national producers. As a result of these developments, in the first decade of its independence the country's foreign dependency was paradoxically, constantly growing, following a tradition that remained unbroken despite the political changes. The indirect rule the British established during colonial times is sometimes referred to as *mediated hegemony* (Cubitt 2013:10). It is a model of governance that, despite the changes that it has gone through during several centuries, remains remarkably stable. The indirect rule essentially was based on a hierarchical structure, the top of which was to be found outside of the country. This is what Bayart calls *extraversion* (Bayart 1993) In order to rule, the foreign power established mediators who were nominated to maintain order locally, being accountable to the colonial master, instead of their local constituency. The tendency of the national elite to turn to foreign political and economic forces in order to secure their power, continued after colonialism, and constitutes a constant until today.

The 70s will remain in our memory as the decade of the oil crisis. The price increase of crude oil in 1973 and the subsequent accumulation of "oil dollars" by the OPEC countries flooded the financial markets with cheap credit at a moment when countries of the periphery and semi-periphery experienced economic hardship. Sierra Leone was not the only country jumping at the opportunity; it only joined a growing camp of indebted poor nations. This camp would be pushed from the early 80s by the IMF to adopt its "structural adjustment" program, aiming at redressing the budgetary balance of economically failing countries by imposing neo-liberal economic reforms on them, encouraging privatisation and cutting of public expenditures. Austerity politics were understandably unpopular. Rulers, if they had the choice, opted for more authoritarianism in order to cling to power against growing resistance. That was also the style of governance chosen by Siaka Stevens, Sierra Leone's leader between 1968 and 1984.

Stevens was notorious for his dictatorial methods of governing, including executing rivals, supressing riots and demonstrations and silencing journalists and the opposition. He used external resources to consolidate his power, in the form of business investment, aid and loan[42]. Foreigners were drawn into the patrimonial chain, through privatisation of national assets in legal and illicit ways. Paradoxically, this trend was not stopped, rather exacerbated by nationalisation. Siaka Stevens made himself the centre of an influential business network composed exclusively of foreigners that he controlled entirely. Privatisation of public goods, centralisation of power and exteriorisation of dependencies reached a peak in the 80s, when Siaka Stevens' most important commercial ally, an Afro-Lebanese businessman succeeded in monopolising 100% of the country's exportation (Peters 2010).

Reno points out that integrating foreigners in the patrimonial chain was profitable in different ways. It made ruling much cheaper than by supporting a large basis of local clients. What is more, a too much empowered local client might always turn to be a potential political rival. This is not the case with foreigners (Reno 1996; 2009). The consequence of the double process of privatisation and extraversion was the effective exclusion of large sections of the population from the protection of the patrimonial regime and the accumulation of most of the resources in a very small elite circle, as redistribution was not necessary any more from the point of view of governing. While from an exterior point of view patrimonialism leads to corruption because it encourages squandering state resource, from an interior point of view, corruption is seen differently. For many Sierra Leoneans it was precisely the implosion of the patrimonial regime which exacerbated corruption, in the sense that redistribution affected more and more wealth within an ever shrinking circle. Thus, extraversion has contributed to exclusion, i.e. the production of a growing mass left alone to survive, attached neither to any protective landlord, nor to the state.

The international financial community also recorded the rampant state corruption and its ravaging social and economic effects. Considering privatisation as the only possible antidote against public waste, it prescribed to the government what it was already doing: further dismantling of the public sector. In a spiral in which more the

---

[42] „From 1970 to 1980 external debt increased from 59 million USD to 433 million". Bah, M. C. (2011) "Time to end Sierra Leone's dependency on aid." Sierra Express Media **Volume**, DOI: 16. May 2011. http://www.sierraexpressmedia.com/archives/23893 (Accessed: 05.05.2012)

country became indebted and the population impoverished, more the IMF pushed the government to harden its austerity policy, the generalized collapse of basic existential security and growing inequalities resulted in a dangerous political instability. "By the end of the 80s everybody agreed that there is no way out but the war" –one of my friends told me. Even if this view is probably an exaggeration, it reflects the generalised desperation that seized the country in the years preceding the war.

Under the direction of Fodday Sankoh, a former photographer, the RUF (Revolutionary United Front) started fighting in March 1991 on the eastern border. Sankoh was the personal friend of Charles Taylor, the warlord and future president of Liberia. Both men had been trained in Kadhafi's camps in Libya. Taylor had good reasons to destabilize Sierra Leone, as the country was then a base for the West African peacekeeping force, ECOMOG that was preventing him from seizing the Liberian capital, Monrovia. The access to the rich diamond fields of Sierra Leone was an additional reward for interference. Under these circumstances it is not surprising that Sankoh's irregular army could count on Liberian backing. It effectively incorporated NPFL[43] members, but also Burkinabe mercenaries and Guineans. It also received support from the Ivory Coast. The war was internationalised from the very beginning, with that it did not represent an exception in Sierra Leonean history.

It is usual to explain away the conflict by the greediness of local and neighbouring political leaders, big and small warlords wanting to put their hand on the country's fabulous diamond wealth. There is certainly truth in this explanation but it does not make the participation of ordinary Sierra Leoneans understandable. As far as the involvement of the Sierra Leonean youth is concerned, the looting of diamond was more a consequence of the war than its immediate motivation. When ex-combatants are invited to rationalize their actions they do not say they wanted quick money; they speak about the difficulties of living in the villages, harassed by corrupt local chiefs and express their rage at seeing the national political elite enrich foreigners while letting the population suffer from hunger (Peters 2010). The intellectuals of the rebel movement always portrayed it as an anti-imperialist war (Richards 1996). In different manners, all of these actors speak about the implosion of the patrimonial regime, which on all levels

---

[43] NPFL National Patriotic Front of Liberia. was the rebel group that initiated the civil war in Liberia in 1989, under the leadership of Charles Taylor, who subsequently became President of the country. The NPFL supported Sierra Leone's RUF (the Revolutionary United Front)

lost its most important control mechanism: the capacity of "communities" (from local communities to the state) to hold their leaders responsible.

Not surprisingly, fighting did not bring any solution. To the contrary, it aggravated the situation. It did not change the behaviour of the international community, either. In 1991 the World Bank offered new loans to Sierra Leone, with the usual conditions. While the schools, hospitals, even the obligatory vaccination of the children ceased to function properly and the roads further deteriorated, cutting off the hinterland from the capital even more drastically, World Bank officials continued to stress the need of more privatization. „This resulted in …(the) regime laying off approximately one-third of the remaining civil service, thereby further alienating the fragile patronage networks that remained" (Reno 1998:127). Privatization supported by the World Bank reached gradually other domains of national interest: "The Public Enterprise Reform and Divestiture Committee (PERDIC) presided over the privatization of the country's twenty-four state owned firms…The country's oil refinery was sold to a Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation… The port was to be privatized by Iranian firms…The Central Bank, as well as the State lottery got privatised" (Reno 1998:133). Even the state security forces were privatised when Executive Outcome, a private South African security company was hired to clean the country from the RUF, as badly paid regular army soldiers were regarded with suspicion both by the government and the population, who believed (with good reason) that soldiers often change their cap, joining the rebels in looting villagers. The increasing pace of privatization and the reforms were supposed to promote good governance, but they did not produce a more efficient state, rather a "*shadow state*" (Reno 1997; Reno 1998) i.e. a captured state totally alienated from its popular base, with no service to give, empty of any meaningful content; its only strength was that it managed to have its own sovereignty recognized by powerful foreign actors.

1995 retrospectively looks like a turning point in the course of events. Facing the growing destruction of the war and the spectacular failure of the structural adjustment policy, the international community decided to intervene otherwise than indirectly by monetary means. While in the first phase of the war, the UN cannot be said to have

played a decisive role[44]– progressively it started to visibly frame and orient politics within the country. In 1995 it sent in its special envoy. In 1996 the world organisation – under the pressure of the British and US governments - played a crucial role in imposing the elections on a vehemently opposing RUF. The elections ended with the victory of a former UN official, Ahmed Tejan Kabbah. The successful election did not mean the end of the war yet. Armed counterinsurgency was taken over by the Nigerian contingent of ECOMOG, the armed force of ECOWAS[45] when the contract with Executive Outcome was terminated. The newly elected government was weak. Only one year after elections, dissatisfied junior army officers created the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC), took the power and forced the President into exile in Guinea, inviting the RUF to participate in the government. AFRC soldiers and RUF fighters merged into a new *People's Army*, resuming fighting.

It took a strange alliance between the Nigerian contingent of ECOMOG, the British, who secretly supported the resistance despite an arms embargo and Civil Defence Force (CDF) - a confederation of local militias composed of neo-traditional hunters claiming to have magical power - to restore civilian rule. Kabbah returned to Freetown, but his government remained vulnerable. On the 6th of January 1999 AFRC and rebel fighters reached Freetown[46]. More than two weeks of intensive fighting followed, resulting in a death toll of 5-6000 people, many of them civilians, before joint ECOMOG and CDF forces managed to drive back the Junta's forces.

The brutal attack on Freetown shocked Western public opinion. Although long and violent, until that point the armed conflict could been seen as a bush war of limited impact. Now the UN reacted also militarily. In July 1999 a peace accord was signed in Lome. As part of the accord, the UN Security Council established UNAMSIL[47] and contributed a force of 6,000 peacekeepers, enhancing the international character of the local conflict, drawing in – among others - Indian, Jordanian, Ghanaian, Senegalese, Zambian and Bangladeshi troops (ICG 2001). When rumour took wind that rebels were

---

[44] The mandate of UN peacekeepers permitted only to protect themselves when threatened and to 'protect civilians in 'imminent threat of physical violence', just like in the Yugoslavian war

[45] ECOWAS is the Economic Community Of West African States. Its peace-keeping force is ECOMOG, the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group.

[46] This is how conventionally the events are presented, however it may be useful take seriously Keen's arguments according to which many civilians were to be found in the mob which attacked Freetown, besides the RUF fighters (2005)

[47] The UN peacekeeping force (United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone)

marching again against Freetown, civilians started a protest march. They reached Sankoh's house. His bodyguards shot at the crowd, and Sankoh, disguised as a woman, fled. In short time he was captured and taken into custody. The renewed talks on cease fire in Abuja[48] resulted in the agreement of an undefeated RUF to end the hostilities in return for demobilization and reintegration guarantees. The war officially ended in January 2002. In the elections following the peace agreement the incumbent President retained his post.

After a rather soft start, the UN remarkably upgraded its military presence by the end of the war, increasing its troops to 17 000. This engagement was probably the result of a decision to turn the Sierra Leonean intervention into a success story, after the mediocre performance of the blue helmet army in the Balkan war. But the intervention was not only about stopping the war; it was also about making the peace. With Mr. Kabbah's second presidency a new era started: that of peace building under the direct supervision of an international organization and its numerous bureaus and agencies[49]. Foreign intervention was not only inevitable but also desirable both in the eyes of the new government and the people of Sierra Leone.

The Abuja peace accord was highly inclusive, carefully redistributing compensation to all factions implicated in the war. At the end however, it was not implemented. Foday Sankoh was decidedly not an ally easy to cooperate with, but there was probably more to this failure. Times were changing and the attitude of the international community became in the meanwhile harsher, turning from inclusion toward impeachment. According to Cubitt who analysed with great precision the process and the outcome of the peacebuilding, the Abuja peace accord was one of the last specimens of inclusive peace agreements, so popular in the nineties. From this point legal interventionism became the norm through the establishment of international tribunals. Sierra Leone benefited from both measures, curiously it even had a third instrument of peace, the TRC (Truth and Reconciliation Commission), at first sight quite incompatible with the work of the Special Court. Although the three instruments were different in style, method and scope, they all served in their own way the sort of peace

---

[48] The Abuja agreement entered into force in May 2001

[49] UNIPSIL is, part of a bigger family, that of UNCT (Country Team), which comprises various UN agencies, funds and programmes, like UNDP, UNFPA, UNAIDS, UNICEF, WFP, WHO, FAO, UNHCR and UNIOSIL, as well as IOM, OHCHR, the Field Security Coordination Officer and the World Bank. http://www.daco-sl.org/encyclopedia/1_gov/1_4jsdp.htm

the international community desired for Sierra Leone, aiming at strong state structures, democratic process and economic reforms (Cubitt 2013:1), a combination known as "*liberal peace*" - an ideal built on the values of liberal democracies: "democratisation, accountability, promotion of civil society, economic liberalization and good governance" (Harris 2013:129). Sierra Leone, emerging from the war supposedly as a tabula rasa, craving for transformation, presented an exceptional terrain for the international community to experiment - almost like in a sterile laboratory - with the building of liberal peace. "Liberal peace reflects a radical developmental agenda for social transformation. In this case however this is an international responsibility and not that of independent or single juridical state" (Duffield: 11).

UNAMSIL was replaced by the United Nations Integrated Office in Sierra Leone (UNIOSIL) in 2005; in 2008 it gave way to the United Nations Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone (UNIPSIL). Like the previous ones, the new office was invested with „both a political and a development mandate"[50] The consecutive peacebuilding missions were not working alone; they were part of a bigger family, that of UNCT (Country Team), comprising various „UN agencies, funds and programmes", like UNDP, UNFPA, UNAIDS, UNICEF, WFP, WHO, FAO, UNHCR.... In addition to these, membership is also held by IOM, OHCHR, The Field Security Coordination Officer and the World Bank"[51]. The impressive institutional system of the UN - which was later joined by an arsenal of bilateral and transnational donors and Western NGOs - has launched an unprecedented modernisation wave, centred on the goal of democratic transformation and market liberalization. The significant role the international NGOs played in this transformation was not a random element of liberal peace building. Rather, their presence was essential in the creation of a new form of governance – which I call "project society". In the way I use the expression, project society is the societal and institutional frame of liberal peace. Although its constituent elements were there already before the end of the war, its full implementation could logically start from 2002.

On self-positioning

I think it is inevitable at this stage to explain, in a few words, where I am writing from. I am not an academic. While I am writing I am still responsible for a small civil society

---

[50] Cf. unmissions.org (Accessed in April 2013)

[51] http://www.daco-sl.org. (Accessed in June 2010)

organisation in Hungary. Thus, my interest in civil society is not an unbiased one. In this respect I am one of the natives. Also, I am European, a member of this large community so much used to be in the centre of World history. As a European, I am part of the colonizers. Even if I want to get rid of this heritage, the mixture of arrogance, Eurocentrism and shame which it is made of is too familiar to me, complicating my relations with Africans – and with myself. However, within Europe I am Hungarian, and as such, I have intense embodied experience of belonging to a semi-periphery, or rather of not belonging to the "superior civilization". Therefore I have informed empathy with anybody negotiating his relation with the centre from a peripheral position. This advantageous point of observation half way between the centre and the periphery allowed me to contemplate project society in Europe and in Africa simultaneously, making me sensitive to structural similarities beyond the geopolitical and historical idiosyncrasies.

In this case, temporality is not just an element of the context. The long term field work allowed me to do more than just making snap shots at a given moment; I followed processes, their transformations and – sometimes - their outcomes. But I understood only after six years that what I saw as gradual transformation was in reality a drastic shifting of the system. I did not only study project society but also its transmogrification into something else. The global and local dynamics, bringing fundamental changes in the rules of the game are part of my research, while being at the same time its broader frame.

I started fieldwork in 2008 with a 2 months pre-field visit, in the heydays of global project society, 20 years after my country had left the Soviet bloc, one year after the guard changing elections in Sierra Leone, in the year when the news on an unprecedented economic crisis shook the West. I remember reading an article on the plane to Freetown about a British man who committed suicide because he could not pay his mortgage. My African neighbour sitting next to me peeped in the journal and burst out in laughter. He was a member of the diaspora, decided to return home in order to take his share of the reconstruction, thinking it extremely funny that people in Europe can get so desperate for such little things. It was a time of optimism and unconditional faith in development in Sierra Leone, while in Europe the first drops of pessimism got already mixed in the victorious narrative about the hegemony of liberal capitalism.

Sierra Leone, by signing to the Lome Peace Accord in 1999, unknowingly joined a world system that was already in deep transformation.

The structure of the book reflects also the individual journey I made during my field work. After my first short visit, I returned to Sierra Leone in 2010 and was able to stay for 12 months thanks to a Wenner-Gren grant. Because fundamentally I was interested in intercultural relations within the field of development, I contacted an international NGO, Handicap International, asking them to allow me using their Sierra Leonean office as a first point of observation. I appreciate the fact they were open to my request, accepting the presence of a critical gaze. My official status was that of a volunteer, and indeed I tried to be useful, but I made clear that the objective of my stay was to make observations. I participated in team meetings, accompanied staff to field visits, and made interviews with NGO workers. I also mapped the network of international organizations involved in the same field, but finally I used very little of this material explicitly, not only because of lack of space here, but because in the mean time I discovered a network of Sierra Leonean civil society organisations and it seemed to me more interesting to describe the developmental relation from their point of view. Although throughout the book my familiarity with the INGO world only transpires sporadically, I believe this double perspective have implicitly informed the treatment of the whole material.

As time went by I made more and more acquaintances in local civil society and I consciously shifted the focus of my investigation. I mostly got connected to two different, partly interrelated networks: human rights-related organizations, and disability-related organizations. I participated in meetings, workshops and collective actions. I observed interactions of civil society activists in formal and informal circumstances. I also made another series of interviews with civil society leaders. All this demanded intense presence and communication, but it still only allowed a partial picture, because it did not open doors to everyday life.

A third phase of the field work started when I got regular access to the disabled homes. From this point my attention was divided between formal, ceremonial occasions involving the disability community and informal moments spent with members of the houses. This proximity conducted me to various unexpected places, allowing me to discover the Sierra Leonean society with them, through their eyes. With some disabled

squatters I went to school to arrange problems with teachers, I accompanied them to hospitals and to the mortuary; I spent time with them in police offices, tribunals, ministries, and even in the prison. From an observer I became part of some of the stories, in which sometimes I got deeply entangled, especially in moments of collective crises, such as evictions, police harassments and court appearances

This intimacy became possible thanks to my friendship with members of one particular local organization, One Family People (OFP). I owe them my discovery of the universe of the polio squats. OFP today is a respected and very busy (albeit somewhat atypical) NGO but I had the chance to make acquaintance with its founders at a moment when they still lived together with the squat dwellers and to be able to follow their incredible institutional ascension, which never cut them from the people whom they worked for - in quite an original way, most of the time with music and dance. OFP had formed a musical group in the polio squat and the band went on increasing, deaf dancers joining the polio-disabled musicians. They still play. Better and better. Paradoxically, just like my relation with HI remains hidden on the following pages, OFP does not appear explicitly either (except on the map of the institutional network). The reason for this is that I esteem they have become too close to me to have the objectivity necessary for a reliable ethnography. They are however present somehow behind each word I put on paper.

My original training predisposed me to a social anthropological approach, while in my NGO work I rely greatly on interactionist theories of communication. In my methodological approach I used both of these frames in a relatively liberal manner. During my fieldwork I paid attention to rumours, news in the media, call-in programs in the radio and informal discussions to identify subjects important for Sierra Leoneans. I was especially attentive to personal interactions, many of which were embedded in intricate stories. I spent hours and hours assisting to collective rituals where identities (such as "people with disability", "civil society", "human rights activists", etc.) under construction were put on stage in front of a cooperative audience. I was looking for dominant representations - and the narratives justifying them - in reports, project descriptions, training material, all sorts of documents belonging to the grey literature of the NGO world. I made interviews with NGO staff, civil society members and ordinary people living with disability. I followed civil society groups' interventions on the ground

and talked to people involved in these on the reception end. The two languages I used for interviews were English or Krio. When my interlocutor spoke none of these languages I resorted to a translator.

I even used a camera - by implication. I asked a friend of mine to accompany me to the field and film some of its moments. A camera was also lent to some of my polio-disabled friends and so the material collected contains images collected by them. In the analysis I used the filmed sequences, as well as my recorded interviews and field notes, but I know that at many times my understanding of the different situations was fed by long informal conversations with my friends, especially one, Lansana, who proved to be a real expert in about everything that was of interest to me and had a pronounced talent to interpret and explain complicated historical, political and sociological contexts.

As I was not working with research assistants, sometimes I had to rely on the help of my friends in other ways, too. At one point, despite exploiting a wide arsenal of qualitative research methods, I felt compelled to turn to numbers. By that time I had gathered a lot of stories, discussions, narratives, representations but I still could not make generalized claims about disability. I still had no idea about how many people lived in the squats, where they came from, how disability affected them. I became so frustrated that I decided to elaborate and conduct a small quantitative survey, the first in my life. I asked a trained statistician[52] to check the questionnaire I made and to process the data I collected. Door to door data collection was a real adventure, in which four of my friends gave me a hand[53]. The questionnaire I used made me discover an aspect of reality that had been hidden to me. I used the survey to answer three sets of questions. My first question regarded the prevalence of disability, within the polio-homes and in non-disability specific urban neighbourhoods. My second aim was to be able to compare aspects of life of disabled people living in the squats with those outside, in order to identify the collective effect on their life conditions. Thirdly, I used the questionnaire for another comparison, comparing the life chances of people with disability with the non-disabled population, in order to identify the hidden logic of discrimination.

The success of this exercise encouraged me to experiment with again a new

---

[52] The statistical calculation is the work of Balázs Szentes
[53] The method of the survey and its outcomes will be presented in more detail in subsequent chapters, namely in chapter 4, 5 and 6.

domain: network analysis[54]. All societies by definition are made by networks, but networking obviously makes the essence of social and political life in Sierra Leone, and the polio squats are not exception. In order to capture the richness and implications of their complicated web of relations I set off to systematically map their networks. Unexperienced as I was, again I had to ask for external assistance. A dedicated colleague helped me to visually represent the matrixes I created and gave me invaluable advices for the interpretation.

The writing bears the mark of this methodological eclecticism. I am aware that the variety of the approaches does not necessarily facilitate the reading, but I hope I can recompense my readers with my consistency in pursuing the same questions with different methods in the consecutive chapters, and by conveying them the fascination I felt discovering a world rarely spoken about: that of the polio-disabled squatters of Freetown.

The end of the one year fieldwork did not stop me from regularly visiting Sierra Leone year after year. I was there during the presidential elections in 2012 and saw how my disabled friends celebrated the victory of the incumbent president. I paid a visit again in 2013 and in 2014, just a few months before the Ebola outbreak. During the same summer the world witnessed a bloody return of the Palestine-Israeli conflict, an escalating war in Ukraine, on the borders of Europe, and the establishment of the new Islamic State which started its operation with cruel theatrical murders and ethnocide. Everything announced that the world was changing, but nobody knew in which direction. I also wondered how these changes would affect economy and politics in Sierra Leone, and what would be the impact on the polio-survivors. In the meantime Sierra Leone became the most affected country by the Ebola epidemics. Almost by miracle the disease did not decimate the squats, but life became even more difficult than before. I wrote my last chapters in this atmosphere. This fact probably explains why my analysis was getting more engaged as time went by.

A last word on names and places. I believe by the end of the book readers will also realize what I discovered in the field: disability is far from a clearly defined subject under the unequivocal auspices of human rights; it is a highly contested, politically

---

[54] The network diagrams were prepared by Márton Gerő, the methodology will be explained in detail in chapter 7

sensitive field wired by power relations. In order to protect my informants, I share personal information parsimoniously - wherever I do not judge it necessary, I refrain from disclosing names. Sometimes however names are unequivocally attached to organisations, places or situations. For the sake of an equal and undifferentiated treatment, I decided not to anonymize the actors where I quote them directly or when their identity is important for understanding the situation. Whenever I cannot avoid using a name, let these be personal or organisational entities, I give real names, those by which places, organisations or people are usually called (this can be a first or a second name, or even a nickname, according to the case). Full personal names are only given in situations when people appear clearly in their public persona.

Roadmap

The organization of the book reflects my personal itinerary as a researcher penetrating into an unknown world. In the first chapter I set the scene. I introduce the people who will be the protagonists of my story and describe the double framework in which they live: places being at the same time informal collective polio homes and formal grass-root organisations.

The second chapter opens a parenthesis. Leaving for a moment the question of disability, I turn toward civil society, to explore it as a broader unity encompassing NGOs, CSOs and the different subcategories of these. DPOs - disabled people's organisations - are part of this world. Their legal status is that of CSOs (civil society organizations), or of CBOs (community based organizations - themselves are a subcategory of CSOs), and this, despite the fact that some of the DPOs have only a fictional legal status, as they are not necessarily registered as such at the competent authorities.

Speaking about civil society the first difficulty is of a definitional nature. If we let go the formal, procedural definition, concentrating rather on the societal functions that *civil* society is expected to fulfil, the already rich civil society landscape starts swarming with groups, collectives and practices fulfilling the *civic* role of enhancing and protecting collective solidarity, contributing to the integrated nature of society. Many of these practices remain invisible for project society. The aim is not to confront formal NGOs and CSOs with informal forms of voluntary associations, neither to idealize traditional

forms in comparison to modern ones. Rather, I believe that broadening the concept of civil society helps us to understand the hybrid origins of present day civil society organisations, which - within the grasp of project society - seem to be the privileged depositories of the modernizing project.

In the third chapter I show how the idea of disability was progressively constructed, parallel to the formation of a collective identity taking place within different institutions. This process leading to the autonomisation of disabled groups was somewhat paradoxical, as in the formation of the collective identity pre-war institutions played a major role. Foreign charities started the practice of gathering people with the same type of disability in one place and it was this patronizing behaviour that ensured on the long run the *critical mass* (Silla 1998), necessary for the emergence of a collective solidarity, a common culture and an educational basis allowing self-valorisation. This identity formation was not linear, not even coherent. Each institutional system dealing with disability contributed to shaping it in its own way, until the disabled communities institutionalised themselves on their turn, transforming themselves and their self-managed places into registered DPOs.

The next chapter speaks about these places and the people populating them. It gives account of personal itineraries of polio victims. Despite the individual differences, these itineraries are crystallized around some common experiences: the advent of the illness, the acceptance of the impairment, the war and the participation in the disability community, but also of love, child rearing and family life. Defying all stereotypes, one salient feature characterizing the life histories of the mobility-disabled is their amazing geographical mobility and capacity to cross boundaries of social groups.

The life in the squats has got its own regularities, to understand these, it is important to understand the many social functions they fulfil: they are at the same time collective homes, economic unities, places of sociability and circles of solidarity. Polio collectives are often described by the political elite as the flaws of the city: as unhealthy, substandard places, constituting an obstacle to "normal" urban development. I try to present them in another light, showing how much life in the squats can be a resource for people who have very little external resources available to rely on.

In chapter 5 I deal with representations. I try to collect all the discursive forms used to talk about disability in different audiences. I show how "the proper way" to talk

about disability prescribed by international organizations and their local allies becomes a tool of cultural violence, apt to stigmatize those whose marking as Others gets wrapped in developmentalist discourses. I try to reconstruct the official view on the traditional beliefs on disability and check one of the main premises of the mainstream opinion about the existence of generalised discrimination against people with disability.

Although discrimination of people with disability seems to be evidence, I show how discrimination functions rather as a prefabricated thesis which precisely forbids formulating interrogations. When empirical data proving discrimination are demanded, these turn out to be scarce. To fill this gap I resorted to my own survey and I found no - or very little - sign pointing at systematic mistreatment of persons with disability by "society" as such. Rather, disabled people seem to suffer from structural violence maintained and obscured by the very authorities that charge the local culture with fuelling discrimination.

In the 6th chapter I confront the non verified hypothesis of discrimination with manifestations of structural violence, causing physical harm, denial of rights and the active production of disabled bodies by a mixture of physical aggression and denial of assistance to persons in danger. I also show that rather than "traditional beliefs", the belief system which causes the most harm is that of coloniality, fuelling contempt and violence against poor Africans amongst their own middle class compatriots. Although at first glance the distinction between discrimination and cultural violence might seem little more than pedantic hear splitting, I believe it is important to maintain the difference, because fighting discrimination do not call for the same form of interventions as fighting structural violence. Sensitisation and awareness raising might not be enough.

The last but one chapter is about politics. I describe how politicians use the squatters, how these exploit their relations with politics and how disabled people do politics with acts and words in their everyday lives. Because the dominant form of engaging in political struggles in Sierra Leone is *network politics* (Utas 2012) I felt it necessary to map the networks in which different disability organizations are embedded and make their political moves. This exercise helped me to clearly see what instinctively I had realized: I found that bellow the institutional level the politics of the organizations is highly personalized. My charts also make it easy to visualize the fact that polio homes - instead of constituting a negligible closed local universe - are part of a global web, which

individual homes turn ingeniously into a resource, in a collective fight against oppression.

In the last chapter I examine other strategies of resistance. I point to *translation* as a mode of survival in a world composed of parallel universes – a form of bifurcated existence characterizing the postcolony (Mamdani 1996; Mbembe 2001) . The polio-disabled of the capital use their double identity to resist threats targeting them. Having become masters in two contradictory languages – gang language and civil society language – they alternately use these to defy the power. In the discursive field produced in these ambiguous interactions, contestations are disguised as false consensus- hence my qualifying of the exercise as *quasi-translation*. This is a powerful strategy, but it is fundamentally double-edged, because of its vulnerability to be easily co-opted by the power. One way of emancipation I see possible would be to unwrap systematically the political claims made by the polio-disabled squatters in moments of crisis and elevate them to the level of consciousness. According to my understanding, such a method would inevitably lead to the subversion of the ambient human rights discourse, dislocating it from its current *identity politics* frame toward a more inclusive *right to the city* paradigm, as subversive statements refer to a universal urban citizenship rather than to rights distributed according to special needs.

In the concluding chapter I take stock of my main statements. I take the point of the end of 2014 to look back on the research and to draw my conclusions. In 2014 the world seems to be changing more rapidly than in the preceding four years. It looks inevitable that project society is changing too. There are many signs already pointing in such a direction. The Sierra Leonean disability movement in its present form, as part of project society, is probably also facing important changes. Immobility is not an option. This can be good or bad news. The decline of the old form of project society confronts all civil society groups - including disabled people's organisations - with a triple alternative: either they disappear, or they become puppets of conservative forces, or they assume their role as changers.

1. Casting

"There is a history to be written of the subjects of government. ...It is a little, variegated, multiple history of the objectification of human beings within the discourses that govern them, and their subjectification in diverse practices and techniques."

Nikolas Rose: Powers of Freedom

Parallel worlds

The 1st of December in 2010 was a busy day. The President invited civil society and the political elite to the Miata Conference Hall to celebrate World Aids Day with long speeches, fanfares and traditional African dancers. SLUDI, the umbrella of disability organisations way anxiously preparing for the International Disability Day, celebrated every year on the 2nd of December. This year IDD was bound to be really special, because the enactment of the Disability Bill in the Parliament was foreseen within a couple of days[55]. The whole disability world was burning in excitement, because it had been waiting for the Act for more than a year and now. Only a few hundred meters from where the President was speaking about AIDS, UNIPSIL simultaneously organised a huge Consultative forum on disability. It had been announced just the day before. To me it was not only surprising that UNIPSIL came up with the idea of organising an important meeting in such a busy period with such a short notice, it proved their complete disregard for those they wanted to involve. What is more, because the Bill was already before Parliament it was not even clear what the objective of a consultative forum could be. I did not expect a lot of people to show up. I was mistaken: the immense hall where the forum was held was in fact full; all the key actors of the disability field were present. People came even from the provinces. The crowd provided at least the visual effect of "representativity", although the participants in fact seemed to have no clue why they were there.

Disability activists were doing their best to be at the same time everywhere, running from one place to the other. Mohamed, member of the Grafton polio community, now a paid staff of one of the local disability NGOs was also obliged to juggle different

---

[55] Despite the expectations the Bill was not yet accepted by Parliament, it was only enacted in 2011.

obligations. In the morning he went to the office to help organise a few things for the next day IDD celebration, then he rushed to World Aids Day to listen to the President and also because he was hoping to catch the moment when his organisation's disabled musical group would perform. They finally never did, and the whole group was leaving frustrated and totally exhausted around noon. After the departure of the President (provoking a little skirmish at the gate, as police started to beat mercilessly the disabled beggars grouping hopefully around the presidential car), Mohamed decided to join his boss who was one of the speakers at the Consultative Forum. He was not lucky. When he arrived, the official part of the program was already over. The international community had left with their big jeeps. Only the disabled participants were there, waiting for the distribution of their lunch. Mohamed joined his boss, a young woman, and the two started to share their different experiences of the day. It was then that the employee distributing the food noticed him. She was an *able-body* Sierra Leonean, working at the Human Right Commission. She was persuaded Mohamed came to "profit" and without asking any question she started to shout at him, making bitter remarks about the "handicapden"[56] in general – a popular name for people with disability. As others commented the incident - intervened in defence of Mohamed, or to the contrary, supported the woman responsible for the food distribution - in no time a loud commotion formed which was in strange contrast to the solemn atmosphere of the official program which just had finished. The incident revealed the doubtful identity of the young man: he came to the forum as a disabled activist and was chased away as a disabled beggar. The transformation happened in less than a minute. Now that the hall was empty of official guests, the time for celebration of disability was over. Respected disabled participants shapeshifted themselves into what they were bound to be seen outside, on the street: disabled beggars, a potential public nuisance, waiting for the distribution of alms.

The protagonists: beggars on wheels

Freetown, 2010 September. It is Friday morning. The city is getting ready for the weekend. It looks even more crowded than other days. Most people wear beautiful, colourful dresses or elegant Western Style costumes, men might wear the *ronko*, a

---

[56] "den" is a suffix in Krio marking the plural of any noun

sleeve-less west-like jacket made of traditional striped woven country cloth. The city is busy, the traffic is dense. At PZ and Eastern Police[57] there are traffic jams formed just by pedestrians bumping into each other. *Okadas[58]* with their passengers are dangerously zigzagging trying to avoid humans and vehicles, forcing themselves through tiny passages between two trucks, but sometimes even they are condemned to patience. The *podapodas[59]* are advancing painfully in the human flow, packed with passengers and their loads, market women carrying their head-pans full of fish and vegetable in their laps, labourers loaded with bags of cement and various tools, office workers with their briefcases, students wearing their neat uniforms, everybody engaged in loud discussions, sharing the latest gossips, commenting on politics or the short lived scenes the street offers. The apprentices[60] are calling loudly the names of the destinations. The air is heavy with a scent made of human odours, dry fish and rotting garbage. Walking through this crowd, avoiding bodies and vehicles is an exhausting task in itself. One is constantly stopped by loud street sellers offering food or the most diverse petty objects – pictures of Obama, cigarettes, sweets, snacks, water, dvds, or just about anything.

Friday is the day of the beggars. Freetown is not an all-Muslim town[61], but the Muslim tradition of consecrating Friday to charity is deeply penetrated in the local culture, Muslim and Christian alike. No self-respecting person can make do without distributing at least a few coins to the mendicants, most of whom are visibly disabled. Beggars with different disabilities are part of the urban landscape as much as street sellers, *okadamen* and *podapodas*, but incontestably, it is the omnipresence of polio survivors that mark the most the observer. Most of the paralyzed are young men. They tend to station on the pavement in clusters, or move together in an impressive file,

---

[57] PZ is the name of a popular market at the Eastern end of downtown Freetown, Eastern Police can be considered as the Eastern edge of the city centre. It is an important junction, connecting Freetown to its Eastern outskirts

[58] Okada is the local name of the motorbike-taxis, which take an important share of public transport; especially on busy axes where other means of transport are slowed down by the constant traffic jams. Okada-drivers are usually young men of low social status. There is a widespread conviction that okadamen are ex-rebels, a stereotype based on the fact that during the re-armament program ex-combatants were consciously oriented towards the commercial sector, namely towards the moto-taxi business.

[59] A podapoda is the most common means of public transport. It is a small bus rearranged with simple wooden benches so that it can carry as many as 20-30 passengers at a time.

[60] A podapoda runs normally with two staff: a driver and an apprentice, who opens the door to the passengers, takes the money and signals the stops.

[61] The majority of the Sierra Leonean population is Muslim with an important minority of Christians. Official statistics enumerate „African tradition" as a third form of the religious, but I believe it is more precise to consider the African cosmology as a separate level, which coexist happily both with Christianity and Islam.

accompanied by even younger helpers. There are also groups of women - the gender division is apparently strictly respected; the groups are almost never mixed. Some of the women are young mothers, they hold their babies in their lap, bigger children can also help their mothers as "pushers". The youth of this population is conspicuous. A few years ago they would have been considered street children; today they are seen as "street boys" – a term indiscriminately comprising girls and boys living in the street.

The choice of the site for begging is crucial from the point of view of the economy of compassion[62] The alms can go from a few hundred leones to several tens of thousands. Pedestrians give less; "big men" or *bobobele* driving expensive cars are expected to disburse more substantial donations. Accordingly, the beggars try to occupy strategic positions. Each of them has their favourite spot. It is of course better to be in the city centre, by the main streets, or on Lumley beach, although the beach is a better site during the weekend than on a week day. A group of young men is squatting near the Bus Station, another one near the Cotton Tree[63], again another one before Choitram Supermarket. There are usually beggars on Pademba Road, on Campbell Street, near Saint John, but the busy Eastern part of the city is also a popular location for beggars, from PZ to Eastern Police and even beyond. Indeed, they seem to be everywhere and the practice of gathering in (sometimes large) groups make their presence even more visible.

In a film released in 2014[64], we see these people effectively as a mob they advance in the night like a mass, forming a shadow army, hobbling, limping, crawling and rolling painfully without – it seems – a definitive destination. The first sequence of the film is impressive, almost terrifying. Caught in panic, one cannot avoid asking questions: Who are these people? Where do they come from? Why are they so many? These are the questions I will seek to answer, trying to show that what might seem to a be a ghost army at first sight, is in fact a well organised community, far from living at the edges of society, rather integrated in different ways in the type of modernity Sierra Leone is striving to build on the ruins of the war.

Disability in Sierra Leone - what we may and may not know about it

---

[62] I owe the expression to Professor Dafinger
[63] The Cotton Tree is not just a common tree; it is the unofficial centre of the city, the symbol of Freetown.
[64] *Shado`Man*, is a film by Boris Gerrets

There is relatively little objective information available based on empirical research on who the disabled people are in Sierra Leone and how they live[65]. The only available national statistics, the 2004 Population and Housing Census[66] (Statistics_Sierra_Leone 2004:29) reports 119,260 people with disabilities corresponding to as little as 2,4% of the total population. In subsequent studies, papers and speeches this figure has been generally considered as largely underestimated, the error attributed to the method of data collection. Nevertheless, the census is regularly cited, as it is the unique available national reference point.

Because of the unreliable nature of this figure or because it fails to support the intuition that "the percentage is probably much higher, following a decade of a cruel civil war and carnage resulting in the mutilation of thousands of children, women and men" (Agbovi 2010:9; World_Health_Organization 1981), instead of local statistical data, the world-wide estimation of WHO is usually used to legitimate disability activism (World_Health_Organization 1981). WHO estimates the proportion of people with disabilities in the world to be 10%. If 10% is the average[67] – the argument goes – it is reasonable to suppose that the occurrence in Sierra Leone (known as "one of the world's least developed country", "ravaged by the war") is much higher. That is all we know.

Partial, localized surveys confirm the perception that disability is a problem affecting larger numbers than assumed by the census. According to FAO (2004 December)[68] the percentage of disabled people is 4,5%. A UNICEF report (2007) establishes that 23% of the children are disabled. These figures nonetheless do not originate from a systematic door to door survey. One such empirical research was conducted by the international charity Leonard Cheshire Disability (Trani and Osman Bah 2009). It collected information in five districts, focusing on towns and villages in urban areas. The authors found that 17,6% of their sample population had some kind of

---

[65] The only systematic anthropological description of a disabled community in Sierra Leone is the work of Maria Berghs. Shivji, Issa G.
    2007   Silences in NGO discourse: The role and future of NGOs in Africa. Oxford: Fahamu.
[66] Although the analytical report of the Statistics Sierra Leone (2004) counted 119 260 people with disability, in subsequent citations the figure has systematically become 130 000
[67] This figure has ever since been re-evaluated. In the latest Disability Report published by WHO 15% of the world population is estimated to be living with some sort of disability. Corker, Mairian, and Tom Shakespeare
    2002   Disability/postmodernity : embodying disability theory. London ; New York: Continuum.
[68] UN Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). 2004. "Disabled in Sierra Leone Prove Disability Is Not Inability." FAO Newsroom, December 2004. http://www.fao.org/newsroom/en/field/2004/51804/index.html; Accessed: June 2011

functional difficulties possible to interpret as disability, but only 4,4% admitted to having severe or very severe difficulties.

Facing this uncertainty I decided to conduct personally a minor survey[69] between September and October 2011 in the Western Area[70]. Because I was looking for answers to both demographic and sociological questions, I designed a rather complicated device that I tested in two types of settlements. I developed two questionnaires. The first one was to be addressed to household heads and its purpose was to identify the composition of the households, filtering out any member that the informant would identify as belonging to a category which can be assimilated to a handicap. In other words, I did not ask if there was any disabled person in the household, but rather if there were anybody having some functional difficulties (hearing, speech, visual, mobility, communication and learning). This question obviously allows highly subjective answers, but I believe it still produces more reliable results than interrogating people about a category they do not necessarily use: disability. In a second phase a more exhaustive questionnaire was taken with the interviewee, addressing different aspect of his/her living conditions. If there was a disabled member in the household the same questionnaire was taken with him or her. The objective of the procedure was to generate data allowing comparison between the life standards of disabled and non-disabled people living in the same environment. I was also curious to find out the impact of collective living on life chances of disabled people. Therefore I reproduced the same data collection technique in two sets of settlement: in 3 randomly chosen urban neighbourhoods and in 3 self-managed polio homes. This was a heroic enterprise but I was lucky to be able to count with valuable helpers. In the field, 4 friends of mine helped me do the door to door survey in the selected areas. I also had an on-line assistant, a statistician with whom I could consult amply and who finally analysed the collected data for me. With this technology we gathered data altogether about 1642 people, out of these we made questionnaire-based in-depth interviews with 366 persons. In this chapter, dealing exclusively with basic data on disability, I only use demographic data collected in the three urban

---

[69] The survey included 6 communities, 3 "polio homes" and 3 urban neighbourhoods. See more on the survey in Chapters 4,5 and 6.
[70] The Western Peninsula is administratively divided into the Western Rural and Western Urban Areas. Freetown is part of the later.

neighbourhoods[71] in order to compare occurrence of disability I found with other available statistics. In the three settlements only we collected data on 1162 persons, of which 76 (i.e. 6,5%) was found to have some sort of disability.

While doing the census, I faced the same difficulties that others did before me: I had to realize that in order to ask questions about disability I had to construct first an idea about it and accept that this idea will inevitably be reflected in the answers. This methodological tautology produces a high level of uncertainty, which affects international statistical data and makes national comparisons a risky enterprise. Consider for example that in 2000 the occurrence of disability in the USA was found to be 19,4 %, while in the same year in Mexico it was only reported at 2,3%, similar to Botswana in 2001 (Ovadiya and Zampaglione 2009).

Clearly, survey data cannot be expected to give fully accurate information. But they do something: with the use of numbers they create the commonsensical idea that disability is a universal quality, a category that exists out there, ready to be captured and used for comparative purposes without any problem of translation; it justifies a "whole regime of enunciation... which accords salience to particular categories, divisions, classifications, relations and identities"(Rose 1999:29).

Given the inconsistencies of the available statistics, it is quite surprising how much the figures are trusted and used as a scientifically consolidated foundation for advocacy and intervention. Being aware of the methodological difficulties, I do not trust my figures any more than any of the available data, but I do not trust them less either. At least I could keep control on their production. In any case, I believe they might serve to crosscheck figures produced by others. In my experience, in the lack of a validated national survey, small scale surveys are more reliable, because they are usually realised with greater care. Their generalizability are however limited. In my case, for example, it should be remembered that at best they reflect an urban situation, characteristic to areas inhabited by lower strata of the population of the capital.

My figures suggest an occurrence of disability higher than it is reflected by the 2004 National Census or by the FAO, but lower than the estimation based on the figures

---

[71] The three (non disability specific) areas where the survey was taken are : Aberdeen, Kroobay, Kissi Dockyard. The big sample taken with the household heads identified 1161 people, 298 in Kissi Dockyard, 233 in Kroobay and 630 in Murraytown/Aberdeen, respectively the disability prevalance was: 4,7%; 4,3% and 8,3% .

of the WHO. .It would be, in any case, more prudent to say that the numbers at best show that a considerable proportion of people are seen as sticking out from the ordinary in their communities, with symptoms that – in an idiom which is different than the one they themselves use - are assimilated to the category of disability. As far as polio is concerned, for sure its high visibility is caused by the existence of specific disabled communities in Freetown, rather than by the overall importance of its general distribution. This observation leads to new questions about the high concentration of disabled beggar communities in Freetown. There is an easy hypothesis according to which this is the result of mass rejection and exclusion of people with disabilities from their communities of origin. A competing hypothesis would identify rather structural and historical causes inherent in the development path of Sierra Leone. In the following chapters I will try to give an answer, follow both trails.

WHO 1981	Statistics 2004 SL	FAO 2004	UNICEF 2007	L.Cheshire 2009	Szántó 2011
People with disability estimated	People with disability	Disabled persons	Disabled children	People living with disabilities, including severe disabilities (urban settings)	People identified with some forms of difficulties (urban settings)
10%	2,4%	4,5%	23%	17,6% 4,4%(severe)	6,5%

1. Figure Comparative statistical data on people with disability in Sierra Leone in different resources

We can suggest that if any census of people with disabilities is always flawed by uncertainty the profiling of a disabled population within a given census is necessarily more reliable, because data collection is at least internally coherent for the population participating in the counting. If in the statistics the group of disabled people is ever broken down into further categories, it is usually according to such "natural" characteristics as the type of disability, sex and age. This does not really help us to completely understand who the disabled people are in Sierra Leone, but it allows deducing some general tendencies. In the National Census it appears that there are more disabled men than women (52,6% vs 47,4%) in a society where women are slightly overrepresented[72]. I found a seemingly more balanced gender distribution (50%-50%), but this division has to be understood in the context of an overrepresentation of women (with a men vs. women ratio of 48,7% to 51,3%.). Because of this distortion 6,7% of the men are disabled as opposed to 6,4% of the women.

Regarding the age distribution, the National Census (2004) affirms that the most important age group amongst the disabled population is that of the "25+". This is of course a strange age group with an open ending, lumping together everybody between 30 and 80 years of age; as a consequence, the high prevalence of disability amongst them

---

[72] (the general male-female population ratio being of 95 to 100 as stated by the World Bank Ovadiya, M. and G. Zampaglione (2009). Escaping Stigma and Neglect. People with disabilities in Sierra Leone. Working Paper. Washington, World Bank.

is not surprising, as we know that disability becomes more probable with age. The second largest category, however, was that of the 5-14 age group, i.e. the generation that was born immediately before and during the war. In my own survey I created age categories by decades (for example from 11 to 20, from 21 to 30, etc) I found that the two most important age groups among people with disabilities are those between 41 and 60 (12,6%) and those between 61 and 80 (27,9%), these two age groups making up for a little more than 40% of all the disabled population. Thus, whoever the disabled are in Sierra Leone, they have slightly more chance to be male and to be relatively old. The fact that the probability of disability increases with the age is not a Sierra Leonean specificity and the figures suggest that that despite the terrible consequences of the war and the ravaging of childhood diseases, ageing has still a stronger disabling effect, even there. This description certainly does not fit the polio community, well visible in the streets, considerably younger than the overall "disabled" group. This recognition must reinforce our vigilance: when we are talking about people with polio we are not necessarily talking about the whole group of People with Disability; these are two, demographically distinct populations!

Making a case for polio

Speaking of disability in general, lumping all the types of impairment together hides also the fact that in all the statistics physical disabilities are overrepresented. In my own census 50% of people identified as disabled have difficulties with using their legs. 29,5% have visual problems and 24,5% have speech and hearing difficulties. This fact points at the importance of mobility disabilities, which are of course the most visually identifiable disabilities.

In the National Census the largest fraction of all the people with disability is constituted also by those who have limited use of limbs (27%). Surprisingly, difficulty using the leg was found to be the most common form of impairment by the census amongst those between 5-14 years. The most probable causes of physical disability at this age, a few years after the end of the civil war are wilful mutilation by one of the fighting factions, other wounds suffered during the war and poliomyelitis. No reliable data exist allowing differentiation between these types of damages. Although the existence of war victims with upper and lower limbs amputated is regularly cited as a

major cause of disability, in reality the numbers known are relatively low as compared to other factors. The government estimates the number of surviving amputee victims between 1,000 and 3,000. (Ovadiya and Zampaglione 2009) The National Census found that the „war accounted for about 11% of disabilities among males and 8% among females". 11329 people were found disabled as a result of the war, while 53952 contracted disability after birth because of illness, (this group accounting for 45% of all the disabled). Combining these different figures, the most common type of disability is related to physical impairments leading to limited use of the limbs, as a result of illness contracted after birth. That makes poliomyelitis the most probable suspect responsible for most cases of physical disability not related to ageing.

Poliomyelitis is a disease caused by a type of enterovirus which attacks the nervous system. It might lead to partial or total paralysis. Most cases occur amongst children between 3 and 5 years old. Although in a lot of cases the infected person develops no symptoms, it might lead from mild symptoms like fever, headache and vomiting to irreversible paralysis - usually in the legs -within a few hours[73]. Usually polio is contracted by faecal-oral transmission, so small children at the age of crawling and playing on the ground growing up in poor countries with bad hygienic conditions are particularly in danger. At the same time, exposure to the virus might naturally lead to self-immunisation. Paradoxically, the polio epidemics in the USA and other industrialised countries during the 40s and 50s of the last century resulted from improved health conditions leading to a decrease of self-immunisation (Renne 2010). There is no cure but vaccination has become generalised from the 70s all over the world, including the developing countries. In 1988 the Global Polio Eradication Initiative began. However, in 2014 poliomyelitis is still not considered completely eradicated. According to the WHO polio remains endemic in three countries – Afghanistan, Nigeria and Pakistan. There are nevertheless many more countries where polio still occurs sporadically.

In Sierra Leone - evaluation of needs and systematic immunisation have been started in the early eighties (Adcock 1982) but immunisation has never been complete and outbreaks have been regularly reported from the region. The last one affecting

---

[73] http://www.polioeradication.org/Dataandmonitoring/Poliothisweek.aspx (accessed : 15th August 2014)

Sierra Leone dates back to 2009,[74], and that despite confident evaluations of WHO, which in 2007victoriously affirmed that for the two preceding years "no case of wild poliovirus was found in the country" (WHO 2007). Random encounters with polio affected children in the streets of Freetown warn that the wild poliomyelitis virus might not have been totally eliminated of in Sierra Leone until today.

Official statistics exist on reported cases, but not on the number of survivors. There are however a few indications signalling the importance of poliomyelitis. In an otherwise rather uninformative article, a medical anthropologist estimated the prevalence of polio cases to 3-1/ 1000 in the total population and of 3-9/1000 in the age group of 5-15 (Adcock 1982). Following the author, for a population of 3 200 000 (data for the 1980s) there should have been grossly between 3200 and 9 600 cases in the country, with a much higher occurrence among young people. Although these numbers do not have to be taken more seriously than similar statistical data based largely on estimations, they certainly point at the relative gravity of the problem. Adcock researched polio before the war. There is no reason to believe that during the war the situation could have in any way improved.

It is all the more surprising that in reports and policy documents concerning disability poliomyelitis is hardly mentioned specifically. In their 2007 report, the notion of disability seems to evoke nominally only one group for the WHO: that of the amputees - their number put to 7000 (Ibid: 13). This is one of the highest estimation for the number of war amputees (Other estimations are considerably lower.) The dreadful imagery of war amputees sticks strongly to Sierra Leone until today; it did and still does exercise a horrified fascination on the international public. Poliomyelitis, which is only indirectly related to the war, and does not have the same awe inspiring connotations, does not provoke the same interest, despite the fact that it probably concerns more people.

Sickness has changed the life of thousands of young people, but their shared experience is not limited to their medical condition. Almost by definition, polio victims come from poor families; first because the majority of them were born in the provinces, which – because of the serious rural-urban divide prevailing in Sierra Leone –

---

[74] http://www.polioeradication.org/Mediaroom/Monthlysituationreports/2009/August.aspx (accessed : 15th August 2014)

constitutes in itself an important socio-economic handicap; second, because, more well-off people had more chance to secure the obligatory vaccination for their children before, and even during the troublesome years of the war. Another fact of life polio victims share as a result of the conflict and the subsequent migration is the explosion of family ties and the dismantlement of other caring institutions which had protected many of them before the armed conflict. Between 1991 and 2002 many polio victims became destitute refugees in their own country drifting from one place to the other by the whims of the fighting. Many of them took to the road fleeing the devastated provinces to the relatively secure capital. They came to increase the number of the already growing population of the urban poor.

Unlike others within this large group, polio-survivors had a special resource: a collective identity allowing them organising themselves in order to find a place to live, to stay alive in the city. They established – by force, by perseverance and by negotiations – collective homes which assured shelter not only for themselves but for many non-disabled friends and helpers whom the disabled organisers patronized. The collective appearance of the beggars in the street is only the reflection of their collective existence organized in disabled homes and squats, hidden from the passers-by. This is the story of the protagonists of this book. But this is certainly not the only possible way of living with polio. I have met with polio victims elsewhere than in the squats.

Abu, for example lives with his parents, he goes to a senior secondary school. His oldest sister is a school teacher and he would like to follow her example. He has heard about disabled people's organisations, but he has never been interested in joining one. It is more urgent for him to find out how to raise money for the university. He hopes that his uncle living in the United States will help him.

Aminata is less lucky. She has never gone to school. She was raised in one of the many shantytowns of Freetown - together with a dozen of siblings and half siblings - by her grandmother who supports the family by selling char coal. The bigger children help her. During the day Aminata stays with the smaller ones and does the cooking. She has never thought of doing anything else, and probably she will never do. It is not disability that retains her, rather her general condition, the same condition she shares with her sisters, as well as with most of the neighbours in her very poor neighbourhood. Despite disability and poverty Aminata is not worried about her life. She thinks she will get

married. But for the girls she knows getting married generally means nothing more than getting pregnant and then in little time being abandoned to take care alone of a child. The idea of disability does not mean anything to her. She does not need a special word to name it. "I am just like that" she simply says.

For some "being like that" is just an additional burden in an already hard life shared with a community that does not designate a special place for disability as long as it does not stop the person from accomplishing useful tasks. For others it is like a dark prison, closing all the doors. Christiana belongs to those for whom disability is an unbearable calamity. I met her in a remote village sitting silently on a wheelchair which had lost its wheels a long time ago. She was staring ahead with a totally empty expression. I guessed that she had been sitting like this day after day, and all she expected from the future was an endless repetition of the day before. Her unique companion was her aged mother who was sitting next to her in the same timeless passivity on the veranda of their decrepit house. Christiana went to school in the village and she still dreams about continuing her studies, a possibility from which she is cut off by the exact distance between her home and the next town. I took a taxi to make the journey in the inverse direction; it took me less than an hour. For Christiana to make this trip is not more realistic than an excursion to the moon. She does not lack the will, nor the support of her mother, nobody from the village stops her, even the school would be open to her. But to raise the money for the daily transport is impossible for her. Christiana is not suffering from discrimination but from neglect. She is neglected not by those close to them, but by the far away State and by that NGO that had supplied her first wheel chair before their programme closed, leaving her without a solution to get a new one.

Besides poverty, there is another common point in the three personal stories above. Instead of speaking about massive discrimination and systematic exclusion, they all point at the tremendous importance of family support and care. I do not want to generalise about disability. Different types of impairment produce different types of social response. Even within the community of the polio victims, there are undeniably other stories to write about. There are children crawling on their hands or jumping with the aid of a stick persecuted and laughed at by the village kids, there are children abandoned by one or both of the parents because of their disability, there is contempt,

animosity, disdain to be faced. Still, it would be profoundly unjust towards Sierra Leoneans as a whole to negate the fact that most of the stories are about solidarity and care, showing an astounding capacity of the society to produce a safety net- in the place of missing structures - around people who need extra attention.

Take Abdul, constrained to jump on one foot, while his other crippled leg, bent at the knee, is hanging uselessly as he moves painfully. He is an orphan. His parents died during the war when he was almost only a baby. He was left without any leaving relatives. A neighbour in the village adopted him and raised him until he became a young teenager. Then a man came around and met the boy. He convinced the foster parents to give him the child so that he can take him to the city. The man is disabled himself; he lives in one of the polio homes of the capital. Although he has other children to feed, he has taken good care of his new foster son. In the polio home Abdul has learned a bit of blacksmithing, on and off he goes to school, learning at least the basics. This is not a happy ending, Abdul has still a hard life, but without a strong sense of collective responsibility of fellow Sierra Leoneans he probably would not be alive today. Within and without the collective homes, the polio-disabled do not live on the margin of society; they are part and parcel of it, for better or worse.

Polio - a mode of living

The polio disabled homes, as we know them today, are relatively recent social formations. During the last years of the war, zones of protection were established in Freetown to host refugees, war victims, amputees as well as polio victims. After the war the amputees and the war wounded were offered modest compensation and they benefited from several resettlement programs. Unlike other war affected categories the "polio generation"[75] never received any compensation[76] or public aid to help their post-

---

[75] The "polio generation" is metaphoric term I use to describe the population of the polio-disabled of Freetown. It is justified by the relatively homogenous age distribution of those living in the squats. The squatters' average age is around 20 years.

[76] The Lomé Peace Accord (1999) foresaw the establishment of a special fund to support the rehabilitation of war victims. The TRC (2004) also recommended a monthly pension for all war wounded. However the government lacked the necessary funds and maybe also the political will, consequently compensation started late - in 2009 – and it remained partial, unsystematic and slow. "Reparations to victims came in the form of housing, skills training, health care, education and agricultural assistance, as well as symbolic activities such as reburials, memorials and remembrance ceremonies." Peace Accords Matrix, Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies, University of Notre Dame. https://peaceaccords.nd.edu/matrix/status/15/reparations (Accessed: 09/05/2014)

conflict reintegration. They had to cope otherwise. Their strategy was staying together and using their collective force to put pressure on the central or local government in order to secure places where they could settle. Several self-managed polio communities were formed in this way within the city and on its Eastern outskirts. It would not be entirely wrong to qualify all of them "squats", because of the insecure land entitlement most of the disabled groups hold. Accordingly, I use the terms "home" "house" or "squat" interchangeably.

Although these places rapidly multiplied, they could not host all the polio-affected displaced. Many of them became simply street dwellers. Today, some of those who started in a disabled home live in their own houses and have respectable social positions but notwithstanding, the majority of street dwellers and squatters still rely on begging for primary subsistence. This is a population counting several thousands in Freetown[77] alone. They are extremely visible on multiple counts - because they live, move around and beg in groups and because they have very noticeable physical characteristics. They are identified by street walkers and sometimes they identify themselves as "cripulden" or "dregmanden", (cripples and beggars), the two qualifiers linked together inseparably. Although, of course, not every poor disabled person lives from begging, somehow the combination of poverty and disability makes all of them a potential "disabled beggar" in the eye of outsiders and they are treated accordingly. In short, poverty and polio seem to go hand in hand.

The geography of poverty

Whoever has read the *Heart of the Matter* by Graham Green might remember that the sociological profile of Freetown was shaped by its geographic and climatic conditions. White colonizers - and following them the well-off Krios - settled voluntarily on the slopes of Lion Mountain, on the Northern peak of the Western Peninsula. The early pattern of settlement set the model for later urban development: the Eastern part of the city still hosts the more popular districts, while the residential areas are found mainly in the West. This is a good first approximation to understand the city, despite the fact that today it is quite difficult to find any neighbourhood from where poverty is totally excluded. The war reorganized considerably the urban geography and although

---

[77] I understand Freetown here together with its periurban area.

the carcasses of burnt out houses have been largely replaced, the memories of the war can still be read in most aspects of the city: in the bumpy roads, the dark nights without electricity, the unfinished constructions abandoned half way, but most importantly, in the ostensible poverty visible everywhere on the streets. The majority of the urban poor are internal migrants who fled the atrocities of the war, the hopelessness that preceded it and the misery that followed it. Many of these people sleep in the streets, but those who do not, usually live in extremely bad housing conditions. The zero degree of housing is the *panbody*. Panbodies are makeshift shacks, fabricated with whatever is at hand: wood, tarpaulin wood or zinc, although zinc in this world counts already as a sign of relative wellbeing. They are usually not bigger than a tiny room, but there are rather spacious panbodies, too, which can accommodate several families. One consequence of the war is that there is basically no panbody-free zone of the city. Behind and among the newly built villas abounding on the slopes of Wilberforce, Lumley and Hill Station (the historically wealthy areas of the city), all around the much poorer East, even in the city centre: there are panbodies everywhere. As a consequence, at first sight it is not easy to tell a slum from a standard urban neighbourhood. The main difference is that slums are bigger and more homogenous territories of concentrated poverty. According to the municipality of Freetown there are currently[78] about 29 slums – or as they are more politely called: "informal settlements" - in Freetown. The most important ones can be found near the sea or on the steepest hill sides where there are neither proper roads, nor safe water provision.

Once a small town of merely 200 000 inhabitants, Freetown today is a town of more than 2 million[79]. The population growth has been dramatic and it would have been difficult for the capital of a post-conflict country to follow it with infrastructure development even if housing had been a priority for policy makers. But there are many signs that it has not been so. Even the UN Habitat ceased to support large scale housing, after the closure of its "Support to Resettlement and Reintegration Programme"[80], leaving as its major legacy the yearly held Habitat Day, organized religiously by a handful of old school civil society activists, to whom, each year Habitat sends a few T shirts to distribute.

---

[78] Interview with the Deputy Mayor September 2011
[79] An estimated number, given by the Deputy Mayor during the interview
[80] http://ww2.unhabitat.org/offices/roaas/sierraleone.asp#b (Accessed 20 July 2011)

As the population pressure grew, rent prices have naturally skyrocketed. To make things worse, rent prices for the poor followed the rising rent prices for the rich, which were based on the purchase power of UN officials and NGO expatriates, making Freetown by the end of the 2000s – at least for foreigners - as expensive a place to live as Paris or London. Even though the expatriate population was not in competition for rent under a certain standard, the price increase filtered down to the lowest levels, also because the local staff of international organizations could afford to pay a bit more to be closer to their workplace located in the West. At the end of the day, however, most of them had to make a compromise and search for a place far on the East end if they did not want to pay all their salary for accommodation. Podapodas collecting market women and NGO employees in the East got crowded as early as 4 o' clock in the morning. Such early rising was necessary because the only road connecting the two ends of the city became totally congested during the day and a short trip of a few kilometres could last for hours.

The housing penury made poor families fight desperately for a roof. They captured pieces of land wherever they could and built whatever they could on them. This was a dangerous enterprise because the land tenure system is particularly muddled. There is no reliable cadastre system and a piece of land is often claimed by several owners at the same time, sometimes these including not only private self-proclaimed owners, but even the state or traditional authorities. As a result, a house built with all the savings of a family on an occupied land – or alternatively on a previously acquired land – is constantly in danger of demolition. When the real (or self-proclaimed) owner of the land arrives he/she usually does not find it difficult to drive the dwellers away.[81] These move on, negotiate with new agents, pay new prices, bribe local chiefs and government officials, build again, probably a smaller and more miserable house, just to find themselves evicted again in short time. This was a common scenario in 2008 and this situation had not changed by 2014.

However, as time passed, the city was slowly transforming. Not that poverty would have gradually disappeared, it was still there, but next to it, affluence became

---

[81] Holston shows in the case of Brazil that illegality is not always dysfunctional, in the sense that it might provide strategic advantages to those who know how to handle it, including both the rich and the poor. The situation is not totally different in Sierra Leone, where the powerful have considerable margin of manoeuvre to legalise what is illegal, but even the poor can exploit legally unclear situations by capturing land and by squatting.

more apparent. By 2011 everywhere from the East to the West, beautiful, new, multiple storey buildings emerged. Some of them were inhabited by the local elite[82], but most of the houses and flats were to be rented to offices and their expatriates – for exorbitant prices. The international organizations fell in their own trap. Many organizations could not afford maintaining a guest house anymore and even expatriates struggled to find an affordable place, let alone Sierra Leoneans. Owners of properties were of course in a privileged position, even in the deepest slum (especially if they were lucky enough to own the land on which their property was built – a relatively rare case). The tenants were in a much more vulnerable situation. They could be chased away any time, their rent could be increased or they might have discovered at their own cost that the one they believed to be their landlord was ultimately not the legitimate owner. Those in the worst situation were the "informal occupants" or squatters. These had no right whatsoever and when the rightful owner, the government, or just a more powerful claimant required the place, they had absolutely nowhere to go to complain. This did not only happen occasionally. In moments of massive urban development, for example in 2010-2011 when Wilkinson road connecting the city centre to Lumley was broadened and paved, whole houses at the edge of the road were destroyed or literally cut into two. For the informal inhabitants of the city frequent loss of property created a vicious circle in which the more they tried to secure a shelter investing in a house, the deeper they fell into poverty.

The settlement of frequent conflicts around land issues by the force (taking the form of violent clashes between communities or of strong-arm interventions by the police), the increasing determination of the municipality and of the government to control and ban social groups occupying urban space informally was not only a sign of a returning policing order after the relative tolerance of the post-war years, but it also revealed the inherent contradiction between the norm of social solidarity and that of exclusion, inherent in capitalist modernization. At the same time harsher public interventions were economically logical responses to the increasing commodification and to the rising monetary value of the land.

Mapping the polio homes of the Western Area

---

[82] I count among the local elite members of the African diaspora as well as Lebanese businessmen living in Sierra Leone since generations.

The housing shortage together with the realisation that staying together increases the chances of polio victims to cope with everyday problems made securing a place for collective living the absolute priority of the first polio organisations. The methods were different, ranging from direct lobbying to arbitrary occupation, the outcomes were however similar: over time a number of collective self-managed spaces were created by and for polio survivors.

In Freetown alone there are today three major polio squats - House of Jesus, Pademba Road and Ecowas (not counting with Walpole Street which is empty now) - and there are many more on the Eastern outskirts belonging to the Western Area[83],. Besides Freetown, the city, the Western Area contains two distinct administrative units: the Western rural and the Western urban areas. The Western Urban covers the crowded suburban periphery. Four polio homes are located here: two at Kissi, one at Rokupa and one at Calabatown. The Western rural is composed of more spaciously dispersed villages. The six other polio homes covered by this research are found respectively in Grafton, Hasting and Waterloo.[84].

Taking a stroll starting from the Pademba Road prison in the city centre to Eastern Police should not take more than 30-40 minutes on foot. On the way we first pass by **PwD**, or simply **Pademba Road**, as everybody knows it. PwD is an abbreviation used by international organisations for "people with disabilities", but interestingly the place inherited its name from the area of the same appellation, and not from its inhabitants. **PwD** is a big dilapidated house - in fact, rather the ruins of a house than an actual building. The empty windows and the lack of a roof give the impression of openness and vulnerability instead of safety. The house must have burned down many years ago, its internal spaces are formless and the different levels are connected by wooden planks instead of stairs. Moving between them demands dexterity and some amount of courage. Its zero level, forming an underground courtyard is lower than the street; it resembles therefore a pit, which, during the rainy season transforms into a

---

[83] The first Freetown settlement was established on the Peninsula, which is also referred to as the Western area. Its geographical unit corresponds to the administrative unit of the crown colony under independence. The administrative and legal separation of this territory from the rest of the country is maintained by a system of legal pluralism: on the territory of the ex-Protectorate the customary law still coexists with the formal legal system.

[84] In Waterloo, where there are at least two separate polio homes, my census ended, but I am aware that similar organizations exist even further to the East and on the side of Lungi, opposite to Freetown.

muddy swamp. In it tiny *panbodies* lean against each other, covering the inner walls. In the same way, *panbodies* occupy some of the external parts, as well as the labyrinth-like rear of the building. The *panbodies* are homes for one, two, three people and some children. Disabled women have their own quarter at the back of the building and they also share their rooms in twos or threes. A few women have children but they rarely live permanently with men. Disabled and non-disabled women alike might prostitute themselves in exchange for material support and protection. The presence of alcohol and weed creates a constant atmosphere of playful violence, susceptible at any time to turning into not that playful fights, into which girls and boys regularly throw themselves with equal determination. Like in all disabled homes, besides the disabled heads of households a small of non-disabled younger boys constitutes a secondary class: they are the everyday helpers of the disabled, accompanying them on their begging expeditions. Apart from begging, the inhabitants live from small jobs. Some of the men practice tinsmithing, the women are engaged in petty trade. The number of members is uncertain. According to the chairman the membership is around 150 heads but this is by counting large, including all those who do not stay in the house permanently, as young street boys and polio disabled from other homes - especially from Waterloo - might use the place as a temporal shelter whenever they want.

Continuing on Pademba Road we soon reach the famous Cotton Tree, the symbolic centre of the town. Turning left towards the sea by the Nacit building, we are close now to another two story house that used to be occupied by polio survivors. The place, **Walpole Street**, was named after its location, but it stands empty now. It was evacuated in 2009.

Turning right at Wallace Johnson Street, we pass first before the Big Market, leaving behind the police station, the entrance of the government wharf, the City council and the SLPP headquarters to reach **House of Jesus**, located in the middle of this administrative area. House of Jesus is situated in a gated enclosure adjacent to the main Bus Station, the downtown terminal of the long distance buses. The iron gates open to a long internal courtyard, with a long row of *panbodies*, on the right side. In front of the doors women are cooking on open fires or washing their children in buckets. Men are hurrying through the courtyard pursuing their different businesses. Some of them are engaged in metal work. Other professional activities include gara tie dying, sawing,

hairdressing and petty trade. The place has even its painter. The corridor-like long yard runs into a kind of community centre at the rear end of the compound, where boys and young men are watching TV in the evening, smoking *ganja*[85] and drinking *rum*, i.e. cheap strong alcohol sold in small plastic packets. A few meters before the end of the corridor a narrow entrance opens to a larger hall, dark like a cellar. It is divided into further cells occupied by whole families. The leaders say they have about 65 permanent adult members but when I made a census in 2011 I counted up to 160 people living there. The difference probably shows two things: that here only disabled persons are counted as full members, and that House of Jesus - just like Pademba Road – accommodates "visitors" (from other houses and from the countryside), some of whom might stay for months or even years.

Continuing always towards the East, crossing only two streets, we soon reach **Ecowas Street** where we find the last squat of the city centre, named after the street. Ecowas is just a few hundred meters away from House of Jesus. Here the polio victims occupy a two storey building with a balcony looking at the busy commercial street below. The exterior of the ground floor is flanked by shops so congested that they almost hide the small entrance leading to a tight inner space - used for washing and cooking. At its rear end there is a row of workshops where men busy themselves with metal work. To the right from the main entrance a staircase leads to the first and second floor. The first floor is divided into two big halls which are used for different professional activities (mostly for sawing and computer work), but children also come here to play and women to rest. Some of the rooms occupied by the families on the next floors are part of the original architecture, but most of the shelters are built with the usual method of partitioning the space with whatever is at hand. The roof is in bad shape, the ceiling is leaking. The high and slippery stairs are difficult to negotiate even without any impairment. The house however accommodates about 100 people, many of them living with serious mobility difficulties.

---

[85] Ganja is the popular name of marijuana

2. Figure Freetown-City centre[86]

To leave the city, we have to take a *podapoda* now at Eastern Police. The vehicle would cut through the crowd on Furay Bay Road with excruciating slowness and would end up reaching the highway linking Freetown to Waterloo. On its way it would cross a number of settlements forming a continuous urban zone. Our first stop is at **Kissi Shell**, a name inherited from the nearby gas station, close to Kissi Dockyard. The polio community of Kissi is both numerically important and visibly significant, as they occupy a relatively large space, located in a former market place. The workshops – which host different crafts, from mechanics through tailoring to black- and tinsmithing - are production units as well as mini vocational schools where apprentices come to learn the job from experienced craftsmen. The organization employs also non-disabled vocational trainers who look after their own workshops, but the black- and tinsmithing section is totally controlled by disabled men who are running the entire business. Some of their crafts are quite impressive. They are capable of producing cheap buckets as well as huge expensive decorated iron gates. Because of the importance of the metal section and also

---

[86] Source:http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Freetown_overview_map.svg

because unlike the other workshops, located in the closed rear end of the building, this one functions in the open air, in front of everybody's eye, there is a strong feeling of male dominance, almost of a Far Western style, amplified by the marked presence of the members of the executive – all men – who imperiously sit in the dusty courtyard, supervising the work from their wheelchairs.

The women are obviously elsewhere. They habitually hang around in the circumference of the dwelling. This one is located a few hundred meters down the road, in a building transformed from an emptied slaughter house. This old plant was never meant to house people, the internal halls are still spacious, although they accommodate individual or family size-shacks that are put up next to the walls. A few *panbodies* lean against the walls on the outside, too. Those for whom there is no place in the make-shift rooms have to content themselves with a bed in the main hall transformed into a huge dormitory. The tenants of these beds are disabled single women, more often than not sharing their quarter with children.

The next polio home on the highway is Pa Mustapha's informal vocational boarding school at **Rokupa**, not far from the big Mosque offered to the city by Colonel Kaddafi as a gift. Pa Mustapha's blacksmith workshop is indeed a one man's business. The old man sitting in his wheelchair has total control over his apprentices, some of whom are his own sons. He has two wives and 12 children. The house is not big enough to offer shelter to everybody, so he puts up only those belonging to his internal circle. Despite of his age he still dreams about expanding his workshop, about including more girls and introducing more crafts to be taught.

Following the road, we find the last polio community of the urban area at **Calabatown**. Like the ones in Kissi and at Rokupa, this community is also organized around professional activities in which disabled and also non-disabled young workers and apprentices are engaged, working under the supervision of older disabled men or hired trainers. The home is known for its good quality metal work and serves a large area with farming tools and other utensils. Not all of the members live at the place. Its present leaders consider it to be more of a centralized business than a collective home for members with equal rights.

3. Figure The Western area[87].

Approaching Grafton we have crossed the border between the urban and the rural of the Western area. The **Grafton** community is probably the largest polio home. It is in fact less a home than a small village with few collective- and many individual houses scattered on the flank of the hill. It has its own school and it even boasts of an existing - although not functioning - health centre. There is also an orphanage for disabled children operating on its territory, but somewhat independently of the rest of the community. The professional activities are organized around the workshops - including blacksmithing and tinsmithing, of course, but also tailoring, soap making and gara tie dying; there is even a piggery providing a living for a few families. The pace of

---

[87] Source: http://www.mappery.com/Freetown-Map

life is visibly slower and calmer here than in the urban homes. Although affluence is not exactly what characterizes the place, it does not resemble to a slum either. Some of the houses are decidedly cosy and nicely decorated. If it were not for the overwhelming presence of wheelchairs and crutches, little would differentiate the community from the surrounding rural settlements.

Adjacent to this big polio village, almost imperceptibly separated from it by an invisible line, there is a second, definitely more vulnerable and smaller polio community. It is called **HATA**, after the organisation it manages. It is composed of just a few houses, most of them unfinished, but even the complete ones look like *pan bodies*, built with zinc, tarpaulin, crates or whatever is at hand.

The next small town, **Hastings**, also houses two polio communities. The bigger one is particular as it is operated and inhabited only by women. Their encampment is somewhat removed from the main road. Its buildings – workshops, collective and dwelling places - are neatly constructed and kept in exemplary order. The houses are surrounded by a spacious garden, where the women do some gardening. In the main building young women are taught to sew and have some other vocational trainings. The youngest girls are sent to the neighbouring school. Mariama, the boss, plans setting up an internet centre, too, which could serve the entire village.

The community of women stands in striking contrast to its neighbour, **Skills Training**. If Mariama's small empire is a female only universe, Skills Training is a world of men. The organization's main resource is its blacksmith workshop, installed right on the highway, under a shade made of sticks and grass. The dwellings, built of mud bricks are a bit farther away. Here live, together with a couple of disabled men, their wives and the pushers, a few disabled women in a state of disheartening desolation. Mud village houses, although they still represent the most widespread technology of building in the countryside, are not considered to be up to the norm any more on the Western Peninsula. This fact causes continuous harassment for the members by the defenders of public order.

The end point of this trip, where my census stops is **Waterloo**. Here again we find two, quite different homes. *The* older and bigger one is actually so well integrated into the surrounding community that it is not easy to pick out the houses of the disabled people scattered in the village. Characteristically, it is the founders and the leaders of the

organization who could afford to build their own family houses in the village. The centre of the organization is the training centre situated near the road, a bit farther from the village. It is a big compound with different buildings housing the workshops. The core of the economic activities is unsurprisingly blacksmithing. Members of this community are so skilful in this craft that they had to pay a heavy price for it: one of them has been arrested and is still in prison for illegal fabrication of arms.

The other polio community is composed of those who were evicted from Walpole Street. Unlike all the other self-managing independent communities, it is under the tutelage of the **Greek Orthodox Church** which built small houses for the disabled boys and girls encouraging them to marry early and so to regroup in families. As a consequence, the place is full of children who play around in the dusty courtyard which is the main square of the disabled village. At the time of my visit a lot of construction was going on in the village. Ever since, the first permanent building was finished. It is the church. Its impressive, white, cathedral-like structure contrasts strangely with the simplicity of the beggars' quarters composed of tiny rooms to be shared by whole families. No meaningful economic activity is practiced in the disabled village, if not by the women, who sell occasionally in the nearby town. The inhabitants are not encouraged to do anything out of the control of the church. No wonder that the men are often away; it is usually easier to find them somewhere in Freetown, especially on Fridays, grouped at the main junctions, waiting for alms.

The polio-homes seen from another perspective:DPOs

Despite their informal character and sometimes clearly illegal form of occupation, polio homes are not romantic places outside of the law and far from the purview of the State. Almost all of them are registered with the Ministry of Social Welfare and the City Council-, and surely all are considered as "disabled people organisations", DPOs - an appellation showing that they are integral part of the organisational field of disability, growing steadily since the late eighties. This is indeed what they are incontestably, organisations set up and maintained by disabled people despite the heterogeneous composition of the squats. In some cases non-disabled people, although pretty much physically present, are not even considered to be members. Very rarely they occupy leading positions. Like most organisations, the homes have a formalised leadership,

called the "Executive", responsible for running the place, keeping order and discipline, generating income, keeping, sharing and reinvesting the funds and for representing the group to the outside. Paperwork is important for the officialization of an organisation. The documentation kept by the executive normally contains at least a written constitution, the bylaws, a membership list (very rarely up to date); sometimes even a detailed strategic plan. Many of these semi-informal places are more formalized – at least in their structure and with regard to red tape - than a lot of civil society organizations in the global North. The affinity to pompous titles and the requirement to produce formal documents might have some roots in the memory of colonial administration, but these traits also correspond to the culture of formality, prevailing in the modern NGO world. There is a certainly practical reason for it: only registered (and well documented) organisations might pretend to enter in partnership with NGOs. But there is also a symbolical reason behind it: Magical techniques of formalisation helps informal places with ambiguous rights and identity transmogrify into unequivocally valued formal civil society organisations!

Polio homes-disabled people organisations exist between formality and informality and this special position allows them to constitute links through their own elites with the higher spheres of the State. Disability is in fact in the forefront of State policies in Sierra Leone. Disability desks have been set up at the main line ministries. The Human Right Commission has a mandate to overview cases of discrimination, with a special attention to violation of the rights of disabled people. One of its senior officers is disabled himself[88]. In 2011 there was a disabled MP sitting in Parliament and several employees of different ministries were equally disabled. The leading party, APC (All People's Congress) even had its special "disabled Wing" – a group of supporters composed of polio-disabled men. After the 2012 election the President placed a disabled man at the top of the Ministry of Social Welfare and a new campaign started to integrate disabled people into the police, although already under the previous government Polio Police, a disabled police officer patrolled the city with a PET, a wooden tricycle typically used by victims of poliomyelitis.

In a certain sense, the State`s concern for disability can be qualified as exemplary. Sierra Leone was one of the first countries signing the *International Convention on the*

---

[88] Data from the time of my field work, 2009-2011

Rights of People with disabilities in July 2009 and it domesticated the Convention by an *Act of Parliament* on the 10th March 2011. The President set up the *National Disability Commission* in August 2012 and nominated the Commissionaire, a member of the Sierra Leonean Diaspora in the United States who was called back to the country for the purpose. A number of international humanitarian organizations are backing the government in its efforts. Since 1991 at least 30 specialised international non-governmental organizations[89] and almost as many local NGOs have been seeking to improve the lives of people with disabilities in various domains from assuring rehabilitation services to the protection of their rights. Handicap International (HI) is beyond any doubt the most influential foreign organisation working in the field of disability. Its original mandate in Sierra Leone was to strengthen physical rehabilitation. It took over NRC, the National Rehabilitation Centre from the government in and created two other centres, in Koidu town and in Bo. The three centres have been transferred to the government ever since and HI recently has been more engaged in lobbying, capacity building of DPOs and other development projects in line with the priorities of the liberal peace.

It is difficult to estimate the number of organisations with a broader mandate, which count people with disability among their general beneficiaries. There must be several hundred of them, because disability is now mainstreamed, i.e. it is considered as an obligatory part of development projects, rather than a specific area to be developed. In 2011 for example the European Union decided to include a disability perspective in all its development projects. The other major trans-governmental institutions active in Sierra Leone are equally engaged in making life better for disabled people. UNIPSIL[90], UNDP, WHO, FAO and the World Bank all support projects targeting people with disabilities.

All around the country, DPOs (disabled people's organisations) have been formed to bring together people with disabilities (PwDs in NGO jargon). Their exact number is uncertain. In 2012 SLUDI, the national federation conducted a survey and counted about

---

[89] My data, cross-checked with the National Directory of Disabled People's Organisations and Specialised Services on Disability Issues, Sierra Leone Union on Disability Issues, Freetown, April 2012
[90] UNIPSIL left the country in March 2014

sixty DPOs[91] - usually organised by types of impairment - claiming to represent the interests of people with disabilities. This number contains also umbrellas, regrouping several organisations, and small organisations having a handful of members. The geographic location of these organisations is uneven. Most of them can be found around urban centres where HI and other NGOs have been active, or where in the past there used to be institutions regrouping people with disabilities. At first sight it appears that external influence has had a big role in calling to life such associations. Although to some extent this is true, in subsequent chapters I will show that the relation between international organisations and home grown associations is more complex. Nevertheless, 60 DPOs all around the country do not seem to be proportional to the enormous political interest disability has recently generated. It shows that for now, disability in Sierra Leone has probably a bigger political than sociological impetus. The fact that out of the 60 recorded DPOs, 20 are in the Western area, close to the political centre, reinforces this impression. Disability has become a hot topic. There is hardly any day without some disability-related news in the newspapers or without a disability-oriented program in the radio or television. Voice of the Handicapped, a private independent radio station is one of the most popular in the country. Disability is in the forefront of national and international policies.

For the polio victims in the region of Freetown the most important umbrella organisation is SLUPP (Sierra Leone Union of Polio Persons). The cross-disability federation of DPOS and umbrellas representing disabled people on the national level is SLUDI (Sierra Leone Union of Disability)[92]. SLUDI has branches in the provinces and even in Freetown it has a local branch: SLUDI Western – an autonomous structure, covering most of the polio-homes in the Western rural area. SLUDI Western is part of the national SLUDI and at the same time – in certain cases - in competition with it. This strange duplication of authority is not explained by any logical necessity of institutional nature, it reflects clearly an unresolved personal rivalry inherited from the times of the formation of polio-DPOs, showing how personal influence of the leaders shines through the falsely smooth surface of the formal organisational landscape. In some instances,

---

[91] Data from National Directory of Disabled People's Organisations and Specialised Services on Disability Issues, Sierra Leone Union on Disability Issues, Freetown, April 2012. It is remarkable that almost half of all the DPOs are polio-organisations, while many others contain polio victims amongst other type of disabilities.
[92] SLUDI is considered by itself and by many international partners as the only legitimate representative of DPOs but its hegemony is regularly contested from within the movement.

rivalry turns into open opposition. Some of the provincial organisations, considering themselves as umbrellas, too, do not wish to join SLUDI and contest its right for universal representation.

The polio homes of Freetown are part of this complex institutional landscape. With their sheer number, they constitute the backbone of the Disability Union, presided almost traditionally by a polio-victim[93]. They are then in the paradoxical situation that on the one hand, as DPOs they represent the very basis of the institutional structure of the disability movement, providing it with grassroots legitimacy; on the other hand, as ghettos populated by beggars and street boys they are at other moments seen as embarrassment and obstacle to development, not only by those on power but also by the very elite of their own movement. In some exceptional cases the two moments collide. This is what happened with Mohamed in the UNIPSIL consultative forum. It is as if polio-disabled put on scene different identities on different stages. Goffman's idea on the differentiation between the back stage and the front stage would be an evident choice of an analytical frame applied to this situation, if only we bore in mind that the Western bias identifying public (and formal) with the front stage and private (and informal) with the back stage should not necessarily work in this context. Goffman suggested that the tendency of people for taking up a public persona when stepping out from their private zone to a performance in public is universal. The back stage would then be this private zone where "the capacity of a performance to express something beyond itself may be painstakingly fabricated; it is here that illusions and impressions are openly constructed." (Goffman 1956:68) According to this definition the back stage would be a safe preparation zone for more important things happening in social settings. In an inspiring analysis of political mobilization for elections Ferme (Ferme 1999:160) has already noted the tendency of Sierra Leoneans to subvert notions of private and public based on such understandings. She emphasizes that what appears in public might be less important (and less true) than what is negotiated in informal settings – which explains why „vote results are the contrary to the voiced opinions". Taking one more step in this direction I would say that the „supposed duplicity" of things (Ibid:163) results in a generalized ambiguity making the back stage and the front stage constantly shift. If the front stage is where social identity has to be built up by adherence to prescribed norms

---

[93] Although the first president was a visually impaired Professor, all the other presidents so far have been or non-disabled or polio-disabled

in performance in front of and in interaction with significant others, informal settings here have as much importance as formal ones, what is more, the definition of what is formal and informal is also floating. As a result, the social identity of people is rarely stable, as we have seen in Mohamed's case. Which of his identities is more important, that of the disability activist or that of the disabled beggar, is not a question that could be answered once for all; it is a question of shifting emphases on stages constantly oscillating between the formal and the informal. Because the structure is not permanent and shifting can happen in a second, it would rather be appropriate to talk about rotary stages in this case, rather than about a fixed back stage and front stage.

Summary

In this chapter my intention has been to introduce the reader into the life-world of the polio-disabled squatters. This introduction has been wilfully impressionist; in subsequent chapters I will develop some of the themes drafted above. I showed that solid knowledge on the phenomenon of disability is scarce and description of the polio-disabled communities is non-existent. This is a surprising fact, taking into consideration the visibility of its population in the street and their complex organisations, covering a vast area all around the Western Peninsula. The stroll we took revealed the variety of the situations, settings, sceneries and arrangements of the polio-homes. Nevertheless, taking stock of them also helps point at the similarities and regularities: If disability is one common denominator in the homes, poverty is another one. Squat dwellers experiment with different copying strategies in the face of scarcity. Polio homes do not only provide shelter for disabled and non-disabled people, they are also economic zones, operating various economic regimes. While the form of dwelling and the ways of making money attach the homes to the domain of informality, another facet of their existence links them to the formally recognised civil society. Delineating formality and informality in these circumstances becomes problematic. Rather, it would be safer to say that polio-disabled squatters live in coexistent, parallel worlds which collide from time to time - mostly in moments of crisis - making distinctions between public and private, formal and informal, front stage and back stage often dubious.

2. Civic Society versus Project Society

"The long dark shadows of war are retreated...the light of truth, the fresh breeze of justice moves freely about this broken and beaten land"[94]

David Crane, first Prosecutor of the Special Court for Sierra Leone

Transforming subjectivities

At the international airport of Lungi, a man size sign-board is greeting the traveller with the following call[95]: "Love Salone. Change your attitude for good". The poster, forming the map of Sierra Leone, is printed in the national colours. It is signed by the "Attitudinal and Behavioural Change Secretariat". It reflects the tone of the giant social experimentation undertaken by the State and its international donors aiming at the overall transformation of the Sierra Leonean society after the 10 year civil war. This heroic enterprise was made necessary – according to the official explanation - by the total collapse of social infrastructure during the armed conflict. Accordingly, the bulky corpus of the NGO literature often pictures Sierra Leone as a "white sheet" (ICG 2007), a *tabula rasa*, a society that has to be reconstructed from scratch[96].

Not only do the developers represent the country as a vast social laboratory, they also point to the prescribed changes which are seen as necessarily cultural rather than political. The attitudinal change slogan implicitly blames Sierra Leoneans, making their "attitude" responsible for the war and for underdevelopment. Surprisingly, the citizens

---

[94] David Crane: Opening Statement of The Prosecutor Special Court of Sierra Leone http://www.rscsl.org/Documents/Press/OTP/prosecutor-openingstatement060304.pdf (Accessed: 11. September 2014the first Prosecutor of the Special Court for Sierra Leone, cited by Kelsall (2009: 36).

[95] I am not aware if the billboard is still at the airport. This part of my account dates from 2009-2010.

[96] The 2007 ICG paper summarizes the situation in the following way: Sierra Leone is at the 176th position out of 177 countries on the HDI scale (Human Development Index), the rate of youth unemployment is at 80 % , 70% of the population lives below the poverty line, 26% in extreme poverty, the perception that the state is corrupt has grown since the war, Transparency International downgraded the country from the126th to the 142th position in 2006. Although this is the usual way for presenting Sierra Leone, especially in project documentation destined to convince donors, sometimes the white sheet theory is contradicted by observations regarding the surprisingly intact character of the social tissue. In the cited ICG paper for example we find references to a 2005 EU funded research which found a "very low level of violent crime". Some authors do not hesitate to express admiration with regard to what they see as the "remarkable resilience of ordinary Sierra Leoneans" (J.Bellows, E. Miguel 2009:1145).

adhere enthusiastically to this analysis. Their full-hearted adhesion to their own symbolic denigration reveals the forces of coloniality, making people of the colonies interiorize their inferior position. In everyday life they express the same idea in their own way: every time a car overtakes in a dangerous way, a politician is accused of corruption or people start pushing each other in a queue, somebody would be ready with the usual comment: "Wi na Salone wi no lov wisef".

The Krio sentence has a double meaning. It should be translated "we do not love one another in Sierra Leone", but it also could mean "we, Sierra Leoneans we do not have love for ourselves". The verb "love" stands here for a particular type of social relationship governed by mutual solidarity, responsibility for the other and sharing - the opposite of selfishness and greed, the two most common accusations against corrupt leaders. For Sierra Leoneans, their country's present state results from a moral squalor. This is the strength of the slogan. It capitalizes on the genuinely Sierra Leonean tendency to make sense of the things of life in terms of a moral economy, instead of a political economy.

This moral penchant relieves the ruling class from taking direct responsibility for the state of the country, accusing rather the national character[97], harmful tradition or backward culture. The reference to "attitude" has the additional advantage of flattering the international community, by containing blame inside the country, making it unnecessary to speak about the global causes of inequalities – which, according to all inside witnesses, contributed greatly - if not lead directly - to the war.

Consequently, the "attitudinal change" campaign has no opponent; it unites people across socio-cultural and even national boundaries. However, this broad agreement is based on an illusion. In fact, if all the parties seem to speak the same language, everybody puts another meaning on the words. From the point of view of Western donors, the attitudinal change probably should start by ending corruption. It would demand dismantling the "harmful tradition" which keep national leaders in the obligation to cater to their families and close supporters rather than serving their broad constituencies. For the political elite, citizens should give up their exaggerated demands

---

[97] I owe to Bea Vidacs the observation that in Cameroon people also happily adhere to the opinion taking for granted the incapacity of their institutions and the superiority of the "white man's" institutions. In Sierra Leone however this assumed inferiority is also coupled – as it is often the case – with some sense of irony. A friend of mine for example regularly referred to the "white man's law" to explain the crookedness of the legal system.

and exercise self-discipline. For ordinary people, the powerful have to be reminded of their obligation of sharing: for them it is totally normal to think of redistribution of wealth as taking place within limited (and localized) personal networks. The problem for them is not that leaders are corrupt; it is rather that their chain of distribution is not expanded enough. Anti-corruption is a powerful narrative, it crystallises the values of modernisation and democratisation and it seems to create an immediate and unconditional adherence. However, its pretended universalism is based on a false agreement. What is corruption for the international community is a burdensome obligation for the elite, while for the little men it is the moral duty of the big ones. This approach is very different from the Western concept of corruption, based on the "Weberian stereotype of bureaucracy as a legal-rational organization" (Shore 2005:131). The general approval given to the attitudinal change campaign is therefore based on a vast intercultural misunderstanding, on something of a quasi translation.

However, the polysemy of the concept is not its weakness; it is the key to its success: by allowing different – even contradictory - meanings to coexist, it makes it possible to emphasize common objectives, while veiling opposing interests. It provides a conveniently versatile theory attributing cultural reasons to the disaster which made a country with huge economic and human potential the ideal type of failed (or "fake") states (Reno 1998) For ordinary Sierra Leoneans the call confirms what they have always thought: "yes, something is wrong with us and the solution should come from inside" (an analysis not that much different from the one offered by the ideologists of the war, who suggested that what was wrong was politics rather than culture). For the international community it sounds like an open invitation for intervention, as if people said: "yes, the problem lies within, so please come and teach us how to change our culture for the better".

Reading project society in the landscape

The "Love Salone" billboard was not the only moralising message, calling Sierra Leoneans - almost in a religious language - to support the forces of good against the forces of evil. All over the city, giant posters showed the way from the bad past to the better future with the not so hidden arrogance of modernizers. The billboards of Freetown told a story, that of the promised modernity, which was liberal, enlightened

and democratic. Sierra Leoneans were invited to make moral choices all the time. One poster publicising safe sex showed a smiling policeman with the legend: "A force for good uses condom". On another one an old man in traditional garment pointed apprehensively to the passer-by calling: "You listen to young voices!" There was of course a poster about corruption, reading: "There is no hiding for a corrupt man" - on it a man was miserably squatting behind a small tree, making his funny posture visible for all. Sometimes it was hard to understand who was addressed by the message. The apprehension was generalised, like on this billboard, which said (in Krio): "When there is no money there is no medicine – that should not be so". I wondered what the objective could be here, because people definitely knew medical services cost money and they could not do anything about it. But the aim was certainly more philosophical than practical. Sierra Leoneans were called to read in the visual signs of the city the new moral order that was proposed to them - if not in practice, at least in theory.

Walking in the city provided information not only on the value system the regime vindicated for itself but also on the means by which the transformation operated from the old to the new. Wherever one looked there were signs showing how the country worked: project by project. NGOs' rusty signboards heralded everywhere the past achievements, which strangely seemed to be outlived by the quickly changing present. One bill-board set up at the entrance of a village for example boasted of the following list of projects: "Access to Justice," "Conflict transformation and prevention," "Human Rights Monitoring," "Youth and Women's Empowerment," "Adult Literacy," "Skills Training Income Generation," "Community Management and Power Relation Process." The particularity of this list is of course its language which makes it impossible to understand what exactly happened here – even less what of the results actually survived.

The words reveal much less about their own significance than about the context in which they are to be interpreted. Their performativity consists in legitimizing a universe of meaning which makes project language appear as normalcy and project reality as taken for granted despite the everyday experience of the majority of people who constantly learn by the small facts of their life that skills training does not lead necessarily to income generation and human rights monitoring is not necessarily the same as having rights - full stop. They also know that "Community Management and

Power Relation Process" does not necessarily stop corruption, abuse and arbitrary justice.[98] People are not fooled, but they do not mind. This fictional reality make them feel that they are part of a bigger thing, called modernity, in which, for some reason the workshops and consultations, empowerment and human rights are linked to the promise of a better road and maybe one day even electricity in the house.

As time passed the link between the moral modernity and the material modernity became clearer and clearer. From 2008 to 2014 there was a clear change going on transforming the visual aspect of the streets, commercial posters coming to substitute progressively the political messages and NGOs' self-publicities. The messages the financial and commercial institutions send out also find their strength in morality. They shape the image of the desirable and ethically approvable way of life in the same way as NGO posters. They all rely on the individual's responsiveness, skilfully mixing moral pressure, conviction and seduction, by projecting an idealized image presented as normalcy. An advertisement for a bank translates the new ideal with impressive simplicity: "Be you, be free, be brilliant!" The circle is closed and the connection revealed: The cultural revolution that was announced after the war for the betterment of the country demanding personal effort from each citizen to participate in the process of democratisation is expected to produce a new type of person, conscious of his/her personal uniqueness, freed from the chains of tradition and community, in other words a perfect subject of a Western-type individualistic society, or of its stereotyped ideal-type. This is how the idealized world of externally dictated and state-designed social reform, the NGO world and the capitalist world meet and live in harmony within Project society.

The nexus between Liberal Peace and Project Society

The mid-nineties – the moment when it became clear for the international community[99] that the war ravaging the interior of Sierra Leone could potentially threaten the political stability of the whole region (Châtaigner 2005) coincided with an important transition in the philosophy of development aid toward a "new or political

---

[98] Sierra Leone: African Minerals Strike Saga - Five Reportedly Killed. Ibrahim Jaffa Conteh, 19 April 2012 Concord Times. http://allafrica.com/stories/201204191211.html Accessed: 22. 05.2012.

[99] The international community is used here in the sense of Cubitt (2013:6), i.e. not as a disparate ensemble of various Global actors, but rather as a unified body with a shared norm and value system and sufficient power to design and supervise the path of „liberal peace". Because these actors do not represent the „world", rather interests and cosmologies of countries in the West, in a world system language the term „international community" could be safely replaced by the „Centre" - externalised.

humanitarianism" with a new focus on "conflict resolution and post war reconstruction" (Duffield : 11). The number of the UN troops had been increased from 40 observers in 1998 to 17 000 soldiers in 2001, making Sierra Leone the site of the most important UN operation in the world (Châtaigner 2005 :13). The UN engaged not only in peace-keeping but also in setting the path for a new type of development that was about to become the norm. In a couple of years, the country turned from a godforsaken place into a major stake for the new UN interventionism. It became a test case of what became known as the Liberal Peace. Cubitt (Cubitt 2013:2) understands the liberal peace as a "method" consisting in "rebuilding peace in conflict ridden, notoriously weak states, combining security considerations and state building in a predefined process whereas peace (is) "done" by (largely Western) peace building experts according to a predefined pattern."

The UN mission in Sierra Leone changed name three times but it kept its leading role in designing, implementing and supervising development policies from 1999 to 2014. Other trans-governmental regulatory organizations, regional and national development agencies were also active in tailoring and financing development, most notoriously the British DFID (Department for International Development), but also the American USAID and EuropAid on behalf of the European Union. These organisations largely relied on the non-governmental sector in implementing development projects. As a result, a host of INGOs (international nongovernmental organisations) including GoNGOS (government organized NGOs) and DoNGOs (donor organized NGOs) (cf. Shivji 2007:25) were recruited to deliver development-aid on the ground. This new donor strategy aiming at strengthening the state by financing NGOs resulted in an improbable marriage between the State and NGOs under the tutelage of the "international community" in the name of "good governance".

When UNIPSIL officially withdrew from the country on the 27th March 2014, leaving its "residual tasks" to the UN Country Team, the UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon asserted that "Sierra Leone represents one of the world's most successful cases of post-conflict recovery, peacekeeping and peacebuilding"[100]. Free multiparty elections, an array of new democratic institutions and a series of laws protecting individual rights, as well as a "vibrant civil society" (Campaign_for_Good_Governance and Christian_Aid

---

[100]http://unipsil.unmissions.org/Default.aspx?tabid=9611&ctl=Details&mid=12590&ItemID=20677&language=en-US

2006) constitutes the legacy of good governance left behind by the out-going UN peace-building mission.

There are however dissonant voices in the overall assessment of the international community's performance in producing the conditions of long lasting peace, in general, and of civil society's capacity to fulfil the promises that others made in its name, in particular. There is considerable evidence that the building of civil society that attained "epidemic proportions" (Cubitt 2013), resulted in an artificially blown-up bubble the content of which weakened proportionally with the increase of its size. Not only did donor preferences and available funding reorient the mandate of existing organisations but they also called to life thousands of new NGOs and local associations, some of them comprising not more than one or two persons. In their position of midwives to nascent "civil society movements" international donors found themselves in the uneasy role of mediating between the state and civil society according to an agenda that did not correspond to the agenda of any of the parties except that of the mediator. The overtaking of the definition of the problems and the subsequent distribution of funds created both alienation and a fierce competition that contributed more to the fragmentation of civil society than to its unification despite the official aim of "empowering" civil society groups.

The philosophy of empowerment reveals the paradox behind the two contradictory assumptions of the liberal peace building. According to the first there is naturally something out there like civil society, separate from the state and society itself, robust enough to take part in governance as a counter-power necessary for the good functioning of the state. According to the second civil society is always in need of construction, strengthening, capacity building, empowering from outside, so that it can accomplish its historical task consisting of transforming governance from bad to "good".

Linking civil society with NGOs

In the historical context of the Post-Cold-War era Tocqueville's definition of civil society as "localism, voluntarism and association" (Ehrenberg 2011:24) was picked up and spread all over the world. Civil society was (re)discovered as a gage of democracy. Conscious building of civil society as a new development strategy went together with the *immaterialisation* of development goals and methods. In the new development agenda

rule of law, *democratization*, *human rights* and - of course - *civil society development* came to replace *industrialization*, *export orientation*, and *intensive agricultural production*. The new language was not only a response to the recognized failure of previous development policies, it also corresponded to a wider political project, in which the hostility of Eastern European intellectuals towards the non-democratic state and the liberal attack on the welfare state in the West (Ibid:23) met to form a coherent and entire social philosophy, expecting from the 'rule of law' "to protect and structure the economic activity of the self-interested members of civil society" (Ibid:21). This was the political philosophy behind the project of exporting liberal democracy from the West to the rest of the world in the years following 1990. In this formula the democratic half served to hide the "state led redistribution of regressive fiscal and monetary policies, deregulation, and privatization" (Ibid: 24).

Civil society was not only a concept; in the process it became identified with non-governmental organisations (NGOs), which – for this reason - are also called civil society organisations (CSOs). The term NGO is as old as the UN (Davies 2014; Thomas 2004). In 1945 when the UN was created, the house rules allowed that not only representatives of governments participate in its assemblies but also some international non-state agencies. These were categorised negatively, by what they were not, as non-government organisations. Although a universally valid definition of NGOs is hard to find, some characteristics are usually implied in the denomination: NGOs are conceived as non-criminal, non-political, non-profit making formally recognised legal entities providing professional work in domains of public interest. Although NGOs and CSOs are logically interchangeable terms, in the local setting of Sierra Leone, linguistic convention, as well as legal regulations make the difference between the two. Accordingly, CSOs are local small scale organisations, they are CBOs (community-based organisations) or DPOs (disabled people's organisation), close to the grass-roots; while NGOs are more professional and financially more solid organisations able not only to handle projects in their own right, but also to act as donors toward smaller organisations.

NGOs got a major part to play in the popularization and implementation of the new development policies. Not only were they believed to incarnate the democratic forces of a society, they were supposed to be more efficient than the state in providing welfare services, in keeping with the "New Policy agenda" based on the "idea that

private sector initiatives are intrinsically more efficient than public initiatives" (Baccaro 2001). This identification of NGOs with civil society is not going for granted. Indeed, if we search for civil society in domains where "social capital" is created and preserved, where culturally acceptable forms of togetherness are regulated, feelings of belonging, mutual trust and solidarity are created, where "the very fabric of the social" is woven (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999:15) where the "legitimation and the limits of power" are negotiated (Ibid:17), where "ideals of participatory governance" put into practice (Ibid:19), where "people are made accountable and responsible to other members of society" (Hann and Dunn 1996:20), we necessarily have to leave behind the narrow limits of the NGO world and there are chances that we find what we are looking for in the fuzzy spheres of informality (McFarlane and Waibel 2012; Roy and AlSayyad 2004). Civil society in this sense is civic society, i.e. that part of the social which keeps together members of society, despite their diverging interests, making them concerned about "community affairs"[101]. Such a conceptual shift makes it possible to focus on the content, rather than on the form and discover in this way an unsuspected wealth of non Western-forms of civil civic society in Africa, not necessarily in relation to modern civil society organisations.

De-linking civil society from NGOs

A 2007 World Bank report on the civil society landscape of Sierra Leone (World_Bank 2007) differentiates three forms of civil society organisations: the formal, the traditional and the neo-traditional. In everyday speech acts as well as in political discourses only the first type seems to be recognised as officially making part of civil society. This part contains organizations with a formal structure, with no primordial reference to ethnic origin, revealing involving no magical rituals, or spiritual belief, showing no inclination towards illicit activities, shortly, only NGO type civil society organisations, those that fit exactly in the implicit theoretical frame of the European Enlightenment. These organizations do not only have in common a relatively homogenous ethos (precisely that of the European Enlightenment), they are characteristically formalized by strict regulations of the State.

---

[101] See. www. merriam-webster.com/dictionary/civic

Despite its evolutionary penchant (implicitly positing that the NGO type organisations constitute the most developed form and all other forms naturally develop towards it) the World Bank report has the merit of recognizing at least that what the NGO literature usually circumscribes as civil society is only a tiny fraction of what could fit in the category without such a modernist bias[102].

If we allow ourselves to broaden our perspective and let non-conventional forms of social practice enter into our field of vision, Sierra Leonean society starts to look much less sunken into desperate anomie than it is suggested by much of NGO literature. While the destructive effects of the war are hardly questionable, some observers admit their bewilderment at "the surprisingly intact character of the social tissue" (ICG 2007) and the "remarkable resilience of ordinary Sierra Leoneans" (Bellows 2009:1145). If these observations are to be trusted, there must be strong social institutions capable of reducing tendencies of disintegration in the face of the violent political and economic turmoil the country has experienced for many decades now.

The most evident suspects are not situated outside the field of power, but are precisely those on which political authority repose in the absence of a strong (or at times indeed any) state. During the years immediately before the war and during the war itself, the state withdrew up to a point when only its empty shell could be sensed by the citizens. This self-sustaining apparatus renouncing of all its social functions is what Reno calls the shadow state[103] (Reno 1996). Under the shadow state the social institutions that prevented complete lawlessness were the ones in which traditional power accumulated: chieftaincy, secret society, kinship and religious authority. These institutions survived the war and continue to play a crucial role in the life worlds of most Sierra Leoneans despite the returning of the modern State and its decentralisation through local councils.

In the provinces, constituting the vast majority of Sierra Leone, actual local governance is shared since decentralisation (2004) between the modern councils and

---

[102] Already under colonialism, the concept of civil society was „applied to an emerging African bourgeoisie and not to rural native subjects. Civil society was presumed to be civilised society.. resulting in a bifurcated system combining direct and indirect rule" (Ferme 1999 : 163)

[103] In Reno's definition „shadow states" are something like collapsing states, unable to fulfil any of their usual functions, as a result of corrupt leaders' usurpation of state resources. Reno also demonstrates how external actors are instrumental for the maintenance of shadow states by lending external legitimacy to regimes which are unwilling to respond to their own constituency.

the traditional institutions of chieftaincy and secret societies. State administration is not present in the same way in the rural and the urban areas. This administrative dualism is a heritage from colonial times. When in 1896 the British annexed the provinces as a Protectorate, they did not only drew the borders of present day Sierra Leone, they created, legitimised and conserved for a long time the dual administrative, legal and political system, which cuts Freetown and the peninsula from the rest of the country even today. The villages in the peninsula do not have chiefs, only headmen, who are elected by universal adult suffrage for a period of 3 years and function more or less as mayors, albeit with less power. In contrast, local leaders in the provinces are chiefs: village chiefs, section chiefs and paramount chiefs. Several sections make a larger unit, a chiefdom, headed by a paramount chief, elected from a ruling family of the chiefdom. These units are separate from the modern administrative units which are the districts. Apart from the Western Area, which stands for Freetown and its environs, there are 3 provinces (Northern, Eastern and Southern), divided into 13 districts and 149 chiefdoms. In spite of the ethnic mixing there is a connection between the chiefdoms and the different ethnic groups, so a chief is not only attached to a geographical area but also to the ethnic groups traditionally living on his/her[104] area.

The system of chieftaincy and that of the State are intimately interlinked but are not the same. Although paramount chiefs are elected directly and for a life time, the result of the election is sanctioned by the President who officially nominates the winning candidate. The highest body of the chiefs is the National Council of Paramount Chiefs, which delegates 12 paramount chiefs to the Parliament. I have known several paramount chiefs who were at the same time district councillors. Chiefs thus participate in national politics, and therefore they cannot be really considered part of civil society in Tocquevilian terms. However, in many other aspects chiefs and councillors are in competition and are considered (and consider themselves) as players of two opposing camps. While the supreme mission of councillors is to bring the modern state close to the citizens, that of the chief is to protect and preserve tradition. It would be easy to argue that these missions are only ideals never achieved, but from the fact that the ideal is far from the real does not follow that these functions are totally hollow. The ideal here

---

[104] There are of course more mail chiefs than female ones, but in certain tribes (certainly not in all) electing a female chief or Paramount Chief is perfectly legitimate. Accordingly, some of the great historical characters of the Sierra Leonean society are women.

means strong cultural expectations. In village settings the chief is not only the highest authority, he is also responsible for the maintenance of order. Ideally - according to his official mandate - he not only enforces the law but also, and more importantly, dispenses justice, according to custom. His role in conflict is between a judge and a mediator and again ideally[105], a conflict is settled after ample consultation with the interested parties and the community elders.

There is no use in romanticizing chieftaincy. In its present form it is neither purely traditional – under colonialism the British turned it into a tool of their indirect rule – nor is it particularly respectful of its purportedly traditional values – more often than not it represents purely individual rather than collective interests. However, in some ways and in some cases – notably when the chief is actually located in the village or in the town section he (or she) is responsible for, it is easier to hold him (or her) accountable than the counsellors whose term is implicitly linked to that of the ruling party. Accountability in this case is not guaranteed by democratic principles; it is rather a side effect of the physical proximity and a result of existing ties of mutual patron-client interdependency.

Although all rural communities are under the rule of chiefs, all chiefs have to share their power with secret society elders. A secret society is an ethnic-based association, divided into local congregations, held together by secret knowledge, as well as by a set of rules and norms regulating social behaviour, gender and inter-generational relations, preferred communication and conflict resolution styles[106]. It is a Maussian "total social fact" as it penetrates both into the mundane and sacred domains of life; it is – at the same time - a legal, moral, economic and religious institution (Magazinier 2006). The transmission of the secret knowledge is associated with initiation, opening the door towards fully assumed adulthood by the inscription of gender onto the body. This is particularly obvious for female initiation involving excision of the clitoris. In village communities only excised girls gain the right to marriage, non initiated women face considerable ostracism and exclusion. Male initiation is not linked to circumcision - this

---

[105] These principles still prevail in practice, despite of the new Chieftaincy Act enacted in 2009, showing a clear political will to "democratize" the institution. . See the Chifetaincy Act, 2009.
 http://www.sierra-leone.org/Laws/2009-10.pdf Accessed: 03. 08 2012
[106] I often heard the phrase that „When initiated people (both men or women) enter a public place they immediately recognize who is initiated, who is not, by the way initiated adults speak, even if they do not belong to the same society".

usually happens at a younger age - however the boys' bodies are also marked in the "bush", usually by scarification or by enduring other hardship. The "secret bush" is an area hidden and forbidden to non-members where the actual initiation takes place.

Traditional secret societies are exclusively male or female. Although different ethnic groups have different societies, in everyday speech the Mende[107] words Poro and Sande stand for all traditional male and female societies respectively. Unlike Poro, Sande has conquered the capital, where it is more known by its Krio name: Bondo. Female secret societies constitute powerful zones of protection and solidarity groups for women (Knörr 2000) and a chance to participate in local decision making. Both male and female societies are strictly hierarchical but at the same time they open an important network for members which they can use irrespectively of their social status. „Despite the clear hierarchy and the central Bondo and Poro teachings which emphasise a show of respect to people older than one, many respondents told me that in the Bondo bush meetings, all members were regarded as equal. They also said that any Bondo member could access anybody in the Bondo society irrespective of their position during Bondo bush meetings" – writes Bosire who are amongst the few who studied Bondo in the post-war period (Bosire 2013:73)

Although it would be misleading to suggest that societies constitute a counter-power against the local elite, as they participate in the same gerontocracy, still female societies provide an important means to affirm a female position in a profoundly patriarchal society. Female society elders are on equal footings with their male counterparts; they are consulted in political matters and feared even by chiefs. It is interesting that the highest ranking female member of the Bondo society, the mabole, is also part of the Poro. "the office of the mabole in the Poro society which is held by a woman, commands the highest respect and has an integral role in the ceremonial life and purpose of that association" (Little 1967:164):

Although secret societies are distinct from secular political organizations, their grip on local political life is strong. During the seclusion of the initiation period, society elders decide about land disputes, mediate in family conflicts, if necessary, settle matters of war and peace. It is not that society rules override chieftaincy rules, rather the two

---

[107] The Mende constitute with the Temne the two most important ethnic groups in Sierra Leone, as far as their numerical representation is concerned.

domains are intertwined, chiefs being responsible for maintaining order and tradition, both notions inseparably tied to secret societies. The influence of the societies exceeds the limits of the locality. It is largely, admitted that nothing can be arranged and negotiated on the political level without taking the societies into account. Even high ranking politicians do sometimes formally prostrate themselves in front of society elders. Poro's[108] perceived importance and its capacity to interfere with national politics is well reflected in the fact that the National Council of Paramount Chiefs "decided to suspend the activities of Poro societies across the country until the November 17 (2012) general elections are concluded"[109] .

Poro and Bondo constitute one of the most important cross-cultural traits of Sierra Leonean ethnic groups. Sierra Leone is a multi-ethnic country – with 16 officially recognised ethnic groups, including the Krio, besides some minorities and immigrant communities, the most important being that of Lebanese merchants. Ethnicity and political affiliation are closely related because geographically ethnic groups are not distributed evenly and voting at national elections has always been influenced by regionalism. Traditionally, the North votes for APC, the South for SLPP. It follows, that Kono, Mende and Sherbro voters are more probably supporters of the SLPP, while the Temne, Limba and Susu have more chance to be on the side of the APC. If despite this inherent tension the highly politicised civil war never took up an ethnic colouring, there must be some important breaks in the system. Besides the integrative force of the society complex, the most important factor in the preservation of ethnic peace during the war was probably kinship, more precisely the highly flexible nature of kinship rules and marriage patterns.

It is not that ethnic groups in Sierra Leone - like elsewhere - are not conceived as ideally endogamous; it is just that transgression is - if not encouraged - socially accepted. This tolerance towards exogamy has been doubtlessly encouraged by the frequent movements of the populations of the "hinterland", the integrative effect of domestic slavery, making it possible for descendants of slaves to be incorporated into local kin groups (Knörr and Trajano Filho 2010), by the urbanization process making Freetown

---

[108] Poro is the men's sodality amongst the Mende and by extrapolation today it often refers generally to the traditional ethnic bound civil societies.

[109] For fear of political intimidation… Paramount Chiefs suspend Poro activities. Africa Young Voices (AYV) http://africayoungvoices.com/2012/06/for-fear-of-political-intimidation%E2%80%A6-paramount-chiefs-suspend-poro-activities/ Accessed: 22.06. 2012

an ethnic melting pot and turning it into the centre of creolisation, producing and spreading a distinct culture and a vernacular language. Exogamy, the liberal attitude towards marriage allowing the incorporation of children born outside of a legal bond and the widespread practice of taking poorer children into fosterage by more well off families make most of households a multiethnic and multicultural melting pot. Although fosterage is not without the danger of child abuse, it has traditionally served – besides socialising Sierra Leoneans to ethnic tolerance - as an important social valve creating some social mobility in an otherwise unequal society.

Multi-ethnic coexistence within the household correlates with broad religious tolerance. According to the CIA fact book[110] 60% of the population is Muslim, 10% Christian and 30% adhere to some kind of "indigenous belief". Other websites[111] publish radically different percentages, mentioning for example 60% indigenous, 30% Muslim and 10 % Christian religion. The problem with these statistics (besides their fundamental inaccuracy) is that contradicting Western dogmatism, „indigenous religion", is not antithetic with Christianity and Islam in most people's mind. Therefore it does not constitute a third category, rather a profound layer always present under a more or less thick layer of monotheism. Presumably those who esteem the Muslim at 60% and the Christians at 20% are closer to the truth. If exact figures are hard to obtain, what is to be retained is the regular coexistence of Islam and Christianity. In almost every village where I went I found at least one church and one mosque and at public events people pray together, following both the Muslim and the Christian tradition.

Religiosity is high, adhesion to a religion is a strong social expectation but the dividing line lies more between believer and non-believer than between Muslim and Christian[112]. On the political level, peaceful religious coexistence is sealed by the highly respected institution of the "Inter-religious Council"[113]. "Among the numerous players involved in shaping the Lomé Peace Agreement, the Inter-religious Council of Sierra Leone (created in 1997) stands out as the most highly visible and effective non-governmental bridge builder between the warring factions and a population devastated

---

[110] https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/sl.html Accessed: 15.08.2012.. If exact
[111] https://www.courses.psu.edu/test/test100_hkr/AFIM/Body_HTML/Religion_table.html
[112] Occasional religious violence however does occur locally and in the past years fundamentalist Islam has been strengthened from outside, without however constituting a threat at this point to ethnic /religious tolerance.
[113] The IRC-SL was formed in 1997 as a chapter of the World Conference on Religion and Peace. See (World Bank, 2007).

and divided by more than eight years of violence" – writes an eyewitness[114] .

Chieftaincy, secret society, kinship and religious authority are the most important fields where hierarchies are fixed and power is located on the local level. If they do not correspond to most definition of civil society, they are certainly part of it, they are the institutions that hold civil society together, in the sense of "the community held together by shared values and ideals" (Garland 1999:72). My intention is not to idealize these institutions. These fields, like any social field where power is concentrated, are potentially oppressive. It would also be very hard to qualify them democratic in any meaningful way; however they probably allow more participation and contribute to reduce power distance more efficiently than formal democratisation. They might partly hold the key to the anthropologist's observation, explaining why"people socialise freely across class and ethnic boundaries." (Bosire 2013:66) For these loci of power are the very domains making it possible that some (if not all) at the bottom – under certain circumstances and within the strict limits of the overall system – can communicate with those at the top, participating not only nominally but effectively in the negotiation of the moral economy of the group. They also encourage the development of a sense of communality which is socially protective and symbolically valorising, circumventing the danger that particularistic identities might represent to a society's integrative forces. In other words, these institutions show the possibility of some form of participatory governance without democracy, of social integration without universalism, of social mobility without equal rights, of civil society without the neat separation between the public and the private, between the power and its subject.

Voluntary organisations

The above account may create the sense that civil society in the Sierra Leonean settings is not necessarily found in voluntary organisations, in the way the West is used to it. My contention then could be read as a disguised *othering* exercise proving maybe that civil society does exist in Sierra Leone, but in a very exotic, almost primitive form. Although my not so hidden intention is to deconstruct the neoliberal understanding of civil society as identical with the NGO world, and to show in how many disguised forms

---

[114] Thomas Mark Turay: Civil Society and Peace Building. The role of the interreligous Council of Sierra Leone, Accord Sierra Leone (2000) http://www.c-r.org/accord-article/civil-society-and-peacebuilding-role-inter-religious-council-sierra-leone

actual civic society might exist in non-Western societies, I also claim that the history of voluntary organisations did not start with NGOs and CSOs. The predecessors of present day CSOs are pretty much local constructs, although we have to make sure that we understand the local as being in a constant production at the intersection of the exogenous and the endogenous. Friendly societies are as old as Freetown, but as Little (Little 1960:92) remarks "the modern African town is mostly a product of forces external not only to itself but to African society in general....its primary relationship is with Europe". A few paragraphs later he adds: "Migration (from the interior) is responsible for a relatively large proportion of the urban being strangers to the modern town and its institutions". As the West African town is a combination between forces of European influence and of internal migration, friendly societies were also born out of these two influences. In the case of Freetown we have to add to the already complex picture the cultural predisposition of the first black settlers, influenced by Yoruba cultural heritage as well as by reminiscences of their sojourn in England and North America. According to Little (1960: 97), the bourgeoning of "voluntary organisations comprising a host of tribal unions, friendly societies, church groups, occupational associations, and savings group" was in a way an answer given to the challenges of a new way of living by people who were fundamentally used to communitarian existence, cast in an environment to which they were strangers. "Voluntary associations are largely an outgrowth of the ideas and institutions brought in by Europeans as missionaries, government officials and business men. In addition, most of them combine in their practices and procedures the traditional interests and customs with which their members are more familiar". (Ibid: 98). Voluntary associations are and have always been an inherent feature of city life in West Africa and they cannot be regarded as foreign implants, but they are also not completely indigenous. "(the associative life) is the product of outside forces, but its principal links, socially as well as culturally, are with its own hinterlands" (Ibid:101)

Many new organisational forms grew out of secret society traditions (Abdullah 1994; Banton 1957 (1969); Cohen 1981; King 2012; Little 1967; Nunley 1987). While Little differentiate traditional, traditional-modernized and modern associations (1957: 589) King (2012) classifies secret societies as traditional, old urban and new urban. Both classifications suggest that there is a relatively continuous transition between organisational forms, newer types continuing to carry some of the traits of older ones.

Traditional secret societies were brought to town by migrants from the provinces and were adapted to city life. King (2012 :71) reminds that Bondo "entered Freetown in 1850…adapting its rituals to mailo jazz ensembles". Urban Bondo ceremonies thus included public dancing to traditional music, mixed with jazz elements. Society traditions, including the importance attributed to the African concept of "medicine" (special objects and preparations having magical power), the practice of secret retreat and the "pulling of the devils" (the public procession making display of the society masks) have survived the rural-urban migration, but these ideas and practices were not strange to the black settlers either.[115] The settlers, who became the Krios, provided professionals and administrators for the colonial administration for generations. They assimilated to the colonial master in their manners and looks, but did not lose completely the Yoruba traditions inherited from their African ancestors (Nunley 1988; Nunley 1985; Nunley 1987) Krios incorporated these traditions into their own secret societies, the two major ones being the Agugu (of Muslim tradition) and the Hunters' Secret society (proper to Christian Krios). While the Bondo can be considered as "traditional", Agugu and the Hunting Society would belong to the "old urban" forms in King's classification.

Free masonry can be considered another form of old urban secret society. There was a time - in the 1960s and 1970s- when it was the most important organizing principle for Krio men's sociability, causing the congregations of the Hunting society appear obsolete (Cohen 1981:102) It seemed that because of its "strict bureaucratic type of organization and discipline" it was more apt to be „introduced within the modern polity". However during the past decades the Hunting society's popularity grew to the detriment of the masonic lodges. Hunting rallies and outings are publicly announced, their activities regularly discussed in Krio gatherings. Although popular and widespread, these activities have still a "secret" character, linked to the ritual and sacred order of the society. They have, at the same time, a more mundane feature, the society assuming much of the roles of a secular civil society organization: offering mutual help for the members, catering to the needs of those in difficulty and collecting money for the education of talented young Krios who are sent abroad to study.

---

[115] African settlers of different ethnic and geographical origins ended up creating a distinct culture, and a language which became the vernacular idiom all over Sierra Leone. On the culture specificities of Krios see: Cohen (1981).

The urban societies, their style and rituals made a deep impression on young boys of modest - especially migrant – origin. From the 1940s they started to create their own groups, which were partly secret societies, partly gangs. These gang-like societies that King categorizes as "new urban" are also called Alikali or Odelay, both having the connotation of being "marginal" (King 2012:1). These societies have often been associated with illicit activities and antisocial behaviour. Their public reception varied from one epoch to the other: While not infrequently they were vilified as posing a threat to public order, when the colonial administration attempted to make them illegal even middle class city dwellers were scandalized by the idea that the police could arrest "devils" who are not humans but spirits, the manifestation of the ancestors (Nunley 1987).

"Devil" masquerades are still an everyday spectacle in the streets of Freetown. They inspire curiosity and awe. The fear they provoke is double: it is similar to the feeling that any gang of potentially drunk or stoned young males marching in the street in large groups would provoke anywhere any time. But this is true only with regard to what is behind the mask. Because the masks themselves command respect and incite apprehension of a spiritual nature, nothing to do with a band of hooligans. Masks do not only personalise spirits, they incarnate them and the one wearing the mask is becoming one with the spirit of the mask. Traditional and neo-traditional societies are not different in this respect.

Apart from the established forms of secret societies, the marginal types also seem to be undergoing a revival. King shows what attraction these societies exercise on young people and how they constitute a channel through which they can negotiate and contest "social relevance, power prestige, citizenship and even nationhood" (King 2012:12) Neo traditional secret societies are voluntary organisations with a real capacity to challenge State power, NOT because of their detachment from formal modern power structures but precisely because they allow destitute youth to participate in networks of power (King 2007). This has always been the case. Most earlier observers mention the involvement of voluntary organizations in politics (Banton 1957 (1969); Nunley 1988), however, the political games in which they are engaged do not always make it easy to decide if this means a chance for them to constitute a counter-power, or, to the contrary, it facilitates their co-optation.

Not all voluntary organisations are of the secret type. Descendants of the settlers[116]' formed descendant associations "celebrating ideas of descendants of different origins" (Cohen 1981) Ethnic identification was the basis on which migrants' tribal associations were organized, crystallized around tribal leaders, officially recognized as tribal heads. The "natives"[117] used these associations for the double purpose of affirming their ethnic identity while getting integrated into the new city life relying on them. They had the function to "welcome and look after persons newly arrived from the country" (Little 57:582), to provide members "with mutual aid…sympathy and financial assistance in the case of illness, and the responsibility for the funeral" (Ibid).

Other associations were created around social functions related to urban life. "As early as 1909, three ratepayers' associations were established in the city…formed for purposes of election, their three thousand members being the only residents who had the right to vote…Each association had a president, a vice-president, financial secretary, treasurer, general secretary and executive council" (Cohen 1981:55).

It became possible to officially register friendly societies as early as in 1886[118]. Although registration was not obligatory it became popular because it was generally held that it meant official recognition for the associations. (Banton 1957 (1969)) From the 1920s to the 1950s the number of registered societies rapidly increased. Banton gives an estimation of around 200 registered organizations operating in 1953. This number however only included a fraction of the totality of active associations, the majority of which remained non-registered. In Banton's 1950 statistics tribal affiliation was still the most important point of reference for the associations. Those of non-ethnic character (15 of them) were organized according to occupational criteria, like the many associations of market women.

By the mid-20th century associative life flourished both in Freetown and in the provinces. Friendly societies organized not only sociability and ethnic solidarity, they „assumed responsibility for social services in matters of health, sanitation and welfare"

---

[116] We remember that the first settlers were of African (often Western-African) origin, transported back by the British from London, Canada, Jamaica and liberated from the (by then) illegal slave boats captured on open sea.
[117] The term "native" is still an accepted word used to for somebody living in the "interior" as opposed to the Western Peninsula
[118] The Savings Bank Ordinance made it possible for friendly organisations to open a bank account as early as 1886.

(Cohen 1981:100). Some of them were limited to mutual aid and benefit, helping members to save, by a rotating credit system, called the *ososu*, which is still a widespread practice both in the cities and in rural areas. Members of ososu groups contribute weekly a given amount and each week somebody else can benefit from the entire savings of the last period. Some associations were organised around social activities. "Social clubs" were originally reserved for the Europeanised Krio elite, offering ballroom dancing, dining and other recreational activities (Little 1957 :586), but the model was progressively taken over by popular classes, albeit with a changed content and today "social clubs" tend to be youth organisations, not infrequently to be found in ghettoes, in which music (and ganja smoking) play and important integrative role. Besides offering a feeling of fraternity, social and economic support, social clubs (and indeed all voluntary organisations) play a socialising, normalising role. Members are expected to follow some basic rules, for example avoid rude language or violence towards each other. Those who transgress these rules risk to be fined, in more serious cases even exclusion. Little (1957 :591) could write in the fifties that friendly societies substitute "traditional agencies of social control" (Ibid 593). King, writing about Odelay societies some 60 years later see these as substitutes of a non-existent welfare system, "providing social services when the state fails" (King 2012 :10). Little seems to be right explaining the effervescence of associative life in the West African city as an adaptive mechanism, responsible for creating – out of an original deficit- an extraordinary rich social dynamic.

Political mobilisation

Political mobilisation in Sierra Leone can be traced back to 3 sources. The first source is collective action of non-political groups, such as secret societies, gangs or even spontaneous assemblies. In 1938 20 000 people demonstrated spontaneously against what they esteemed to be a threat against the liberty of expression by the government (Denzel 1982). Riots in 1955-56 also mobilized huge numbers. During the mid-seventies, under the authoritarian rule of Siaka Stevens, university students formed the most vocal opposition to the regime (Luke 1985:664). Political mobilisation however is not universally oppositional. Political leaders have always been notorious for using youth gangs for rallying and bullying adversary camps. This habit accompanied presidential and legislative elections throughout the war well until the last elections,

despite the fact that most external observers found these fairly democratic (Christensen 2012).

The second source of openly politicized civil society action from the beginning of the 20th century is the pool of different professional unions, some of which developed into class conscious trade unions (Luke 1985) By 1963 the number of affiliated members in the Federation of Labour (Labour Congress) augmented to 19.441 (Ibid :628). After a promising start, trade unionism began to decline with Siaka Steven's arrival into power. Although Stevens was also a trade unionist (Ibid :625), when he came into power he did little to prove his allegiance to the working class or to the poor. "Labour Congress (SLLC), the country's principal labour union, was closely tied to that of the governing APC" (Pham 2004). Trade union leaders were silenced and replaced by reliable party members or offered positions in the government. With the introduction of the one party regime, trade union opposition became even less critical and more and more invisible. It was not until the early 80'ies that, awakened by the general degradation of living standards, the Labour Congress found its lost impetus when calling for a general strike led to the arrest of many of its leaders. In the post-war period professional associations have still played sometimes an oppositional role, defending loudly the interest of their members – this is true first of all for marginalised professions, like that of the moto-taxi drivers - but trade unions usually have not received much encouragement from the new pro-civil society government or international organisations. When I visited their offices in 2008-2009, they looked a bit obsolete and lacking dynamism, next to the newer civil society focusing on Human Rights, which received most of the official attention.

The third source of political activism is to be found in voluntary organizations with a political agenda. The difficulty to draw a neat dividing line between civil society and political power is particularly noticeable here, as most of the political parties developed out of associations defending collective interests, initially opposing people of the Protectorate and .the Krio elite. In 1922 the Committee of Educated Aborigines was formed (Koroma and al. 2005:95) In 1940 and 46 two other organisations saw the light of day: the Protectorate Educational Progressive Union and the Sierra Leone Organization Society. As a response, the Krios formed in 1950 the National Council of Sierra Leone (NCSL), incorporating several existing associations, authorities and

political entities, namely: the Sierra Leone Youth League, the Settlers Descendants Associations, the Rate Payers Association, the Rural Areas Council, the Sierra Leone Socialist Party, the Sierra Leone Branch of the National Congress of British West Africa, the Sierra Leone Political Group and the Fourah Bay Communities. The NCSL functioned as an actual party, with the aim of influencing the content of the new constitution, and to prepare Independence.

The Sierra Leone Youth League was created by Wallace Johnson in 1938, on the model of the West African Youth League, another organisation created by Johnson a few years earlier. Johnson was a radical activist. He initiated various labour unions, started a movement and edited a newspaper. He was arrested several times and he served a 12 month prison sentence (Denzel 1982). Cumming-John's Women Movement founded in 1952 followed more or less the same line. This line is not easily separable from that of the labour movement, as both Wallace and Cumming-John were trade unionist, but both of them had a larger vision, influenced by pan-Africanist, anti-imperialist, Marxist-Leninists currents of thought. Before they became politically active in Sierra Leone, they had both travelled widely and got involved in different international political movements. This type of politicizing also lost impetus with the one party system, all the more so because Stevens was not Wallace's hereditary political enemy but his theoretical ally. The authoritarian rule of Stevens shed doubt on the sincerity and relevance of trade unionism.

Paradoxically the civil war served again as a new catalyser of civil movements, mobilising vast sections of the population. In a widely cited article, Pham relates a story, in which "fifteen of the local (leaders of the Soro-Gbema chiefdom) walked across the (Mano River) bridge to the rebel-controlled territory singing hymns and carrying banners bearing peace slogans". Three of them offered themselves as hostages for the rebels as guarantors of the truce. (Pham 2004) That happened in 1994. A year later "some sixty groups from the religious, civil society, and other non-governmental sectors—including the Council of Churches in Sierra Leone, the Sierra Leone Labour Congress, and the Sierra Leone Teachers' Union—to band together in early 1995 to form the National Co-ordinating Committee for Peace (NCCP)" (Ibid). In the same period, meetings between representatives of the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA), the Women's Association for National Development (WAND), the National Organization

for Women (NOW), and the Women's Wing of the Sierra Leone Labour Congress, the Sierra Leone Association of University Women (SLAUW), members of Freetown's women traders' associations and religiously based women's groups, the National Displaced Women's Organization— „led to the establishment of the Sierra Leone Women's Forum (SLWF). Out of these networking meetings, a new group, the Sierra Leone Women's Movement for Peace (SLWMP) was formed….the SLWMP led a "peace march" of women professionals, students, traders, and even soldiers, singing and dancing through the streets of Freetown in January 1995." (Ibid).

Civil Society, and especially women's group were particularly loud in calling for peace, but their voices were amplified and made more articulate by external actors. The National Consultative Conference where these groups were invited to discuss about the peace and the coming elections – the idea that elections were necessary for peace was promoted by the UN – was organised by a Sierra Leonean UN diplomat. At the elections that finally took place in 1996 another UN diplomat was voted in. Civil Society continued to have the same enhanced role within a framework created elsewhere - in the spheres of power - even in the post-conflict peace-building process. Its fitting in this framework became progressively more and more visibly uncomfortable. The first instrument created to ensure accountability was the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, as proposed in the Lomé Peace Agreement. The objective of the Commission was national healing, rather than doing justice. It was therefore conceived as an inclusive body: in the selection committee for its seven members even the RUF was represented. Civil Society was invited to act for the TRC. A coalition of twenty-seven human rights organisation (National Forum for Human Rights) was set up with the help of the Open Society Institute and UNAMSIL and its members requested to conduct a "national sensitisation campaign".

But by the time the Commission could start its work, the mood of the international community and that of the Sierra Leone government was less forgiving. Times have changed and it was important to point at the culprits to avoid impunity. In 2002 the UN signed a contract with the government of Sierra Leone agreeing on the establishment of a Special Court (SCSL) for the indictment of those "who bear the greatest responsibility" for the atrocities. The two accountability instruments thus operated next to each other with a considerably different ethos, and arguably the newer

brother side-lined the older one, the Special Court deviating considerable funds from TRC. Unlike the latter, the SCSL did not recruit civil society members, but it relied even more heavily on civil society for the popularisation of its activities, to that point that it even created its own sensitising civil society group. "The SCSL has become perhaps the first international tribunal to create its own nongovernmental organisation, the "Accountability Now Clubs", a student-based program supported by the Special Court's outreach Budget" (Pham 2004)

With this brief – and certainly incomplete – historical overview I intended to call attention to the rich tradition of Sierra Leonean civil society, outside the NGO world, a fact that present international civil society builders easily forget, if they ever have been aware of it. Despite the importance of the historical perspective, it is important not to read this story through an evolutionary prism. The appearance of new forms of organizations does not necessarily mean the extinction of the predecessors. Nor do people join organizations in an exclusive manner. Simultaneous memberships in different forms of associations are more the rule than the exception. As a result, the present civil society landscape is populated by all the strata, classes and types described above - between which people are crossing and trafficking with surprising ease, constantly linking and de-linking alliances. Amongst the borders to be crossed daily there is the one separating civil society and the state. The state thus penetrates in civil society, attempting to canalise, tame and use its civic potentials.

NGOization of civil society –production of project society

Notwithstanding the long tradition of voluntary organisations, linking mentally the development of Sierra Leonean civil society to the influx of international NGOs during the war is partially correct. Although – as I have shown - civil society existed before, after 1990 (and in fact more from 1995) the transformation from previous forms of civil society to organizations responding to NGO expectations accelerated - a process accompanied by the relegation of anything that did not fit in this picture into the more and more discredited domain of tradition, made invisible for those engaged in democracy building.   When the CGG[119] speaks of a "vibrant civil society[120]"

---

[119] Campaign for Good Governance, a local NGO

(Campaign_for_Good_Governance and Christian_Aid 2006). it is already evident that the expression uniquely encompasses these newer forms of organisations: registered NGOs and civil society organisations, which correspond to the definition of civil society in the modern sense.

Not that traditional organizations cannot be assimilated in a way that they fit the new criteria. For example, Firestone Odelay society, one of the most important neo-traditional urban secret societies, formed in the 50ies renamed itself Firestone Cultural Society in 1967 and Firestone Youth Development and Cultural organisation in 1989. (King 2012 :53) In 2008 Firestone Youth Development and Cultural organisation was carrying out an NGO sponsored sensitisation programme on peaceful local elections. (Ibid:66) Not that the society had been entirely changed or lost its secret society identity. According to King Firestone Odelay emphasises that it is still a secret society, "while progressively refashioning itself as being a youth organisation, a social service provider and even an NGO with a secret society core" (Ibid:81) In other words, for certain purposes it is a respectable civil society organisation, for other purposes it is a secret society, on the margin between the occult and the criminal. King speaks about "structured ambiguity" to explain how this double identity can be exploited both by the organisation itself and the official structures that interact with it. I prefer to speak about NGOization. Thanks to NGOization when the CGG or other potential donor organisations look at Firestone, they do not have to see the second identity. It is as if they dealt with a standard civil society organisation, not very different from any such organisations in any Western city.

In the second half of the 2000s Sierra Leone saw an unprecedented expansion of such organisations. When I started my fieldwork in 2008 I quickly came to the conclusion that I arrived in a country with the largest number of civil society organisation per capita in the world. Exact figures were hard to get even in the ministry which is supposed to carry out the registration, but in 2009, during a personal interview[121] the government official in charge mentioned about 3000 registered NGOs (international or national altogether). Local CSOs (an expression which is sometimes

---

[120] Between the non existent, the weak and the vibrant civil society the distance is not as big as it seems to be. These combination of words are used in the same contexts, with different purposes, referring to the same organisational background
[121] Interview with a functionary in MOFED (Ministry of Finance and Economic Development) , April 2009

used as a collective category including all registered local voluntary organisations, but more often it is understood to signify grass-roots organisations as opposed to NGOs) were logically more numerous because their registration is linked to fewer formalities.

Local and international non-governmental organisations are alike under the NGO legislation of 2009[122]. The system is highly formalised, costly and gives full control to state agencies. NGOs are supposed to be registered several times. They have to register at the City council, at MoFED (Ministry of Finance and Economic Development) and with an umbrella organization, SLANGO (Sierra Leone Association of Non-Governmental Organizations), a body created and financed by the government. The registration fee is relatively high and it is payable each year. The Ministry can deny the re-registration of an NGO based on its "performance". In the years between 2009-2014 this right was rarely exercised, but this stipulation of the law clearly gives authorisation to the State to get rid of any organisation qualified as "undesirable".

Local NGOs represent only the tip of the iceberg, they constitute the aristocracy of civil society, those organisations that have reached maturity and can apply for funds in their own right. CSOs including CBOs (Community Based Organisations), DPOs (Disabled People's Organisation) and other Os[123] face somewhat lighter administrative regulations. CBOs register at the local council and with the Ministry of Social Welfare. The complicated registration system (and the costs it represents) creates a secondary hierarchy separating those organizations (both NGOs and other CSOs) which can afford meeting all the official requirements from those which are not able to do so, and as a consequence are condemned to some kind of semi-illegality. Paradoxically, in this way, the stringent formal criteria contribute to maintaining informality. What the system does not provide is transparency, as neither SLANGO nor the Ministry sees all the organizations. They have only estimates of their number – not necessarily the same, let alone a clear picture of what they are doing.

In spite of the fuzziness of the zone in which NGOs operate, this formalized part of civil society constituted Sierra Leone's most important economic sector in the post-war years. The bulk of development money is absorbed by international organizations which

---

[122] The Government of Sierra Leone enacted the Revised NGO Policy Regulations in 2009 . Cf. http://www.icnl.org/research/monitor.html
[123] For a full classification of types of CSOs see Shivji (2007)

often constitute the most important intermediary link between foreign aid provision and local beneficiaries. In the 2010 budget foreign aid represented 40% of the total revenues, while the domestic revenue (collected from taxes) was only 6%[124].

As international organisations usually need local counterparts to channel aid to end users, a chain is formed from donors to beneficiaries with several intermediary links. Through the chain not only are financial resources circulated but also ideas, ideals, prestige and position. In other words, economic, symbolic and social capital is formed, accumulated and exchanged in civil society, contributing to the formation of a new local NGO elite necessarily influenced by donor expectations, these more often than not reflecting "the global hegemony of the Western worldview" (Rottenburg 2009) . In this way aid becomes a tool of normalisation through NGOs.

NGOs work by projects. Not that this is what necessarily they esteem to be the best way, but because this is what corresponds the most to the power structure of which they are the product. Sampson coined the expression of "Project Society" to describe the power structure in which NGOs operate (Sampson 2005). Despite the temporal and geographic specificities of its genesis – Sampson worked in the Balkans in the early 2000ies -, the use of the expression can be generalized and extended. It seems to perfectly suit the case of Sierra Leone. In project society the dominant mode of redistribution passes through NGOs, ostensibly detached from national and international governments but in reality caught in a network of cascading dependencies. What ensues is a specific mode of governmentality with specific types of actors and specific types of policies which NGOs come to serve.

Project society is more than a form of governance through short term projects channelling funds - mostly of international origin - through a series of non-state actors to a fragmented, selected and localised public. The fact that projects become the main tool for treating social problems in a country reflects the refusal of the state to take full responsibility for redistribution and for equalising the highly unequal life chances of its citizens. In this way, stuck between international donors and NGOs, the state is

---

[124] Ministry of Finance and Economic Development,– Publications, Of course, the figures published in official statistics totally disregard the informal sector, which provides subsistence to the majority of the population. http://www.mofed.gov.sl/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=13&Itemid=28, Accessed: 06.07. 2012.

exonerated from producing a coherent policy in relation to social welfare and the protection of pluralism.

The submission of civil society to dominant power relations risks emptying the concept of civil society itself. Instead of accountability, project society has created an NGO elite more accountable to donors than to their own "target groups". Instead of promoting "democracy" it has cut the chances of those at the bottom to have a real say in questions affecting their lives. Instead of creating "social mobility" it has widened the gap between social classes, strengthening and reifying the boundaries separating them. In this upside-down world, the ostensible empowerment of civil society by international actors results often in their fundamental disempowerment (Comaroff and Comaroff 1999; Davis 2006b; Ferguson 2006; Hann and Dunn 1996; Hudock 1999).Despite of the fact that there are remarkably resilient NGOs and CSOs, NGOisation remains a threat capable of sucking any voluntary association, group or movement into project society, neutralising its potentially subversive energy. In this way the politicised language of project society becomes part of the state's anti-politics machine, depoliticising potential political actions and movements (Ferguson 1994)

NGOIzation describes a general process promising democracy but delivering only formal democratization. By letting itself be NGOIzed, civil society is committing a supreme betrayal, reversing its own historical role, offering its alliance to those on power rather than to subaltern classes (Gramsci and Buttigieg 1992). Consequently, civil society today, taken hostage by a complicated web of local and global interests, might easily be confined to a function of containing potential social unrest - thus entrenching inequalities – instead of reducing them.

Where parallel worlds meet: Civil society against civic society

Civil society building has been one of the major tasks of developmental agencies taking care of post-war reconstruction. That meant in practice the (re)thematisation of civic movements and groups according to the preferences of the international community, the tacit motivation to create new organisations and the channelling of existing organisations into broader federations, umbrellas and forums, linking these to the state apparatus. Human Rights were such a broad thematic focus. The National Forum for Human Rights was composed of not less than twenty sever human rights

organization and it was supported by UNAMSIL. UNAMSIL also helped to set up district level Human Right Committees from 2002. These Committees are also supported by the parastatal scheme funded by DFID (UK's Department for International Development), the Justice Sector Development Program (JSDP). DFID also launched its own civil society building initiative in 2005. ENCISS (Enhancing the interface between civil society and the state) was nominally a project but practically a new institution financed to the extent of 5 million USD. In 2008 UNDP brought to life another interface between the state and civil society: the UNDP-CSO Human Rights Forum, registering 50 CSOs in Freetown as well as in the provinces. The rationale behind the new structure was that civil society was "chronically weak" and "unable to participate adequately in policy dialogue on national issues that affect the country" (UNDP 2008:6). At the moment of its closure in 2011 however it was difficult to see in what way the Forum strengthened civil society, leaving behind a disoriented group, profoundly embittered by the shrinking of funding possibilities, with little will to continue the cooperation outside the arena created by UNDP. The gap was soon filled by UNPSIL (the successor of UNAMSIL) which came back to organise a new human rights forum the same year. Although UNIPSIL and UNDP belonged to the same UN family, working for the same cause, under the surface there had always been a secret rivalry between them over the ownership of Human Rights issues – at least this is how organisations in the field decoded the situation. As a result, members of older District Human Rights Committees (as well as workers of JSDP) regarded the young Human Rights Forum (and its members) with an ill-concealed suspicion.

Between 2009 and 2011 I regularly attended meetings of the Forum. Once a month a public meeting was organised by UNDP, but in between these rather formal occasions, the forum also held its "in-house meetings", where only local members participated, excluding the UN personnel. The incident I would like to relate bellow started in one of these in-house meetings. Just before closing the assembly, one of the members presented a guest, who was the chairman of a District Human Rights Committee. This was already an event in itself, because of the hidden tension between UNIPSIL and UNDP of which everybody knew but nobody wanted to speak about. Indeed, what brought the guest was a "serious Human Rights violation" – as he formulated it. The case was apparently that serious that he had to ask the official support of the Forum. What actually had happened was not immediately totally clear:

"the women came to pressurise their society business"…"the boy was laying on the veranda when they captured him"… "they took him to their secret bush and washed him with leaves"… "he was given food"…"he will not live long"…"the father begged the women but they insisted that he pays"…"the women also claim for a girl in exchange" – he resumed. The story had to be translated more or less like this: in a village belonging under his authority as a District Committee Chairman, women belonging to the Bondo society abducted and tortured a child (actually we understood he was a teenager boy), then asking an unreasonably high ransom from the boy's traumatised father for his release. They also obliged the man to provide a young girl to be initiated.

To me, this sounded rather like a village quarrel without importance, but to my surprise the Forum took the complaint very seriously and immediately formed a "fact finding mission" to be sent to the village and write a report. I volunteered to be part of the delegation. When our group actually hit the road a few days later I discovered with surprise that finally only one regular member of the Forum took part, the other two delegates were young people whom I had never seen before. UNDP agreed to contribute with the travel costs but I offered to pay for my trip, this was probably a reason why my candidature was accepted. Our very small and quite heteroclite group arrived to the district headquarters on a Friday afternoon. There we were the guests of the Human Rights Committee Chairman who offered us a copious dinner, to which he invited members of local CSOs belonging to the Committee. Most of these CSOs are local branches of international federations with their headquarters in Freetown. Their local character is therefore somewhat ambiguous, as they are part of a larger, cosmopolitan, urbanised trans-local network, despite their rural attachments. The impression that what actually was at stake was a combat between the forces of backward tradition and those of enlightened modernity was accentuated by the participants' explicit framing, our leader announcing that "we came from Freetown to find out the truth", while our hosts warned us that if we visit the Paramount Chief, we should not "allow the tradition overshadow Human Rights". The irony of the situation was that it was in fact tradition which demanded that before any other proceedings we visit the Chief and ask for his protection, symbolically "sitting on his knee" and giving him a "small kola", a token payment. The Committee Chairman in person watched that we comply with this obligation, accompanying our group to the ruler's house.

Apart from good manners, it was logical to start the investigation by talking to the Chief, as apparently, he was also involved in the incident. His participation in the events was only natural as he was considered to be the custodian of tradition, including secrete society tradition, and he was expected to stand as a guarantor of customary law. At the chief's house what was supposed to be a simple act of politeness and a possible reality check was gradually turned to be a strange duel between modernity and tradition, where the camps were increasingly unclear. While on the one hand, the parties clearly announced from where they talked - the delegation from a legalist, human right perspective ("Human Rights is the priority today of the government"), the chief from a traditionalist stance ("culture is culture and nobody is going to take it away from us") - on the other hand, their different arguments produced a blurred field where what was magical and what rational got confused. The human rights defenders did not stop speaking about the magical harm inflicted on the child, while the chief was depicting the boy's father as a scoundrel acting for quite mundane, monetary benefits. He was visibly not interested in the occult implications of the story. He was an educated, well-travelled man and he refused to be treated as intellectually inferior to his urban guests. He did not hesitate to attack them on their own field. He was not against human rights, he was against ignorance – he said. "Please Lord, let these people be trained!"- He sighed at one point theatrically, lifting his eyes to the sky. "They pick them up in the street and then they advocate human rights! Please, let them be trained first!"

Despite his irritation he told us what he knew: Office holders of the Bondo society reported to him that a boy broke the law by not hiding in the house - as custom wants it - the moment when the newly initiate girls left the bush to come sing and dance in the village. The elders of the society had warned everybody in the village and so they hold the boy's father directly responsible for the transgression as he was supposed to make sure everybody in his household obey the warning. In the circumstances the women are entitled to fine the culprit, which they did, after releasing the boy. However, the father, in his infinite cowardice ran to his friends in Freetown to save him, rather than paying the due fine. Although he was too old to conduct the investigation himself – the chief said - he did what he was supposed to do: send his two emissaries, two women, a traditional leader and a councillor. These two women were not only entrusted to find out what had happened but also to negotiate with the parties and come out with a just solution, respectful of customary law. This was the summary of the situation, although everything

was not said as clearly, facts were rather alluded to. The Paramount Chief finished with an advice: we should go and see the things with our own eyes. His only condition was that we take the two female emissaries with us.

And so we did. The next day we hired a taxi, picked up the women and went with them directly to the village. Besides the Freetown based human rights fighters, the Distrct Human Rights Committee Chairman and two of his Committee members were part of this trip. One of them was a young woman, working for an NGO fighting against FGM (female genital mutilation – a value laden technical term used by NGOs for female circumcision), the other one the presenter of a local radio, who apparently was the one who thought of referring the case to the UNDP-CSO Forum in the beginning. It was clear that for all the three of them it was a matter of honour to prove the well-foundedness of the accusation of human rights abuse, while the chief's two representatives had the interest to prove the guiltiness of the father. Despite the opposing stances, no animosity could be felt in the car.

After this long and elaborate preparation, the reception in the village was somewhat disappointing. We found nobody at home, except for the complainant, the father of the victim. He alone seemed to have been expecting the visit. His son could not be found anywhere. It was a cloudy day, the grey sky was hanging low and the abandoned village looked hostile to the uninvited guests. The father rushed to find his son somewhere in the forest. The members of the delegation were roaming aimlessly amongst the empty houses. There was nobody to talk to except for our two guides, the Paramount Chief's messengers. They were not unfriendly and not reluctant to talk. By the time an official village meeting could finally be called, the biggest part of the investigation had already been completed – in the privacy of a veranda.

As it turned out, just the day before another fact finding mission visited the village, that of the local JSDP office. As the JSDP was supposed to work with the Human Rights Committee it was strange that the Committee's Chairman was not informed about this mission. Decidedly, the case of the Bondo women became an issue for more and more actors, for whom the position to be taken in the matter became a serious stake. As other details were being revealed, we had one surprise after another. First, we learned that the complainant father was nobody else than the village chief. That put the whole story in a different perspective because even the Freetown NGO members had to admit:

he should have been the one to enforce the law, instead of breaking it. Second, we understood that the unfortunate boy was not his biological son, but a member of his larger family living under his roof. In itself this was not an indication for the quality of their relation, although it could be suspected that the chief was not as concerned by the wellbeing of the boy as if he had been his real son. In this light he faced two accusations: a legal and a moral one. He was really behaving carelessly: when his son returned from the forest that night when the Bondo women came out, he refused to let the boy enter the house. This one had nothing to do but try to go to sleep on the veranda. This was where the angry Bondo women discovered him. They called in to the father, but this one only told them they should take the boy with them as a punishment. In the new story our client was transformed from an abused father into a weak chief who could not keep order even in his own house, let alone in his village. Not only that, but he clearly broke the law when he refused to pay the fine that the Bondo officials levied on him. Instead, he went to complain to the Paramount Chief, who agreed to mediate between him and the women. Finally his fine was reduced. The women said they would be satisfied with 1 goat instead of 4, 2 yards of cloths, instead of 12, 80 000 leones, instead of 800 000, and they accepted 2 non initiated girls instead of the originally demanded 7. That was a considerable reduction. The problem was that the chief continued to refuse to pay even after that, going this time not only against the Bondo women but also against the will of the Paramount Chief. Even the leader of our delegation seemed resentful: "This is the law" – he declared solemnly – "Order and law should be observed everywhere".

If I thought that with this declaration our fact finding mission was over, I was mistaken. Soon, a public hearing became possible because the errant boy was finally found. What happened afterwards in public did not seem to be influenced the least by what had been heard or said just before that, in the back stage. With the public hearing a new act started with new actors appearing on stage. The delegation took seat in the barry[125], in front of them the chief and the boy. The young man very clearly would have liked to be somewhere else. He looked stubbornly at the ground in front of him, his voice was barely audible. The audience was also progressively growing. In the beginning it was only composed of elderly women, probably all members of the Bondo society, but as time was passing, some young men also joined the company, including the head of the

---

[125] The barry is a usually semi-open public space in village settings where court hearings and occasionally markets are organised

Youth Organisation and the Deputy Chief. I understood that the group of the elderly women comprised also the Sowe, the chief initiator and the Mamy Queen, the leader of the village womenfolk. The atmosphere was hostile, but I sensed the hostility turning less against our group than against the chief, who appeared now unequivocally as accused rather than accuser. The boy denied that he was tortured. He said more or less what we already knew: that night when he arrived to the village it was too late, his father would not let him in the house, so he was trying to hide, falling asleep on the veranda. The women came and took him away. That much we had known already. Now there was a chance to find out what happened afterwards. "Did they take you near the water?" – the Councillor asked. "No – replied the boy" to the visible satisfaction of his interrogator. The answer indicated that the boy was kept far away from the actual place of the initiation, so he was not in immediate ritual danger.

Now, the Sowe talked, and as she spoke, she also turned out to be somebody else than what she had appeared to be in the previous act. It is true, she was the head of the female society, but she was also the grandmother of the boy. When she heard about the arrest of his grandson, she preferred to keep him close to her – she said - she gave him a mat to sleep on and called his mother to give him food. So we realised that the potentially dangerous food that the boy was made to eat was actually prepared by his own mother. As I listened to the story, I wondered more and more about what our fact finding committee was doing there. Not so my colleagues. The leader of the delegation gave a long speech invoking improbable allies in his combat the objective of which was progressively fading away. He said something like that: "Human Right business is amongst us. When we vote for the President, we trust that he will represent us internationally….Our President went overseas and there he met the President of the United States. The two presidents signed a lot of documents. The law of America is now for us. We have got to see that it works. Civil society, police, the chiefs, everybody has to make sure that what the President has signed will happen"

That could be read as a threat: If the women resist the will of civil society, it is as if they resisted the will of the President and they can be answerable before the law. But also, there was something solemn about it: apparently even the President, even the President of the United State was interested in what was happening in that dusty little village with the Bondo society. And there was also a promise: The evocation of the

power of America could stand for all the material wealth it represented, what all Sierra Leoneans were longing for. This was the promise of development - not the controversial development usually criticised by anthropologists of development, but the promise of having enough to eat, being able to send the kids to school and, in general, having a good life[126]. If, for some obscure reason, the access to this universe lead magically through Human Rights, what could be more reasonable than to full-heartedly take this road? This was the essence of the message sent to the Bondo Women, and through them, to the whole village. In the process the miserable chief did not appear to have more significance than a figurant.

Although the delegation was finally obtained to him what he was begging for, he did not leave the scene victoriously. After much negotiation, during which the women withdrew several times to deliberate, and much procrastination on behalf of the chief, promising, than taking back his promises, than promising again, the women finally got enough. In their wrath they did something unheard of: they simply cancelled all the debt of the misbehaving chief. Obviously that was nothing but a figure of speech, but our delegation leader jumped on it and announced the verdict: The women renounced of what was their due fine, the case ended. That was very far from justice in any conceivable sense. Even the complainant-turned-accused was visibly embarrassed. Not only was it a humiliating verdict for all the protagonists, it was logically non-sustainable. While we were returning to Freetown we could be sure that we were leaving the village pray to acrimonious internal fights.

I was outraged. At least the meaning of the events seemed finally clear to me. Civil society, contrary to the role conventionally attributed to it in Western democracies, was not summoned here to check on the government in defence of the grass roots, rather, to check on the grass roots in defence of the government, or rather of what was behind the government: the international community. Civil society stood on the side of the elite, executing its civilising mission on its behalf, civilising the uncivilised rural native subjects. There was nothing new about it. Ferme affirmed that civil society was understood in this sense already at its inception "applied to an emerging African bourgeoisie" (Ferme 1999:163) The implicit equation of civil society with "civilized

---

[126] On the philosophical and practical implications of criticizing modernity from a cultural relativist point of view in an African context, see Ferguson "Decomposing Modernity: History and Hierarchy after Development" in Ferguson 2006.

society" has deeply rooted historical reminiscences in Sierra Leone. It echoes age-old stereotypes differentiating the "civilized" colony from the "uncivilized" protectorate. The action undertaken by "civil society" in this case, instead of playing a critical role, seemed to have an inverse effect: it reinforced in almost all aspects the prevailing power hierarchies, strengthening a male, urban and international dominance over a female, rural, local population. Or so I believed.

A year later I returned to the District headquarters. I visited the Chairman of the Human Rights Committee and systematically paid a visit to all the main protagonists of my story. The old Parmount Chief was dead by now. His successor was presented to me as "member of the local civil society". In fact he was a friend of the radio man who brought the case of the Bondo women to the Human Rights Forum. I remembered him from the previous year. This was coherent with my interpretation. It was plausible that under the cover of an uninteresting village dispute, a deeper political fight had been fought in order to help somebody into power who could be expected to be favourable to the local NGO elite. But as I started to talk to the people, my theoretical construct was slowly crumbling.

The new chief assured me that maybe he was a "civil society chief" – as his friends jokingly called him - but he was a chief "conscious of his traditional responsibilities". He knew that as a traditional authority he had the mission to maintain "order and custom". "No exception!" – he proudly claimed. Little differentiated this talk from the talk of the old chief. It was as if the man had been changed with his new role.

This was not all. After that I wanted to meet with the previous Paramount Chief's emissaries, the two ladies who accompanied us to the village and who fought the misbehaving village chief on behalf of the Bondo women. I only found one of them and to my greatest surprise I discovered that she lived in the same compound with the radio presenter. My acquaintance was sitting in the courtyard together with the man's wife. When I evoked the incident, the two women conspiratorially laughed, cracking jokes at the expense of the unfortunate village chief – who, they assured - was not a chief any more. It was hard to conceive that the woman's husband used to be the loudest defender of the man. What had seemed to be simple before became more and more blurred. It was as if people had not had a fix role, but had played different parts on rotating stages.

Even the Bondo women were not the same. I went to meet them in the village but they remained invisible when I asked people about them. Then, all of a sudden I came across with the Mammy Queen and the Sowe. They pretended not to recognise me. They introduced themselves as the leaders of the Mother's club, a new women's group supported by a major international NGO. They firmly refused to talk about society business. It was difficult for me to get rid of the unsettling feeling that nobody in that world was what she/he seemed to be. But I had the intuition that there was more into it than simple shape shifting. What I experienced made me remember Ferme's beautiful book, The underneath of things. In the introduction she explains the etymology of the word meaning in Mende: "the meaning is what is underneath" (hidden under changing surfaces) (Ferme 2001:4). Underneath the surface of change I perceived a deep continuity, that of the "cultural order of dissimulation, through strategies of concealment" (Ibid:1). Not that the meaning was stable as opposed to the volatile surface: "meanings are perceived always as unstable and different from prior manifestation" (Ibid:6). If Ferme is right affirming that the resulting ambiguity is essentially political in nature, then what I saw in the village - thanks to the fact finding mission - was how various people performed the political in everyday life under changing circumstances.

What sort of conclusion could possibly be drawn from this story? Does my adventure with the Bondo women illustrate the irresistible force of NGOization and the vulnerability of local forms of the social in the face of an emerging opportunistic cosmopolitan elite or to the contrary, does it show the stamina of civic society, able to reinvent itself under new names, and to change the external form in order to preserve the unchangeable inner content? Paradoxically, I believe, it illustrates both ways - or rather, none of them. More probably, it reveals the naivety of interpreting the heated debate between the old Paramount Chief and the human rights defenders as a fight between tradition and modernity. NGOIzation in this light does not appear to be different from previous boom times of voluntary organisations in Africa, which - according to Little - are inseparable from the process of urbanisation itself. Although it would be easy to interpret the syncretic character of the African urban life in terms of culture contact, according to Little (1957: 579), the term "is not precise enough". "First, many of the principal agents of cultural change nowadays are Africans themselves – he explains - and second, many Western ideas, practices and procedures have already been

fully assimilated to African culture. Africans became important as "acculturative agents" – he affirms. Not only urban human rights defenders are acculturative agents, but also Bondo women are, when they magically turn to be a Mothers' Club. NGOization is not (only) an external force bequeathed to village communities, it is (also) a collective enterprise in which village communities participate along urban civil societies. This does not suppose however neither unproblematic assimilation, nor a unidirectional idea of progress, always implicit in theories of modernisation.

Summary

In this chapter I described the conjectural linking of the idea of civil society with the existence of NGOs. While the former is a philosophical concept, used by classical authors, the emergence and sudden carrier of NGOs belong to the recent past and it corresponds to a double societal transformation: on the one hand, that of the global power balance after the end of the cold-war; on the other hand, that of the gradual transformation of mainstream development theories and discourses. The linking of the two concept yielded project society, a form of social structure in which NGO type organisations were invited to play a major role in governance, taking over many of the state's roles, especially in issues related to the welfare of the citizens and in the protection of democratic liberties. I attempted to demonstrate that delinking conceptually civil society from the NGO world might have a liberating affect, making it possible to identify integrative forces in Sierra Leonean society far beyond the officially recognised civil society. At the same time, the case study I presented above des not allow deducting a simple imposition of a supposedly foreign cultural construct on supposedly millennial traditional forms; the story illustrates rather the mutual interpenetration of different practices and ideas, of both global and local origin, in a given social field wired by power and vibrating with resistance – endowing Little's observations on the syncretic nature of the West African associational life with quite a contemporaneous significance.

3, Institutionalisation of disability

Defining disability as social relational poses a wide range of sociological questions, including: what socio-cultural processes are involved in the construction of particular features of the body as constituting 'impairment' and in what forms and places?

Carole Thomas and Marian Corker: A Journey around the social model[127]

What Institutionalization stands for

In disability studies "institutionalization"[128] usually refers to the practice of segregating disabled people placing them in total institutions where all their needs are taken care of – according to a central plan based on standardisation and depersonalization. Despite their different foci there is no debate between Foucault (Foucault and Khalfa 2006; Tremain 2005) and Goffman (Goffman 1962; Goffman 1963) over the fact that these places function as disciplinary institutions. Not only is their highly normative and hierarchical structure made to discipline the mind and the body of the inmates, this disciplinary practice carefully draws the line between normality and abnormality for the general population. This policing function makes total institutions extremely efficient political weapons in supporting and maintaining hegemonic regimes – as anybody who has seen the film "*One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*" easily understands. The film was made in 1975 in the USA by Milos Forman. It gives a painfully sharp description of how total institutions create their own definitions of normality, while they actively and directly shape subjectivities with their everyday practices (including physical punishment) as well as with the vocabulary they use and impose. It is exactly this image of the Institution that triggered the powerful social movement of "deinstitutionalisation" in Western Welfare societies from the 1960s onwards; aiming to relocate long term disabled patients from total intuitions back to their communities.

Because of the heavy Foucauldian connotation of institutionalization within the disability field, I believe that it is useful to constantly remember that the concept

---

[127] In Evans, Peter
    2013   Human Development, State Transformation and the Politics of the Developmental State. *In* The Oxford handbook of transformations of the state. Pp. pages cm.
[128] See for example http://dredf.org/international/RosenthalKanter.html (Accessed: 17. May 2012)

originates from welfare societies and therefore the transferability of its critique to African non-welfare societies is doubtful. Also, I intend to use the term here in a somewhat different perspective, understanding institutionalization rather as the dynamic process of formalizing the types of organizations considered as legitimate institutional actors within the organisational field of disability. Although institutionalization understood in this sense has a less oppressive connotation than total institutions, it is evident that not only total institutions but all organisations have a certain normative function as they prescribe accepted and expected figures of speech and patterns of behaviour. They are capable of forming and defining identities through the distribution of labels (like "people with disability" or "PwD") which become filled with meaning in the process in which people identifying with the label play out the roles prescribed to them.

In the following I will give a short historical overview of the institutionalisation of disability in Sierra Leone – in this particular sense - making an inventory of the different roles and identities made available for people with disability by the materialization of different organizational forms. I rely on oral history; as a consequence, despite all my efforts to double check the data, the following account will reflect inevitably the failings of the memory and the subjective interpretations of my interviewees, as well as the distortions resulting from my necessarily selective attention. Such sources of error notwithstanding, I attempt to reconstruct a reasonably faithful chronicle of the organisations of the polio victims.

Deserving poor

Charitable organizations working for people with disabilities existed already in colonial times. Women of high society created their own charities to alleviate the sufferings of disabled people. This tradition continued after independence. President Momoh's wife in particular was known for her sensitivity to issues of disability. Even after the coup[129] breaking her husband's political career, her charity remained active. The Vice President's wife was also engaged in benevolent activities. These good willing actions were necessarily imbued with condescendence, or this is how those concerned

---

[129] Gen. Joseph Saidu Momoh was the successor of Siaka Stevens who willingly ceded his place to the Major-General of the Sierra Leonean army in 1985. It was under President Momoh that the country entered in civil war in 1991. Momoh was overthrown in 1992 by Valentine Strasser, a 25 year old army officer.

sensed it. Maybe this is the reason why they do not feel a lot of gratefulness and prefer to emphasize the superficiality of these initiatives[130]

"Their main target was Christmas, Christian holidays or Easter, they would gather us, organize a kind of party, they served us ginger bear, soft drink, food, they took a few pictures and after this everybody scattered" [131]

More important than pass-time charities led by influential women were those institutions that offered education for disabled children. The political elite supported the creation of educational institutions following foreign (especially British) models. Sir Milton Margai[132], the first Sierra Leonean president in the post-colonial era patronized the School for the Blind (1956) and the School for the Deaf in Freetown (1965)133. A school for Mentally Affected Children was established in 1970 (Berghs 2013:59) The Freetown Cheshire Home[134] in Cline town opened in 1962, SOS village[135] in Lumley in 1988. Both function as boarding schools for children with polio. Specialized boarding schools bore the mark of contemporaneous Western ideas on the "right way" to deal with disability. These implied separating disabled children from their families, catering for all their needs collectively from education to shelter, through food and clothing. These were thus total disciplinary institutions in the Foucauldian sense, still, disabled people who passed in these institutions usually keep rather good memories of those days:

"The care I got in the Cheshire Home was very good. I also received quality rehabilitation which was provided for me at no cost...Since the Cheshire Home was funded mainly from international sources, especially from the United Kingdom, we had care that we would not normally have had had we been with our families or probably not affordable

---

[130] A critical assessment of charitable achievement is not limited to classical charities. In the same vein, NGOs are often criticised by their beneficiaries for the little impact they make.

[131] Interview with Cyprian Kabbah, one of the founders of PVA and ex-chairman of SLUDI, 13. 07. 2011

[132] Sir Milton Margai was the first Prime Minister of Sierra Leone. As a political leader, he led the country to Independence in1961.

[133] Statement Delivered by Frederick J. M. Kamara, Chairman and Chief Commissioner of Sierra Leone National Commission for Persons with Disability at the 6th Conference of State Parties to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities held in New York on 19th July, 2013 http://news.sl/drwebsite/publish/printer_200523297.shtml (Accessed: 24. January 2014)

[134] The British Leonard Cheshire Foundation opened a home for disabled children in 1961 in Freetown. Another similar institution functioned in Bo.

[135] SOS Children village in Lumley is part of SOS Children Villages International, a movement initiated by an Austrian philanthropist after the Second World War. In Freetown the association has been operating a school for young polio victims since 1988. It has a boarding section for poor children with polio who live in the children village.

by ordinary Sierra Leonean…. For instance, we had three square meals, good medical care, and a good primary education. The accommodations were better than we could have had elsewhere. We did not share beds, had our own clothes and had the support from 'home mothers' as our matrons were called, who were employed to provide care for us… I could say here, without any compunction, that I probably received one of the best primary school education available in Sierra Leone in those days in the special school attached to the Cheshire Home…. "

The above passage incidentally explains why parents were ready to send their disabled children to boarding schools maintained by foreigners. Not only transferring the financial burden of raising a disabled child to an institution eased the (usually overstretched) budget of the household, on the top of that, they could almost be certain that in this way the disabled child would get a better education than the rest of the pastry. If - through education - the child would achieve a higher social position that his or her sisters or brothers, he or she was expected to help those in the family who did not get this chance. The result of the calculation thus was not only positive on the individual but also on the collective level. It does not mean that the cutting off the children from their original family and culture was not resented. Many parents had hesitated a long time before they finally gave in. Parents and children suffered alike from strict segregational policies.

"Even though the Freetown Cheshire Home was a pleasant place to grow up in as a child there were many drawbacks that came with (that) life… Children in the Cheshire Home had very little contact with their families. Neither were we able to make childhood friends with other children. Visitors, including our parents were only allowed to visit in the afternoon on Saturdays and Sundays. Visiting hours only lasted for a couple of hours and then all visitors were expected to leave the home's premises. I think during the time I stayed in the Cheshire Home, visiting hours was between 2 and 6pm on weekends. Also, children whose parents visited were not allowed to go and visit them. The excuse was that they may acquire 'bad behaviour' if they mix with the children outside the home"[136]

The idea that poor parents' children were better off separated from their families of origin was not unique to disability, neither to Africa. Similar arguments were popping

---

[136] These passages are quotations from an unpublished article. Ibrahim Bangura: My Story – with the author's permission

up from time to time until as late as the second half of the 20th century concerning many disadvantaged groups from Australian Aborigines to European Roma. Paradoxically, the "charity approach" prevailing in these institutions - however outdated it appears today - can boast of some non-negligible achievements that modern NGOs are far from attaining: charities indeed enabled certain individuals to literally tear themselves out of poverty and to start a white collar carrier, many a time outstripping their fathers' and their "abled bodied" brothers' educational level. The elite of today's self-conscious and highly politicized disabled organizations would probably not exist if it were not for the total institutions that provided home and schooling to young people with disabilities a few decades ago[137]. Not only did these institutions create the collective identity and critical mass necessary for mobilisation, prepared future disability leaders to talk in the language of Western donors, but contributed to the disability movement also in an indirect and rather paradoxical way. Because they took disabled children at an early age from their parents and did not have a plan for how to reintegrate them in their families once they were released from the institution, they reinforced the idea amongst people with disabilities coming out of the homes that they could count only on each other for support.

"Most children who lived in the Cheshire Home at some point left the home to live either with some parent or relative who could not sustain the quality education these children started when they were in the home. I think too that this may be the fate of children who are presently living in these institutions in Sierra Leone to this day… Sadly too, the majority of these children who got into school because they lived in the Cheshire Home, only a handful did not end up in the street as beggars or in some other despondent condition."[138]

The unfortunate outcome of the process does not invalidate the argument that these children received a better education than the average, but shows that formal education is not the sole factor responsible for a person's success. What these children leaving the school lacked most was a strong protective network, something they recreated with time in their own communities.

---

[137] I owe to Bea Vidacs and interesting observation. She pointed out that there is a parallel between the Sierra Leonean disability movement and the Australian Aborigine's right movement, which is also full of people who were forcefully removed from their families in their childhood.

[138] Ibid

Institutionalisation was not limited to the capital. In the formative years of disability politics charities operated by churches sent foreign missionaries and nuns to the remotest parts of Sierra Leone. In the provinces where they opened schools for village children they made sure disabled children can also access them, by offering scholarships and boarding. Although these homes tended to separate children with disabilities from their parents and their communities just like the Cheshire Home, they did not apply total segregation. To the contrary, they provided a framework for interaction between disabled and non-disabled children on the basis of equality:

„ The place that we got in Kambia was a place for polio kids…Well, the school was operated by the priests but it was made for the entire community. We just lived in the home. In the morning we got mixed with all the others. So we went to a normal school."[139]

Adaptation to life in the homes was also facilitated by the attraction of comfort (showers and toilets that in later life became cruelly missing to those used to them), and even more importantly by the personification of the care. For the children put up in the home it was not the church which was responsible for them, but directly the priest leading the mission. This personal relation was conceived in kinship terms:

„Right at the age of two or so, I got this disability. Then, I began to attend school; at class two I got adopted by this catholic priest, Reverend father Camilo Libani."[140]

In the homes, under the personal guardianship of an attributed adoptive father or mother, children and young people with disability recreated a sort of new family, the strength and sense of security of which helped them greatly to create later their first self-help societies.

Society's victims

The war and the intensive reconstruction following it made Sierra Leone a priority target for international aid organizations, resulting in a sort of NGO boom. From the mid- 90ies, the burden of relieving the sufferings of "the poorest of the poor" was taken over almost entirely by international organizations; responding to a "humanitarian emergency", while local elites and the state happily renounced their

---

[139] Interview with Cyprian Kabbah, former SLUDI Chairman, co-founder of PVA, 13.07. 2011
[140] Ibid

responsibilities, leaving the field of social work almost entirely to NGOs[141]. In the last phase of the war people with physical impairments, amputees and polio victims were gathered in special camps in Freetown (in Aberdeen and in the National Stadium), maintained by INGOs, making disability more visible and more overtly connected to victimhood.

Local discourses on disability remained shaped by Western models, but these models had perceptibly changed. By the 90s the international disability movement had turned definitely away from the "charity approach" denouncing severely total institutions, championing a new way of seeing and dealing with disability, through the lens of the "*social model[142]*" and of the "*rights based approach*. The latter was a corollary of the social model, framing the needs of people with disability as individual rights and the ignorance of these rights as discrimination. In the new idiom, people with disabilities were now called "*Pwds*" (people with disabilities) and their organizations *DPOs* (disabled people's organizations). For the majority of the population, disabled and non-disabled alike, these foreign expressions continued to have little meaning. For this reason one of the main activities of the NGOs became the education of people through workshops and different "awareness raising" activities teaching them the correct way to think and to speak about disability. More than once I heard international NGO staff gets exasperated by the fact that despite their sustained efforts people apparently still could not use the new disability model properly, for example they failed to accurately distinguish impairment, disability and handicap.

Despite the paradigmatic change in disability theory – a change happening in the West, of which NGOs became the heralds in Africa - the rupture with the "charity approach" was more apparent than real: old fashioned total institutions and humanitarian INGOs alike considered their beneficiaries as autonomous individuals who had to be protected from their environment rather than as members of their families and communities. The social model reflects the image of a society the members of which are engaged in a permanent fight against the collective, in order to defend their individual rights. It conveys the image of an individualistic society, with atomized members alienated from the whole, as well as from each other. This is not the image of

---

[141] It is true that the social workers work for the Ministry of Social Welfare or for municipalities
[142] For a detailed explanation of the „social model" see the introductory Chapter

Sierra Leone today, but it might very well anticipate the direction the country is engaged to go.

From Patients to responsible users

The *social model* came to replace the *medical model*, which – so the argument goes - "erroneously" located the source of the handicap in the disabled body rather than in society, and accordingly it sought medicalised, rather than societal solutions for disability. In reality though, the social model continued to coexist with the medical model in the domain of rehabilitation, from where it was more difficult to expel medicalised solutions. The question of the human body, its suffering, its pains, its limits and its adaptability sneaks back with physical rehabilitation, even if modern physical rehabilitation experts are not less committed to the social model than most disability theorists. The duality of the body-society, separated from each other, remains the corner stone of the philosophy legitimising present day interventions, dividing neatly the domains of physical rehabilitation, social work and advocacy. This has not always been the case.

The Orthopaedic Technical Centre of Makeni was as much a rehabilitation centre as an institution offering social services. Its founder, Brother Alois Schneider has become a mythical figure in the history of the disability movement. Without him the landscape of disability related organisations would look quite different today. The Centre opened in 1972 with the support of the German Leprosy Mission (GLRA). More than a simple orthopaedic centre, Brother Schneider's place became a "home", caring for the welfare and education of hundreds of disabled children, whom the Father – as his students called him – sought out in neighbouring villages. Besides providing mobility aids, performing smaller corrective operations and offering physiotherapy, the centre also ensured schooling and vocational training for the children. While a large number of Brother Schneider's protégés were on full board, he also catered to commuters. When in the mid-nineties the rebels burnt the Kambia home, all the disabled children were transferred from there to Makeni. Thus the Makeni centre became a sort of melting pot, creating a sense of community based on shared identity, transcending regional and ethnic divisions. Out of this feeling of community was born later the will to form the first self-representing organizations.

The Makeni centre played an outstanding role in the history of the disability movement but as a rehabilitation institution it was not the first in the country. The State owned National Limb Fitting Centre was inaugurated in the Western part of Freetown as early as in 1961. Unlike Brother Schneider's place, the Limb Fitting Centre focused only on the medical aspects of disability. It fabricated and fixed prosthesis and distributed other mobility aids. The first "limb fitters" were trained in foreign countries (England, Iran and Togo), provisioned by the government. With the general economic decline of the 70ies and 80ies the Centre began to lack basic resources and became less and less effective. By the mid-eighties it almost stopped working altogether. After a vain effort to bring it back to life with the financial support of the British Council and the German Charity, GLRA, its demise continued until it was finally overtaken by the French NGO, Handicap International (HI) in 1998.

HI, one of the worlds' leading disability-focused INGOs started to work in Sierra Leone in 1996, in the provincial city of Bo. Faithful to its principal vocation, it offered orthopaedic and prosthetic services, as well as some psychosocial support to victims of the war. During the following years it initiated projects in different other locations, but many of these projects were short lived and finally HI left a long lasting legacy only in three cities: Bo, Koidu and Freetown. Although HI initiated, created and ran the rehabilitation Centres in Bo and Koidu, these became physically integrated into the local hospitals. In Freetown however, the situation was different. The Limb fitting Centre maybe was decaying but it was existing, standing alone on a small hill in Murray town, far from any other medical facilities. When HI decided to take it over, it became de facto separated physically and administratively from all other government based health institutions. HI reconstructed the main building and opened the new National Rehabilitation Centre in 2002 which, from that moment was cut off from the government's budget and attention. HI ran the centre alone, paying for everything from the personnel to the energy used. This would not have been a problem if the NGO could have guaranteed a permanent presence in the country. Such a long term engagement however is difficult to envisage in project society. HI started to prepare its pulling out strategy already in 2006. Removing the rehabilitation services from the Ministry of Health instead of working alongside with it did not really help to locally embed the rehabilitation services and it made the forced reintegration of the Centre a painful and difficult exercise for all the parties. Despite the snail space of the negotiations and the

reluctance of the government to take total responsibility, the three centres were handed over to the Ministry of Health and Sanitation by 2009. In practice however during the coming years the centres still depended on external support, which was planned to be reduced progressively. Although most of the personnel were finally taken on the Ministry's pay roll,[143] their income (and consequently their social status) considerably decreased. This caused embitterment among the staff and in some cases a drop in the quality of services, worsened by the acute shortage of material. Interestingly, it was the biggest, the Freetown-based "National" centre that was the most affected by the negative consequences of the transfer. In INGO circles it was usual to attribute the problems to personal reasons, but it is more probable that the difficulties were programmed in the way the take over and reintegration was managed in a short period.

It did not help that other disability related NGOs decided to withdraw more or less the same time, or even before. Mercy Ship, CAUSE-Canada, and GLRA had already pulled out, leaving a huge responsibility to the French-based organisation. Not that the problem of prosthetic services and physical rehabilitation could be considered to be solved, but in the mid- 2000s Sierra Leone was not as interesting anymore for international donors as immediately after the war, consequently a lot of NGOs struggled to maintain their programs. Retrospectively, the strategy of INGOs initiating punctual, decentralised, non-concerted local projects - although understandable in the circumstances - seems to have yielded ambiguous results. Taking over the responsibility of physical rehabilitation from an incapable state saved and improved numberless lives. At the same time it exempted the government from creating a national strategy of rehabilitation. What is more, when rehabilitation was finally made part of the National Health system again, it was integrated into the secondary-, rather than in the primary health care. The secondary health care comprises hospitals, better equipped and staffed, but are more difficult to access than the local health centres. The latter offer more rudimentary medical services but they have a good coverage all over the country. By linking rehabilitation to the secondary health care, it was assured that the huge gaps and

---

[143] One category of people constituted an exception: these were the CBR workers, engaged in "Community Based Rehabilitation". The failure to integrate them in the staff of the Ministry also reflects the undefined status that they had already as employees of an INGO, itself a reflection of the sometimes incompatible expectations they have to face because of the uncertainties of the definition of CBR. With this respect see. Ingstad (1995)

the patchy map of unequally available services that the NGO functioning institutionalised was to remain for a long time.

Ironically, in many aspects the situation of physical rehabilitation, as well as of medical services in general - was worse in 2011 than it was during the war. There were very few hospitals proposing corrective operations and if they did, it was a paying service that only few people could afford. Between 2011 and 2014 I assisted friends with a small local NGO in identifying patients needing urgent operations. Foday, a polio patient from one of the squats was diagnosed with a serious back bone deterioration and operation was proposed by a well know surgeon for an estimated amount of 2000 dollars. That was certainly an unrealistic fee for him to pay. Foday was using crutches but his back pain threatened to make him a wheelchair user. The case was however dropped for lack of money. No follow up was offered in the hospital. Dora, a young mother of two, suffered from elephantiasis and her right leg was gradually swelling until it lost all aspect of a human limb. The only solution for her would have been amputation, a relatively simple intervention, but she found no doctor ready for do the operation. She used to sit around in front of her squat selling cigarettes but at the end she was just lying, moaning of pain and fever, not able to get up any more. Abdul was a young child when he was adopted by one of the squat dwellers. He was a polio survivor and his leg, fixed in a bent position at the knee obliged him to jump on one foot. Just like Dora, a simple amputation could have helped him to walk with prosthesis. These are just a few cases out of many that I saw. I accompanied the patients to hospitals, took appointment with star doctors and got in contact with international medical staff – just to realise: there was absolutely no medical solution foreseen for this population. In the meantime even Abdul's father became disabled. He had broken a leg a long time ago and without treatment he gradually became unable to walk. Out of these four persons only Dora benefited from an operation at the end in early 2014 at the government hospital in Freetown, thanks to the generous contribution of two private donors and the perseverance of my friends who did the lobbying for her. Dora's amputation cost millions of Leones, even the bandage had to be daily paid. We seriously suspected that at the end of the day more bandages were bought than ever used to treat our patient. This was accepted as normal and counted little anyhow in the face of the big victory of helping Dora be relieved from her suffering. Dora's story is a real fairy tale with a happy ending, but it can be hardly considered as the illustration of the existence of structural

solutions for ordinary medical problems needing intervention. Applying the social model for these 4 cases we can say that it is indeed the lack of available rehabilitation and medical services which creates disability out of existing impairments. At the same time it can be argued that services are not totally unavailable as the case of Dora suggests. They are just distributed and priced in a way that exacerbates social inequalities instead of mitigating them. Being sick and needing medical care is like to play Russian roulette: if you are at the right place at the right moment you might be lucky.

The cost of medical services is a serious concern, not only for ordinary people, but also for the international community, conscious of the fact that prohibitive prices contribute to bad accessibility of services, and so indirectly to (dramatically) bad health indicators. In 2010 free medical health care was introduced for pregnant and lactating women and for children under five, as a program initiated and financed by UNICEF. The scheme certainly saved lives in certain cases but on the whole it was not as successful as it was supposed to be. The mitigated success had many reasons[144] but a medical officer whom I interviewed in 2011 pointed out that free health care was not attributed as a right to the needy but to a vast category based uniquely on biological characteristics - age and pregnancy - irrespective of the woman's or her family's social status. The problem – he said - was not that wealthy women absorbed the resources depriving the poor, the services were so bad in the government hospital that it was probable anyhow that whoever could afford it would go to a private clinic, the problem was that the medical personnel received no sign that poverty in itself could entail special needs and continued to turn down a number of patients, precisely from the poorest category, sometimes pregnant women and small children included[145].

In the rehabilitation sector, too, there were a lot of debates about pricing the services, already before the reintegration of the centres. At the moment of reintegration "cost-recovery" seemed to be paramount for sustainability. Unlike ordinary medical services, rehabilitation services were heavily subsidised by international organisations -

---

[144] One of the reasons was corruption. In many parts of the country the free drugs never arrived to hospitals and local clinics. They were suspected to have been diverted from their destination. See for example: http://www.irinnews.org/report/95896/sierra-leone-drug-diversions-hamper-free-healthcare (Accessed: 12. 09. 2014). See also:
https://www.amnestyusa.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/sierral_maternaltrpt_0.pdf (Accessed: 12. 09. 2014)
[145] Women I talked to complained that when they go to hospital, they get just one pill and they are told to go and buy the rest necessary for the treatment.

but from 2006 HI, the largest provider, started to work on the establishment of a sound "cost recovery system". The idea of the introduction of a general user fee (again with no respect to the patient's financial situation) was justified by a concern for sustainability, but the contribution that seemed possible to ask from the patient was so low that it was difficult to justify the introduction of the user fee only by economic reasons. Making rehabilitation a paying service was rather part of a larger conceptual shift, accompanying the passage "from the humanitarian to the developmental" phase of NGO activities in Sierra Leone. In this new phase educating war victims and patients to become responsible individual consumers became a priority. Paying services thus gradually became viewed as inevitable, both for financial reasons and as a disciplining strategy addressed to a potentially undisciplined population. Although the Disability Bill – which became an Act in 2011 – explicitly foresaw free medical care for people with disabilities, the government obviously lacked the resources to introduce such a measure in practice and no international organisation proposed to come in with help, as UNICEF had done it for the women.

From Beneficiaries to partners

Paradoxically, most of those making up the undisciplined crowd of the non-trustworthy disabled beggars come from the polio homes which were important development partners of INGOs in their quality of DPOs. DPOs are the basic constituting units of the international disability movement; without them the local fight for the rights of disabled people could hardly be legitimate. They are therefore essential for any external actor engaged in advocacy for disabled people in a given country. These organisations counted as natural partners for HI, but they became even more important after 2006 when the organisation shifted palpably towards "rights, inclusion, advocacy and capacity building" with a new project, opening a new chapter of its work in Sierra Leone. For the years to come lobbying for the rights of people with disability and capacity building of disabled organisations became as important as physical rehabilitation and when HI officially handed over the rehabilitation centres, defending disability rights remained de facto its main activity. This was not an easy shift. Although organising physical rehabilitation with the prevailing material constraints was not a simple task, organising organisations of disabled people turned to be infinitely trickier. In project reports, evaluation papers and strategic documents one often found bitter

complaints about "the lack of unity within the disability movement", about the "much politicised disability movement where certain groups refuse to work with other groups", "internal problems and low capacity of DPOs"[146]. There was something tragically heroic and at the same time ironically paradoxical in this work. According to the organisation's own self-evaluation it was a problem that projects were "expatriate driven", while the objective of these same expatriates was to put "DPOs to the driving seat". Consequently, one of the most basic activities of HI was the persuasion of people with disability to come together and form organisations and the socialising of these organisations into the NGO-type functioning by means of "capacity building", which meant organising workshops, promising, giving and withholding funds and demanding reports. That was very far from an equal relationship, although leaders of beneficiary organisations effectively used their agency to withhold information, sabotage project implementation, ignore demands for reports, criticise violently donors and most importantly to refuse to sit around the same table with their adversaries. The coercive nature of donor activities notwithstanding this relationship was called partnership and DPOs signed MOUs (memorandum of understanding) with international organisation instead of grant agreements. I do not know exactly when INGOs started calling their beneficiaries "partners" but it is certain that in 2008 – the year I started the fieldwork – I was struck by the fact that practically all types of relations between INGOs and local organizations were framed as partnerships. This was however a strange kind of partnership, based not on equal status and mutual obligations but on a strict hierarchy and mutual, albeit asymmetrical, dependency: DPOS depending on INGOs for resources, NGOs depending on DPOs for grass-root legitimization.

Groups and coalitions multiplied. New collective entities were regularly invented by project coordinators. There were the CABs (Community advisory boards), the users groups, the NGO focus group, each new formation brought to life launching a new series of meetings and workshops. Not surprisingly new DPOs were also mushrooming, especially in the regions (of Bo, Koido and Freetown) where rights-focused NGO activities were implemented.

The origins of the Freetown polio organisations

---

[146] Thes citations are from different internal papers produced by different NGOs, their exact origin is not important as the citations serve purely illustrative purposes

On the one hand, the history of the polio homes are intricately interlinked with that of the NGO presence in the country, on the other, it would be a serious mistake to consider these as simple Western implants. The origin of disabled people's organisations goes back to a past where even the name NGO was not invented. In other words they are in reality as syncretic assemblages as any of the friendly societies associated with the urbanisation of Freetown. This is not a coincidence. I argue that although polio-DPOs on the surface might have a singularly cosmopolitan look, in reality they are closer to characteristically West African voluntary associations than to internationalised disabled organisations.

People with disabilities in Sierra Leone started to organise as early as in the 70s :"By the mid-1970s, some of the children who had acquired education and training from the various schools and institutions began to set-up organizations geared towards serving their respective interests, like the Sierra Leone Youth Society for the Blind (SLYSB), which was later transformed into the Sierra Leone Association of the Blind (SLAB)."[147] According to testimonies of the founders, the first polio organisation dates back to the 80s. Indeed, in their genesis foreign charities played a crucial role, but these were specialised educational institutions rather than modern NGOs.

Amongst the 13 polio-home-DPOs in Freetown and on the Western Peninsula, of which I took an inventory in Chapter 1, only Pa Mustapha's organization constitutes a veritable exception to this rule. Pa Mustapha had never been in a boarding school. His organisation started as a blacksmith workshop in Moyamba, back in 1963 where he trained young disabled boys. This certainly did not count as an exception. The many skilled metalworkers amongst the polio victims all around the country point at a strong relationship between the art of blacksmithing and disability. Blacksmiths in West-Africa (like in many other places of the world including India and Eastern Europe) are ambiguous beings, recognised for their skills but often recruited from people counted as lower caste. In sub-Saharan Africa they are reported to „occupy confusing social spaces, as if they lived in two conflicting dimensions. They are glorified and shunned, feared and despised, afforded special privileges and bounded by special interdictions" (McNaughton 1988:xiii). The association between polio-victims and metal work recreates and doubles this ambiguity. Apprenticeship as a means of transmission is not

---

[147] Statement Delivered by Frederick J. M. Kamara, see footnote 130.

exceptional either, this is in fact the most common way of learning a professional skill even today. What makes Pa Mustapha's case special is the facility with which the illiterate craftsman adapted to the changing circumstances, reinventing his business as a veritable "DPO" by the 80s. In Moyamba he managed to secure assistance from the Peace Corps and from the St. Joseph Convent to transform his small workshop into a "training centre". When the war reached Moyamba in 1995, he decided to transfer his base to Freetown and with the help of Mercy Ships, a religious international organization, he opened a new training centre in Rokupa[148]. He named his new centre **Indigenous Blacksmith Development Association**.

Being a veritable one man business, IBDA does not quite fit the mould. More characteristic of the formation of polio-DPOs is the story of PVA (Polio Victims' Association), later re-baptised as POCA. PVA started in another provincial town, Makeni, in the Rehabilitation Centre maintained by Brother Schneider. There were three main phases of dispersal from this centre, one immediately before, one at the beginning and one during the second half of the war. The people who created PVA in 1989 belonged to the first wave. The founders were relatively educated men, often the first ones in their families. They were also experienced leaders, having acquired their practical training in youth groups and religious groups. Brother Schneider's centre became for them another step in their political education:

"Well, the home, where we were brought up, the polio home, we got some of these ideas from the father by then, you know, he really taught us some of these things, and some of us, art students, and political students, for our examinations we read some of these things."[149]

Despite – or maybe because of - the notoriously antidemocratic atmosphere of pre-war Sierra Leone, forming pressure groups was somehow in the air and examples of progressive, semi-political, semi-professional civil society movements, like that of the teachers were available:

"Well, I can say, even though Sierra Leone was not democratic at all, we were under the one party state, but people looked free to form any movement or organization. Those which were overtly non-political, did not bother the power, they did not care about them, by that time they did not suppress those kinds of organizations. But there were others, like

---

[148] Rokupa is one of the Eastern suburbs of Freetown. It is famous for its Mosque "donated" by General Kadhafi.
[149] Interview with Cyprian Kabbah

the Sierra Leone Teachers Union, those were pressure groups, so we looked at it and say, we are going to form our own so that it serves as a pressure group on our behalf."[150]

Collective mobilization was in the air. It was an available option. Some of the first polio activists decided to leave Makeni for the capital "to organize there the polio community". They managed to mobilise enough people to affectively appear as a pressure group, in a very literal sense of the term:

„We organised a demonstration. We passed the information to every disabled, particularly to the polio. We went to the State House. As early as 7 o'clock the disabled arrived. When the President came he met us inside[151]. We presented to him a position statement. We called it the "Handicap cry". When he saw it he donated us 50 000 Leones. We refused to take the money. We said we wanted (rather) programs that address problems of the disabled. The president looked surprised. He gave instruction to the Minister of Social Welfare to open an account (for us) and started to work for the disabled." [152]

The group wanted "durable solutions", first of all to the burning problem of shelter and livelihood. Finally they received a piece of land in Grafton, leased to them by the government. Leasing was a relatively common solution for transfer of governmental land with advantageous conditions. Usually it was understood that after some years of regular paying the ownership would be bestowed to the rent payers. Users of leased land considered it as their own. As soon as the authors of *"Handicap cry"* got access to their land they immediately started to develop it with the help of international donors who agreed to assist with building. In this way the group became the first effective DPO/polio-home in the Western area. With time PVA changed its name to POCA (Polio Challenged Association), as they "did not want to be victims any more" – the chairman says.

PVA is often called "the mother of all the organizations" and it deserves its name, as many of the DPO homes around Freetown are breakaways or "splinters" having their origin in PVA. The first splinter group became **House of Jesus of the Disabled**. Its founders also came from Makeni (probably during the second wave) and some of them passed by PVA, but they were mostly "suffering in the street" – members told me - when

---

[150] Interview with Cyprian Kabbah
[151] Joseph Saidu Momoh was president between 85 to 92
[152]Interview with Sylvanus Bundu, co-founder of PVA, Chairman of POCA, 23.06. 2011

they met an Italian man, a certain Mr. Caracassi, who obtained a temporary permission from the state for his protégés to settle down in the empty premises of the National Road Company next to the Bus Station. The exact date of these events is not clear for me as there are many contradictions in the temporal references of the witnesses, but I believe it must have happened around 1996 (or more exactly sometime between 1992 to 1996[153], during the NPRC regime). The filiations from mother groups to splinter groups is carefully recorded and recalled (usually by the mother group):

"*PVA was first. From PVA to House of Jesus. From there to Kissi Shell, Waterloo too, they broke away from us, Pademba from here, then Ecowas*"[154]

The reality must be more complicated, as groups are not compact and permanent entities; every member has his or her own story diffusing into the malleable story of the group. Nevertheless, the narrative describing the birth of new organizations from older ones reflects the segmentary logic working behind the multiplication of the groups.

The last group stemming directly from the Orthopaedic Centre in Makeni (and indirectly from PVA), is **HYDA (**Handicap Youth Development Association) in Ecowas Street. The founders of HYDA seem to have belonged to the next age group following those who had created PVA and they also received active support from Brother Schneider, who was by then sure that the days of the centre were counted:

„We started with this organization in 1996, in Makeni, that was where we were first. One father helped us instantiate this idea. He said it was better that we all come together to help each other as brothers and sisters. Because – he said- for now he can sponsor us but he does not know when he has to leave. And when we make an organisation, he believes, this will help us to go forward….. I do not know what time he left us, but early 99 when they (the Rebels) attacked Makeni we ran away, we came to settle in Freetown."[155]

In 1999 the refugees from the provinces were first received and settled in a camp set up in the National Stadium, but as the war came to an end they had to move on. The polio group tried to ask for help from the Social Ministry for a place to stay, but when they did not get a positive response as quickly as they wanted to, they ended up

---

[153] Valentine Strasser ousted President Momoh in 1992 and established the NPRC regime , which ended in1996. with the election of President Kabbah. Dating is uncertain because the reference my informant used ("the military government's time") also applies to the AFRC (1997-1998)
[154] Interview with Alhaji Mansaray, Chairman of House of Jesus, 11.07. 2011
[155] Interview with Abdul Thomas Sessay, alias Abuti, Chairman of Ecowas 08.07. 2011

occupying an uninhabited two story building not far from the Bus Station and only then did they receive a promise from the Minister that they can stay as long as they are not provided a new place. The number of inhabitants grew, some came from PVA, others arrived from House of Jesus which had become totally congested by that time.

Segmentarization did not stop and throughout the 90s new groups continued to emerge, transforming themselves - with time - into localized living communities. In the founding stories of these communities links with a place of origin in the provinces and/or with a previously existing group are as recurrent as the fabulous appearance of a wonderful saviour on whom the group in search of a new patron could rely for protection. **HAM** (Handicap Action Movement) located now in Calabatown, for example, emanated from the group around Pa Mustapha, with their roots going back to Moyamba:

"This organisation initially started from Moyamba district in the Southern province by a group of disabled... they were trainees under Pa Mustapha. When the war came, they had to run away for their lives. Eventually they found themselves in Freetown here. When they came they realised they will not sit idle - because they scattered away - so they went for search and they were able to recover themselves again. When they came together, they met another trainer, Pa Momo, at Ulaf Junction. When they met him, they said: "Pa, we too are blacksmith. We are interested in this thing so we want to work with you". The Pa became very happy, he accepted them and they started to work together."[156]

Having a powerful protector could help the sedentarisation of the group but it was not a sufficient condition. Negotiations had to be kept up with the government and exploitation of the resources offered by international NGOs became essential. HAM's example illustrates the ingenious strategy disabled groups followed to maximize the types of resources used, procuring the additional advantage that each case of successfully gained support added to the legitimacy of the group in the eyes of further potential supporters. In the case of HAM this is how their story is reconstituted retrospectively by the founding members: while still working with their new boss, the disabled apprentices contacted a local organisation (CADO) which put them in contact with an INGO, Action Aid International and WFP (World Food Program). They also got into contact with a priest, Reverend Father Beton, who was leading the Family Homes Movement. The priest agreed to lease a piece of land for them in Calabatown, and

---

[156] Interview with Kini Jusayah, nephew of Patrick Kini Jusayah, founder of HAM, 07.07. 2011

apparently this is what Action Aid was waiting for to start building a permanent place for the group. Soon the main building of the training centre was ready and from this point their organisational history – like any number of similar histories - turned into a long list of projects following one another financed by international agencies.

Besides strategic alliances, settling a group and securing a place sometimes requires opposition, open rupture, revolt and even physical fight. These processes define the genesis of the Amazon-like community of polio-girls established in Hastings. This place, officially named as **PWGDO** (Polio Women and Girls Development Organisation) has the particularity of being maintained and inhabited entirely by women. When I first asked people of PVA/POCA in Grafton about this strange community of polio girls in their neighbourhood, they smiled and said mysteriously: "oh, they are our wives". As I discovered, the kinship term meant: "they are under our protection, they can count on us". At the same time PVA members did not forget to emphasize: "They are a splinter group, they broke away from us". Mariama Jalloh, the leader of the Amazons did not deny any of these statements. She said:

„Yes, I was a member of PVA, because this was the first group that came together. All the groups that you find today in this country came from them. Yes, all the groups must have one or two members that came from PVA, who broke away. This is how our group came together too."[157]

The recognition of the filiation does not stop Mariama from affirming her autonomy:

„This is PWGDO. We were formed in 1997. Why we formed it? Because of the constraints. Some of our sisters did not get the opportunity for going to the school, so they went to the street to beg. When they go to the street, some men misused them, they got pregnant…Some of us were fortunate enough to go to school …so we said let's come together. After our education we decided to come together."[158]

Education again plays a major role in informing disability activism. The passage in an institution where collective identity was construed on the basis of disability is equally important. Mariama got her own education and met a group of disabled people as an inmate of the Cheshire Home in Freetown.

---

[157] Interview with Mariama Jalloh, founder and Chairlady of PWGDO, 08.07. 2011
[158] Ibid

After creating her own organization, Mariama's main preoccupation became logically securing a place for her group. She presented her request to the Ministry of Land and she was allocated a piece of land in Hastings. ODRAD[159], a local NGO entered in the picture, promising to help develop the place, on behalf of an International donor, Bread for the World. Mariama however had a quarrel with the director of ODRAD, and in the conflict which followed her group fended in two. The renegades left their leader and established a new organisation. At the end however Mariama won on all fronts. She changed her sponsor, turning to Leonard Cheshire Disability (LCDI). LCDI gave the girls machines and tools to work with. Later Mission Direct agreed to complete the centre with sleeping rooms and toilets. This is how the place became a well-organized self-sustaining home.

In the second half of the 90s the proliferation of the polio organisations continued with PHDA, HATA and **UPBSA** (United Polio Brothers and Sisters Association) - commonly called "Kissi Shell", with reference to its emplacement. The latter - is the most successful of the three last homes as regards the stability of its leadership and the variety and strength of its economic activities. Although the group occupied their present place – an old food processing plant – only in 2001, their history goes back to the times of the war, and is closely linked to that of House of Jesus. It was apparently in 1999 that some of the oldest members of House of Jesus broke away, under the protection of – and probably instigated by – the local branch of a semi-religious international movement, IOGT (International Organisation of Good Templars), a society in many ways akin to Free Masonry. The director of IOGT rented a temporary place for the renegades in Kissi Dock Yard, East of Freetown. Some young men joined the new group from Ecowas, too.

In the beginning the disabled boys were satisfied with the arrangement but slowly their relation with their patron deteriorated, and a few of them decided to take things in their own hands and set out to find a new, permanent place. This fraction again was supported by a priest, father Louis. Like all emerging organizations, the future UDBA (in the beginning it was a men-only organization, called United Disabled Brothers Association) waged a war for the place on two fronts: putting pressure on the government, negotiating with high level government officials, on the one hand; on the

---

[159] Organisation for the disabled homeless rural development

other hand, investigating on their own account, ready to occupy and defend a new home by force. Like a number of other cases before, this strategy proved to be successful. This is how the process is recalled now, (re)framed in the discursive genre of disability activism:

"We sat together to have a common goal, to find a government place, not for our benefit, but for the benefit of all disabled people... and we found the place, opposite the factory...so we went there, a great number of us, we talked with one voice, we called the police, and we went and took some members, went to the Minister, let him approve for us to stay there.... he saw a good number of us, they tried to brutalise us first, but we were many... We went to Tejan Kabbah[160] we went to Berewa[161], you know, he also came here,...so we made claims that this place belongs to us, so we pushed together - when we are going some side we are very neat, we try to distinguish ourselves, by fine appearance, that is one of our policy, not to get any of our members to the street and beg... we sit together and said let us form our own organisation, we were just coming out of the war, we have nobody to support us...In 2001, we started to use United Disabled Brothers Association (as a name) "[162]

UDBA changed its name to UPBSA (United Polio Brothers and Sisters Association) subsequently, when its founders understood that having no women in the group might be a potential disadvantage for them in their relations with potential donors. A women's wing was then set up. Also, later UPBSA agreed to host the female splinter group from Hastings, PWGDA. Consequently today it is a mixed organization, with the decision making power however entirely remaining in the hands of the male leaders.

While UDBA originated in House of Jesus, PHDA (Progressive Handicap Development Association) has its roots in the group around Pa Mustapha. After their arrival from Moyamba, some of the young men left their leader and found refuge in a hospital ward in Kissi where they stayed for 2 years. In 1997 they formed their own organisation: DHU (Displaced Handicapped Union). They managed to secure aid from organisations like UMC and World Food Program. They applied to the government and in 2000 they received the possibility to lease a piece of land in Waterloo. There they laid down the foundation of a well- structured and extended community, relying first of all

---

[160] Alhaji Ahmad Tejan Kabbah, President of Sierra Leone from 1996 to 2007
[161] Solomon Ekuma Dominic Berewa, Vice-President of Sierra Leone from 2002 to 2007
[162] Interview with Ali M. Kuma, Secretary of UPBSA, 07.07. 2011.

on its blacksmith workshop. In 2011, at the time of my visit, the organisation went through a major crisis as the antagonism between the executive and the general membership resulted in an open revolt of the latter. Such upheavals are not uncommon in the world of the polio homes. Many of them suffer from the instability of its leadership and power differential facilitates suspicion and internal tension.

HATA (Handicap Activity Training Association) is the closest neighbour of POCA in Grafton. Their camps are adjacent and the two groups are linked by many ties, but HATA is not a direct descendant of PVA, the two organizations followed parallel development paths. The first members of HATA originated from Kailahun, Makeni, and other places in the provinces. They grouped together during the last years of the war at the National Stadium, where so many war amputees and war victims were given temporary shelter between 2000 and 2001. When the war was over, all the refugees had to leave the Stadium. Except for the amputees and war wounded, they received no state help for resettlement. For polio victims creating an organization remained the only available option to keep some leverage in defending their collective interests.

The organisation was first called West Side Squad, a name strangely reminiscent of the infamous rebel group, the West Side Boys. The polio victims observed that the war wounded population was transferred from the Stadium to a terrain in Grafton bought by MSF (Medcins sans Frontieres, a French NGO). They decided to follow this movement and established a small irregular settlement between the terrain of POCA and the land of the war wounded. The government knew about the illegal occupation, but turned a blind eye on it. Beyond this passive tolerance however, HATA never received any official support or any document attesting at least a temporary entitlement to the land. All the same, the small informal settlement grew and managed to secure some basic resources (like zinc - to cover their makeshift houses). Wedged between POCA – good at seeking funds from international organizations - and the camp of the war wounded - supported officially by the government, HATA appears particularly destitute. In the beginning the group had a strong leader but once his attempts to establish some sort of partnership with POCA failed, he decided to return to Kono where he took charge of the local branch of PVA. Many of HATA's members say they would have liked to follow him but lacked resources; this is how the organization remained without a true leader and with a somewhat disoriented membership.

The last generation of the DPO-homes was formed and settled after the war. I have classed five organizations in this group. These are: PwD (Pademba Road); Skills Training in Hastings; Walpole Street in the city centre (already closed); UDO in Waterloo and PWDGA in Kissi. Organisations belonging to this generation have in common that they have even less secure tenure rights than their peers. Pademba road and Walpole streets are clearly squats with no legal entitlements. Walpole Street is the only squat having been successfully evicted and Skills Training is the only polio home outside of Freetown having been attacked by the police with the same ruthlessness as the squats of the city centre. UDO and PWGDA lack the total independence that the others enjoy, UDO being controlled by the Orthodox Church, PWGDA being physically hosted by UPBSA.

PwD occupies a building near the Pademba road prison- hence the common name of the squat: "Pademba Road". According to the explanation of the leaders the formation of the group was almost accidental: first two, then three, then a few more disabled (and non-disabled) youth sought refuge amongst the ruins of the big building adjacent to the prison, where a group of soldiers camped around in 2002-2003. The soldiers (especially one, a certain Bese) took pity on the young people and allowed them to stay. The boys had come from different corners of the country. Some had spent some time already in Grafton with the West Side Squad (later transformed to HATA); some had passed through Ecowas street; some had arrived from Kono; some from the Centre for the Disabled in Kenema; some from Makeni, with an eventual passage through House of Jesus. The eviction of the squat in Walpole Street also resulted in an increase of the membership. Somehow it feels that this is a place for those who dropped out from everywhere else. Notwithstanding, this organization - like all the others - is under a formal (although not very strong) leadership and although they do not have a full-fledged workshop, some amount of artisanal work is being performed here, too. The most important asset of the squat nevertheless is its emplacement, by the road on which big men, including high level politicians, businessmen and expatriates pass daily, making it a wonderful site for begging.

The members of **Skills Training** in Hastings, next to the camp of the polio girls, have more consequential professional competences; still their situation was hardly any better in 2011. They had experienced a brutal eviction attempt some time before, in which they lost not only their houses but also one of the members and they were still

palpably demoralized. Apparently the origin of the organization goes back to 1995 when Pa Mustapha arrived in town and some of his boys scattered and found refuge in Kissi. From there a number of them joined HAM at Calabatown but soon they broke away from there too, trying their chance as an independent group. First they tried to settle on a land in Calabatown but finally they moved to Hastings on their own decision. There they leased the land from the government for 3 years but they never managed to pay the full price, consequently they are in an irregular situation now and can expect to be evicted any day.

Walpole Street today is no more than a myth. Closed in 2009, its memory is fading slowly away. The place was occupied illegally in 2007 by a handful of people, but the population grew rapidly to over 100. The abandoned old two-storey house in the symbolic heart of the city, next to the Cotton Tree was privately owned and the owner suddenly reclaimed it. The squatters could have resisted like others did before (and after) but finally they left the building peacefully, persuaded by an orthodox priest who planned to create a "disabled village" on the Eastern outskirts of town. At that time the "village" contained just a few unfinished houses, so many of the new settlers were forced to come back to Freetown, finding places in other squats or had to go back to the street. The leaders of the group made serious efforts to keep the members together searching for an alternative solution but they did not get any support from the government or from INGOs. The majority of the group was finally resettled in Waterloo by the orthodox priests.

UDO (United Disabled Organisation) was formed in Walpole Street but now it continues to exist in the disabled village of the Orthodox Church. This is the only non-autonomous DPO-home. Every aspect of life of the disabled residents is under the control of the Church.

Just as UDO sticks out from other organizations as the only non-independent polio home, **PWGDEA** (Polio Women and Girls Development Association) constitutes also a special case, for other reasons. This is the renegade group having split from PWGDO in Hastings; consequently this is also an women-only organisation. Although they enjoy the hospitability of UPBSA in Kissi, they cannot be considered as a full-fledged DPO/home, as only a few of them effectively stay in Kissi. It is more accurate to say that they use UPBSA as a regular meeting point. Despite the disadvantage of not

having their own physical place suitable to accommodate the members, the group is quite active and efficient in creating resources from collective work.

Thee 13 polio DPO-squats that I have identified on the Western Peninsula do not probably make a complete list of the polio organisations and an exact list would be difficult to establish anyhow as organizations continue to pop up every day. But polio-homes are not as easy to establish as DPOs, and indeed from 2008 to 2014 I did not witness the birth of any new home (except for UDO in Waterloo, which is in itself an exceptional case, showing more the loss of agency of polio victims than their successful organization). It is possible that the age when self-mobilization of people with disability for sustainable existential solutions was still an option is over. Today's DPOs respond to other criteria: they might participate in the distribution of funds and might take part in disability politics but are not strong enough to bring to life autonomous self-managed places. Until today the corner stone on which the Freetown polio community is relying are the 13 polio homes present in my listing.

The figure bellow highlights the role of the foreign-cantered total institutions in the organization of the polio survivors. The chart also explains the rural-urban connection, pointing at the provincial origin of most of the Freetown polio homes, demonstrating that these are ultimately the outcomes of an ongoing urbanization process.

Reading the figure from the top to the bottom, we can observe how the multiplication of the organizations by fragmentation is responsible for the creation of a dense network. This network enhances the collective strength of the organizations, while it has to be recognized that the organizations formed relatively late do not have the same leverage as the first ones[163]. It seems that fragmentation goes hand in hand with weakening, as if the energy carrying the first organizations had been lost somehow on the way, despite the INGOs' sustained efforts to "empower" DPOs with "capacity building". Shortly, the source of real empowerment is more likely to be found within than outside of the organizations themselves.

---

[163] The process of multiplication by fragmentation is very close to what classical African ethnography described under the term of "segmentary society". More on the topic: cf. Fortes, Meyer/ Evans-Pritchard, Edward (eds.): Introduction to African Political Systems (APS). London 1940.
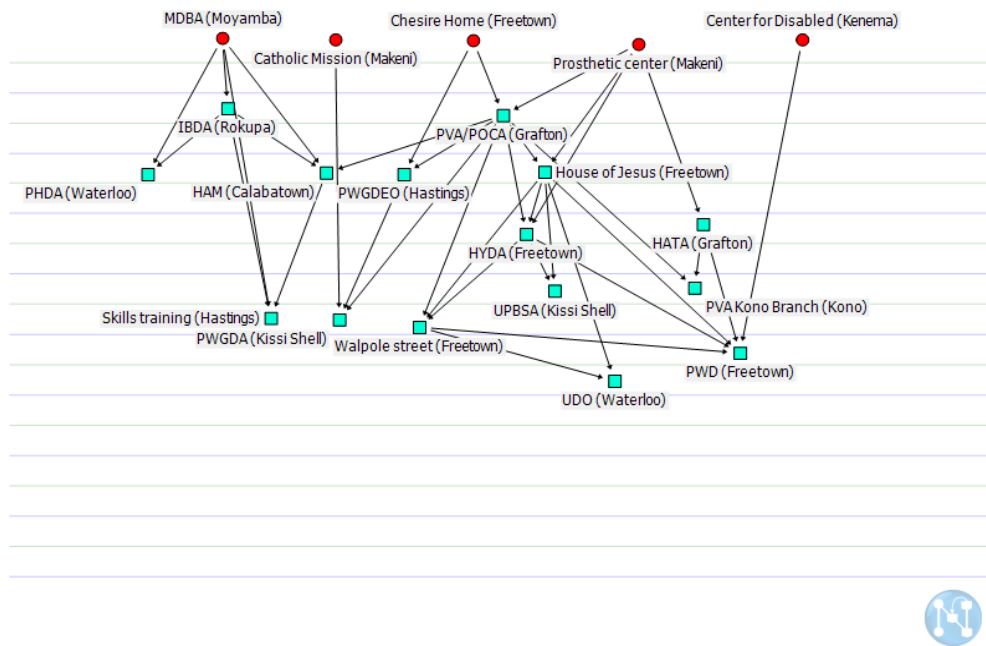
4. Figure Genealogy of the polio homes in the Western Area

NAME	Full name	Emplacement now	Establishment of the present place	Time of formation	Origin	Place of origin	First name	Full first name
POCA	Polio Challenged association	Grafton	1995	1989	Makeni Prosthetic centre/PVA	Makeni/Grafton	PVA	Polio Victims Association
IBDA	Indigenous Blacksmith Development Association	Rokupa	1995	1963		Shenge		Moyamba Disabled Blacksmith Apprentice Program
House of Jesus	House of Jesus	Freetown, Bus Station	1996	1992-96	Makeni Prosthetic centre/PVA	Makeni		
HAM	Handicap Action Movement.	Calabatown	1995-96	1995	Pa Mustapha	Moyamba		Organisation for Young Disabled
HYDA	Handicap Youth Development Association, Ecowas	Freetown, Ecowas street	1999	1996	Makeni Prosthetic centre/PVA/National Stadium	Makeni/Grafton/ Freetown		

PWGDO	Polio Women and girls development organisation	Hastings	1999	1997	Cheshire Home/PVA	Freetown/Grafton		
PHDA	Progressive handicap development association	Waterloo	2000	1997	Pa Mustapha	Moyamba	DHU	Displaced Handicapped Union
UPBSA	United Polio Brothers and Sisters Association	Kissi Shell	2001	1997-99	House of Jesus/ECOWAS	Freetown/Kissi	UDPB	United Disabled Polio Brothers
HATA	Handicap Activity Training Association	Grafton	2000-2001	2000	National Stadium			West Side Squad.
PWD	Pademba Road	Freetown, Pademba road	2003	2001	Centre for Disabled Kenema/House of Jesus/PVA	Kenema/Freetown/Grafton		

Skills training	Skills training	Hastings	2005	1995	Pa Mustapha/ HAM	Moyamba/Kissi/ Calabatown
Walpole street	Walpole Street	closed	2007	2007	PVA/House of Jesus	Grafton/Freetown
UDO	United Disabled organisation/Saint Moses The African Orthodox disabled village	Waterloo	2009	2007	Walpole street	Freetown
PWGDA	Polio Women and girls development association.	Kissi Shell, with UBSA	2009	2001	Catholic Mission Makeni/PWGDO	Makeni/Hastings /Kissi

5. Figure Summary of data concerning 13 polio DPO-homes in the Western Area

The hierarchy of organisations: umbrellas

The idea behind the valorisation of partnership is an (implicit) theory of representation. According to this theory a grass root organization somehow embodies the whole constituency its members claim to represent. Polio homes, according to this theory represent the plight of polio victims, in general. Accordingly, those who work with these organizations can pretend to work indirectly with "the polio victims", as if the category would contain an inert and homogenous mass waiting to be represented by a few. A chain of representation is then created. The "mass" would be represented by grass roots organization, these would be represented by umbrella organizations and umbrella organizations would be represented by other, even larger umbrella organizations.

The most important cross-disability umbrella organization is SLUDI, the Sierra Leonean Union of Disability. As opposed to the polio DPO/homes, the initiators of SLUDI were not half-educated rural migrants, they belonged to the educated high-middle class Krio elite of Freetown. The original founder was Professor Eldred Jones, a well-known university professor at Fourah Bay College, who had lost his sight in the early eighties. According to the Professor, the idea materialised thanks to an encounter with two disabled intellectuals:

„ (The idea) came about because of people like Freddy Kamara[164]. He was in the Ministry of social welfare. He had been my student in Furah Bay College. He was the first blind student that came to Furah Bay College at all. I was his personal tutor. And then there was another remarkable student: Baba Tunde Hume Dosen. He was a polio victim, a severe polio victim. He again was so extraordinary. He came from Freetown, from a very distinguished Krio family. His grandfather was town clerk of the city of Freetown and his mother was very influential at church women societies .It was him, while he was still in college, after this conversation with Freddy Kamara, who suggested that it might be a good idea for us to bring all the various disabled societies together".[165]

According to Professor Jones this happened more or less when the war broke out in the provinces. Those times there were not that many DPOs as today. Only the ex-

---

[164] Frederick Kamara was appointed Chairman of the Sierra Leone National Disability Commission in 2012.
[165] Interview with Professor Eldred Jones, founder of SLUDI, 23.07.2012

students of the School of the Blind Deaf had formed a formal organization and the first Polio Organisation (PVA) was about to get organized. Founders of PVA even claim to have the priority of the idea of a cross-disability organization. According to their own recollections they only withdraw because they did not want to interfere with Professor Jones' initiative.

In the 90s organizations of people with disability started to quickly multiply and leaders of SLUDI soon discovered how difficult it was to unite disabled people under one banner. It seems that already at that time the intricate nature of the disability field, its fragmentation and the competition between branches was noticeable.

"there were voluntary associations that were not really flourished, that did not come too much. Nothing is shorter lived in this country than the societies for the disabled. They quarrelled; they dissolved, almost week by week. It was very difficult to bring them together. Because there was probably more than one club for each of the disabilities."[166]

The circumstances of its birth explain why SLUDI sometimes identify itself as a DPO, representing people with disabilities, sometimes as an umbrella, representing DPOs, sometimes even as a super-umbrella, representing DPOs and umbrellas alike. Despite the fragmented nature of the disability field (or maybe because of it) speaking with one voice was an important aim of SLUDI and it has never renounced of representing the totality of the disabled organizations. This was obviously a highly ambitious goal, if not for other reasons, because even SLUDI could not follow the rapid changes within the disability world and had no idea of the exact number of DPOs. A bigger problem was that amongst the organizations some grew too quickly and came to challenge SLUDI's hegemony. There could be only two solutions then. One was – more or less open - war, using all available weapons, including recruiting international organizations as allies; the other consisting in incorporating the new umbrella in the older one. Sometimes open hostility was just a phase preceding the incorporation. Sometimes the incorporation happened by a personal union, one and the same person occupying executive positions in two, previously quarrelling organisations. Something similar happened when the chairman of SLUPP (Sierra Leonean Union of Polio Persons) defying for long SLUDI, got elected as the president of the latter.

---

[166] Ibid

SLUPP was created in the last days of the war by members of existing polio homes. But as not all the known polio leaders were represented in its creation, inevitably the new organization was contested by some. Despite the initial hostility of one section of the polio leaders, SLUPP managed to make its own place under the sun and by today it has become recognized practically by all the polio organizations. It organizes and supervises elections in the homes, produces strategic papers and official documentations for them and is often invited to mediate in case of conflicts. Just like SLUDI was not called to life by the demand of the organizations to represent them (most of which did not exist yet at the time of its creation anyhow), SLUPP as an umbrella cannot be fully considered as an initiative coming from the polio-homes wanting to come together. It would be more appropriate to see the birth of SLUPP as resulting from the intersection between the interest of a few polio home leaders and those of the Ministry of Social Welfare. Some go as far as considering SLUPP as a creation of the Ministry:

"*SLUPP come into being just after the war when the Minister of Social Welfare himself saw that after the war about 18 different polio organisations made the job difficult (for them). So the Ministry said: These polio groups, they are too many by now. I think you need for get one group which could represent all of them, which could speak on their behalf, which the Ministry will deal with easily.*"[167]

From this perspective "the one voice" paradigm serves rather the interest of the interlocutors of the DPOs, who, in this way, do not have to bother with the complex reality of multiple interest groups voicing contradictory demands. Not only local authorities found it easier to deal with one organization instead of many, the idea was picked up and actively supported by an American charity, Mercy Ship, specialized in providing medical service to vulnerable populations in the developing world. The influence of foreign actors in shaping the landscape of the disability organizations is not a secret. As a friend of mine put it: "*HI has got SLUDI, Mercy Ship got SLUPP*". SLUPP became influential because of the important personal network it managed to mobilize. Within the founders we find Franklin Kabbah, the future SLUDI president, Paul Osman Kabiah, the chairman of UPBSA, Vandey Samura who was working with an Italian NGO, Coopi and Julius Cuffie, the first polio MP.

---

[167] Interview with Cyprian Kabbah, former SLUDI Chairman, co-founder of PVA, 13.07.2011.

This power concentration continued with the creation of an even newer umbrella-like organisation: DAAG (Disability Awareness Action Group). DAAG could have disturbed the circles of SLUDI and SLUPP, the only reason why this was not the case is that DAAG consisted more or less of the same group of people as the two others, and anyhow it soon renounced to be an umbrella, opting rather for an NGO status. Like the other two super-DPOs, DAAG also owes its existence to the strategic positioning of the disabled elite as well as to considerable external support.

"*One organisation in the UK, they call it Community Based Children's Aid, helped us to set up DAAG. The fundament was put down by Kabbah (*the then SLUPP president, now the president of SLUDI), *Patrick Taylor (the PRO of SLUDI, officer at the Human Right Commission), Arona (now in Canada) and then Salomon Sahr Bundu and the rest. Since then DAAG has been very instrumental*".[168]

It is certainly instrumental: DAAG managed to raise constant support from Lillian Foundation, another INGO and with these resources it could help out SLUPP and SLUDI. At the time of my visit, both organisations shared the office of DAAG and DAAG also paid the salary of the President of SLUDI. As NGOs are a better position to get funds for their own projects, the road from a DPO to an NGO has appeared to be profitable to other organisations too, and today the most dynamic and most ambitious ones consider the transformation, including some of the polio-homes. The process of NGOIzation finally has attained the disability world.

Summary

The way institutionalisation of disability happened in Sierra Leone is connected in many ways to the evolution of mainstream ideas in North America and Europe. Parallels are easy to find. However, the process followed different logics in the global North and in the South. Just like in Europe, public attention turned towards people with disability in Sierra Leone first in the 60ies and got manifest in the creation of charities and mass institutions. However, unlike in Europe, deinstitutionalisation happened not as part of an emancipatory plan, but as the consequence of the total collapse of the state and its institutions, followed by the destruction of the civil war. The first polio

---

[168] Interview with Sahr Koto Quee, Programme manager of DAAG, 01.08. 2011.

communities that discovered themselves as DPOs responded to the dramatic disappearance of the institutions that used to protect them..

The story relating the formation of the polio-homes challenges, I believe, some of the ready-made ideas about people with disability in general, and about people with disability in the Global South, in particular. Instead of passive victims of society, polio survivors appear in this story as quite active in shaping their own destiny. At the same time, it is clear that the polio homes would not be the same without the circumstances created by the presence of foreign actors. Disabled organizations elsewhere in Africa too, came to life by the combination of a series of exogenous and endogenous factors, as Whyte and Muyinda (2007) demonstrated in the case of Uganda. In Sierra Leone the boarding schools, from where the first polio organizations started, not only facilitated the emergence of a collective identity necessary for later mobilization, but also integrated the first activists in a network in which international concepts and norms were put and kept in circulation. These institutions would not be considered today as very progressive. Ironically though, they probably did more for the actual empowerment of people with disability than many present day "capacity building" programs.

4. Squat stories

"At Walpole street, no matter what was going on, there was this unity, this love. Despite the quarel, every time, but after any quarel at the moment, you see people moving on again. That is why I say it was a different world. Everybody was different, but still, they were heading to something, we were heading to a place. To the future. We were ready to conquer, in life. Yes, everybody was having a determination. Positive dreams. And Walpole street, that is why I say, it was a big world. Everybody came out with something."

Memories of an ex-squatter

The polio experience

Generalising about life courses of people affected by polio is as risky an enterprise as generalising about anything else. However, given the fundamental effect of the sickness, the heavy impact of the overall context and the collective experience of rural to urban migration, there are a number of recurrent points in which a life with polio can be resumed. As I will try to show, such a stereotyped "polio experience" has got as little to do with the "individual tragedy" frame of the Western medical model than with the "defective society against the vulnerable individual disabled" fame of the social model, and definitely contradicts the theory "of the hidden disabled", specifically fabricated for a Western public striving to understand the phenomenon of disability in developing countries (accessorily satisfying also a perverse curiosity eager to dwell on horrific details of "barbaric customs"). Concordant testimonies of squat dwellers also raise questions about usually taken for granted ideas on integration, inclusion and charity.

Struck by polio

The first common point in the life stories narrated by polio survivors is the eruption of the disease, which changed all their subsequent existence. The virus of poliomyelitis attacked the narrators at different ages in their childhood and so some of them have clear memories of the life before, some only remember the aftermath, but all of them with no exception start their story with the onset of the outrageous disaster, recalled as a unique point in time: at one moment the person walks, in the next one he falls down and stays there, unable to detach himself from the ground. The whole life story that follows is one of a long struggle to overcome this situation - overcoming

means both accepting the non-changeable and challenging and reversing the fate. The account of the brutal rupture in time strangely contrasts with the neutral, objectifying style:

"I was walking, I think. For Pray-day we went walking all sides, that was when I got up and said: 'Mama, I want drink water' She told me: 'try, try, get up!' Then she started to take me from one herbalist to the other". [169]

The rupture is often linked to an apparently accidental act or event, which retrospectively reveals to be the trigger of the catastrophe. In the precedent case the trigger was the sudden thirst of the child, in the following one it is the uncommon appearance of some utterly common insect:

"I was born in Makeni, I was able to walk, I was walking, then one night - there is that long insect, they call it centipede, when you touch it, it rounds up, it excretes something - so one night it was coming to walk on my pillow. My mother caught it, she hit it, from its tail something white came out, blood came out. Now, after that I cried, I was not able to get up again." [170]

The individual mythologies run into a larger river, forming a collective mythology. The incident of the incomprehensible fall telescopes with an act of creation. In this moment of rebirth to the disabled existence, the child is never alone; she is accompanied by the parents, by the family, surrounded and supported by close and remote family members, who - for a certain time - try to reverse the destiny, fighting against the misfortune. Far from being abandoned and rejected, the sick child becomes the centre of the family, which is concentrating all its efforts and material resources on the search for an adapted medical treatment, often combining paths of different medical traditions.

"My mother did everything, she forced me to walk but I was not able to walk. My mother begged the doctor to try it over and over again, let him make me walk again. They gave me (traditional) medicine, the medicine burned my skin, blood came out, I scratched my foot, I was not able to walk. The mother went to the hospital; let them do operation on me… The mother and the father, there was nothing they did not try…" [171]

---

[169] Interview with Cyprian Kabbah, 13.07.2011
[170] Interview with Augustus, co-founder of POCA, 09.07. 2011
[171] Ibid

In this long and desperate struggle there comes a moment of resignation. The family abandons the hope that the child can be healthy again. His status definitely changes; from this point it is not recovery which is sought after, but adaptation to the situation. Here the resources of the family determine the range of possibilities. In many cases there is no other mobility aid than a stick that the child can use to jump on if he is not confined altogether to drag himself with his hands. He is allowed to play with other children on the ground and the parents are carrying him everywhere. Even during the war disabled children were not left behind. Abubakar remembers his father as a hero:

"*My father was carrying me on his back, he was already old and he was not strong but he kept running with me. The bullets were flying. Sometimes people had to advise him: you have to put this child down now because of the bullets*." [172]

In some cases corrective operations and mobility aids were available:

"*They did the operation and from that point I use callipers*".[173]

"*At the end of the day they gave up. They went to Father Olivani's place and they managed to get crutches and callipers*". [174]

The acceptance of the fate and the onset of a family life with a disabled child demands adaptation from the family too. In some cases the couple profit of the new situation to rearrange the relation. There is a common Western accusation against Africans according to which mothers are often punished and mistreated for giving birth to a disabled child. Sometimes indeed it happens so. It is always easier for the father to cast the fault on the woman. However it is also possible that the disability of the child in some of the cases only serves as a pretext to voice and justify pre-existing jealousy.

"*My father was very angry. He said in his family there had never been a disabled child, and that he did not even believe I was his child. Maybe that was the reason he never accepted me*".[175]

Frequently the opposite happens. I have known several men who were abandoned with a disabled child by the mother, with the excuse that it is too shameful or too difficult to raise such an offspring. Before we draw any hasty conclusions from such

---

[172] Interview with Abubakkar, young polio victim, 09.10. 2010
[173] Interview with Sylvanus Bundu, 23.06. 2011
[174] Interview with Cyprian Kabbah, 13.07.2011
[175] Interview with Abubakkar, 09.10. 2010

cases on general attitudes regarding disability, it is wise to add immediately that - especially in poor, lower cast families - single parenting is extremely widespread and leaving the child care entirely to one parent (the mother, or the father alike) is a common solution, with the possibility left open to exchange the roles any time. Grandparents might play the same role of temporary or permanent guardians, for disabled and non-disabled children alike.

Also it should not be forgotten that in many cases the couple is united and strengthened by the misfortune and support their disabled child in unison:

"*That time I was two years, six months, my people tried to cure me, they could not, they went to the hospital, they went to the traditional (healer), they spent all their money, anywhere where they said they treat disabled, they took me there. My father and my mother, they took me everywhere but there was nothing to do. ...They still come and visit me every weekend. They come from Kambia, they cross with the ferry; they do it every week.*"[176]

Despite this frenzy around her, for the child the process of the identity formation does not immediately crystallise around the impairment. The consciousness of being different might develop gradually, as a result of seeing oneself in others' eyes.

"*I realised I was different at the age of 7-8. That was really the time when I came to my senses, because before, the other children were also crawling on the ground, so nothing made me think I got that. But at the age of 6-7 I was already conscious. I felt it too much. Because I looked at my sisters and brothers and saw they all stood up, all the people were walking around me.*" [177]

This person must have had a very happy childhood, free from any form of discrimination, as nobody in her entourage reminded her to her disability until she discovered it for herself. Others have more bitter memories of early cases of humiliation:

"*Well, the other children, they can ridicule you, they can provoke you, some can come and mock you. You know, the kids make all kind of jokes to say this or that is my wife, like this. If it was for me and I said such a thing, they were very angry with me, for them it*

---

[176] Interview with Mariama Jalloh, 01.07. 2011
[177] Ibid

was an insult, because I dragged myself on the ground, with my hands and feet, I did not use crutches yet. (– But these children, they played with you?) – *Yes of course*".[178]

This, and similar stories, point at the experience of discrimination from early childhood - in the sense of being marked with difference. They do not support however the theory of massive exclusion. To the contrary, the quasi totality of the testimonies that I gathered draw a picture of inclusion, showing the child hit by polio deeply embedded in the family and the local community.

The source of existential anguish comes from the feeling of being different rather than from being rejected. Many life stories I collected reflect a sustained effort to transform this difference into a source of pride or resource, instead of negating or hiding it. The charity homes operated by religious organisations, where many of these children grew up, provided a sense of strength to the inmates, precisely because they realised they were not alone:

"*I felt it; I really felt it (*being different*). The only thing that helped me to get courage was when they took me to the home, where I met my companions. Because in the village I was alone so I got discouraged. But when they took me to the home, I saw other people like me, they were the same and I saw myself even stronger than them. I was so happy. And that just gave me the zeal to educate myself.*"[179]

"*Inclusion is a modern thinking. But you know it is good to come together. We can hear that the charity model is no good, the social model is good. To me, both of them are good.*"[180]

Life in the charity homes was protected life and helped to create a community, but sometimes it also created opportunity to meet with the non-disabled world on quasi equal terms

"*In the home I was able to expose myself, mingle with different people; go to the beach, do sports, you know, school activities in which we participated*".[181]

---

[178] Interview with Cyprian Kabbah, 13.07.2011
[179] Interview with Mariama Jalloh, 01.07. 2011
[180] Ibid
[181] Interview with Mariama Jalloh, 01.07. 2011

At times inclusion also happened following a reversed model, in which the disabled children who – catered for by foreigners - had more resources than the non-disabled ones, created clientelistic relations with the later.

"*The non-disabled boys, we met them in the school. There were some of them, I remember, we took our lunch to the school and they did not get any. So I looked at them and said: they gave me lunch in the morning, so let we come together and share it. I shared it with one or two. So as I came, they took the wheelchair, pushed it everywhere. I precisely remember one, Abu. We shared the lunch, then he pushed me. We come and go*."[182]

This model became later imported to the self-managed polio homes where disabled members share with their helpers and family members resources that they only are entitled to.

War: horror and displacement

Another collective experience which marked the totality of the polio victims was the encounter with the war. Disability is a serious handicap when quick movement is necessary to save people's lives. Without the protection of the family and the collective solidarity of the communities physically challenged people would have had very little chance to survive. Disability could paradoxically even turn to be an asset in the flight, as it turns out in a story told by Abubakar, a polio victim who was about 7-8 years old at the moment of the events he recollects. While his family was running away from the rebels, somehow in the chaos he found himself alone in the forest. It was then that he accidentally came across with a rebel leader.

"*I shouted, I was so much afraid. I shouted at him, I told him let him kill me. He came to me and advised me, he told me not to make any noise, to go and find a place to hide and wait. I followed the advice.*"[183]

If Abubakar saved his life, he could not protect himself from the traumatising experience of the violence. It stays with him, as with his whole generation.

"*I saw how they killed people, how they cut hands, I saw everything. When I think of it I am afraid I would go crazy. This is why sometimes I just want to sit alone.*" [184]

---

[182] Interview with Cyprian Kabbah, 13.07.2011
[183] Interview with Abubakkar, 09.10. 2010

Not only children got traumatised but also young adults, going through the same experiences.

"*I fully experienced the war, because I was not a child any more at that time. The war affected all the areas. They attacked Kono, then Kabala, then they attacked us too (in Makeni). We got the news, but we also saw many things happen.*"[185]

Disabled people who arrived to Freetown during and after the war and created their own communities there form a profoundly traumatized generation. This is not particular to disability. By the end of the war, in the provinces as well as in Freetown basically everybody had got more or less direct experience with the war. Maybe this is the reason why I did not find any correlation between the fact of having been exposed to the war and other possibly handicapping factors when I was looking for such relations in my survey. The war experience just did not seem to create any large discrepancies between people. However, when one looks at the disabled boys (and girls) gathering at some corners by the road, asking for alms, it must not be forgotten what they went through. They are obviously disabled. But this is not the whole story. They had experienced poverty and desperation in their villages, lived through the combats, participated in forced displacement, they ran for their lives, alone or with their families, whom they eventually left behind, they lived in refugee camps, they crossed the border to find asylum in neighbouring Guinea, they came back home, started life anew from total scratch, with no or very little institutional help. They are part of a generation deserving respect for simply being alive. They deserve protection - and that, not only on the account of their disability.

The mobility of the mobility handicapped

Paradoxically, the war and the forced displacement enhanced the mobility of disabled people. For better or for worse, greater mobility has become one of the collective experiences within the polio world.

"*Before the war my father died. My mother went to follow one of my brothers in Guinea. At some point I had to join them too. Although I did not stay there permanently, I was just coming and going. The major events found me here. We had to move the polio*

---

[184] Ibid
[185] Interview with Cyprian Kabbah, 13.07.2011

organisation back to Makeni from Grafton because it was too close to the ECOMOG camp. Lot of people went back to the provinces, with some we lost contact until the end of the war."[186]

Disabled people during the war were - and they still are - much more mobile than it could be expected (seen from a Western perspective) from people who did not only have serious mobility constraints but also lacked totally the technical facilities and social protection that compensate for the loss of mobility in welfare societies. The most amazing example that I came across with is the case of Augustus, whose entire life has been under the sign of mobility, not because of the constraints of the war, but of his own choice.

Augustus is about in his 50ies today, he has double paralysis affecting both of his legs and he uses callipers and crutches to walk.   I cite his life story in some length here, paying a tribute to the entrepreneurship of polio victims.

*"My mother paid for me to go to the school. But she was struggling. She met the fathers (*the Catholic Mission*) and begged them to take me in the program in the Church. So they started to supply me every month. Then a black man said he would pay me for the school, but after a while he stopped, so I stopped school from grade 3. I started to strain and I saw my mother strain too. I told myself, I am already mature, I should travel. So I went to Liberia in 1978, but when the war broke out there I had to come back to Freetown. I never went back to school again; I started to travel on ships. First I went to Liberia, they were supposed to fly me back, but finally they just gave me money and I came back to Freetown. Then I travelled to Nigeria, I stayed there until Nigeria came under military rule, then they reported us to the Immigration (office) and so I came home. But the ship did not go directly to Freetown; I went straight to America, Chile. From Chile they flew me back to Freetown again. With another ship they took me to Guyana, South America. Another ship took me to Chiliano, I went around Portorico, Santiago, Bahamas, then I came back. The last time they took me to Tanzania, East Africa. When I came, I started to do business with the white people that I met in Guinea. But the money I earned I spent it on the organisation; I shared it with my disabled companions. So I had to travel again because I ran out of money. I went to Senegal, then to Gambia. From Banjul now I had to travel to*

---

[186] Interview with Augustus, co-founder of PVA/ POCA, 01.08. 2011.

Mauritania, then Guinea, Conakry, then I decided to go to Mali again. Mali, Bamako, I went to Togo, Burkina Faso, Ivory Coast."

- How did you manage your way to all these ships?

I just hid somewhere and waited for the ship to leave. After 2-3 days when I felt hungry and thirsty, I came out so that people can see me. They were angry with me but gave me food, than later they opened a room for me, so that I can sleep. When the ship arrived to the coast they took me to the Immigration office. Sometimes they put me to a hotel, they flew me back home."[187]

"Well, the only thing I can do, sometimes I go to the port, I come along the sailors and try to get on board. There are some vessels on which they can ask for some work. Some of them have cook, but not sufficient staff to work in the kitchen. I can go there, do the washing up and stuff. I work with them, then they give me a small thing and I can survive. Sometimes when the sailors get of the vessel, I can take them out for a walk. They want to see the city, they want to buy this and that, and they offer me something in exchange. Some of them want to go to the night club, I can take them, then take them back safely to the ship".[188]

Augustus was one of the founding members of PVA. Without the ingenuity and entrepreneurial spirit of people like Augustus, Sylvanus, Cyprian, Mariama, and others all around the country there would be no self-managed polio communities, functioning as alternative social security nets in the total absence of institutionalised solutions.

Love stories

There are love stories in the squats. The fact that disabled people fall in love, have sex, found families, have children should not come as a surprise unless there is a strong taboo relegating these facts of life to the realm of the non-existent or to that of the not totally acceptable. This taboo does exist, although its home is to be found rather in the West than in Sierra Leone. The controversy around the sculpture representing a naked pregnant woman with no arms and truncated legs in the middle of London,[189] as well as

---

[187] Interview with Augustus, POCA, 01.08. 2011.
[188] Ibid
[189] Marc Quinn's artwork is entitled „Alison Lapper Pregnant". It was modelled after Alison Lapper, a British artist born with no arms and was erected on Trafalgar Square in 2005.

the success of recent films speaking openly about the sexual life of people with disability[190] prove rather than disprove the existence of this taboo in Western culture.

The Austrian film „Lourdes" (2009), by Jessica Hausner exploits this taboo in a particularly cruel way. The protagonist of the film is a disabled woman who prays for a miracle in Lourdes, where thousands of desperate devotes share a solitary and alienated existence where love and compassion has no place. Against all odds the miracle happens and the young woman stands up from her wheelchair. Her companions look at her with ill-concealed jealousy. An elderly woman bitterly remarks that now she can even fall in love or get married. This is a special moment, because it shows - as in a mocking glass - what the disabled body is considered not capable of, nor entitled to. As if the right to living a full human life were attached somehow to the ideal of a perfect body, both in functional and aesthetic terms.

The scene luckily does not reflect totally the reality of disabled people's life in Europe, many of whom live happy lives with their partners. It reflects however something real. This nonchalant remark tells a lot about prevailing conceptions of disability. Perceived as being excluded from social and biological reproduction, the disabled body carries the stigma of a diminished personhood. Robert Murphy, in "The Body Silent in America" goes even further, comparing the "devalued status" of disabled people to that of ex-convicts, "whose very humanity is questionable" (Murphy 1995:140). He sees the cause of this devaluation in the highly normative representation of the human body. Non-conformity with the modern ideal of a clean, slim, strong and young body is severely sanctioned. Murphy does not believe that this ideal is necessarily universal. To the contrary, he notes: "I suspect that future studies will reveal that in lands where poverty and disease are rampant, the disabled will not be as excluded from social life as they are in the United States, but it probably will also come out that they always receive special treatment" (Ibid:144).

---

[190] Amongst recent titles only a few for illustration: The Intouchables (French, 2011); Rust and Bone (French-Belgian,2012); Hasta La Vista (Belgian, 2011)

It is good to remember Murphy's intuition in Sierra Leone. In spite of the tremendous difference between the two social and cultural worlds, the idea that a person's value is attached to his/her perceived capacity to freely enjoy sexual life and to procreate is secretly shared by Africans and Europeans. The huge difference is that while in Europe (and North America) the disabled body is judged unattractive and hence not considered as suitable for sex (and marriage), in Sierra Leone the relation between beauty, desirability and union is articulated in a very different way. First, unlike in Western societies, a disabled body is not considered undesirable by definition. Second, marriage (and even romantic relationship) in West Africa is more a social and economic pact than the realisation of romantic love. *"According to tradition it's the man who supports the woman and the children; if I marry (a disabled person) I'd assume all the risks and responsibilities, and that would be too heavy for me."* says a female community leader in a report on the representations of disability (Agbovi 2010). Although others in the same report seem more ready to sacrifice „tradition" to love, stating that "What is important is love and if I love her, I'd get married without any problem", love here stands probably for the ability to share, mutual compassion and care, for a community of destiny. There is evidence that the capacity to contribute to the household's economy is still the priority in establishing long term relationships, although women and men are not expected to participate in this economy in the same way. Successful marriages between a disabled and non-disabled person that I have seen depended on the capacity of the spouses for performing their gender roles as providers (for men) and managers of the home economy (for women). In this respect even physical immobility is not an obstacle; provided that the physically impaired husband or wife can command a large enough network of helpers.

Unlike the solitary miracle-hunters in Lourdes, disabled people's social life in the polio-squats of Freetown does not differ from that of non-disabled people living in the same place, including their participation in sexual, familial and communal life – except for the important fact that they are the leaders. As a consequence, not only they are not dehumanized on account of their disability, their personhood is not diminished in any noticeable way, compared to others with whom they live.

The nuance between humanisation and personification seems pedantic but it is important. Humanisation – according to Ingstad and Whyte (1995) - is the first degree of

accepting the other as similar, as a fellow-member of the human community, bearing inalienable rights. Despite widespread discrimination against people with disability all over the world, cases of outright dehumanisation are rare. In normal circumstances, says Ingstad, disabled people in Africa, just like in Europe, cannot be killed or mistreated unpunished, they receive care and their basic needs are addressed. The problem is not that much dehumanisation, but rather depersonification – as the heroine of "Lourdes" painfully experienced – showing that if DE personification exists, it is not exclusively an African problem. Desexualisation is both a tool and a marker of depersonification. A curtailed personhood still confers rights, but it diminishes the individual's social significance, in comparison to other individuals. While somebody (or something) is either a human or not, personification is gradual. „If personhood is seen as being not simply human but human in a way that is valued and meaningful – Ingstad notes - then individuals can be persons to a greater or lesser extent". (Ibid:11) Personhood is linked to social statuses and to social roles that are considered to be corresponding to the status. Disability undeniably plays a role in the construction of social identity, but in Sierra Leone (like probably in other places of the world) it is not a master category, a sufficient marker capable of determining a persons' degree of personification in itself. In the polio squats (contrary to other places of the world) it is not disability that stops a person from engaging in a love relation or from forming a couple, it is the incapacity to do so (for whatever reason) which becomes truly disabling. Disability alone does not disqualify a person from participation in this realm of life but non participation becomes a social stigma adding to the disabling factor of the impairment. Persons affected by poliomyelitis are not unmarriageable by definition; their capacity to create a lasting marital relationship – like anybody else's - depends on their capacity to sustain a family (as a man) or to contribute to the household's stability (as a woman).

Being disabled, carrying the imprint of physical deformity then is not handicapping in the same way in Africa and in Europe/America. In Sierra Leone bodies maimed by poliomyelitis are not universally rejected, they remain desirable and desired. Also, within the polio community being stricken with the disease does not have the same meaning for everybody. The community is differentiated and stratified and the stratification can be read clearly in the types of relationships people contract with their partners, reflecting by the same token the degree of their personification.

On the top of the symbolic and social ladder we find "successful" disabled men. They are not necessarily those who have an enviable job or an important political position, although obviously these factors help. Many of the original leaders of the polio movement, the founders of the organisations, the long-term and permanent heads of the polio homes can be categorised here. These men frequently live in regular marriage or in marriage-like relationships with non-disabled women, they have children and they fully assume the position of the household head. Some of them leave the collective homes as soon as they have a chance to do it and establish their own house somewhere outside. Some stay inside the community, delimitating the territory of their own family by symbolic means: choosing an eccentric emplacement, surrounding the house with flowers, furnishing it with heavy furniture, or at least decorating it carefully with posters, artificial flowers and other objects of prestige.

Although men in this situation admit that they met resistance from their in-laws in the beginning, with time they overcome the hostility by proving that they are reliable resource providers and responsible family heads. The following testimony follows a recurrent pattern (that of a process going from reticence to acceptance)

"*I met her in Guinea... She accepted me. The father was very much against. But the mother was very kind, and the sisters and brothers also. They managed to persuade the father. His only argument was that polio victims are too violent (*stubborn*), but we educated him saying that not all polio-victims are the same, we are different. Before we created this organisation it would have been very difficult to persuade him. Today I am his best friend, as I proved he was wrong. He is happy for her daughter*"[191].

In some cases, not only is disability being forgotten and excused with time, but it is transformed from a handicap into an advantage, like in the following case:

"*The woman I married, I met her close to the place where I worked. I proposed to marry her. At that time I experienced complete discrimination. This lady accepted me, completely loved me, but her mother said she did not want me because I was disabled. I tried to talk to her, sent her people to talk for me, but she could not change her mind. The only excuse she found was to say her daughter needs to further her education. We forced her a bit, I made her daughter pregnant. So she turned away from her child, for some time she stopped caring for her. But after a while, she started to see improvement in the girl's*

---

[191] Interview with Sylvanus Bundu, 23.06. 2011

life. By then the other girls who had relationships with abled men were at home because the men who impregnated them did not care. But I took care of my wife and of the children. Whilst the others were suffering. So at the end of the day, she regretted everything. I came back to her as a father, and she respected me. Especially during the war, when at times I bought one-one bag of rice for her. So finally she said we should do the marriage ceremony. In the church. That was the only church marriage in the whole family.”[192]

What links these two cases and some similar other ones is that the men in these situations are educated, with important social and cultural capital. The situation of the women is somewhat different. As I said, the polio homes are male dominated universes but there are some disabled women in each. In a few cases the elected chairladies clearly have only a token position to assure a minimum apparent gender balance in the executive, but some of the women are real leaders. This is evidently so in the two only-women organisations. Interestingly, although women can achieve a relatively high status in the polio world, they usually do not have the same marital status as their male counterparts. There are basically three variations. Many of the women are single or more exactly single mothers. This fact can be the result of conscious choice, as for the polio girls of Hastings who are not allowed to live with a partner within the place, or it can be the natural outcome of the course of life. In any case the women with polio usually have a strong negative opinion of men who are said to abuse women then leave them pregnant, not caring for the children. The men in question are preponderantly not disabled. The second possibility is related to the first one. If the sexual relation between the disabled woman and the non- disabled man is not totally transient, temporarily they can form couples, but these are rarely as stable as the marriages of the male leaders. All the women I have known in this situation live in recomposed families with several children born from different men. The third possibility is a couple formed by a disabled man and a disabled woman. Although these unions seem to be more permanent than the previous ones, many a times the couple separate temporarily or they do not live at the same place, the children following one or the other parent. Temporary separation sometimes is a solution chosen for a situation where the man cannot sustain his family.

This possibility evokes a problem that both men and women face, namely marital unfaithfulness. Lower status disabled men can unite with non-disabled women, just like

---

[192] Ibid

the "big ones" but they constantly fear that their women would leave them. This is a very likely eventuality and it is accepted as a fatality because a man who cannot provide for his wife cannot really claim a moral right on her, nor on the children. Sometimes the solution chosen is to take a disabled wife who might be less likely to search for a substitute provider; everybody though knows that the protection is inadequate, as a disabled wife is as free as a non-disabled one to get rightful compensation if she considers that her husband does not take care of her according to her needs.

"*Last week I went to see her and when she opened the door I saw she was with somebody. She did not say a word. He told me I should be ashamed, I do not deserve a wife like her. I did not want to fight. Finally, if he provides for her I do not have the right to complain.*" – confesses a man who is struggling to build a house for his family in the outskirts of Freetown, while his wife and child are being hosted in the provinces by the grandmother. The woman's adventure with another man obviously has not made him change his plans.

The capacity to procreate is equally important for men and women, a fact reflected maybe by the Krio linguistic convention omitting any difference between a male and female speaker for the act of giving birth. A born am" is a Krio expression meaning that the person had a child independently of his/her sex. For people with disability it is an even stronger imperative to affirm their "normalcy" by parenting children.

"*Some men when they see a polio (*woman*) they say this one will never give birth. Then some of us show them our children, they would say: What is that! – They cannot believe their eyes. Because they believe when you are disabled and if you give birth, you will have a disabled child. When they see how beautiful our children are they say "Oooh!"*"[193]

This pride might partly explain the ambiguity that women with polio show towards unexpected pregnancy. Although medical and NGO staff have often warned them that giving birth may cost their lives unless they undergo a caesarean operation, and although they know they have very little chance of getting proper medical treatment[194], they usually welcome pregnancy. A contributing factor might be that single

---

[193] Interview with Mariama Jalloh,, 08.07. 2011
[194] Although regular health services are both difficult to access for disabled women and they are not necessary prepared to host them, a few special institutions, like the Aberdeen Women's centre or Mary Stopes offer

mothers face no stigma. Even more importantly, a child for a severely disabled woman might be more than a family; it can be a dedicated helper. From a Western point of view this fact is not easy to accept. I remember how shocked I was when Esther, a young friend of mine living alone told me about the loss of her child:

"*She lived until she was three. I was very sad when I lost her. She just started to walk. She was bringing me things.*"

However, what she said made perfect sense in her situation and it did not imply in any way that she did not love that child. Esther is a beggar in wheelchair and she badly needs a pusher. She also needs to feel "normal". Normality would not mean for her the ability to walk but the ability to raise a child and being surrounded by a family. The stigma which cannot be washed away is not the polio, but social incapacity reflected directly by the lack of being embedded in society by communal, family and relational ties. What Talle notes regarding the Maasai, holds for Sierra Leoneans, too: "(they) do not regard people with a disabling condition as a single, unified category, toward whom they relate...In other words, "disability" is not a criterion for classifying people or of interaction. Being "human" - being a person - is to live communally with other people" (Talle 1995).

The meaning of disability

The struggle for dignity is an important theme of the life of people living with the sequels of polio. Those living with their families in open neighbourhoods try to obtain dignity by assimilating and finding an accepted place in the non-disabled community, by rendering themselves useful. Often they attribute very little importance to the notion of disability and have rather scarce - if any - information on the disability movement.[195] For people living in polio communities the situation is different. For them disability offers an alternative identity instead of the little valued beggar or squatter identity. They happily embrace it, although this identification is contextual - always attached to the idea of being organised and united. Disability in this sense functions in public contexts and becomes almost a collective shield, something like a political claim:

affordable services for both disabled and non-disabled women. In my experience though, disabled women do not know about these facilities or do not believe these are for them.
[195] This situation is changing quickly though because of massive media coverage on issues concerning disability

"We started to talk about disability during the war, around 96-97. There were so many causalities and they started to give them that name. So many people became disabled. So this disability business emerged. As there were so many amputees, they started to recognise us. Before all the people who recognised us only wanted to give us charity. The name... yes, it gave me strength. Just like when we say they have already ratified a disability bill. When they start implementing it, we will not talk the same talk!"[196]

In a private context, however when they talk about their own individual experience, the same people may refuse the disabled identity altogether:

"I am in this home, I take care of it. I have my children, I send them to school. I go about my business. Why would I be disabled?"

The meaning of disability is not the same for everybody. People (especially women) on the lower end of the social hierarchy are rarely heard to speak proudly about their disability. In contrast, people in leading positions, usually the most self-reliant and self-confident persons readily admit that disability in a certain sense can be an asset:

"I am not afraid to say: my life would not have been the same if I had not had the disability. I would not be in this home with my sisters. I would not have done so many things. Maybe I was in the street now, like so many other women. It is God who made me so. I can accept it and stay: I still worth something."[197]

"Disability impacted on me, even my growth was different, I became different mentally... It has got advantage and disadvantage. When I meet some people I feel, when you are disabled, you have no dignity, you have no respect.... Also, when you are disabled you know you cannot run with the others, so you rather spend your time on your studies and you compensate them...I cannot say disability had a negative impact on me. If I had the feeling that I achieved nothing I would say it is bad. But I was able to revert. The general theme for my life is to live a victorious life!"[198]

Such testimonies could easily be taken as psychological compensation for an irreversible loss, and they certainly have something to do with the culturally encouraged attitude of resilience of Sierra Leoneans. But there is more to it than that. Most people

---

[196] Interview with Mariama Jalloh,, 08.07. 2011
[197] Ibid
[198] Interview with Sylvanus Bundu, 23.06. 2011

that I talked to in the squats - not exclusively the leaders –at one point compared their lives with those of their sisters and brothers left behind in the provinces, observing that probably they had gone farther, in terms of education, for sure in geographical, but also in social mobility, since in the city their chances of joining networks including diverse, high status persons were infinitely higher. And such a network is a resource! That is why living in a polio community can also constitute an asset, compensating for the loss of family ties, and to some extent even for the impairment.

Living in the polio homes

Polio homes or squats make exactly that possible: they recreate a sort of communality around people who, for different reasons, found themselves cut from their original communities. Obviously not all the polio-disabled live in polio homes. Besides those who continue living with their families (in the city or in villages) there are still young disabled people (boys and girls) arriving daily from the provinces, trying their chances in the city. If they have a family in town, they might find a permanent refuge, but many of them join those who live in the streets. Although the people of the squats say the places are open, it is not that easy to become a permanent member today as it was in the beginning. First, there are obviously more pavement dwellers than places in the squats; second, once an organisation is formed, it starts to monitor its boundaries. I often heard that if I wanted a place in a squat the only thing I had to do was to hand in my official request to the executive. Probably that was true. The executive would have examined my demand, would have seen if somebody could recommend me and would have decided if my presence was likely to bring more advantage to the place than disadvantage. In my case there were good chances that I could pass the exam. But in practice new adherences rarely happen so. For newcomers it is a process taking some time and it is possibly never completely definitive. The freshman often comes to spend some time in this or that squat during the day and gradually he gets recognised as (unofficially) belonging to the place, however in most of the cases this symbolic belonging does not go with other privileges. If, however, he has a family member or a good friend living already in the place, he can be incorporated very easily in the household of the latter, with the status of a guest, until achieving full memberships. Many polio-disabled people – as many non-disabled youth - are more or less at home in

more than one disabled home and this double affiliation also creates a powerful bond between the city centre and its periphery.

Not everybody is considered to be apt to live according to the formal constraints of a collective home. I heard sometimes – from members of squats - that people living in the street are not really able to adapt, or that they remain on the street out of their own choice. Homeless people all over the world are thought - by those who are not homeless - to have chosen their life style. Others, who have a roof somewhere and belong to functional families, have indeed little motivation to join. It also happens that somebody who gets married and finds somehow a means to sustain his family, draws out, moving into a house, however – in most cases - maintaining the relation with the community. Despite the often conflicting and fractured nature of intra-squat relations and other inconveniences, the people of the polio squats understand very well the advantage of grouping together. Living together is framed as sharing love – "love" standing in most textual contexts for mutual care and solidarity. Those who are not able to share are "selfish", a serious accusation that carries its punishment in itself.

"*Some people do not take the opportunity to live with disabled compins, they do not think about it. They do not have love for their fellow disabled; they do not even go close. So they cannot benefit, because they stay alone, they do not associate and they cannot get the benefit that comes with it*".[199]

The advantages are strategical: they go beyond immediate material benefit, they are about security. The members of a squat form powerful solidarity networks, showing a united front towards external threats, no matter what problems they might have with each other in everyday life. Solidarity is potentially subversive. This is not a secret for public authorities who have a pronounced aversion against informal groupings. As the deputy-mayor of Freetown pointed out to me tellingly, allowing disabled people to live together is dangerous, because, as he said: "*As soon as you group them together, likewise think alike* – he paused meaningly, than added with a sigh: *There should be a way of integrating them in a way that they cannot keep togeth*er" [200]. His views, although for different reasons, are completely in line with mainstream ideas about inclusion, hostile to any collective forms of living of people with disability.

---

[199] Interview with Mariama Jalloh, 01.07. 2011
[200] Interview with Gibril Ibrahim Bakar Kanu, Deputy-Mayor of Freetown, 15. 09. 2010.

Surprisingly, there are few studies of these communities and consequently there is little reflection on the causes and on the effects of the collective life style chosen by so many polio victims. One of the rare exceptions is a short article by two disability experts (Santos-Zingale and McColl 2006) who honestly admit their surprise, observing that widespread ideas on integration does not seem to work here. They find it counter-intuitive and unexpected that collective living apparently offers some important advantages to people with disability in this situation. Indeed, making sense of this model from a disability theory point of view is tricky. Unless we change the prism and start considering the self- managed communities as a class phenomena[201] it is impossible to fully apprehend their full significance. Disability – not as a generalized identity marker, but as the lived experience of the physical deformation of the body – is an important factor in the formation of the polio communities, but it is not the only explanatory principle. Origin, social hierarchy, the resources of the family, geographical mobility, social and cultural capital - have all an important say here, as these are the very dimensons creating commonalities between the squat dwellers, crossing boundaries between disabled and non-disabled. Also, the particular post-war context and the shared history have facilitated both regrouping and informal occupation. Collective homes are adaptive structures, making it possible to live a humanised life in extreme conditions, similarly to the panbodys ("makeshift homes and businesses") covering the city from the West to the South, which Shepler – with good reasons - considers the material proofs of the "creativity" of Sierra Leoneans (Shepler 2011). Besides offering shelter to a potentially homeless population, polio squats are centres of economic activities, key places for socialising and information sharing and organised networks of solidarity.

Demography

Who are the people living in the squats? Obviously there are the polio-disabled; everywhere they are the founding fathers and the leaders. There are also the "able-bodies", women, children and young boys, sometimes even whole families living as "tenants", craftsmen, shopkeepers and "teachers," working in the workshops of the disabled or for their own account. This diversity is visually observable, it was still a

---

[201] Harvey points out that class in late capitalism cannot be understood in pure Marxian terms. Exploitation and extraction create commonalities between indebted white and blue collar workers. This is not the same as the "proletariat", but people have pronounced class interests, as far as their relation to exploitation is concerned. Here I understand "class" as a collectively occupied subaltern position in the face of big capital.

surprise to me when – in order to form a clearer idea on the composition of the population in the polio homes - I made an experimental census in 3 squats (Pademba Road, House of Jesus and Kissi Shell) and found disabled people in a situation of net minority.

In the 3 selected homes, I counted a total population of 481 people, including adults and children. Out of this number exactly 100, i.e. 20,8% were known to have some form of disability. [202] That was definitely less than I expected! Since the homes are effectively run by disabled people this structure can be considered as a reversed integration model, where a disabled minority is successfully "integrating" a non-disabled majority. I suggest that although the homes differ from each other in many ways, extrapolation from the data collected is possible for the rest of the homes.

When I compared the population of the homes with demographical data coming from 3 ordinary neighbourhoods (Kissi Dockyards, Aberdeen and Kroobay) – ordinary meaning here: with no specific concentration of people with disability - I found that the squats differ from the general demographic pattern in other aspects, too. The average age of the squat dwellers was somewhat lower than that of the urban neighbourhoods (20,25 against 24,5). Statistics do not tell everything. The average in urban communities is computed taking into consideration a big number of children and the presence of elderly people. There are far less children in the squats while old people are almost entirely missing. In other words: people populating the squats tend to be teenagers and young adults.

Not only there are proportionally more young people in the polio homes than in the surrounding communities, there are also more men. In the 3 urban communities constituting the test group women made up to 51% of the population, while in the squats they reached barely 42%. If we take only the population of people with disability, the gender disparity grows to 74% to the advantage of men. This certainly does not mean that poliomyelitis is an almost exclusively masculine problem; rather it shows that disabled men have been in a stronger position in framing disability as an entitlement for

---

[202] This census was part of a larger survey in which I compared the population of 3 urban neighbourhoods and 3 polio homes. See more on the results in Chapter 5 and 6. These data come from a large sample including 1642 people, 481 living in squats, 1162 living in urban neighbourhoods, with 100 disabled people in the first and 76 disabled people in the second type of community.

special rights and consequently have been more successful in capturing collective places for living than the women. The two women-only organisations can be understood as a reaction to this imbalanced situation. Despite this exception, most of the female disabled beggars with whom one comes across in Freetown sleep not in special homes but on the pavement, many of them in Wilberforce Street, transformed into a gigantesque dormitory during the night.

The squats differ greatly from one another in their family compositions. In UDO where the Orthodox Church encouraged young boys with disability to marry early, almost all of them have several children by the age of 20-25. In Pademba road there are more single youth changing sex partners frequently. In older and more established homes like in POCA, House of Jesus or Ecowas, families with children prevail, although couples often break up and families are recomposed.. Disabled women living in squats are less likely involved in permanent relationships than men. Although many of them have children, they tend to be single mothers, even if in some cases the father recognises and supports the child. Single women keep together and constitute micro units within the squats, often sharing a room by twos or threes for a while.

Shelter

The first and most obvious function of the polio homes is shelter. Although disabled beggars often speak about themselves as of people "living in the street", there is evidently a tremendous difference between being a squatter and a pavement dweller. A squat makes it possible to have a permanent home, an individualised place of intimacy to where families can withdraw. Makeshift family rooms have doors to be locked and the interior can be adapted to personal needs, desires, esthetical concepts – and means. Some of these rooms are really austere, people sleeping on the bare ground, but some are neatly decorated with photos and newspaper clippings and many offer even some rudimentary comfort assured by a foam bed, some chairs and additional furniture. The most "well-off" have even a radio or a television. Electricity is available, if not officially, at least informally. As a friend of mine put it: "*We have to be natural electricians. We steal light with our natural hands*."

The polio squats are as stratified as any human settlement and the stratification also affects the comfort of living. The stratification is even more pronounced in the polio

villages outside of the city, where some of the houses are not more than a panbody, while some are spacious, well furnished, beautifully decorated and in general do not differ in anything from most of the houses around dwelt by non-disabled neighbours.

People rarely live alone. Disabled men - like the non-disabled - tend to live in couples, with their wives or girlfriends. The difference between the two statuses is more a question of age than that of a formal procedure, as marriage, which does not necessarily result from any special ceremony, is conceived rather as a state to be acquired in time than consecrated by formality. The permanence of marriage is also determined by the social position and the economic situation of the people involved. Poor people, like slum dwellers and squatters live less in long term relationships than those with a more stable social standing. Because squat dwelling disabled people are definitely poor, and they are considerably younger than the ones living in open communities, there are much more single disabled people in the squats than in the neighbourhoods (48,7% vs. 25%), but living a single life does not necessarily mean living alone: lovers, friends and relatives might come for a certain time and go. Within the squats the nuclear family as the main constituent of the household is often substituted by close friends of the same sex.

The household as a physically fixed domestic unit where people sleep, eat and share possessions must be differentiated from the household conceived as an economic unit. In this second sense the borders of the household are much more porous. Male and female members alike contribute to the economy of the domestic group, but many a times far away relatives have to be counted with, both as potential resources for the home economy and as bonds creating economic obligations. When they can afford it, people go "home" for funerals or for a simple visit and they are expected not to arrive with empty hands (which explains why many people - and not only in the squats - hesitate to visit too often their communities of origin). Children are expected to help elderly or sick parents and relatives and polio-disabled people are not exceptions. Grandmothers in the village might raise children of squatter parents, and village kids are sent to fosterage to families living in polio homes. No matter how typically urban the polio homes are, they are socially (and economically) remain connected to the rural.

Shelter is not only about sleeping. The homes have to provide possibilities for cooking, washing and they must have some kind of toilets. Cooking and eating are

typically activities that are marked simultaneously by individualist and collectivist values. Members of a household eat together and unsurprisingly cooking is the woman's task. Women however might share the chore between themselves and it is not unusual that women of several household cooperate on a meal (sharing the preparation as well as the consumption). There is also food which is prepared for sale. For singles it is more economical to buy a dish instead of spending time on cooking. This also creates some income for women with an enterprising spirit. Sharing food gifts between neighbours is also normal, as well as feeding those who for some reason (sickness, sudden economic hardship or other calamities) are unable to provide for themselves. It is not easy to have a full stomach in a squat, but it is also impossible to die of starvation.

Besides food, personal hygiene is also a concern that has to be addressed in the homes. Washing (the body and cloths) is as regular an activity as daily cooking. Most of the time beggars and squatters are surprisingly clean. This is a real feat, for several reasons. First, polio victims move around with crutches and wheelchairs but at home, because of the constraints of the places, using these aids are not always possible, so many of them are obliged to crawl on the ground or to use two wooden bars to pull themselves with their hands so as to avoid touching directly the earth. Especially in the rainy season, where the dirt becomes mud, simple moving around becomes a very dirty activity. Second, there are only one or two water points in (or sometimes only close to) the shelter and even those got temporarily locked some of the days. Taking water therefore has to be planned and well organised. Buckets full of water are also heavy, as a consequence all the disabled need non-disabled helpers for a regular provision of water. Adding to this the difficulty of assuring some kind of gender-sensitive intimacy for bathing (women and men can wash together but in strictly separate groups); it is really almost a miracle that most of the time beggars walk around with clean body and clean cloths. They also put a lot of emphasize on being properly clad. I remember my surprise when in the beginning of my field work I observed a pole-disabled beggar paying to a non-disabled boy to clean his shoes.

If bathing needs an elaborate cooperation, simply going to toilet might be problematic, too. All the polio homes have collective toilets; most often pit latrines (although there are luckier homes for which NGOs have built flush toilets – without the flush function, of course). Collective pit latrines are dirty places, especially when they get

filled up, which is happening relatively quickly with such a massive use, but it has to be added that in many slum areas even such facilities are missing. When the latrine gets full, the squat has to organise itself to empty it, as they would not be able to pay for a municipality service. Building toilets, keeping them clean and accessible is a core problem for every community. Personal hygiene therefore depends on complex collective organisation.

Social organisation

I have already mentioned that all the homes have a formal leadership, called the "executive". The functions within the Executive reflect a high degree of formality. Typical functions include: Chairman, Acting chairman, Vice chairman, Secretary, Chairlady, Secretary to the Chairlady, Organizer, Assistant Social organizer, Treasurer, Adviser, Disciplinary officer, Financial secretary, Public Relation Officer, Auditor and Youth leader- to mention only the most common titles. These functions lend an official look to these homes, facilitating their incorporation among the officially recognised civil society organisations, but the affinity to fancy titles must have preceded the age of project society, it is a common trait of friendly societies. Bosire (2013) reports the same tendency within the Bondo society and King (2012) also gives an impressive list of the functions within the Firestone Odelay society. Executive members are supposed to be elected "democratically", that is through a transparent and formal process, to which, in some cases, even officers of the NEC (the National Election Committee) are invited. In practice, however, not all the houses esteem it necessary to call elections and sometimes the leadership does not change by the polls but rather by a coup – by members revolting against the executive.

It is not easy to be a leader. People do not respect weak leaders and they constantly suspect strong ones of "eating" the money that is supposed to be the property of the whole community. Money and other wealth, especially food can come to the executive in different ways. Sometimes NGOs and other private donors donate more or less important amounts, cloths or a bag of rice or two. Members also might pay regular membership fees - the respective rule exists universally - but it is recognised that levying tax-like payments from the membership usually hurts into obstacles. In a few (rather exceptional) cases the executive controls also the means of production and makes the organisation function as an enterprise, perceiving directly the price of given

services or goods produced. In any case the temptation is effectively big for those who have direct access to the treasury to self-service or at least to influence the redistribution so as to favour certain to the detriment of others. The explanation is not only ordinary human weakness. Leaders are constantly pressurised to show generosity towards their closest circles, family members and supporters. Their authority depends on their capacity to respond to these expectations.

They stem from the historical heritage of patrimonialism, the hegemonic political system in West-Africa both in pre-colonial and in colonial times. In a patrimonial regime political stability is assured by chains of mutual dependence between patrons and clients. In a patrimonial chain the supreme leader relies on smaller leaders, and these again on commoners, who themselves might have their own clients depending on them. This system regulates not only the distribution of power but also the redistribution of wealth. Clients owe their political loyalty (and sometimes even the fruits of their work) to patrons. Patrons in exchange offer protection and material resources. Chiefs by definition have to be rich and generous, although their generosity should not be regulated by egalitarian principles, rather by the obligation to compensate the necessarily limited circle of dependents. The indirect rule of the British was the method by which patrimonialism was transferred in the colonial system and arguably it has not disappeared in the post-colony. Cultural expectations attached to patrimonialism have made the life of political leaders of Sierra Leone a hard job for generations, but they influence also lower level structures, such as polio homes. In consequence, the most successful polio chairmen are not those who respect democratic values, but those who have enough power to play the role of a benevolent but strong-handed patron.

The chairman and the executive have the responsibility of assuring the wellbeing of the community and to make sure that everybody adheres to the common rules and regulations. Their most important roles are that of bridging (between the outside world and the community), translating (between project society and the implicit and explicit inside rules), and controlling (the flux of information and resources). Written bylaws exist everywhere but the rules differ from house to house. Using abusive language (mammy curse) or violence is punishable everywhere, smoking publically ganja also tend to be, but from this rule there are exceptions, too. The leaders of UPBSA in Kissi are

proud that begging is forbidden for their members and I knew an organisation where even common early morning prayer was part of bylaw:

"I look at the boys out there, they wake up in the morning, they go for the early morning prayers, six o'clock. And we pray until six thirty, I tried to put some people in charge, we had bylaws, we had different rules or regulations."[203]

"Every morning we came here and we used to pray, we prayed God and we made our reconciliation. People made themselves an opportunity to say "hey this person did this to me and I did not like it. And that person apologised. This is the court and also the Church. The altar and the court. "[204]

Those who break the law are fined, and payment in such occasions - unlike registration fees - tends to be really enforced. However, if the culprit refuses to pay, or when the transgression is too important, the next level of punishment is expulsion. Expulsion can be temporary or in the worst case - at least in theory - definitive. It is not only the authority of the executive that makes the law respected, but also peer pressure. Conflicts and complaints are treated publically and although such proceedings seem highly unruly and chaotic, everybody shouting at the same time - sometimes even blows are exchanged or stones are thrown - at the end of the day the decision of the executive is usually accepted – unless it is the executive which finds itself in the dock. Public support of the executive in such occasions is important, so each trial is not only a test case allowing checking the strength of the law but also an occasion to expess adherence to the leaders, or to the contrary, showing distrust and faltering loyalty.

Rare are the leaders who are not suspected with corruption or with biased decision making at one point or another. When the rumours run for too long time, the accumulation of tensions might lead to a veritable coup and the running executive might be deposited before time. In such violent conflicts, SLUPP, SLUDI and OFP, a local NGO might also be requested to come in to mediate. When the members of PHDA revolted against their executive, they called in the leader of the Western Rural Branch of SLUDI, while the leaders used their connection with SLUPP, DAAG and the national office of SLUDI to denounce the "misbehaviour" of the lay members. As the conflict persisted and took considerable proportions, other actors became enrolled to support one side or the

---

[203] Informal Interview with an ex-member of the Walpole Street squat
[204] Informal Interview with an ex-member of the Walpole Street squat

other. "The boys", i.e. the mutinies, were arrested by the police, sent to prison, had a trial, but they were supported by a social worker of the Ministry of Social Welfare, and at one point even the Deputy Minister had to intervene, attempting mediation, enlisted by both the National Union and its Western Rural Branch. What started as an unimportant household quarrel within an organisation between the wife of the chairman and some of the "boys" became a political issue and a case to test the strength of two important disability leaders through their relations to state agencies.

Economy

Money making is the main everyday preoccupation of squat dwellers, of disabled and non-disabled alike, and if starvation is not likely to threaten them, they also have little chance to accumulate enough so that the obligation of finding a daily meal might stop being a worrisome concern. The polio homes participate in three economies: the economy of compassion, the economy of entitlement and the economy of commercial exchange. The two first economies have the particularity that they are not recognised as such by most people getting in relation with the squatters from the outside world; however, their share in the households' income is probably bigger than that of the third one. This fact is recognised by those engaged in these practices and consequently the notion of "working" have a radically different meaning within and without the polio homes.

Begging is an organised activity, rarely practiced alone. Polio-disabled men and women beg in gender-based groups, at particular places of town, so if any time during the day one wants to talk to anyone of them, there is good chance to find him or her at their usual spot. The fact that both men and women beg, but separately, shows that the separation is not related to the gendered division of labour within the household - there are relatively few couples composed of two disabled persons anyhow – it is rather considered as a type of work where the notions of sociability and bread winning go together. It allows young men and young women hanging around together in the public space. The daily earnings of the group are shared. Disabled people usually "employ" non-disabled helpers who assist them while they are begging. Amongst the polio victims helpers are called pushers. These are young boys who push the wheelchairs and get a share of the income. Wives, children and other non-disabled family members are also

supported from begging. In this way begging opens and makes function a large circle of redistribution, of which disabled people keep the control.

Begging is the privilege of the disabled and of the very old. By custom it is not only allowed to vulnerable people to beg, it is a religious obligation to give alms to that in need and both poor and rich takes this obligation for granted, making begging a relatively lucrative business despite the generalised scarcity. It is not that it is an enviable occupation. Most beggars that I talked to affirmed their wish to "leave the street", speaking about begging in a euphemised language setting up a mutually exclusive relation between dignity and begging. As I mentioned above, begging is explicitly forbidden in some of the homes – an interdiction which certainly does not stop begging but makes it more stigmatised. I understood the motivation of those who told me they wanted to change begging for a socially more recognised occupation but I could not stop thinking that stigmatisation is reinforced by the NGO discourse, which framed the activity itself as shameful, without speaking about the condition leading to it. Writing about the moral economy my of debt Grabber (2011) also seems to affirm that begging and giving alms reciprocally create a somehow shameful dependence and reinforce hierarchy. He differentiates three relations as the foundations of debt: communism, hierarchy and exchange, and for him begging belongs to the second domain. I have the feeling that the way how Sierra Leoneans look at begging is closer to the principle of "communism", i.e. everyone according to their need, making it difficult to refuse something to a person visibly in need, without that the act of giving in this case should create an obligation of exchange. If it is shameful to beg, it is in the sense that it is shameful to be the object of pity, but the notion that the person somehow is responsible for her condition had been missing in public considerations of beggars, before that this Western idea has forcefully been brought in by contemporary modernists.

Rather than begging, it is entitlement that creates and reinforces hierarchies. This is a fundamental problem of partnerships practiced by NGOs. There are non-equal partnerships but it is difficult to imagine a genuine partnership where the parties are essentially and radically unequal. This is however the case when INGOs enter in relation with local NGOs or other types of civil society organisations. The inequality is not only financial, it permeates all domains. This is the inequality between the developers and the developed, implying an inequality of knowledge, competences and moral superiority of

the first. It creates an accepted and even actively maintained dependence, which becomes the most evident when participants of a workshop demand as their natural right food, "transport" and "daily allowance". Originally the practice was a logical innovation in war torn and desperately poor Sierra Leone, where poor people – especially in the countryside – have the greatest difficulties to travel for lack of money. But the practice became a principle, independent of the need of the participants and going to trainings, workshoping and conferencing became a sort of legitimate income generating activity for many, even in the highest spheres.

This is not the only way connections with NGOs bring resources into the polio-homes. NGOs bring projects and projects are cashable in many ways. As we have seen, most of the polio-homes owe part if their infrastructure and equipment to projects. Many of the developments have proved to be non-sustainable after the project's withdrawal but the structures remain and allow pursuing income generating activities. One of the problems of the immaterialisation of development is precisely that newer projects do not build material facilities, on which long term exploitation could be built. In one way or another, polio homes are "selling" their positions as beneficiaries to NGOs, and because they are not recognised as mixed squatter communities but only as disabled people's organisations, here again the pattern is that a minority of disabled people are supporting a majority of non-disabled. However, the relation between donors and beneficiaries is rarely harmonious. Despite the enormous benefit it procures, the hierarchical relationship that projects produce are almost always actively resisted. It is rare to hear people praising their benefactors; instead, developers are bitterly criticised (for not fulfilling what they have promised whatever those promises were) and they are often suspected of making money on the back of their beneficiaries. In a way it is a charge difficult to counter as NGO staff are definitively living on the salaries (and other benefits) projects generate. Like in any other patron-client-like relation the most powerful arm of resistance used by both sides is the possibility of changing allegiance (or of evoking the possibility to do so)

The third economy polio-disabled communities are living on is that of commercial exchange. It has got two sources: productive labour and pure commerce. The traditional occupation polio-disabled men brought with themselves from the countryside is metal work. Its significance has changed in the city, but the rural is always

close, so producing cutlasses and different other metal tools has still its symbolic and material importance. One urban variation of the traditional rural blacksmithing is tinsmithing. Tinsmiths are good at making pots, pans and buckets and they have the advantage that their raw material is recycled tin, considerably cheaper than iron. Some of the boys in the squats of the city-centre are knowledgeable in this profession thanks to trainings offered by NGOs, but most of the metal workers have been trained by other skilled workers. The apprentice system is still maintained in the collective homes and workshops are usually called "training centres", where sometimes non-disabled trainers are employed. Economic activities are not pursued only individually. Some of the homes are really good at organizing the place as a collective business.

Other activities include tailoring, shoemaking, or barbing, women mostly sell food, cigarettes and other small items, or they produce soap, do gear-tie dying or needlework. In Ecowas Street some of the disabled men and women have white collar jobs; they work in offices in town. Alhaji, the chairman of House of Jesus maintains a stand at a street corner that he calls his "business centre"; he sells soft drinks and pocket water. Yebu, the chairlady, produces bed covers and table cloths that she sells in offices and banks. Kady, the vice-chairlady has a permanent stall at the market. Papsay, the vice-chairman proudly considers himself an artist, offering his services to restaurant owners or to anybody ready to buy a painting. Suary is making buckets trusting them to an ambulant seller who takes a percentage on the sales. His wife, Dora sells cigarettes, alcohol and peanuts in front of the squat, supported by a microcredit scheme, provided by an organisation the name of which she is unable to recall. For the squatters themselves the difference between producing and selling, participating in projects and begging has no great practical importance, all the three economies can be classed under the heading of "managing", of which they are all masters.

Circles of Solidarity

Despite the frequent clashes and suppressed violence boiling constantly even bellow a temporarily calm surface, despite the pronounced individualism of the members, feeding jealousy, competition and rivalry between families and persons, the most important function of the collective homes is the maintenance of a strong solidarity net, substituting institutional social insurance. Regular ososu, i.e., a rotating saving and

credit system[205] is not really practiced at the squat level (it would make too big a circle), but it might concern smaller groups first of all women groups, similarly to what can be found in villages, (although ososu in the squats is much less important than in many other settings). Credit is given and taken in other forms, too; usually linked to commercial activities. Buckets, batique bed-sheets and other goods produced in the homes might be consigned to non-disabled people who can move around more easily and sell them in exchange of a percentage gained on the selling price. Or, conversely, non-disabled women living in the homes in the outskirts might bake cakes and consign them to disabled men who try to sell them in the homes of the city centre. All these affairs demand considerable trust, and indeed the Krio word used for lending something to somebody is "trust". It might surprise many that ososu circles and consignment transactions work in this environment marked by insecurity and instability – trust transactions constitute indeed an important basis for monetary accumulation – when it is a taken for granted fact by financial institutions that practicing micro credit is a high risk business amongst poor Africans, considered to be notoriously bad payers. But there are important differences between trust transactions and microcredit: as opposed to the latter, the first types of transactions are understood as based on a moral obligation, rather than on an impersonal fiscal or a legal one. Also, when people trust each other, they would not demand a 20-30% interest, which is usual with micro credit companies (ironically charged because of the high risk, produced amongst others by the high interest rates). In other words, trust transactions remain within the community and empower it both financially and morally, while microcredit is drawing resources out of the community, while establishing purely legal obligations with individuals. Squat dwellers (like many other poor Sierra Leoneans) have quickly understood the difference, not NGOs. Dora, who for a long time had sold petty items in front of House of Jesus, lost her business soon after joining a micro credit scheme. This event corresponded to a general boom of micro credits, an idea picked up by many NGOs. The problem with the NGO provided micro credit was even deeper: people used to have entitlements on account of their identity resented the idea of changing relations of entitlement to commercial relations with their benefactors. After the joy of receiving money for nothing, they soon felt the obligation of paying high rates as a betrayal of the established patron-client relationship.

---

[205] For a more detailed description of ososu see Chapter 2.

Credit in this sense is similar to social security. These institutions exist and they indeed procure benefit to many, but their real beneficiaries belong to a social layer far away from the reality of the polio homes. Social insurance is a legal right of officially contracted employees, but formally employed wage earners are rare in this environment. In case of misfortune people of the squats cannot count on anybody but on themselves. When sickness comes, when the dead must be buried or when new born babies must be offered name giving ceremonies, the whole collective contributes. Besides individual contributions, it is also the responsibility of the executive to reserve some amounts of cash for such cases. In addition to monetary benefits, members also profit of regular exchanges of services and food, as well as of sympathy and moral support in case of hardship. When a polio victim appears in court, a huge group from his house comes to support him. When hospitalised, a disabled squat dweller or even his/her relative has usually the biggest entourage in the ward, people changing the guard watching over the patient. A case of incarceration of polio victims drew a small crowd in front of the police, waiting patiently the opportunity to see the convicts, to send them some food or cloths. Being member of a collective home means being embedded in a complicated web of – often conflicting – personal relations, but this same web has the power of keeping the individual over the surface against (almost) all tides.

Relations with the outside world – sociability

The fact that the population of the collective homes is younger, more male dominated and has a higher proportion of physically disabled, visually different people than their environments, provokes some popular uneasiness with regards to polio squats: a blend of supernatural fear and a sense of physical threat associated with a mass of potentially violent young men grouping together. Considering this fact, it is surprising how much these places manage to live in symbiosis with their environment rather than being isolated islands. Indeed, polio communities are by no means closed, their boundaries are porous and they actually integrate a much larger public than that of the permanent members.

Besides those who actually live in the homes, there are relatives who come to visit and stay for some time, there are those who come and go, commuting between different homes, sometimes between a village in the countryside and Freetown, and most importantly there is this vast halo made of more or less habitual frequentations -
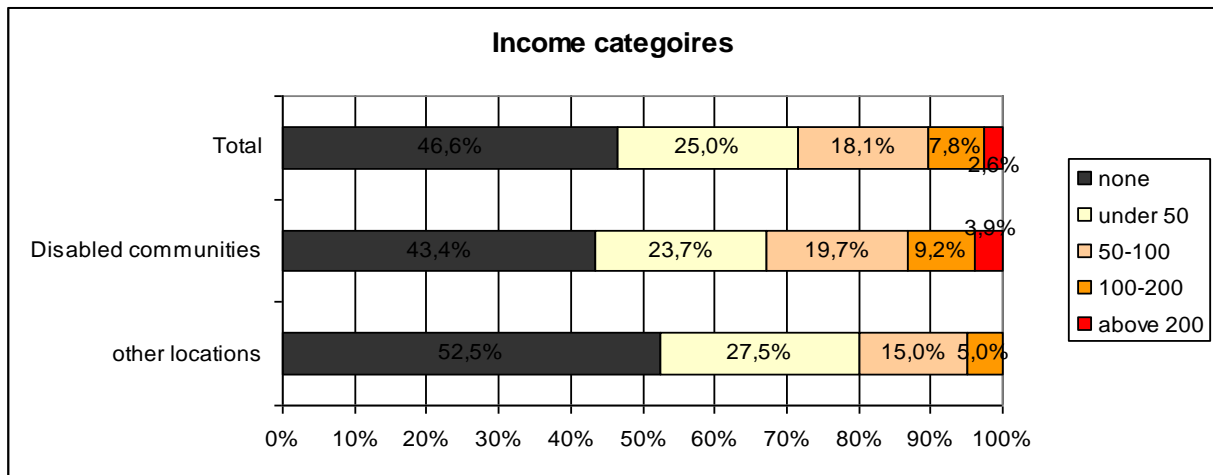
composed of friends, neighbours, policemen, employees of nearby shops, workshops and public offices. Passers-by regularly come to share a gossip, have a joint or a drink; alternatively they come to do some business with the squatters. Polio squats are important nodes of information sharing and key places for socialising, open to a large non-disabled population. Many years after the closing of Walpole Street, young "able-bodied" men hanging regularly around the petrol station adjacent to the squat greeted still happily their ex-neighbours whenever they accidentally passed by and a long conversation ensued, evoking the good old days with joyful nostalgia. Despite the concentration of people with disabilities, polio-squats are open places, which, instead of isolating the disabled population, constantly draw social life into the homes from outside and from where polio victims can manage their relations with the outside world.

What are polio-homes good for (and what not)?

In order to assess the possible advantages (and disadvantages) of collective living, I made interviews with disabled people within and without the homes and compared some of the factors potentially influencing the quality of their lives. I interviewed altogether 116 people with disability, 76 of whom lived in polio homes[206].

My first observation was that people with disability living in the polio homes had more chance to earn money than their peers living with their family members in the city. There are fewer people in the first group reporting having no income at all and while in the second group the ceiling seems to be 200 USD a month, some of the squat dwellers exceed this limit.

---

[206] A reminder: the survey consisted in two parts. In a first time I interviewed unequally household heads in order to collect demographic data. In this way I obtained basic information on 1162 persons. In a second time I made more detailed interviews with 366 respondents, out of whom 116 lived in some kind of disability. 76 of the disabled people lived in one of the three squats in the sample, 40 in open urban neighbourhoods.

Income categoires

	none	under 50	50-100	100-200	above 200
Total	46,6%	25,0%	18,1%	7,8%	2,6%
Disabled communities	43,4%	23,7%	19,7%	9,2%	3,9%
other locations	52,5%	27,5%	15,0%	5,0%	

6. Figure Monthly income[207] of people with disability in polio homes and in urban neighbourhoods (in USD**)**

However surprising this data might seem it is nothing but logical. Income should be understood here as personal money intake and - as we have seen - begging is legitimately counted amongst the income generating activities. No relation should be made on this level between the level of poverty and momentary income, because individual income is distributed on the level of the household. Consequently the only thing that the graph shows is that there are more family heads (and possibly loners) amongst the squat dwellers than amongst the disabled men and women living with their larger families. In other words, from the fact that the disabled of the squats earn more, does not follow that they are poorer. And indeed, answers to other questions regarding eating habits (do they have enough to eat) personal possessions (they had to choose out of a list of objects)[208] and housing security (do they owe the house, rent or squat) show that by most standards they can clearly be considered poorer. They have less and more rudimentary personal possessions (a bed here counts already as wealth), they more probably go hungry and most of all – being squatters – by definition they are more insecure regarding housing. In short, safer or bigger individual income does not proportionally increase the comfort of living, contrary to what development projects targeting individuals rather than communities implicitly assume. This correspondence is shown in the diagramme bellow for which a complex index was created by the method

---

[207] I take it as probable that answers to this question take into consideration income generated by begging, while, in answers to the question: „Do you work" begging was somtimes accounted for, sometimes not.
[208] Possessions contained: bed, bednet, mp3, laptop, working tools

of principal component analysis grouping answers to questions regarding personal possessions, food security and housing security, whereas the 0 point is the average of all the respondents (disabled and non disabled inhabitants of all the 6 locations, i.e. 366 respondents)
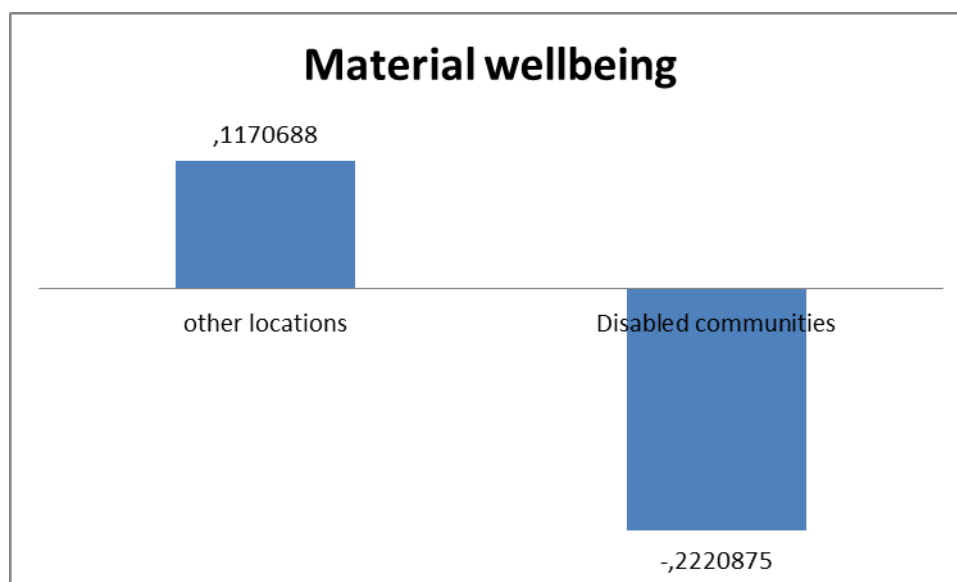

7. Figure Material wellbeing of those living in squats and in urban neighbourhoods

An alternative way of assessing poverty is by assessing access to medical facilities. Medical services can be classed in a hierarchical order on the basis of the availability of a trained medical doctor or other trained medical staff. Hospitals have doctors but are expensive, local clinics (or health centres) are less costly but have only a middle-level medical personnel. Most of the medical advises and treatment are given in pharmacies where (most of the time) there is a trained middle level personnel. The lowest possible grade of available medical help is that proposed by untrained hawkers selling medicine in the street.[209] As hospitals are paying and the behaviour of the medical personnel with poor patients is often condescending if not openly hostile, most poor people tend to turn to medical centres and pharmacies in need. The most vulnerable are those who only buy medicine in the street or do not get treatment at all. By a simple scale, people can be classed as having more or less opportunities according to their access to trained

---

[209] Most Sierra Leoneans also turn to traditional healers or herbalists in case of health problem. My list purposefully excluded these specialists, as my intention was to create a hierarchical order of accessible medical services In the framework of Western type medicine.

medical, trained para-medical and untrained non-medical aid. At the extreme of the range are those who do not have any medical help at all.

And indeed, disabled people in the squats have access to professional medical care to a lesser extent. While accessible medical care is a general concern for all, squat dwellers apparently are in the worst situation. A good number of them say they do not have access to any medical services or they admit that they only frequent drug sellers and pharmacies in the street in case of sickness, 38% of them never get to a hospital.
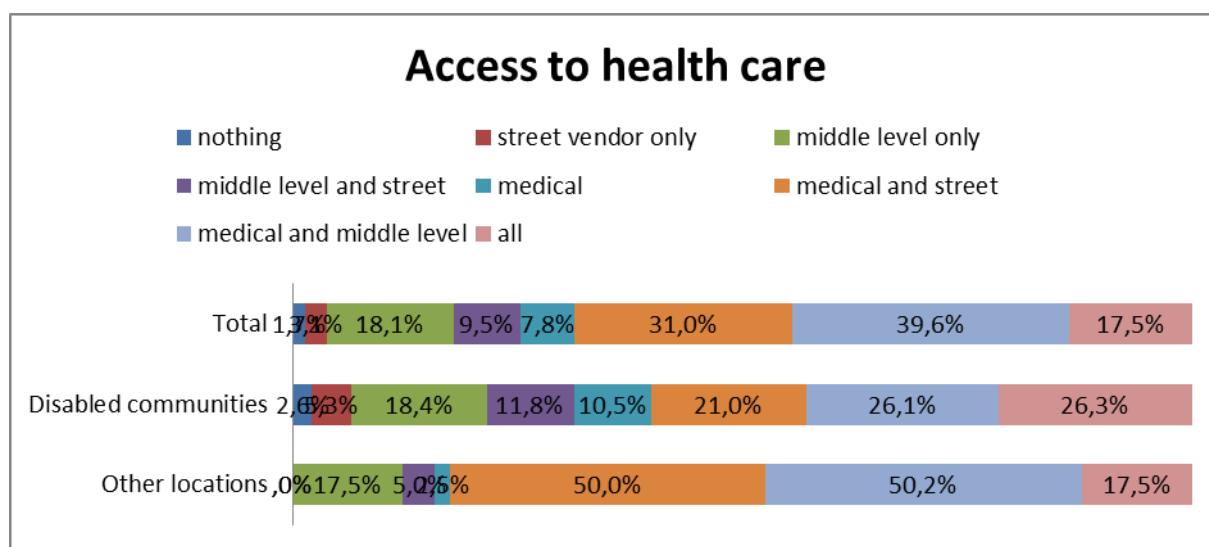
8. Figure Access to healthcare for people with disability in the polio-homes and in urban communities

More income therefore cannot be said to correlate with more comfort or more personal choice - regarding amongst other things access to medical services -but it does with a more active life and with a more positive attitude. Despite their clear disadvantage squatters believe they enjoy a better medical condition than people with disability outside of the squats.
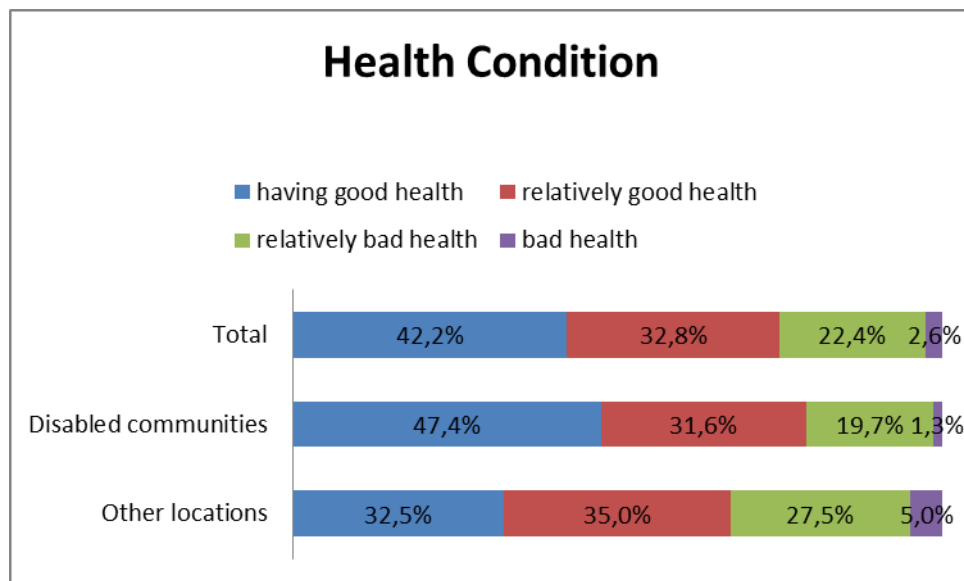
9. _{Figure} Appreciation of people with disability of their own health

Despite a relatively poor medical coverage only 1,3% of people with disability living in polio homes complain about categorically bad health and 47,4% esteem their health fairly good, while in the neighbourhoods only 32,5% are satisfied with their health and 5% are totally unsatisfied. It is true that disabled people in the squats tend to be younger than elsewhere, a fact which certainly contributes to feeling better, but maybe more importantly, squat dwellers living in a community of people with disability are less apt to establish any relation between their state of health and their impairment – which they accept as an act of fate, nonetheless an ordinary circumstance of life and do not see it as a debilitating medical condition. Also, subjective appreciation of one's health might be connected to non health related social factors, like that of having a social network provoking feeling of security and satisfaction. Seen from this perspective squat dweller polio disabled might be said to compensate their material insecurity with a stronger social embeddedness.

Data concerning social participation might give some hints about social embeddedness. The first arena of participation is the family: major decisions are taken and conflicts are settled during family gatherings. Now, for lack of money the polio victims settled in Freetown are only rarely are able to travel back to their original families in the provinces in order to participate in these meetings. Also, as they have been living outside of the family since their young age, they are not necessarily

considered as essential participants. Being marginalised on the family level, they however have a much wider range of possible fields of participation than those they left behind. The disability movement itself offers special occasions for self-representation; it creates social events and available leadership positions only accessible for those participating in the movement, if only by belonging to a disabled home. Interestingly, although disabled squatters are less prone to declare themselves members of secret societies; more of them say they participate in such events compared to those people with disability who live in open urban settings. They have also more opportunity to join a social club (another name of formalized youth gangs) or participate at parties with music and dance, which should not come as a surprise as they are also younger and it is easier to mobilize them collectively for such occasions. Briefly, people with disability living in the squats have less access to family resources, but apart from family participation in family gatherings, they socialise more and in more various groups than those living outside of the squats..
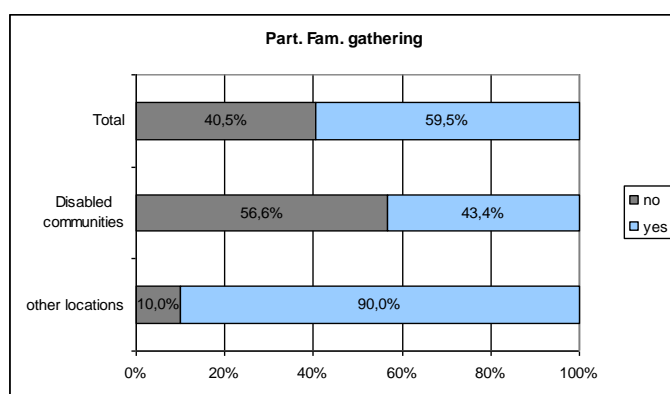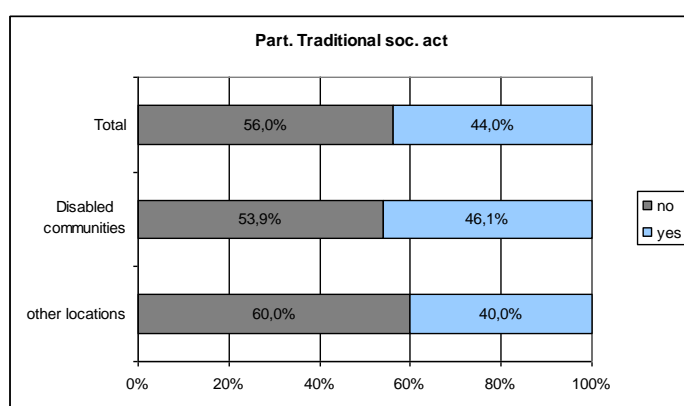

10. Figure Participation of people with disability in family meetings
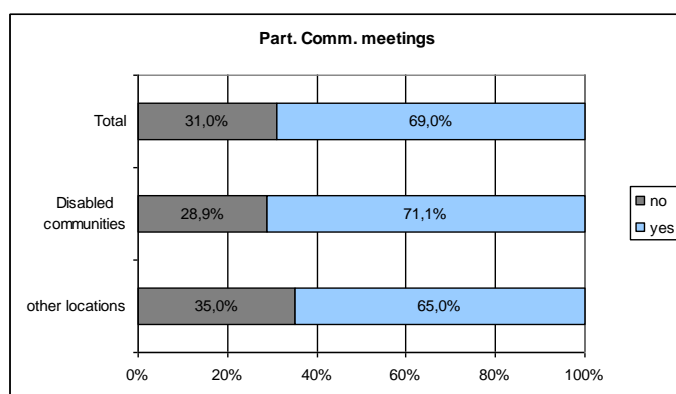
11. Figure Participation of people with disability in community meetings
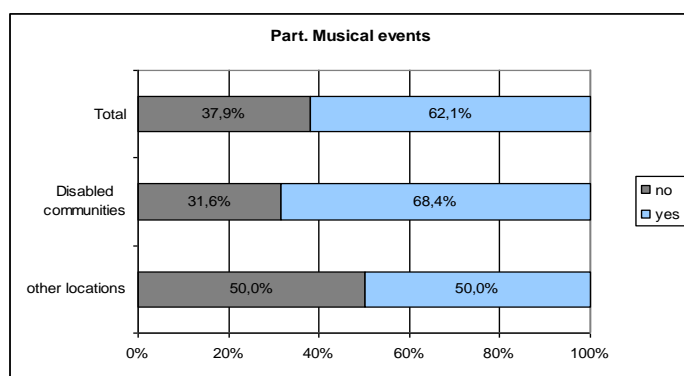
12. Figure Participation of people with disability at musical events

13. Figure Participation of people with disability at traditional society activities

Although statistical data are vulnerable to all sorts of distortions, and mine are no exception, what the figures show is relatively intuitive at the end. Disabled people in the squats do not necessarily live better than those who live in open communities, but they are more active, both economically and socially – and in the given circumstances this seems to constitute a powerful compensatory mechanism protecting against the effects of poverty and against social anomy. Squats create buffer zones susceptible to effectively make up for real disadvantages. The psychological effect of such zones is tremendous. This is best shown by the answers that I got when I wanted to know how much satisfied people were with their lives. Although there are slightly more totally satisfied people amongst those who live with a slight disability outside the squats than inside, globally it is still the latter seems to be the happiest category of all. Similarly, amongst the severely impaired proportionally there are more satisfied people in the polio homes than in regular neighbourhoods. The least happy are severely disabled people living in open

communities. Interestingly, even non-disabled people living in squats are more satisfied with their lives than their peers living outside of such places.
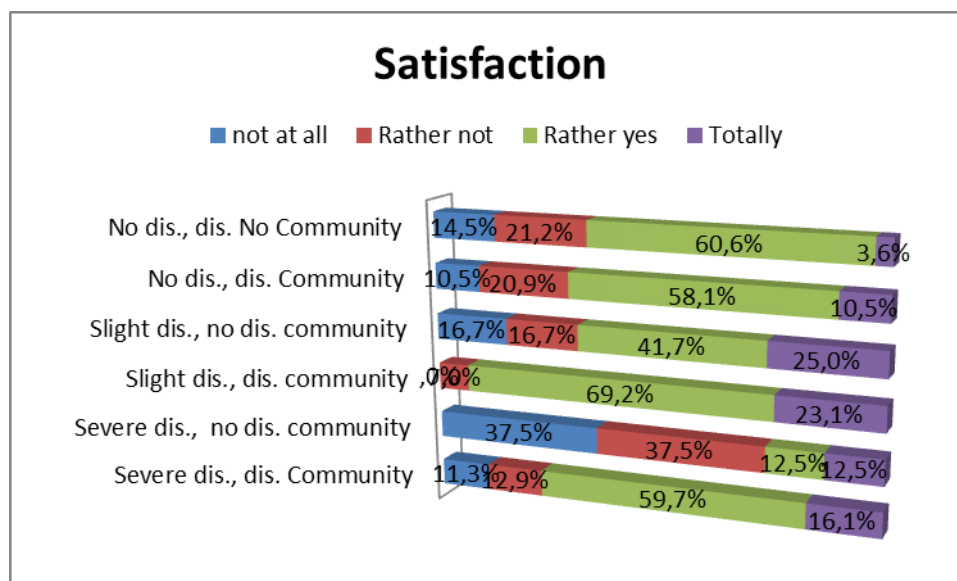
14. Figure Satisfaction with life

Living in the squats means facing a thousand daily problems, but all and all it is a completely rational and rather efficient response to the unimaginable hardship disabled people left to themselves face in the city. There might be a way to integrate squat dwellers in the larger society by discontinuing the squats – as the deputy Mayor wishes – but under the circumstances such a policy would probably be disastrous. When the conditions against which the collective homes defend their inhabitants improve, they will probably disintegrate themselves anyhow. Until then they save lives.

Summary

Physical Disability is an undeniable calamity, affecting individual, familial and collective destinies, but in no way it can be considered as automatically diniminishing humanity or personhood. Social status is the result of a complex combination and disability is not but one factor adding to it. Other factors, related to the capacity of supporting the family, contributing to collective tasks or of continuing the lineage enter into consideration to a much larger extent. Both the disabled person and her environment possess important strategies and practices of inclusion susceptible to compensate for the negative consequences of the impairment. Polio homes are the

physical manifestations of this capacity. These are formidable mixtures of the formal and the informal, concentrating a big amount of violence and conflicts, at the same time giving space to a remarkable set of skills including conflict resolution, self-help and self-representation. That is why polio homes are more than just mini-slums: they are in fact small political communities with a real counter-hegemonic potential.

5. Representing representations

"People with disabilities face systematic exclusion and denial of basic rights in all areas of society. Negative traditional and cultural beliefs not only cause the acceptance of people to be denied their right to active participation in education, accessing livelihood opportunities, health services, or family/community decision making, but often these people are locked away and hidden from the communities in which they live. These discriminatory practices continue a negative poverty cycle that is commonly faced by people with disabilities and needs immediate intervention in order to work towards the eradication of extreme poverty"

<div align="right">

Extract from a project proposal

</div>

Fabricating coloniality

Disability as a master category conveys by pure evocation an idea of a homogenous universe in which people with disabilities live - by the mere fact of their disability. In policy papers and project documentation giving background information on Sierra Leone, this world is invariably described as dismal. It is made of deprivation, marginalization, segregation, wicked superstitions, prejudice and purposeful discrimination. Because empirical data are missing or are extremely rare, arguments are sacrificed for taken for granted assumptions - of this kind: "*PWDs do not have access to equal opportunities and are voiceless.*" "*PWDs remain the poorest among the poorest, excluded from the mainstream society.*" "*disabled persons in Sierra Leone are still susceptible to discrimination and stigma. Family members and the wilder community routinely call disabled children names related to disability rather than the names given to them by their parents.*" "*As a result of their marginalisation, people with disabilities are one of the poorest and most vulnerable population groups in Sierra Leone.*[210]

---

[210] These passages from 2006, 2009 and 2010 have been taken from documents produced by various NGOs operating in Sierra Leone. Such phrases are so normalized and have entered in public discourse in such a taken for granted manner that there is hardly any need for more precise identification. In any case, I prefer withholding the references in order to preserve the anonymity of my sources

In all these and a lot of similar texts disabled people seem to suffer *because of* the confused ideas ("wrong beliefs" and "false perception") of their fellow citizens. This joint diagnosis fixes a double identity: on the one hand, people with disability appear as helpless, voiceless, passive victims; on the other hand, the Sierra Leonean society is depicted as a backward, almost barbarian social world lacking the virtues of empathy and solidarity. This diagnosis is problematic for different reasons. First, it denies agency to disabled people. Second, by describing the Sierra Leonean society as the land of abject backwardness, it reproduces and activates the same contempt against Sierra Leoneans as these are accused to nourish against disabled people – who, after all, are also Sierra Leoneans (thus inadvertently sharing a part of the contempt). Last but not least, this approach leads to false conclusions, maintaining, rather than eliminating the problems affecting disabled people's lives. There is no historical evidence proving that poverty and social marginalization could be effectively fought against simply by "educating" people to use the right words, without touching the existing power structure.

The social model itself would not preclude a deeper structural analysis, but how it is put to use locally evacuates all considerations that could be regarded as remotely political. There are good reasons for that. The postcolonial governance tends to maintain a certain "coloniality of power" (Quijano 2000), positing as taken for granted a given hexarchy of knowledge systems, in which European becomes synonyms with modern, African with backward. Policing ideas about disability in this context becomes an "othering device" (Comaroff 1993) conserving the existing power structure rather than challenging it. As a result, without sufficient caution, the right-based discourse on disability might be easily enrolled in producing a regime of truth (Chakrabarty 2000; Kelsall 2009; Rose 1999), which is both alienating and conservative.

Disability as source of social rejection has to be constructed in the same way as Lesotho in Ferguson's account (1994) on a failed development project had to be constructed as a "least developed country" in order to prepare and justify developmentalist intervention. Because the analysis of the problem is substituted by an ideological construction, the nature of intervention depends less on the understood needs of the would be beneficiaries than on the existing toolbox of the developers. This is something that other students of development have already noted elsewhere. Tania Li for example found that improvement programs in Indonesia were often ineffective

because "the identification of a problem is intimately linked to the availability of a solution" (Li 2007:7). In the present context of the right-based development, NGOs tend to identify problems that are best treated with their existing tools. Accordingly, the problems affecting people with disabilities are carefully categorized in a way to invite what is judged as legitimate intervention: awareness raising, lobbying and "civil society building" - through support given to representative organizations. The following classification of problems affecting people with disability is characteristic of project proposals offering the same solutions. Thus the problems are of three types:

"1) Cultural, social and physical barriers (wrong belief, false perception of disability and building inaccessibility), which affect civil society, institutional actors, PWDs and their families; 2) Lack of policies and legislation: policies and legislation have been developed recently, but are not recognized and implemented yet; 3) Weakness of existing DPOs and local service providers to fulfil their role and responsibilities for the benefit of PWDs."[211]

This vision is based on two contradictory, but equally ethnocentric assumptions; the first one emphasizing traditional beliefs, "*exoticizes*" Sierra Leonean society, the second "*normalizes*" disability, making all its local specificities disappear. As a result, Sierra Leone appears simultaneously as a place utterly different from the West, representing irreducible Otherness, and suspiciously close to it, following – if only from far – its norms and expectations. Inaccessibility of public buildings is certainly oppressive in London and in Sierra Leone, but it does not represent the same urgent need in a place where masses of disabled people are de facto homeless, have the greatest difficulties to procure their vital mobility appliances, struggle to get the simplest medical care, cannot afford to send their children to school – to mention only a few of the most immediate grievances. These are basic needs disabled people share with the urban poor, and indeed, in disabled homes disabled and non-disabled family members live together in the same conditions. They consequently claim for the same rights, having some quite clear ideas about how to make these rights effective: through cheap long term lease of land and public help for building houses, meaningful education and training assorted with initial aid to set up small businesses, scholarship for themselves and for their children to start or further education, free medical care or contribution to

---

[211] Passages from a project proposal, 2006

medical fees; schools where there is teaching and hospitals where there is healing – and access to these. All the rest comes after. This is just common sense.

The gap between project language and the world of the disabled beggars seem to be too big to be bridged. Notwithstanding, words have the power to present themselves as facts, with quite real consequences. Words are not limited to reflect reality, they *do* things, as Austin (Austin 1962) warned us they would. Project language also creates its own reality:

"Although the law recommends consideration, respect and acceptance of people with disabilities (PWDs) as having the same rights as any other person, the fact remains that the social integration of PWDs depends on the social perceptions and representations at a given time and in a given culture. The manifestations of these representations are found at different levels in all social classes and often are a basis for stigmatizing attitudes and practices leading to the exclusion and marginalization of PWDs." (Agbovi 2010)

The implicit argument here is that widespread negative attitudes towards disabled people are responsible for their mistreatment. The report from where the passage is taken is about "representations and perception of disability"; it is based on a series of interviews conducted with senior officials and local authorities. Now, the problem is that the responses do not seem to confirm the hypothesis. Most respondents claim to be willing to marry a disabled person or let their children make such a choice, they have no problem working with somebody disabled, acknowledge the right of disabled children to get the same love and care as their non-disabled peers. It is possible of course that they dissimulate their real feelings in an interview situation, but the analysis is supposed to be based on what they say. However, no matter how they defend themselves, they are consistently accused of having wrong, "inadequate, limited, negative and simplistic information on disability."

In this framework negative attitudes are unequivocally attached to "traditional beliefs" which are set in contrast with appropriate "modern views". *"Denying rights to people with disabilities clearly shows that senior public officials and local authorities still keep in their minds the traditional representation of PWDs as expressed by the different ethnic terms"* (Ibid). These ethnic terms are then listed as the ultimate evidence of the obscurantism of the respondents. In Krio, for example – the study reports – *disability* *"means a failure, a distortion that makes someone unable to undertake normal activities,*

someone who needs help". Indeed, Sierra Leoneans are reprimanded for using the bad Krio term "disability" instead of the correct English term "disability".

"Traditional beliefs"

The conceptual framework behind this modernist version of the "right based approach" supposes that "bad" (standing for traditional) and "good" (standing for modern) ideas are mutually exclusive and that there is a direct causal relationship leading from backward traditional ideas to enlightened ones, so that at a certain point (after enough persuasion) the latter will inevitably come to replace the former. This is why awareness raising campaigns have become the single most used tool to improve the lives of those at the bottom.

In order to better understand this logic, it is time to get acquainted with some of the "wrong ideas". In the following I borrow from an unpublished document listing the "traditional beliefs" explaining disability[212]:

1. *Worship of certain animals – which should not be killed*
2. *Witch snake*
3. *A covenant with a spirit*
4. *Evil dreams*
5. *Contact with an evil spirit during wet dreams*
6. *Contact with evil spirits while walking in the forest at night*
7. *Domestic violence*
8. *Working on a site where a Juju is buried*
9. *Sleeping in the forest*
10. *Having sex in the bush*
11. *Washing a baby at night*
12. *A bad behaviour related to the mother*
13. *A pregnant woman ready to deliver should not have sex with her husband*
14. *To avoid having a child with a disability, a pregnant woman should not:*
   - *have sex with a man other than her husband*

---

[212] Extract from a unpublished internal document, 2012

- *eat some bush animals and meat*
- *eat some kinds of snake*
- *expose her navel*
- *wear bras as it will tangle her baby's umbilical cord*
- *lay in a hammock*
- *stand at the entrance of a door*
- *sit on a fire stone*
- *wash at night*
- *be naked in streams and rivers*
- *take baths at night*
- *work and/or be exposed at 5:00 am as she will contact bad spirits*
- *look at a "masked devil" (she should be careful what she looks at)*
- *turn back if she is going on a journey"*

The list is impressive; in fact it enumerates most of the things one hears about some people being different. It gives quite a good picture of the heterogeneous character of the explanatory mechanisms Sierra Leoneans use to rationalize the un-rationalizable: random misfortune. However, the long list does not give an answer to the essential question: how are these explanations used in real situations, which one is chosen in which situation and what are the social consequences of these choices? One cannot seriously reproach a quick list not satisfying the requirements of proper ethnography, but it cannot be expected either that such a list helps to fully understand the system of local concepts of disability.

Explanatory models are rarely exclusive. Several local explanations may coexist, involving spirits, witches and taboos, and might even be combined with theories about germs, microbes and genetic malformations. According to Latour (1993) occidental thinking is not different in this respect from any other thinking. What makes the modern (in the sense of Westerner modern) unique is their constant effort with which they hide chaotic multiple realities, convincing themselves that they live in a "purified" world. In Sierra Leone purification is far from being such a collective obsession as it is in the West. Hybridization is the norm. Contrary to what is believed in expatriate circles training and persuasion do not invalidate pre-existent worldviews. They just add to the available perspectives. Siaka, an NGO worker, for example did not find it strange to tell me that I

should pay attention not to step in other people's spit lest I attract disaster, right after he was admonishing the audience of a community centre for hours teaching his public that there is no such thing as witchcraft. I did not find it strange either. I do not believe in witchcraft but whenever I do not want to lose my luck I "touch wood".

Sierra Leoneans – not quite unlike Europeans – do not have any difficulty in combining contradictory cosmologies. Abubakar for example knows very well that polio is a viral disease that he contracted when he was about two or three years old. Still, when I ask him to tell me about his life he gives another version of the story. He explains to me that he was about three years old when he was playing in his village and then he fell all of a sudden. "It was white people who cast a spell on me" - he says - because they were jealous since "I was growing too quickly". I am amazed by the poetics of the story. Abubakar, with his atrophied legs, is a short man today, the opposite of somebody who grew "too quickly". He does not deny that viruses exist, but at the end he *knows* that it is human agency that in reality caused his damnation. The need to evoke human agency where Europeans would speak about the blind laws of the nature (or of the market for that matter) is indeed the main logic underlying the theory of witchcraft in Africa– as suggested first by Evans-Pritchard (Evans-Pritchard and Gillies 1976) who explained that the Azande did not ignore the laws of nature, but believed that these never give satisfactory response to the final question: "if a tree has to fall, why does it have to fall on *me*?". Geschiere (Geschiere 1997) elaborated later on this idea, accusing the sudden advancing of capitalism for a recrudescence of witchcraft accusations in Africa. Ferguson (2006) believes that speaking about the invisible hand of the market does not reflect magical thinking less than evoking human capacity to harm.

In Sierra Leone – as elsewhere in Africa - the most common motive for witchcraft - i.e. misery of human origin - is envy or jealousy. Paradoxically, however, it is rarely the envy of the have-not that would threaten the well-being of the well-off. Witches are in general powerful individuals, who owe their power precisely to their capacity of taping into the resources of the weak. They are insatiable monsters, who cannot contain their greed. *Greed* and jealousy are indeed the two sides of the same coin. In my experience, greed or jealousy are the most common rationales used to explain disability or other mysterious sicknesses in Sierra Leone. No wonder – a friend explained to me - that chiefs, politicians or successful business people often have disabled children at home.

"*This is all about life exchange.*" Life exchange is a native theory about energies of life. Precious resources - like wealth, health and life itself - are distributed in a system of a close circuit in a way that plenty on one side inexorably entails the empty on the other. That is how discussions about the acute anaemia of a successful disabled politician's wife quickly turns into serious questioning about the possibility of the politician being a witch.

Following Geschiere and Ferguson, there is a possibility to read Abubakar's rationalization as an intuition suspecting that misfortunes are not totally independent of human activity. So when Abubakar says that his disability was caused by the jealousy of white people, he points at the direction of the source of the insatiable plenty. Abubakar is from Kono. For him white people personify evil greed for good reasons. Kono is both the richest region in diamond and miserably poor. Diamond mines have always been exploited by white people - Israelis, South Africans, Belgians, British and so on. It is still mining companies that displace whole populations in order to enlarge the area of extraction, and they are the ones that send policemen to shoot at strikers, that are responsible for the explosions that make the houses of Koidutown shake. Looking at the desolation of Kono, with its muddy roads and broken infrastructure, where the giant machines of the mining companies are the only signs of some kind of material development, Abubakar's implicit reasoning cannot be dismissed as completely absurd. If poverty kills, and greed is the other face of poverty, than greed kills - by the intermediary of humans. Sierra Leoneans do not doubt that poverty kills and can leave people – children and adults – disabled. Some non- Sierra Leoneans believe the same.

In a recent report on the health situation in the Northern Region of Sierra Leone the author (Mir 2013) admits: "Against most of the diseases present in Sierra Leone prevention exists. Malaria is one of the most common causes of sickness and death and is the main factor of mortality amongst the children under five years. Other factors that contribute to the propagation of diseases are related to the bad conditions of the environment, to the access and the quality of the water and to the low level of immunization of the population. The malnutrition generates high rates of anaemia, especially amongst children and women. In 2008, 21% of the children under five weighed less than the normal weight for their age, 36% suffered from retarded growth". Bad health conditions are not "natural". They are the products of a certain history of

governance. In these circumstances, exchanging the bad, i.e. traditional beliefs concerning disability for good, i.e. scientific explanations, means also desocializing problems that Sierra Leoneans believe to be first of all social. They might be correct.

Now, returning to Abubakar's story, in this light his interpretation of the onset of polio does not seem to be out of this world any more. Also, his case shows that there is no direct logical chain from magical explanations through negative attitudes to discrimination. If there was, the belief that some children struck by polio have been victims of witchcraft because they had something special (intelligence, beauty or other extraordinary characteristics), envied by powerful enemies should inspire respect or admiration towards them. Unfortunately however, this is not the case. Attitudes towards disabled people are less shaped by the explanation of the formation of their impairment than than by their social position. What is more, attitudes are really bad indicators of concrete behaviour in concrete situations. That is why it is hard to construct any probable scenario from answers of the type "would you let your child marry somebody disabled?"

As divergent explanations are available, and might be judged equally and simultaneously valid, it is possible to choose – according to the circumstance - the one which will probably meet with the most social agreement, or the one which is most in accordance with the aspect of the identity of the person momentarily emphasized. (Ingstad and Whyte 1995:18, citing Helander)[213] evokes a story in which in a Somali village there are two disabled boys. Their condition is almost the same, but the inhabitants still use two different explanations to rationalize their symptoms of mental disability. The first one belongs to a powerful patrilineage which blame the "weakness" of the boy on the low social status of the mother. He is cared for by his fathers' relatives and is treated with respect. The second is an orphan, he is said to be possessed by a spirit, and children are throwing stones on him. The story shows how the social status of the person influences the choice of the explanatory model. It also shows that some social conditions might have a more handicapping effect on the person than disability itself. The explicative concepts chosen, as well as the treatment applied, are more the functions of the social status than a direct consequence of a given impairment.

---

[213] Helander, 1990 (42-44) Merci or rehabilitation? Culture and the prospects for disabled in Southern Somalia. In Disability in a cross-cultural perspective, ed. Bruun and Ingstad, working paper 4, Oslo, Dept of Social Anthropo, University of Oslo.

Nicolasien finds the same pattern amongst the Punan Bah of Central Borneo, for whom to be handicapped means to be in a liminal state (Nicalasien 1995). However, the Punan Bah do not necessarily link the handicap to a particular impairment. For them unmarried people and people without children are the ones who are really stuck in a liminal state, unable to reach social adulthood. In a reverse relationship, the same liminality might strike orphans, without parents.

In Sierra Leone, while disability is an undeniable calamity, it alone does not exclude the person from the social world of human beings. It does not matter if the causes of disability are traced back to the improper behaviour of one of the parents or to the intervention of the spirits; the disabled person himself is rarely taken to be responsible for his condition. As a consequence, explanatory models evoking taboos and witchcraft - no matter how much they are in contradiction with Western models - do not, by any means, automatically entail the dehumanization of the disabled person (contrary to what Agbovi suggests above). Humanization however does not necessarily mean full personification[214]. Now, it is clear that the social value attributed to disabled beggars is not the same as that attributed to Sierra Leoneans driving nice cars, sipping cocktails on the beaches or working for an international NGO, no matter if they are disabled or not. There is a secret hierarchy operating here, similar to the one that ranks - in many invisible ways – Africans in relation to Europeans.

Even the widespread custom of "naming" the disabled person does not allow far reaching conclusions concerning attitudes towards people with disability. Because "disability" is not a widely acknowledged category – people are constraint to use other names available in their personal vocabulary. For people with physical disability, sometimes the word "handicap" is used. Despite its civilized appearance, this noun becomes in the context a close synonym of "cripul", the most widespread name for a physically challenged person, so widespread indeed that not infrequently it is used also for self-identification. Besides the cripulden, there are also the mumuden, the blajmanden, and the crazeden[215]. People indeed use these names to identify others or themselves. Each of these names evokes different images and different considerations, and outside of the disability movement there is no effort to class all these different

---

[214] See Chapter 4. Ingstad, Benedicte, and Susan Reynolds Whyte
    1995   Disability and culture. Berkeley: University of California Press.
[215] Words for the deaf, the blind and the mentally disabled, used in plural, in Krio in the text.

realities under one single collective category. These "bad names" are not only descriptive terms; they are often used as vocatives. This habit fits in the more general practice of using salient characteristics to name and call persons. White people are called out to as "Opoto!", "Pumuy!", or simply "White!" A lighter skinned African would be referred to as "that Yallaman", a darker one as "that Blackman", somebody with dreadlocks, as "that Rasta". In a similar manner, functions can also become names. A taxi driver is always addressed to shortly as "Driver!", a little girl selling water would be called by passers-by shouting "Wata!", an old women selling kola nuts "Kola!", etc. Polio victims would call anybody non-disabled "Wakafoot". The opposite of Wakafoot would be Diefoot (meaning somebody with a paralyzed leg) or Cotfoot (an amputee). In everyday life nobody would seriously suggest that the use of such names is direct evidence of discrimination. Just like nobody would suggest that replacing such names by more polite ones would automatically denote positive attitudes, or that applying the "correct" term would rule out contempt, an attitude probably closer to discrimination than name giving. Many of the negative representations concerning disabled beggars have nothing to do with "cultural beliefs" with respect to disability, but rather with a generalized disdain of the poor.

Talking with disabled Sierra Leoneans one often hears in fact that they were treated differently compared to other children in the family. Some say they were given household chores or small jobs while the other children went to school. Some relate that they were harshly treated by the mother or the father, because these were embarrassed by the disability of their child. Some complain that instead of being sent to school they were given to a craftsman as an apprentice[216]. But even these children were taken care of, and many of them ended by being more educated than their sisters and brothers because when the opportunity was given to the family - either by the intervention of a more well off friend, or by a religious or charity institution - they were allowed to learn. In circumstances when hard choices had to be made, many a times the disabled child was indeed the last one to benefit from the scarce resources, but it could also happen that the disabled child was more encouraged to learn than the others, because the parents realized that education was the only way out for somebody not being able to

---

[216] This is not the worst thing that can happen to a child. In fact it happens with a lot of non-disabled children too. Apprenticeship is a socially recognised and appreciated way of learning.

work on the farm. In other words, those who succeeded did not succeed despite their family, but thanks to an important family support.

In a country where public assistance of people with disability is entirely missing, care - in most cases - is less a function of the type of rationalization chosen than that of the available means of the family. The lack of means is often compensated for by the involvement of the extended family network. Disabled children might be "passed on" to an aunt or a grandmother for a more or less prolonged period. Thus, family members take turns caring for the disabled child. This does not mean that the child is neglected. Although he or she still might well feel being marginalized for different reasons.

On the trail of discrimination

Construing the figure of the disabled as victim of uncivilised thinking participates in construing Sierra Leone as the heart of darkness. I mean, this is not just an unfortunate by-product of the right-based approach; to the contrary, discourses on disability participate logically in the project of producing "governable subjects" in a particular way, by their "objectification…within the discourses that govern them, and their subjectification in diverse practices and techniques. (Rose 1999:38) Producing discourses on disability in Sierra Leone has become part of the techniques of governance. This explains why issues related to disability are perceived both by the government and the governed as political. Discourses build particular "regimes of truth"; they are experienced as "veridical", made convincing by a whole regime of enunciation. …which accords salience to particular categories, divisions, classifications, relations and identities." (Ibid:29) Once the category of disability is created it is explained by discrimination, objectified by statistics. Statistics is like any other objectifying techniques - a map, a chart, a table, a diagram - these are all „little machine(s) for producing conviction in others". (Ibid: 37)

When discrimination is presumed, it is measured and proved by statistics. Numbers are convincing by nature, but when we have a deeper look into the question, hard facts are surprisingly rare. Empirical researches are altogether missing, or when such works exist, they are all too broad or of too small scale. That is why the survey conducted by LCD in 2009 deserves special attention. It was conducted in villages

around urban areas, in 11 locations in 6 districts and it reached 424 respondents. Its sample population therefore is quite different from the one I worked with, but disability remains a linking category. In the publication that resulted from the research (Trani and Osman Bah 2009) conclusions – unlike in most similar literature - are systematically supported by first hand evidence.... or so it appears. A second look exposes the peculiar structure of this paper. It is divided into 7 chapters, each of them offering measurable data, positioning the population of people with disability - weighing its social handicap along particular dimensions - within the world of the abled-bodies. Each chapter is closed by a short summary. The kind of discrimination we are searching for here is the same as people with disabilities face in any of the developed countries, where supportive structures are given, but people often bypass them because of hidden or not so hidden prejudice. Now, a thorough reading reveals that while the textual presentation of the findings confirms the existence of such discrimination, the quantitative data are not always in coherence with the texts. It is as if two different universes were presented simultaneously: one is painted by words, comforting common sense knowledge about disability in the Global South, and a more nuanced one, told by the graphs, often astonishingly challenging pre-fabricated ideas about discrimination.

In the first universe suspicion of discrimination is systematically confirmed in all domains of life: employment, income, education, social acceptance: *"The survey provides statistical verification of the fact that respondents with severe or very severe disabilities find it more difficult to access employment than respondents with mild, moderate or no disabilities – only 29.6% of adults with severe or very severe disabilities are working, compared with 56.1% of adults with mild or moderate disabilities and 60.4% of non-disabled adults". (p.22) "respondents with severe or very severe disabilities are the lowest earners" (p.23) „Children with disabilities are often marginalised and excluded within communities, and many of them face stigma and discrimination in school as well as low parental expectations." (p.23) "Of the children included in the interviews, those with severe or very severe disabilities were less likely to go to school and more likely to stay at home and undertake household chores than their peers with mild, moderate or no disabilities"* (p.22)

The statements do not leave much place for doubts or nuances. They prove that the social treatment of disabled people reflect the abominable conditions that we might

expect from an underdeveloped country, like Sierra Leone. Figures are used to consolidate this diagnosis. Explicitly or implicitly, underdevelopment is a key explanatory factor here.

The graphs tell another story: they show that although severely disabled people do face the hardest conditions of all, in many aspects there is no or very little difference between the non-disabled and the disabled group as a whole (mildly, moderately and severely disabled counted together). In fact, according to the figures, in some domains the disabled group even seems to have a certain advantage over the test group. This result is so counter-intuitive that it might be a good idea to cross-check the data with the few other available resources. The problem then is that the data do not seem to correlate in the resources we have at hand.

To start with the domain of **employment,** The World Bank states that 38% of people with disability between 10 and 65 years is employed (or self-employed) against 46% of people without a disability (Ovadiya and Zampaglione 2009:13). The report does not reveal the source of this information. Going back to the National Census, from where the authors usually draw their data, we find a different figure. This source puts the number of the economically active disabled people at 47,9%. (Statistics_Sierra_Leone 2004:14). According to the LCD report, around 62% of non-disabled people have some kind of work, while around 58% of moderately disabled people work against 30% of severely disabled. Although the meaning of work here is not precised, it can be supposed from the questions that it covers both the formal and the informal domain, although it most probably excludes begging as a form of work.
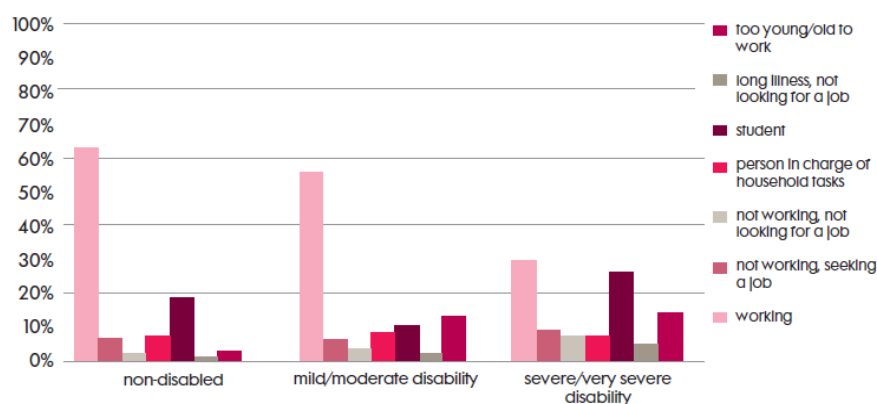
15. Figure Employment situation for adults (>17) (Source: LCD report, 2009, p.18)

The disadvantage of disabled people seems real; however the difference between non-disabled people and people with a mild disability is surprisingly small. In fact, it might be interesting to compare Sierrra Leone with a more developed nation, let's say the UK. A report produced by Leonard Cheshire (Lang, et al. 2009):16 cites the UK's Labour Force Survey, estimating that only 50% of people with disabilities were actually employed in the UK in 2008. Because of the dramatically different context and measurement methods, this figure cannot be used for comparison with Sierra Leone, but I believe that whatever the chosen method was, because it was used consistently, cross-checking of the GAP between the disabled and non-disabled population between the two countries might still be interesting. In fact, such a comparison results in a dramatically bad score – for the UK! While in Sierra Leone the difference in the employment situation to the detriment of people with disabilities is less than 10 percentage points according to the World Bank, the same difference is up to 40 percentage points in the UK - if statistics are to be believed.

The LCD report reveals even more interesting details on the employment structure of its sample population. It shows that even severely disabled adults are active. There are even more students amongst them than amongst the non-disabled, and according to the figure below if they are on the labour market, proportionally they have more chance to work for the government, for a private company or for an NGO than non-disabled. Also within their own category there are more employers and apprentices amongst them. There is practically no difference in the percentage of those who have their own business (are self-employed) in the three categories (37% of non-disabled, 34.9%of respondents with mild or moderate disabilities and 35% of respondents with severe or very severe disabilities) The job-category which really makes a difference and where severely disabled people indeed have much less chance to compete with abled-bodies and people with moderate disabilities, is farming – a category which, together with self-employment - constitutes the primary income generating activity for Sierra Leoneans.
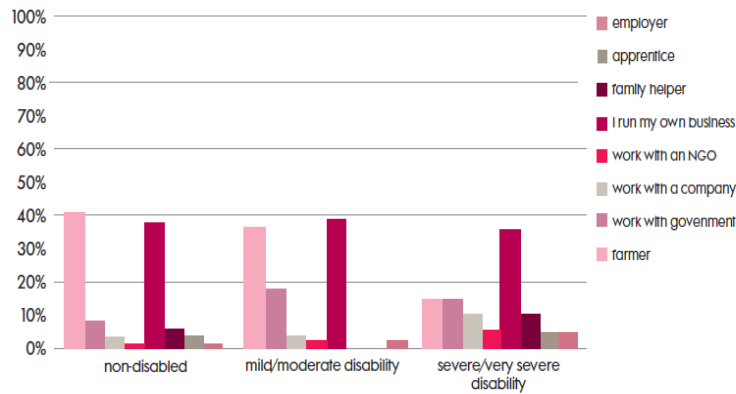
16. Figure Employment status for active adults (>17) (Source: LCD report, 2009, p.19)

Do we really have to consider this as discrimination or does it only reflect the fact that farming is a physically hard job to do where engaging people with disabilities is not productive? Also, if it is true that the proportion of family helpers is the highest amongst severely disabled people, does this show discrimination or is it a sign that people even with severe disability can make themselves useful? The answer is open to interpretations.

If the data presented above prove something, it is that disabled people, men and women, occupy positions that are socially, economically and culturally available – not only for disabled people but for the whole population - and it seems that the availability of these positions determine their situation more than the sole fact of being disabled. In a country where formal employment is a scarcity, agricultural work, housework and self-employment – including mining and trading – are the only available options for many to engage in economically productive activities in order to sustain their own lives and cater for the needs of their families. Disabled people participate in this economy and in the light of the figures their participation is far from being merely symbolic.

17. Figure Work situation of people with and without a disability according to different sources

Source	Year of reference	Variable	PwDs	Mild disability	Severe disability	Non-disabled	Difference (to the detriment of PwDs) In percentage points
World Bank	2009	employed or self employed	38,00%			46,00%	8
National Census	2004	economically active	47,90%			?	?
LCD	2009	working		58,00%	30,00%	62,00%	Scattered between 4 and 32

The sole fact of being economically active or not does not give a full picture of a person's **economic situation**. In a country where the proportion of the population below the poverty line is estimated at 70 percent and some 26 percent is classified as extremely poor, the income gained from work in itself is not a good enough indicator for economic safety. The World Bank Report in this regard limits itself to a general statement, citing the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (2005) according to which "the poorest" in Sierra Leone are "often physically (and psychologically) challenged. There is no indication as to what it means and how we know it. Only the LCD report offers some concrete facts, concluding that "according to the survey, over two thirds of respondents with severe or very severe disabilities have no income", while this is true just for under one third of non-disabled respondents (Trani and Osman Bah 2009:21). This is not quite what I found in Freetown, making it probable that the better income position of disabled people living in polio homes there comes from begging, which is a compensation for other type of family or community support, and from NGO support which is always more readily available in cities than in rural areas.

Respondent monthly income	no disability	mild/moderate disability	severe/very severe disability
No income	32%	36%	69%
under SLL 14,600	3%	3%	0%
SLL 14,601-60,000	26%	18%	8%
SLL 60,001-150,000	23%	13%	11%
SLL 150,001-1,800,000	16%	31%	11%

18. Figure Percentages of respondents in monthly income categories (Source: LCD report, 2009, p22)

In the villages surveyed by the researchers of LCD severely disabled people seem indeed to do much worse than their non-disabled neighbours. There are two details however coming to mitigate this bleak picture. First, the graphs show that it is amongst the moderately disabled people that we find the biggest proportion (31%) of those falling in the highest income bracket (over 37 USD!- a very moderate welfare). Second, according to my observation – and this is not shown by the table - the level of the personal income and that of the overall material wellbeing do not correlate, perhaps because contrary to individualistic expectations, the material comfort of a person

depends more on the income of the household than on his/her personal capacity to earn money. The LCD survey itself finally establishes that "the differences in income between households having a person with disability and those without are not too pronounced". (Trani and Osman Bah 2009:22).

19. _{Figure} Economic situation of people with and without a disability according to different sources

Source	Year of reference	Variable	PwDs	Mild disability	Severe disability	Non-disabled	Difference to the detriment of PwDs in percentage points
LCD	2009	The poorest: No income		36,00%	69,00%	32,00%	Scattered between 3 and 37

The third domain where discrimination is usually expected to afflict people with disability is **education**. The National Census conforms to this expectation. Its findings point at existing discrimination against persons with disability, as well as against girls amongst the disabled children: "The proportion of disabled persons aged between 6 and 29 years who are attending school was 11% compared to 40% for non-disabled persons." "School attendance amongst them was higher for males than females, 61% against 39%, respectively" (Statistics_Sierra_Leone 2004:12). The World Bank's figures (Ovadiya and Zampaglione 2009:12) show a considerably different picture (38,3% of disabled children between 05 and 24 years attending some kind of school as opposed to 48,9% of non disabled children) reducing the difference between persons with and without disability to about 10 percentage points.

We find more unexpected results in the LCD report: "*Surprisingly, in contrast to results found in other countries, our findings show that the level of access to school and literacy rates are similar for persons with disabilities and those without in and around urban areas*" (Trani and Osman Bah 2009:25). It is worth to be reminded that although the research report refers in its title to "urban areas", the survey was conducted in 11 villages. In such settings the (generally) high level of education is indeed surprising. Probably some distortion is produced by the large age group fixed between 6 and 18. Even in poor families – which constitute the majority of the rural population – it is usual that children start school and attend it for a couple of years before they drop out. Discrimination, if there is, could be more easily measured by the age of the dropping out than by the lack of schooling, but I suspect that economic conditions of the family have a greater impact on this factor than the disability of the child.
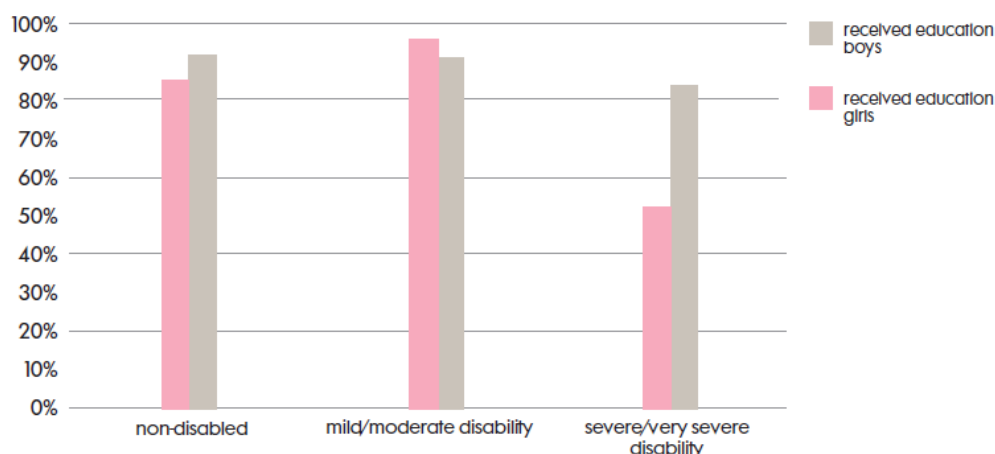
20. Figure School attendance according to disability and gender (6-18) (Source: LCD report, 2009, p.26)

The above graph shows not only quite a balanced situation in the age group between 6 and 18 years, it also allows discovering that moderately disabled girls are more likely to go to school than their non-disabled pairs. Severely disabled boys have a handicap of only a few percentage points compared to the two other groups. It is the severely disabled girls who have a real disadvantage: only 56% of them attend school versus about 82% of the boys, but it is the mildly disabled girls who have the best scores of all (98%). These differences point at some kind of gender discrimination. It seems that parents of disabled girls push school even harder than others, but there is a point where the severity of disability makes it hopeless for the parents that the child might succeed in any way in life. This point is set much farther for the boys. This gender difference notwithstanding, the figures do not support the thesis that disabled children in general would be massively deprived of school *because of* ignorance of the parents. Access to school - let's put it in this way: to education worthy of its name - is a problem for the majority of Sierra Leoneans, and poorer kids have even less chance than the slightly better off. Disabled children in poor families can be effectively hindered from going to school if rational choices have to be made in the family on resource allocation. But other, simultaneous strategies exist: a disabled child can be sent to school before his sisters and brothers because he is les fit for farm work; he can be given as an apprentice to a local craftsman or admitted in a boarding charity school. The existence of special charity schemes and scholarships (combined with the concern of the family) seem to

have counterbalanced to some extent the obvious social handicap of disabled children – or at least this was the situation up to the near past!

The present anti-charity philosophy and the rights based approach putting the blame on the families and on nebulous entities like the "community", claiming to fight discrimination not with scholarships but with attitudinal change risk to worsening the statistics in the future. The idea of giving individualized monetary support to families with disabled children or to children of disabled families on the basis of need or merit is a heresy according to the present day humanitarian thinking. There is a chance that this thinking reflects changing conceptions of social welfare in Europe where citizens are actively encouraged to de-learn the concept of the welfare state and appropriate the virtues of self-care (Clarke 2012). Is a fact that current development theories are not supportive to any corrective measures resembling to welfare rights, without which educational handicap of disabled children (and also of children with one or two disabled parents) might quickly turn from assumption to reality.

21. _{Figure} Schooling of people with and without a disability according to different sources

Source	Year of reference	Variable	PwDs	Mild disable	Severe disabled	Non disabled	Difference to the detriment of PwDs in percentage points
National Census	2004	school attendance 6-29 years	11,00%			40,00%	29
World Bank	2009	school attendance 5-24 years	38,30%			48,90%	10,6
LCD	2009	school attendance 6-18 year boys		92%	82,50%	92,00%	Scattered between 0 and 9,5
LCD	2009	school attendance 6-18 year girls		98%	57%	91,00%	Scattered between -7 and 34

Comparing life situations

The figures presented above show dispersion and refuse to talk a clear talk, but there seems to be no doubt: in the main domains of life there are no concerted evidences proving massive discrimination affecting people with disabilities - at least not in the sense discrimination is usually defined in official reports and public speeches: put in relation with "attitudes". It is no wonder that in a country where survival is a daily struggle for most of the people, being disabled means an additional social handicap (as it does in more affluent countries, too), however, empirical observations point at important cultural resources in including disabled members of society. These resources can be deducted from the figures which suggest that instead of wilful marginalisation, probably some kind of compensatory mechanisms work on the community level. Recognising these mechanisms would not invalidate the claim for special rights for people with disabilities, but it would relativize the discourse demanding the overall restructuring of the Sierra Leonean society on the account of its "backwardness". Stigmatization of a whole society is probably not necessary so that special rights can be demanded for a given group.

Inconsistencies in the data, as well as in the interpretations suggest that figures and statistics are not used to build adequate policies and projects on objectifiable facts, but rather the other way round: in order to legitimize existing policies and support project proposals which would not contradict donors' expectations. The same survey that I presented partly in Chapter 1 and 4 might be used here for comparative purposes in order to cross-check the findings of the LCD report. Although – as I said – my sample population is quite different from that of the LCD research in that my respondents live in the capital instead of villages and most disabled people in my sample are members of collective homes - my findings are not fundamentally different from that of Trani et al. I remind quickly here of my methodology already described above.

The survey I conducted[217] covered three urban neighbourhoods and three polio communities[218]. It was realised in two times. First with the help of my voluntary

---

[217] I am grateful to Handicap International which supported the study with a stipend offered to research assistants and a symbolic incentive to respondents

assistants I made a simple census asking family heads about the composition of their households. The respondents were chosen randomly, according to the snow ball method. In a second time, we made long interviews with the help of a detailed questionnaire and we reached altogether 366 people in this way. The principle was that wherever we found a disabled household member we tried to make an interview with them, with the household head and with a second person from the household. If the household head was disabled himself we randomly chose a second non-disabled person in the same household or in the proximity of it. The questionnaire was typed in English but interviews were made in Krio, except for a few cases where the respondent spoke only another local language. In these cases I used my assistant-friends as interpreters. Out of the 366 people we interviewed, 116 were disabled and 250 were non-disabled. In the following presentation I make no difference between people living in disabled homes or elsewhere, but I am aware that this choice produces an important overrepresentation of physical impairments in my sample, another reason why the results of the LCD report and mine cannot be considered as totally consubstantial.

Because of the particularities of the methodologies, neither the LCD report, nor mine can be considered representative for the entire disabled population, but because the methods we used were intensive, reaching relatively many people in clearly circumscribed areas, I stay convinced that despite all the inherent flaws, these data are more realistic than the ones pretending to give a national picture, largely from extrapolations. Like the researchers of LCD I also systematically asked people to assess the severity of their disability, which produces an additional nuance, sometimes reflected in the charts. As based on the respondents' answers, this distinction should be understood as more subjective than objective; however there is an objective fact: people who cannot walk even with crutches and so are obliged to use a wheelchair for locomotion systematically classed themselves in the category of "severely disabled". In other ways too, in the design of my questionnaire I was greatly inspired by the LCD research. Also, the data I have obtained show important resemblances with its findings. At the same time, paradoxically, they do not back up its main conclusions. If there is massive discrimination affecting people with disabilities, these figures simply refuse to

---

[218] The three polio community involved in the research: Pademba Road, House of Jesus, Kissi Shell; the three urban neighbourhoods: Aberdeen/Murraytown, Kroobay, Kissi Dock Yard.

unveil it. A statistician helped me with the calculations[219]. He used principal component analysis to regroup the factors measured by my many questions into a limited number of dimensions. The three main dimensions I was curious of were **social capital, economic situation and social embeddedness**. I also tried to assess the respondents'' health situation and their general attitude towards life.

I composed my **social capital dimension** combining the person's experience in formal education; his/her acquired basic competences and his or her occupation. In my sample (maybe surprisingly but not quite in contradiction with the LCD study) the disabled group has a somewhat more substantial experience in formal learning than the test group. Disabled people not only score higher in vocational training, there are also more disabled people having reached high school and they even have a better chance to have finished the primary school. At the same time, there are proportionally less disabled than non-disabled people having finished the secondary school. Advantages in education have to be understood as relative anyhow, as almost half of the total sample population have not got even a few years of experience in the school system.
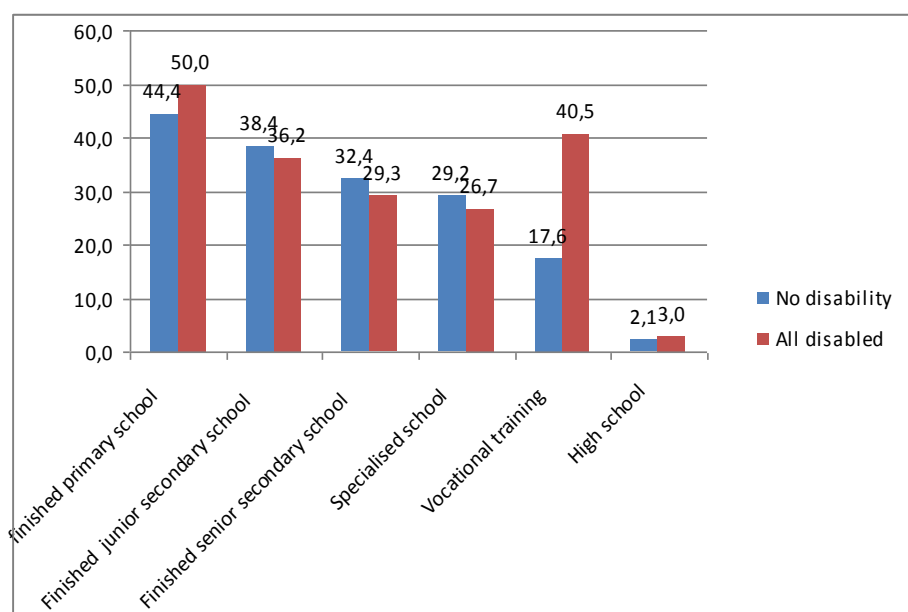

22. Figure Education and training – highest educational levels in the two groups

In accordance with a relatively better education level - at least in some grades and in some categories - but maybe also because of their more direct exposure to the cosmopolitan culture of project society, people with disability in the sample are also

---

[219] All the statistical calculations are the work of Balázs Danka.

better in writing, reading and in speaking English (usually a corollary of school attendance).
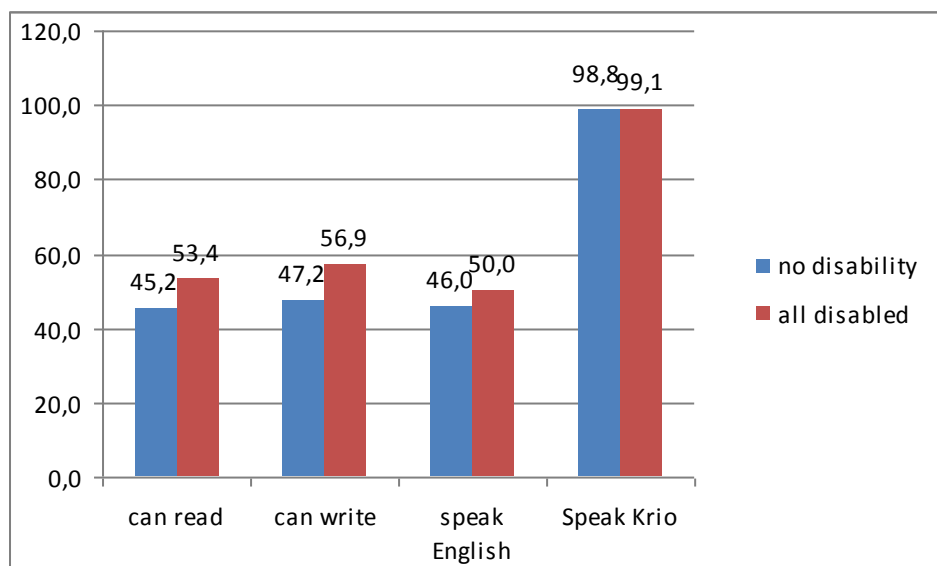
23. Figure Acquired basic compentences in the two groups

Finally, disability does not seem to negatively affect a person's ability to work either, as people with disability tend to be as much (or as little) economically active as people without disability (only about 36 % of the total sample say they have some kind of work) although it is true that people with disability have more chance to be self-employed, thus less likely to have a paid employment. There is also a high possibility that some of the respondents considered begging as self-employment, because the question was put in relation to the ability to generate income. That would be an interpretation in sharp contradiction with Western concepts of work but would be more than justified by the fact that a great number of family heads sustain family members through begging. Also, begging as self-employment is not an activity exclusive to PwDs, as non-disabled youth (pushers) helping the polio victims equally participate in begging, as paid working force, "employed" by disabled persons. Formal employment is more an exception than the rule. Even amongst the non-disabled respondents, formal employment concern only 8,5% (as compared to 3,1% of people with disability).
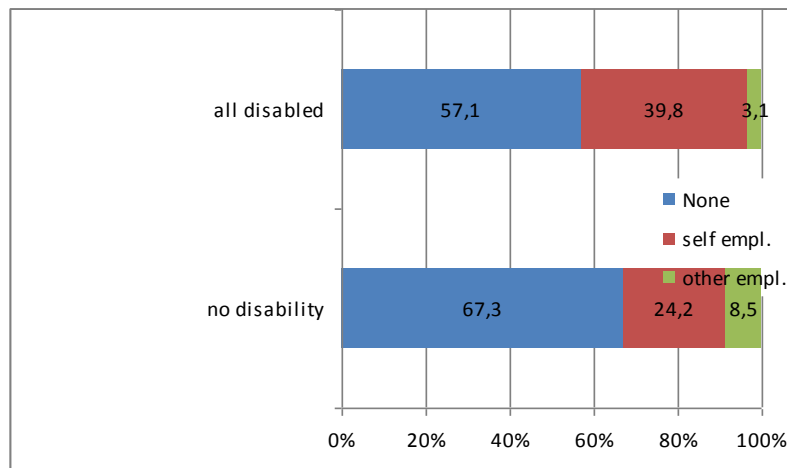
24. _{Figure} Employment within the two groups – ("Are you employed?")

In keeping with disabled people's better performance in the individual factors (education, competences, economically productive activity) their overall score for the *social capital* dimension is also somewhat higher, although the difference is not big enough to be considered as significant (Sig.: 0,473) This dimension, like the other dimensions, were created by the principal component method, making it is possible to translate the original number of variables into a more limited number of sets, by adding up (and computing the average of) the original factors. The values are relative, i.e. they depend on each other. A 0 value means that there is no difference between the two groups. A negative value means that the given group is in a worse situation than the average, a positive value shows that the group is above the average.
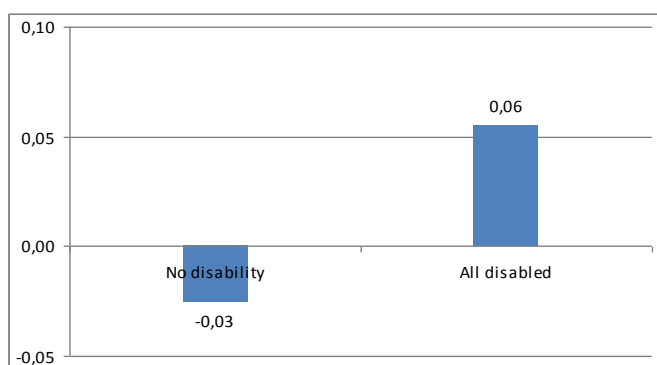
25. _{Figure} Comparison along the dimension of the social capital

My social capital dimension was deliberately constructed based on Western ideas of what makes somebody's social standing. At the same time, I also applied another concept, that of "**social embeddedness**" to measure possible "softer" components of the

238

social status. My social embeddeddness dimension grossly corresponds to the category of "social participation" used in the LCD report, which concludes:

"This chapter identifies several encouraging features of social participation for persons with disabilities: similar levels of commitment to leadership roles at community level as for non-disabled persons; the capacity to make friends and the current ability to participate in some, although not all, community activities; and a general consensus that persons with disabilities should have the same rights as everyone else. However, prejudice and discrimination remain areas of concern and can take various, insidious forms..." (Trani and Osman Bah 2009:58)

We are very far here from the devastating conclusions of the report cited in the first section of this chapter (Agbovi 2010) Comparing my results with those of the LCD paper is only possible for subcategories as indicators in the two surveys are not constructed in the same way. The social embeddedness dimension that I constructed included data about the extension and the strength of one's social network, of one's participation in social activities and the roles played within important social groups.

I start with the social network. Although my sample included only teenagers and adults, only about half of the respondents (55,5%) said they lived in marriage. As I have already noted[220] interpreting such an answer is not easy because of the blurred line between marriage and single life, but I suggest that for this same reason the question was rather understood in terms of durable, stable relation with somebody. Because the interpretation should be the same for the disabled and the non-disabled group, the answers still gives some kind of information regarding to the differences to be found between the two groups. With that caution we can see that marriage occurs somewhat more frequently amongst the non-disabled, but the difference is hardly perceptible. However the measurable percentage of divorce amongst people with disability means that their relations tend to last shorter and they are likely to get engaged in consecutive relations. Severely disabled people have in fact the most chance to live alone.

---

[220] See Chapter 4.
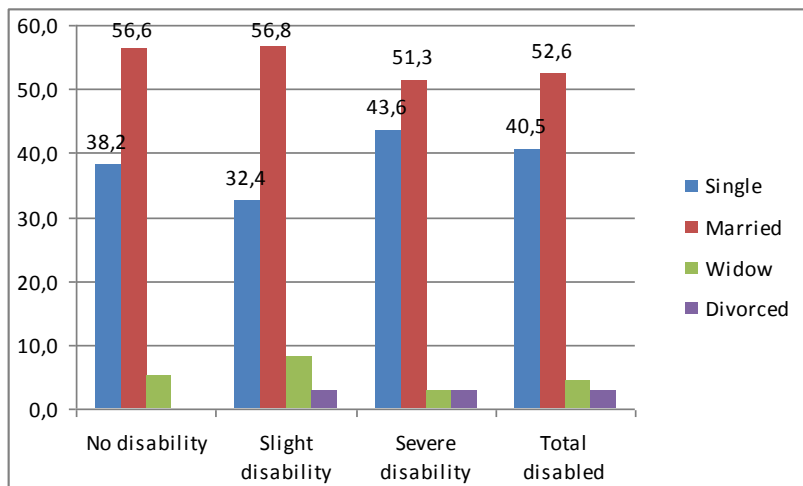
26. Figure Marital relationship – ("What kind of relationship do you live in?")

The nuclear family and supportive social networks do not overlap, even though they fulfil partly similar roles. They provide an emergency net in case of unforeseen trouble. To evaluate people's protective network I asked them who they can turn to with their problems. 10% of all respondents only (disabled and non-disabled confounded) feel they cannot rely on anybody but themselves[221]. People with disability belong to this group with a greater probability. The family, religious groups, traditional society, friends and neighbours are mentioned as the most reliable sources of support in need, indicating that the informal networks are considered to be more supportive than the ones provided by formal structures (including government and NGOs). In the sample people without disability seem to have a somewhat stronger informal network than their disabled pairs, although people with slight disabilities are even above of the average. On the other end of the scale it is amongst the most severely disabled that we find the most people thinking that they cannot rely on anybody but themselves.

---

[221] Between the answer „I can count on nobody but me" and that of „I can count on this or that person or institution", there was one more recurrent answer: „I can count only on God". Because of the elliptic manner of referring to God, I felt myself authorised to interpret these answers as a declaration of relative resource less-ness, although I am conscious of the ethnocentric bias in this choice.
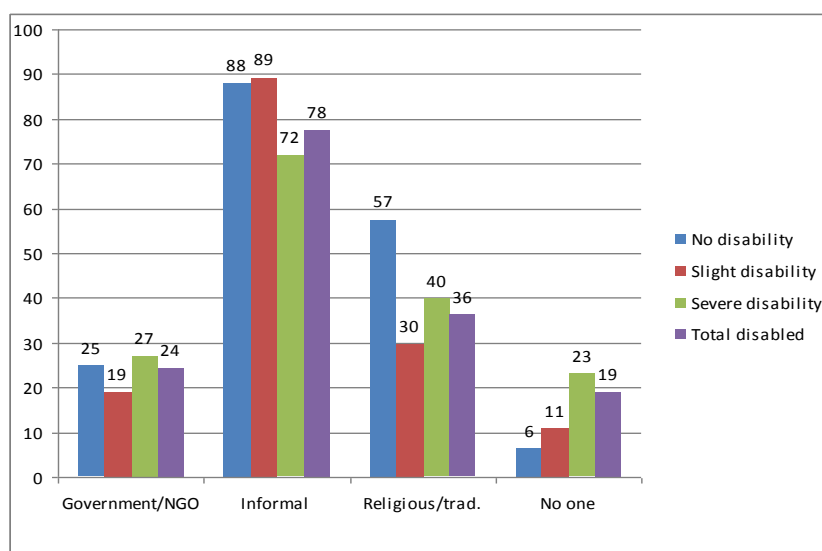
27. Figure Sources of support – (Who can you count on in need?)

Another way of assessing social participation is to ask questions about group membership. As we have seen in Chapter 2 membership in different types of voluntary organizations is widespread. In the sample membership in religious groups, secret societies and social clubs were confessed to be the most important, with a notable difference between the disabled and non-disabled population. People with disability tend to belong to more numerous and more varied organizations, although they have less access to some form of groups, as a quick assessment of social activities reveal.
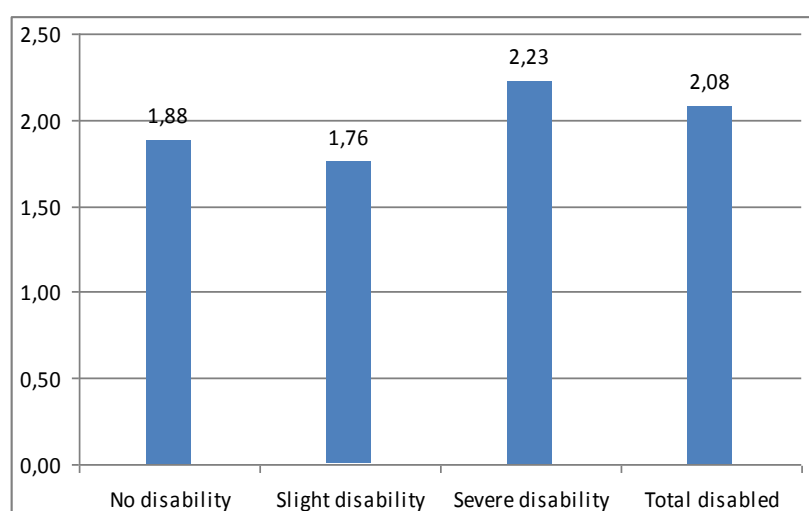

28. Figure Number of organizations a person is affiliated to on an average

There is no important difference linked to disability in the participation in community and religious events. Non-disabled people however tend to participate more in family gatherings and traditional society activities, while people with disability go more often to events organized by local associations or NGOs. This is understandable as most of the disabled persons in the sample live in the polio squat, so by definition they are members of a DPO and live for from their original communities.

.
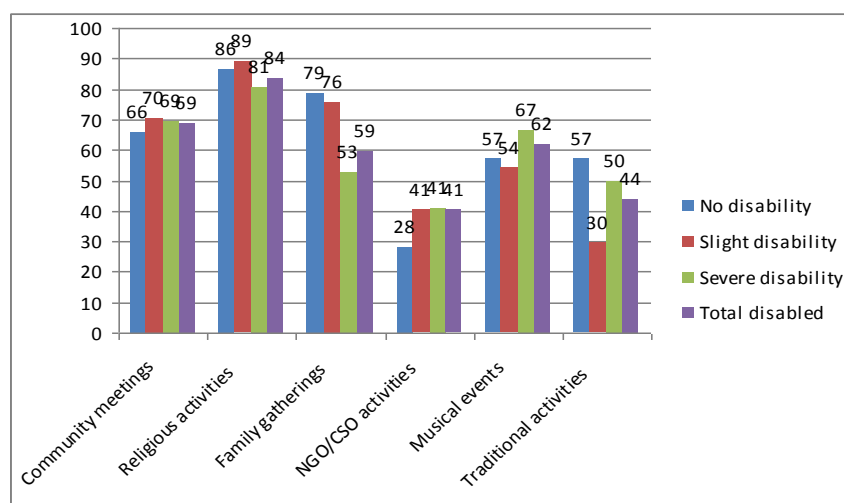
29. Figure. Participation at social events

It is a surprising fact that people with disability seem to be amongst those who take on more social responsibility (23,3% against 12,7%), although this seeming anomaly might be explained by the fact that the polio squats function as autonomous organizations with disabled people in the leadership.
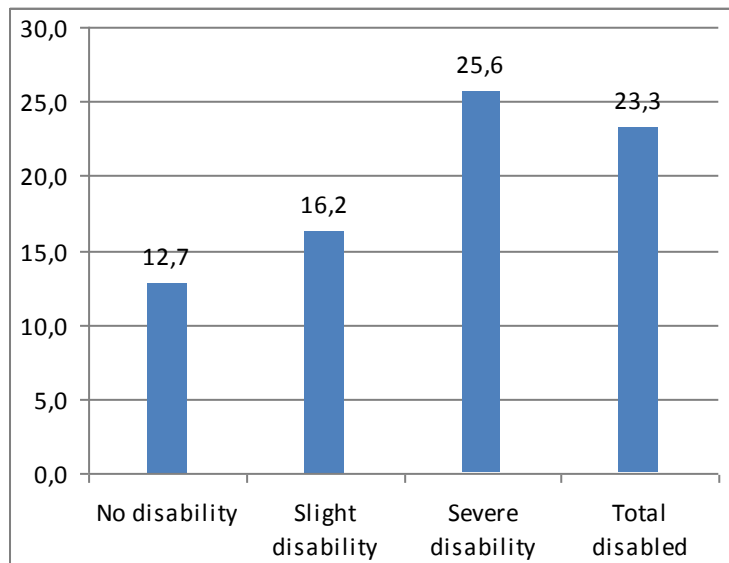
30. Figure Social responsibility – leadership in formal and informal associations

Even bearing in mind that many of the leadership roles can be linked to disability related groups, there is hardly any indication here pointing at the massive and generalised marginalization of people with disabilities. However counter-intuitive this conclusion seems, the results of the LCD survey confirm it, noting that „about 19% of Sierra Leoneans interviewed have such responsibilities, and that there is no significant difference according to the level of disability." (Trani and Osman Bah 2009:51).

All in all, the combined value of the **social embeddedness** dimension, computed from factors relating to the social network, membership and leadership in social groups, as well as participation in social events scores somewhat worse for disabled people than for non-disabled (0,10 points below the average), even though the difference is still not significant (Sig: 0,211). Also, in some sub-domains people with disabilities do better than their non-disabled pairs. Most surprisingly, with regard to some of the variables people with severe disability are doing considerably better than people with moderate disability – a fact that might point again to the compensatory value of the squats, where most of the severely disabled people live – in terms of substituting primary social relations.
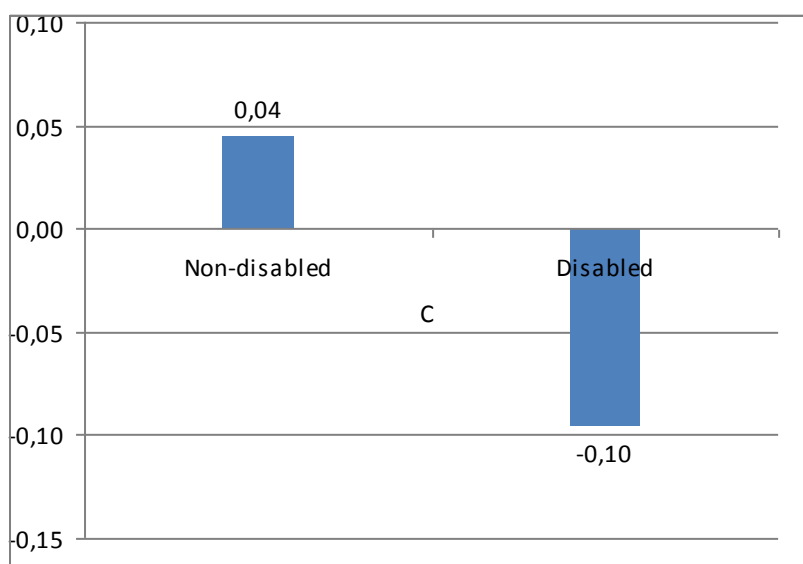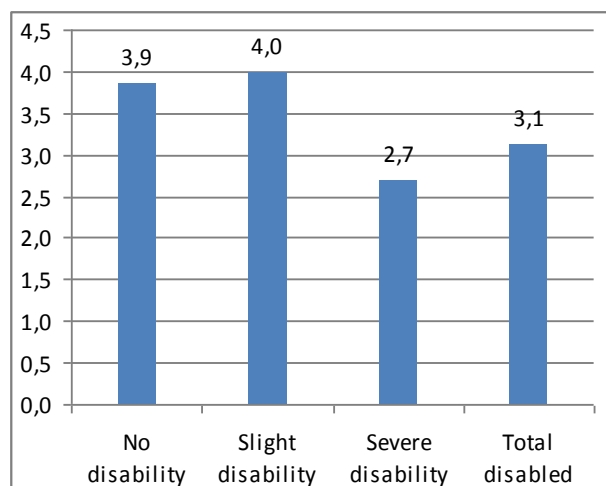
31. _{Figure} Comparison along the dimension of social embeddedness

In the design of the survey I took **economic situation** to be independent from the social capital, and indeed my results show that the two dimensions do not correlate. I constructed the dimension of the economic situation taking into consideration monthly income, housing conditions, personal possessions and quantity of available food. Although the monthly income of people with disability is not lower than that of the test group (as also disclosed by the LCD publication and suggested by my comparison between squats and non squats) they live in less material comfort, have fewer possessions and lack food more often. Those polio-disabled living in the disabled squats also have fragile housing entitlement - by definition. The result is that despite their relatively acceptable income level, people with disability in the sample are materially more deprived than people without disability. This fact was not revealed by the LCD report, but again their sample did not target the independent polio homes.
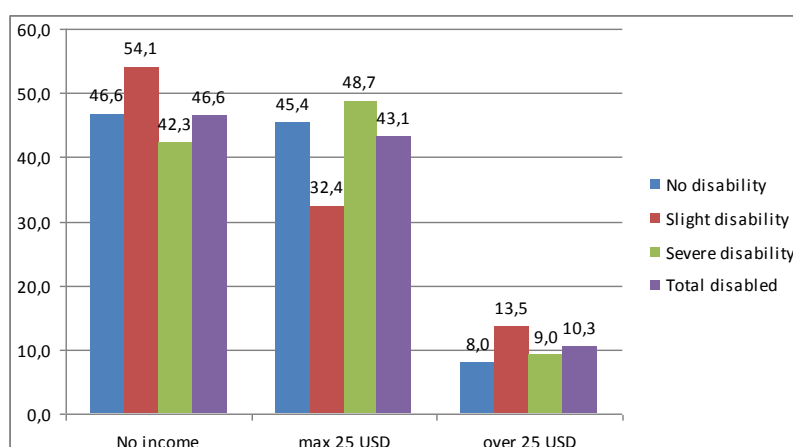
32. Figure Average monthly income

The following table shows the average number of personally owned "luxury" objects out of a list of 10, from laptop through mobile phone to bed, including ownership indicating entitlement to housing[222].

Bar chart showing average luxury possessions: No disability 3,9; Slight disability 4,0; Severe disability 2,7; Total disabled 3,1.

33. Figure Personnal posessions (number of "luxury possessions" from a list of 10)

Although personal possessions might be a possible indicator of material wellbeing, in this deprived context the quantity of food available is certainly more important than having for example an mp3. Consequently, I also put a question about the availability of food. More precisely I asked people if the food they had was enough for them.

---

[222] The full list included: house land, animals, motorized vehicle, non-motorized vehicle, bed, mosquito net, mobile phone, MP3/radio, computer/laptop, working tools
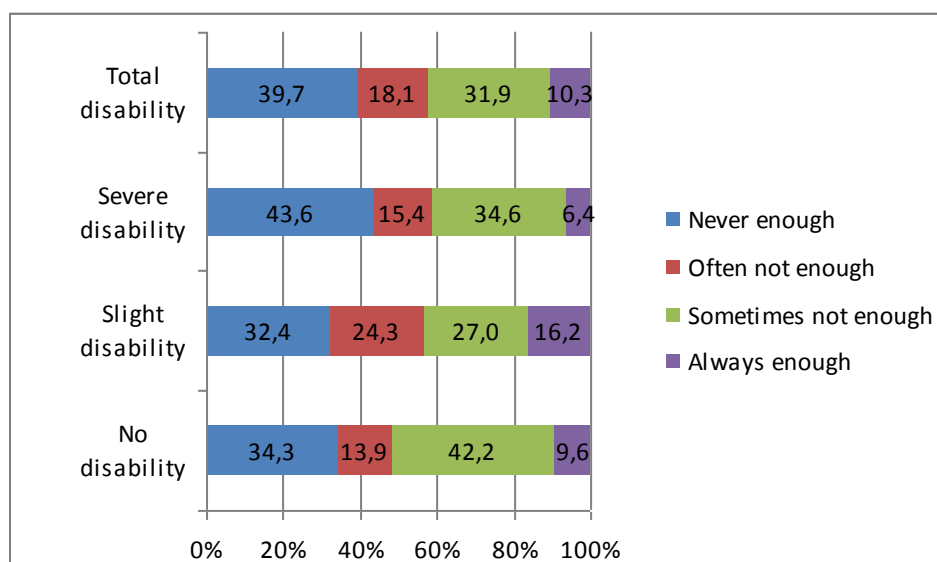
34. Figure Satisfaction with the quantity of food ("How often the food that you get is not enough for you?")

According to the answers, people with disability are somewhat hungrier, but this is largely because of people with severe disability, who are more likely to live in squats. The fact that people with a mild disability – many of whom live in the open neighbourhoods – are less hungry suggest that they might live in scarcity but they are not deliberately deprived.

Based on the above variables, the principal component method applied for the economic situation shows that people with a slight disability live in relative material comfort, while severely disabled people can be considered as the "poorest". People with no disability occupy an intermediary position. The two disabled subgroups together are doing worse than the non-disabled, although the difference is still not significant.
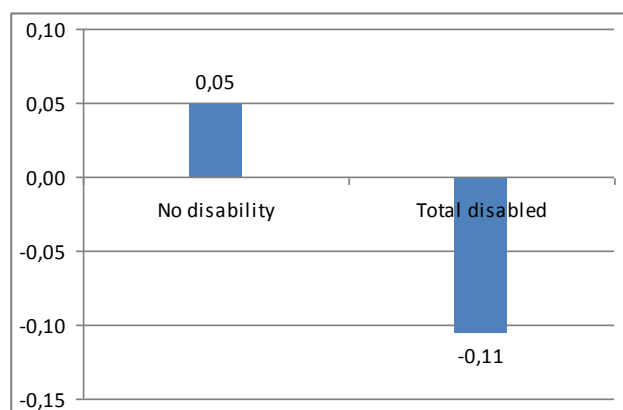
35. Figure .. Comparison along the dimension of economic situation

246

Not only is the difference negligible, the basis of the comparison is already extremely low. The picture is that of a population living in generalised poverty, including disabled people, some of whom face somewhat more hardship, some less than the average, rather than that of a society pushing its disabled members to the margin voluntarily.

Summary

What story these statistics might tell after all? If they talk about anything, they do not reveal wide scale systematic discrimination of disabled people. While the overall comparison shows people with disability slightly disadvantaged, their distance from the average in different domains is in fact astonishingly small, and in some cases people with disability even score better. In this light the thesis of generalized mass rejection in all domains of life cannot possibly be maintained. However, if systematic marginalization cannot be demonstrated, a collectively shared state of deprivation can be well read from the numbers. In this respect, the disabled sample group and the test group have more in common than differences that would separate them. One of the things that the discourse on discrimination does is to disguise this fact, isolating people with disability rhetorically rather than integrating them in larger communities. Its other effect is to preclude questions about the important compensatory mechanisms responsible for the curious fact that disability – although not less a burden and a stigma than elsewhere – does not annul one's chances to live a full life, in conditions that are not necessarily worse than those of others' in the same social stratum. Silencing disabled people's strength amounts to maintaining them in a weak position. Silencing a society's aptitude for solidarity and integration because it does not fit with the "backwardness theory" comes close to maintaining coloniality.

6. On actually existing discrimination

"Misery is one form of suffering, hence there is violence somewhere"

"There is also a general thrust in the power system: single acts of violence come out of structures of political decisions and economic transactions; and the latter cause each other. But underneath it all lurks culture; legitimizing some structures and acts, delegitimizing others."

Johan Galtung: Peace by peaceful means

Bringing discrimination to light

Disability as a master category has been introduced progressively into the Sierra Leonean society, but it has so far rather unevenly spread and gained recognition. For many people it is still a relatively vague or even empty category. Contrary to what could be suggested, the word "disability" is not simply a linguistic recognition of an objectively existing social reality. Rather, the opposite is true. A category creates, with linguistic tools, its own reality, together with an implicit social theory which allows understanding that reality in a certain way. Categories and social theories thus generate and suppose each other. The implicit social theory behind the "disability" category leads easily to the construction of these (equally implicit) premises: the statistical importance of disability makes it a serious political issue; disability is *sui generis*, consequently it should be dealt with when it is already there; disability *is* a problem because of discrimination, hence the accurate political answer to disability is antidiscrimination policies.

The implications of these premises are far reaching, with serious consequences on disabled people themselves, whose life problems and difficulties tend to be viewed by external actors - and sometimes by themselves alike - through the exclusive prism of disability. Although this prism allows making important claims, producing significant improvements in *some* disabled people's lives, giving it an exclusivity, banishing all other possible prisms - like class, social stratification, gender and housing condition - risks to naturalize, and thus to depoliticize rather than to politicize the question of inequality -

248

which, after all, remains the main problem for the polio-disabled community of Freetown. I claim that the basic premises the disability category produces are - if not false - at least misleading. It is statistically important in Sierra Leone *because* it is politically relevant, not the other way round. Disability is not only given, it is actively produced by social practices and governmental practices. The present form of disability politics turns attention away from the disabling practices of the state; finally, antidiscrimination policy is one powerful tool to protect people with disabilities but certainly not the only one - it is a particularly weak weapon against injustices perpetrated by the state. The present discourse on discrimination – construed as the product of ordinary people's ignorance - exonerates the state for taking responsibility for the direct and structural violence producing maimed bodies in large numbers, directly by violent actions targeting citizens, and indirectly by operating one of the least reliable and most discriminative health service in the world.

The formidable violence of the state

Living in Sierra Leone my most fundamental existential experience was that of security. For a country, emerging from a violent civil war, it was indeed surprising how safe one could feel day and night, walking alone in the streets or crammed in crowded public transport. Nevertheless, one could feel that violence was still there, boiling under a calm surface. It erupted occasionally, sometimes foreseeably, connected to political events, such as elections, or to long term social dissatisfaction, leading to riots of youth, students or workers of the mines. One sunny afternoon I was walking in the city centre when I saw thousands of school children literally pouring down on the market, roaring, hurling stones and brandishing sticks, snatching on the way anything they could reach for. Adults froze or retreated into shops, market women trying to protect their belongings with their bodies. The children came from a joint exercise in the National Stadium; they apparently got drunk from their own mass, from their own suddenly discovered power.

Violence was not only on the side of ordinary people; one could sense it on the side of public authorities, too. Although the British[223] did a great job by transforming an unreliable, disorganised and undisciplined armed force into a passably normalised force

---

[223] IMATT , "International Military Advisory Training Team" under British command is supervising the country's security policy, it also trains the military and police personnel.

of order, any time I saw trucks of policemen patrolling in the streets, my immediate feeling was not security but possible threat and I quickly changed my steps to avoid them. I knew the country was not completely settled and the reminiscences of the war were not far. Still, any time I experienced the abrupt and irrational eruption of violence, it came as a surprise: as a suddenly opening abyss. This is what happened one Saturday afternoon when I was obliviously chatting with my friends. All of a sudden the telephone rang.

On that 11th of June 2011 I was in the office of OFP. OFP is a rather atypical local NGO. Its founders – contrary to other organizations with similar mandates – had always been in close personal connection with the people of the squats. Some years back they even used to live with the squatters. It was understandable that the chairman of POCA from Grafton chose to call them in an emergency. "His people had been arrested" – he shouted on the phone – "they were held in custody in the Kissi police station".

Kissi being in the Eastern outskirts, and traffic being heavy on Saturdays, we took a bike to rush to the place. Our little emergency group was made of three. Besides OFP's leader and me, there was, Jab, another friend, the director of COJA (Coalition for Justice and Accountability). COJA was another small local NGO, supported by Open Society Foundation, originally endowed with the mission to popularise the Special Court, but reaching out to other justice related issues now, as Special Court was folding up.

At the police station we found about 15 people locked up in a cell, men and women together; there were at least three young boys with them. Most of the men were disabled, deprived of their crutches, squatting on the ground. Some of them were visibly wounded. A man had an open wound on the head, it was still bleeding. He was sobbing. Our arrival created a lively commotion in the dusty courtyard of the police. After a lot of shouting, begging and arguing, we finally got permission from the officer in charge to go and talk to the arrested.

This is what they explained: Grafton (where the disabled home is located) is adjacent to Kossotown, the next settlement. The youths of the two towns are often in fight, sometimes for minor issues, but more often for the land, which is a major cause for dispute between communities. This time, disagreement on land rights sparked violence again. Youths from the two towns decided respectively, at the same moment, to go and brush an area in the no man's land between the two settlements. Whoever brushes a

land claims the right to occupy and cultivate it. What was on stake was the question where the piece of land was to belong to.

When the two groups met, a fierce battle erupted. "Disabled people were caught in the middle" – said the arrested. "They fought on the side of Grafton" – said the police. The police, when it was called in – it seems - also took side, supporting Kossotown against Grafton. This was in a way logical, as the police station from where they came was located also in Kossotwon. A pursuit started, Kossotown youths pushing back the Grafton youths to their village. On their way, the police were chasing and beating whoever they found. Because disabled people were understandably slower to withdraw, they were the ones getting injured – and also arrested. They were pursued even into the polio community, and some of the people just being outside of their homes - like one of my friends, a project officer in an NGO I knew – were taken haphazardly with the ones fleeing.

Considering that the police case was about physical fight between two communities, it was astounding that only people from Grafton, and even there, exclusively those living in the disabled community were amongst the arrested. When we arrived to the sight, our small rescue team tried different means of persuasion. Arguing rationally for the equal responsibility of the two communities would not help. The argument that made visibly falter the officer was the mention of the Special Court and my friend's authoritarian declarations about violation against "human rights". As by magic, unruly disabled beggars were transformed into vulnerable people deserving rights. It did not matter that only a part of them were actually disabled, the protection was extended to the whole group. But that was not enough to obtain their release. The most what we could achieve was the possibility of paying a warranty, so that people can go home for the night at least. After a long negotiation that took hours and hours, the offer was finally accepted and the freedom of the accused was temporarily bought back. They all agreed to return to the police the next morning, willingly and at their own costs. We left the place victoriously, some of the policemen even waving to us cheerfully as we crammed the group of the disabled people on a van to take them home.

The next day however commenced badly. Early morning people from Kossotown appeared in the polio community of Grafton and started to throw stones on the houses. The inhabitants came out, shouting that they would rather die but would not let their

houses destroyed. The fight flared up again. Somebody called the police but it did not arrive on time. A young journalist, Ibrahim Foday [224], living in the disabled community, decided to mediate between the fighting factions. He ran towards the bridge separating the two communities. On his way he met the Kossotown youths, who again were protected by the police. Ibrahim wanted to make peace, but he paid with his life. He was stubbed to death on the bridge. While his aggressor attacked him, he was held back by a policeman, so that he could not escape. After the murder both the aggressor and his accomplice ran away. A young soldier rushed Ibrahim to a hospital with a motorbike but the journalist died on the way.

Total confusion took over. In the disarray, at long last, two trucks of policeman arrived to the polio village. They started again to arrest people randomly; catching indiscriminately whoever they found outside of their houses. Again, nobody from Kossotown was arrested, certainly not the murderer, whose identity was however known to everybody. He managed to disappear in the chaos. Amongst the arrested there were the ones bailed out the day before, together with some more people, disabled and non-disabled alike. The group was rudely tossed on a van, crutches were confiscated, disabled men were told they would not need them anymore.

In the evening we met this whole company in the police station. This time it was out of question that the police would let them go. "This was a different story" –the policeman in charge explained us. "This was about homicide!" The fact that the victim was on the side of the suspects and got killed by an identified murderer from the adverse group, in another community, far from the polio home, did not seem to bother the officer.

From an outsider point of view, these events are hard to situate in a coherent explanatory framework. Violence, both that of the youth coming from the two settlements, and that perpetrated by the police, seems random, the unfortunate outcome of a disastrous combination of contingent factors. Why did the two groups decide to go and brush the same land on the same day? Why did they choose open confrontation? Why did the police intervene in an obviously biased manner giving support to one group against the other? How is it possible that people are arrested without a clear charge

---

[224] The local media broadly covered the events. From related articles see:
http://sierraleonenewshunters2011.blogspot.hu/2011_06_01_archive.html (accessed: 19. August 2013)

against them? How is it possible that the police participate in a murder and obviously innocent people have to pay for that crime? Why did Ibrahim Foday have to die? In this story direct violence (the fight of the youth, the violent arrests in the polio community making several casualties, the murder of Ibrahim and the participation of a police officer in the crime, the unhuman treatment of the detainees in the prison) becomes meaningful only when interpreted as the outcome of pre-existing structural violence.

Structural violence is a concept used by many students of unevenly distributed human sufferings (Farmer 1999; Scheper-Hughes 1992) but it was probably Galtung (Galtung 1996) who developed the most explicit theory about it. If there is an identifiable sender of the harm, we can speak of direct violence – he explains. If the sender remains invisible and only the results of the inflicted harm are revealed to the world, then we speak of indirect violence. For Galtung, indirect violence is never random or irrational, it is part of "a violent structure, a vocabulary and a discourse" (Ibid:198) at the heart of which there is usually unequal exchange. Economic violence (exploitation) and political violence (repression) thus usually go together.

The primary reason of the skirmish between the Grafton and Kossotown youth was land scarcity. Land is not objectively scarce, it is made so by chaotic land entitlements, which make even legal land procurements highly unsafe as a buyer can never be sure if the piece of land they paid for will not be reclaimed by a different owner than the one they bought the land from. A so far invisible land lord or the government itself might always step up, annulling previous transactions, leaving little choice for the unlucky buyer than abandoning their rights, together with any building they might have built on the land. Land is scarce in the city also because of the rural exodus fuelled by growing existential insecurity in rural areas, which remained a constant factor in the transition between the war and the peace. Land is also scarce because of its increased value as the result of recent real estate investments actively encouraged by the state. In the vicinity of the polio village in Grafton one of the biggest housing investments is going on. The town is destined to turn soon into the Eastern suburb for the rich. Just a few steps from the polio houses a giant bill-board is addressing the would-be owners: "Come and live in the first gated community of Sierra Leone!". The photo shows the same landscape with beautiful new houses on a well-organized terrain protected by high

walls. The existing houses of the poor all around are not visible in the picture, reflecting the wishful thinking of the investors or maybe standing as a prophecy.

Poor people are both extremely vulnerable to the mystification of structural violence, at the same time they are remarkably clairvoyant. The suspicion that the two communities became victims of the tensions created by the existing power structure found expression in the many rumours circulating about the eventual involvement of the political elite in the affair. It was insinuated that a big man – maybe a Minister?! – paid the youths in Grafton to go and capture the land. The same rumour circulated about the Kossotown youth, at the same time.

Structural violence - according to Galtung - does not only prevent peace, it constantly screens the very mechanisms by which violation itself operates, "by segmentation of the vision of reality available, by conditioning the mind, by fragmentation (splitting those bellow away from each other), and by marginalisation (setting those bellow apart from the rest) (Ibid:93). Framing youth unemployment, poverty, lack of hope and lack of access to land as a conflict between too equally poor communities is part of the strategy of fragmentation. Making the inhabitants of the polio community scapegoats in a murder case by putting them in prison is part of the strategy of marginalisation.

Structural violence at its work: the limits of human rights (defenders)

On the Monday morning following Ibrahim Foday's death our little rescue team was back at the police station. One of us called the Inspector General, the supreme chief of the police. He was very helpful and reassuring on the phone, but he emphasized that the official procedure had to be followed. We had to be patient. That was an advice difficult to follow as the meaning of the events totally escaped us. We felt impotent and frustrated to watch the arrested people moaning in their cell. We were not allowed to talk to them anymore. Some of them were virtually stripped naked, some were crying, I wondered if out of anger or pain. In the middle of the day a delegation arrived from the Police Headquarters to discuss the case with their colleagues. The Chairman of the Grafton Polio Community who was waiting with us outside of the building tried to assume his official role, persuading the policemen that as a local authority, he should be

involved in the discussions. Nobody paid attention to him. Our protégés were now officially treated as ordinary criminals.

On Thursday, unexpectedly they were transferred from the Kissi police station to the Criminal Investigation Department Headquarters. This was a totally new situation. Now we did not only speak about temporary detention; our people were in a real prison! And this was bound to last. The following week the Grafton Chairman, together with a couple of his men, as well as my NGO activist friends were busy planning different strategies to liberate the prisoners. I visited with them some of the biggest Human Rights NGOs, an organization of Human Rights lawyers, an INGO for child protection. Most of the people we talked to were absolutely scandalized. They promised unconditional help. Then nothing happened. It was as if this group of disabled and non-disabled people had fallen into a black hole from where messages could not reach project society. Even the umbrella organisation's standpoint was ambiguous. Its leaders were as outraged as anybody else, but when it came to practical help, they got relatively little involved. Visibly, they were too busy to organize an awareness raising event for the enactment of the "Disability Bill" which happened only a few weeks before. The event was supposed to be an open forum thanking the government for its efforts to protect rights of people with disability and speaking about the "Grafton case" did not quite fit in the planned program. Similarly, the child protection organization did not have time as they were preparing the celebrations on the occasion of the Day of the African Child. The fact that there were three minors amongst the prisoners, detained against the law, did not move them. The human right lawyers just never turned up without further explanation.

Then one day I lost patience and decided to use my connections. A friend of mine took an appointment for me with a high ranking police officer at the Main Police Headquarters. I was received kindly by a policeman who led me into a room where about 15 men all clad in black were already waiting for me. It was an intimidating experience meeting them, although they were extremely polite. The introduced themselves one by one. One of them said he was from the Interpol. They were apparently excited to talk to me. But when I told them I came to protest against the brutality of the police and what seemed to me the unlawful detention of people, they sighed – I had the feeling – with relief. They had possibly thought that I wanted to talk

about the murder and the involvement of a police officer in it. When they understood that it was all about a "human rights issue", they were not interested any more. They advised me to go and talk to another colleague of theirs. I was accompanied to see the man in the next office. As I sat down, a second man joined us, he was a Sierra Leonean but he said he came from the UN and was dealing with Human Rights. I thought finally I was at the right place. I started to tell him my story but quickly I was interrupted: "Why disabled people always have to get into riots?" – "Because it all happened at their place" – I responded. This answer did not satisfy him. „They can be very mischievous sometimes" – said he, jovially smiling and shaking his head. That was the summary of his opinion. The audience was over. All this time, he was holding a book: the new edition of the Human Rights country report by Amnesty International. He explained that he had just come from the reception where the report was launched.

The days passed and nothing seemed to change. Then we heard that a new convict was brought to the prison. That could not be anybody else – we thought - that the actual murderer – hoping that it would mean the release of the polio-group. It was a surprise when we discovered that the new prisoner was nobody else than the young soldier – an elegant and very calm man – who had been carrying the injured journalist to the hospital on his motorbike. He said he did not know why he was arrested.

The legal time for detention without trial was about to expire but there was still no sign that the Grafton group would be released. Despite the mushrooming of Human Rights organizations in the country, none of them was interested to conduct an investigation and to defend the disabled beggars. Manifestly, some bigger weapons had to be deployed. Luckily, just at this moment the Special Rapporteur on the Situation of Human Rights Defenders – a function established back in 2004 by the African Commission on Human and Peoples' Rights - came to visit Sierra Leone. This gave my friends a chance to infiltrate into the public audition to present the case. One of OFP's leaders and the chairman of the Grafton polio community prepared a detailed report but finally they had only a few minutes to talk. Their account was drowned in a sea of complaints from different organizations, some representing workers, some women, some youth, some in fact, disabled people, all claiming that their constituency were discriminated more than the others. The Rapporteur smiled encouragingly and scrupulously noted down everything. She did not seem to be biased by the fact that the

Grafton affair was one that was happening simultaneously with the conference and could be used as a live case-study. The Chairman did not give up though; he waited for her after the audition. She did not have a lot of time for him; she was expected soon for another meeting. But her assistant gave us a visit card: "This is a very interesting case; please write us if there is any development". Before disappearing on the stairs the Rapporteur turned back smiling, graciously wishing us "Good Luck!"

The protection of Human Rights is not just one element of the good governance prescribed for the Sierra Leonean government by the international community, it is the core element of the liberal peace – a master frame in which the ideals of a desirable form of governing is expressed. By presenting the ideal as an achieved objective, by using a discourse in sharp contrast with the reality, by selectively choosing rights worth being defended, by transforming Human Rights from a weapon into a powerless dummy put on scene for the sake of trouble-free celebration, by making Human Rights nothing more than a framing device to veil exploitation and repression, project society is not only culprit in the structural violence perpetrated by the state, but it becomes directly responsible for it. Disability itself becomes part of this framing device when it is used as an explanatory frame for oppression, silencing what is the other side of the coin: economic exploitation. This is what Galtung calls "segmentation of the vision of reality". (Galtung 1996:96).

Yet, mainstream disability discourses cannot be accused of denying the effect of economic factors on disability. In fact, the connection between disability and poverty is emphasized everywhere. Making the connection too tight however leads easily to an ellipsis making it unnecessary asking questions about the mechanism producing poverty - or about the consequences of poverty - on disabled people's life.
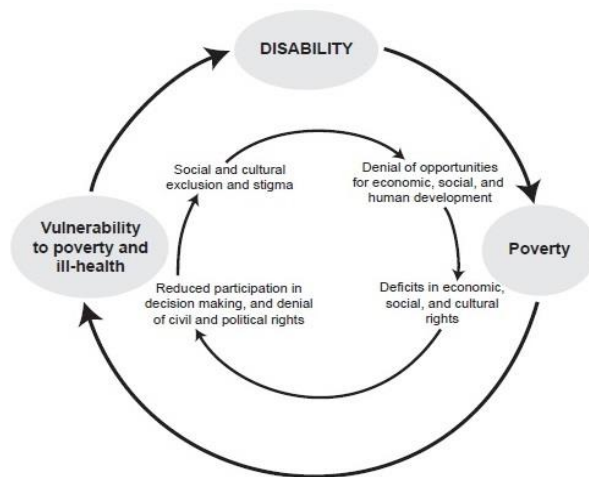
36. Figure Cycle of poverty and disability"[225]

The circular relationship between poverty and disability as presented in the chart above creates an illusion of a static situation in which disability and poverty mutually maintain each other without any external factor interfering with the system. Neither of them deserves further investigation, as they mutually explain each other: "Poverty and disability reinforce each other, contributing to increased vulnerability and exclusion" (Ovadiya and Zampaglione 2009:6)

The result of this representation is the emerging image of an artificially "localized" Sierra Leonean society closed on itself. What really causes poverty - the expropriation of natural resources by multinationals with no return to "local communities", the more or less forced displacement of whole populations because of investors' needs, the collapse of traditional agriculture accelerated by artificially blown up food importation, the weakness of local industries because of the vulnerability of deregulated local markets, endemic unemployment and the lack of job creating policy, to mention only a few factors - is totally missing from the picture. In this way the structural violence of the state (and that of the more complex global power structure

---

[225] UK Department for International Development (DFID), London, UK, February 2000, cited by Ovadiya and Zampaglione 2009:6

replacing it) does not have to be invited for a trial. The economic and political practices responsible for this very real violence are seldom accused. Instead, the two main suspects, "discrimination" and "traditional beliefs", point jointly toward the incriminated "local culture". Disability is used in this way to "naturalize" poverty and poverty is used to explain disability, the dynamic of the circle being attributed to pathogenic local culture.

It is this representation that makes awareness raising, sensitization and lobbying for disability rights the shortest way to "repair" harms, making it irrelevant to control foreign capital, to impose social obligations on new investments, to impose control on land transaction, to limit deregulation of trade conditions, to build functioning institutions for the protection of the weak, just to mention only a few other theoretical options. Eradication of poverty becomes in this framework a simple question of good will and Enlightenment. No wonder that the highest defender of Human Rights in Africa could not offer more than wishing good luck to the people whose rights are openly violated without any consequences, because they are poor.

Structural violence at it work: the production of disabled bodies

That Sunday when the journalist was killed and people got arrested in the polio-community for the second time, we found a woman in the same cell with the arrested men. Esther who got to prison because she was trying to protect her son, was the young wife of a severely disabled man with whom she had two children. She was not disabled herself. That day she was sitting on her veranda when she saw his teenage son running towards her. He was pursued by a policeman. Before the boy could reach the house he was caught up by his persecutor, who started to mercilessly beat him. Esther hurled herself between her son and the man. The policemen, furious, turned against her; first kicked her with his boot on her leg, then when she fell on the ground, he stepped heavily on the same injured leg. She suffered a double fracture, but at this moment she did not know it yet. She was tossed on the van with the others: a dozen of disabled men and three young boys, including her own son.

When it became clear that there wasn't any chance to bail out the detainees a second time, we were trying to plead at least for her and the boys who were supposed to take their final exam the next day in school. Missing their exam meant for them losing

their whole year of study. As for Esther, she visibly needed medical help. She was not complaining but her leg was swelling and she was unable to stand up. She was crawling on the ground like the rest of the men deprived of their crutches. Her detention seemed even less justified than that of the rest of the group: it seemed totally excluded that she could have to do anything with the homicide. But the officer in charge was adamant: "A murder is a murder and now all the detainees were suspects"- he told us, without explaining what exactly they were suspected of. At any case, we did not have to worry - he assured us: "The lady got treated". Later I found out that this meant: she was given a few painkillers.

By next morning Esther did not get better. She had fever and she was lying on the ground motionless. Besides her, there was also Bokari, whose head was still bleeding. According to his testimony it was broken by a policeman who used his handcuffs to beat him while he was trying to "run away" during the commotion when the police raided the group doing the brushing. Running away was certainly an option for him, as both of his legs were atrophied with polio. Since the previous evening he did not stop crying and moaning. It was while I was trying to persuade the officer to release at least the two wounded, that the delegation from the Police Headquarters was announced. Was it because I explained the policemen that now that the Disability Bill was enacted he can be taken responsible before the law, or because he was afraid that his superiors would not like to meet a white woman arguing with him over two injured persons under his authority, he suddenly changed his mind and allowed me to take away Bokari and Esther before the delegation arrived.

I thought it was a victory, but with the liberation of the two casualties, another desperate adventure started. Now we had to find a hospital where they could be treated. We started at a nearby private hospital but the nurse in the entrance did not even let us explain the situation; she was busy reading out the price list. The prices were out of reach for us. We continued to the local public hospital. Here Bokari's head was treated and Esther's foot was bandaged but there was no doctor to fix it. There was no bandage either, to buy it I had to leave the hospital and walk a long way to the next pharmacy. That was not a special treatment reserved to Esther because of my presence. Drugs and other medical material are not provided by the hospitals. They have to be bought in the pharmacy of the hospital – if they are on stock. If not they have to be brought in from

outside. The Rokupa public hospital is certainly not one of the most well equipped hospitals in Sierra Leone, but it still surprised me that even a fracture surpassed their competence. Nonetheless, I took their advice: I sent Bokari home and took a taxi with Esther to take her to Connaught, the main public hospital of Freetown. In the heavy traffic it took us about two hours to get there. This hospital has an X-ray machine. That was how we were informed about the double fracture. After the X-ray we had to wait for a doctor. A name was mentioned, that of a man that I accidentally knew: he was a renowned (and quite expensive) orthopaedist surgeon, having a private consultation in town. The nurses promised us he would not be long to come along. But he did not. Not that day, nor the next three days that we were waiting for him in the corridor. In the beginning I made Esther come and go between Grafton and Freetown, but finally she had enough and asked some friends to accommodate her in Ecowas, one of the three squats of the city centre. Every morning we would take a taxi to the hospital, where we waited in vain until the afternoon. Esther did not seem to lose patience. But I did.

The third day I remembered that once I had met a doctor on the beach who told me he was working for Emergency, the hospital run by the Italians. I called him. He explained me that Esther did not meet the criteria of the admission but if I mention his name at the gate she would be taken. Emergency is another hour from the city centre by car. We took a taxi again. The doctor who received us almost shouted at me: "How can somebody possibly be so careless?" "What made you wait so long?" The bones started to join, if it had been for one or two days more, it would have been too late, Esther would have turned disabled herself. I omitted explaining him the circumstances, happy that my patient was in good hands. She was finally operated on and her operation was successful. In this way Sierra Leone avoided having one more disabled beggar out in the streets.

Structural violence often strikes in the guise of health problems. Two experts of structural violence, Farmer (1996) -with regards to Haiti - and Nancy Scheper-Hughes (1992) - with regards to Brazil - demonstrate how economic inequalities and an oppressive power structure disguised as a benevolent state create health inequality, killing systematically the poor. This is why the way in which people fall sick, get treated, rationalize their own sickness or die belong not only to the domain of medicine but also

to that of politics. "Health is today, and throughout the Third World, the political symbol that is most subject to manipulation"- warns Scheper-Hughes (1992:202).

Health indicators all over the world make social injustices plain. Information on public health systems provide schemes explaining how inequalities are both maintained and reproduced. Figures speak about structural violence, but sometimes the story of one person is more telling than statistics.

Like Farmer and Scheper-Hughes, during my field work in Sierra Leone I also often came across with structural violence wrapped in medical histories. I have witnessed eruptions of banal illness leading to unnecessary deaths and an incredible amount of suffering, which people invariably accepted as taken for granted, with no revolt. All these cases made me sad, but nothing shocked me more than the death of Kombah; maybe because, besides being absurd, it seemed to me highly symbolic.

Kombah was a friend. He lived in one of the polio squats in downtown Freetown. Unlike most of the other members, he was not a polio victim but a war-wounded. He was an ex-combatant, as he admitted himself, although he never cared to specify where and on whose side he had fought. As he was not a professional soldier, he could only be part of the rebel forces or he might have belonged to one of the civil militia groups. In any case he was probably one of the many youths forcefully mobilized as unwilling volunteers in a war whose logic escaped them. He used to dwell on the fact that he had got wounded in the second phase of the war[226]. He liked to explain: "*there is phase one, phase two, mine yon bi insaj phase two*"[227] - as if this chronology in which he could position himself with some degree of exactitude, could have helped him to find a sense in the obvious nonsense of his story: having been involved in the war, having got wounded and having become finally a "die-foot", a disabled beggar in a polio squat.

He came from Kono. Once he got discharged from hospital he found a place in "Pademba Road"[228] where many of his fellow countrymen were settled. He was saved paradoxically because Sierra Leone was in war. "White people" took care of him and rushed him to hospital. During those times medical expertise, infrastructure and

---

[226] I can just speculate: maybe this fact makes the theory of the Civil Defence Force more plausible. Young people usually do not boast with their past membership in the rebel forces (at least to strangers), but hints to past ties with the Kamajors still command respect.

[227] Translation: "(In the war) there was phase one and phase two. Me, I got wounded in phase two."

[228] "Pademba Road" is one of the three polio-squats in the city centre, the disabled people's organisation in charge of managing the place is called "PwD"

organisation allowing quick hospitalisation of emergency cases still existed. After the war, most of these facilities ceased to exist for ordinary Sierra Leoneans. Kombah went through several operations after which he had to learn again to speak. He recovered but he lost the use of his legs forever. Despite his past, he was a smiling, jovial boy, popular in the squat, and beyond. He was voted in the executive. Being an ex-combatant, the role of the disciplinary officer particularly suited him. He was coping with his new life in the squat remarkably well. His shack, made of zinc, set up at the entrance of the main building, was always well arranged and clean, almost cosy: he possessed a bed, a television and even an armchair. He decorated the walls with clippings from colourful magazines.

No one imagined that he was condemned to premature death. He died from a bad tooth. He complained of pain and on the advice of a friend he went to see a self-made dentist who proposed to pull out the decayed tooth. After the intervention he developed high fever. He did not want to go to the hospital and this was not possible anyhow as he had no money to pay for his admittance. But his state worsened. Finally he was so much in pain that his companions organised a collection for him and took him to the hospital against his wish. Obviously it was too late. He died in the hospital the same day, getting almost no attention from the staff. He did not die of the war; he died of the peace - in which people like him or Esther became a negligible factor. Nobody can be blamed for Kombah's death, just like nobody would have been responsible for Esther's disability had she not received medical care in the last minute. She was saved out of pure luck and coincidence. Just like Kombah died out of lack of luck. "Enabling conditions of structures are both "sinful" and ostensibly "nobody's fault." (Farmer 1969 : 307)

Interior colony

Cultural violence is part of structural violence: its role is to justify direct of structural violence. "Cultural power moves actors by persuading them what is right or wrong" (Galtung 1996:2), by inculcating ideas, values and world views of those on power into those who suffer from it.

The idea about the backwardness of the people of Sierra Leone belongs not only to members of the international community alienated from the culture of their host society, it is a stereotype shared by those very Sierra Leoneans. Early in my fieldwork I

accompanied a project officer working in an INGO to his "awareness raising tour" in a nearby neighbourhood. He is a middle aged polio-affected Sierra Leonean. He lives in one of the outskirts-based polio homes. That morning he gathered elders, women and youth (the usual public of such events) in a community centre to teach them about "right ideas" concerning disability. He started with a long enumeration of "traditional beliefs", deconstructing and ridiculing these one by one. He also mentioned different forms of discrimination, apparently resulting from those beliefs. He concluded by lamenting over Sierra Leoneans' backward state of mind, affirming that in most other African countries – as opposed to his country - and certainly in all Europe - disabled people received proper treatment, they were respected and people did not rely on superstitions but on scientific concepts. The public did not seem to be vexed, they were nodding affirmatively.

My friend was visibly happy to have a European at hand and finished by giving me the floor so that I can add to what was said. At that time I sincerely believed that offering a slight correction to the picture was not only the right thing to do but would also make the audience feel better. I told them that as much as I knew people with disability are often discriminated in subtler ways even in Europe and that I believed that Sierra Leoneans have important assets in dealing with disability on which they can draw to make society a better place for all. I met no enthusiasm. Unwittingly, I deeply embarrassed my friend and he was obliged to politely but firmly put me to my place, pointing out that I still had to learn a lot so that I can understand how much Sierra Leoneans were far from being civilized as measured by all international standards. I would have thought that telling overtly "community people" that they were brainless and wicked was not the best way of gaining their support, but I was obviously mistaken. It was my intervention that was judged out of place.

All hegemonic power produces "veridical discourses" (Rose 1999) demanding exclusivity and aspiring to be taken for granted. But the power of coloniality lies in the fact that its "regimes of truth" are deeply interiorized by the colonized. Consequently, the latter is obliged to share the contempt of which he is the subject. Fanon would not have been surprised at the community centre. "Every colonized people- he writes - in other words, every people in whose soul an inferiority complex has been created by the death and burial of its local cultural originality – finds itself face to face with the

language of the civilizing nation:" (Fanon 1967:9) In the postcolony the civilising nation is not the colonial empire any more, it is called the "international community" whose language becomes the only acceptable language. This is why my intervention was not well received, neither by the project officer nor by the public. I obviously talked out of the frame.

The taken for granted asymmetrical relation at the roots of the coloniality of power - according to its most renown theoretician - is what fuels racism. (Quijano 2000) The asymmetry between what is called "international community" and the local community is not the same as the racism of the colony. It is the result of a mixed hierarchy in which the skin colour counts less than the cultural distance from "the global metropol" – as Connel calls the core powers in the Global North and in some corners of the Global South (Connell 2011), but the difference is still sensed, rationalized and acted upon in racist terms. This asymmetry is also reflected in the strange ranked relations between expatriates and national workers of international NGOs.

Expatriates these days are not all white; not infrequently they are black Africans, coming from other African countries. Nevertheless, their status is always closer to their European colleagues than to that of the Sierra Leonean staff. The simplest and most immediate expression of the difference between the two categories is found in the salaries people from the two groups get for more or less the same work. There is nothing surprising in it, this is how it is all over the world where international NGOs intervene for the sake of local populations, and there are practical reasons for that, as I was explained: expatriates are harder to find than locals and if locals would be paid at the same level as expatriates, all the local doctors would rather drive cars for NGOs. That would have disastrous effects on the local economy. I quite agree. Nevertheless, the fact remains that the difference in salary becomes a trap: it comes to symbolise a hierarchy, which it contributes to produce.

The salary difference has a meaning for the identity. "And so it is not I who make a meaning for myself, but it is the meaning that was already there, pre-existing, waiting for me" – says Fanon (Fanon 1967:102). He makes it very clear that the psychological, existential, ontological inferiority is nothing but a reflection of an economically unequal social structure, which inevitably engenders a racist type of society: „If there is inferiority complex, it is the outcome of a double process: -primarily, economic; -

subsequently, the internalization – or better, the epidermalization - of this inferiority"
(Ibid)

In project society ranking of people is reflected in many other ways. It is expressed in words, attitudes and in differential treatments. It is never admitted, still everything points to it: from the differences in salaries to the security regulations: in the heydays of project society expatriates of most NGOs and international organisations were not allowed to travel with public transport, walk alone in the street after sun set (in some areas even during the day) because all these things were esteemed too dangerous, while nationals did not even have a proper insurance in case of accident. The sickness of a senior expatriate's dog demanded more attention than the sickness of a driver's little daughter.

This is how things are. The personification of humans – as Ingstad explained (1995).- is a question of scale, attached to the social value, itself attached to the social status. This is proper neither to Africa, nor to project society. "In the United States, if a middle-class thirteen year old girl is kidnapped, raped and killed, it is considered an agonizing national crisis that everyone with a television is expected to follow for several weeks. If a thirteen-year-old girl is turned out as a child prostitute, raped systematically for years, and ultimately killed, all this is considered unremarkable – really just the sort of thing one can expect to end up happening to someone like that" (Graeber 2011:112)

The same is true for disabled beggars. It is not necessarily disability that degrades their social value; it is their social status which defines how their disability is seen by others and how it is experienced by themselves. Furthermore, it is because disability is associated with the underclass that practically anybody with a disability –unless he/she is particularly well dressed or drives a car – might turn to be a disabled beggar in the eye of the other. The particularity of that situation is that race, economic status and disability get entangled in an intricate mix, justifying and calling for discrimination, violence and symbolic annihilation, practiced not necessarily by those who are at the top – white, upper middle class professionals – but by those who have so well interiorized the global power hierarchy that they do not even recognise that they are also on the losers' side of it. Racism of lower middle class Aficans towards poor Africans is one of the most ruthless form of racism.

Because polio-disabled beggars are both disabled and poor, they are obliged to carry a double stigma. Disability renders different but does not necessarily mitigates the person's value. There are ways to inverse the effect of stigmatisation (by education, by wealth or by position). Poverty leaves much less margin to challenge and change the attributed social valance. Poverty combined with disability and with the social position of the beggar opens indeed a huge door for contempt, prejudice and discrimination. People guilty of this kind of violence do not necessarily realise it, as the assumed inferiority of the other is such that it legitimises any negative opinion – and treatment. So when the UN human right officer calls the disabled "troublesome" instead of being obfuscated by their condemnable detention, there is little chance that he is aware of the incongruity between his professional status and his opinions. Disabled people i.e. polio-disabled people, more exactly, polio-disabled people who, with great probability, belong to the category of beggars - are "troublesome". This is common knowledge which does not need to be justified.

The common sense of the street is very far from the common sense of project society. While in the grey literature of NGO papers and policy documents disabled people are systematically presented as innocent and powerless victims of a wicked and abusive society, according to widespread popular stereotypes, people with disability are not only active, but even dangerously so. Not all disabled are believed to be troublesome though, only disabled beggars, and amongst them mostly the inhabitants of the polio homes, begging together in groups, hanging on their crutches or sitting around in their wheelchairs at busy intersections. Strange as it seems, people do not simply feel pity for them or are annoyed by their presence, they feel a deep apprehension. This fear of the maimed body might be read psychoanalytically, but more prosaically it is connected to the recognized propensity of the disabled youth to get agitated quickly. One might find an interesting parallel between this fear and the one inspired by the amputees (Csordas 1994) found in the refugee camps near the Thai-Cambodian border. This is how he relates his discovery with undisguised astonishment: "Amputees in Site II. elicited not a generalised anxiety about war, but quite specific anxiety about personal safety: people were afraid of them!" The explanation that he found seems to hold for the disabled beggars of Freetown. Csordas connects the amputees' violent reputation to the symbolic vulnerability of their "face", face used here in the sense of Goffman, as the positive self-

image which one is constantly obliged to try to present towards the outside word in search of social recognition (Goffman 1956)

"For and amputee, "face" was often one of the few personal resources left to protect" (Csordas 1994:84) "It was as though nothing they could do would really diminish them further. This gave them a kind of carelessness, or lack of concern about the consequences of their actions" (Idbid:87). Similarly, the disabled beggars of Freetown appear to be afraid of nothing and are ready to fight in response to a misplaced word or gesture without hesitation. Humiliation is at the same time the worst and most common thing that can happen to them and consequently they are always vigilant, suspecting it might come from any side any time.

Although the image of the dangerously violent beggar is not less distorted than that of the impotent disabled victim, at least it does not deprive its subject of personhood and agency. In this way it is paradoxically closer to some form of recognition. Aware of the widespread prejudice, I was not really surprised by the indelicate remark of the UN Human Rights officer. I was all the more shocked when another public personality, a high ranked police officer openly likened them to animals.

This happened when Sylvanus, the polio-chairman of Grafton took me to the Criminal Investigation Department where he discovered: he got an ex-school mate. He wanted me to plead for the detainees and hoped that his personal connection will help us open the locks of the cell, which have been closed for such a long time. Our mission was not that successful.

When we entered the office, we found the officer sitting barefoot and half naked; he did not seem to be bothered the least by our visit. Next to him the television was yelling to a point we barely heard our own voice. He leaned back in his armchair, with his two legs on the table, pointing his soles to our faces. He did not change his position when he saw us enter. He did not seem to be moved by the Chairman's complaint, either. "These disabled can be really stubborn"[229] – he concluded, like the Human Rights officer before him. But he did not stop there. He paused, then still grinning, he added: "dis human rightsden don pasmak. Cause, this black colour (he pinched his own arm), if you no treat them as animals den no go yeri". (Approximate Translation: *There is too much*

---

[229] "Stubborn" is the translation of the Krio expression " tranga yes", literally "tough-eared", the meaning of which is close to "troublesome", another qualifier also often used for people with disability.

noise about human rights these days. You know, if you do not treat Africans like animals, they will not understand). The fact that he himself was an African counted as no contradiction, rather it was supposed to increase the authenticity of his statement.

It is very much possible that all this was provocation: my presence might have encouraged him to go beyond his limits in his cynicism. But whatever his motives were, there was a pinch of sincerity in his voice. He actually must have believed that: a, those people in the cell did not worth anything; b, black people are naturally inferior to white people, c, he himself was closer to the white superior than to the black inferior type of man. But his remark also reflected the fact that blackness is not an objective category. It is a construct in which a good number of factors play a role, apart from the skin colour - which, at the end, might lose all its significance: "Blackmen" becomes simply the synonym of the "non-civilised", while "white" stands for "civilisation". That is why, in his huge armchair, watching his oversize television, he did not have to be afraid to be identified with "those blackmen" imprisoned in the cave of the police building. .

So, when the policeman compares black people to animals, he is not advancing an anti-disabled theory, or a racist theory; in fact, implicitly he is developing a class theory. It is poor black people he is talking about – the type of the disabled beggars. This is the type of people that not only police officers, but also service providers, financial institutions, and even Human Right defenders are suspicious of. The kind of discrimination affecting them is not produced within the non-caring family or in the superstitious community, but rather in the functioning institutions of the democratic State, from the police to the hospital. From there it escapes and contaminates even project society which tries hard to distance itself from the same racial hierarchy it generates.

The colony without

While street walkers are torn between dismay and compassion in the face of disabled beggars, while police officers think it should be allowed to brutalize them, within the walls of the international organisations there is quite a different discourse about the inherent dignity of the "person with disability", or as it is usually simply put: of the "PwD". This is the official discourse. But it is quite difficult to put it in practice. Because, out in the street there are no PwDs walking. There are however quite a few

disabled beggars. It is them NGO workers would meet, and their – not always good – impressions inevitably colour their attitudes in real life situations.

Foreign senior expatriate staff has little direct contact with the squats, while their junior staff fill their desks with reports written on "DPOs". It does not matter that the two are the same. Words shape perception. In the exercise the reality of the streets grows dim. This is how it could happen that the singular emergence of the polio homes did not steer more interest in the international community, their existence is barely reflected in reports, let alone in more substantial studies. The result is that nobody talks about disabled beggars, but everybody inevitably thinks of them. The World Bank Report (Ovadiya and Zampaglione 2009:13) on disability in Sierra Leone has the merit of at least mentioning the begging communities, however superficially. Out of its 56 pages it consecrates the following passage to the question:

"Begging by people with disabilities is visible, especially in Freetown. At traffic lights, at the helipad, in markets, and in other public places it is very common to see large disabled groups, helped by young children, begging. Their number has grown significantly since the end of the conflict, or at least they are more visible than before in what seems to be a growing industry. In fact, many of them are part of well-organized networks of beggars. Moreover, anecdotal evidence shows that virtually all disabled beggars are accompanied by a non-disabled person"

The authors of the study at least did pay attention to what they saw from their cars. But they did not think it necessary to learn more about this phenomenon than what "anecdotal evidence" could teach them. Despite the conspicuous nature of the disabled homes and pavement dwellers, NGOs and government policies have trouble in addressing the specific problems of these communities. Today's interventions (as opposed to interventions in the immediate aftermath of the war) usually target disabled individuals rather than communities, and if finally (and rarely) a disabled home is considered as a collective beneficiary, singled out organisations become in this way competitors to each other, in the same way as individual beneficiaries are competitors to each other within the homes.

A deep ambiguity characterizes the gaze of even the most good-willing NGO workers. On the one hand, the universalistic NGO language and the identity politics inherent in it do not allow considering that people with disability living in the streets of

Freetown might have different needs and problems than those living in functional families under a more or less secure roof in industrialised, individualistic societies. On the other hand, their own (often unpleasant) daily personal encounters with disabled beggars inevitably colour their ideas on their beneficiaries. NGO workers (local and international alike) struggle with the gap between the ideal and the real, exacerbated by the language of project society.

Inevitably, expatriate staff shares secretly many of the distrustful preconceptions about people with disability circulating around them. In 2011 international NGOs, interested in implementing micro credit projects, turned towards professional financial institutions specialized in selling credits to the poorest. I followed one of these projects. Its implementation was staggering. One reason was the difficult negotiation with the financial organisation chosen for the job. They demanded more and more guaranties from the NGO. At one team-meeting the project officer explained that the firm threatened to withdraw unless the originally agreed guarantee was doubled. I was flabbergasted – and convinced that the blackmail would be firmly refused. This did not happen though. The argument that "working with disabled people naturally involves more risks" was accepted. Nobody raised objections. It occurred to nobody that admitting that people with disability were not trustworthy could not be easily reconciled with the mission of fighting against prejudices and discrimination. Nobody recognised either that what everybody esteemed risky was not giving credit to "PwDs" but giving credit to beggars.

Incidentally, the double construction of the target group - resulting in a fictive fleshless category of the worthy disabled, victim of society; and its down to earth mirror picture: that of the undeserving, unreliable and potentially abusive disabled has got its correspondence in the wider development industry, in the ways the figure of the local is constructed simultaneously as vulnerable beneficiary with valuable (albeit anachronistic) cultural traditions and as a stubborn (if not primitive) obstacle to development. Recurrent (non-official) representations within the "international community" not infrequently picture Sierra Leoneans as lazy, incapable and unwilling to work (explaining poverty), unable to make rational choices, too dumb to profit of development opportunities (explaining underdevelopment), unreliable liars and opportunists (explaining corruption). Arguably, these non-admitted, non-official

representations - concerning both disabled people as a sub group and Sierra Leoneans as a whole – do at least that much, if not more harm than "traditional beliefs"; they turn everyday prejudice imperceptibly into non-intended institutional discrimination.

Maybe it was because the distance between project language and the massive presence of disabled beggars in the street was more pronounced in Freetown than in the provinces that institutional discrimination was also more palpable. It sneaked even into institutions destined to serve this very public. The fact that NGOs gradually transferred the operation of these services to government did not help. The rehabilitation services all over the country suffered from the difficulties of the transition, but it was in the rehabilitation centre of the capital that the deteriorating working conditions, the dropping salaries and the increased pressure from the public refusing to understand the changes caused the most disturbances. Although most employees were dedicated and showed great patience and humility in the face of the situation, a discriminative system always finds human agents to personify discrimination. When patients queued up and choices had to be made, the polio-disabled beggars were rarely the ones first served. It was as if a secret selection by the look of the patient had installed itself.

George was not lucky. For some reason the local technician in the rehabilitation centre did not like his look, although he was not really a disabled beggar. He was instead a national champion of table tennis, regularly beating non-disabled challengers. This did not stop him from being poor and from turning up from time to time in the squats where many of his friends lived. That was enough reason for him to be regularly treated as a beggar. As a sportsman, he used his wheelchair more roughly than others, so when he heard that there was free wheelchair distribution in the rehabilitation centre, he decided to go and find a new one. He asked me to make arrangements and accompany him, but when we got to the place we could find just a junior staff, who was visibly happy to be able to decide alone about life and death.

He could not care less that I had made an appointment. "There are no wheelchairs", that was as simple as that. I decided to threaten him, promising to call his boss. Reluctantly he admitted that he could actually serve us, but he had no time. After maybe half an hour of harsh argument, he gave in. He disappeared and after a while he returned with a brand new wheelchair. I was thinking that he brought it to adjust it to George's size, but I was mistaken. He pushed it in the waiting hall and left it next to the

wall, ordering George to get up from his old chair. Because the polio-disabled beggars were esteemed untrustworthy and were always suspected to make business with the wheelchairs instead of using them, it was usual to ask them to leave their old appliances in the centre when they received a new one. But as it turned out, George was asked not only to leave his old chair, but also to take off the wheels from it. He obeyed. But the employee was still not satisfied. He started to shout asking the boy squatting on the ground not to leave the carcass in the court but to carry it in the building instead. George is very strong, it would have been child's play for him to pick up the heavy metal construction and carry it where he was told to – only that he cannot walk. He did his best though: crawling on the ground he dragged the old chair into the building. Only then was he told that the new wheelchair was not ready yet, he had to come back the next day. He asked no question, he borrowed two crutches from a friend and walked away, patient and silent. He could have argued, or hit the man. His immense biceps promised no chance for the other. But it was more important to get the chair. He knew he probably would. Because he had already paid for it - by allowing the man to come out victorious from the duel.

It is not that international NGOs would have a racist culture or local service providers would be naturally discriminatory. That would be absurd to affirm. It is rather that the climate in which they operate is part of a global hierarchy, the nature of which retains its colonial legacies. Somewhat melodramatically - Ndlovu defines this legacy as "the oppressive character of the racially-organized, hegemonic, patriarchal and capitalist world order alongside Euro-American epistemological fundamentalism that denies the existence of knowledge from the non-Western parts of the world" (Ndlovu-Gatsheni 2013:viii). If the African author's verdict on African coloniality sounds almost as a parody of anti-globalist political pamphlets, it is because the heated style suggests a simple world made of (necessarily bad and supposedly white) culprits and (supposedly good and necessarily black) victims.

As the example of black racist police officers, white expatriates joggling with a double standard and arrogant Sierra Leonean rehabilitation technicians shows: the situation is more complicated. In a racist structure racism is not the privilege of just one group. White (or not quite white) foreign NGO workers, UN officials, and – why not? – anthropologists - do not live in houses twenty times more expensive than the locals

because they are racist; it is rather the other way round: they have occasionally racist thoughts *because* they live in houses twenty times more expensive, because they drive expensive cars, because they have local drivers, cooks, maids, gardeners, and only rarely, very rarely local bosses. And locals identify with this hierarchy *because* they live in houses twenty times cheaper, with no comfort, far from the houses of their foreign bosses, because they leave for work at 4. a. m. to get to their work place in crowded local transports, because they are the ones that work in the kitchens, in the gardens and in the back of offices and workshops, for a fraction of an expatriate's salary – when they are lucky enough to work. Racism is a saviour: it exempts – both the ones on the top and those at the bottom - from questioning further the sources of these inequalities.

The forest behind the tree

No one denies that living a life with a serious impairment aggravates ordinary hardships. Nevertheless, living with a serious impairment from one day to the next, in a temporary shelter or in the street, lacking the most elementary comfort and security, being submerged in total uncertainty about the future, could be considered as a bit more than just ordinary hardships. The population of the squats share this extra-ordinarily ordinary hardship with non-disabled people living in the same conditions struck by poverty and insecurity. Statistically, people living in squats, slums and those populating the *panbodies* of the city-centre are connected by one more characteristic: they tend to be recent migrants in the city. This fact is particularly visible in my survey conducted with 366 respondents. Not only Krios are rare amongst them (the most important ethnic group being the Temene, followed by the Mende and the Limba) suggesting a more or less remote provincial origin, an astoundingly high number of the respondents de facto could be identified as first generation migrants.
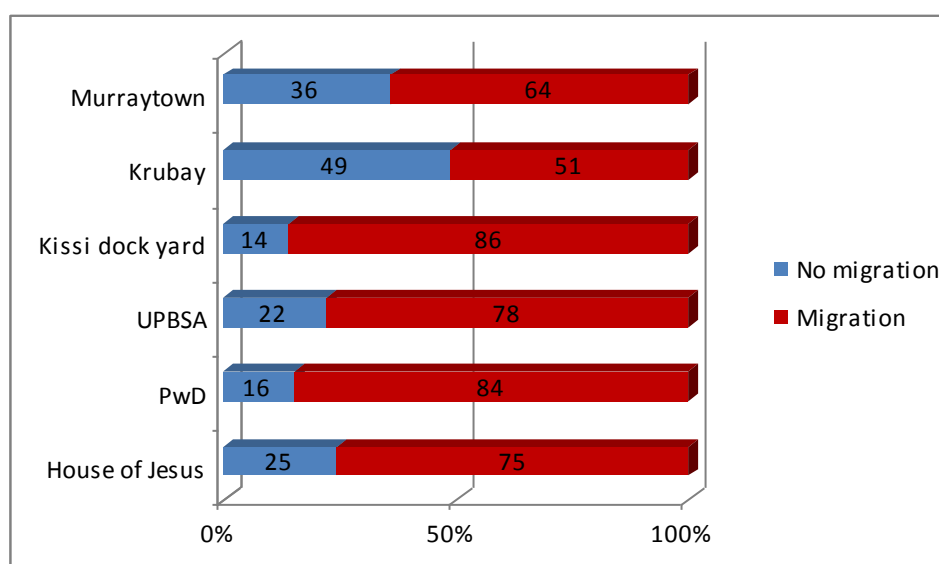
37. Figure Proportion of rural migrants within full population

It seems that not only there is a strong connection between disability and poverty; there is an equally clear connection between poverty and the situation of migration. If this could be demonstrated, then discrimination, understood as systematic disadvantage affecting people belonging to the same group, would be even less likely to be the outcome of wrong ideas or bad attitude, the relation between structural inequalities and individual hardship could be established more clearly. Pushed by curiosity, I took my sample population of 366 respondents and using the same dimensions by which I compared the group of disabled and non-disabled, I created a new comparison between migrants and non migrants. (In fact, I also took into consideration other factors, like the direct experience of the war, but contrary to migration this criterion did not produce any correlation[230]) Not only – as I expected -migrants did considerably worse in all the domains I examined, to my surprise I found that in all the dimensions the gap between

---

[230] I also probed into a third potentially disabling factor; that of being affected by the war, but interestingly, this characteristic did not function as an important variable. Probably because this was simply a bad question, the answer depending more on idiosyncratic interpretation than on objective facts, as in a country like Sierra Leone, so badly hit by the war, everybody with no exception can legitimately consider him or herself a "war victim" especially those who were obliged to migrate during its course. If, however the answers do not reflect a strong bias, the results might suggest that deep experience of the war do not diminish a person's social assets as much as it does have a negative effect on one's economic situation.
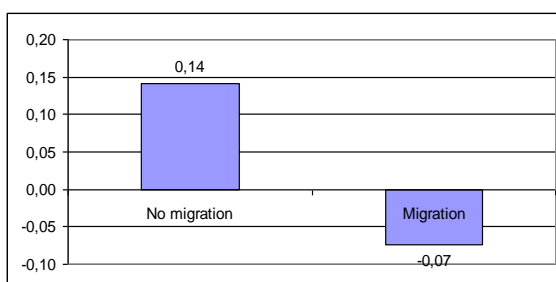
the migrants and the non-migrants was statistically bigger than the one between people with and without disability. [231]
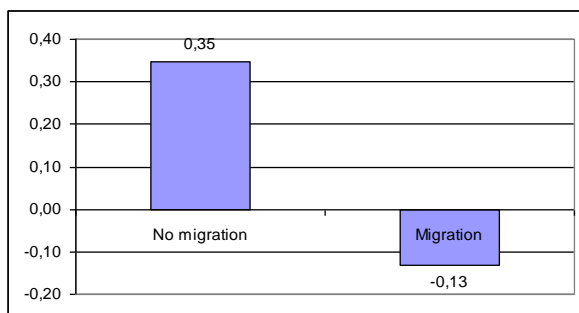
38. Figure Comparison of the Social capital dimension between migrants and non-migrants
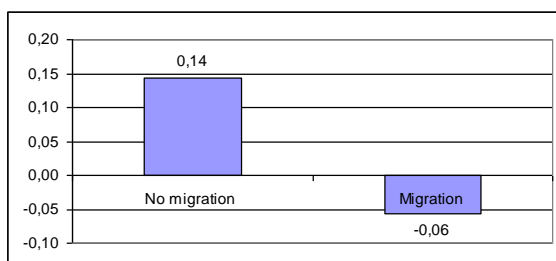
39. Figure Comparison of the Social embeddness index between migrants and non-migrants

40. Figure Comparison of the Material wellbeing index between migrants and non-migrants

Why does the fact of being a rural immigrant have such a disastrous effect on one's life chances? First of all, the majority of the rural migrants living in Freetown can be considered as forced migrants. They were forced to the capital by the war, by poverty,

---

[231] The base of the calculation is the avarage value, the difference between the two groups is relative to each other. Negative values mean a negative deviation from the avarage, postitive values mean a better score.

lack of possibilities or exploitation on behalf of rural chiefs or again on that of multinational companies. In any case they were escaping a difficult situation, but that situation did not change when they arrived to the city. Migration was thus a probable result of poverty and vulnerability, and was at the same time a further reason for poverty, because migrants, by leaving their original communities, got stripped off with the move the very minimal safety and community support that they used to enjoy back home. Not that I believe that all village communities are necessarily supportive, but relative safety I refer to was the outcome of a structural factor: that of the system of land use rights.

In the traditional system the use of land meant shelter and livelihood. Individuals did not have ownership of the land but by custom even the poorest or the most recent immigrant could be sure to have minimal access to it. Added to it the resource which the extended family represented and the obligation of the village community to provide support in moments of crises, the traditional village community effectively work as a more or less trustworthy safety net. When this safety net gets destroyed, or by military violence or by expropriation of land by companies, or because the land ceases to provide reliable livelihood, villagers make a rational choice to move to the city. The city offers more opportunity for individual copying in exchange of total insecurity.

Rural migrants who left everything behind can only be absorbed in the growing informal network of the city, assuring access to informal forms of shelter and to informal forms of livelihood. Living on the margin, in a liminal state, considered by public authorities as a useless surplus population, for whom no solution is envisioned (except for encouraging them to return to the countryside - both by verbal promises and by physical harassment), rural migrants had to reconstruct from scratch a community of survival in the city.

This does not mean however that being disabled would be a negligible factor in shaping a person's chances in life. What happens rather is that those combining the two factors – being both disabled and recent migrants - systematically have the weakest score everywhere. This is precisely the situation of the majority of the polio-disabled living in the squats. Magnifying one aspect of their identity to the detriment of another can only result in a distorted concept of rights, fitting only partially with their real needs.
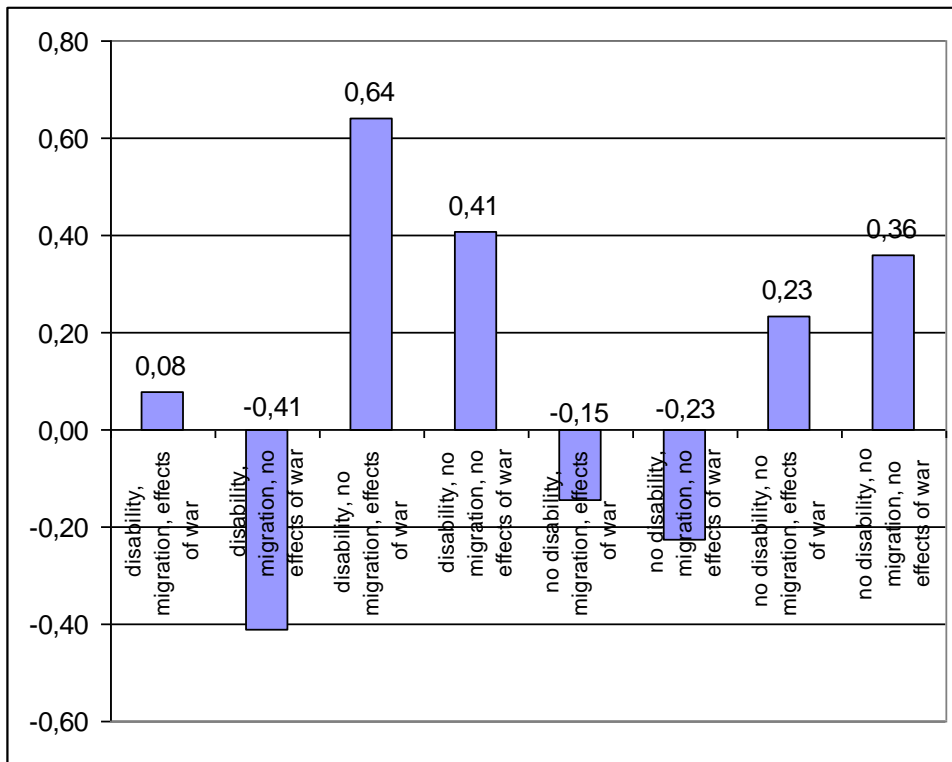
41. Figure Variation of the social capital index for different factors
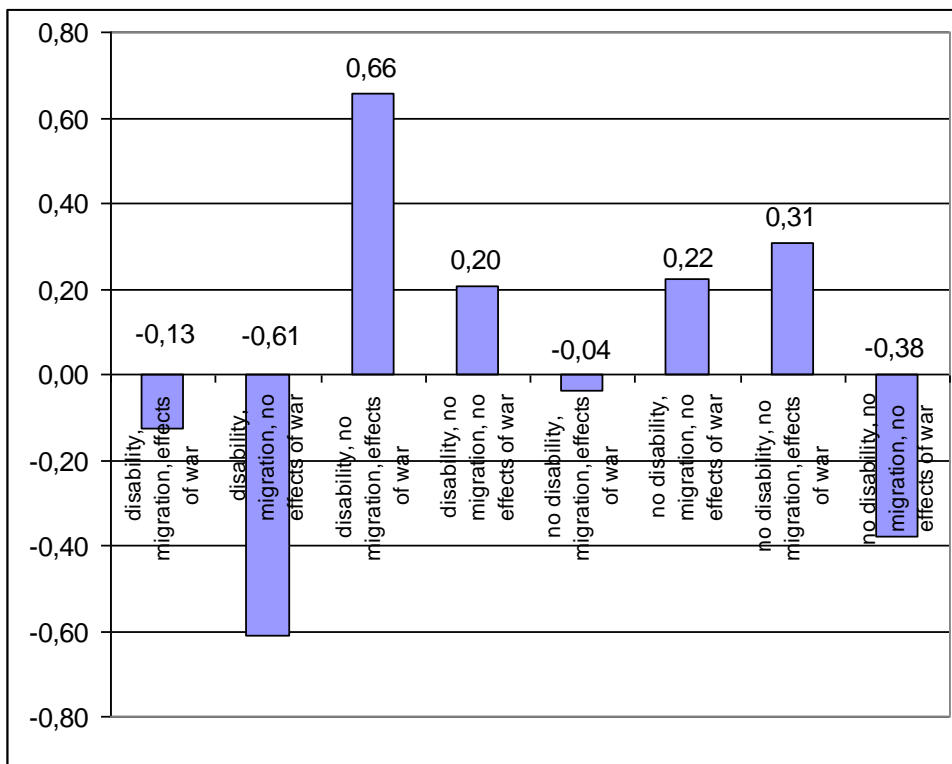
42. Figure Variation of the social embeddness index for different factors
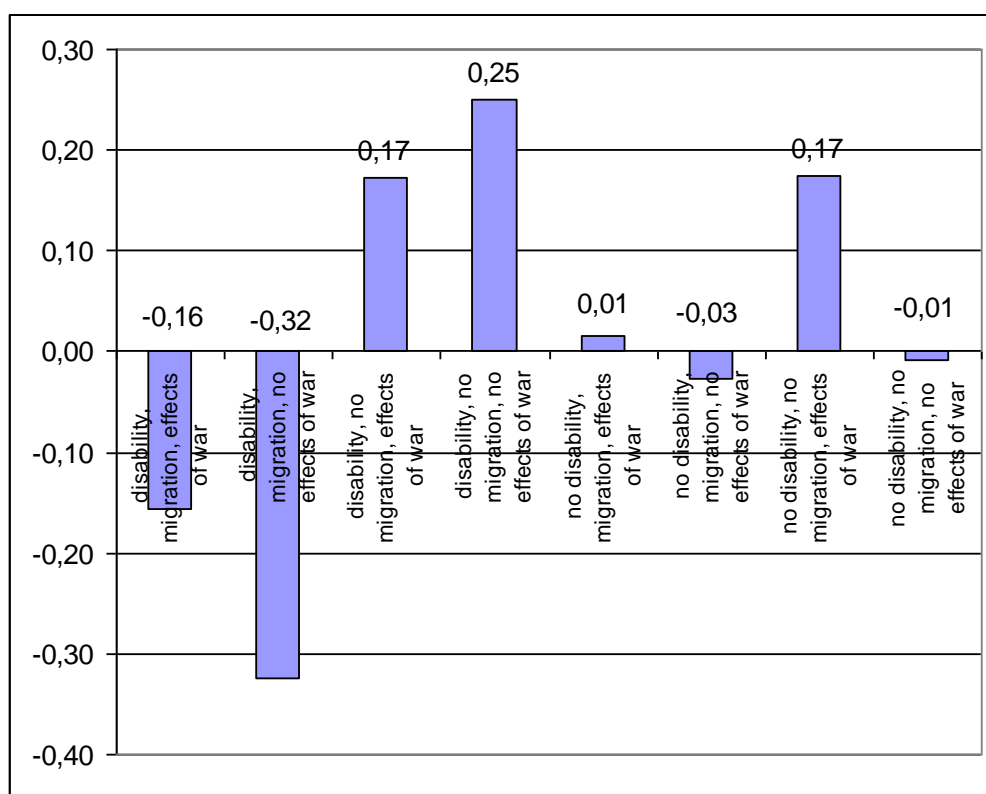
43. ₍Figure₎ Variation of the material wellbeing index for different factors

The above graphs show concordant,- albeit somewhat counterintuitive - results. Those who cope best in the three categories are the non-migrants (possessing more embedded social networks) living with a disability. This result might reflect that in the struggle for life in the informal urban context disability became an asset because it created a strong sense of shared identity and interest, which allowed developing collective strategies and drawing in important resources from project society. However, those who seem to suffer from the most social handicap are the disabled migrants: those who unite in their person the two disadvantages making them twice vulnerable.

Undoubtedly, the figures should be read with certain caution. The sample is small anyhow, (including 366 people) and polio-disabled people living in the squats are overrepresented. Far reaching consequences probably cannot be drawn from this small scale survey. One thing seems sure however: the observation of the polio-homes reveals us much about the painful process of urbanization than about the none the less bleak reality of disability. The evacuation of the question of poverty, informality and homelessness from the institutionalized disability movement risks hitting back on the very population which is supposed to form its base.

Summary

Persons with disability constitute the category of people that have probably suffered the most in modern Sierra Leone. However, they are suffering for several reasons. In contradiction with the Human Rights discourse which blames traditional thinking and invests hope in modernist development, most of these reasons are structural and are linked to the very modernisation process which is depicted by project society as the saviour. As long as structural reasons are not tackled directly by disability activists, the Human Right approach remains a fig leaf that depoliticises rather than politicises the apparently militant disability movement. Ferguson (1994) once called development the anti-politics machine, accusing it of having reduced the political to technical solutions. In this new area of development depoliticisation is constant, although it has become more subtle. Today it is not the technicization of the language that renders political mobilisation impossible, but rather the astute reference to universal human rights appropriated for the defence of not so universal interests. No Disability Act can improve considerably the destiny of actual Sierra Leoneans living with disability unless Sierra Leone is made a more just place for all its poor, overcoming coloniality, concealed racism and inequality.

7. Network politics

"At the bottom, the actors organise themselves in factions in order to win or conserve power at the various echelons of the social pyramid, and this competition is the very stuff of political life"

Bayart: The State in Africa: Politics of the Belly

Manipulating the chain of mutual benefits

One Sunday, shortly I started field work morning I got a phone call from friends belonging to various civil society groups asking me to go and meet them out of town for an important meeting. I was obviously delighted to be able to follow so closely the movements of civil society activists, although I was a bit surprised by their sudden invitation. When I arrived to the place I discovered a disorganised little group gathered under the roof of a half-finished house in a densely populated semi-urban neighbourhood, typical of the Eastern Suburbs. Besides my friends, only a few bored youths were present. The meeting seemed anything but important, and my efforts to find out what it was about remained vain. Nevertheless, my arrival apparently had an impact on the program, because soon we all set out for a long walk in the neighbourhood with no other visible objective than to make my presence known and noticed by everyone. I was presented to a number of men and women before finally we met the chief, who took me to the water point of the community: a tiny creak, accessible only by a steep and long path on which dozens of young children struggled to make their way up and down, carrying containers on their heads filled with muddy water. The chief turned to me with confidence, explaining me all the constraints the lack of clean water meant for the community, visibly expecting that I bring a solution. I was furious with my friends as I felt cheated, taken hostage of something I had nothing to do with. Then slowly my anger dissipated as I started to grasp the full meaning of the situation. The real objective of the "meeting" was indeed to bring my presence to this neighbourhood, and play it out as a trump in the tussle between local organizations. I had to acquiesce to the fact: my identity was an asset that different groups competed to link with in order to use this connection (or the appearance of it) for their purposes. This seemed after all fair

enough to me, as my objective was to use my connections for my own purposes, which was to do fieldwork. Willy-nilly I got absorbed in the chain of links where personal connections produced reciprocal benefits, and there was more to be happy about than to be annoyed with. I soon realised that manipulating this chain was the dominant form of the political, on all the levels - and especially between the levels. I gave a name to it. I called it the big "Who uses who" game.

In-group solidarity

The unnecessary death of the journalist killed while he was trying to mediate between two equally poor communities and the subsequent arrest of innocent people, including young schoolboys and seriously impaired men kept in prison for weeks without explanation in inhuman conditions was a shock for the polio-disabled community, no matter how much they were used to unexplainable disasters and everyday adversities. Also, the events unleashed an unusually strong manifestation of collective solidarity.

The injured woman, Esther, was received by a related family living in the squat of Ecowas street, in the city centre, so that she does not have to come and go between her home in Grafton and Freetown where she was to receive medical treatment. As in the Ecowas squat rooms are upstairs, on the second floor, she had to be carried up and down on the steep stairs several times a day. She had to be fed, washed, taken care of. Clothes had to be found for her. All this demanded non negligible efforts from her host family but that was just part of reasonably expectable hospitality.

Other manifestations of solidarity punctuated the weeks during which the polio group was in prison. On the first Sunday, a lot of disabled people arrived from the Grafton community, and beyond, even from Hastings and Waterloo. The visitors were not allowed to talk to the detainees, but they gathered in the courtyard and were waiving cheerfully from there to their friends behind the bars. The wives of the disabled men and the mothers of the boys in prison settled at the gates, seemingly ready to stay for an indefinite time. They cooked food, which they partly sold to the policemen on duty; partly they sent it in the prison to their family members, bribing the guards. During the whole time, until the liberation of the prisoners, these regularly received food, clean cloths and money from those outside.

In-group solidarity is not something that should be taken for granted, at least on a big scale. In many occasions, evictions or other adverse events happening to one home raised considerable interest in all the other, but without producing a unanimous inter-squat mobilisation. But within the same home or between several homes there are strong personal ties, forming smaller circles of solidarity which provide support to persons or to whole families in times of need. The crisis of Grafton mobilised the polio homes and personal dyadic ties were activated. Although collective agency is played out in the networks of sociability, these networks remain fragmented even in moments of crises, more personal than institutional. It is the addition of these strong interpersonal relations that eventually produces the impression of a strong organisational network.

Support can take the form of giving help in conflicts with third actors, accommodating members of another organization or participating at collective events, like burial, baptism, etc. Dora from House of Jesus was not only invited to the baptism of Munda's little girl in Waterloo, she was one of the cooks. When Munda, member of UDO comes to town, he sleeps in House of Jesus. At the same time, Alhaji and his friends, equally members of UDO, a few years younger than Munda, keep a similar position in Pademba road, knowing that they are always welcome to spend there one night or two when they are in town. Most transactions between the houses are of this order, constituting banal, everyday routines, in which some of the dyadic personal relations are put in use. The more these relations are taken for granted, the more they get activated in concrete situations, each new situation reinforcing a sense of normality and regularity.

It soon became evident for me that if I was interested in individual and collective agency, I had to understand the functioning of the networks of the polio squats. Instead of using a formal questionnaire, I relied on my interviews and conversations made with members and leaders of the homes in order to create network maps. The stories people told me about themselves and their places inevitably were full of different - individual and organisational –third parties – which I scrupulously listed in the order of their appearance, noting also the type of relation linking them to the story teller or to any third persons/organisations. One result of this exercise is the network diagram[232] presented bellow (Figure 44.). In it each red square represents a polio home and each line stands for a particular relation, distilled from the stories gathered in conversations

---

[232] The visual projections of the networks presented here are the work of Márton Gerő

and in interviews. The stories were usually told in the third person, about others, by naturally biased story tellers, filtered through the subjective listening of the interviewer. Consequently, the network presented here cannot be taken as an image of reality; it is rather the admittedly distorted visual projection of many individual perspectives appearing simultaneously. Another source of distortion is the lack of temporal elaboration. The moment when the stories were recorded[233] makes the different moments of the past collapse into one single temporal dimension: events forgotten long time ago and still on-going intrigues are represented in the same picture. The third source of distortion is the highly conjectural nature of the appearance of the actors in the stories, not necessarily in relation to their objective or subjective importance to the speaker. Arguably, the diagram does not represent the network but at the most only its fragmented and imperfect representation. Nevertheless, if it is a representation, it is collective representation, and it's precisely its collective nature that compensates for the individual failings of memory and for other distortions. Consequently it does reflect the reality of the universe of the squats in a given moment, from a given angle, showing also, by the number of relations connecting them, the relative importance they have for each other.
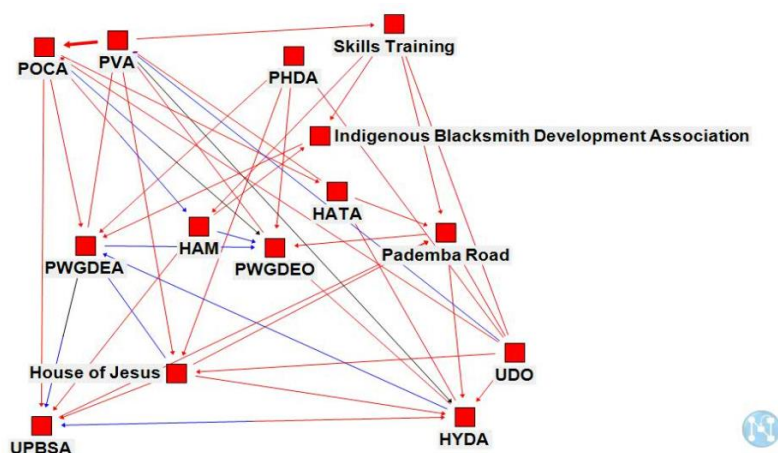
44. Figure In group network of the 13 homes[234]

---

[233] The interviews for this part of the research were made between June and September 2011.
[234] We have 14 symbols on the map because PVA and POCA are indeed the same and one organisation. PVA is the original name.

Although – because of the methodology chosen - we can be sure that this network is far from being complete, the dense web reflects quite suggestively the strong interdependence between the homes. The diagram makes possible another immediate observation. If this is a network of solidarity, conflict is not a less important element of it than cooperation. The positive relations (alliance, sympathy or support) are marked in red; the negative ones (discontent, conflict or failed support) are marked in blue. The heads of the arrows always point towards the passive end of the relation, so that a blue arrow pointing from A to B might mean that somebody in A (according to at least one informant) has got a grudge against, or a conflict with somebody in B, while the same link in red means that somebody in A appreciates somebody in B or that A supports B in one way or another. It could be objected that the diagram contains too heterogeneous information to be simply interpreted. Indeed, its actors are only seemingly organisations; often behind the organisations there are relations between people. However, as I argued above, this is one distinctive feature of the network: behind the institutional surface it is highly personalised. Dora, my disabled friend from House of Jesus for example did not remember the organisation that proposed her the micro-credit to upscale her little commercial business, all she knew was that on certain days "Madam Clara" would come to collect the instalments. Many a times it was difficult to get information of past projects or institutional support as people tended to remember the names of people (sometimes of expatriates who worked in the country only for a couple of months) rather than those of the organisations, let alone the donor who ultimately assured the support. To make things more complicated, the diagram shows not one, rather two superposed networks collapsed into one: that of opinions and that of transactions. I believe it makes sense to read the two separate networks as one, as both opinion and exchange suppose a certain degree of acquaintance and they reveal an existent and potentially activated channel of information. It is also important to note that my informants did not qualify the relationship in abstract terms; they only told particular stories, which I translated into one time, one story-specific links; the qualification is therefore my work, not theirs. However contingent the results of this method seem, they are based on concrete examples of conflict and support, demonstrating that rivalry and cooperation are inseparable in this system, a regular trait – as it seems to be – of networks constituting the founding bricks of social and political life in Sierra Leone (Murphy 2010; Utas 2012).

Mishaps and consolidations

DPO-homes - just as their inhabitants - are struggling with problems of everyday survival; they are busy with stirring and solving conflicts, trying to get access to material resources or to symbolic assets, such as status, recognition and power. Confrontations reorganise the systems of alliances, as potential allies can easily be turned to enemies in no time and supporters can refuse support at any moment. Navigating daily on these trouble waters, this is disability politics on the ground level. The story of Mariama, leader of the Hastings women group, illustrates well the conflicting nature of inter-group relations, as well as the importance of building strategic alliances within the DPO world.

*„Those days we worked with O (*name of a local NGO*); they did not work yet with other organisations. But when we got this confusion (*disagreement within the organisation over O's role and the ownership of the project *), the director gave 5-5 thousand leones (*to part of the membership, supporting O*)…So they decided to break away, and start their own (*organisation*). We told them this is not a problem, we are all together anyhow. But we could not agree to give up the land. We had to fight for it. They attacked us, the boys of E (*one of the homes*), the director (of O) could incite them against us. We called our brothers from PVA, we fought together. We finally could keep the land. From there we started to develop."*

For those not familiar with the internal affairs of the polio world the storyline might seem to be a bit too compact to follow. I am proposing here a short summary of the events. Mariama, like most of the polio home leaders started as member of PVA. At one point she decided to form her own group, recruited followers and broke away. The process, like all the cases of group formation through segmentation was highly contentious and provoked the resentment of PVA's leaders. All the same, the new organisation started to lobby for resources in its own right. It was quite successful in lobbying: Mariama and her friends found a benevolent patron in the person of the Deputy-Mayor of Freetown who directed at the same time a local NGO. Mariama obtained a piece of land from the government on which the NGO was supposed to construct a centre for them from international funding. Mariama however, suspected danger, fearing that the NGO would expropriate her own project. She publicly attacked

the NGO and its director, denouncing him directly with the funder for mismanagement. This was a perilous move, taking into consideration the political and economic weight of her adversary. What is more, the scandal caused rupture within Mariama's own organisation, as part of the membership refused to turn against the Deputy-Mayor, who awarded the loyalty with cash and support. The organisation split into two and the renegades left, creating a new group, following the usual segmentary logic of group formation. In the meanwhile the Deputy-Mayor launched a smear campaign against Mariama, determined to chase her from the land she continued to control. He managed to enrol some of the polio organisations and one day a real war broke out when a group of men attacked physically Mariama and her followers on their terrain. The power balance was not on her side, but the chance turned when members of neighbouring PVA arrived to fight the intruders. The assailants were beaten off. Mariama's group came out strengthened from the incident, but interestingly the renegade group, too. The local NGO ceased existing when its director, the Deputy-Mayor, died in an accident, soon after the events. At the end of the day, no polio organisation's reputation was durably tarnished. What could have been a pretext for disorganisation and disintegration, turned out to be in the long run a collective experience fortifying the polio community. What is interesting at the end is less the twists and turns of this and similar stories than how conflict is used to build coherence within a complex web, which internally remains highly contentious while showing considerable unity towards the outside world.

While being the sites of constant rivalry and intrigue, these banal and not so banal exchanges produce a considerable amount of collective moral support, mutuality and solidarity, briefly: social capital, as it is understood by Putnam[235](1995): as a collective resource, protecting the community against anomy. In fact, clashes enhance this production, instead of hampering it. Because they constantly reposition the individual players, allowing a debate on - and the subsequent redefinition of - the minimum set of shared values, they create and reinforce a common "life world" and a collective identity. Obviously, I borrow the concept of "life worlds" from Shütz, who

---

[235] For Putnam, social capital is necessarily a collective asset, something that is produced within and through the working of the network, and although he admits that it might have - in certain circumstances - be used for negative purposes, for him social capital is very obviously a synonym of solidarity and integration, a force that works against social entropy. "For a variety of reasons, life is easier in a community blessed with a substantial stock of social capital"- he writes. (1995) cf. http://xroads.virginia.edu/~hyper/DETOC/assoc/bowling.html

affirms that these are "frames of references" (Shütz 1987:12) produced within the sociability of everyday life. It is precisely the banality of everyday happenings that endows them with a strong feeling of taken for grantedness, reinforced by interpersonal interactions in which they get consistence and pertinence. "Partaking in a community of space means that a certain portion of the exterior world is accessible in the same way to one and the other (partners of exchange) and that (this portion of the exterior world) contains objects that are of interest in the same way for both of them." (Ibid:22). Mishaps and consolidations within the polio world contribute to a strong, collectively shared frame of reference. This is probably the reason why the homes - taken individually or together - are capable of presenting such a surprising level of unity and agreement towards the exterior, despite the many frictions and overt disagreement within and between them.

The diagram draws the (necessarily porous) boundaries of this world, showing the links which get activated in the exchanges but it does not reveal the content of the exchanges. However, it is not possible to fully understand the nature of this network without knowing what actually is exchanged through the links. It is useful to return to the interviews and see what exactly is exchanged along the lines. Despite the variety of the stories, most of the exchanges - just like in the incident related above - fit into two broad categories: bringing and receiving support or getting engaged in – sometimes violent – fights. Fights might break out over sharing resources or over sharing values (the two motifs obviously not excluding each other). Although in this network there are supporters and dependents, the former rarely – if ever - provide vital resources to the latter. What is exchanged here is rather human investment, distributed on the basis of reciprocity. As a consequence, the distance between those above and the ones below is never too great. However competitive its actors are amongst themselves, this network remains rather egalitarian and closer to a "moral community" than to a "patrimonial marketplace" (Podolny and Page 1998, cited by Utas 2012). This is a flat structure, a dense, homogenous, relatively small network of equals, with a high level of trust because literally everybody knows everybody[236], making mediators and brokers superfluous[237],

---

[236] This is an exaggerated statement, taken only the diagram into account. However, if we consider the diagram as a partial reflection of reality, it points at a more general regularity. The hypothesis of the dense interconnectedness of the homes and their members can be confirmed by every day, empirical observation, too.

and where even the biggest one is only a *primus inter pares.* It generates social capital but it does not generate wealth. Left alone, the network would not survive.

Connecting up: a pyramidal system of hierarchical exchanges

If wealth is injected in the homes, it has to come from outside, in the form of right to land (or property) use, money, competences or "projects" (which are assets themselves). Mariama's story related above becomes intelligible only if it is placed within a broader network where not only human support but also economic resources are circulated. It becomes clear then that internal rivalry is produced in relation to other types of actors who occupy a position of superiority vis a vis the homes, because they are able to distribute wealth and conditions to produce wealth, according to their own criteria. It is "donors" and "authorities" who put the homes in the position of competitors. In this system these patrons are generally NGOs, governmental or transgovernmental institutions. A connection to this bigger network is the very object of the rivalry amongst the homes. Fig 45.shows this bigger picture.

---

[237] Structural holes are places in the network created by two nodes that are not connected. A third person having connection to both the non-connected nodes have the advantage of controlling communication between the two.
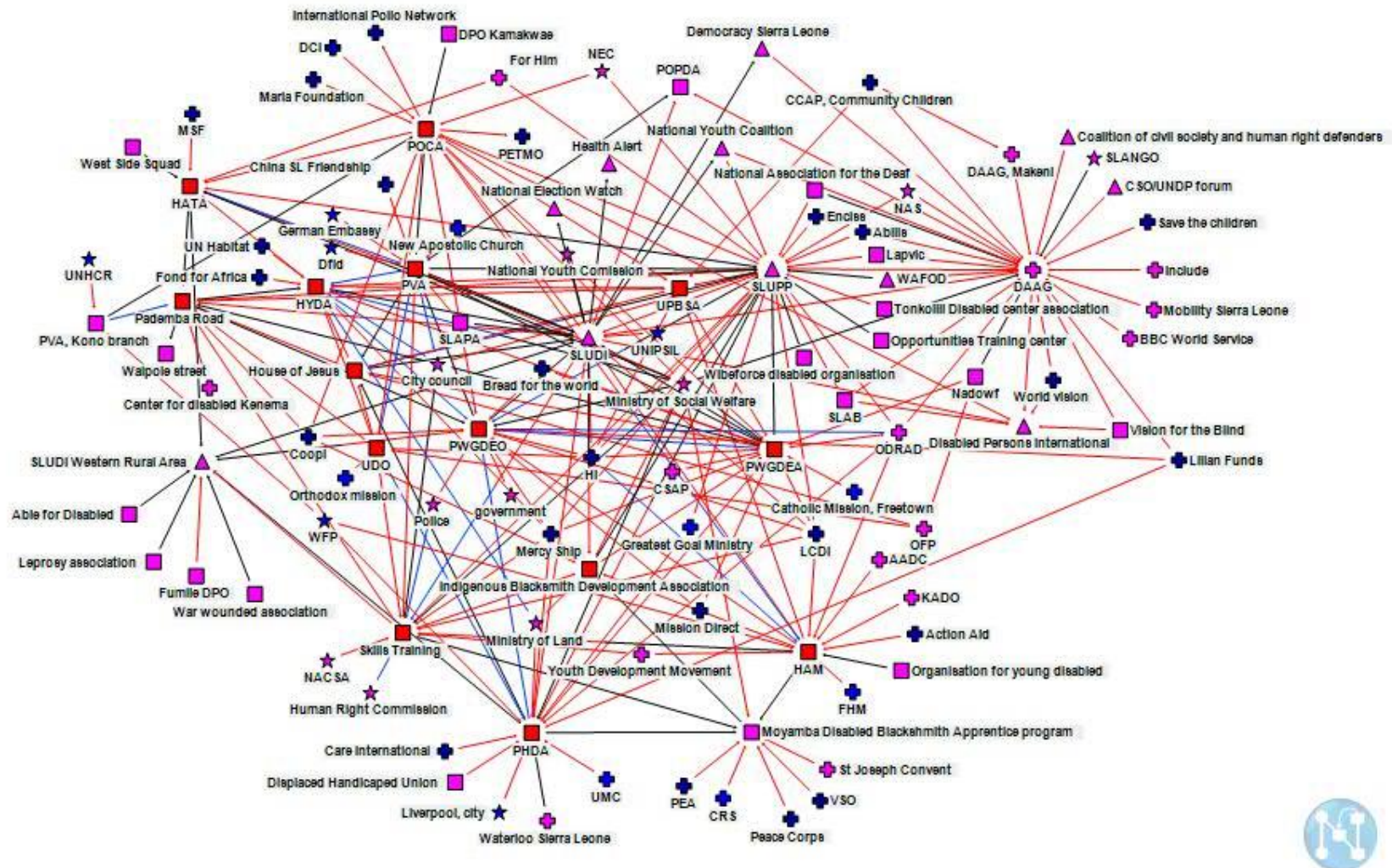
45. Figure Complex network of the 13 polio-homes: the universe of polio-disability in Freetown

Fig. 45. presents the "complete"[238] organisational network in which the polio homes participate, showing all the actors with a legal identity who made their appearance in the stories. Mirrored in this picture, the social life of the disabled homes proves to be more complicated than what we could have suspected before, when we focused only on their inter-house relations. They appear here all embedded in a complex web, populated by important players - each of whom opens access to some potential advantage to gain.

In this diagram the 13 polio-homes are still marked by red squares. Blue signs stand for international/foreign actors, pink for the national ones. Pink squares are local grass root organizations representing people with disability (not necessarily only polio victims). Pink triangles are umbrella organizations. Pink crosses are national NGOs (or coalitions of such) while blue crosses represent international NGOs. Following the same logic, pink stars stand for local state organizations or public bodies, while blue stars must be understood as foreign or transnational public bodies. (Churches in this figure are likened to NGOs because of the same structural role they play in the network, and are marked as crosses with the same colour code). Here black lines stand for neutral relations (with no positive or negative value), the most often used to mark affiliations (as when organization A is member of federation B, for example; red and blue lines continue to stand for positive and negative relations). Arrows are pointing from givers to takers.

Although the explanation of this system of symbols sounds complicated, the shapes and colours allow grasping the heterogeneous nature of the network in a glimpse and reveal its surprisingly globalised nature. The many blue spots in the diagram testify the fact that the polio homes directly or indirectly are connected to international urban centres, such as London, Berlin, Washington, New York, Paris or Lyon – however even this scanty listing makes it perfectly clear that this international network is less global than cross-regional: through the homes it connects Freetown to the leading Western liberal democracies of the developed world. Through the channels created by these links not only resources flow but also ideas, categories and representations. The common world which lends intelligibility to exchanges and happenings in this network is that of

---

[238] The diagram is not more complete than the previous one, in the sense that it would contain more information, but it makes visible all the lines that have been created between persons and organisations during my interviews.

project society, in which the polio-homes are connected to international and national actors only in their quality of DPOs (disabled people's organisations). This produces another system of pertinence than that of the homes, created with the help of a meta language that successfully links the two universes.

The signage system makes it possible to visualise that despite (important) individual differences, institutional identity (see the shapes) determines to a large extent the place an actor can occupy in the network (see the direction of an arrow). Fig. 46. shows a restricted – exclusively transactional - network from which relations of opinions and attitudes are excluded: the existing lines mark channels of exchange, arrows pointing systematically at "takers". In conformity with common sense, as well as with the highly sophisticated exchange theory developed by Levi-Strauss (Claude Lévi-Strauss 1967 (1947)), not only do givers systematically occupy a higher status than takers, their position is enhanced by each transaction. As a result, this network is essentially hierarchical, quite in contrast with the flat in-group network of the polio-homes. Hierarchical transactions producing material benefit and differentiated statuses, characteristic for relations between patrons and clients are marked with blue, while non- hierarchical exchange of help and support is marked by red. Reciprocal support is marked by green. The latter two types of relation are characteristic for relations between allays.
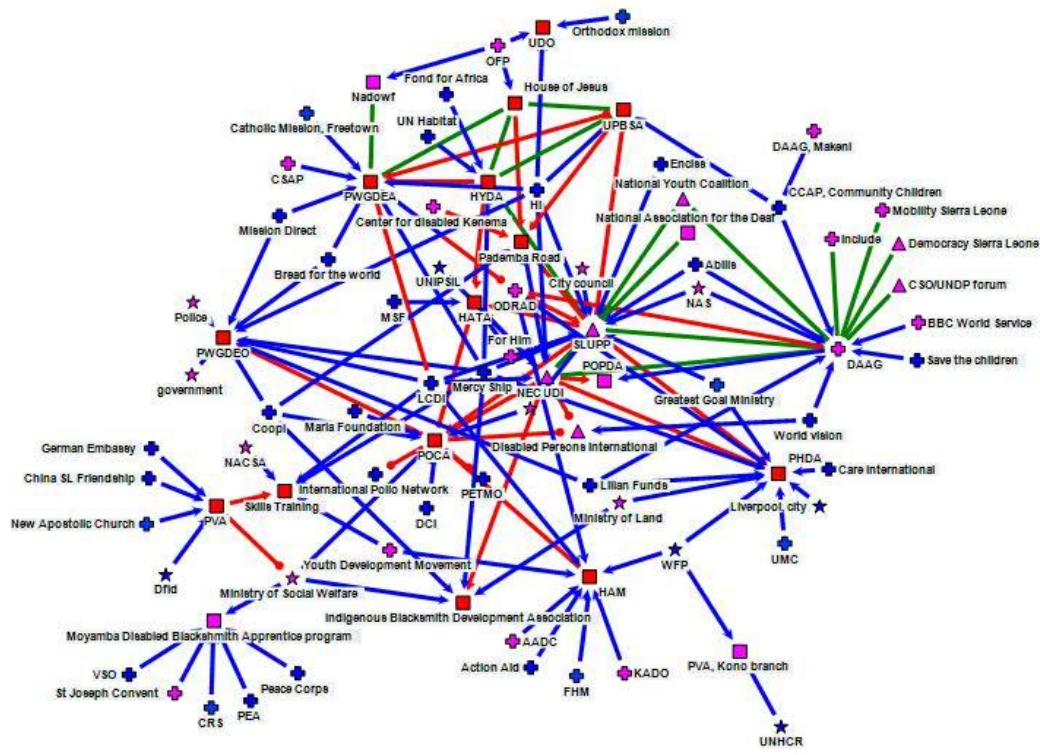
46. Figure Types of transactions in the large network

As this hierarchical network is different from that of the flat network of the homes, understandably, it also regulates different types of exchanges. Here support means redistribution of material resources rather than care. These exchanges are so important for the DPO-homes that their official history can only be told as a list of benefits successfully captured. The following passage is an excerpt from the official chronicle of IBDA, reified in a typed document, authored by the founder himself:

"*By the mid-eighties the disabled welfare conscious Pa Mustapha succeeded in securing assistance and service from some philanthropists groups like CRS and VSO, Peace Corps and nuns of the St Joseph Convent Moyamba, (including the Social Welfare ministry), which assisted by replacing the makeshift workshop with a special block house with dormitory facilities, accessible lavatories and showers, a hand level pump well and a standby electricity supply, facilitating welding. Tools, mobility aids, crutches, wheelchairs, callipers were also donated to the institution. Food, medical facilities, clothing, toiletries were the rule rather than the exception. People Education Association (PEA) moved in and gave help in adult literacy and today the executive director is able to read and write even though he never went to school….*"

293

The list of donations and that of the donors is indeed impressive. Quite probably, Pa Mustapha could not have exploited these connections to such an extent without having come to the realization that the small community he organised was actually a DPO, a "disabled people organisation". In fact, from this large network the squats have been erased; what is left is an assemblage of formal organisations, all unified in their shared identity marked by disability and in their common fight against discrimination.

Within such a network relations produce a pyramidal system in which as a rule, grass root organisations (such as DPOs) stand in the position of receivers both to local and to international NGOs; while local NGOs usually occupy a place between grass-roots organisations and international organisations. Finally, both international and local NGOs depend on larger international (private or public) donors for resources. Umbrellas occupy an intermediary position, being engaged both in egalitarian, as well as hierarchical relationships with the polio homes. The state itself and its institutions might step in this chain as donors in relation to local organisations, and as beneficiaries in relation to international organisations. Accordingly, the more a grass-roots organisation manages to create strong contacts (in number or in intensity) with international organizations (behaving as direct or indirect donors), the more probably it has access to scarce resources. In other words, access to key actors becomes directly convertible to wealth, security or other existential advantages. That is why the network is not only a means to obtain key resources, it is resource itself. Direct or indirect connection with international actors means a comparative advantage even if no immediate gain is materialised. Such connections imply the possibility of being activated one day, and in the meantime, they allow enhancing the social status of the beneficiary of the contact, even without a real transaction. Upward connections create social capital, this time, rather as Bourdieu understands it: as a resource gained by one player from the position he/she//it occupies in the network (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992)[239].

As compared to the flat structure discussed above, this network is less dense and more heterogeneous as to the identity of its actors between whom the social distance is

---

[239] For Bourdieu, social capital is won by actors tied to each other by the very link of competition, each striving to obtain the best position in his web of connections. He defines social capital as "the sum of the resources, actual and virtual, that accrue to an individual or group, by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition".

also greater, which puts brokers, exploiting structural holes in an advantageous position. Therefore the system works with a low level of trust, information retention and sudden swaps of allies becomes a reasonable (and quite widespread) strategy, making the whole system inherently unstable. Its internal conflict tolerance is high, in fact conflicts are conceived as part of the system, since relations have to be probed and challenged regularly to test their solidity. Changing "caps" and positions are not considered as treason, but rather as the normal outcome of non-conclusive tests. This network in a way also forms a moral community, but only as long as it fulfils its primary role: it is above all a dynamic "patrimonial marketplace" (see above: Podolny and Page 1998), regulating hierarchized exchanges. The ways DPOs as collective actors (as well as their leaders as individual actors) go about the business of navigating between stability and instability in order to stabilize their position and gain competitive advantages by destabilising others is what makes these organisations and the dynamic of their relations essentially political.

The historical continuity of networks politics

The idea that the essence of political power is to be found in and has to be constructed through the exploitation of hierarchized networks is not new. In fact, this is what patrimonialism is all about, captured in the – often cited – notion: "Wealth in People" (Bledsoe 1980; Goody and International African Institute. 1971; Miers and Kopytoff 1977; Murphy 2010) .The formula has become the accepted shorthand for the principle determining the ways leadership has been conceived, achieved and performed since times immemorial in West-Africa. It expresses in a lively manner the fact that contrary to European serfdom where land constituted the main value, in the traditional African political system the power of leaders (linage elders or chiefs) did not depend as much on their control of a specific territory, but rather on their capacity to draw a number of men under their control. To put it in another way: the capacity of a chief to control a territory depended on his capacity "to secure allies and supporters to consolidate, administer, and protect that territory" (Murphy 2010:36) rather than the other way round.

Loyalty of clients was the basic currency maintaining the system, but it was also a scarce resource, as followers could at any time withdraw their support or change allegiance. Rewarding clients materially thus became a political must because only by

this means could their loyalty be assured- at least temporarily. Being a patron therefore demanded important material resources available for redistribution. In other worlds, in the network material and symbolic resources were kept in circulation and were constantly exchanged for each other. (Utas 2012:6) Networks were then the battle fields making it possible to achieve a prominent status; they constituted at the same time a redistribution system, responsible for creating, accumulating and spreading wealth, capable of assuring an asymmetric form of social solidarity and the accumulation of wealth and influence in the hands of the same persons.

The system of power based on this principle produced a pyramidal pattern, as allies of chiefs and supporters could also build their own network of supporters, reproducing the original relation and stretching it out towards the bottom, almost infinitely, each client potentially being the patron of somebody. This system was maintained less by coercion than by the reciprocal advantages it offered to the parties. Rulers were expected to provide their clients „protection and economic support in times of need", while these in exchange „were obliged to maintain their personal loyalty as well as to provide economic and military support to the ruler" (Murphy 2010). The lack of coercion and the capacity of followers to build their own camp made this pattern permanent, still highly vulnerable to internal change as any client who managed to create a big enough camp of followers could improve his social status and at the end defy the ruler. This rhizomatic pattern of pyramidal structures based on mutual obligations and on the exchange of resources against loyalty, creating a power system always in movement but always recreating the master blueprint is at the foundation of what is called a *patrimonial regime.*

The term patrimonialism, or neo-patrimonialsm today is used mostly as a synonym for modern-days state corruption, acknowledging the continuity of the system, still vesting it with a pejorative, almost criminal connotation. Not all forms of survival of patrimonialism is criminal though. Patrimonial patterns are to be found in the relations citizens maintain with their political representatives, and even in everyday conception of power of any sort. It is recognised by all that maintaining a patrimonial regime is costly. Therefore the concentration of political power and wealth in the hands of a few is not frowned on by the constituency; to the contrary, leaders are expected to be wealthy. Wealth is in fact the condition that leaders can act as patrons, i.e. they can take care of

their constituency, can distribute favours and can be relied on in case of urgent need. Patrons are naturally respected for these services, even if these remain only potential. In a society "that attributes value to the wealth of men" (Bayart 1993:233) it is not connecting power and wealth which is problematic, it is the fact of not sharing the later, or using it for bad purposes. Wealth is influence, and hence power. And power is influence, hence wealth. This is why power and wealth are not seen as independent, objective and objectifyable categories, but as linked to, and produced in social relations. It is not corrupt leaders that people would punish, popular wrath goes against weak leaders who do not fulfil their promises and prove impotent to protect or reward their clients. Accountability here is not directly linked to democratic values, rather to a capacity of control linked to physical proximity and to existing ties of mutual personal interdependency.

Although the system is essentially unstable, its instability grows when external actors are drawn into it from outside. When mutual dependence is suspended because leaders find the source of their power not within their constituency but as vested in external actors, the clientelist chains are broken and more and more people find themselves pushed out of the redistributive network and have less and less power to keep their leaders accountable. Corruption then is more an outcome of the breaking down of patrimonial chains than that of their survival. Bayart calls this process "extraversion" (Bayart 1993:74).

Extraversion has a similarly long history in Sierra Leone as patrimonialism. Possibly it began when chiefs of the interior started to trade slaves with Europeans. Although slavery was not a foreign implant in West-Africa, the exploitative slave trade making humans goods to exchange was quite different from the domestic slavery practiced traditionally by the autochthon tribes. When the British colonized the Peninsula and later annexed the Protectorate, they did not put an end to the patrimonial regime, instead they changed the key actors, replacing the lineage elders with a new generation of chiefs, whose rule depended more on the colonial administration than on their own constituency. This was the essence of the indirect rule, by which leaders were made oppressors of their own people in the defence of foreign interests. Extraversion of the political leaders did not stop, rather continued to grow after independence as the country's economic and political point of gravity was shifting towards international

players. Siaka Stevens - who, for the maintenance of his power, relied totally on an economic elite composed of foreign businessmen – is the most emblematic figure of this era. Politically, Stevens was dependent on conditionalities linked to external aid and on cheap credit offered by the IMF. This double dependence was not uncomfortable for him, as it was much less onerous and politically less risky to rely on external allies than on local clients, who could always express their protest by changing alliance. (Reno 1995; 1996; Reno 2009) From pre-colonial to postcolonial times, clientelism never ceased to be the dominant form of the political, only its extraversion increased as local Big Men became less and less dependent on (and consequently less and less accountable to) their local constituency.

Although the post-war governments (and their foreign donors) ostensibly called for a merciless fight against corruption, in practice they did little to put an end to clientelism, while they maintained, indeed reinforced extraversion. Principles and practices of patrimonialism infiltrated all the organs of governance and at the end network politics colonized the whole system of governance, including the international community which de facto participates in the act of governing.

The DPO-NGO nexus

In a setting steeped by the culture of patrimonialism, a network in which some actors stand systematically as givers and some as receivers will probably be apprehended by its users as that of a pyramidal structure made of patron-client chains. Contrary to the relation of partnership, a patron-client relation is not based on reciprocity, but on redistribution, whereas each act of giving opens more right to expect more. Consequently, giving becomes an obligation, rather than an option, and taking becomes seen as a right. No MOU signed by the so called partners can conceal the fundamental inequality of the exchange and no amount of ink can re-establish reciprocity without which no partnership is conceivable. Without reciprocity, there is no trust: givers spend their time controlling and monitoring their beneficiaries, takers waste their time and energy eluding control, accusing their benefactors of intervening unduly in their internal affairs and of withholding support in an unjustified and unjustifiable manner. It is little comfort for DPOs that NGOs have to assume the same heavy control and disciplining from their own donors, usually big international development agencies. What might be considered as too much red-tape in a rational autocracy, is considered as provocation

and prevarication in a patrimonial network. It follows that the relation between donors and beneficiaries are usually tense. If some kind of reciprocity is reinstalled at all between partners of different statuses, it is through symbolic exchange. Material donations are reciprocated by a symbolic gift of legitimacy which a partnership contracted with a local grass-root organisation assures for an NGO, especially for a foreign NGO, which would not be able to operate in the country without an official local connection.

This asymmetrical, mutually constraining reciprocity puts both ends in an uncomfortably dependent position. Both clients and patrons might threaten to severe the relation and look for other "partners". The awareness of this possibility generates quite irrational suspicion on the one hand, and unrealistic expectations of exclusivity, on the other. Clients would not tolerate that patrons make alliance with rivals. NGOs navigating on these troubled waters do not understand why they are unable to put different local organisations around the same table. What makes relations more complicated is that a patrimonial chain is not a dyadic relationship, but rather a gradually devolving nexus from the top to the bottom. In the conceptual frame of local NGO workers and grass-roots activists the chain necessarily goes from international NGOs to DPOs, by the intermediary of local NGOs and umbrellas. Stepping over the grades is not tolerated. That is why the disability union deeply resented the possibility that the NGO whose support it had enjoyed for many years, might start to work directly with some of the DPOs which were its members. When a newly founded local NGO started to train speech and hearing impaired young people to dance, this aroused the wrath of the Association of the Deaf, whose leader stated that anybody working with any deaf person "should sign first an MOU with the association". When my friends and I organized a talent competition in one of the polio squats, I got seriously reprimanded by the polio umbrella for acting within their sphere of interest without their permission. Patrons and would be patrons formulate ownership claims over desired clients, while these, without putting the principle of submission into question, affirm their right to choose freely those with whom they are ready to cooperate, and if they can, leap happily the grades, searching for patrons at the highest possible level. Whatever equilibrium is achieved, it always remains fragile and temporal. Civil Society Organizations of the same level – both DPOs and NGOs - compete for the same sources of funding and consequently relate to each other both as potential allies and potential rivals. This dynamics produce

volatile and often changing alliances. Figs 47. and 48. show the network in two different points of time. Comparison between the two diagrams reveals how cliques are formed and reorganized without challenging the main relational pattern.
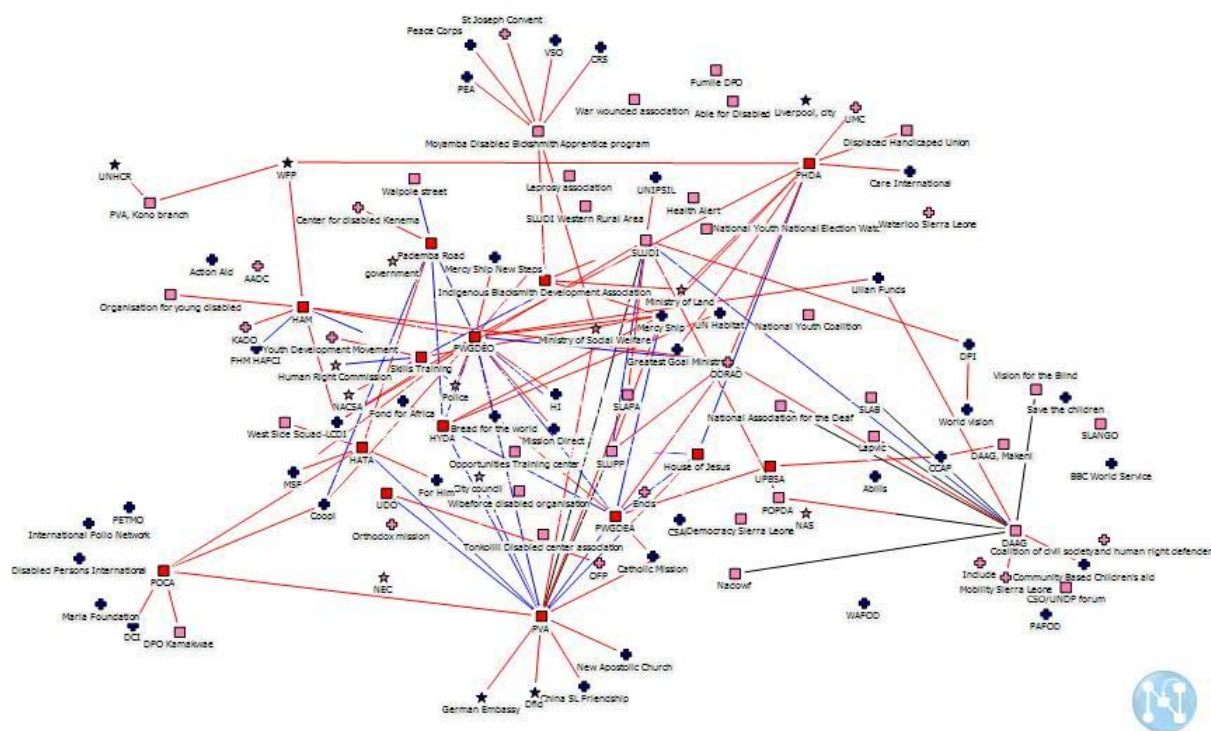
47. Figure Connections in a distant past[240]

---

[240] the distinction between distant and recent past maybe not the most exact one. I ordered in one group those events that have happened recently or which still have effect on the speaker, while the rest were categorised in another group. Past and present perfect may be more descriptive.

48. Figure Connections in the recent past
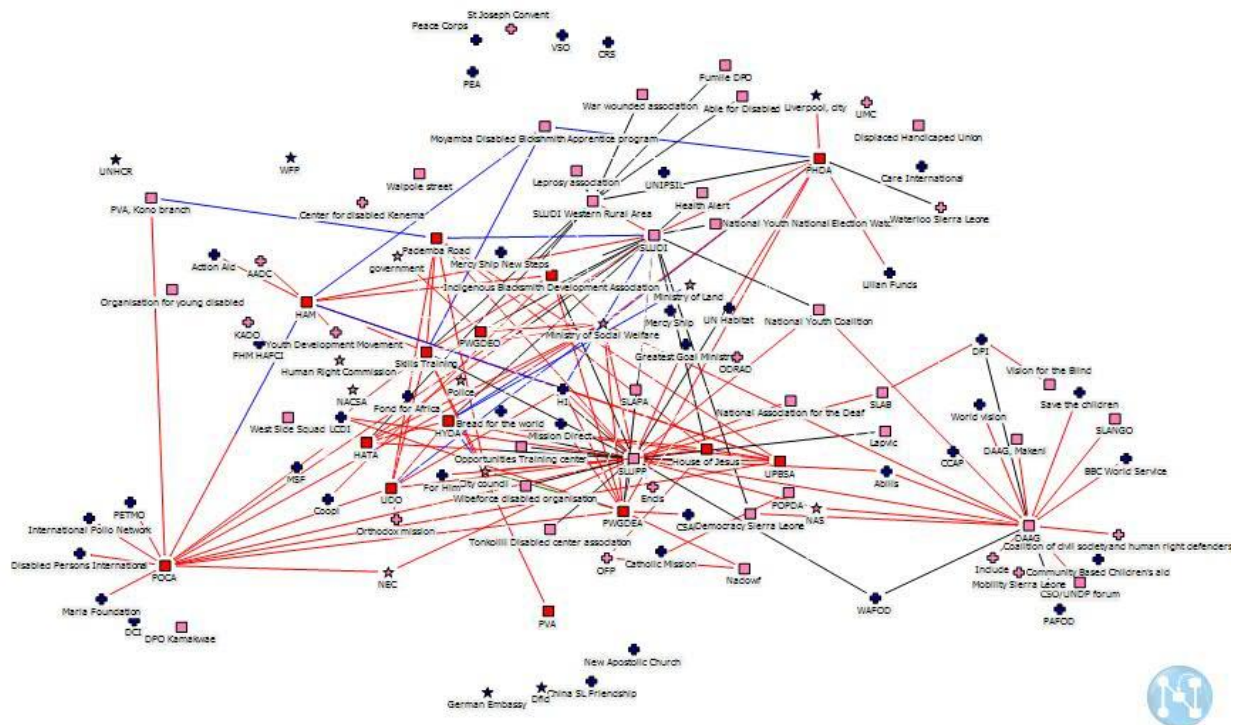
Comparison of the two pictures leads easily to the conclusion that the "rich" tend to get "richer" with time, i.e. existing relations today contribute to the multiplication of the relations tomorrow. The visual representation of the network at two points in time shows how organisations get strengthened by multiplying their allies. This principle explains what is the incentive in the creation of umbrellas. Not only they can claim symbolic "ownership" over their member organisations, by enlarging their membership, they enlarge at the same time their sphere of influence, and by enlarging their sphere of influence they enlarge their membership. This is the case of SLUDI, SLUPP and even DAAG (which originally was supposed to be an umbrella before it was registered as an NGO). The personal overlapping between the three organisations, all possessing an important and growing "interest coalition" (Boissevain and Mitchell 1973)- suggested in the diagram by the star-like pattern around them - makes their alliance invincible. While they behave as patrons with member DPOs, they also position themselves as clients vis-à-vis other organisations, first of all international NGOs.

From one point in time to the other, besides the strengthening of the umbrellas, there are other changes, too: we can observe for example the emergence of a new federation: the Western Area Branch of SLUDI. We can note the disappearance of some of the organizations and the transmutation of others into new ones. One-time hostility between some organizations has been transformed into a strong alliance. Splinter groups or branches have been formed and the new groups have come to defy their own mother-organizations. DPOs have sought (successfully) to replace their withdrawing supporters with new ones. The network is accumulating experiences and past experience orients future actions - but only to a certain extent, because the network is more future oriented (Ibid:246) than past oriented. People are not meticulous record-keepers but rather talented politicians making calculations and bets on possible future gains, rather than being captives of a past track. This mode of action explains otherwise hardly explainable changes in allegiance. Navigating in this system of alliance is where individual and collective agency is performed. This might be seen as instrumental agency, aimed at using the system, rather than at transforming it, but it helps disabled people belonging to disabled organisations transcend the role of passive victims in which the global disability discourse places them. Being a client is quite the opposite of being a victim: a client - contrary to a silenced victim - has got its own interest, its own vision and its own voice.

Invisible lines

The network diagram above is artificially circumscribed – like any network projection of its kind. It is obvious that all relations of all the actors cannot be represented, nor explained by it. It is worth mentioning some of the links missing from the picture, influencing in important ways the dynamic of the whole network.

The nature of the diagram does not allow for example the visualization of internal fractures within organizations. The homes do not constitute homogenous blocks in a state of equilibrium. On the contrary, they are cross cut by the same fractions and rivalries as those dividing the whole network. Leaders occupying the executive positions are often targeted by the rank and file membership and mutinies are not infrequent. Some of the executives are also divided internally, different office holders joining different coalitions, within and outside the organization. Sometimes personal rivalry

divides the executive, splitting at the same time the organization itself. This happened with the Association of the Deaf which has had for a long time two Presidents, both claiming exclusive legitimacy. Not accidentally, fissions within old organizations[241] constitute the most frequent way leading to the genesis of new organizations.

Another, even more hidden connection missing from my graph is the one linking the urban and the rural. Although the mass presence of polio-disabled beggars in the public space is a distinctly urban phenomenon, it takes its roots in the provinces. As we have seen, most of the squatters are rural migrants, who, most of the time still maintain some kind of relations with their place of origin. Although the collective homes are perfect ethnic melting pots, each house has some very pronounced affinity with one or another geographical region. These nexuses are not only determined by the geographical origin of the majority of the members, but also by the history of the organization and by the person of the leader or leaders. Also, polio homes and organisations do exist in different rural towns, and these too, maintain privileged relations with selected homes in Freetown. Some of the rural organizations are considered to be the branches of organizations in Freetown (at least in the interpretation of the polio leaders in Freetown). Because in Sierra Leone national politics is permeated by regionalism, these connections are not at all politically neutral. Polio organizations have the capacity to reach, and if necessary, to mobilize at lightning speed important groups of disabled people in the provinces, each of whom are embedded in larger families and neighbourhoods, well beyond the borders of the disabled community. These cross-regional relations make the polio houses important resources – or threats, depending on the perspective – in the eye of politicians.

The intricate relations the polio squats maintain with the highest spheres of politics is the third missing dimension in the charts, although arguably these relations are as important for DPO-homes as relations with NGOs. It is worth remembering that the myths of origin of these organizations systematically involve the intervention of a high ranking politician: the President, the Vice-President, various ministers, the Deputy-Mayor or the Mayor of Freetown. Interactions with these high status interlocutors included negotiation at a table, silent sitting in front of their office and loud protestations causing confusion. This surprising intimacy connecting the

---

[241] See Chapter 3.

representatives of the highest level of the State and the very bottom of the social hierarchy (Cf. Mbembe 2001) might be the most striking feature of Sierra Leonean political life.

Networking with the State: understanding Kombah's funeral

When I first heard about Kombah's death, I was far from imagining that his demise would create an opportunity for the collapse of the boundaries between the highest spheres of the state and the world of the polio squats. Kombah, the disabled beggar, who died of an ordinary toothache would have never imagined such an outcome either. One could suppose that the death of people of his status goes unnoticed and their names are quickly forgotten. This might be true for many of his peers, but not for him. His funeral resembled that of a statesman. It was a last gift from the President, Ernest Bai Koroma, in person.

Koroma knew the Pademba road boys very well. The presidential car met the disabled beggars daily on the road leading from the State House to the residence of the President. They called him "the Pa" and he called them "his boys", acknowledging the patrimonial relation the latter claimed on him. As a benevolent patron, he honoured his obligations regularly, by distributing alms from the open window of his car or by sending more valuable items - essentially bags of rice - to the squat. When "the Pa" heard what happened to Kombah, he immediately offered two bags of rice for the *sarah*, the mourning ceremony. He also lent a military truck to the disabled beggars, so that they could transport the body to Kono, Kombah's native land, where the funeral had to take place. Kombah received as much tribute at his funeral as few army officers would do, and of which he could not have dreamt while he was alive.

It is far from me to question the feelings of the President. I believe Koroma really liked Kombah. However, I cannot not put his funeral into a larger context, that of the 2012 national elections. Kombah's death ensued one year before election times and the incumbent president had obvious interests in enrolling street-boys as potential voters[242]. One could add that sending a military truck with the body to Kono, the stronghold of the opposition party, was a particularly clever move, contributing to

---

[242] The use of street boys, or "rarray boys" or doubtful lumpen elements for political purposes has a long tradition in Sierra Leone. See . Christensen 2012

constructing the image of a benevolent ruler, even on the terrain of his political enemy. The gesture presented Koroma as a leader who honours patrimonial obligations, as opposed to those politicians who are accused of "chopping" the money of the poor.

The worth of the bottom

The intimate relationship between the bottom and the top pays of course in the most evident way during election times. The notorious use of patrimonial networks for securing votes is not a secret to any student of African politics. In Sierra Leone, too, it has its long and rich tradition (Christensen 2012). Christensen described, how, at the time of the 2007 elections both the ruling party and the opposition party resorted to intimidation by enrolling ex-combatants as "support groups". Against this background, the 2012 Presidential election, organized ten years after the end of the war, was recognized as remarkably "democratic" not only by the totally enchanted international community, but also by more reflective external observers (Harris 2013). I do not have the intention to propose here a fundamental correction to this analysis, but I believe the following account might shed light on how democracy is actually functioning in West Africa, while showing the role polio communities - as clients - might play in such crucial moments of national politics.

The politicization of polio groups started long before the elections. The first signs could be perceived within SLUDI[243], the national union of disabled people`s organisations. During the second half of 2011 there was hardly any disability related public event - including SLUDI´s own internal meetings - where the chairman would not make a symbolic gesture towards the government – praising the president's achievements. This open position taking led to internal fission, since within the executive not everybody agreed with this gesture and dissenting voices gradually gained strength. However, during the months preceding the election most of the executives of the polio homes lined up behind the SLUDI chairman. As this was not necessarily the case for the totality of the rank and file membership, political debates created fissures within the homes. Leaders were reported to use their power against dissidents to punish them for the slightest of misdemeanours. Even though the SLUDI president could count on the backing of the majority of the polio chairmen, it was commonly considered as an

---

[243] SLUDI (Sierra Leone Union of Disability) is the most important national Umbrella organisation of DPOs, It has a Freetown office, and several branches in the provinces, as well as in the Western Rural area

excess when he went on air to endorse Koroma, urging his fellow disabled to vote for the APC[244]. This overtly political self-positioning on behalf of a supposedly apolitical organisation caused significant public uproar even outside of the disability world and subsequently led to a radical reconfiguration of the alliance system on the top level of the disability movement.

Under these circumstances it was not surprising that the majority of the homes voted for the APC. The announcement of Koroma`s victory – which came unexpectedly early, on a Friday afternoon, when most of the families were at home, and (for those who had it) in front of the television - triggered a spontaneous and immoderate popular celebration in the squats. People were pouring out to the street from House of Jesus, too, dancing and singing. (Their manifest joy caused them a lot of trouble the next day when SLPP supporters who witnessed the scene from the neighbouring party headquarters came to raid the house to retaliate for what they considered an open provocation.) In the meantime the boys of Pademba road joined the presidential cortege and travelled around the town on a truck following the president`s car.[245] That was their day! They had actively participated in the campaign, canvassing for their "Pa" in the provinces for weeks. For that purpose they received a podapoda and of course some amount of rice and money. The celebrations went on late into the night and started again early morning the next day, alcohol and *ganja* adding to the heated emotions. At about noon somebody suggested that they would have deserved more for their participation and no doubt the President would agree - should they put their request to him. They hired a taxi. Those who could not fit in the car took place in the boot. Spirits were high.

When the delegation arrived in front of the presidential palace, they were at first stopped by the guards. But these knew them personally and after a short negotiation they got permission to send in two emissaries in the person of the chairman and one of his companions. When the two boys returned from their mission, they were radiant: they actually received an additional package from the President. The way home was even more joyful than the way there. The boys stopped on the road to buy more alcohol.

---

[244] http://africayoungvoices.com/2012/11/sludi-endorses-president-koroma-for-second-term/

[245] Although all the events relating to the elections took place after my field work, I witnessed personally the announcement of the results, a moment which found me in Freetown where I spent some weeks in 2012. I was not direct eyewitness of everything I relate here, though. Particularly, the visit to the Presidential residence was only told to me.

When finally they arrived back to the squat, they were all dead drunk. Then the problems started. According to unwritten rules the money should have been duly distributed. But when the members checked the chairman´s pocket, what they found was much less than expected. Those who had been waiting at home accused those who participated in the mission, and these accused each other in their turn. Before long, half naked bodies rolled on the ground, fighting, entangled with each other.

Pademba road was not an isolated case. Even weeks after the election, the increase in violence and in alcohol consumption was noticeable everywhere. Never had I seen so many drunk and stoned people in the squats as in those days. Before long all the money was squandered[246]. The podapoda of the Pademba road boys had been broken down and parked for a long time, somewhere by the Freetown highway. Nothing else really changed – not for the moment. It is possible however that the national election and the ways in which the actors participated in it contributed in the long run to the reorganisation of the power relations within the polio network. In any case by early 2014 all the three of the downtown polio squats had changed their executive, not by elections but by dismissing - sometimes by quite violent means - their leaders. The president of SLUDI was re-elected; however some claimed that the election lacked transparency. The renegades, who broke away from the SLUDI executive, subsequently set up a new organisation.

In the "who uses who" game not everybody can expect the same prize, despite the reciprocity of the system. The bigger the power distance between the patron and his clients, the bigger is the clients' dependence, but also his potential gain. The position of being the clients of such a mighty Big Man as the President of the country ensures considerable protection for the disabled beggars. This safety though is relative and highly volatile. "Participants in a political game continually assess one another's power position...No disgrace is attached to the man who changes sides" (Boissevain and Mitchell 1973:246). This adage is certainly true not only for clients, but also for patrons. Disabled beggars can count on the President's protection only as long as having them as clients promises higher political rewards than sacrificing them for the sake of other, more influential groups. It is very unlikely that even the President's favour can protect

---

[246] I owe to Mats Utas the observation that money received as a price for votes resembles to „blood money", dirty money which cannot be accumulated; it has to be spent quickly, in conspicuous and seemingly irrational ways.

the Pademba road boys from displacement on the long run. Inevitably, the eviction of the Pademba road squat was announced at the end of 2013. The boys did not lose hope, believing firmly that they would be relocated to a nearby place, instead of being pushed out of the city. But for many months nothing happened. One day workers came and set up zinc sheets around the house to protect it from the gaze of the passers-by. As I am writing, the squat still lives its life behind this fence.[247]

Mobilisation

Polio-disabled beggars, leaders and lay members of their organisations are certainly not powerless victims, they are full- fledged political actors, using skilfully their relations with patrons and and letting themselves to be used in exchange. The gains are many; in fact, without this competence the polio-homes would not exist. However, it is difficult to see how participating in the system could protect them effectively against the impacts of structural violence the system itself produces. In Chapter 6. I showed the many ways in which the population of the polio-squats fall prey to structural violence. Here I would like to point out the possibility of mobilisation against it.

Farmer (1996) and Galtung (1996) agree in the conclusion that the most oppressive character of structural violence is cultural violence, making mobilisation - if not impossible - at least highly unlikely. From inside structural violence is difficult to fight, because it is made part of the life world of its victims. Even the way to deal with it is shaped by this very taken for grantedness. "Structural violence is structured and structuring. It constricts the agency of its victims". – Farmer writes (1996:315). Indeed, a very high degree of violence perpetrated in highly unusual circumstances is necessary to break the wall of resignation. That is what finally happened when the police arrested a dozen of people with disabilities from the Grafton community, keeping them behind the bars for weeks without giving any explanation. Indignation was growing day after day. Indignation however would not have been enough for building mobilisation, let alone for its victory. Because, against all expectations, the people of the polio homes stood up for their incarcerated colleagues as one, and even more unexpectedly they gained cause. Besides indignation, three other things were necessary for the success: in-

---

[247] In April 2014 the eviction is still in the air, but nobody knows when it is going to happen.

group solidarity, mobilisation of a vertically diverse network and the existence of an ambiguous frame with a high political potential: that of disability.

The original source of resistance was to be found amongst the leaders of the two victimized community: POCA and HATA, but their fight would not have been successful without strong allies from the NGO world. Allies did not come though from big international organisations, they were recruited from amongst engaged members of two small local NGOs (OFP and COJA). But even that would not have been enough if almost by miracle the small resistance group had not found an influential support in the person of one of the members of the local political elite: the chief editor of an important local newspaper. Enrolling her was a highly efficient strategy but I suspect that what really changed the mind of whoever had the power to release the prisoners was the sudden and unexpected mobilisation of the quasi-totality of the Western Area polio-homes.

While the disabled group was in prison there were crisis meetings every afternoon in OFP's office, with the presence of the two chairmen of the two Grafton communities. Some executive members joined the meetings from the beginning. One of them, Mohamed, worked for OFP. OFP's leaders got also involved. My presence was accepted. Different strategies were proposed. Different possible allies were mentioned. By the second week we had exhausted all our possibilities within the vast NGO network. Suddenly one of us evoked the media. Somebody knew somebody who had a telephone number to the chief editor of one of the most important daily newspapers. She was a rather controversial person, not being easily daunted. Would she be interested in the case? To our surprise she was!

Only a few hours after our telephone call, her big black Mercedes parked in front of our office. An imposing figure got out of the car, wearing an impeccable blue costume, stilettos, long gloves and a huge hat. As to her outfit, she was the replica of the British Queen in an African edition. She wanted to know everything, interviewed two eye witnesses from Grafton and promised to send immediately her journalists to the polio community to collect more testimonies. She was not bluffing, the next day a two-page article appeared relating the whole story, with pictures of the two injured: Esther and Bokari, as well as photos of the detained school boys. Journalists from other newspapers started to call us. The Grafton Chairman was asked to talk on the radio. But the police

remained unwavering. Worse, from this moment on they took us for their enemies. Our visits to the prisoners were stopped.

We were entering into the third week from the skirmish in Grafton when our "crisis group" decided to go ahead with the media war. On Monday it was decided that we would organize a press conference for Wednesday. I was doubtful. First, it seemed to me a waste of time; second, I did not believe that with a two day notice we could reach enough journalists. Third, I was afraid that the fact of not having the direct support of the umbrella organization would possibly intimidate members of the polio communities from participating. The result surpassed our expectations. On Wednesday afternoon, at 2 o clock the conference hall of the Western Area Human Right Committee rented for this occasion was full. The caretaker of the place had to run to rent more chairs because people could not sit. All the polio houses sent their representatives. More than 20 journalists were present, as well as the spokesperson of the police. His clumsy explanations were received with a constant murmur of disapproval. He stood humble and humiliated. Then Esther and Bokari stood up. They explained what they went through. The room became dead silent. The "voice of the voiceless" was not faltering. They did not need anybody to talk for them. The journalists were busy making notes. The following next days at least some 10 articles and radio programs gave account of the case. People were calling in radio programs condemning the action of the police. All this was very exiting but did not change the situation in the prison.

The crisis group was reinforced now by the journalists. We all met once again and decided to address personally the Chief of the Police, the Inspector General. The plan was to send him a letter together with the detailed report of the events and distribute a copy to the most important NGOs and trans-governmental institutions. This happened on the 16th days since the group from Grafton got incarcerated. The same day, our new friend's newspaper came out with one more compromising article against the Police, evoking the I.G's personal responsibility. On the 17th day early in the morning two bikes were leaving from the office to distribute the copies of the letter. The same day, the officer in charge of the investigation gave in: at 2 o'clock pm. he sent somebody with the news that a bail would be accepted. By late afternoon the prisoners were free. Their liberation was a real media event. Although it happened so abruptly and unexpectedly, many people came to witness it. The President and the Secretary of the umbrella

organization were there, all radiant, leaders of various disability-related NGOs, my project officer friend who had been arrested 3 weeks before with the beggars by mistake, friends and families of the captives, the mysterious Editor in Chief in person, another half a dozen journalists, and of course the two Grafton Chairmen. If for our small team all this time it felt like a solitary fight, all of a sudden the event became the breakthrough of the whole disability movement. The liberated convicts were celebrated like national heroes!

The truth is that more than a strong and heterogeneous network, probably one more thing was necessary for the victory: a language in which resistance could be formulated in a way which could be turned into a political arm - when amplified by the media. Disability has been high on the government's agenda for long. Disability Rights was a cause loudly defended by all the international agencies. The Disability Bill, which was sitting for a year in front of the Parliament, was ratified just a month earlier, not least thanks to the sustained lobbying efforts of SLUDI and HI. The victory of the Grafton group did not take place in a political vacuum, but within this context. It did not happen within project society, but it was not independent from it: it was fought out at the intersection of the world of the beggars, the NGO world and that of the media, mobilized by a member of the elite who decided that it was possible and worthwhile using the story of a few disabled beggars in a political argument with the government.

The informal versus the formal

Like many stories that I witnessed during my field work, this one, too, had a layer which resisted all efforts of analysis, just like any form of conventional logic. Neither the circumstances that led to the collective arrest of the polio-disabled people (and their children), nor those that led to their sudden liberation are entirely clear and probably they never will be. One thing is clear though: the story certainly allows a quick assessment of the impressive resources the polio-disabled are able to mobilise. Without these resources the collective homes would not exist.

Polio homes have a few basic functions and their success depends on their capacity to fulfil these: first of all they have to procure material safety for its members, in terms of security of shelter, security of livelihood and some rudimentary comfort of life. The active membership of disabled homes has a physical limit. A collective home cannot

accommodate people above its capacity. DPOs have to respond to other criteria. In theory, DPOs are little lobbying machines. The more members they have, the stronger they are. There is no physical limit to their growth. Their strength can be measured by their capacity to influence political decisions and mobilise their membership for a common cause. In practice however, these things depend often on more down to earth criteria: the existence of an appropriate filing and book keeping, an office base, capacity of the leadership to answer calls for proposals or at least to implement projects as partners and produce reports afterwards. In real life DPOs are not separate from the homes, the two are the same, and although the two rankings are not totally similar, generally speaking, the most successful homes are those which also function as well performing DPOs.

In the language of network theory, the fact of having a large personal network can be measured by the "size" (i.e. the number of relations), being influential depends on being indispensable (standing between two actors who mutually need each other), and this quality is expressed by "betweeness-centrality". Actors in a position of centrality are brokers: they can mediate between different other actors separated by structural holes (Burt 2002) or control communication between them, facilitate or block the flow of information. This point highlights - from another perspective - the advantage of being an umbrella organisation. Understandably the power of control enhances the status of an actor. According to network theory, it should be possible to identify the key actors just by their position in the network.

Well, in my network diagram (Fig. 49) this is indeed the case - but only to a certain extent. In Fig. 49. central actors are those having the most direct connections. But the most well-functioning DPO/homes do not necessarily occupy the most central position in the network. In this case there should be something else than their position that can explain the good performance of some of the polio organisations. It is possible that the key to success can be found outside of network theory, in the geographic location of the homes or the composition of their membership. It is indeed possible but my intuition was that the relative success of a DPO/home depends largely on who its leaders are. If we complete the institutional network with that of the persons, it is easy to verify the intuition. Below we see a total network, containing all the actors and links as mentioned by my interviewees. New elements in the graph are the green triangles,

each standing for a person. The respective size of the symbols represents the importance of the actors, as measured by the indicator of betweenness-centraility, measuring the xxx. In this simplistic picture the bigger the organisation looks, the more important it is from the point of view of its strategic position. A person that becomes visible in this network is bound to be an important player.

The people who we can see in this way are those we have already met: Kabbah, the president of the national union (SLUDI) and Sylvanus, the chairman of SLUDI's Western Branch, and that of POCA at the same time. We see other leaders of homes: Mariama, the chairlady of the Hastings girls, Silvanus, the Grafton chairman, Agnes, the leader of the splinter organisation from Hastings, Paul-Osman from UPBSA (Kissi), Abu-White from HAM, Abu-Bakr from PHDA (Waterloo), and Pa Mustapha. Paul-Osman and Abu-Bakr are also members of the executive of SLUPP. Those leaders who appear in this network are in general affiliated to organisations which themselves are well positioned in the network. These are also the ones that I have identified as the most successful, both as polio homes and as DPOs, even if they do not occupy a central position in the network, as illustrated by Fig., showing number of their direct relations (Fig. 45). This is the case of UPBSA and to a certain extent of HAM, certainly of Indigenous Blacksmith association (Pa Mustapha).
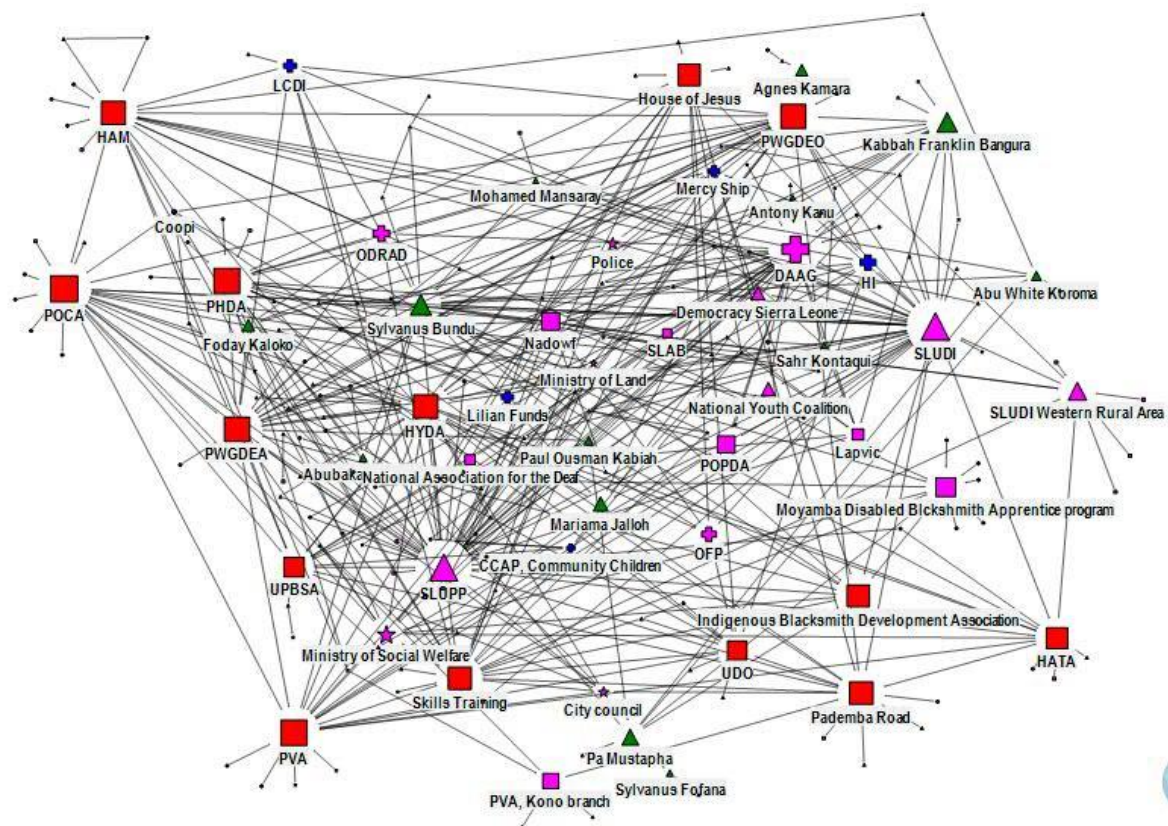
49. Figure All-actor network of the polio homes: key figures by their capacity to occupy structural holes

The influential leaders in question are the strong ones, those who are not necessarily democratically elected, those who can keep to their position for a long time, those whose positions are secured by their capacity to take care of a vast network of dependents. The network rewards its members according to other criteria than the ones that are on the list of international organisations. Network theory seems to work after all and it indicates that behind the organisational landscape there is a structure dominated by a few key figures accumulating a lot of relations and skilful in mediating between different fractions of the network. Behind the formal façade of civil society bigmanity governs the politics of the polio homes. If the chairman of the Grafton community was not one of the founders of the movement, if he was not at the same time the chairman of the Western Area branch of SLUDI, in long time rivalry with the national office of the Union and its leader, mobilisation for the liberation of the Grafton prisoners would probably have not been successful. To be more precise, there are chances that mobilisation would not have happened at all. If the Chief Editor of a national newspaper would not have had political ambitions she probably would not have supported the

mobilisation of the victims with such a sustained interest. Mobilisation finally is not that unlikely as Galtung and Farmer would predict, but when it happens there is more likelihood that it emerges as part of the dynamic of the system, without challenging profoundly its internal rules.

The power of the client –and the limits of his agency

I have tried to demonstrate that polio homes owe their existence and long term survival to collective, albeit fragmented solidarity, on the one hand; and to the capacity of their disabled leaders to play the patrimonial game. Polio homes are able to procure security to their members because they are embedded in several patrimonial networks which they manipulate with relative success. I also showed that - contrary to romantic assumptions about the inherent subversive agency of informal urban groupings (Obadare and Willems 2014), criticising (not without reasons) the role of formalized NGOs in progressive movements – polio-homes sustain their agency not despite of their formalized character, but because of it. Their strength is derived precisely from their ability to link the informal and formal side of their identity. Being a recognised DPO is as important an asset as being a street band from where rarray boys can be recruited. Being the two at the same time, maintaining the capacity of quick shape shifting is an invaluable political resource for a group that many consider – with good reasons – would identify as one of the most vulnerable one in the post war development era.

Shape shifting is an idea alien to Western philosophy; reluctant to accept self-contradictions, but it is a common experience of Sierra Leoneans, whose world view[248] allows recognizing two things as the same and different simultaneously. A man can be a human *and* a witch, a chicken can be a bird *and* a human[249], however, only one of their complementary identities may be manifest at a time. I use shapeshifting as a concept to

---

[248] In Americanist ethnography a similar psychological phenomenon is called "perspectivism". Viveiros de Castro wrote a lot about it in relation to the Brazilian Indians. I suspect though that the correspondence is not full. In the cosmology of the Brazilian Indians the essence is always the same, while the appearance might change, according to the perspective of the viewer. That is why for an observer an animal can "turn into" a man or vice versa at any moment It is as if in Western Africa the essence was changing, leaving sometimes intact the appearance. That is why the external aspects of things do not help understand the essence.

[249] The story of the Kabala chicken, which I heard on the radio, might illustrate how African perspectivism works. In 2009, in an atmosphere where rumours about human sacrifice circulated widely, somebody found a bundle in which he believed to recognize the remnants of a slaughtered child. But when the package was brought to the police and opened, only parts of a dead chicken could be identified. For the public waiting outside of the police station the discovery was not a proof of an original mistake but a clear evidence of shape shifting. [249].

describe strategies of sudden shifts in positioning, consisting in performing one out of complementary identities and dissimulating another. On one occasion I witnessed a group of young men in wheelchairs coming to beg in front of the Ministry of Health, a strategic location, they liked to occupy. They were surprised by a couple of journalists who were invited to report on a donation ceremony, in which a few Jeeps were transferred from a foreign NGO to the Ministry, with the aim of helping the government to do out-reach in physical rehabilitation. The boys had no idea of what was going on, but it took them only a second to reposition themselves. Transformed into responsibilized beneficiaries and prospective users they gave several interviews on the spot in a perfectly adapted project jargon, explaining to journalists the immense importance and expected huge benefits of the donation. The event was reported in the press as something like "DPOs coming to celebrate a big moment in the promotion of disability rights".

Being a client obliges the actors to make choices, act out - on different scenes - relations of alliance and hostility, join and form alliances and use these against adversaries, briefly to play an active, and to some extent autonomous, political role. Autonomy in this case consists of having the relative liberty to choose one's identity or to change camps if assessment of possible future gains makes such a shift a rational choice. But liberty does not go as far as challenging the whole system. The capacity to form coalitions is an important asset for the subaltern, but as long as coalitions can be played out against each other, their power of resistance remains necessarily restricted. Also, complementary identities can be used against each other. Disabled beggars can be presented as different and separate from street vendors, slum dwellers or street boys, despite the fact that these groups face the same threats imposed by quick urban development; despite the fact that these groups are composed largely by the same people. This is where identity politics - allowing (and rewarding) only one identity, that of the disabled - might turn to be counterproductive on the long run. People with disability, inhabitants of the polio squats, despite their existing agency, are kept in a double trap by identity politics, which anchors them simultaneously in the patrimonial regime of project society and that of the state. This double indebtedness makes any alliance outside of the disability field highly improbable. State power in this way creates a group of supporters – twice beholden to the elite -at a place from where critical voices

should be expected to rise. Did not the disability movement start as a political movement after all?

Disabled identity gives people of the squats considerable strength in defending their interests, but it also confines them to a relatively closed world. If the polio-disability network is heterogeneous as far as the types of actors and their geographic affiliation is concerned, it is strikingly homogenous concerning the scope of issues defended. In other words, although the network is linking international and national organisations, private and public stakeholders, NGOs and CSOs, it contains barely any contacts with organizations outside the disability field. Even within the disability world, this network is closing in on itself, creating a strong sense of solidarity between the polio survivors, with weaker and far fewer links (except for the centre of the network) to other groups of disabled people.

50. Figure Transsectorial alliances within the network

Figure 50. permits us to have a look at the total network one more time, from the perspective of identity politics. Here the system of marking is somewhat different from

the preceding graphs. The geometrical shapes differentiating between types of actors are the same, but the colours here are used to distinguish the dominant themes of the organisations. Red squares are still the polio homes of Freetown, purple stands for other polio-related DPOs, orange marks cross-disability organisations, while the meaning of black here is "disability-neutral". The diagram reveals to what point the network of the polio-homes is homogenous and closed in on itself. All the non-disabled allies are NGOs, umbrellas and state institutions; polio DPOs on the grass-root level do not even maintain direct contact with DPOs representing people with other types of impairments, let alone grass-roots organisations organised on other basis than on disability. Coalitions therefore are bound to remain identity based, issue based alignments are excluded and so mobilisation for universal social rights for a universal public is highly unlikely.

Summary

This chapter dealt with the political life of the polio-homes. Their networks are essentially political in nature for two reasons: on the one hand, because their structures constraint the agency of their members; on the other, because they constitute a field where individual and collective agency might be performed, solidarity can be organised and mobilisation can emerge. Deep-rooted cultural patterns, often described as patrimonialism, as well as the institutional system of what I have called project society shape the form of the structure and establish the rules of the game in it, reward certain strategies more than others. In a study comparing the networks of Russian and Chinese entrepreneurs, Batjargal found the same cultural embeddednes of network strategies and suggested that "institutions and cultures influence network structures and relations in interactive ways" (Batjargal 2005). The old principle of "Wealth in People" permeates still the relational universe of the DPO/homes. Consequently, occupying and using structural holes strategically in order to filter information, trying to establish paternalistic relations with would-be clients and clientalistic relations with potential patrons are the basic components of their network politics. In the competition for scarce resources and in order to acquire a minimum existential safety, their double identity (as formal DPOs and informal collective homes) can be used as an asset. The strategy of shape shifting has got its natural limits though. There are circumstances when the disabled identity might assure enough protection, although more often than not, its evocation does not trigger immediate recognition. Other circumstances are necessary to

make identity politics a winning strategy. These circumstances are anchored today in project society. With changing circumstances – the progressive retirement of foreign NGOs might lead to such changes - the pronounced homogeneity of the network - with disability as the only common point of reference - might be turned from an advantage into a disadvantage, and previously successful strategies might be found counter-productive.

8. From quasi translation to insurgent citizenship

"The "war", honestly, was an inappropriate one for the programme, the aim of which was, first and foremost, modernization, with railways, schools, hospitals, shops - amenities these populations could quickly take advantage of by trading their craft production based on plant fibre, hevea gum and natural pigments."

Efoui, Kossi: The shadow of things to come

Where parallel worlds meet: legal equality versus de facto vulnerability

"The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) was ratified by the Sierra Leone Parliament on 4th May, 2009, after a long and hard fight by the Disabled Persons Organizations (DPOs) in the country calling for the ratification of that document. Subsequently in May, 2011 the CRPD was domesticated in Sierra Leone by the enactment of a national legislation – The Persons with Disabilities Act, 2011.Article 29 of the CRPD provides that States Parties shall guarantee political rights to Persons with Disabilities (PWDs) and the opportunity to enjoy those rights on an equal basis with others. By the same token section 29 of the Persons with Disabilities Act, 2011 provides for the same."

The above citation is from an oral presentation by Hon. Julius Cuffie[250], the first polio-disabled MP of Sierra Leone. Accordingly, in Mr. Cuffie's interpretation *The Persons with Disabilities Act* conferred to its beneficiaries civic rights of which they had been previously deprived. In a strict sense, this is not precisely the case, as even prior to the Act, in principle nothing stopped people with disabilities from voting or from being voted for, as the very example of Mr. Cuffie proves, who had been elected years before the "Disability Law". The quoted 29th paragraph in actual fact does not provide additional political rights; it simply prescribes accessibility of polling stations. This is a big difference! And yet, for Honourable Cuffie - as for most stakeholders involved in one

---

[250] Text available online:
http://www.google.hu/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=1&ved=0CCAQFjAA&url=http%3A%2F%2F
www.un.org%2Fdisabilities%2Fdocuments%2FCOP%2Fcosp4_presentation_cuffie.doc&ei=kVBLVaqAGoT_UPi5
gVg&usg=AFQjCNHyQtZKyRJzchbhmmNxrCr0G588Lg&sig2=Y5C9iHRer1TVPoYN2ufq4Q&bvm=bv.92765956,d.d
24

way or another in the enactment of the Bill - its significance was that it conferred full citizenship to people with disabilities – as if citizenship was the strongest language in which inclusion, acceptance and the ambition of living a "normal" life could be expressed.

However, formal equality guaranteed by legal provisions seems to be of little help against violence. Exactly one month before the Grafton incident and only a few days after the Disability Bill became an Act the squat of Ecowas Street suffered a massive attack from the police. The raid shed light on the tremendous gap separating the two universes between which the polio squats constituted a bridge: that of identity politics and that of the disenfranchised urban poor. While in theory the law protected people with disability against discrimination, nothing protected poor urban squatters against violent evictions.

The 11th of May is normally a happy day for Freetownians, because that day in all the ghettoes the birthday of Bob Marley is celebrated with concerts and parties. On the 11th of May 2011 however the polio-disabled community had no reason to celebrate. Early in the morning two trucks filled with policemen parked in front of Ecowas and the troops surrounded the house. Days before rumours had been circulating about imminent eviction but the nature of rumours is such that people always maintain a right to doubt until it is too late. Although it could not be considered totally unexpected, the arrival of the police found the squatters unprepared. It was an ordinary morning and people were getting ready for their daily chores, some were having breakfast, some were washing, mothers were preparing the children for school. When the police invited them to leave the place, they refused. After that everything happened very quickly. The police started to shoot tear gas in the building. The people – little children included – fell in a trap. Most of them were upstairs; they could not rush down the stairs. They did not intend to do so either. Despite of the suffocating smoke, they remained in the building starting to fight back with stones and other projectiles. They were quickly outnumbered by the police. Policemen finally entered the building and hurled out everything they could over the railing of the balcony: personal belongings, furniture, working tools, computers and sewing machines, the iceboxes of the soda sellers, schoolbags of schoolchildren, everything that had meant security for the squatters. Sally, single mother of a small girl, living on the second floor was traumatised:

"I was in my room, I was preparing my child for school, I was about to go and sell, then came the police and the fight started. Our children were in the house with us when they fired tear gas on us and on our children at the same time. So it was not very easy for us, we had to face so many punishments, so many of our members got beaten, some got wounded, some they stole their properties from the rooms and the properties of the organisation, too."[251]

Indeed, the policemen were suspected not only to destroy things but also to steal, and not only valuables but also money.

"They came in, they attacked us, attacked the coordinator, they attacked also the chairman, they emptied his pockets, took everything he got."

The chairman was wounded on his leg and subsequently handcuffed to a lamp-post in the street. Other injured were carried out from the house by their abled bodied companions and by some of the neighbours who looked as shocked and scandalised as the victims themselves. Groups of people gathered in the street, commenting vividly the events, some of them trying to reason the police. Nobody seemed to approve what was happening. As the pile of wreckage was growing bigger and bigger in the street, the inhabitants were gradually giving up resistance. They gathered their possessions and helped the police empty the building. Most of them settled down with all their property right in front of the house, on the other side of the street. They did not move from there for 24 hours, despite the storm that arrived during the night.

"So we had to come out to the street, we all came out, they pulled out our things, we were with our children, so from that day up to the next day we stayed out in the street, we suffered under the rain and under the sun. Some policemen came back and they brought tear gas!"

Luckily nobody was seriously injured at the end except for a small baby who got the tear gas right in his eyes. But the life of over 150 people seemed to be definitely ruined. I believed so at least. That was without counting with their extraordinary resistance and with the inconsistency of the situation. Already during the morning while the police were still attacking, different messengers from different social spheres arrived making it known that the squatters were not alone. Besides the neighbours and curious

---

[251] Passages from an interview with Sally, inhabitant of the "Ecowas" squat, after the eviction which took place on the 11th of May, 2011

passers-by, representatives of different polio-homes also formed little groups: people came mostly from the nearby House of Jesus, but PO, the chairman from Kissi was also there with other executive members of SLUPP and SLUDI. The chairman of SLUDI arrived with a jeep that had been donated to the organisation little time before by an INGO and which conferred a rather official look to his appearance. After a few angry exchanges with the policemen, he disappeared, presumably in search of higher protectors. Later on we learnt that he went straight to talk to the chief of the Police. After a while Patrick Taylor also came running, forgetting about his crutches. He was a member of the SLUDI executive, but more importantly, he worked for the Human Rights Commission. No policemen dared to stop him. Finally, even the Deputy-Minister of Social Welfare joined the growing crowd. She came in a big black car and although she did not get off, she talked to the officer in charge and to some of the evicted. She was almost apologetic. She assured everybody that her Ministry was not involved, was not even informed and she said was really sorry for what had happened. Activists from the two local NGOs, OFP and COJA were there too, I was not sure if they were the ones who called the press, but several cameramen were shooting at the scene. This massive public support was enough to intimidate the police who slowly retreated, but it was not enough to cancel the order of eviction. Although property rights were not totally clear, according to the most reliable sources the building belonged to the City Council and people claimed to know that it was the Municipality which had decided to throw out the polio-disabled because they wanted to lease it to somebody. If the squatters wanted to keep the right to the building they had to negotiate with the City Council.

This is what they did, as soon as the next morning. Most of them remained camped in front of their house but a medium size cortege was sent to protest in front of the Council's building. They came back empty handed. The negotiations were not conclusive. By the afternoon nothing changed. The brebis were still in the middle of the road, the house stayed empty and whole families were camping all around it. Then seemingly without any reason, people started to move back, one by one. They gathered whatever still could be used and carried all the saved items back to the place. By sunset only the disorder in front of the house reminded of the violent events. Around 7 o' clock a truck full of policemen turned into the street, it slowed down in front of the house, but did not stop. The storm was over.

What happened was so illogical that it would be easy to qualify it as a random show of power on behalf of the police, without deeper political motives. But if the events had not had structural causes, it would have remained an isolated case. This is clearly not so. Since 2009 the police or other armed forces intervened in the forced eviction of the polio squats of the Western Peninsula at least on 6 occasions[252]. The process was non-violent only in one case, when the inhabitants left the place voluntarily in exchange of a proposal of immediate relocation. In all the other cases police brutality claimed both material and human casualties, leaving behind broken and stolen possessions, wounded victims and – at least in one occasion – dead bodies[253].

The common feature between all the evictions is the combination of an absolute lack of transparency and a sense of irrational violence, suspending the illusion - fed by the disability movement itself - that the relation between the government and people with disability is essentially defined by international standards of human rights. Although according to the authorities the attempted evictions have always been sanctioned by a court order, in most cases the squatters deny having been officially invited to (or even informed about) the court hearing. In those cases when they were informed about the procedure, they never received a copy of the order officially. In the absence of the written document it is impossible to understand on what basis the forceful eviction was decided. Not knowing the charges, it is equally impossible for the squatters to defend themselves by providing proof attesting their good faith. In any case, given that the court orders presumably have existed for a while and they permanently hang over the heads of the squatters, nobody understands what triggers the eviction at a particular moment, just as it remains impossible to know who exactly is responsible for mobilizing the police, is it really the police involved, and if yes, which section of it, and who is in charge? Finally, people can only guess whose interests are being served: gossips are circulating about the government, the municipality, the original owners of the property, prospective investors, local or international businesses – nobody knows for sure.

The choice of the method of evictions is not less difficult to understand as its triggers. Teargas and rubber bullets are widely used by the police all over the world to

---

[252] Walpole Street was evacuated in 2009, House of Jesus was evacuated 3 times, Ecowas and Skills training were attacked by police force at least once.
[253] Members of Skills training affirm having lost members in the confrontation.

control potentially violent citizens, but these methods seem to be a bit heavy handed on a population using wheelchairs and crutches, whose only crime – the informal occupation - is tacitly tolerated by the political elite any other day of the year. Alhaji, the chairman of House of Jesus also speaks about tear gas evoking the last attack that his house suffered:

"*They came with tear gas, they broke everything, they fired teargas in the wheelchairs. You see this man (*pointing to Suari*); they fired teargas in his chair. He had to dash, like a soldier (he* laughs and shows how his friend had to throw himself on the ground*) "[254]

Isn't the government busy affirming that they support people with disability and help the efforts of international donors to create sustainable livelihood strategies for them? It is as if for the day of the eviction all these efforts had been annulled and the counter had been put back to zero. The police not only brutalize the men and the women, they also cause considerable material damage. Personal and collective properties are destroyed, including *panbodies*, which are homes for individual families, results of years of effort to leave the street. Work tools, computers, sewing machines and other utensils – the tangible part of development projects - are demolished or plundered. It is almost unthinkable that the same people had been celebrated on the account of their disability at so many occasions before. Their being treated as ordinary criminals suspends their innocuous beneficiary status just for one day, and that day the international community remains silent. INGOs prefer starting a new project providing more tools and equipment than officially protesting against the destructions, because protest would mean getting involved in politics, which most INGOs paradoxically want to avoid at all cost.

However arbitrary the whole process seems to be, Amin Kamete[255], an experienced student of urban politics in South Africa insists on the rational nature of state violence against the inhabitants of informal neighbourhoods. He believes that evictions and other campaigns of "cleaning" are used as communication tools by those in

---

[254] Interview with Alhaji, chairman of House of Jesus, in September 2010
[255] On urban planning, informality and the 'polis' in Southern Africa. (filmed) lecture by Dr. Amin Kamete, Bangor University, UK. (34 min.), in the framework of the conference 'Remaking the city: Life and planning at the informal/formal interface', 7 March 2012, Uppsala, Sweden, organised by the Nordic Africa Institute
http://www.nai.uu.se/events/multimedia/remaking-the-city-7-march/

power. The message that the ad hoc violence contains is that although the state does not have enough strength to flush all the surplus population out of the city all at once (and maybe it does not even wish so) it maintains the right to keep a tight control on them, reminding them from time to time that the seeming tolerance might end one day. The message of the evictions is that despite the long tolerance and even state protection they enjoy, squat-dwellers are part of the unwanted surplus population. They constitute a stain on the yet non-existent but so much desired beauty[256] of the city, because they are an obstacle to the privatization of urban spaces and to the transformation of the city centre according to the taste and aspirations of investors and of the ascending upper middle class. Capitalism has turned the old West-African principle upside down. In the present version of patrimonial power-management, people do not represent wealth anymore; they have become superfluous. Rather than people, land is wealth, and there is shortage of it.

Selling (out) Sierra Leone - the spacialisation of exclusion

Despite the "Wealth in People" principle, the power game in Sierra Leone has always had a very important territorial aspect: those in power seeking to limit the access and use of spaces by those who are excluded from power. The aim of the game was indeed to recruit followers but this aim could not have been realized without the capacity of elders to control land use. So access to land has always marked the dividing line between big and small men, between those who controlled and those who were controlled in a chain of reciprocal patrimonial dependencies.

While lineage elders had the right to exercise "some administrative rights" on the land and pass it on, latter settlers only had prescribed rights to use it (Moyo and Foray 2009). Despite the inbuilt structural inequality of this situation, strangers - even slaves – could get integrated in important lineages through the kinship system, and become elders or chiefs with time. The present system combines three different forms of land tenure: private-, government- and collective rights. In the whole territory of the ex-Protectorate, land is still in the possession of communities and hence is non- alienable. The detractors of customary land rights argue that it does not favour long term

---

[256] De Pa don really woke' : How President Koroma has transformed Sierra Leone to a land of beauty
http://www.cocorioko.net/?p=33834

investment, as individual cultivators cannot be sure they can personally profit from increased yields in the future. Others, on the contrary, emphasize the collective security inherent in customary land ownership. This system, as Barrows notes, gives precedence to „economic security" over „economic opportunity" (Barrows 1974).

The historical process of Sierra Leone's long march into modernity has been marked by the increase of land-insecurity of those who do not have direct control of land. Similarly, Big Men, traditionally investing in the accumulation of men instead of the accumulation of land - have gradually changed their strategy: drawing power from land instead of relying on people. While network politics is still the dominant form of the political, more and more people are being transformed into a superfluous surplus. Investors in the countryside and municipalities in the cities face the same problem: today there seems to be too many people and too little (free) space to develop.

Collective land tenure is challenged by its detractors and land reform is on the government's agenda again. The impossibility to procure property rights to land deters investors - argue most of the reformers. However, it would be a mistake to believe that in the present system the interdiction of land alienation provides sufficient protection to poor farmers. Because communal land cannot be sold, companies lease the land, usually to the maximum time allowed by a 1927 Protectorate Ordinance, i.e. for 50 years, with a 21 year possible extension.

"Early 2011, close to 500,000 ha of farmland had been leased or were under negotiation for lease". Land deals are characterised by a complete lack of transparency. Leases are negotiated "directly with chiefs and landowners, and often the signatories do not have copies nor are they aware of the terms of the leases or even the land area covered. As a result, there is little critical or accurate media coverage of the land deals, Sierra Leoneans don't know how much of their farmland has already been leased to foreign investors, and there is no serious public debate on the subject " – a report of the Oakland Institute notes. (Oakland_Insitute 2012).

The possibility of long term land lease provides immense „economic opportunity" for investors, but of course definite ownership would constitute a much stronger guarantee of their interests in the long term. In 2010 the Law Reform Commission started to prepare a new policy document in view of large-scale industrial, export-oriented agriculture. Land reform seems at this point inevitable – not simply because the

co-existence of 3 different land titles[257] is indeed problematic, but mainly because the ban on permanent land alienation is going against the interest of powerful potential land buyers, as well as against the preferences of advocates of individual rights. This is how the not so secret alliance of project society with free market capitalism works, feeding directly into state designed policies. Whatever impact the reform will have on industrial and agricultural production, it is probable that it will lead to the further acceleration of the rural exodus of poor landless people towards the cities, first of all towards Freetown.

Sahr Piquiva is not a landless man, at least not yet; he is the chief of the village Jardu Gbense (Kono district), but he is afraid that the nearby expanding mining company will covet the land of his village and he has a quite clear view about his chances to protect his people, knowing perfectly well the company's strategies:

"They just come pay you and they relocate you, forgetting the fact, that the land where you are is a continuous possession from generations yet unborn. They will have to depend on it. They cannot pay you one day. There are children. And great-great children will have to come. But if you insist, and the government wants that place, you as a local authority, who are you to challenge it?"

Chief Piquiva knows that the government's support is invariably on the side of the investor and the inalienable right to communal land is not going to stop the effective alienation of the land. And when the land does not secure livelihood any more what else will be left to the village people than joining the growing tide of rural migrants? The population of Freetown is over 2 million now in a country of 5 to 6 million inhabitants. The overpopulation strains the town's already fragile infrastructure and leads to palpable social tensions. The central government and the City Council have no solution to this problem, except for "controlling" this population – in the words of the Deputy Mayor, and for encouraging people to return to the countryside. The failure of this policy is attributed – as usual – to the stubbornness, irrationality and idleness of the poor.

Whose city is it, anyhow?

During the war, until the attack of January 1999 Freetown was a Safe haven compared to the countryside. Accommodating rural refugees was its taken for granted

---

[257] The system today includes private-, government- and community land rights

obligation. The war and its destructions also mitigated the differences between the rich and the poor; as a result the city has shown for a long time natural tolerance towards its own messy image, and towards the poor masses responsible for it. Although there were many highly protected private estates, the coexistence of the rich and the poor remained the rule. In the immediate after-war period there was no "quartier chic" absolutely free of poverty, although there were quite many "ghettos" or "slums", which did not really "stick out" by their destitution, but rather by the insecure entitlements of their residents.

Due to this historical conjuncture the division line between the city centre and the periphery is less clear than elsewhere, for example in Sao Paolo, where Holston (2008) was able to produce a neat description of the concentric urban structure. But the centre-periphery relation is not simply a geographical one. Holston's essential observation is that spacial organisation reflects the distribution of social rights (Ibid: 158) and values, in as much as the centre and the periphery are respectively associated with binary ideas such as modernity-backwardness, hygiene-salubrity, morality-immorality. (Ibid: 162). Periphery is thus a concept of structural violence crystallised in space.

In a place like in Freetown the spacial distribution of economic, social, political and cultural capital is not that clear-cut than in Sao Paolo, although spacial segregation exists. "The periphery" then becomes more a metaphor, used for those spaces that are in the position of material exclusion and of symbolic inferiority in relation to the centre. It becomes possible than to speak about internal peripheries within the centre and internal centres within the peripheries.

Freetown nonetheless is changing, approaching slowly the ideal of the city beautiful (displaying new, impressive buildings instead of shacks, wide avenues instead of narrow dirt roads, new public solar lights instead of streets plunged in darkness), proving, indisputably, that the "Pa is working"[258]. As wealth became once again visible in the streets, urbanity became gradually a synonym for intolerant development and the geographical peripherisation of social exclusion started.

Development has a price: it requires transformation of the space by elimination. The list of the things and of the people which and who do not have a place in this new city is getting longer every day. Already in 2008 I remember listening to programs in

---

[258] Reference made to the article published in Cocorico, cited above

the then UN radio mobilizing against the street vendors who were obstructing – as it was said - the traffic. I wondered how such a policy can ever succeed, since every second inhabitant of the city seemed to be engaged in selling 24 hours a day. The policy did not succeed; less because of the active protest of street vendors than because of their passive resistance or because of the physical impossibility to eliminate a million people from the street. Other "cleaning" strategies were more effective. From time to time, for reasons that remained unexplained, the police came to collect and pester whoever they found sleeping on the pavement. *Okadamen,* another category of people using the street as a resource, have also been target of police harassment for long time. The war against the okadamen culminated in "operation WID", a measure to clear the city centre from moto-taxis commanded by President Koroma immediately after his second investiture in 2012.

The savage market of Victoria Park was transformed into a "civilized" covered market, accommodating less than the half of the vendors who used to sell there. The popular fish frying restaurants of Lumley had been all gone by 2010, because – as the argument went - nobody has the right to appropriate collective property and the beach is indeed the most collective property of Freetownians. Collective property notwithstanding, almost immediately the small wooden shacks were replaced by more durable constructions: today terraces and restaurants offer food and drink for those who can afford it, for prices as high as in London or Paris. Modernisation continued by the broadening of Wilkinson road and Lumley road entailing the destruction of thousands of small selling stalls and the cutting into two of a big number of houses and properties. Owners were indemnified – although not to the extent of their loss, they complained – but hundreds of renters, informal dwellers and squatters definitely lost their homes. One domain where the disabled squatters might find common ground with the largely migrant urban poor is by facing the common threat to be evicted, displaced, banned from certain parts of the city, where development is crutching gradually into the living places of the poor, advancing by everyday harassment and by occasional, seemingly irrational, abrupt eruptions of violence.

As the awareness of the threat is growing, people belonging to the targeted categories start to respond:

"*Slums, you have to remove the slums from the people, not to remove the people from the Slums*"

I have not read this statement on one of those moralising giant posters which are supposed to tell people the difference between right and wrong, it was the chief of the vast slums of Kroobay who made this enunciation in person to answer my question about the chances of the "cleaning" of his realm. Obviously, he repeated a slogan that he had heard somewhere, in one of those civil society meetings that punctuated people's life in the post war years. He did not mean it less, for that matter. He was not aware of any concrete plan yet – he told me - but rumours about the imminent displacement of the population had been in the air for a while. The municipality denied having such intention, at least in the immediate future, but the deputy mayor was also adamant about the improbability of the requalification of the neighbourhood: there was no money for that. Sooner or later, the land, well situated, right at the sea, will have to be liberated for more productive use. Yet, Kroobay is not one of those savage lands dotted by panbodies of the freshly arrived migrants who did not know where to camp while waiting for a better chance to move on. It can be said to be a "historical slums", progressively populated from the end of the 19th century, by poor people from the interior attracted by the town life but not being able to afford accommodation in the inner city. After independence the influx of people continued, even accelerated, and it is still not ready to stop. Expensive dwelling and the poor housing conditions all over the city made this place popular, where – just with the permission of the chief – newcomers could quickly start putting up their own hovel. Consequently, the streets and the housing areas developed in a chaotic way, basically by gradual occupation, without any planning. The result is an overcrowded labyrinth of shanties where strangers are not advised to adventure even before dark.

What looked like hell for any unwarranted newcomer was home for more than 10 000 people, the majority of whom also owed their livelihood to the place. All were aware of the threat of displacement, and none of them approved it. Murray Allie Conteh, ex-counsellor of the neighbourhood explained to me why: "*I am giving you an example: if I am a fisherman, I work at the warf. You want to take me to live on the hill, where there is no fishing!? How am I going to sustain my family*?" Allie has taken things into his own hands. He made Kroobay a branch of the National Slumdwellers Federation (itself a

branch of the South-African based Slum Dwellers International) and apparently he also took the grief of his people to the Vice-President:

„So I put this on the table. We met face to face with the Vice-President, he was sitting in front of me, with the minister of lands and other stakeholders, in the Vice-President's office. I was the spokesman that day. I told him: Pa', we are hearing about plans of evicting us from Kroobay. We are not secondary citizens in this country. So if you are talking about eviction, it is like a slap on our face."

For the ex-councillor the claim for being included could be best formulated in the language of citizenship, just like for Honourable Cuffie, the polio-disabled MP. But unlike the disabled politician, Allie did not wish to feel more included in the political body of the nation; he simply wanted to remain included in the city. The accusation that the government considered the slums dwellers as secondary citizens was a clever argument, because discrimination was the last thing a politician would have liked to admit under the regime boasting of its democratic character. The existence of differentiated social rights resulting in graduated citizenship was nonetheless a fact and both Allie and the Vice-President knew this. In these circumstances Allie's statement was not a negation. On the contrary, by a feigned denial he pointed at a reality which he refused to accept.

Between subjects and citizens - historical origins of differentiated citizenship

In Africa – argues Mamdani (1996) – differentiated citizenship is the historical product of the huge distance introduced by colonialism separating the governors and the governed. The colonial governance was based on an original division which produced what he calls the *Bifurcated State*. His theory is based on South-African ethnography, where the bifurcated state has operated in a particularly virulent form, but, according to him, more or less open apartheid has been and is still practiced in most modern African states, although not always in its racialized form.

Under colonial rule the state conceded civil rights to the educated urban elite while it preserved traditional authority in the rural areas, creating a sharp administrative, cultural and symbolic division between two categories of people: those belonging to the enlightened civil society - embodied by the colonial administration as

well as those under its protection - and those living in the supposedly backward kingdom of "culture"; who - "would be the subject to an all-round tutelage" (Mamdani 1996:17). Thus, the bifurcated state engendered a bifurcated society, separating citizens and subjects, a separation which persisted after independence in most African countries. The survival of double standards has helped reproduce the racist prejudices white colonizer held towards African subjects in the contempt that the African urban elite has maintained towards the uneducated village people. Urbanisation changed the geographical distribution, but did not really change the social relation. The urban poor, who have - to a great extent - rural origins, continue to live in a symbolic periphery which is separated from the urban elite not only physically but also socially, culturally and by a differentiated relation to civil rights, in principle guaranteed for all.

In Sierra Leone, too, a deracialized and democratised form of apartheid has been practiced from the beginning, separating the right bearing citizens of the colony from the not-yet-totally-civilised subject of the protectorate. The British crown built up its administrative system in Freetown and never totally annexed the rest of Sierra Leone, which became the Protectorate in 1896. The cultural, social and political distance between the Western Area and the Provinces is still palpable, as it is reflected in the language: Freetownians call "up-line"[259] anything which is outside of the Peninsula and village people in Mende refer to Freetown as "Salone" (the affectionate name for Sierra Leone) as if they considered themselves radically separated from the city dwellers of the capital. The separation does not exist only in people's heads. Until today the administrative system, the legal system and land rights are de facto different in the territory of the ex-colony and in the ex-protectorate.

The Bifurcated state at the origin of the parallel worlds

As elsewhere, colonial apartheid survived independence in insidious ways. The division which separated the colony from the protectorate survives today in the differentiation between cosmopolitan elites and the rural and urban poor. Project society has preserved traits of this coloniality maintaining a symbolical distance between a "civilized" civil society and the yet to be civilized "local communities". The survival of the bifurcated state obliges Sierra Leoneans – both the elite and the commons

---

[259] "up-line" is an expression from another epoch, evoking the times when there was still a railway line working in Sierra Leone

- to live not only under a bifurcated state but also in a bifurcated society, where everything is duplicated: the norms and rules guiding people's everyday life, the expectations people have of each other, the distinction between what is important and unimportant, what is good and bad, what is speakable and unspeakable, even the words that are available to express what can be expressed. Under the thin surface of the common world produced by project society the fissure between parallel universes threatens constantly to break open. In these circumstances it is not surprising that many signifiers stubbornly maintain a certain distance from the signified. There are gaps everywhere, as Li discovered in another version of project society in Indonesia: "gaps between one document and the next, gaps between the world conveyed in the texts ant the world to be transformed and gaps between what the program proposed and what they delivered."[260] (Li 2007:121)

But there is more to it than just the difference between the abstract and the real. In some ways, project society's reality is as real as that of "local communities", just the two are not joined into one, they remain superposed. In everyday interactions the co-existence of parallel worlds transpires through seemingly incoherent position takings, allowing mutually exclusive statements and opinions coexist. Everything is all right and unbearable at the same time. In the same way, relevant others might be simultaneously enemies and allies, or alternately one or the other, depending on the situation. Again, multiple identities are not specific to Africa, but I contend that here we face something unique, something rooted in the colonial experience, something that Fanon explains as the double frame of reference imposed on the colonized African: "Overnight the Negro has been given two frames of reference within which he has had to place himself."- he writes (Fanon 1967:83). His analysis is still pertinent, illuminating the profoundly neo-colonial nature of the post-colonial, post-war political regime. The two frames of reference within which the Sierra Leonean subject-citizen has to place himself is that of project society on the one hand, and everything else that continues to exist outside of it, on the other.

---

[260] One example for the parallel worlds is a discussion I had with an expert who came to evaluate the strength of the DPOs in Sierra Leone. He was exasperated. He had the feeling that DPOs are weak not because of their natural lack of capacity but because they are made dependent on project funding. I did not expect him to put all his negative feelings into his report, still I was still flabbergasted when I saw his paper coming out with the brightest possible evaluation.

At the end of the day, in this bifurcated society, despite the existence of differentiated rights and huge social distances, everybody is at the same time subject and citizen. "First class" and "Second class citizens are linked by the same need to be civilized by civilizing others: all parties are demanded to play a double role: being reformed and reforming, being agents and subjects of change at the same time. The specifically modern „combination of democracy, violence, injustice and impunity" (Holston 2008: 304) is not something secondary citizens experience alone, this is the common frame of reference for all, a master frame which joins into an incoherent and alienating one the distinctly existing parallel universes.

Making parallel worlds meet: quasi translation as governance

In another part of the world, in a different society, Holston (2008:197) also finds traces of differentiated citizenship, which seems to be the common trait of all deeply inegalitarian society. The Brazilian state however, contrary to the British rule in Sierra Leone, did not make the differentiation open. "In Brazil citizenship was from the start universally inclusive in membership and massively inegalitarian in distribution." The same model of universally inclusive citizenship coexisting with its "massively inegalitarian" distribution became the norm in Sierra Leone after Independence. Holston's analysis therefore might be enlightening also for the Sierra Leonean case. Analysing the strategy of the Brazilian state from the 19th century to the election of Lula the author finds a remarkably consistent pattern, alienating "the vast majority of Brazilians" from the law, by their "exclusion from politics, property, dignity and law" (Ibid:198) In many respects, those Sierra Leoneans, who recognise themselves as "secondary citizens", find themselves in a similar situation as the Brazilian poor: being of rural origin, they are absorbed first by the city only to get pushed to its peripheries (wherever these peripheries might be) by various measures and practices. Landlessness, housing insecurity, complicated ownerships rights and non-transparent ownership structure as well as bad or missing infrastructure characterise these urban peripheries, which in the Sierra Leonean context, at least for the time being, might be found as well in the middle of the city. The present urban development of Freetown seems to contain elements that enhance geographical peripherisation, instead of the infrastructural and social deperipherisation of the city centre. The Kroobay chief knew what he was afraid

of: rather than the slums, the people are being removed. In Brazil, as well as in Sierra Leone, nobody takes responsibility for this kind of segregation. What pushes the poor out of the city is after all *development,* rather than an admitted policy.

Development that everybody wants and nobody contests becomes in this way a fig leaf, hiding the very exclusion it produces. It functions like the linguistic innovation "Frontier Challenge" –in the novel of Efoui[261] - used to mask a war waged by the elite living in the centre against the rebellious indigenous population of the frontier zone. Calling a war "frontier challenge" is not properly a lie; in the novel it is a euphemism used to translate between two universes in order to keep these together despite the huge internal tensions stretching the system from inside. Authors (Clarke 2012; Rose 1999) interested in governmentality tend to see in translation the very work governments need to perform in order to translate principles of governance in the everyday life of people (Clarke 2012) Translation for Rose is what makes the daily business of governing possible (Rose 1999)

Calling a war "frontier challenge" (Efoui 2013) however is not only translation, but something I would call "quasi translation". This kind of translation is bad not in the sense of being socially damaging (this is not always the case, although more often than not it happens so), but in the sense of using words that are intentionally disloyal to the original meaning. Quasi translations bridge the gaps between parallel worlds, without bringing them closer together. In some sense of course, all translations are bad. Latour for example emphasises the role of the translator as mediator, active in "making sense and doing things" – as opposed to "intermediaries, who lay barren and dead, not doing anything anymore… transporting meaning or force without transformation" (Latour 2005:39) *Pace* Latour, all translations are not bad in the same way; mediation may involve different processes with very different outcomes – some transformations are necessary to maintain democratic regimes, some feed oppressive powers, some again bring change. In some cases translation is the process through which common worlds are produced. Star and Griesemer (Star 1989b) looked at translation in science, showing how consensus is produced around a common goal between divergent world views and

---

[261] Efui describes a concentration camp like environment in an imaginary African country. He claims to have been inspired by one of my compatriots: Imre Kertész, who won the Nobel price with his novel written on Nazi concentration camps from the point of view of a young boy.

social universes. Their story is about the creation of a natural history museum in the United States, making it necessary to bring together different opinions of different participants: amateurs, managers and scientists. For Star and Greisemer, difference and cooperation are the key words. If difference makes translation necessary, cooperation makes it possible. The outcome of such a collective work is what they call "boundary objects", i.e. objects that "inhabit several intersecting social worlds", being "plastic enough to adapt to local needs and the constraints of several parties employing them, yet, robust enough to maintain a common identity across sites" (Star 1989b:393). The authors do not completely evacuate the question of power from their account; this, however, becomes secondary, because, in their story, the translators have equal interest in "maintain(ing) the integrity of others". Therefore they are more motivated in making others interested in their meaning than forcing meanings on them. (Star 1989b:389). Borrowing this language, I would say that "quasi translation" can be understood as the opposite of "boundary object", because quasi translations aim at dissimulating a power distance, rather than at working through it. If all translations are necessarily bad to some extent, some are worse than others. I take for quasi translation an exercise of mediation resulting in a forced compromise pretending to be a boundary object. Accordingly, I understand translation as bad not if it does not produce a complete coherence between two worlds – this by definition, is impossible anyhow; a quasi-translation, to the contrary, produces a false consensus that presents itself as real and complete. This is the secret of all hegemonies.

No wonder that many boundary objects are co-created in all social systems, even in the most authoritarian ones, but Star's and Griesemer's definition conceals the fact that hegemonic power systems (in fact more easily than authoritarian ones) have the capacity to create an appearance of coherence, even in cases where the objective interests of those having power and those without power are dramatically divergent. Governors are therefore as interested in creating a common language accessible for everybody around them as curators of museum. The only difference is that governors have a more pronounced ability than natural historians to produce a manipulated language sounding so natural, so taken for granted, that it evacuates even the possibility of any alternative.

The outcome of quasi translations is never boundary objects but at most assemblages. If assemblage is by what rulers rule, they are the same time the weak point of any system, from where resistance may emerge. "Assemblage points to the practices that bring together multiple sets of ideas, apparatuses, personnel and practices into apparently coherent entities that function as ways of governing".

The translations project society uses are oppressive because they legitimize and/or dissimulate the maintenance of poverty, inequality and the double standard in the distribution of social rights. The words used for these purposes are often of noble origin: development, democracy and human rights. They might be all integrated in quasi translations in order to dissimulate the gap separating the universes kept apart by differentiated citizenship and coloniality.

Quasi translation as resistance

Quasi translations used for the purpose of governance have their weak points. There is always a danger that the apparent coherence ends up by being contested by some. The governed tend to keep a space of liberty – however small it might be - from where hegemony can be questioned. This is the final, most dangerous weapon of the Weak. Remember the Malaysian peasants in Scott: all day long they are conspiring against the meanings imposed on them, they contest, ridicule, twist the truths of the powerful and are busy in recreating meanings of their own (Scott 1985). They take their revenge by translating back to power.

The squatters of the polio-homes similarly use the opportunity of the eviction to renegotiate their relation with the state, taking advantage from their double position: talking from a squat and at the same time from a DPO. In the face of evictions, the polio-beggars manipulate the self-presentation of their own collective identity, while constantly crossing the borders of discursive universes. With the exception of one notable case where the squatters left voluntarily, in all the other occasions that I know this strategy proved to be successful: they systematically ended up by re-conquering their places. More by negotiation than by the force.

When fighting the police back with stones and blows proves inefficient, when the battle seems already lost, a cortege is sent to the President, or to the Vice President. Surprisingly, following a scenario that has become almost routine, the President

expresses his indignation about the incident and gives his personal permission to the people to return to their house "until an alternative solution" is found. Everybody seems to be satisfied; the President proves his benevolence, the squatters can go home. Still, it would be too cynical to dare to call this a win-win situation. The losses and the suffering on one side are too heavy. When Alhaji, chairman of House of Jesus, tells the story of his negotiation with the President, he is understandably proud of his victory. But he is not satisfied with the temporary permission alone. He speaks not only to defend his squat but also to propose to his interlocutor an alternative reading of the situation. He proposes a new translation – a new way to define what a citizen is.

"*This last time when they broke in, we said, let's go to the Pa's house[262], we went there and slept in front of his house. We slept until morning. The next day we went back, and slept there again. We did the same to the Vice-President. We showed them that we are also* **concerned citizens***. If they treat us in this way, we will believe that the government does not like us anymore.* "

Listening to Alhaji, I found it interesting how for him, squatting was interpreted as a right, and refusing the eviction was as a sign of "concerned citizenship", suggesting cooperation with, instead of resistance to the state. What exactly, in this framing, is the meaning of citizen? The answer is not simple because citizenship in this context is precisely one of those words that create linkages between dissimilar social universes, veiling, rather than revealing the tension which separates them. A perfect word to use for quasi translation.

"*I told the President, we are also citizens of this country. We cannot go anywhere else. If you break our houses all what is left to us is going to the street to beg. We say we are not going anywhere. If you guys do not give us a place, we are not leaving. If we have to, we will all die here*"

Citizenship, in its first, most obvious sense is a binding bond between the State and its subject, based on reciprocal rights and obligations. In Sierra Leone - as elsewhere - the Constitution fixes the framework for this reciprocity. Alhaji – had it occurred to him –could have cited the following section of the constitution to underpin his claims.

---

[262] „The Pa", i.e. „The Father" is the popular appellation of the President

"7. (1) The State shall … manage and control the national economy in such a manner as to *secure* the maximum *welfare* and *freedom* of every citizen on the basis of *social justice* and *equality* of opportunity"[263]

However, citing to the constitution could have been perilous, as the President could have retorted:

"13. Every citizen shall— protect and preserve *public property* and prevent the misappropriation and squandering of funds *belonging to the Government*, local authorities or public corporations."

Although there is no sign that either Alhaji or the President would have wanted to elevate the discussion to this level, opposing and competing moral claims transcend their conversation. What Alhaji is talking about is an idea that belonging to a bigger political unit confers rights in terms of security. This is exactly what – in its ideal form - patrimonial leadership and communal land entitlement is about. Private property creates a new relation to land, more exclusive than inclusive, implying that somebody's right to own necessarily entails the banning of others from use. Public property in this sense would not be different, just a collective form of private ownership.

The constitution would not help to arbitrate in this matter as it seems to hesitate between two conceptions of basic rights, revealing its double - Western and African – origins[264]. Not that the two principles – collective security (welfare) and private property - could not coexist in Western constitutions. Naturally they do, and their coexistence is the very basis of the ideal of our liberal democracies, in which private property is regarded as the source of collective welfare[265]. However, questioning this hierarchical and causal order - suggesting that the collective welfare might as well be a source of the individual wellbeing - is questioning the essence and meaning of democracy as it is conceived in its Western version.

---

[263] Constitution http://www.sierra-leone.org/Laws/constitution1991.pdf

[264] In contrast, the American notion of citizenship does not contain any obligation for the state to provide welfare for its subjects. Instead, the State is obliged to create an environment where free subjects can achieve welfare by their own force. The main rights of an American citizen are : „Freedom to express yourself; Freedom to worship as you wish; Right to a prompt, fair trial by jury; Right to vote in elections for public officials; Right to apply for federal employment requiring U.S. citizenship; Right to run for elected office; Freedom to pursue "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." http://www.uscis.gov/citizenship/learners/citizenship-rights-and-responsibilities. (Accessed: Februrary 2014)

[265] Welfare of a few should be shared by the many through the mythical „trickle-down effect" - yet to come

The relationship between the collective and the individual is consubstantial with that between the public and the private. As we know it from another debate, that between Nancy Fraser (1990) and Habermas (1989) what is private for one, might very well mean public for the other. For the President the public probably means "state related", which, in Africa is often a realm expropriated from the collective for the private use of whoever is on power. Nothing illustrates more clearly the easy transition from public to private in the Sierra Leonean political life than the period when Siaka Stevens maximised nationalisation in order to boost his – and his followers` private wealth.

For Alhaji, the private life of the squatters is possibly a public matter, in the sense that the life of the squatter families should be of a general concern[266]. What does a "private person" mean anyhow in a society where the definition of a person is precisely that of a human rendered social?[267] Few things could be contained in Alhaji's world in the private sphere which is not immediately rendered public. In his squat every family's life is played out in the public space, in the open air, in front of the panbodies, discussed and debated in the most possible open arena. In this community even individual destinies are not private. The war, national and international politics and the world economy played as big a role in their coming together as individual will and pure hazard. How could these lives be private? How could a life without property, without the liberty to have a say in one's destiny be private?

Present day civil society builders (and the Sierra Leonean State is one of them, despite its noticeable reluctance) take it for granted with Habermas that the liberal public sphere is by definition inseparable from liberal capitalism, which, on its turn, becomes inseparable from democracy. Frazer would object that this public sphere contains in its core the legitimation of "a number of significant exclusions" (Fraser 1990:59).. She warns that "bracketing the differences" rather than eliminating them might be just another form of oppression, underscoring that democracy is not possible without combating inequality. Alhaji is likely to agree with Fraser. He understands that claiming citizenship means (also) claiming some? more?, a minimum? social equality. Without promoting equality, the "*official public sphere* [268], calling eloquently for the

---

[266] Fraser (1990:71) mentions four different possible interpretations of the public: 1, "state-related", 2, "accessible to everyone", 3, "of concern to everyone", 4, "pertaining to a common good."
[267] The most evident means of socialisation being the act of initiation, alongside with more implicit and pervasive means, including the obligatory participation in a network of obligations.
[268] Italics by me

participation of the grassroots, instead of opening the way to the emancipation of the poor, might turn out to be just another means of prolonging the Friedmaninan (Piketty 2014; Stiglitz 2013) social order, asking the poor to actively participate in the maintenance of their oppression.

Alhaji, too, has some concerns with Habermas. Although, as member of local civil society, in many circumstances he happily brackets his own difference in order to partake as an equal in what is, in all appearance, a collective deliberation; at other times he cannot help admitting that he does not necessarily believe in the reality of the bracketing and in the value of the deliberation – showing by the way that he is perfectly aware of the difference between formal and substantial democracy.

"*They just say: the disabled have the rights, have the right, have the right, but the law is not implemented. It is the same in the hospital, when you go there they say they do not treat you unless you have money*"[269].

This is a whole social theory in short. The squatter says: bracketing is not enough so as to become a citizen; I need to be made equal. Not in front of a chimerical tribunal of Human Rights (Connell 2011), but rather by getting a chance to access social services, including housing and medication. Unfortunately, those who financed Sierra Leone's reconstruction - from Blair[270] to Cameron[271] - do believe in human rights but do not believe in social services. The politics that led to "privatizing Europe" spilled over, and came to define the direction of economic and political development in most of the developing countries, at least the totality of those under Western influence. This policy trend does not present privatization simply as an economic necessity; it justifies it on a moral basis, creating a new civic ideal: the self-caring citizen (Rose 1999:135). This is what is demanded from disabled beggars too, not in theory, but in practice: not only they are required to survive on their own, without any public help (except for the ambiguous tolerance of the informal occupation), NGOs, government and their own elite join to make moralising statements on begging, judging such survival strategies as contrary to the ideal of the productive citizen.

As Ferguson explains (2010) , the figure of the self-caring citizen was not only a political chimera jumping out of neoliberal phantasm; it responded to a tough political

---

[269] see Persons with Disability Act
[270] http://www.theguardian.com/society/2002/jun/10/socialexclusion.politics1
[271] http://www.newstatesman.com/blogs/the-staggers/2010/07/reform-plans-cameron-idea

rationality, to the recognition that unemployment, financial deprivation, informal forms of livelihood and housing insecurity is not a temporary accident in a worker's career but it is probable there to stay. In Africa where formal workers have always been a minority compared to those surviving out of the formal sectors, creating social security for all by public policy seemed to be a battle lost in advance. From the beginning of the second millennium in many Southern countries politics of direct cash distribution has been experimented with as an alternative to classical social welfare policy (Ibid). The few pro-poor welfare measures introduced in Sierra Leone went in this direction. This is how the war wounded and the amputees were compensated after the war. Polio victims did not belong to the beneficiaries. Other welfare measures missed making a difference for the polio-disabled not because they were to selective, but because they were too general. Free health care for young mothers and babies was one of these incentives, based on the principle of universality, instead of redistribution. Because free health care for mothers was not seen as a measure for the poor, the poorest were still discriminated against within a socially heterogeneous public in circumstances where sudden increase of demand met a lot of health centres unprepared[272].

Despite all rhetoric to contrary, strengthening the quality and accessibility of the public services has not belonged to the priorities of the Sierra Leonean peace-building project (Cubitt 2013). It is so much true that the people of the polio squats do not even appear particularly marginalized compared to other social groups in similar economic situation, as inability to access acceptable levels of medical services and education melts in the ordinary. As far as social protection is concerned, the only allowance a disabled squatter can count on is in the form of "emergency" contributions of his or her house, gathered informally from other members, or formally donated by the leadership. Redistribution and social solidarity is something polio victims experience as members of their squats rather than as citizens of their country. Because in this way the squats relieve the state, overtaking part of its role, containing possible (probable?) social unrest, they are tolerated. But this tolerance is based on a fragile basis, on the paternalistic relationship that links the highest spheres of the State to the disabled beggars.

---

[272] Cf. Amy Maxmen: Sierra Leone's free health-care initiative: work in progress
http://www.thelancet.com/pdfs/journals/lancet/PIIS0140673613600744.pdf (Accessed: 13. September 2014)

People with disability speak the language of the power because this language draws them into a political field from where they can legitimately challenge it. Translation thus has a counterhegemonic potential, not despite, but because of its relation to power. Co-optation and civic insurgence happen in the same place and at the same time, as "assemblages of entrenched and insurgent forms (of citizenship)". (Holston 2008: 33) Insurgence does not equal here with the heroic collective mobilization of an organized revolution (Obadare and Willems 2014:7), it is rather performed - like in Butler (2006) - by bringing minor shifts in the normative model within a web of meaning, not outside the influence of power, but in its core (Obadare and Willems 2014:7). Bayart calls this ambivalent alternation between collaboration and resistance "working misunderstanding" (1993:273) – which, according to him, have always marked the relation between colonizers and African actors, the elite and the subordinates.

Working misunderstanding "works" (Chabal and Daloz 1999), in the sense that it produces mutual benefits. This mutuality however does not exclude the fact that at times it may serve more hegemonic, at other times, more counter-hegemonic interests. In any case, it reintroduces the political in the relationship between the government and the subject, because it demands the active participation of the latter in the games of politics, not only as victims of false consciousness (as in theories of hegemony) but as full-fledged, rational actors. Sometimes only, working misunderstanding becomes insurgent, in the sense of producing dislocations in the course of events under the existing order. This is what happens when the squatters manage to reverse the process of the eviction. It is not the act of re-occupying empty places which is truly insurgent but the fact of being able to force those vested with state power to recognise this act as a right.

Insurgent citizenship: claiming the right to the right to the city

Insurgence –Holston (2008:34) reminds us "has no inherent moral or political value"...but it is "an acting counter, a counterpolitics, that destabilizes the present and renders it fragile, defamiliarizing the coherence with which it usually presents itself." What is insurgent is not necessarily revolutionary; "most of the time it remains

---

[273] Sahlins?

conjoined with the entrenched, but in an unbalanced and corrosive entanglement that unsettles both state and society." (Ibid:13) Insurgence of the Weak takes apart assemblages of the governance puts into question taken for granted meanings, contests the translations presented to them as "regimes of truth" (Rose 1999)

"Because we do not know any more what to do, when you are in the countryside, people discriminate you, when you come to the city, you think life is going to be better for you....We are disabled people, we stay here, we do a lot of things here, in this house. We stay here, we do little things to survive and to sustain our sisters and brothers who are in the street and beg..."

Abuti, the chairman of Ecowas is clear about the claims of the squatters, as well as about the argument which gives right to them to lay these claims: the city, in opposition to the countryside where people are used to think about themselves as naturally unequal subjects, holds the promise of including in a common citizenship everybody who contributes actively in its transformation by active appropriation. On this basis, he does not claim only to have certain rights but more importantly he considers having rights to have rights – "to have a daily life in the city worthy of a citizen's dignity" (Holston 2008: 313)

This is a serious political claim for the just city, implying, amongst other things, the redefinition of democracy, extending its scope from the political to the social. This is a claim for the rights to be framed as right to the city! Coined originally by Lefebvre (Lefebvre 1991),, the expression "Right to the City" became a concept, popularised by social scientist studying modern urbanity, like Holston and David Harvey (Harvey 1993; Harvey 2008; 2012). The originality of this concept is that it promotes the role of the urban space from a landscape where political debates are taking place to the very object and stake of the most important political debates of our times. It obliges a re-evaluation of the value and meaning of land and shelter, refusing to consider housing exclusively in terms of a question of real estate property. This is a perspective of democracy in which "access to infrastructure (like electricity and sewage lines) and the security of the body can no more be neglected" (Holston 2008: 311), offering arguments for universal access to public services (Fawaz 2013). The reference to urbanity in this context is more than a reflection on a specific type of human settlement, the city here becomes a paraphrase for

the reconceptualization of modern society, allowing the reconsideration of the contract between the state and its subjects; it is a new way to conceive citizenship.

The concept of the "right to the city" was formulated in the North but its working principles emerged from the South. By the second half of the 20th century – explains Holston (2008) - it became clear that the reorganisation of the work made it impossible for the working class to stand up as a unified force against the capital. This was excessively true for countries of the global South where the bulk of the work people were engaged in was to be found in the informal sector. While informality did not allow to members of low social classes to claim citizenship through labour, it proved to be a rich terrain for claiming a new type of citizenship through the belonging to the city. The new urban underclass was not so much produced by drop outs from the working class than by untied rural subjects conquering in masses the city, which lacked the capacity of fully absorbing them. The fight for citizenship in the new circumstances meant first of all obtaining the right to belong to the city and this right was exercised by getting integrated in systems of informality: informal housing, informal livelihood, informal existence. The notion of "informality" here draws the contours of a kind of grey zone between legality and illegality. This is exactly the kind of temporal, conditional, amputated citizenship that the polio-disabled squatters of Freetown and the squatting inhabitants of the Kroobay slums have achieved. The right to the city claims a right of those living in informality to enjoy the full protection of their citizenship.

Although endowed with a formal citizenship, informal inhabitants of the city, like the polio-disabled squatters lack „substantive citizenship": "substantive distribution of rights, meanings, institutions and practices that membership entails to those deemed citizens" (Holston 2008:7). Instead of resigning, conditional urban citizens all over the world – very much like polio-squatters – answered by creating their own meanings, institutions and practices, claiming their full citizenship rights. The spontaneous flux of impoverished rural populations towards the cities and the efforts of governments and municipalities to contain this population while expanding the capitalized urban space marks the process of present day urbanization – stresses Harvey - (2008), on the one hand. On the other hand, urbanisation involves the mobilization of the new urban poor against segregation and for social services by legalising the illegal, like in the peripheries of Sao Paolo or by extending and subverting the meaning of the legal, like in Freetown.

Harvey believes that this process is historical and our time is only different from the previous waves of the urbanization *cum* exclusion process that it has grown genuinely global. According to him - the 21st century city is becoming the location of "officialised segregation" (Harvey 2008) slowly eating up what has remained of the social. It is against the human cataclysm unfolding in this process that he opposes the Right to the City. For him the Right to the City is the newest, and in the present circumstances the most fundamental of all the human rights. It is not only about territory, public space and shelter; it is about redistribution of wealth and security and about the protective role of the state. The right to the city is a holistic right, because – Harvey writes - the question "what kind of city we want cannot be divorced from what kind of social ties, relationship to nature, lifestyles, technologies and aesthetic values we desire" (Harvey 2008:23) Under the debate over the city, there is another debate about solidarity, democracy, social and spatial justice. It is a debate about the desirable future.

On the limits of quasi translations

What are the chances of the insurgence of the squatters to produce long lasting consequences, leading in the long or medium term to an extended, recognised and respected right to the city? It is to be afraid: under the present conditions not much.

Project society creates conditions for working misunderstandings which work sometimes and under some condition to the subaltern, but it is fundamentally incompatible with the kind of democracy the right to the city would imply: a democracy that can "protect a citizen's body of produce a just city" (Holston 2008: 309). Instead, it produces a truncated democracy conceived exclusively as the result of formally accorded political rights, exactly in the same way as the polio-disabled MP conceives inclusion: guaranteed by voting rights. Social rights in this conception are secondary, instead of the state its protection is left to "strong civil society". The truth is however that this externally built civil society is rather weak in protecting any rights which are not inscribed in the government's agenda. It is even less capable to propose a revision of the pre-established hierarchy of rights. In any case the right to be protected against the "collateral damage" of capitalist development is not included in the list, because the concept of democracy promoted by developers is based on the precedence of private property rights over the right to collective welfare. The model citizen of Project society

is not the squatter who does *"little things to survive and to sustain his sisters and brothers who are in the street"* but rather the self-caring, self-conscious, citizen who is smiling from the publicities all over the city.

The attitudinal change campaign of the government might be over, but the transformation of subjectivities by messages conveyed by giant posters continues, bill-boards publicising everywhere the ideal figure of the active, responsible, self-confident citizen having as little claim on the state as possible. This figure has not come from nowhere. It is the product of the past twenty years' Western political culture, dominated by a strong predilection for anti-statism and anti-welferism (Clarke 2010). This imagined model citizen is a diligent family man, having a good job, a house and enough resources to capitalize on, saving for consumption as well as for "self-care"[274]. He is the happy, smiling citizen one meets on publicities in the streets of Freetown: he drinks whisky in a suit; he buys his new car, uses his mobile phone to transfer money to his family living in a village. In reality he is as far from the real citizen out there in the streets, struggling with everyday survival to make ends meet as the idealized democratic state is far from the actually existing captured state with its surviving pockets of the shadow state where millions of people live. Still, people staring at the giant poster do not say: that man is not like me! They say: "We want to be him, whatever it takes". This is the trap of the promise of development, even if most people secretly know that realising the promise is out of reach in their personal lives.

This is why quasi translation – even if it procures considerable power to disabled squatters to defend their interests in moments of crises and it can introduce small shifts in the existing order - cannot be expected to change the status quo, " the existing arrangements" (Holston 2008:18). The polio squatters' relative safety depends on the goodwill of the state, which decides between repression and tolerance on a case per case basis, depending on how much in the given situation the mobilisation of a patron-client relationship might be judged as useful as compared to the costs. Their strength therefore is linked to their maintenance in a weak position. Identity politics celebrating disability thus paradoxically has a disempowering effect as much as it cherishes a victim identity.

---

[274] The ideal of self-care is the core concept behind the British invention: "Big Society", but it is preached as a moral virtue in all the countries of the European Union.

The status quo in this case means that in the best case the squatters are allowed to continue to live in the grey zone of the informal, left to themselves to assure their shelter and their livelihood, with no or very little access to educational or medical services, out of the zone of protection of formal institutions, with the possibility always left open that their informal status will be requalified as illegal. The prevalence of informality means also that an ever increasing group continues to live under the reign of the shadow state while the formally democratic state is being rebuilt and made to function for a minority. But even this vision is too optimistic. The status quo itself is hanging on a tiny thread.

If Kamete is right when he explains random state violence as message to the underdog, then the multiplication of the attempted evictions probably means that the days of the squats are counted. These incidents should be understood in this case as anticipated projections of the desired near future, when the ideal of the city beautiful will have definitely overcome and the city has become a place reserved only for citizens adhering to the values of Western modernity and capable to fully participate in the consumerist society, established as the norm. As the city ineluctably pushes its surplus population always farther, always more out of sight, it is to be feared that the squatters will sooner or later end up by abandoning their urban strongholds without however leaving the confinement of the shadow state. Even the President's anachronistic paternalist protection will not be able to protect them against their secret enemy: capitalist development.

Several things might follow. First of all, the security back-up that the downtown squats constitute for the Western urban polio population will disappear, making it much more difficult for everybody to come to the city for begging. This will tremendously affect the living chances of polio communities everywhere because besides moralising discourses on begging nobody has a viable plan for massive job creation. Second, if the polio communities will be weakened in their status of subjects, this will have lasting consequences on their newly acquired citizen identity as persons with disability. Simply, with the polio homes out of sight, they will function less efficiently as a pressure group for disability rights - except indeed for a tiny minority which will fully enjoy the protection which identity politics assures to its economically non-stigmatised members. Forced out of the city as non desirable subjects, the voice of those whom project society

regards as its grass-roots will be less audible too. The majority of people with disability, unable to find effective protection in their disabled identity, stripped definitely of their various other identities, will loose on all grounds. Coloniality – the exploitation of the identity of the local subject by the global citizen – will continue to define the social structure of geographical spaces, having full authority to decide on the emplacement of the borderlines between inclusion and exclusion.

Project society is one of the last political experiments aiming to glue together by force what cannot logically go together: democracy, coloniality and inequality. According to the sociologist and economist Wolfang Streeck (2011) the present political and economic crises are the products of this self-incompatibility inherent of democratic neoliberal capitalism. "Inflation, deficits and financial under-regulation should not be understood as results of faulty economic management but rather as temporary stop-gaps to simultaneously satisfy democratic-political claims for social justice and economic claims for profitability" – he writes (Ibid:iii). Streeck's arguments are essentially economic. Examining the question from a philosophical point of view (Fraser 1990; Harvey 2008) leads to the same conclusion. If democracy is the capacity of the majority kept out of the power to represent its interests in the face of a minority on power, than the best measure of democracy is not the formal existence of democratic institutions, nor is it a "vibrant civil society" but rather the decrease of social and economic inequalities. Logically a truly democratic society in which inequalities are growing is not conceivable. This is why the observation of the vicissitudes of the polio communities can be used to measure the extent to which the liberal peacemaking project applied in Sierra Leone has fulfilled its democratic promises – or not. This project has promised to boost neo-liberal capitalist market economy by strengthening democracy. The natural tension between the two parts of this promise is at the ultimate source of the gap between parallel worlds.

The end of project society?

Disabled communities experienced a net improvement in their conditions right after the war, but this improvement should be considered as relative, because compared to the hell of the fights, of the refugee camps or of fending for themselves in the street the organisation of collective homes could be considered as an improvement. The pace

of progress however was slowing down and during the time of my fieldwork the objective situation of polio-disabled beggars was stagnating despite of the passing of the "Disability Bill". If the bill did not bring real changes in terms of redistributive justice, at least its language of rights promised a new sort of dignity to the impoverished disabled population. The brutality of the police action exactly one month after the passing of the law was so painful because it pointed cruelly to the fragility of the newly achieved dignity.

The polio-disabled squatters were not the only targets of attempts of exclusion. As the country was entering into a phase of a more conspicuous economic growth[275], the conflicts between the beneficiaries of capitalist development and the left-behinds got more violent, unveiling the insidious violence of the formally democratic state ostensibly protecting human rights. The industry which was taking the heaviest toll in 2011 was still mining, despite the quick expansion of the highly contentious bio-fuel and other agro-industrial investments. Koidu Holding might serve as a good example. In Koidu town the youth has been regularly rioting since 2007. The mining area is protected by armed men but some of the locals refuse to stay away. In September 2011 I was sitting at a table with a local journalist and a police officer discussing the disappearance of a young man within the premises of the company. That day three men were seen to enter the mine and only two were reported to come out. The third one was never found. The journalist explained that young people regularly break in the territory of the mine because they consider it to be theirs, refusing to accept the appropriation of the land by the company. In a war between the company and "community members" disappearances, suspected or proven murders were not infrequent. For the police officer the story was of little importance. He did not deny that the young man was probably killed but he found this normal. "This is what happens to thieves" - he commented simply.

The state participates in this form of violence, either by voluntarily turning a blind eye on incidents, or by actively intervening on the side of the foreign investors. In April 2012 several employees of African Minerals were killed by the police in a protest for better working conditions. This incident wasn't the first one AML has been

---

[275] Real GDP growth was 6% in 2011, 15,2% in 2012, 20,1% in 2013,. It fell back to 8% in 2014 and is forecast to reach 9,9 % in 2015 according to the IMF

implicated in. The press reports: "In 2010, at another AML mining site ...landowners were subjected to unprovoked violence and harassment as they resisted corporate abuse of their rights"[276].

At the end of 2013 even the international press[277] related the fact that the police had opened fire at workers on strike against SOCFIN, a palm oil factory with its headquarters in Luxembourg. Again, state violence in defence of the capital resulted in several wounded and one death. Most of similar cases remain untold by the media. But if we put together all the scattered reports and the rumours, it is not hard to give a shape to the small intensity war waged against the poor, producing considerable casualties. The relative violence of the African postcolonial state is barely surprising. What gives more food for thought is that all this happened when the Sierra Leonean state was still under the direct supervision of the UN and a small "army" of NGOs monitored the respect of Human Rights. Not that all civil society were passive. But except for a few brave activists – like the journalist I was talking to - and a couple of militant local and international organisations, the biggest part of civil society and almost the whole of the international community remained predominantly silent. It was in nobody's interest to tarnish the myth depicting Sierra Leone as the model state of liberal peace building. The international community was directly responsible for this project and local civil society was enrolled as its most important ally. The liberal peace was a common cause for the government, the international community and civil society.

That situation changed considerably by 2014. International NGOs had been retreating for a while. Number of projects came to an end without continuation, some of the NGOs were folding up, or reduced the scope of their activity, funding became more scarce and the expatriate population decreased. In March 2014 UNIPSIL, The UN Integrated Peacebuilding Office in Sierra Leone ended its mission. This was not a rupture (number of organisations remained and the UN had still a dozen agencies working in the country) but rather an almost imperceptible shift. This shift was accompanied by another subtle dynamic affecting the relation between civil society and the government, smeared by increasing control, growing suspicion and sometimes open

---

[276] African Minarals Condemned in Sierra Leone. London Mining Network. May 11, 2012 http://londonminingnetwork.org/2012/05/african-minerals-condemned-in-sierra-leone/ (Accessed: 20.06.2012)
[277] Cf.. http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/12/10/sierraleone-socfin-idUSL6N0JP45E20131210, Accessed: 2014. jan. 3.

hostility. Incarceration of journalists, intimidation of civil society activists[278], curbing free expression of opinion and in 2014 a violent attack against Human Rights Watch[279] - all point at the same direction: the taken for granted alliance between the government and civil society was about to come to an end or at least it became more evidently conditional.

Sierra Leone is not the only country where the climate has palpably changed for civil society. In 2014 such disparate countries as Hungary, Egypt, Azerbaijan, Mexico, Pakistan, Russia, Sudan and Venezuela280 passed laws and initiated legal procedures restricting the operation of NGOs. India's Intelligence Bureau in 2014 came out with a report in which it "unmasked" foreign NGOs trying to undermine India's project for development. (Clarke 2015:9) Even within the centre the state-civil society relation was deteriorating. In the UK one of the biggest charity, Oxfam was publically reprimanded for putting its nose into politics by talking about poverty not in Africa but in England[281] . At a public event a British MP warned charities to "stick to their knitting". (Clarke 2015:9) Project society as we knew it for almost 20 years was visibly changing, or at least entered a phase of deep transformation.

This change might have several reasons. I suspect that that one of them is the failure of project society to fulfil its own promises. The second, probably interrelated one is a larger global transformation changing the relations between the centre(s) and the peripher(ies). I willingly use the opposition here in the systemic sense of Wallerstein's world systems. Without resorting to the whole explanatory model, I would like to underline here the idea that the unequal geographical distribution of wealth and power in the world can be best understood in a structural model where the dynamic relation between the parts of the system determines the shape and characteristics of the whole in a given moment. To the least the theory might help understand why similar things happen at the same time in very dissimilar places. In a world system countries standing in similar peripheral (or semi-peripheral) relation to a centre (characterised by

---

[278] http://news.sl/drwebsite/publish/article_200524779.shtml
http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/03/14/courage-speak-sierra-leone
http://www.hrw.org/node/123182
http://www.hrw.org/news/2014/02/19/sierra-leone-mining-boom-brings-rights-abuses
[279] Human Right Watch is an international NGO with its headquarters in the USA. Its mission is monitoring states for their Human Rights performance
[280] http://www.economist.com/news/international/21616969-more-and-more-autocrats-are-stifling-criticism-barring-non-governmental-organisations
[281] Personal communication of John Clarke

a concentration of capital and technology, according to the theory) encounter similar constraints which determine their scope of liberty to come up with original answers to systemic challenges. The rise and fall of project society might be part of such a global dynamic.

Project society has been based on a double pact: that between the centre and the periphery, on the one hand and that between the state and civil society on the other. It promised that following its model will allow poor nations to catch up with the rich (Western) ones, and that people all over will profit from more justice, more wealth and welfare. Not only neither of these promises have been fully realised, but even the centre's position has moved. For decades after the fall of the Berlin wall the centre was in North America and Western Europe. Without a contestant, liberal democracy appeared to be the only game in town, strong enough to impose its model and attractive enough to easily recruit followers. There was a short moment in history where a global agreement on the words to use, on the values to defend and the processes to follow seemed to be possible. But apparently this was just an illusion, no better than quasi translation. As the point of gravity of the centre slowly shifted from the North to the South, from the West to the East the relationship between the "Atlantic alliance" and the rest of the world progressively altered. The Western model certainly does not seem to be the only option any more. Project society is shaking everywhere because its foundations are shaking.

What is next? (Where parallel worlds might meet again)

Project society as a global paradigm of the developmental state is arriving to its end. Probably no one knows what comes after. There is a strong possibility though that its disappearance will lead to a new combination of sources of oppression. If Project Society was based on the conviction that not only globalised economic exploitation can coexist with the enlightened state distributing liberal citizenship rights, but that in fact the two sides necessary suppose each other, in the new world which is about to emerge liberal rights might increasingly retreat, while leaving intact the oppression of the globalised market. "Civil society", which was the major ally of the liberal state, officially commandited to safeguard civil rights, might find itself in an odd new situation, where involuntarily it recognises itself as the appointed enemy of the state. What will be the

chances of insurgence then? What are the new resources to fight differentiated citizenship and where are they?

My intuition is that they might be found in the already existing. Working misunderstandings, allowing talking back to the oppressor will continue to be as instrumental as informal and marginal experimentations with alternative models for conceiving and organising the social. Unless full dictatorships ensue the talk of rights and citizenship that project society have taught oppressed people to talk will probably continue to fertilize the imagination of individuals and groups living in the internal peripheries of states. The genie is out of the bottle and is not ready to go back soon. It is also probable that alternative models of the social will continue to be produced on the peripheries, if not for other reasons, out of necessity. The combination of the two sources of resistance constitutes a force that repression might strengthen instead of weakening, giving a new meaning to civil society. There are examples in the past for civil society groups going through the path of formalisation, co-optation and re-organisation. Vibrant trade unionism that was drown into nepotism under the rule of Siaka Stevens, before it was completely silenced by ruthless repression, remerged as a force of opposition after decades of dormant existence at a moment when popular discontent reached a critical level[282].

That is why the existing models of the Kroobay slum-dwellers, formalized within the international movement Slum Dwellers International and that of the polio homes organised as DPOs might constitute a resource for the future, despite all their inherent weaknesses. Especially if slum dwellers and squatters discover that they talk the same talk, claiming, from different perspectives the same right: the right to belong to the city.

The idea of the right to the city should not be used as a new mould, but it can be a catalyser to destabilise and rejuvenate previous emancipatory frames that are on the way of rigidification – Human Rights might be one of these. The right to the city is not a superior conception of human rights; it is not less vulnerable to misappropriation and rigidification than any other progressive ideas. Its growing popularity, the ability with which it has been used to back up arguments of marketization (Soto 2000) and the fact that even the United Nations has picked it up to formulate a new policy (Vogiazides 2012) shows that appropriation is already taking place. There is no master frame, no

---

[282] Cf. Chapter 2

final solution. In order to resist intellectual paralysis and the tricks of deceptive language it is necessary to constantly innovate. However, in the contemporary ideological landscape, the right to the city framework is still a powerful alternative, in fact, for the time being the only existing one allowing to "reclaim the political nature of "space" or of the "urban" (Fawaz 2013:31) in the language of rights. For now, this seems to be the framework that addresses in the most straightforward way the most burning needs and concerns of slum dwellers and disabled squatters alike.

All the more, because without knowing it, the squatters have already started to put the principles of the right to the city into practice, as the conversation between the polio-disabled and the statesman shows. This is no surprise. Many scholars have considered "informal settlements" to be the *par excellence* embodiment of the right to the city (Holston 2008; Samara, et al. 2013). Squats are places of social experimentation, not by vocation, but by necessity. In them alternative modes of solidarity, collective deliberation and coexistence are practiced on a daily basis. This is – by all evidence – a viable model of the social, with which the polio communities have contributed to the big depository of actually existing models. I am not saying that this model should be the solution for the problems of the segregating city – Holston warns us that what is insurgent is not necessarily morally better, but it has the merit to unsettle existing models which hegemony makes look taken for granted without any alternative. I suggest that the polio squats in any case constitute an interesting counterproposition, a proposal for "acting counter", forcing us to take Alhaji's claims for citizenship seriously: the proposition includes redistribution based on collective solidarity, as well as a quasi-direct form of democracy.

I try to resist the temptation of idealizing the squats. Pervasive violence, chronic alcoholism, the vulnerability of young girls to sexual abuse, every-day quarrels, continuous rumours about suspected corruption concerning the leadership and other tars make these places very unlikely candidates for being counted amongst the existing utopias. However, quite unconsciously and against themselves, the squats prove, with their mere existence, that the subjugation of subjectivities to norms imposed by coloniality have not been completed. Alternative norms have been maintained. The secret of survival in a city that lacks public services and social protection is social solidarity – of those inside, but also of those outside of semi-segregated spaces: polio-

squats could not exist without relying on the city dwellers, who are the ones giving alms, buying goods offered for sale, who - at times of eviction – come and help to pack the abandoned properties and to evacuate the wounded.

Adumbrating an alternative vision of modernity in which solidarity, equality and justice become inseparable from democracy is the real content of Alhaji's talks with the President. Transformation – if only in small steps- has already started, not at the edge of project society but in its very core, in the interstices between the DPOs and the squats, where the contours of a possible new form of civil society are being drawn. This potentially renewed civil society is nourished by two resources. On the one hand, the long experience of semi legal existence in the troubled zone of the informal and the necessity to construct an alternative social structure out of the boundaries of the officially accepted have created a reflex of resistance and a remarkably efficient strategy of auto-defence by shape shifting and by bad translation. On the other hand, the participation in project society has been concomitant with a lot of learning. Much of that learning has no relevance out of the scope of project society, but the very practice of learning has endowed the polio-disabled people organised into DPOs with a cultural capital which might be convertible and serve as a catalyst of change. Amongst all the dimensions that my survey looked at, the one that yielded the most surprising results is that of cultural capital (including factors related to basic competences – of reading, writing, speaking several languages- and level of schooling). Not only disabled people as a whole performed better in my sample than non-disabled ones, amongst people with disability those living in the polio-homes are much better trained than the ones living outside of these places. The following figure shows the cultural capital of people with disability according to their places of residence, compared to a relative 0 point, equivalent with the average of the whole sample (366 people)
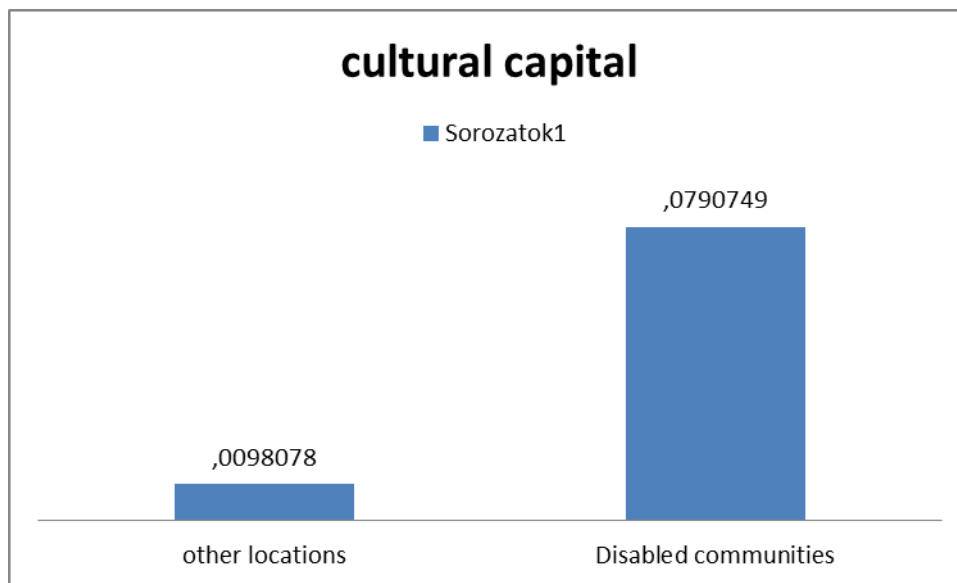
51. Figure Cultural capital of people with disability according to their places of residence

Just like strong polio organisations emerged twenty years back from obsolete, paternalistic charities, the reinvention of civil society could very well be the unintended and unexpected legacy of the almost twenty years rule of project society.

Summary

Oppression of the poor today is manifest in exclusion rather than in exploitation. That is why the question of citizenship has become essential for the oppressed, as citizenship rights draw the contours of possible inclusions. The inheritance of a bifurcated state producing a differentiated citizenship survives in project society where "first class" and "secondary class" citizens live increasingly apart. Segregation is also an effect of urbanization. The transformation of the spacial structure of Freetown pushes an ever increasing number of groups out of the city, to a geographical and symbolic periphery. The inhabitants of the polio-squats constitute one of these groups. Today a new scramble has started for urban properties and land, which will further reduce the chances of poor people living in the informal zone of the city to remain part of it. In face of the danger of eviction and displacement, subaltern groups organise themselves. They gather in formal organisations, they organise civil disobedience and they support their resistance by transforming their needs into rights. They use quasi translations and

working misunderstanding in order to speak the language of those who govern. This strategy has its inherent limits. The best thing the polio-disabled people of the squats can hope for is to maintain the status quo between the illegal and the informal. New developments make the long term success of this strategy even more improbable. Project society is coming to a possible end. The new era promises a more unbridled global market and a more intolerant state. The experience of the polio squatters in the creation of autonomous collective places, and their acquired competence in the talk of rights might become an important resource in keeping civil society alive while making it more civic.

Conclusion

"I did not just stay in Walpole Street for nothing. At least I have got some experience from Walpole Street. A lot. I learned a lot from Walpole Street. And I miss Walpole Street, a lot. "

Recollection of an ex-squatter

My motives to accomplish this work – as I came to realize gradually during the writing – were as double-edged as the parallel worlds that I discovered in Sierra Leone. On the one hand, I felt an urge to pay tribute to the remarkable resourcefulness and strength of those people whom anybody not familiar with their life and history would only know as "the disabled beggars of Freetown". On the other hand, I needed to make sense of the often surrealistic political order in which their struggles and fights were situated and which I recognised as familiar to another world where I come from, in Eastern Europe. Despite all the differences of the context and history, it was recognisably the same system, the same type of postcolonial transformation, a combination of accelerated capitalist privatisation and frantic democratisation, to which strong civil society was said to be the key. That was Project Society, a post-cold war invention, proposing a unique solution to development in a global world order suddenly become unipolar. It was urgent to understand the logic of power in this system, as well as the limits and the possibilities it made available to civil society, suffocating in a prefabricated box too tight to contain it. It was important because the capacity of the polio disabled of Freetown to improve their lives or at least the lives of their children might have depended on it.

The political culture of government, civil society and disability are the three main fields I hope to have contributed to - not from a purely theoretical point of view, but by observing them on the ground in post-war Sierra Leone. More precisely, mine is an experiment aiming to understand what role the internationally endorsed civil society has played in shaping the life conditions and life chances of physically disabled people living in the Sierra Leonean capital.

Disability as a lived experience is first of all a visual shock for the non-disabled stranger in Freetown. Sierra Leone entered the record of war horrors as the land of "savage amputations" of civilians by armed warriors, but strangely, disability in Freetown makes itself known more as polio than anything else. Polio appears as an unsettling mass phenomenon, recognisable by the maimed individual body, as well as by the collective body of young men or young women loitering and moving together in the street. This is disability before theorisation; it is not yet a concept, but a physical and social experience, the encounter with the suffering body and with the afflicted social identity, marked by difference. The gaze of the stranger is homogenising and totalising, but the individual experience on the other side is fundamentally different. From inside, disability is not perceived as a single unified condition, it is named by different names. Depending on the form of the impairment, the person is called a "die hand", a "die foot", a "handicap" - or a "cripple". And even within these groups, the existential suffering is not commensurable. It is not the same to be a die foot driving a black jeep or a die foot squatting on the pavement waiting for alms.

I got interested in polio-disabled people living in self-managed collective homes in Freetown, but I am aware that what I learned cannot be automatically extended to other forms of disability or to other ways of experiencing it. Even polio has very different faces. It is not the same in a remote village in a poor household reduced to a couple of members, in the city, close to some NGO facilities, or in a middle class extended family. There are people suffering from the sequels of polio among the well-off, but the most common experience of polio victims is that of poverty, which most of them know, although they have received different shares of it. This is not the magical, self-encompassing poverty coming from nowhere, presented in the graphs of WHO as a closed circle, having no external trigger. This is the very real, manmade poverty, which Sierra Leoneans have been familiar with for ages; poverty constructed painstakingly by the elite of all times – made by the Atlantic slave trade, British colonisation, post-colonial one party rule, the shadow state, structural adjustments, the rebel war. It makes sense to include in the list the post-war reconstruction. For many – indeed for most - the chain has not been broken.

The problem of polio in Sierra Leone is first of all a problem of poverty. Ignoring the economic dimension and refusing to see how political decisions produce economic

outcomes imprisons the disability movement in a closed circle, turning it into a culprit – by omission - in the continuous manmade production of structural violence. Instead of chastising ordinary Sierra Leoneans for their alleged discrimination of people with disabilities, the disability movement would gain by pointing clearly at the political source of their oppression. Especially, because despite of allegations concerning "backward traditional believes", empiric observations show an admirable capacity of people living together with persons with disability[283] to create a social net diminishing – if not abolishing - the social effects of the impairment. In their majority, Sierra Leoneans do not deserve to be stigmatised for their alleged lack of sensitivity, caused - as the mantra goes - by "ignorance". They would rather deserve recognition and respect. Most importantly, they would need a little bit of support.

The support – for those lucky who have access to it - comes today in the form of aid and services of NGOs. Since HI transferred the responsibility of the rehabilitation centres, the State gets also involved, but the centres are still those which used to be operated by the NGO, consequently the distribution of their geographical location does not correspond to any national plan, it simply reflects the contingencies of the past. NGOs can do a lot for randomly selected individuals at a particular moment at a particular location, but they cannot replace strategically conceived and patiently built up welfare system, no matter how rudimentary. NGOs cannot replace the State.

The promotion of disability rights by awareness raising and political lobbying is important, but the overall success of disability policy will not be measured by individual success stories, but rather by the capacity of the system to systematically shorten the distance between those on the top and those at the bottom. This is the only way to make poor disabled people more "equal".

I can imagine two objections. Some would say my expectations are unrealistic. How could the government of a country that only recently was labelled a failed State possibly build up a welfare system, when all signs indicate that the welfare state is shrinking also in countries from where the idea originally comes from? How social expenses would not make a poor country even poorer drawing away important

---

[283] It is important to remember again and again to the fact that this book is about polio-disabled people. Whatever is said about disability is to be understood in this context. Certainly a very different book should be written about other types of disabilities, especially about mental disabilities – which results in very different social responses.

resources from the more urgent economic development? I would answer what Farmer (Farmer 1999:20) said concerning the apparent impossibility to stop AIDS in the developing world: "Cost efficiency cannot be that unique and overarching criterion to plan public health" He affirms that the cost-benefit calculation here is based on false premises and thus it leads to erroneous conclusions, making contingent political choices on resource distribution appear like following from the objective rules of the all-mighty market, conceived as self-contained, free from human manipulation. He says no less than that building a universally accessible good enough quality medical (and social) service in developing countries is hampered less by the lack of resources, than by the lack of political will – and imagination. I would add that if my expectations are unrealistic, what is the use of enacting laws promising free education, free health service to people with disability, and compulsory screening for all at health centres. If such a law was endorsed in Parliament[284], as it happened, some at least must have believed that this was possible.

Others would - on the contrary – object that I am banging on open doors. During the one and the half decade following the Lome peace accord[285], Sierra Leone has managed to rebuild a medical system literally from scratch, the objective of the primary health care system is precisely to cover the whole territory with a network of local clinics, making basic medical care available even to the remotest places. The system works, not perfectly, but reasonably well - taking into consideration the circumstances. The development of secondary health care is hampered by extraordinary challenges: lack of resources, the heritage of an obsolete infrastructure and a culture of corruption, contempt and arrogance that characterises an important section of the health personnel, from nurses up to doctors (a cultural peculiarity decidedly more widespread in the capital than in the provinces). International donor organisations and Western based NGOs have offered much help to the Sierra Leonean government in order to upgrade its health system. It is enough to mention the outstanding role UNICEF played in the effective introduction of the free medical care system (reserved for pregnant women, lactating mothers and children up to five years), or the role of HI in making physical rehabilitation a priority for the Ministry of Health. Things are definitely being done! The

---

[284] The Act's official name is: The Persons with Disability Act, 2011
The entire text can be found at: http://www.sierra-leone.org/Laws/2011-03.pdf (accessed on the 21. November 2014)
[285] The Lome peace agreement was signed in 1999. It was never implemented as it was designed. Peace was officially declared only in 2002.

problem is that despite the undeniable results, the very framework of development is hopelessly unclear, reflecting the uneasy and self-contradictory position of the international community.

International organisations recognise the need of structural reforms in order to universalise rights to benefits and services, but they are unable to conceive entitlement otherwise than attached to special needs - like in the case of the free health care scheme – independently from questions of indigence. "Special needs" derived from economic inequality is systematically ignored; this is why the free health care for women makes no difference between various economic strata.

NGOs have never been asked to work out systematic solutions for social or health problems for a country. They are expected to work sporadically with a well circumscribed mission. The difference is not a question of scale, but that of philosophy. The political (and economic) choices made in Sierra Leone are greatly determined by the constraints of available models, provided by those countries that have been the most involved in helping the Sierra Leonean State to rebuild itself. It happens that the aversion of these governments toward the welfare state is not fortuitous but structural. This aversion is embedded in the very heart of Project Society

Just like disability, ***Project Society*** in Sierra Leone did not appear to me as a concept; it was a very concrete, primary empirical experience. It was visible everywhere, in the street, in offices and in community centres; it reverberated in public speeches and in the way people talked with each other. If I wanted to understand in what reality the polio-disabled squatters lived, first of all I had to comprehend the reality which it was made of. I arrived in Sierra Leone 6 years after the official declaration of the peace and 9 years after the UN established UNAMSIL, its peace keeping mission, undertaking the enormous task of designing a roadmap for the Sierra Leonean government to lead the country out of the war and into a sustainable peace. Through UNAMSIL and a host of other agencies and offices, it was the UN that designated the direction of the expected political transformation and defined the major development goals to be achieved.

The tools and processes of this interventionism formed a coherent policy package which had been applied elsewhere too, but maybe never in such a clear cut and almost totalitarian manner as in Sierra Leone, presented in policy documents often as an amorphous mass waiting to be shaped by the international community after the civil

war. The political objective was to transform Sierra Leone into a liberal democracy, on the model of the Western donor States. For this purpose it was urgent to reinforce the State, consolidate and democratize state-society relations, and create open market economy, friendly to foreign investors. This was a double democratization cum modernization process, keeping coherent with a particular worldview that imagined modernization as equivalent with marketization, and conceived democratization as a process best assured by multiparty elections and by the existence of a strong civil society. One important policy implication of this conceptual framework was the importance put on civil society building - civil society defined here as the ensemble of formally established and registered NGOs and civil society organizations.

This political philosophy resulted in a special form of governmentality, based on the valorisation of capital accumulation, on the one hand; and that of pluralism - on the other hand. Limiting inequalities and achieving more social justice by strengthening the redistributive capacity of the state was not considered a necessary corollary of democracy. NGOs took over the main social tasks from the government, exempting it from long term investment in human capital[286]. International NGOs connected large foreign donors to local civil society organisations, creating a cascading chain of mutual but hierarchical interdependences, where small and local became a guarantee of authenticity, while big and international became one with power and the production of a "veridical", i.e. unquestionable form of talk. Civil society in this way became enrolled in governance, in general, and in redistribution, in particular. As a result – contrary to what was claimed loudly in NGO literature – the political agency of civil society was seriously weakened. In practice top down "civil society building" meant bringing to life a number of organisations that would not have existed if there had not been any economic incentive involved, tamed previously existing popular initiatives by drawing them into patron client networks, while side-lining all forms of voluntary associations that did not correspond to the liberal vision: ignoring traditional and neo-traditional forms of collective action and withholding support from any potentially political groupings with a remotely social democratic penchant (Cubitt 2013). For example, trade unions did not

---

[286] Peter Evans is one of those who insist on the importance of human capital in political transformations. He demonstrates how the most resilient systems combine respect for the public good and for pluralism. cf. Evans' article in The Oxford Handbook of Transformations of the State.(2015)

enjoy the same capacity building facility as human rights organisations did. Also human rights organisations outnumbered largely the trade unions in the post-war regime.

I wish to make it clear that I do not target NGOs, neither as a class, nor as individual members of a class. I do recognise that individual NGOs accomplish a titanic work, made considerable achievements in creating more equality of chance - in small pockets at least. Some – if certainly not all - constitute a strong check against power abuses by the state. I believe the problem is not what civil society is or does, but rather the framework in which it operates and which expects two contradictory things from it, creating at the same time conditions making it impossible to live up to any of them. As the main purveyor of public goods, civil society is necessarily and by definition an imperfect substitute for the state. As a watch dog defending the interests of the Weak in the face of the state, it is understandably inefficient because of the dependencies that render it vulnerable. By creating this double bind for civil society organisations, Project Society effectively disempowers civil society while apparently working busily on its empowerment.

Project society ostensibly celebrates civil society, while in reality it depoliticises it by keeping it in dependence. Project society ostensibly strengthens democracy, but its concept of democracy is such that it does not imply any action against growing inequalities – as a consequence, the democracy it promotes remains fleshless. Project Society ostensibly defends human rights, but by selecting the sorts of rights to be defended, it makes sure that these do not challenge the exploitative economic order.

These features are not characteristic to Sierra Leone alone; project society is part of a global process, which started after the end of the cold war. East European countries having left the Soviet Block at the end of the 80ies, have followed a similar path. Although this remark might sound anecdotal, I insist on this fact because it is important to understand that the Sierra Leonean transformation is part of a larger dynamic and is not an isolated case. However, it is also conceivable that similar conditions produce different outcomes in different places. The Sierra Leonean version of Project Society has its own particularities. First, it is concomitant with a severe land crisis, in which, in relatively short time, land - previously conceived as abundant – has become a scarce resource. This development changed the relation to land in the countryside where foreign owned industries covet ever increasing territories for production, threatening

366

the livelihood of vast chunks of the rural population. In the city, real estate investment is one of the most lucrative businesses, constantly reclaiming property back from informal users, or from users with weak entitlement. In rural, as well as in urban territories politics have "liberated" spaces from collective use in order to make them available for private enclosure. Deregulation of the market thus went together with intensive regulation of space.

As a result, growing masses have become superfluous both in the provinces and in the city, forced into informality in all aspects of life, into informal housing, informal work, informal social protection, while simultaneously, informality is getting more and more criminalized. Second, although the situation of both Eastern Europe and West Africa can be interpreted from a postcolonial perspective, coloniality is definitely more directly felt and has infinitely more severe repercussions in Africa. The project of transforming subjectivities making individuals ready for embracing the ideal of liberal democracy that is proposed to them is not only implicit; it is explicitly part of the development package. In order to access "development" – which, in this sense, equals with promised material prosperity - people are asked to "change their attitude" and are constantly forced in a position of cultural inferiority in the face of the developers. Their thoughts are "perceptions" and "cultural beliefs", as opposed to scientific "truth" and higher "values" derived from supposedly universal human rights. Their practices are barbaric rituals. Fanon's words are still timely here. The Blackman talks: "I begin to suffer from not being a white man to the degree that the white man imposes discrimination on me, makes me a colonized native, robs me of all worth, individuality, tells me that I am a parasite on the world, that I must bring as quickly as possible into step with the white world". (Fanon 1967)

Fanon's analysis is psychological, but he knows that the source of the inferiority is economic. The cultural distance equals here to the economic distance. He also knows that the possibility of reducing economic inequality – that is, increasing development – depends on the possibility of putting an end to the internalization of inferiority. A state under reconstruction guided in the process by Western powers helping it catch up with the white world is meant to follow the footsteps of its mentors. Development in these circumstances implies not only copying a certain form of state but also fabricating the sort of citizen that goes with this idealized governmental model: the responsible, active,

right-bearing citizen. The transformation of subjectivities therefore does not only require the internalization of hierarchical relations within the global world order, but also the internalization of the value system attributed to this imagined Western-type citizen, abhorring collective obligations and cherishing individual rights. Hence the slightly obsolete, traditionalist connotation of the word "community", which usually designates (a not yet totally civilized) group of people, destined to be transformed by the appropriate developmental practice.

Third, the Sierra Leonean version of Project Society was introduced under markedly worse economic conditions than the one in Eastern Europe, it was offered to a society ravaged by war, struggling not only to rebuild, but literally to reinvent the State, after the years that were characterized - according to Reno – by the "shadow state", i.e., a state, empty of its social functions, unable and unwilling to take responsibility for its citizens. The shadow state was also a captured state by external economic and political interests to an extent that it became totally uninterested in serving its citizens. While the UN-led international community and successive post-war Sierra Leonean governments made a lot of effort in order to effectively bring the State back – to produce good governance was indeed in the centre of development efforts - the captured nature of the government was neither recognized, nor fought against. Project Society ignores the fact that there are still pockets of society - and not just a few - in which people live under a shadow state, left to themselves, despite the omnipresence of state regulations and a multitude of projects ostensibly directed to improve their lives. The vast majority of the polio-disabled squatters live in such pockets, under the governance of such a shadow state.

In fact, the coexistence of two different, mutually exclusive life worlds: that of the liberal democratic state led by the values of human rights and the captured shadow state is one of the most distinctive features of contemporary Sierra Leone. Being at home in **parallel universes** is therefore the most common experience of the subaltern, whose existence is largely tied to the second domain. The polio-communities constitute a glaring example of this existential duality. Members of the squatter community are viewed - and view themselves – as disabled beggars at 11 a.m. and by noon they are transformed into celebrated disabled activists put on stage at a public event. The double nature of the groups, being at the same time squat-homes on the one hand, and civil

society organizations (DPOs), on the other, create a tension between informality and formality, linking two different notions of civil society. For disabled beggars the parallel worlds do not appear as an experience of external circumstances, the separate universes meet in their persons, producing a distinct "personal pluralism" – very similar to that which Shaw discovered and understood as the reminiscence of another form of oppression - the Atlantic slave trade - in contemporary Sierra Leone (Shaw 2002:21). She beautifully explains how the memory of past oppression becomes part of present-day representations and practices, in which both the slave trader's and the slave's positions are incorporated: "This co-transmutation of absorber and absorbed, and the back-and-forth movement between desire, imitation, and appropriation on the one hand, and critical commentary on the other, each constitute what I call, the duality of incorporation." – she writes. Her words reverberate in the squats, where the polio-disabled participate in development both in their quality of receivers and as "doers" in their role of civil society members.

The multiplication of worlds is characteristic of disabled people's lives but is not unique to them. In Project Society everybody is familiar with the duplication of realities, which is not unlike Lefebvre's notion of duplication of spaces and the distinction he makes between representational287 and lived space (Lefebvre 1991). The same distinction, separating sharply the signifier from the signified applies to project language. There is one reality on paper; there is another, quite different reality out there, in the real lives of real people. There is a specific vocabulary used in project language which has a different meaning - or no meaning whatsoever - outside of this frame. The words are indexed to reality only loosely, with a permanent quotation mark, that is why development's buzz worlds sound so hollow, with no roots in real life. The insights of Goffman about back stage and front stage might be even more useful here, because contrary to the "buzz words" literature, Goffman (1956) does not attribute a more authentic reality to any of the spheres, the differentiation rather refers to the separation between the public or private nature of communication. Following Goffman, it is tempting to identify the front-stage with official discourses, and the back stage with what is discussed and expressed behind the curtains. To some extent the metaphor

---

[287] Lefebvre in reality does not speak about a duplication, rather about a three-tier division between the perceived, conceived and lived space. A more profound division shines however through this distinction, between the abstract and the empirical.

works, but only on the condition that we allow that the stages constantly change places. In parallel worlds the distinction between the back stage and the front stage holds, but their position is not fixed. What is front stage in a given situation is decided in the interaction.

What I mean by parallel worlds incorporates the double nature of project language but is not confined to it. The problem of "parallel worlds" is not a problem of language, but that of power. Hegemonic power structures operate in this way, by producing "veridical discourses" (Rose 1999:20) i.e. distinct regimes of truth that are not only imposed on the subjects but are required to be fully interiorized. The result is less a separation between mystification and reality than the production of equally valid, fully populated, but mutually exclusive life worlds, operating simultaneously in people's lives. Life worlds are not only made of words, but also of convictions, values, meanings, practices and interiorized rules. Life worlds produces different embodied social structures, i.e. different sorts of habitus(es) (Bourdieu 1990), equally valid at the same time.

The individual lived experience of disability and **disability as a collective identity** also correspond to two different life worlds. Neither manifestation of disability should be taken for granted – as Benedict Ingstad (Ingstad and Whyte 1995) warns. Ingstad views disability as a culturally sensitive social construction, rather than as a universally distributed natural fact of life, carrying everywhere the same meaning. Inspired by Ingstad's work, I looked back in time in order to reconstitute the history of the social production of disability in Sierra Leone, in general, and within the groups of polio-disabled, in particular. What history revealed was that the crystallisation of disabled identity in this case had not been neither totally home grown, nor totally imported – a statement equally applicable to civil society as a whole.

Paradoxically, the emerging autonomous disabled groups grew out of the paternalism of European-style charities. They simultaneously drew on European models of disabled activism, on an African tradition of voluntary associations and on previous models of African political mobilisation, of which internationalism and pan-Africanism were important drivers. The first activists of the movement embodied this plurality, and made the best possible use of it. They grabbed the opportunity the new collective identity offered to them and learned quickly how to get the most of it, how to use it to

build collective actions for the defence of collective interests. In the chaos of the war and that of the post-war consolidation this capacity was a key to survival. The self-managed disabled homes grew out of the recognised necessity to form self-help groups, based on mutual support and on a shared collective identity, in the face of a disinterested, if not openly hostile socio-political environment.

The meaning and the direction of this collective action was very different from those of classical Western disability activism, a fact reflected by the open nature of the disabled communities, rendered viable and functional by the co-existence of disabled and non-disabled community members. Disability activism was a language these groups discovered while they were constituting themselves as living communities. This language made them stronger and provided them with a socially acceptable identity which could be used as a rhetorical weapon in the face of power and was suitable to obtain certain advantages (that were altogether more symbolic than real) [288] but it also confined them to a segregated universe. While polio homes are truly inclusive, DPOs - constituting their external façade - are segregated and segregating groupings, usually inhospitable to non-disabled members. This has not always been the case and it does not seem to be a stable feature. One of SLUDI's first leaders was a non-disabled woman. The NGO boom bringing international NGOs to the country from the second half of the war contributed to the crystallisation and overvaluation of the disabled identity, in two distinct ways: by promoting identity politics actively and by making disabled individuals beneficiaries, i.e. by bringing considerable financial and material assets into disabled communities, on account of disability. This dynamic set off a process making DPOs more "disability conscious", effectively pushing out non-disabled members from the positions of decision-making[289]. Disability as a collective identity is therefore of a typically dual character: it is a potential asset and a strait-jacket at the same time.

Disability might be an asset because identity politics offers changing a potential stigma into a valued identity, providing a powerful discursive weapon suitable for self-defence, capable of effectively upgrading the social status of a marginalised minority. Project society adds the advantage by selectively distributing resources and

---

[288] Among the advantages we find free transport with the Ferry, free entry in museums and cultural spaces. In areas where positive discrimination would be more important, it does not exist.

[289] Lately however, either because more emphasise was put on inclusion in disability discourses, or because disabled communities realised the benefit of enrolling non-disabled supporters, several DPOs eased their conditions of membership, giving executive positions also to non-disabled members.

entitlements according to identity categories. But disability is also a straightjacket[290] because it pushes towards disability fundamentalism (Fougeyrollas 2010) quite contradictory to the demands of collective life and rather disrespectful of Sierra Leonean society, the collective solidarity of which it refuses to see, let alone recognise. The truth is that disabled members of society would not survive if society as a whole, and local communities specifically, were indeed as hostile to children and people with disabilities as it is claimed in Sierra Leonean activist narratives. Even polio-disabled homes would not be viable were they not socially embedded in their environment. Ready-made discourses about discrimination fabricated elsewhere applied uncritically to a local context risk taking disability hostage in an unfinished cultural war, reminiscent of colonialism, building patiently the image of the backward local in order to justify betterment programs, serving the interests of the coloniser rather than that of the colonised. Assuming fully the disabled identity paradoxically means to accept a personal identity supposed to be denigrated (a reason why many polio-disabled refuse to be considered as disabled under circumstances other than the collective celebration of disability) as well as to assume a devalued collective identity as a Sierra Leonean, member of a society systematically depicted as having barbarian instincts in the face of disability. The paradox is that this identity empowers the disabled individual on the condition that he or she assumes to be weak, and accepts belonging to a community victimized by a society that he/she recognises and denounces as hostile and backward.

Disability politics is offered space by the power as long as these premises are accepted. Because of this restriction, it can be considered to be political only in an extremely constrained sense, as it is tolerated only in so far as people with disability do not peep over the fence of identity politics, and do not question their own position, understood as inferior by definition, or do not start denouncing societal conditions from an alternative position. Identity politics of disability is more comfortable for the government than other forms of social contestations, as it excludes from its explanatory frame the unjust redistribution of the national wealth. Disability politics is allowed to exist on the sole condition that it remains depoliticised, excluding the possibility of alliances with other oppressed groups, alliances which could overstep and link different types of collective identities.

---

[290] expression borrowed with courtesy from Bea Vidacs

Disability politics in Sierra Leone is therefore a double edged weapon. It creates economic possibilities, provides a positive public identity and provides some (although far from automatic) protection against some forms of human rights abuses in some circumstances. At the same time it prevents the valorisation of the experiences of the disabled homes, it makes impossible the recognition of the achievements of people with disability in creating alternative models of collective solidarity, and it definitively depoliticizes their collective struggle, rendering them extremely fragile in the face of the capitalist transformations.

When structural violence is disguised as discrimination, it becomes impossible to fight against it. While discrimination could theoretically be fought simply by changing the attitudes, structural violence would demand structural changes. It is not by chance that the single best used weapon of the officially endorsed disability movement is awareness raising. When talking through the category of disability becomes the only legitimate form of talk, it condemns the group of the polio squats (and indeed the whole disability world) to being locked in circular argumentations mystifying rather than revealing the sources of their oppression. Disability then becomes a magic word offering dispensation from thinking; the opposite of what disability theory is meant it to be. Instead of calling people with disability to politicize their demands, the disability movement then may fall prey to the big anti-politics machine, disguising real political choices and structural violence of the state under a consensual language forbidding further questioning.

Structural violence however is all too conspicuous as soon as we allow ourselves to think (and to look) outside of the discrimination framework. It appears in different forms. It can take the form of direct violence, when people with disability are beaten by the police and put to prison for crimes that they have not committed. It manifests as symbolic violence when they are explicitly likened to beasts – and treated as such - by a cynical police officer. It materialises as indirect violence, when disabled beggars (and their children) die from curable diseases, in the street, or in badly equipped hospitals. It exerts its effect as cultural violence, when they have to call their own perceptions "beliefs", and recognise the opposing view as THE truth. Being forced to live in (and in between) parallel universes is a form of cultural violence, too. Asked to participate in a workshop on disability rights right after one lost his child because of lack of means to

buy her the necessary treatment, is not less violent than being evicted with weapons from an illegal squat which is at the same time a legal DPO, receiving important aid from various NGOs, with the silent complicity and support of the government.

Parallel worlds are both the outcome and the very form of a specific type of governance structure, which also indirectly shapes the possibilities of **resistance**. Strategies of the weak aim at protecting themselves against alienation, avoiding the blows and recovering certain entitlements, by manipulating the distance separating the universes. The simplest strategy is situational identification. Disabled beggars squatting on the pavement can be as openly bitter against the government's policy as they can be sincerely appreciative and enthusiastic at a public celebration, just a few minutes later. This is not role playing. Their sudden change of mood shows a remarkable capacity of switching between frames of reference. Frames are first of all specific angles of observation, but they also imply distinct repertoires for talking, behaving, appearing or making judgments, in short, different frames of reference mobilize different identities, between witch the polio-disabled beggars are moving with notable ease. When they are disabled beggars, they think, talk and act as disabled beggars. When they act as disability activists, they are disability activists. Shape shifting allows talking from different positions in different situations, or changing these positions several times in the same context.

Shape shifting logically implies the command of different idioms. Beggars have to be able to talk as rascals in the street, but they also need to be fluent in their role of civil society activists, and most of all they must be able to choose the appropriate idiom depending on the situation. Because they are at home in both universes, they are also able to translate between them. Shape shifting means moving freely between separate universes, translation brings these universes together, making their simultaneous presence possible. Translation potentially might have different outcomes. It could – at least ideally – abolish the tension between the two source languages, and help arrive to an acceptable middle position, to a new common understanding based on a consensus. Such an outcome however is highly unlikely within the present political order, where hegemonic (in this sense: falsely consensual) language is used to exercise oppressive power. Translation in these circumstances becomes a game of power and counter-power, a place open for oppression as well as for resistance. It is a kind of bracketing, a

manipulation of reality with the use of quotation marks. This "as-if "character might be captured by the expression of "quasi-translation", a possible name for a practice able to produce a sense of coherence in a situation of tension, without annulling the original contradiction. When those in power use quasi-translation, it often takes the form of euphemism, understatement and forced meaning. This is what happens when the "rule of law" equals officialised injustice, or consultation becomes a word used to force decisions on people. When the subaltern resorts to it, quasi-translation becomes a form of resistance. Unlike shape-shifting, quasi-translation does not imply deft changing of positions. On the contrary, it supposes the constant use of double-sense. The performative power of language is such that quasi translation does not only modify the meaning of existing words, but it also effectively draws elements of one life world into the other, introducing minor changes in the latter. Demanding collective social rights not only creates an alternative meaning of citizenship competing with the official one, the act of demanding effectively creates an alternative mode of being a citizen.

This is not an arbitrary example. Because Project Society recognizes only two figures of the citizen: the oppressed one, alienated from power with no possibility to rise up, and the imaginary enlightened citizen, protected by the state with no reason to rise up for, the capacity of the oppressed to negotiate an alternative form of state-citizen relation is necessarily at the core of any politically meaningful resistance. Polio disabled beggars, occupying a liminal position between "the populace" and the officially recognized civil society are both well-positioned for, and extremely skilful at subverting the meaning of citizenship, by creating quasi-translations, both by speech acts and by deeds. Shape shifting and quasi translation allow the polio-disabled to hold on to their squats despite repeated attempts of eviction, to claim for special rights, both in the economy of entitlements (in the form of trainings, tools or money) and in the economy of compassion (in the form of alms),, but also to demand broad social rights, not in the name of disability, but in the name of a shared belonging to a state that they imagine protective and inclusive.

Despite all its negative impacts, project society apparently unleashed a genie from a bottle, and it is far from being certain if it will be able to keep it under control. A paradoxical consequence of the disempowerment called empowerment is… empowerment. The pressure to create collective forms of living and the incentive to

form DPOs went with non-negligible political and technical learning. Polio-disabled people had to learn not only how to manage populous, heteroclite and not quite disciplined communities, but also how to raise funds, how to make fiery speeches, how to negotiate with public office holders, how to write and implement projects, how to do accounting and reporting, how to use the internet and the global network to search for resources and far away allies. All these are skills which they can possibly exploit in different settings even under changing circumstances. Identity politics depoliticized them but also it made them grow in self-assurance and confidence. The hardship of living in the self-managed homes made them more daring and determined. Their agency took a form of resistance not in spite of them being part of the officially constituted part of civil society, but precisely because they occupy a place in the grey zone between formality and informality, having grown to be masters of manipulating both domains.

Because of its paradoxical nature, taking stock of Project Society's achievements is not an easy task. There is hardly any doubt that post-war liberal peace betrayed the poor. Liberal peace proposed by the largely Western political community brought growth but growth did not translate into increased welfare of the people. It brought formal democracy but democracy did not imply broad participation in decision making. It spoke about human rights, but it remained silent about redistribution, access to basic services and the obligation of the state to take responsibility for its citizens. While in Freetown civil society was convoked to discuss questions of human rights, rural communities, pushed out of their lands by multinational mining and agribusiness companies, were losing security of existence, livelihood and shelter. In Freetown urban rejuvenation threatens everybody who lives and survives by means of the vast informal market of the city. While the new disability act guaranteed free education for persons with disability, people in the disabled homes were struggling to send their children – no matter if they were disabled or non-disabled - to schools. While discrimination against people with disability was loudly denounced, armed men holding a court order, destroyed their homes and stole their properties.

The era after the war meant less a rupture with the past than a smooth, albeit disguised continuation. Privatization of public goods, the centralization of power, the externalization of dependences (reducing the internal clientelistic networks, while opening them to foreign players), the alienation of the elite from the people, the

implosion of the patrimonial regime, making corruption the norm on every level of society were not new inventions, they constituted the heritage of several generations. What was new was the insistence on multiparty elections and civil society participation. Project society proposed to make the economy work for the people through democratization of the state, but the economy continued to work for the rich. Because inequality was unchallenged, democracy remained illusory. Out of the principles of an ideal liberal democracy, plurality was the only norm that traversed the Sierra Leonean society profoundly. Identity politics put the figure of the Youth, the Woman and the Disabled on a pedestal (albeit leaving flesh and blood youth, women and people with disability in misery). Freedom of speech and that of assembly were taken for granted (although when somebody had a run-in with the justice, it was easy to lose freedom). Finally, the deficit of democracy also made freedom and pluralism fragile.

Circles of freedom are already shrinking and pluralism is losing its attractiveness, not only in Sierra Leone, but in many places of the world. As the economic centre of the globe is shifting, the Western-type liberal democracy is not the only available model any more. Its main local promoter, the UN peace keeping mission has left Sierra Leone. Losing its strong external political support, the artificially blown up civil society bubble is likely to burst with time. There are already signs of change: veteran civil society activists leaving the non-profit sphere in order to join big politics or big business, alternatively leaving the country or getting silenced. Not everybody will leave though. Remaining civil society will probably have the choice between getting more politicized or getting closer to politics. Working misunderstandings might not work anymore in the way they did in the past. This is probably bad news for the polio-disabled-homes which will lose their main weapon, obliged to adapt to the new circumstances. Or it might not be bad news. They could even become stronger. As civil society organizations they might engage in more conscious social criticism. As disabled homes they might make their local communities more resilient, by making their right claiming more inclusive, reaching out to all the others who have interest in claiming their right to the city. Their liminal position between civil society organizations and the urban poor could help them bring civic agency back in civil society, if only – as Davis wished– the disabled identity could be turned to a link connecting identities suffering from discrimination, oppression and structural violence.

List of figures

379

References

Abdullah, Ibrahim
   1994   Rethinking the Freetown crowd: The moral economy of the 1919 strikes and riot in Sierra Leone. Canadian Journal of African studies 28(2):197-218.
Adcock, Carolyn
   1982   Poliomyelitis In Sierra Leone. British Medical Journal (Clinical Research Edition) Vol. 285, (No. 6347).
Agbovi, Komlan Kwassi
   2010   Representation and perception of disability by senior public officials and local authorities. Pp. 52 p. Freetown: Republic of Sierra Leone.
Alie, Joe A. D.
   1990   A new history of Sierra Leone. New York: St. Martin's Press.
Allen, Tim, and Alan Thomas
   2000   Agencies of development. *In* Poverty and development into the 21st century
T. Allen and A. Thomas, eds. Pp. xi, 572 p. Oxford ; New York: Open University in association with Oxford University Press.
Austin, J. L.
   1962   How to do things with words. Oxford,: Clarendon Press.
Babones;, Salvatore, and Christopher Chase-Dunn, eds.
   2012   Routledge Handbook of World Systems Aanalysis: Routledge, Taylor and Francis.
Baccaro, Lucio
   2001   Civil Society, NGOs, and Decent Work Policies: Sorting out the Issues. Decent Work Research Programme. *In* Discussion Paper Series. Geneva: International Insitute for Labour Studies.
Banton, Michael
   1957 (1969)   West African City. A Study of Tribal Life in Freetown. London, Ibadan, Accra: Oxford University Press.
Barnes, Colin, G. Mercer, and Tom Shakespeare
   1999   Exploring disability : a sociological introduction. Malden, Mass: Polity Press.
Barnes, Colin, Mike Oliver, and Len Barton
   2002   Disability studies today. Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA: Polity Press in association with Blackwell Publishers.
Barrows, Richard L.
   1974   African Land Reform Policies: The Case of Sierra Leone. Land Economics 50(4.):pp. 402-410.
Batjargal, Bat
   2005   Comparative social capital:Networks of Entrepreneurs and Investors in China and Russia. University of Michigan: The William Davidson Insitute
Bayart, Jean-François
   1993   The state in Africa : the politics of the belly. London ; New York: Longman.
Bellows, John; Miguel, Edward
   2009   War and collective action in Sierra Leone. Journal of Public Economics (93):1144-1157.
Berghs, Maria
   2013   War and embodied memory : becoming disabled in Sierra Leone. Burlington, VT: Ashgate Pub. Co.
Bledsoe, Caroline H.

1980   Women and marriage in Kpelle society. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.
Boissevain, Jeremy, and J. Clyde Mitchell
1973   Network analysis: studies in human interaction. The Hague,: Mouton.
Bosire, Tom Obara
2013   Politics of female genital cutting (FGC), human rights and the Sierra Leone state : the case of Bondo secret society.
Bourdieu, Pierre
1986   The forms of capital.. *In* Handbook of Theory and Research for the Sociology of Education J. Richardson, ed. Pp. 241-258. New York: Greenwood.
1990   The logic of practice. Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press.
Bourdieu, Pierre, and Loïc J. D. Wacquant
1992   An invitation to reflexive sociology. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Burt, Ronald S.
2002   The Social Capital of Structural Holes. *In* The new economic sociology : developments in an emerging field. M.F. Guillén, ed. Pp. x, 381 p. New York: Russell Sage Foundation.
Butler, Judith
2006   Gender trouble : feminism and the subversion of identity. New York: Routledge.
Campaign_for_Good_Governance, and Christian_Aid
2006   A critical time for Civil Society in Sierra Leone (2006). *In* CIVICUS Civil Society Index Report for the Republic of Sierra Leone: CIVICUS: World Alliance for Citizen Participation.
Chabal, Patrick
2009   Africa : the politics of suffering and smiling. London, Pietermaritzburg: Zed ;University of KwaZulu-Natal Press.
Chabal, Patrick, and Jean-Pascal Daloz
1999   Africa works : disorder as political instrument. [London]Bloomington: International African Institute in association with James Currey, Indiana University Press.
Chakrabarty, Dipesh
2000   Provincializing Europe : postcolonial thought and historical difference. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.
Châtaigner, Jean-Marc
2005   L'ONU dans la crise en Sierra Leone : les méandres d'une négociation. Paris: Karthala.
Christensen, Maya Mynster
2012   Big Man business in the borderland of Sierra Leone. *In* African conflicts and informal power : big men and networks. M. Utas, ed. Pp. 255 p. London: Zed Books.
Clarke, John
2010   Enrollling Ordinary People: governmental strategies and the avoidance of politcs? . Citizenship Studies 14(6):637-650.
2012   The work of governing. *In* Governing Cultures: Anthropological Perspectives on Political Labor, Power, and Government. . K.C.a.W.R. Schumann, ed. Pp. pp: 209-232. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
2015   Contesting Civil Society: the politics of conjuncture.
Claude Lévi-Strauss
1967 (1947)   Les structures élémentaires de la parenté. Paris: Maison des Sciences de l'Homme.
Cohen, Abner
1981   The politics of elite culture : explorations in the dramaturgy of power in a modern African society. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Comaroff, Jean
1993   Modernity and its malcontents. Ritual and power in postcolonial Africa. Chicago [u.a.]: Univ. of Chicago Press.
Comaroff, Jean, and John L. Comaroff

        2012   Theory from the south, or, How Euro-America is evolving toward Africa. Boulder, CO: Paradigm Publishers.
Comaroff, John L., and Jean Comaroff
        1999   Civil society and the political imagination in Africa : critical perspectives. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Connell, Raewyn
        2011   Southern Bodies and Disability: re-thinking concepts,. Third World Quarterly 32(8):Third World Quarterly.
Corker, Mairian, and Tom Shakespeare
        2002   Disability/postmodernity : embodying disability theory. London ; New York: Continuum.
Crow, Liz
        1992   Renewing the Social Model of Disability. Coalition (July):5-9.
Cubitt, Christine
        2013   Local and global dynamics of peacebuilding : post-conflict reconstruction in Sierra Leone. Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon ;: New York : Routledge.
Csordas, Thomas J.
        1994   Embodiment and experience : the existential ground of culture and self. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press.
Davies, Thomas
        2014   NGOs: A New History of Transnational Civil Society. New York: Oxford University Press. .
Davis, J. Leonard
        2006a   The End of Identity Politics and the Begnning of Dismodernisim: On disability as an Unstable Category. *In* The disability studies reader. L.J. Davis, ed. Pp. xviii, 451 p. New York: Routledge.
Davis, Mike
        2006b   Planet of slums. London, New York: VERSO.
Deleuze, Gilles, and Félix Guattari
        1983   Anti-Oedipus : capitalism and schizophrenia. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
Denzel, LaRay
        1982   Wallace-Johnson and the Sierra Leone Labor Crisis of 1939. African Studies Review 25(2/3):159-183.
Duffield, Mark R.
        2001   Global governance and the new wars : the merging of development and security. London ; New York, New York: Zed Books ; Distributed in the USA exclusively by Palgrave.
Efoui, Kossi
        2013   The Shadow of Things to Come: Seagull books.
Ehrenberg, John
        2011   The history of civil society ideals. *In* The Oxford handbook of civil society. M. Edwards, ed. Pp. xiii, 515 p. New York: Oxford University Press.
Evans-Pritchard, E. E., and Eva Gillies
        1976   Witchcraft, oracles, and magic among the Azande. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
Evans, Peter
        2013   Human Development, State Transformation and the Politics of the Developmental State. *In* The Oxford handbook of transformations of the state. Pp. pages cm.
Fanon, Frantz
        1967   Black skin, white masks. New York,: Grove Press.
FAO
        2004 December   Disabled in Sierra Leone prove disability is not inability. *In* FAO Newsroom.

Farmer, Paul

    1996   On suffering and structural violence: a view from bellow. Daedalus 125(1):261-283.
    1999   Infections and inequalities : the modern plagues. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Fawaz, Mona

    2013   Towards the right to the city in informal settlments. *In* Locating right to the city in the Global South. T.R. Samara, S. He, and G. Chen, eds. Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge.

Ferguson, James

    1994   The anti-politics machine : "development," depoliticization, and bureaucratic power in Lesotho. Revision of the author's thesis (Ph.D.), Cambridge University Press, Harvard University, 1985.
    2006   Global shadows : Africa in the neoliberal world order. Durham [N.C.]: Duke University Press.

Ferme, Mariane

    1999   Staging Politisi: The Dialogics of Publicity and Secrecy in Sierra Leone. *In* Civil society and the political imagination in Africa : critical perspectives. J.L. Comaroff and J. Comaroff, eds. Pp. xi, 318 p. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Ferme, Mariane Conchita

    2001   The underneath of things. Violence, history, and the everyday in Sierra Leone. Berkeley [u.a.]: University of California Press.

Foucault, Michel, et al.

    1991   The Foucault effect : studies in governmentality : with two lectures by and an interview with Michel Foucault. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Foucault, Michel, and Jean Khalfa

    2006   History of madness. New York: Routledge.

Fougeyrollas, Patrick

    2010   La funambule, le fil et la toile. Transformations réciproques du sens du handicap. Quebec: Les Presses de l'Université Laval

Fraser, Nancy

    1990   Rethinking the public sphere: A contribution to the critique of actually existing democracy. Social Text 25/26:56-80.

Fyfe, Christopher

    1962   A history of Sierra Leone. [London]: Oxford University Press.

Galtung, Johan

    1996   Peace by peaceful means : peace and conflict, development and civilization. Oslo London ; Thousand Oaks, CA: International Peace Research Institute ; Sage Publications.

Garland, Elizabeth

    1999   Developing Bushmen: Building Civil(ized) society in the Kalahari and Beyond. *In* Civil society and the political imagination in Africa : critical perspectives. J.L. Comaroff and J. Comaroff, eds. Pp. xi, 318 p. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Geschiere, Peter

    1997   The modernity of witchcraft : politics and the occult in postcolonial Africa = Sorcellerie et politique en Afrique : la viande des autres. Charlottesville [Va.]: University Press of Virginia.

Goffman, Erving

    1956   The presentation of self in everyday life. Edinburgh,: University of Edinburgh, Social Sciences Research Centre.
    1962   Asylums: essays on the social situation of mental patients and other inmates. Chicago,: Aldine Pub. Co.
    1963   Stigma; notes on the management of spoiled identity. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.,: Prentice-Hall.

Goody, Jack, and International African Institute.
    1971   Technology, tradition, and the state in Africa. London,: Oxford University Press.
Graeber, David
    2011   Debt : the first 5,000 years. Brooklin, New York: Melville House Publishing.
Gramsci, Antonio, and Joseph A. Buttigieg
    1992   Prison notebooks. New York: Columbia University Press.
Habermas, Jürgen
    1989   The structural transformation of the public sphere : an inquiry into a category of
    bourgeois society. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
Hann, C. M., and Elizabeth Dunn
    1996   Civil society : challenging western models. London ; New York: Routledge.
Harbeson, John W., and Donald S. Rothchild
    2009   Africa in world politics : reforming political order. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
Harbeson, John W., Donald S. Rothchild, and Naomi Chazan
    1994   Civil society and the state in Africa. Boulder: L. Rienner Publishers.
Harris, David
    2013   Sierra Leone : a political history. London: C. Hurst and Co.
Hart, Keith
    1973   Informal income opportunities and urban employment in Ghana. Journal of Modern
    African Studies 11:61-89.
Harvey, David
    1993   From space to place and back again: Reflections on the condition of postmodernity.
    In Mapping the futures : local cultures, global change. J. Bird and T.P. Barry Curtis, George
    Robertson, Lisa Tickner, eds. Pp. 3-30. Futures, new perspectives for cultural analysis. London
    ; New York: Routledge.
    2008   The Right to the City. New Left Review 53:23-40.
    2012   Rebel cities : from the right to the city to the urban revolution. New York: Verso.
Holston, James
    2008   Insurgent citizenship : disjunctions of democracy and modernity in Brazil. Princeton,
    N.J.: Princeton University Press.
Hudock, Ann
    1999   NGOs and civil society : democracy by proxy? / Ann C. Hudock. Malden, MA :: Polity
    Press.
ICG
    2001   Sierra Leone: Time for a new military and political strategy: ICG,
    Freetown/London/Brussels.
    2007   Sierra Leone: the election opportunity. : International crisis group.
Ingstad, Benedicte, and Susan Reynolds Whyte
    1995   Disability and culture. Berkeley: University of California Press.
    2007   Disability in local and global worlds. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Kamete, Anderson
    2013   On handling urban informality in Sothern Africa. Geografiska Annaler: Series B,
    Human Geography 95(1):17-31.
Kasnitz, Devva , and Russell P. Shuttleworth
    2001   Introduction: Anthropology in Disability Studies. *In* Disability studies quarterly, Vol
    21.
Kelsall, Tim
    2009   Culture under cross-examination : international justice and the special court for
    Sierra Leone. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press.
King, Nathaniel
    2007   Conflict as integration youth aspiration to personhood in the teleology of Sierra
    Leone's 'senseless war'. *In* Current African Issues.

2012   Contested spaces in post-war society. The devil business in Freetown, Sierra Leone, Martin-Luther Universitate. Knörr, Jacqueline

2000   Female secret societies and their impact on ethnic and trans-ethnic identities among migrant women in Freetwon, Sierra Leone. *In* Women and Migration: Anthropological Perspectives. J. Knörr and B. Meier, eds. Pp. 80-98. Frankfurt/Main: Campus Verlag.

Knörr, Jacqueline, and Wilson Trajano Filho

2010   The powerful presence of the past : integration and conflict along the upper Guinea Coast. Leiden ; Boston: Brill.

Koroma, Rev. Keifala Amodu, and et al.

2005   Topics in Sierra Leone History for Senior Secondary Schools (a school book). Freetown.

Lang, Raymond, et al.

2009   The potential impact of the Globl Economic Downturn on People with Disabilities in Developing Countries. *In* Working Paper Series: UCL Leonard Chesire Disability and Inclusive development center. .

Latour, Bruno

2005   Reassembling the social : an introduction to actor-network-theory. Oxford ; New York: Oxford University Press.

Latour, Bruno

1993   We have never been modern, Pearson Education, 1993: Pearson Education.

Lefebvre, Henri

1991   The production of space. Oxford, OX, UK ; Cambridge, Mass., USA: Blackwell.

Lévi-Strauss, Claude

1966   The savage mind (La pensée sauvage). London,: Weidenfeld & Nicolson.

Lewis, David, and David Mosse

2006   Development brokers and translators. The ethnography of aid and agencies. Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press.

Li, Tania

2007   The will to improve : governmentality, development, and the practice of politics. Durham: Duke University Press.

Lindsey, Delario

2012   The embedded periphery: slums, favelas, shantytowns and a new regime of spatial inequality in the modern world-system. *In* Routledge Handbook of World Systems Aanalysis. S. Babones; and C. Chase-Dunn, eds: Routledge, Taylor and Francis.

Little, Kenneth

1967   Voluntary Associations in Urban Life: A Case Study of Differential Adaptation. . *In* Social Organisation. Essays presented to Raymond Firth. . M. Freedman, ed. London.

Little, Kenneth Lindsay

1960   West African Urbanisation as a Social Process. Cahiers d'Études Africaines 1.(Cahier 3.).

Luke, David Fashole

1985   The development of modern trade unionism in Sierra Leone, Part II. The International Journal of African Historical Studies, 18(4.):625-655.

Magazinier, R. Daniel

2006   One word: Listening to early violence in Colonial Sierra Leone. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin.

Mamdani, Mahmood

1996   Citizen and subject : contemporary Africa and the legacy of late colonialism. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press.

Mbembe, J. A.

2001   On the postcolony. Berkeley: University of California Press.

McFarlane, Colin, and Michael Waibel

2012   Urban informalities : reflections on the formal and informal. Farnham ; Burlington, VT: Ashgate.

McNaughton, Patrick R.

1988   The Mande blacksmiths : knowledge, power, and art in West Africa. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Mdembe, Achille

1992   Provisional notes on the postcolony. Journal of the International African Insitutute 62(1):3-37.

Meekosha, HELEN, and KAREN Soldatic

2011   Human Rights and the Global South: the case of disability. Third World Quarterly 32(8):1383-1398.

Miers, Suzanne, and Igor Kopytoff

1977   Slavery in Africa : historical and anthropological perspectives. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press.

Mir, Javier Rodríguez

2013   Articulación de los sistemas de salud en Sierra Leona. Perspectivasdesde la antropología médica. Gazeta de Antropología 29(1):articulo no. 1.

Morris, Jenny

1991   Pride against prejudice : a personal politics of disability. London: Women's Press.

Moyo, Sam, and K. Mohamed Foray

2009   SCOPING MISSION REPORT- KEY LAND TENURE ISSUES AND REFORM PROCESSES FOR SIERRA LEONE. *In* Report commissioned for the Ministry of Land, Country Planning and the Environment, by the United Nations Development Programme, Freetown (Sierra Leone). Freetown: UNDP.

Murphy, Robert

1995   The body silent in America. *In* Disability and culture B. Ingstad and S.R. Whyte, eds. Pp. x, 307 p. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Murphy, William P.

2010   Patrimonial Logic of Centrifugal Forces in the Political History of the Upper Guniea Coast. *In* The Powerful Presence of the Past. Integration and Conflict along the Upper Guniea Coast. J.W.T.F. Knörr, ed. African Social Studies Series, Vol. Volume 24. Leiden, Boston: Brill.

Mutua, Makau

2002   Human rights : a political and cultural critique. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni, Sabelo J.

2013   Coloniality of power in postcolonial Africa : myths of decolonization. Dakar: Codesria.

Nicalasien, Ida

1995   Persons and nonpersons: Disability and Personhood among the Punan Bah of Central Borneo *In* Disability and culture. B. Ingstad and S.R. Whyte, eds. Pp. x, 307 p. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Nunley, John

1988   Purity and polution in Freetown : Masked Performance. TDR 32(2):102-122.

Nunley, John W.

1985   The lantern festival of Sierra Leone. African Arts 18(2.):45-103.

1987   Moving with the face of the devil : art and politics in urban West Africa. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

Oakland_Insitute

2012   DEALING WITH DISCLOSURE:IMPROVING TRANSPARENCY IN DECISION-MAKING OVER LARGE-SCALE- LAND ACQUISITIONS, ALLOCATIONS AND INVESTMENTS.

Obadare, Ebenezer, and Wendy Willems, eds.

2014   Civic Agency in Africa : arts of resistance in the 21st century. Woodbridge, Suffolk: James Currey.

Ovadiya, Mirey, and Giuseppe Zampaglione
    2009   Escaping Stigma and Neglect. People with disabilities in Sierra Leone. *In* Working Paper. Washington: World Bank.
Peters, Krijn
    2010   Generating Rebels and Soldiers: On the Socio-Economic Crises of Rural Youth in Sierra Leone before the War. *In* The Powerful Presence of the Past. Integration and Conflict along the Upper Guniea Coast. J.W.T.F. Knörr, ed. African Social Studies Series, Vol. Volume 24. Leiden, Boston: Brill.
Pham, J. Peter
    2004   Lazarus Rising: Civil Society and Sierra Leone's Return from the Grave *In* The International Journal of Not-for-Profit Law, Vol. 7.
Piketty, Thomas
    2014   Capital in the twenty-first century. Harward: The President and Fellows of Harward College.
Podolny, Joel M., and Karen L. Page
    1998   Network forms of organisation. Annual Review of Sociology 24:57-65.
Putnam, Robert D.
    1995   Bowling Alone: America's declining social capital - an interview with Robert D. Putnam. Journal of Democracy 6(1):65-78.
Quijano, Anibal
    2000   Coloniality of Power, Eurocentrism and Latin America. Nepantla: Views from South 1(3):533-580.
Renne, Elisha P.
    2010   The politics of polio in northern Nigeria. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
Reno, William
    1995   Markets, War, and the Reconfiguration of Political Authority in Sierra Leone. Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne des Ẵtudes Africaines 29(2):203-221.
    1996   Ironies of Post-Cold War Structural Adjustment in Sierra Leone
Review of African Political Economy 23(No. 67, The Cunning of Conflict):pp. 7-18.
    1998   Warlord politics and African states. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers.
    2009   The privatisation of Africa's International Relations. *In* Africa in world politics : reforming political order. W.a.R. Haberson, D., ed. Pp. xvi, 408 p. Boulder, CO: Westview Press.
Richards, Paul
    1996   Fighting for the rain forest. war, youth & resources in Sierra Leone. Oxford [u.a.]: International African Institute [u.a.].
Rist, Gilbert
    2006   The history of development. From western origins to global faith. London [u.a.]: Zed Books.
Rose, Nikolas S.
    1999   Powers of freedom : reframing political thought. Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.
Rottenburg, Richard
    2009   Far-fetched facts : a parable of development aid. Cambridge, Mass.: The MIT Press.
Roy, Ananya, and Nezar AlSayyad
    2004   Urban informality : transnational perspectives from the Middle East, Latin America, and South Asia. Lanham, Md.Berkeley, Calif.: Lexington Books ; Center for Middle Eastern Studies, University of California at Berkeley.
Samara, Tony Roshan, Shenjing He, and Guo Chen
    2013   Locating right to the city in the Global South. Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge.

Sampson, Steven
> 2005   Integrity warriors: global morality and the anticorruption movement in the Balkans. *In* Corruption. C. Shore and D. Haller, eds. London: Pluto Press.

Santos-Zingale, Myriam dos, and Mary Ann McColl
> 2006   Disability and participation in post-conflict situations: the case of Sierra Leone. Disability & Society, 21.(3.):pp. 243–257.

Scheper-Hughes, Nancy
> 1992   Death without weeping : the violence of everyday life in Brazil. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Scott, James C.
> 1985   Weapons of the weak : everyday forms of peasant resistance. New Haven: Yale University Press.

Shakespeare, Tom
> 2006   The social model of disability. *In* The disability studies reader. L.J. Davis, ed. Pp. xviii, 451 p. New York: Routledge.

Sharma, Aradhana
> 2006   Crossbreeding insitutions, breeding struggle:women's empowerment, neoliberal governmentality, and state (re)formation in India. Cultural Anthropology 21(1):61-95.
> 2008   Logics of empowerment : development, gender, and governance in neoliberal India. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Shaw, Rosalind
> 2002   Memories of the slave trade : ritual and the historical imagination in Sierra Leone. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Shepler, Susan
> 2011   Introduction: Everyday Life in Postwar Sierra Leone. Africa Today 58. 2.(Everyday Life in Postwar Sierra Leone).

Shivji, Issa G.
> 2007   Silences in NGO discourse: The role and future of NGOs in Africa. Oxford: Fahamu.

Shore, Chris
> 2005   Culture and corruption in the EU: reflections on fraud, nepotism and cronyism in the European Commission. *In* Corruption. C.a.D. Shore, Haller, ed. London: Pluto Press.

Shütz, Alfred
> 1987   Le chercheur et le quotidien. Paris: Klincksieck.

Siebers, Tobin
> 2006   Disability in Theory. From Social Constructionism to the New Realism of the Body. *In* The disability studies reader. L.J. Davis, ed. Pp. xviii, 451 p. New York: Routledge.

Silla, Eric
> 1998   People are not the same : leprosy and identity in twentieth-century Mali. Portsmouth, NH Oxford [England]: Heinemann ; J. Currey, Ltd.

Soto, Hernando de
> 2000   The mystery of capital : why capitalism triumphs in the West and fails everywhere else. New York: Basic Books.

Star, Susan Leigh and Griesemer, James R.
> 1989b   'Translations' and Boundary objects: Amateurs and professionals in Berkerley's museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1907-39. Social Studies of Science 19. (No.3):pp 387-420.

Star, Susan Leigh, and James R. Griesemer.
> 1989   Institutional Ecology, "Translation," and Boundary Objects: Amateurs and Professionals in Berkeley's Museum of Vertebrate Zoology, 1909–1939. . Social Studies of Science 19:: 387–420.

Statistics_Sierra_Leone
> 2004   "National Population and Housing Census , 2004 Sierra Leone." Analytical report.

Stiglitz, Joseph E.

2013   The price of inequality : [how today's divided society endangers our future]. New York: W.W. Norton & Co.

Streeck, Wolfgang

2011   The Crisis in Context

Democratic Capitalism and Its Contradictions. *In* MPIfG Discussion Paper 11/15, Vol. 11.

Talle, Aud

1995   A child is a child: Disability and equality amongh the Kenya Maasai. *In* Disability and culture. B. Ingstad and S.R. Whyte, eds. Pp. x, 307 p. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Thomas, Caroline

2004   The international financial instituttutions's relations with Africa. Insights from the issue of representation and voice. *In* Africa in international politics : external involvement on the continent / I.a.P.W.e.b. Taylor, ed. London :: Routledge.

Tostensen, Arne, Inge Tvedten, and Mariken Vaa, eds.

2001   Associational life in African cities. Stockholm: Nordiska Afrikainstitutet.

Trani, Jean-Francois, and Nicki Bailey Osman Bah, Joyce Browne, Nora Groce and Maria Kett

2009   Disability in and around urban areas of Sierra Leone. L.C. Disability, ed.

Tremain, Shelley

2005   Foucault and the government of disability. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

UNDP

2008   ANNUAL REPORT. STRENGTHENING DEMOCRATIC GOVERNANCE. S.L.D.G. UNIT, ed. Freetown.

UNICEF_Sierra_Leone, and Statistics_Sierra_Leone

2007   Sierra Leone Multiple indicator survey cluster 2005. Monitoring the situation of children and women. Final Report. Freetown.

Utas, Mats

2012   Introduction: Bigmanity and network governance in African conflicts. *In* African conflicts and informal power : big men and networks. M. Utas, ed. Pp. 255 p. London: Zed Books.

Vogiazides, Louisa

2012   Legal Empowerment of the Poor" versus "Right to the City". Implications for access to housing in urban Africa. *In* Policy Dialogue. Uppsala: Nordiska Akrifainstitutet,.

Wallerstein, Immanuel Maurice

2004   World-systems analysis : an introduction. Durham [N.C.] ; London: Duke University Press.

WHO

2007   WHO COUNTRY COOPERATION STRATEGY 2004-2007.

Whyte, Susan Reynolds, and Herbert Muyinda

2007   Wheels and new legs: Mobilization in Uganda. *In* Disability in local and global worlds. B. Ingstad and S.R. Whyte, eds. Pp. ix, 324 p. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Williams, Glyn

2004   Evaluating participatory development: tyranny, power and (re)politicisation. . Third World Quarterly, 25(3) 25(3):557–578.

World_Bank, Africa Region External Affairs Unit

2007   The Civil Society Landscape in Sierra Leone Understanding Context , Motives and Challenges. *In* World.

World_Health_Organization

1981   Disability prevention and rehabilitation: report of the WHO expert committee on disability prevention and rehabilitation . *In* Technical Report Series 668. Geneva: WHO.