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Stasik, M.

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# DISCO<sup>n</sup>nections



Langaa &  
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# DISCOConnections

Popular music audiences  
in Freetown, Sierra Leone

Michael Stasik



At the Old Skool night club, Freetown, 2009 (courtesy of John Alie)





Langaa Research and Publishing Common Initiative Group  
PO Box 902 Mankon  
Bamenda  
North West Region  
Cameroon  
Phone +237 33 07 34 69 / 33 36 14 02  
LangaaGrp@gmail.com  
[www.africanbookscollective.com/publishers/langaa-rpcig](http://www.africanbookscollective.com/publishers/langaa-rpcig)



African Studies Centre  
P.O. Box 9555  
2300 RB Leiden  
The Netherlands  
[asc@ascleiden.nl](mailto:asc@ascleiden.nl)  
[www.ascleiden.nl](http://www.ascleiden.nl)

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## Preface

This book is the winner of the ASC's Africa Thesis Award 2011. The jury's report included the following conclusion:

*Michael Stasik has written a highly original thesis in terms of subject choice, theoretical interpretation and methodological approach. Beautifully written, this thesis brings the reader to an unexpected social reality in Freetown that does not fit the common media and Western stereotypes of the capital of a war-torn country. The thesis never suggests any romantic and simple message such as 'music is a universal and unifying language that bridges people across any divide'. Music is rather an expression and vehicle of society and social relations with all their contradictions and paradoxical tendencies. This fascinating complexity is superbly captured.*





*For my lovely  
Elisabeth*

*&*

*To the memory of  
Michael "Dr Daddy" Loco  
1939-2009  
"when things change,  
it is a good thing"*





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## Abbreviations

AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
APC	All People's Congress
CSA	Cassette Sellers Association
ECOMOG	Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
FBC	Fourah Bay College
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MDC	Music and Disco Center
NASLA	National Association of Sierra Leonean Artists
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPRC	National Patriotic Ruling Council
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
OAU	Organization of African Unity
PMDC	People's Movement for Democratic Change
SLBS	Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service
SLPP	Sierra Leone People's Party
SSL	Statistics Sierra Leone
UN	United Nations
UNAMSIL	United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme



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## Introduction

This book is about the patterns of social connection and disconnection that the consumption of music helps to shape, to (re)create, and to defy in Freetown, the capital city of the West African country Sierra Leone. As a conceptual gateway for this work I draw on the expressive and playful metaphor from socio-musicology that “interacting sounds constitute the abstraction ‘music’ in the same way that interacting people constitute the abstraction ‘society’” (Keil 1998: 303). Hence, I aim to explore the connecting and the competing disseminations of sounds and people, the conjunctures of music practices and social affiliations, and the diverse intersections, interactions and contradictions between music and society in Freetown’s past and present.

It is a truism that music unites and *connects* people; music dissolves boundaries of otherness; music is used to shape, to assert and to express communal and collective identity. In creating aural spaces in which members of society congregate, whether physically in discos, music halls, on the street or in rather virtual spaces created through radio broadcasts or the circulation of cassettes, music does function to integrate society. While taking part in a music performance, whether live or recorded, by dancing, by singing, by listening collectively or individually, people share experiences of sounds and grooves. Music is, in this sense, indeed bringing about a “pattern which connects” (Small 1995).

By the same token, music also separates, divides and thus *disconnects* people. These divides can be due to deliberate efforts of one social group to set itself off from other – by affirming, exploring and celebrating opposed senses of who they are via music tastes and associated fashions, behaviours, ways of speaking, and other forms of expressive affiliation-markers. However, divisions can be as well delineated along the subtler boundaries between people who – without any implied efforts to create, subvert or reinforce social alliances or divides – just listen to certain music and those who do not, between people who attend a

concert and the vast rest. Aural congregations produce inclusions and connections just as they produce exclusions and disconnections.

The connections and disconnections music creates between people do not necessarily follow the connections and disconnections that people create and draw between lines of spatial, social, economic, political, generational, gender, religious, ethnic or “racial” divides. Music can both *transcend* lines of spatial, social, economic etc. divides and *reinforce* them. As people listen to different sorts and sounds of music and attend different sorts of music events, they continuously connect with and disconnect from each other, thereby both crossing and reinforcing lines drawn along spatial, social, economic etc. divides.

In her seminal study of leisure in colonial Brazzaville, Phyllis Martin (1995: 2) coined the notion of “communities of taste”. While an individual might always face certain restrictions that constrain the forms of leisure activities through which his/her tastes can be expressed, such as access to time and money on an individual level or the accessibility of recreational spaces on a communal level, the expression of taste, as Martin argues, nevertheless remains within a realm of ongoing contestation of given restrictions. In fact, taste might be seen as a means that in itself creates realms in which restrictive orders embedded in spatial, social, economic etc. structures and divides are being contested and suspended. Whereas other main forms of leisure activities that shape and express taste, for example fashion, art, sport or food, often tend to coincide with the preferences of others in a given social group, as defined by variables such as generation, class or gender, the “social space of music’s appeal”, as Theodor Adorno writes (1975: 79-80; *my transl.*), remains to a large extent “at the sheer booty of taste”. Music tastes transcend social and other boundaries easier. Communities of music taste might thus be understood as yielding forces that have the potentiality to nullify the limitations of given societal structures, be it on a local, a national, a regional, or even on a global scale.

In the setting of Freetown’s highly dispersed and to large parts impoverished and illiterate urban society, the connecting and boundaries-crossing quality of music sounds takes on particular significance. Music can easily traverse across and nullify spatial, social, economic etc. boundaries. For identifying with, dancing or listening to music, one has neither to actually possess its materially embodied devices (of a cassette, CD, computer, sound system etc.) nor does one have to have much of a qualifying knowledge about its forms or medium. Unlike other manifestation and “materializations” of (popular) culture, for example, film, theatre, sport or literature, the consumption of music is relatively free of preconditions. Participation in and “appropriation” of music are potentially possible wherever and whenever musically-patterned sounds dwell in and resonate across space. The social spaces, in turn, that music persuasively creates, be it

physically (in discos, music halls etc.) or rather virtually (through radio broadcasts, the circulation of cassettes etc.) are potent sites for shared expressions and experiences of a commonly created but otherwise dispersed reality of Freetown's urban life. In this manner music is often providing the only public forum through and in which a nascent sense of a common identity can be found and manifested.

However, while music tastes and associated practices of music consumption are prone to transcend divides drawn along societal boundaries – and thus to *connect* otherwise divided groups of people – various social forces and factors are in turn prone to reaffirm given societal boundaries within the realms of music tastes and practices – and thus to *disconnect* groups of people. In much of the recent literature on popular culture, the sociological category of “class”, mainly defined by parameters of employment and education, is ascribed a central role in determining the musical tastes and practices of a given social group, or class (e.g. Pieper 2008; Witte & Ryan 2004). Pierre Bourdieu (1984: 18), in his extensive study of (French) taste formations, even describes music taste as the primal affirmation of class: “[N]othing more clearly affirms one's ‘class’, nothing more infallibly classifies, than tastes in music. This is of course because (...) there is no more ‘classificatory’ practice than concert-going or playing a ‘noble’ instrument”. Thus, as class is a considerable element in the formation of a given social group's music tastes and practices, a group's music tastes and practices are, in turn, considerable elements in this very group's attempts to transcend their confined categorization to a social class. In this book I aim at exploring these, as well as other, potentially paradoxical conjunctures of music practices and social affiliations.

## Readjusting perspectives

With regard to the past two decades of studies on Freetown's society, scholarly attention was widely subjugated to Sierra Leone's eleven-year-lasting war (1991-2002). This focus on violence and despair strongly neglected other, utterly prominent social and cultural dynamics of Freetown's society during the period of war as well as in the post-war years. While I do not intend to deny the effects of Sierra Leone's undoubtedly brutal war, I nevertheless propose to put its contemporary significance into an adjusted perspective. During seven months of fieldwork in Freetown, which I conducted from August 2009 to February 2010 and which form the empirical foundation of this work, I found what might be called a fatigue with both the topic and the topos of war that people – Freetonians and Sierra Leoneans – expressed to me in manifold blunt and subtle ways. After some eight years have passed since the declaration of peace in January 2002, Freetonians appear – rightfully as it is – fed up with being associated with and confined to the dreads of “their” war. Whether this war fatigue stems from a

(psychologically and morally questionable) repression of unwanted scars and memories or from a (psychologically and morally understandable) moving on from passed scars and memories is not at stake here. Unlike many other researchers who recently entered Sierra Leone's "field", I was not in Sierra Leone "to search for the remains of a war" (van Gog 2008: 26). Rather, I was there to look beyond the scars and memories of the war. And what I found was that – despite the still perceptible scars and memories of past's dreads – a somewhat "ordinarily" turbulent but thriving urban life recaptured all spheres of the city and its people.

In this book I attempt to capture some of these dynamics of a turbulent but thriving urban life as they are made manifest on the intersections between the aesthetic domains of music and the social domains of Freetonian life. For this, I adapt a cross-disciplinary approach in which I critically combine analytical and methodological elements of the social science and humanities. By seizing upon concepts and methods from studies on, among others, anthropology, popular culture, music, sociology, and philosophy, I aim to calibrate Freetown's social polyphony with its musical counterpart.

The main question I will be dealing with throughout this book is: how do patterns of music consumption reinforce, reflect and defy patterns of social connection and disconnection? In other words: why does music both unite and divide people, and how?

In a sense, the question can be answered with a most trivial and trivially short answer: because humans simply are like that. In all spheres of society and human life, people cooperate and contend, they come together and come apart, they connect with some and disconnect with others. And as music is played and listened to by people, the same dynamics apply in the spheres of human's music lives.

However, music does its (social) uniting and dividing in specific ways. In this book, I propose a longer and more thorough answer to this question; or rather, I propose an apposition of related (and not always answered) questions and reflections about music's specific ways of uniting and dividing.

## Chapter synopsis

I have organized this book in four main parts, which I divided in twenty chapters. With the end of this short, first introductory chapter, I continue with Part I. Therein I unfurl a more in-depth introduction into my field of research, that is: Freetown and its sounds, music and society (Chapter 2), my main theoretical standpoints (Chapter 3), and my methodological framework and practices (Chapter 4). In order to examine the intersections between patterns of music consumption and patterns of social dis/connections, I adopted a combination of a

## *Chapter 1: Introduction*

historical and of a thematic approach, which I develop in parts two and three respectively. Thus in Part II, I set forth a historiography of Freetown's changing social relationships and the concurrent, interspersed developments and changes in the city's music life. This part is structured along a chronological order, in which I trace back various main stages in the changing interplay between Freetown's society and its music from the first days of the colony in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century to the very "ethnographic present" of my fieldwork in early 2010 (Chapters 5-11). The presentation and discussion of these long-established socio-musical "templates" will then serve as a foundation for the subsequent thematic discussion of contemporary Freetown's social dynamics in the realms of music. Thus in Part III, I delve into various musical as well as "extra-musical" factors and forces of social dis/connection as I observed them during my fieldwork. I begin with a theorizing approach towards several central aspects of socio-musical dis/connectivity (Chapter 12). Thereupon, I map out the broader contexts and a tentative typology of (mainly but not only) collective practices of music consumption (Chapters 13-15). In the following four chapters (16-19), I turn towards the ethnographic centerpiece of this work and present and discuss several main aspects and dynamics of social dis/connections in present-day Freetonians' practices of collective music consumption. I conclude with the short Part IV, in which I propose what I call – with reference to Ato Quayson (2003) – a *calibrated* reading of a relationship central to contemporary Freetown's musical and social domains, that is, the intriguing relationship between dreams and reality (Chapter 20).





## PART I

### The music/society nexus - some introductory reflections and observations



Dancing in Freetown, 2009 *(courtesy of Mustapha Dumbuya)*



## Introducing the city and its sounds

### Freetown sounds

As I sit on my flight back to Sierra Leone from a visit to Ghana, a Nigerian trader sitting next to me starts cursing about Freetown. “This place is such a noise! When I come to Freetown I cannot hear my own thoughts.” As I tell him that I am doing a study on popular music in Freetown, he laughs at me: “So, you are studying noise.” Asking him whether the megalopolis Lagos was not much louder and noisier, he denies emphatically: “No, Lagos is different. In Lagos the noise is making sense. It is a very big city, so it has to be loud. Freetown is small, but it is so noisy.”

The opinion the Nigerian trader had about the sounds of Freetown was not an exception. Most expatriates and visitors I talked to share similar perceptions. They perceive Freetown as loud and noisy. In their opinion, music is not making much a difference in Freetown’s sonic environment. Rather, music is considered to be noise itself, to add noise to the noise. A young Chinese merchant whom I visited at times in his electronics shop downtown once burst out raging: “Their music is no music. Loud tam-tam”, after which he started to simulate what he perceived to be “their music”, droning unmelodiously “bum-bum-bum-bum-bum”. In a conversation about Freetown’s music scene I had with a musically inclined Canadian NGO-worker, she connected the city’s noise to the sparse use of playing with the volume in the music she heard around town. “People here don’t know how to play with timbre and dynamics. No crescendo-decrescendo-crescendo, it is just always loud. Fortissimo forever. Just like the city.” Similarly, a Frenchman, employed on a short-termed and lucrative contract by a human rights organization, remarked to me, “The music here is all just noise.”

Noise is the sound of the Other, as a German saying, ascribed to Kurt Tucholsky, goes. Noise is a difficult concept to define. And as difficult a concept it is, as telling it is about the relationships of humans to the world, and to its

sounds. In the broadest sense, the “sounds of the world” can be categorized along three lines: pleasant and wanted sounds such as music or intimate voices, unpleasant and unwanted sounds such as noise or hostile voices, and potentially neutral sounds. Besides being a counterpart to silence, noise can be understood as a sonic antipode to music. The lines of demarcation, however, are most flexible, relative and, to a decisive extent, socially- and culturally-defined. Different cultures have different ways of dealing with sounds and with the respective meanings sounds are ascribed. These differences are conveyed in, for example, the sonic components of religious rites and their respective handling of silence, sounds and, at times, noise. According to the respective religious and cultural codes of procedure, moments of silence and moments of sounds and noise can mark the difference between the sacred and the profane or between different religions as such. The liturgical practices of European Roman Catholics, for example, are structured along alternating moments of unified praying, solemn singing and devout silence. During the services of various expressions of African Christianity, on the other hand, loud music, often played on electrified instruments, is alternated with ecstatic praying and singing, as for example in Nigerian Aladura churches or in independent spiritual churches across West Africa.

Sounds bring about identity, sympathy, confidence or hostility. In the search for pleasant sounds and the attempt to avoid unpleasant sounds, and in the underlying processes that define what a pleasant sound is and what an unpleasant sound is, different cultures of sound emerged. The dichotomizing and reciprocally excluding categories of music and noise, and the understanding of what music is and what noise is, of what our (non-noisy) music is and what other’s (noisy) music is, “speak” of these socio-cultural negotiations of the meanings of sound. Before delving into Freetonians’ (emic) understandings and negotiations of the meanings of (musical) sounds – whose various dimensions form the centrepiece of this book – I will first continue exploring the intriguing nature of music’s alleged counterpart: noise.

The main difficulty in defining noise in a generally applicable way follows from the subjective character of its perception. What one person may perceive as noise at one moment, another person may perceive as music or pleasurable sound, while the respective perceptions may well reverse in the following moment and with the following sounds. Christopher Small (1998: 121) gives a lucid and concise definition of noise as “unwanted sounds – sounds, that is, whose meaning we either cannot discern or do not like when we do discern it”. Noise can be thus understood as an audible perturbation to our sense-and-meaning-making of the world. Our sense-and-meaning-making of the world, in turn, is thoroughly shaped and influenced by the experiences we make throughout life. Because members of the same social group shape and create the world

they share with each other, the experiences made by members of this group tend to be broadly similar and to reinforce one another. Their sensual and reflective means to make sense of the(ir) world and its experiences are structured along similar lines.

These matters lead to the cornerstone of modern sociological thought, that is, collective identity formation. As this (somewhat burdensome) column of sociological theory and inquiry (along with its long history of changing approaches and conceptualizations; see, e.g. Cerulo 1997) only indirectly touches upon the agenda of this book, I will, at this point, deal with it in a most cursory way. Two elementary approaches towards collective identity formation can be discerned, and (again, cursorily) combined. On the one hand, following the position of social constructionism, it is shared assumptions about the world and its relationships moulded and mobilized in accord with reigning cultural scripts and centres of power against which a collective's members found, or "construct", their "witness" and which holds them together. On the other hand, following a Durkheimian tradition, it is the very *acting-together* of the respective collective's members which creates their shared assumptions about the world and its relationships and which binds the group together. The underlying processes follow a dialectical pattern. Each individual acts, more or less at least, according to the experiences made in the world of the social group he or she belongs to. These acts and experiences, in turn, shape and create the world of the respective social group.

Outsiders, either short-term visitors, expatriates, or newly arrived research students, are prone to misunderstand, or just not to see – and hear – the messages and meanings transmitted in a given expression or sound. Their assumptions about the world and its relationships stem from another context, from other collectives' binding constructs and acts. Among the potential perturbations to their sensual and reflective attempts to understand the new context, its relationships and meanings, *audible* perturbations are probably the one's which are most prone to occur. As Adorno (1975: 68) notes, the organs of our two most prominent senses, the eye and the ear, are marked by a deciding anthropological difference. The eye is covered by the lid. We need to open it and direct our vision to the stimuli we want to perceive. The ear is open. Rather than directing its attention to stimuli, we need to protect it from them. While sight is an active sense, the sense of hearing is passive. The process to adapt the ear to a context of new sounds might thus require either more time or more active attempts than the processes required to adapt the eye to a context of new sights.

In the course of my fieldwork, I experienced this process of audible adaptation and understanding in a very conscious manner. During my first weeks in Freetown, I stayed in a cheap brothel-cum-hotel downtown, right next to Freetown's

most bustling intersection, the so-called PZ. In terms of sounds, the area appeared to me as one big sonic havoc; an anarchic adaptation of the *Musica Universalis* reified by the confusion of humans and animals, of trolleys, cars, motorbikes, busses and trucks. Watching the street and its continuously self-rearranging maze of people and objects, the chaotic structure appears to have some sort of inherent equilibrium that keeps its movements in seamless motion; a spectacular urban ballet choreographed by the indiscernible forces of collective actions. As I joined in the performance myself, I could not keep with the rhythm, stumbled, bumped into people, and got hit by passing cars' side-view mirrors. At any time of the day and of the night, PZ's central roundabout is packed with vendors and hawkers selling the universe of items available in the country. Some two dozen music sellers frame the roundabout with their stalls full of dusty cassettes, pirated CDs, and movie collections. Each has his stall equipped with a stereo playing out latest hits. Despite their close proximity, some stalls stand right next to each other, everyone is nevertheless playing his music at full volume. The interfering musical sounds harmoniously join the cacophony of the place. Together with the sounds of honking cars, the odd police siren, the muezzin's crier, the sort of white noise produced by various parlours broadcasting European football matches, and the generators fuelling their transmissions, the area around the roundabout resembles the scenario of a rampant competition for audible attention. Around PZ, Freetown's urban symphony appears indeed to be played in steady fortissimo.



*Photo 2.1* Downtown Freetown's spectacular urban ballet, January 2010

However, soon my perception of the city began to change. I started to familiarize myself with the streets and places in downtown Freetown which, together with its surrounding neighbourhoods, became my main research sites. I began to understand the basics of central Freetown's urban ballet and learned to sidestep passing cars and people at the right moment. I also started to accustom myself to Freetown's sounds and to broaden my horizon about their diverse forms and manifestations. Different areas have different converses of producing and handling the ratio of sounds and silence. Each area has its own modulation of acoustic codes and restraints. The respective sounds mirror processes of social convergence and demarcation. Sonically discrete environments *earmark* environments of different social realms and functions. And vice versa, each socially defined and distinguished space has its own, distinguishable sounds and its distinct relation of sounds and silence. The cacophony of the trading hubs around PZ has its complement in the rather quiet residential areas, which all in turn have their own sonic specifics. In fact, the noise of PZ seems rather an exception to Freetown's general sonic environment than the rule. In many parts of town, the prevailing sound is, actually, a sound of relative silence. In the most densely populated part of Freetown called East Side, an area stretching east of PZ all the way towards the fringes of the peninsula, this is particularly striking. In the East Side, inside some of West Africa's most congested urban space, the city is a remarkably quiet place.

On a map of Africa, Sierra Leone appears as a small splodge on the western edge of the continent (Map 2.1). On a map of Sierra Leone, Freetown conveys the same impression (Map 2.2). Even in terms of Sierra Leone's relatively small geographic size, Freetown occupies a relatively small area on the western outskirts of the country. Within this small area, the East Side occupies about one third of the city's geographical space. However, according to the 2004 population census, about two-thirds of Freetown's population lives in the East Side, making up about one-tenth of Sierra Leone's total population.<sup>1</sup> The area is fiercely congested. Given the density of lives lived next to each other, the quietness that marks the sonic environment of the East Side is in fact striking.

A main reason for the rather unexpected quietness in the densely populated East Side is, on the one hand, the undersupply of public electricity and, on the other hand, the costs of electricity. According to local media, Freetown holds the unofficial, inglorious title of being "the darkest city in Africa, if not the world". Measured by real wage, electricity in Sierra Leone is estimated to be more expensive than in any other country of the world (Alie 2006: 221). Generally, the

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<sup>1</sup> In the 2004 census, the estimate for Sierra Leone's total population is 4,976,871, for Freetown 772,873, and for Freetown's East Side 451,509 (see Statistics Sierra Leone 2006a).





Map 2.1 Sierra Leone in Africa



Map 2.2 Freetown in Sierra Leone

power supply in Freetown, as in other parts of the country that actually are on the electrical grid, is poor. In the East Side it is particularly bad. There, electricity is virtually absent. Because of the unreliable or inexistent service provision, many who can afford it rely on private power sources. These are mainly so-called “Kabbah Tigers”, Chinese-produced generators running on diesel that are amongst the most notorious sources of loud (and noisy) sounds in Freetown. The Kabbah Tigers, however, growl only around areas and places where people can afford to pay for the fuel to run them. These are, mainly, business centres and trading hubs, the more affluent western parts of Freetown, and particular areas where drinking parlours, dancing spots, bars, clubs and their various hybrids agglomerate. In the East Side most households are not able to afford neither the fuel to run a generator nor the generator itself. Here, Tiger-run sources of electrified, loud sounds are limited to spots of trade and amusement. After the prompt setting of the sun at seven pm, the East Side obscures its sight. And as the lights are and stay off, so do many sources of loud (and noisy) sounds.

In the situation of deficient and expensive supply of electricity, loud, electrically amplified sounds, in particular music played out loud on stereos, become a rarity. Being a rarity, the presence of loud, electrically amplified sounds takes on the role of a social marker. When music is played out loud, it speaks of three main possible contexts of its emission: Wealth, business or a special occasion. Either somebody just can afford to pay for the loud sounds, that is, for the respective medium and the required electricity, because he or she has the financial means to do so (whether this “wealth” is permanently or temporarily is of secondary concern); or somebody just has to afford it because his or her business requires electricity (e.g. selling cold drinks) or music (e.g. selling

music) or both (e.g. a dance bar); or a special occasion (e.g. a marriage) leads to the suspension of the norm when loud, electrically amplified sounds are rare. Once one or several of these factors apply, the music is often, if not always, played in full volume.

Whether in a small drinking spot or a larger dance bar, at a private gathering or during public events, in a tiny shop selling “miscellaneous” or at bustling PZ, if there is a stereo playing music, the music is played either in full volume or close to the fullest. In many instances, the music’s loudness appears – at least to the newbie’s perception – to contradict the function of the place, to disturb rather than to attract potential guest or to please present ones. This putative contradiction struck me for the first time during a visit in a small bar in the West End of town, where I perceived it to be particularly salient. The bar is famous for its goat soup. Particularly on weekends it attracts many to come by and eat. The place is a rather ordinary “chop bar”, a rudimentary concrete structure with a tin roof, a couple of plastic tables and chairs, and a kitchen separated by an improvised wooden wall. People come here to eat, mainly, to eat goat soup, to chat a bit while eating, and to leave again after having eaten. As I was told by my companions, once the goat soup was finished, people did not come any more and the place remained empty until the next day and soup. The goat soup bar is about goat soup, and nothing indicates that somebody would come here to dance or listen to music. At the goat soup bar music is nevertheless played at a deafening level. Two large speakers frame the small space while the cook serves simultaneously as a DJ. As I asked him why he played the music that loud (which I in fact perceived as a disturbingly noisy volume), he replied with another question, asking me if I did not like the music. The other present customers, including my Freetonian companions, showed not a whiff of nuisance but ate and chatted apparently unhampered by the loud sounds.

This sort of misunderstanding is paradigmatic. In the first place, it speaks about my very own initial misunderstanding, or misinterpretation, of Freetown’s socio-sonic relationships and its “economy of sounds”. What I, as a newbie, perceived as an outright audible perturbation to the meaning-and-sense-making in the (for me new) world of the goat soup bar, was an accustomed and known sonic reality to the bar’s other guests. In the following weeks, I asked the same volume-question in several other places which struck me by the apparent contradiction between their function and the sonic and musical environment that was deliberately created therein. All answers I received were tellingly vague, such as: “because we like it”, “for people to hear”, or “why not?” The loudness and (what I perceived as) noisiness was not perceived as too loud, noisy or disturbing. In fact, during the seven months I spent roaming about Freetown’s places of music consumption, only in two instances I saw people complaining about the volume

of the music: One time, at a vernissage at the British Council where a local DJ played for an audience comprised mostly of Freetown's expat community; the other time, at a casino night in an expensive hotel where a Freetonian band provided the musical background to the monthly gambling-meeting of Freetown's Chinese community. In Freetown, Tucholsky's (musical) "noise as the sound of the Other" assumes a storybook character.

As Freetown's music volume-phenomenon bears no, or not many, explanations when approached with emic accounts, some tentative etic descriptions might be put forward. Music, it might be thus alleged, is played out at full volume once it is played out loud at all because it attracts attention and enviers, creates curiosity, signals (however factual) wealth, action, life, trade, exchange, encounter, and special and exceptional occasions. And the louder it is played, the clearer and further it sends out and emits these meanings. The connection of loud music sounds to contexts and settings of wealth, business and special occasions also points towards a possible explanation for many outsiders' perception of Freetown as notoriously noisy, as these are mainly the contexts and settings in which many expats and other foreign visitors stay in and move about. We might, furthermore, speak of a sort of adjusted technological imperative – according to which that what *can* be done (technologically) inevitably *will* or even *ought to* be done (Ozbekhan 1968) – and translate it into Freetown's music-volume realms: Once the (music) technology and its prerequisites (mainly electricity) are available, people will inevitably make *full* use of it. Not least, the loud play of music serves the fairly pragmatic reason to drown the (unmusical, noisy) sounds of the diesel generator which, in many instances, fuels the musical sounds.

As loud music is confined to wealth, businesses or special occasions, Freetown's overall soundscape contradicts a general development brought about by urbanisation and industrial technology. As Raymond Schafer (1993) argues, before the dawn of industrial and technological revolution loud sounds, as well as loud music, were confined to exceptional happenings (e.g. a festivity) or indicated them (e.g. an alarm). Sonic environments were relatively "simple" and, for the most part, relatively mute and "natural". At the dawn of what Kofi Annan called the "urban millennium" (UN 2005) and its concomitant rise and spread of new media and technologies, humanity produced, and experienced, an ever-increasing complexity of its sonic surroundings and an ever-growing array of artificially amplified (and potentially noisy) sounds. In this process, music too began to lose its exceptional character. New technologies and media made music increasingly available, present and loud. Walking through public spaces in basically any bigger town in the world, sounds of music approach us through the open windows of houses and passing cars, through speakers discreetly mounted in shops, malls, elevators and waiting rooms, or through our neighbour's ear-

phones in a bus or subway. Despite Freetown's rushing urbanisation and growing technologization, the undersupply of electricity halts this trend. With the non-ready availability of electricity, music too becomes less available. Its presence reverses to exceptional happenings. Freetown, seen in its soundscape as a whole, represents a form of silenced – or muted – urbanism.

## Musical minds

The more time I spent in Freetown, the more I strolled around, met, visited and talked to people, and the more I listened, the more I became aware that, despite the general rarity of hearing much loud music on the streets, music was nevertheless all around. Where there were people – and there were always people – there was music. The music was with the people. On the one hand, it was there rather quietly, unobtrusively in its volume. Since many Freetonians cannot afford to have stereos or to pay for the electricity to run them (given the exceptional case that electricity is available at all), the most common music devices are small, battery-run radios and the increasingly affordable mobile phones capable to play music, which both produce only fairly moderate volumes. On the other hand, music was there silently, literally in silence. It was *inside* the people.

I met Emanuel<sup>2</sup> at a barber's shop, a decidedly quiet place. We were both just sitting at the bench next to the barber without actually waiting for a haircut or shaving. As so many of my interviewees, Emanuel lives "off Kissy Road", the main, ever-traffic jammed street cutting across the East Side. He is in his mid-twenties. Since he earned his high-school diploma seven years ago, he tries to find the means to establish his own business. He stays with his mother and is currently without any job. It took us only a few sentences before our conversation turned to music. Emanuel is a music encyclopaedia. His knowledge about music is astonishing. He is up to date with virtually all musical trends and styles that currently exist in Freetown, which is a vast number. He knows about local musicians, about major developments in West African popular music, about new and old hits in the US, about past and forthcoming concerts and parties, he knows the songs, the artists, and many lyrics, which he is very fond of reciting and commenting upon, along with the respective melodies. When I asked him where he got all his knowledge about music from, he had to think long for an answer. According to his own estimate, he is not much passionate about music. He obviously likes music and listens to it, but he is not spending much money on it by buying records, going to parties or to concerts. The music he knows about, he says, he somehow just knows, from friends, from the radio, from the street. A couple of weeks later, I visited him at his home, a tiny one-and-a-half rooms-

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<sup>2</sup> The names in this book may or may not have been changed.

construct attached to a bigger house. There I found that Emanuel possesses exactly one CD, a pirated compilation of love-songs which he cannot play because he has no CD player. What he has, in terms of music devices, is a small radio and the mobile phone on which he used to play music before its speaker got raddled. The rest of his music, the astonishingly comprehensive knowledge about artists, songs, lyrics and melodies, is within him, inside him, in his mind.

Emanuel was no exception. I encountered this sort of “musical mind” with many more, especially young Freetonians. What struck me most about it was the apparent disproportion between people’s vast knowledge about music, on the one hand, and the small or inexistent amount of music people possess, on the other hand. Their “possession” of music was imagined, so to say, tangible – in talks and expressions – but immaterial.

This is, of course, not quite true. Music is not just in people’s minds, if it is there at all. Speaking of imagined or immaterial “possession” of music (with or without inverted commas), I am making inexact, if not false, use of language. Emanuel did not compose the songs himself. First, he heard “his” music *on the outside*, on the streets, or on the radio, or from friends or others. Before his music became “his” music it was someone else’s music. Someone composed the songs, someone recorded them, someone put them on tapes and CDs, someone sent them across the channels of local or global music dissemination, and yet someone else sold or played them on Freetown’s streets or radio waves, which marked the link in the long chain in the social production and dissemination of music where Emanuel finally got (to hear) it. What form of “property” does Emanuel, and we, hence possess “having” music? Do we “possess” music after purchasing a record? Do we “acquire” music while listening to the transient sequence of patterned sounds played out during a performance or from our radio at home? Is music “there”, somewhere? Where is music, and, above all, what is “it”?

Music – similar to noise – is difficult to grasp. The question what music is and what it is not is as old as thinking about music itself. To name but a few (German) examples in the overarching attempts to define “it”: Some approach music as a rational science based on numbers and algorithms, thus as pure theory (Leibniz). Others see it as pure praxis (Novalis). Yet others emphasize music’s nature as an outright expression of our connectedness to the transcendental (Schopenhauer); as the concurrence of Apollonian and Dionysian ethics and aesthetics (Nietzsche), or as a coherent expression of society’s contradictions and paradoxes (Adorno). With regard to the libraries devoted to intriguing and ingenious arguments about the “nature” of music and their likewise intriguingly ingenious counter-arguments, we might conclude that, actually, music is not to grasp at all, not coherently at least. Bourdieu (1984: 80), writing about the inscrutable nature of art (as “a sort of symbolic gymnastics”), framed the following

trenchant sentences about music's particular ineffability: "music, the most 'pure' and 'spiritual' of the arts, is perhaps simply the most corporeal. Linked to *états d'âme* (...) it ravishes, carries away, moves. It is not so much beyond words as below them".

Being a phenomenon "below words", definitions of music are inevitably of a provisional character – tentative trials and prostheses. Following an arbitrating approach, it might be stated that some tentative definitions of music are useful for some purposes while others are useful for other purposes. As my purposes mainly aim at the realms of music audiences, at how people relate to music, and at how people relate through music to each other and to their world(s), I will – in the following chapter – propose and combine three main approaches towards a tentative definition of music, with particular regard to music's role in society: (1) I propose a short phenomenological perspective on music's "mode of being"; (2) I enrich this phenomenological perspective with some anthropologically- and sociologically-inspired reflections about music; and (3) I put forward a first, tentative definition of *music in Freetown*, informed by my own ethnography, and juxtapose this emic notion of Freetonians' music with several perspectives and insights from the neuro- and evolutionary-science's approaches towards music.

## Music and society – a preliminary theoretical outline

### A brief phenomenology of music

Looking back at the centuries-old discussions about an understanding of music, Polish phenomenologist Roman Ingarden (1962) makes a curtly but fundamental shift in the theorizing approach towards music. Rather than engrossing the mind in long reflections about the aesthetic value of music, either in itself or in comparison with other forms of artistic expressions, Ingarden proposes to look, first and foremost, at the ontological structure of music, its mode of being, and the relations this being is founded in.

Musical sounds, it can be argued in line with Ingarden's approach, occur in two basic realms: (1) in the physical realms of the material world, where waves of oscillating pressure generate audible phenomena and where living organisms perceive these phenomena, produce and play with them by breathing, singing, whistling, speaking, moaning, screaming, by beating on membranes, blowing air through holes, plucking strings, and by potentially every movement and action they do; and (2) in the mental realms of the processes in the mind, where a constant stream of consciousness restructures the perceptions of the physical world and its sounds and orders, enriches and manipulates these perceptions with emotions, thoughts, memories and imaginations.<sup>1</sup>

This somewhat blunt dualism between world and mind and the places sounds occupy in it raises the question exactly where, and how, these sounds are then organized into a form recognized as music. For a sound by itself – whether

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<sup>1</sup> Of course, this division of (musical) matter and (musical) mind baldly invokes the materialist's critical exclamation. Rather than trying to introduce any sort of Cartesian music-dualism, I use this division to emphasize the distinctiveness of sounds outside the mind and sounds inside the mind. Whether mental qualities are (ir)reducible to physical qualities (or not) is not at stake here.

actualized as a physical phenomenon or as a mental occurrence in the streams of mind – does not make any music yet.

A brief answer is that, in physical realms, sound occurrences are organized into a form recognized as music when people sing, clap, whistle, play instruments, perform concerts, record albums etc. In mental realms, the organization takes place within the processes and acts of consciousness in which, on the one hand, perceived sound occurrences (of singing, clapping, whistling, the play of an instrument, a concert, record etc., as well as “natural” sounds like, e.g. a bird’s “singing”) are recognized and *labeled* as music. On the other hand, sound occurrences may as well be thought of or imagined in acts of consciousness, which subsequently may then again lead to a creative act of material organization of sound occurrences (by e.g. singing the imagined sounds or by or playing them on an instrument). In other words, we can *do* music, we can *perceive* music, and we can *imagine* music.

By stating that sounds become music when people play music or when people perceive or imagine sounds as music, this short answer risks, on the one hand, to fall into tautologies. On the other hand, it fails to explain the link between the physical and the mental realms.

Ingarden (1962: 104) provides a more profound answer. By assigning music an “intentional existence” (*my transl.*) he argues that music simultaneously combines both realms while it also transcends them. Music cannot be identified solely with its material components (e.g. the individual sound event, the lives, times and acts of performers and listeners, the particular instrument, concert, record etc.), nor with its “mental concretisation” (*ibid.*: 103; *my transl.*) formed in the perceptions of its respective performers and listeners. Music is, in this way, more than the sum of its (material and mental) parts, for its respective parts are linked by yet another element: Intentionality. Intentionality, in turn, is not a mere mental act. It necessitates a phenomenon it can be directed at and enabled by, in this case – sounds. Following Edmund Husserl’s paths, Ingarden thus extends the critique of the representational theory of mind (in which mental acts are understood as mere representations of the physical world) to musical realms. Music is not a mere object of the physical world, in which we have sounds, musicians, composers, listeners, instruments, concerts, records etc. A sound by itself does not make any music yet, nor does a musician, an instrument, concert, record etc. Neither is music a mere adjusted consciousness of the physical world, in which we have musicians, composers and listeners’ consciousness of sounds, concerts, records etc. The one necessitates the other. For sounds to become music, the idea of music is required. For the idea of music, sounds are required. In other words, music is created through, on the one hand, a multitude of acts of consciousness, “mental concretisations”, by performers and listeners that perceive sounds to be



music, and, on the other hand, through the very material form and manifestation of music in sounds in which the form itself becomes a means for the mental concretisation, for the *intentionality* or “aboutness” of sounds as music. Similarly to Wittgenstein’s (1984) debunk of a private language, it can be thus stated in line with Ingarden’s reasoning that a thoroughly *private music* cannot exist. Sounds become *musical* sounds in the “sound-games” played by society. Music, just as language, is intrinsically social.

## Musicking

With this phenomenological and fairly, or very, abstract understanding of music as a product of intentionality, Ingarden clears the way to approach music by its relational character. Music, in this approach, is established as a relation between world and mind, between sounds and their perception, between material forms and mental concretisations, and, not least, between people. What holds the musical world and its constituting relations together in its inmost folds is: Intentionality. However, at the same time Ingarden falls into what Small (1998: 61) calls “the trap of reification, or thing-making”. Reification is, in the first place, a linguistic or semantic phenomenon, or problem. It stems from the convenience of having nouns that enable us to talk about concrete acts and relationships as if they were a thing. From acts and relationships we do and experience in the world, we create abstractions. The acts, relationships and experiences of loving, for example, become the abstract love. This, by itself, is a normal and rather unproblematic means to ease thought and speech and the meanings it is meant to communicate. Though, once we aim at defining a reality’s phenomenon, reification can easily seduce us to come to think of the abstraction as more real than the reality it represents.

The abstract “music” might be thought of as a major example for this seductive and delusive power semantics hold over reality. The use of a noun to describe the category of humanly organized sounds of a musical kind swiftly precipitates the idea of music as a thing, entailing conceptualizations of music as untouched by time and social change. Small (1998) argues that the tendency to think of music as a thing, to presume an autonomous “thingness” of music, characterizes most scholarly attempts to explain the nature and meaning of music. Presuming that the meaning of music resides in the sound object itself, scholars thus put the prime focus on music’s however tangible objects and materials – the musical work, its score or transcript, and its lyrics. By this, the attention is distracted away from other elements that make humanly organized sounds into a form recognized as music. For music, according to Small, “is not a thing at all but an activity, something that people do” (*ibid.*: 2). Music is action, a performance in which all those present are involved – those who play the music,

if present at all, just as those who listen and dance (read: perform) to it. To omit the trap of reification, Small introduces a new word, namely the verb *to music*, with *musicking* as its participle, and its definition: “to music is to take part, in any capacity, in a musical performance, whether by performing, by listening, by rehearsing, or practicing, by providing material for performance (what is called composing), or by dancing” (*ibid.*: 9). Consequently, the meanings of *musicking* are not to be found in the music itself, in music’s sound objects, but are generated and negotiated wherever, whenever and however people *do it*.

Small’s theoretical and methodological turnabout implies four main positions in the further conceptualization of music. (1) *Performance* “does not exist in order to present musical works, but rather, musical works exist in order to give performers something to perform” (Small 1998: 8). What makes the sounds become music is the countless number of mental and physical acts involved in its creation in play and its recreation in perception. The emphasis is thus to be put on the action of art, the art of creation and recreation, rather than on the created art object itself. (2) The *form* in which one partakes in the act of musicking, whether actively as a musician or as an allegedly passive listener, is not a prime concern. What matters primarily is the act itself. This does not lead to the odd assertion that there is no difference between somebody who performs in front of a crowd and somebody who listens to the performance as part of the crowd. There certainly is. But both *activities* bear their respective meanings, and both are parts in the grand act of intentionality at work that makes sounds become music. (3) When the *meanings* of music reside not in musical “materials” themselves but in people’s perceptions and the ideas they ascribe to them, then (potentially) every listener creates his and her very own meanings and interpretations. To speak of music’s meaning is thus to speak either of one’s own meanings taken from and ascribed to the music, or about other people’s respective meanings taken from and ascribed to the music, or about nothing at all. (4) Consequently, music and its meanings are never above *time and space* but radically context-dependent. To ask the question what the meaning of music is in itself is to ask a question that has no possible answer. Questions that will lead us closer to the meanings of music are: what does it mean when those people are musicking at this time and in this place?

Returning to the abovementioned case of Emanuel, we might thus once again pose the question where and what “his” music is if he does not “posses” it (im)materially? With regard to the above-evolved concepts of music as created by intentionality (Ingarden) and as a performative act (Small), we might state that Emanuel (re)created and (re)performed music in the relationship he established with me during our conversations. Our shared intentionality and understanding of certain songs imaginatively (re)created sounds of a musical kind and brought

music “to the fore”. Songs which both of us have before perceived, listened to, and recreated as mental concretisations came back in the form of shared imaginings. The music was thereby neither solely in him, nor was it solely in me, nor was it just outside us. Rather it was established in the relationship *between* him and me and the world. Emanuel was thus musicking with me: He was acting, performing, imagining, understanding, sharing and behaving – for musicking is also, and maybe even primarily, behaviour.

The questions of who musics with whom, where and when necessarily lead to the social realms in which music is played, perceived, and given its meanings. Alan Merriam (1964: 27) points towards the importance of these realms by defining music as socially-accepted patterns of sound and behaviour. Since music inevitably takes place within social actions, and eventually is social action, it involves the behaviour of individuals and groups of individuals. As a unique form of behaviours in which sounds are organized into a phenomenon recognized as music, it demands the social concurrence of people who decide what it is and is not, and what it can and cannot be. Herein, too, lies the fundamental and defining distinction between, as listed by Richard Waterman (1963: 86), “what is music and what is not music, between what is proper music and what is improper music, between what is our music and what is someone else’s music, between what is good and meaningful music and, and what is bad and inept music”, and, as we might add as the maybe most fundamental distinction, between what is noise and what is music.

Though, the relation between social concurrence and musical behaviour is not marked by a one-sided imposition of socially-accepted patterns on sounds. The process is in fact strikingly dialectical. And it is no coincidence that it follows the same pattern of dialectical processes in which individuals simultaneously shape and are shaped by the realities of the social group(s) and its world(s) they belong to, as described above. Sociocultural concepts shape the perceptions of sounds as music while music, in turn, feeds back upon the concepts held about sounds as music. Given the significant features in the processes of musicking – play, performance, invention, improvisation, imagination – the spaces which music occupies in society are marked by a realm of constant change of both sounds and behaviours. Kofi Agawu (2001: 7) dubbed this realm the “hollow space” in which “active listeners and interpreters are invited to play, to invent, to dream, and inevitably, to lie”. Society, apprehended as music audiences writ large, is thus in a constant process of negotiating, and re-inventing, the meanings of music(king); while, in turn and simultaneously, the realms created through musicking function as spaces to negotiate, and to re-invent, the social meanings shared by its performers and participants.

## Music/dance

Music, as the evolutionary sciences are teaching us, is inherent to human nature. Every normally endowed human being is born with the gift of music (or: to music) no less than the gift of speech (or: to speak). Music is inscribed into our species' evolutionary history, and it makes us, so it is alleged, a most distinct species (e.g. Cross 2003b). Our closest biological kin, the great apes, are noticeably unmusical fellows (Williams 1980). So are, supposedly, all other species.<sup>2</sup> In every human culture, on the other hand, there is music. Or, as formulated more technically by John Blacking (1995: 224), "every known human society has what trained musicologists would recognise as 'music'". On a broad (or "deep") scale, music thus connects, or even "unites", humanity. The human capacity to music is universal; similarly is the human capacity to perceive and distinguish musical sounds from non-musical sounds universal, potentially at least. As trenchantly put by Adorno (1975: 186), music is indeed a universal language, and yet – as he quickly adds – it is no Esperanto.

As much as music connects and unites the human species in dissociation from the rest of our planet's living creatures, as much does it also bear the potentials to disconnect humans from each other. Music is, simultaneously and paradoxically, a universal and non-universal phenomenon. Ian Cross (2003a: 19) therefore proposes the odd-sounding term "musics", for musics "resonate with the histories, values, conventions, institutions and technologies that enfold them; musics can only be approached through culturally situated acts of interpretation". And these acts – and behaviours – "unveil a multiplicity of musical ontologies, some, or most of which, may be mutually irreconcilable: Hence a multiplicity of 'musics'" (*ibid.*).

Against this (conceptual) background of a multiplicity of simultaneously connecting and disconnecting musics, we may now turn towards our particular case; that is, Freetown's music and Freetonians' musicking – along with its particular ontology, its particular culturally situated acts of interpretation, its particular associated behaviours, imaginations, shared intentionalities, and socio-musical conventions. The deeper-layered (and complicated) histories, institutions and technologies in which Freetown's music is enfolded in will be discussed at length in Part II (Chapters 4-11). At this point I attempt to map out a basic category by which Freetonians partition sounds into non-musical and musical sounds; in other words, a category that defines Freetonians' music. A short anecdote from my fieldwork serves well to illustrate the contours of that defining category.

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<sup>2</sup> There are, however, also theories that question the unmusicality of the animal world; see e.g. Martinelli (2008, 2009).

Agnes and Angela, both in their early twenties, are two students from Freetown. I was introduced to them through a friend, who also took me to their room at the college dormitory. As usual, I was particularly interested to find out about their musical preferences and practices. When I asked them about their music, Agnes handed me over her laptop on which, as she said, I could find all their music. While all I found was, for Freetonian standards, a fairly unexceptional selection of recent and up-to-date music hits from the US, the Caribbean, and Anglophone Africa, one track protruded from the rest of Agnes and Angela's music collection and struck my attention: Beethoven's "Fifth Symphony". As I asked the girls if they liked Beethoven, I received a puzzled look in return and was asked to play the music. After some view moments of listening, Agnes laughed at me, asking whether the name of the music was really Beethoven since that is a dog's name. After a few more moments of amused bafflement, she then asked me to turn it off, adding: "You call this music? How do you dance to this?" Neither she nor Angela had ever before listened to it, at least not consciously, and certainly not with the thought or association of music on their minds.

The fragment of Beethoven's symphony came into Agnes' music collection as a pre-installed demo song on her computer. That Agnes associated the name Beethoven with a dog was probably because she saw the Hollywood movie starring a St. Bernard with that name. While these two points touch upon related and relevant aspects as well (e.g. of technology and media-related developments and of new channels of music dissemination in contemporary Freetown), the main point for our current concerns lies in Agnes and Angela's bafflement about Beethoven's sounds and their explicit refusal to call them "music". Apparently, the sounds did not fit the concepts and conventions Agnes and Angela hold about music, even though they avoided to dub them "noise" (as did the above-mentioned Nigerian, Chinese, Canadian and Frenchmen and -women with regard to Freetonian music). Beethoven was, so to say, "out of the frame" which defines their ideas about *musical* sounds and which separates these from non-musical sounds. And that frame – erected and formed by the social (and sonic) realities Agnes and Angela share and co-create with their Freetonian contemporaries – was calibrated on one deciding feature: *danceability*. A main, and most probably *the main*, defining characteristic of music in Freetown is thus: *to dance to 'it'*.

It is, however, not the question whether Agnes and Angela *always* have to dance to patterns of sounds to call them music. The question is whether music is something which is *potentially* danceable. By definition, by Agnes and Angela's definition of music, that is the case. And maybe this is already the closest we can get to a common denominator for socially-established and shared conventions that define what Freetonians would accept as music and what not. Of course there are exceptions. On the one hand, Freetown's soundscapes bear (as we will

see in the second part of this book) a strikingly broad diversity of different musical genres, styles, traditions, influences, and – by this – also of music-defining conventions. In a later period of my fieldwork I also encountered Freetonians who were most familiar with Beethoven and the Viennese classics and who, despite not attempting to dance to it, referred to it even as their favourite music. On the other hand, there are (again: of course) genre-differences that Freetonians establish and apply between different forms of music. Within these different genres, not all patterns of sounds of a musical kind that fall into the superordinated category of music are necessarily defined by being danceable. Hymns and sacred chants, played, sang and listened to in Freetown's churches, are among the clearest – and in fact few – examples of patterned sounds of a musical kind which must *not always* and not necessarily be danceable in order to be labeled (Freetonian) music. Depending on the denomination and on the respective occasion, the ratio of non-danceable church songs during the service might be fairly high while certainly no Freetonian participant would not *not* call them music. However, the inflationary spread of Pentecostal sects in Freetown – whose services are characterized by highly danceable and outright ecstatic songs and music – further narrows down the already narrow genre of non-danceable church music.

As I asked Agnes and Angela whether all music has to be danceable in order to be music, they agreed upon that this must not be the case. There is, also within their conventions, space for non-danceable music as well. In fact, indirectly they also recognized Beethoven as some sort of music, speaking of it as “your music” – that is: mine; hence, the Other's music – but not theirs. From here, we might continue by stating that, from Agnes and Angela's point of view (and complemented with Cross' vocabulary), there are three main categories of music. On the broadest scale, there is the category of *musics* of the world, with all their multiplicities and mutual irreconcilabilities. On the scale of Agnes and Angela, there is the broad category of *their* music as discerned and implicitly defined against the Others' music(s). Within this category in turn, there is yet another multiplicity of sub-categorizations as done by Agnes and Angela and many other of my Freetonian informants and which, with some exceptions, aggregates around the trait of being danceable music.

So, what is it about dance and music? Coming back once again to Cross (2003b: 80), it is intriguing to note that he – as a musicologist with a strong inclination towards cognitive science – treats dance as indistinguishable from music as well: “music and dance are simply two sides of the same coin” (see also Cross 2006 & 2007). According to Cross and other scholars of a neuro-musicological orientation (e.g. Benzon 2001), music and dance are inseparable in terms of their evolutionary origin and, consequently, in terms of their allocation

of the activities in the brain that take place during acts of music/dance. As Cross (2003b: 79) writes:

Indeed, the necessity of a link between music and overt action (i.e. dance) is obscured in the (fairly recent) social practices of western art-music which involve drawing clear distinctions between 'active' performer and 'passive' audience, and by very recent technological developments that enable 'music' to be 'caused' by purchasing a phonographic roll or downloading an MP3 file.

William Benzon (2001: 46), in turn, adds to it: "much if not all of music's neural substrate will be found in structures that evolved to serve other behaviours". Quoting Jude Trama, he continues: "'There is no music nervous center in the brain, no grossly identifiable brain structure that works solely during music's cognition.' (...) brains make music by using old structures and systems in a new way" (*ibid.*). The connection of music and dance and the ability to do "it" thus evolved from our evolutionary raw material in relation to our evolutionary needs and deeds. Three main lines of thought and theory which attempt to explain the evolutionary evolution and function of music/dance underpin that statement.

Firstly, music is said to have evolved from early human's courtship rituals and was thereby intrinsically connected to dancing practices. Geoffrey Miller (2003), for example, sees music/dance as a ritual that symbolizes evolutionary survival capabilities. A young Stone Age man who danced and sang untiringly and impressively thereby paraded his creativity, intelligence and physical fitness. This sort of musicking courtship attracted the Stone Age's womankind and propelled the continued existence of musically-inclined offspring.

Secondly, music/dance is also said to reinforce the cohesion and creation of social groups. Cross & Morley (2008: 63), drawing in turn on Steven Brown, write that

music is a 'suite of traits that favour the formation of coalitions, promote cooperative behaviour towards group members and create potential for hostility towards those outside the group'. Music supports these traits through the opportunities that it offers for the formation and manifestation of group identity, for the conduct of collective thinking (as in the transmission of group history and planning for action), for group co-ordination through synchronization (the sharing of time – between members of a group), and for group catharsis, the collective expression and experience of emotion. Ultimately, (...) music is a type of 'modulatory system acting at the group level to convey the reinforcement value of these activities for survival'.

The act of musicking together is thus a fertile source for the creation of collectivity and of a collective's cohesion of emotional coordinates. Benzon developed a theory about musicking as not only a (abstract) bonding force of social beings but also of the very physical brain structures and neural formations. Through musicking our heads and bodies align with the heads and bodies of others. Benzon (2001: 23) speaks of musicking as a "medium through which

individual brains are coupled together in a shared activity”, a means for “interactional synchrony” (*ibid.*: 25). (I will revisit Benzon’s ideas in Chapter 15.) Dance plays a central role in these synchronizations. In a similar line as Benzon, William McNeill (1995: 27), in his exploration of dance as a form of *Keeping Together in Time*, writes:

Moving together rhythmically for hours on end can be counted upon to strengthen emotional bonds among those who take part. (...) Far larger bands than any existing today among chimpanzees or other great apes could therefore come into being. (...) What we may think of as the human scale of primary community, comprising anything from several score to many hundreds of persons, thus emerged, thanks to the emotional solidarities aroused by keeping together in time.

Thirdly, yet another line of thought suggests that rather than, or – as I would argue – besides, music/dance being a *cause* of social cohesion, it *signals* social cohesion achieved by other means. Hagan & Bryant (2003: 25) write that “for humans and human ancestors, musical displays may have (...) functioned, in part, to defend territory (and perhaps also to signal group identity), and that these displays may have formed the evolutionary basis for the musical behaviours of modern humans”. They propose that the amount of time a group needed to create and practice music and dance corresponds with the quality of the coalition of the respective group performing them, indicating how much time they have devoted to preparation of their skill and thus of their preexisting bonding and cohesion. Reviewing Hagan & Bryant’s work, Cross & Morley (2008: 64) write that the view of musicking as a means *exclusively* for signaling cohesion (and not also for its promotion) “ignores all factors consequent on emotional bonding and the loyalty engendered by a mutual emotion experience. An individual may already have established their credibility within a group (...) but this provides no indication of their likelihood of doing so, or of to whom they will direct their assistance”. In other words, while groups certainly display music/dance skills *after* established bondings that does not imply that new and more refined bondings (and couplings) will occur within the dances of these already bonded groups. People who already know each other and who already are close may well get to know each other better and become (much) closer during collective dances.

Taking together these three lines of argumentation and the concepts about music evolved further above, it becomes clear that – at least on an analytical level – it is indeed very difficult to discriminate between music and dance and to disentangle them. Both are deeply personal (as every musicking participant potentially evolves his and her own ways of hearing, listening and interpreting “it”) *and* highly social (as it is in the social realms that conventions about what music is are established in the first place); furthermore, both serve the coordination of different individual mental and physical functions *and* the coordi-



nation of a social group's promotion and signaling of mental and physical bonding.

Thinking about *music* along the individual/collective trajectory: We can and do perceive patterned sounds – first and foremost – alone. We experience sounds as music in the narrow space between our ears and in the realms of our corporal being confined in our bodies – thus: a thoroughly *intimate* experience. At the same time, however, these experiences and perceptions of sounds as music are founded in the nonfinite spaces outside our ears and bodies. That is, in the universes of our social worlds where humanly organized forms of sound occurrences are created and engendered by human's shared intentionalities and founded on social conventions about these sound occurrences as music – thus: a thoroughly *social* (or socially founded) experience. Listening to music, music-making, can be thus termed a form of *social intimacy*, or *intimate collectivity*.

Thinking, in turn, about *dance* along the individual/collective trajectory: It is true that people can and do dance alone. However, in most cases they do not. It simply does not make much sense to dance on your own (apart maybe from some rehearsal of dancing steps, thus as a form of preparation for the collective act of dancing). By and large people dance in some kind of collective setting, be it a religious ritual, a social ceremony, a street parade, or a night club. However, even though dancing occurs mainly in collective settings, every participant of the collective dance produces his and her own individual moves. Through the dance moves they produce, each dancer expresses and displays his and her own individuality – thus: an *individual* form of expression (of individuality). And yet, all individual traits and expressions of each dancer are coordinated along the line of collectively perceived patterns of sound occurrences, which the collectivity perceives and labels as “music”. So there is— beyond or underneath the fragmented pattern of individual dance moves – a common and combining pattern (of perceived sounds) that coordinates the proceedings, that adjusts and aligns the respective individual movements into a common, collectively expressed groove – thus, a *social and collective* form of expression. Parallel to the act of listening (as a form of social intimacy), the act of dancing can be thus termed a form of *collectively embraced individuality*, or *individually engendered collectivity*.

Agnes and Angela's premise of danceability for sounds to be labeled music, which speaks of the broader Freetonian conventions held about sounds as music, can be said to follow a (analytically) consistent and consequent line of thought. Music's emergence is difficult (if not impossible) to explain without reference to some form of dance. The emergence of dance, on the other hand, is difficult (if not impossible) to imagine without reference to some form of music. The concept of music Agnes and Angela as well as many if not most other Freetonians express – both verbally and in practices – transcends the artificial and (from an

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evolutionary point of view) fairly recently evolved divide between music and dance in a ludic and somewhat self-evident way.

## Revisiting methods of socio-sonic inquiry

### (Re-)inquiring Africa's socio-sonic fields

Much of the recent, sociologically-inclined music research in African studies is based on two main paradigms. The first paradigm evokes the claim that music “reflects” the wider cultural, social, political, economic etc. realities and institutions it is produced and consumed in. Music is assumed and approached as a form of multi-layered “text” that can be interpreted as a social chronicle. Music, in its various musical idioms and especially in its verbal expressions, is then taken as a reflection of prevalent social discourses and realities and, furthermore, as a representation of broader societal traits and structures – a societal “mirror”. The underlying epistemological stance of that paradigm can be summarized in the assertion that: as music is “done” by society, music “speaks” of society.

While this first paradigm can be found in many socio-musical studies concerned with socio-musical fields outside Africa as well, the second paradigm might be regarded as a sort of specifically Africanist’ paradigm in music studies. This paradigm draws a significant distinction between music produced locally and music produced elsewhere. Karin Barber (1987: 108), in her influential essay on *Popular Arts in Africa*, explains the importance of this distinction by stating that art “produced by the people themselves (...) has a better claim to express some aspects of their own attitudes or experience”. While this claim might be valid in analytical terms (as it somewhat eases the endeavour to read society through its own music), it carries the fallacy to restrict the “readings” to this very locally produced music and thereby to disregard music that often has a much wider African listenership – that is: non-locally (or “globally”) produced music.

These two paradigms – to approach music as a societal mirror and to confine music’s mirroring to locally produced music – yield several methodological shortcomings and analytical fallacies. The commonly implemented mode of a “mirroring”-interpretation is structured along a line which might be described as

reaching (and reading) from the inside-out: one looks at “what is in the music” (the *inside*) to deduce from it “what is (alleged) to be in society” (the *outside*). Beside the risk of producing tautological circles and thriving on a fairly simplistic mode of mimesis – since one is prone to find in the music only what one has already found, or been searching for, in society (and the other way round) – there are at least four main problems at stake.

The first problem concerns the enigmatic quest for music’s meaning. The “inside-out” mode of reading music in (its) relation to society – thus of reading society through (its own) music – is premised, again; more often implicitly than explicitly, on yet another well-established paradigm in the study of music which suggests that the meanings of music are to be found in the music itself. This idea might be well suitable for the rather narrow hermeneutic modes of musicological analysis (in which the strictly musical parameters of music are analysed; e.g. harmony, melody, riff, beat). For any sociologically-oriented music analysis, however, the concept of music’s intrinsic meanings proves delusive. Its utilization is nevertheless as widespread as unchallenged and particularly visible in Africanist’ studies dealing with so-called “political music”. In these “socio-political music studies”, which in fact form the bulk of Africanists’ music-related studies, notions are coined such as music as “the means of expression of the marginalized masses” or the somewhat self-contradicting idea of music as “the voice of the voiceless” (see e.g. Englert 2008). In regard of musical expressions, this sort of political function-lens was obviously inspired by musicians’ potential and ability “to sing what cannot be spoken” (Agawu 2001: 4), their granted *Narrenfreiheit* to criticize the establishment.

Whereas these approaches towards music have their due rationale, first and foremost by pointing out the socio-political relevance of musical expressions, they speak of several conceptual and methodological fallacies. Too often music is confined only to its (politically relevant) lyrics, at the expense of its vital characteristics of non-verbal sounds, performance, and play. Likewise, the focus put on ideological and political contents (of musical lyrics) often obstructs a more heuristic view on the broad range of ideological stances inherent in musical expressions and their social interpretations. These might, and often do, range from explicit class-conscious critiques, to a more or less tacit support of the status quo, and through to the probably most common characteristic of serving entertainment purposes and of “thus” being above political frays, which in fact bears ideological implications, too. Frequently, though, the whole range of these stances is displayed within the work of a single artist. In a similar manner, music’s meaning-generating instance is ascribed predominantly to the musicians and their intentions, leaving aside the dimension of audiences’ perceptions, ideas and actions. Consequently, the understanding and interpretation of music’s social

meaning is often confined to a contextualized reading of its lyrics, supplemented by a sketch of the artists' biographies and attitudes.

Beside the rampant fetishization of the (musical) word, the respective approaches are grounded in the concept that by interpreting the musical expressions, thus by reading the *music's* meanings, one could further interpret, or rather interpretatively deduce, from them the "expressions of the masses"; that is, a society's prevalent social discourses, local experiences, concerns etc. In other words, the meaning-generating and meaning-constituting factor is allocated on the side of the music. However, while the musical meanings might well be found therein, any extra-musical and especially *social* meanings of music – and that is, in the end, what sociologists of music are dealing with – are not. Music's social meanings are allocated within the respective sides of the society they are generated in. The analyst's proclamation that a musical piece *speaks* for the masses unveils as a rather dubious claim of the analyst him/herself to interpret the music for "the masses".

Secondly, these matters lead straight on to the often over-stretched quest for music's representation; that is, for its level and dimension of social representationality. In the "inside-out" and "reading society through (its) music"-approaches, it is implicitly argued that a musician in fact does speak for his/her society. S/he does that by, firstly, being – a representative – part of the respective society and its discourses, and, secondly, by bundling prevalent social discourses through the disseminating – and representational – power of the microphone and the mass-produced and consumed channels through which his/her music is spread across society (making it in fact a monologues relation, as the artist echoes back on society its own discourses). Following this line of reasoning, the "inside-out" reading mode implicitly assumes that, since the musician does represent society, the analyst does as well unveil social meanings (or their representations) by looking at the musician and reading his/her music.

The argument, as well as its debunk, is redundant. Whoever the musician might speak or sing for, thus "give representation to", in the end it is – again – the analyst who reads the representation as a representation of "the masses". The meaning – or, in this case, the representation-generating factor – is allocated first on the side of the music (and its musician), from which (and whom) the analyst then alleges to deduce other, social meanings and representations. The bounding of the socio-musical field is, once more, left with the analyst who decides which meanings are socially meaningful and which representations speak of (or represent) which social realms, discourses, experiences, concerns etc. Gayatri Spivak's (1988) critical metaphor of the (academic) ventriloquist who speaks for the "subaltern puppet" here takes on a particular inflection, raising the rhetoric question whether the subaltern can *sing*?

Thirdly, however, the most practical problem affects the very empirical heart of many if not most socio-musical studies concerned with the social meanings of music in Africa and reveals the two above-evolved issues vigorously; that is, the (socio-geographic) places of origins of the music in relation to the (socio-geographic) place of the studied society. Driven by the (implicitly assumed) premises of the “inside-out” reading mode, by its underlying paradigms, and by the consequent urge to read society through its own music, a too obvious reality is, too often, left unmentioned: At least for the last four or so decades, the music of many societies in Africa is, to a (often very) large percentage, not the music produced in the respective society but coming from the outside. Any attempt to either allocate the music’s meanings in the music itself and to deduce from it social meanings or to take a musician’s stance as a representational case for prevalent social discourses and meanings collapses along with all of its pre-assumptions. What can we – sociologically – learn about the Freetonian society from, let’s say, Celine Dion’s music, which had an undeniable resonance in that Freetonian society, by looking at Mrs. Dion’s lyrics and her representational social and discursive affiliations?

The last problem concerns the intricate notion of “*popular*” in popular music – the academic genre to which much of the recent sociologically-inclined Africanist’ music studies are assigned to. For this, we might return to Barber’s (1987) influential treatise on that matter. Therein, she defines the “popular” art as a relational concept with fluid and shifting boundaries whose meanings oscillate between, traverse across, and coalesce with what other Africanist “populists” often defined as “traditional arts” and “elite arts” (*ibid.*: 9-12). According to her, for the “popular” art to become popular it has “to appeal to people, it has to plug in at some level to popular consciousness (...). It is the capacity to pick up popular aspirations, fears and anxieties, give them concrete expressions and communicate them” (*ibid.*: 108). This communication process, she continues, “is fragile, and full of risks, divisions and fragmentations” (*ibid.*: 110). And since this fragmented communication, which lies at the very heart of the popular art, is taking place mainly on the side of the audiences, she concludes that we “should build up a more detailed picture of the ‘publics’ to which different popular genres are *directed*” (*ibid.*; *my emphasis*).

The key term, and in fact the problematic and analytically incoherent one, is “directed”. While Barber evidently points towards the importance of the audiences, she somehow misses to take the final, resolute step and to allocate the “popular” *within* these audiences. Instead, she sticks to the apprehension of the “popular” in popular art by looking at the artefacts, and not at the populace that make these artefacts popular. This becomes plain in her formulation that the “popular genres are *directed*” to the populace, which implies, firstly, that they

already are popular before they reach “their” populaces, and secondly, that – at least theoretically – the audience is in fact not a required force in the processes that constitute popular art.

Especially with regard to popular music arts in contemporary urban Africa, in many cases the respective (musical) art itself is, as noted above, not directed *at* Africa nor is it directing anything particular *to* Africa. The bulk of these arts is produced elsewhere. What is directing – and directed – are the audiences who chose from the ever-growing array of globally transmitted and available media and arts. I would thus propose to modify Barber’s (1987: 47) attempt to define the “popular” in popular art (and music) “by the relationship between performers and audiences”. It is in fact defined by the crucial notion of “relationship”. However, this relationship in turn is mainly established by the audiences whose relational complement might rather, or better, be described as an imagined performer; something, or somebody, whose significance – the “capacity to pick up popular aspirations, fears and anxieties” – is constituted mainly on the side of the audiences, and not by the performer.

Seizing on Barber’s (1987: 5) work once more, I do agree with her that for the study of popular arts in Africa (as elsewhere) the “methods of aesthetic criticism must be conjoined, and not at a superficial level, with those of social science”. What I partly disagree with, though, is her conclusion that we thus need to ask “by whom and by what means, in what circumstances, under what constraints, in whose interests, and in accordance with what conventions, these arts are *produced*” (*ibid.*; *my emphasis*). Rather, I argue, we need to ask primarily, though not exclusively, by whom, by what means, and in what circumstances these arts are *consumed*.

These four, briefly scrutinized problems in Africanist’ socio-musical studies all point towards one main analytical volte-face that is to be eked by one main methodological volte-face. Analytically, the idea of music’s intrinsic meanings has to be abandoned (at least for any study outside strictly musicologists domains, in which already enough “meaning-battles” are being fought) so to clear a space for the more sociologically relevant questions of what it means when this music is performed, played and (especially) listened to at this time, in this place, and with those people taking part in it – thus for the social meanings of music. Methodologically, a similar space is to be cleared for a social group other than socio-musical analysts to account for the consumption and interpretation as well as for the meaning-generating and -constituting processes of music. Rather than listening to the musicians and their music, the sociologically-oriented researcher of music has to listen to people listening to their music. While the respective results are prone to be much more fractured, confusing and contradicting, they

might – thereby – come much closer to the actual (fractured, confusing and contradicting) role music plays in society.

Clifford Geertz (1973a: 405), drawing on Ludwig Wittgenstein’s discussion of the meaning of words (as an effect of the *use* of words), derives the following sort of methodological advice for the study of meaning in the ethnographic field: “meaning is not intrinsic in the objects, acts, processes, and so on, which bear it, but (...) imposed upon them; and the explanation of its properties must therefore be sought in that which does the imposing – men living in society. The study of thought is, to borrow a phrase from Joseph Levenson, the study of men thinking”.

Borrowing and adjusting in turn that phrase from Geertz, we might state that the study of music (and its meanings) is the study of men (and women) music-making.

### Networks and methods of inquiry in Freetown’s socio-sonic fields

In line with the concepts evolved above, the methodological orientation during my fieldwork in Freetown was structured along a line which can be described as reaching from the *outside-in*: I looked at what is in society (music’s social “outside”) and evolved, from there, my investigations into the realms of society’s practices of music production, dissemination, and, primarily, consumption (society’s musical “inside”). In more technical terms: Unlike most researchers in the (Africanist’) field of study of music and society, who make music their independent variable and reconstruct the social world(s) around it as the dependent variable, I attempted to construct the social world(s) first – as my independent variable(s) – and, from there, to explore the places, roles and meanings of society’s music as the dependent variables.

This approach resulted in one main sort of “methodological imperative”; that is, my main fields of inquiry were *not primarily* in the realms of social music production and consumption but in the much broader – and much vaguer – (primarily non-musical) fields of everyday life and everyday life encounters. In other words, in order *not* to narrow down my groups of informants to those who do attend certain places of music consumption (bars, clubs, parties) and who already expose certain musical preferences and practices – thus, in order *not* to begin in the musical “inside” – I “assembled” my groups of informants (primarily but not exclusively) outside the places of music consumption and then and from there explored their musical preferences and practices.

My field research took place between August 2009 and February 2010. With the exception of a short trip to Ghana in mid-October, I spent my whole fieldwork period living right in the geographical heart of Freetown. During the first weeks in downtown Freetown and, from the second month onwards, at the



Fourah Bay College (FBC) located at Mount Aureol in central Freetown. It was also from these two locations that I got into my first main groups and networks of informants. Although I widely expanded the scope and range of my informants in the following months, the people and groups of people whom I encountered as a neighbour and on a day to day basis remained at and formed the very heart of my pool of informants, and friends.

These main groups consisted of four distinguishable and internally only loosely connected networks of people. (1) Various loosely associated groups in downtown Freetown including street hawkers, street traders, shop owners, their kin and associates, whom I encountered (and befriended) in the first month of my stay downtown. (2) Various similarly loosely associated groups of students from the FBC as well as other groups based at the FBC campus (including lecturers and other employees, kin and associates), through whose networks I also got involved into various other, non-student circles of young(er) and old(er) Freetonians outside the college vicinity. (3) A smaller and narrower circumscribed group of befriended work-associates in central (but not downtown) Freetown who work in different low-income jobs (including phone-credit sellers, hawkers selling food and drinks, and money changers). (4) A loose network of friends, neighbours, and work and school colleagues from around Freetown's Kissy Road in the East Side, to which I was introduced through Emanuel (the young Freetonian mentioned above).

As the composition of these groups and networks of informants resulted from my own (more or less accidental) place of location and from sorts of rather arbitrary encounters, they were not assembled in accordance with any sort of standardized sampling method but, on the contrary, represent a very non-standardized sample of informants. However, while these groups of informants were assembled by somewhat arbitrary and accidental "methods", they nevertheless represent a fairly cross-sectional range of socially differentiated, and sociologically differentiable, groups of Freetonians; including a wide ranging scope in terms of variables like, for example, age (from thirteen to seventy years of age), education (from illiterates to Sierra Leone's intelligentsia), occupation (from un-, under- and semi-employed to highly trained and paid professionals), and representing both genders, various religious denominations (mainly Muslims and various branches of Christianity), various places of origin (in and outside Freetown), and areas of living (all three main areas in Freetown: East Side, Centre, West Side). It is, however, noteworthy that about half of my informants and interviewees from these four as well as from other groups count among the economic category of the un-, under- and semi-employed – meaning: doing "something" for money but not every day and without (any sort of) regular

payment – and that about the same proportion is living in Freetown’s impoverished East Side.

Commencing from (or from inside) these four groups and networks, I applied what is often referred to as “snowball sampling” and interviewed my way through various junctions and nexuses of these groups and networks, being handed on from friends to their friends, to colleagues, school and college mates, relatives, neighbours and so forth.

At the same time, I was also actively seeking, firstly, for groups and informants outside my established networks. In most cases, however, this “outside” remained a vague presumption as I regularly discovered links created through people whose contacts and acquaintances appeared to “cut across” all groups of my informants. Secondly, I also strived for data collected from informants with perspectives and positions different than that of “mere” music consumers and audiences (mainly music sellers, producers, distributors and musicians). For this, I followed three separate paths.

The first path was simply to stroll around different areas of Freetown, to react to the reactions caused by my presence (which were usually frequent and manifold), to engage people in conversations, and – usually after a first established contact – to conduct interviews with them. Although this method exceeded the “snowball sampling” in arbitrariness (turning into some form of “snowfall sampling”), the encounters, contacts and interviews resulting from this practice often proved most satisfying as the scope of my overall data-sample grew with almost every new encounter. The topic of music, with which I started most conversations with my arbitrary encounters, thereby proved particularly fruitful as a sort of discursive “doorway” to other topics about extra-musical and non-music-related realms and experiences.

In order to gather wider and more embracing data about Freetonians’ musical practices and preferences, I also conducted interviews (the second path) with a fair number of musical “intermediaries” (Shuker 1998: 67), including music producers and distributors, official and clandestine street sellers, retail sellers, and wholesalers, radio, TV and club DJs, concert and club managers, as well as with musicians, both active and retired. While musicians were, to some extent, a good source of information too, I mainly strived for the insights of what I refer to as “music duplicators and replicators”, that is: sellers and radio DJs who, in many cases, form the intersection between, on the one hand, music production and import and, on the other hand, (mass) music consumption. For these interviews I employed a more systematic sampling method and attempted to visit and interview as many of Freetown’s radio DJs and important sellers as possible. The, to large parts, centralized and monopolized structures of official music production, distribution and sale in Freetown (and Sierra Leone) significantly eased the

access to and coverage of the latter group of sellers. So did the similarly centralized structures of unofficial and illegal music reproduction and sale (meaning: pirates). With regard to Freetown's main music media channels, radio and TV, the task was more challenging. While I was lucky enough to find one of my most devoted key informants in the music chef of Sierra Leone's national radio and TV broadcaster (Mohamed Bangura *aka* King Millan), the access to Freetown's mushrooming private radio stations was complicated already by the sheer number of DJs and stations, of which I managed to visit about half of the existing ones.

Finally (the third path), I also "recruited" informants and interviewees in what might be broadly described as "places of collective music consumption" – meaning: various types of music bars, night clubs, concerts, parties and other kinds of music-related festivities and events. This "sampling method" proved a two-edged device: on the one hand, it contradicted my "methodological imperative" of *not* approaching the music/society nexus through an inside-out "reading" mode but to do it the other way around. On the other hand, however, it was particularly at more exclusive and expensive parties, clubs and concerts that I could gain access to more "exclusive" sections and informants of Freetown's society and music audiences. While, in several instances, this sampling method yielded fruitful encounters and interviews as well, generally it turned out the most difficult and painstaking as places of collective music consumption are anything but appropriate settings for the conduct of interviews (mainly because of the music and "noise" volume) or for approaching potential interviewees (as most visitors are preoccupied with activities other than explaining their activities; e.g. dance, flirt and other pleasures).

My actual data-collecting techniques can be divided into four categories. In my first and central method I followed Charles Keil's (2005: 2) appeal to scholars working on music "to dance more and footnote less". In more technical terms, this methodological device resembled what Barber (1987: 65) calls "participatory interpretation of human experience". While Barber is therewith referring to the researcher's possibility to participate in the production of popular culture (in her case in a Nigerian TV-series) so to gain in-depth understandings about the cultural practices in question from the side of the artists and producers, I attempted to do the same within the sites of audiences and consumers of music. Whereas the practical and theoretical proximity to the method of participant observation is obvious, it is the notion of *experience* that sets Barber's concept apart from the techniques of participating while observing (and vice versa). Margret Drewal (1991: 34) interprets this method "in short" as "being there, and being there with others, and being there completely involved with them in whatever performance, implicating myself in its very production." Citing Michael

Jackson, she further distinguishes it from participant observation by describing it as “‘joining without ulterior motive and literally putting oneself in the place of the other persons: inhabiting their world’” (Drewal 1991: 34), so that participation, at least for the very moment, becomes an end in itself – hence: utter experience.

These (utter) experiences then served as the main foundation for my second main method: participant observation – which I understand as a distinct technique for data-collection, not as a general description of ethnographic work (DeWalt & DeWalt 2000). It was also from the systematic and “semi-systematic” recording of data (from unsystematic samples), compiled through the acts of participating and observing, that I collected the bulk of my overall fieldwork data. At times, however, the combined methods of joining for utter experiences *and* for purposive (ethnographic) experiences caused certain misunderstandings among my informants. For example, after some four months of almost daily encounters and many long conversations with my informants group of befriended work-associates in central Freetown, I had compiled whole biographies about them, worked out long lists of their music practices and preferences, recorded them singing and narrating folk tales to me, took portraits of them, and had their worries, concerns and dreams firmly inscribed into my long-term memory. Despite all that (data gathering), a week before my departure three members of the group approached me in a sort of aggrieved manner and asked why I had never conducted any interview with them. As much as they knew and were aware of my purposive (ethnographic) motives, of me taking notes and pictures, making recordings, and endlessly badgering them with questions about their lives, worries and dreams, apparently I was not perceived as a “proper scientist” who sits down with his interviewee and questionnaire and gets to the point by asking pre-formulated questions.

In many other instances, particularly with informants whom I could not meet on a daily basis, I employed, firstly, (slightly) more formal interview techniques and, secondly, what Levy & Hollan (2000) call “person-centred interviewing”, for which I adopted a (slightly) more “proper scientific” appearance as well. The former interview technique consisted mainly of semi-structured interviews, which I predominantly conducted with the groups of Freetown’s music “intermediaries”, duplicators and replicators. I employed the latter technique of person-centred interviewing mostly for the interviewing of arbitrarily sampled interviewees. This method was primarily meant to unveil the complex and shifting interplay between the more individual realms and the more socio-cultural, collective ones. In my fieldwork practice, person-centred interviewing implied to approach the interviewee as both an informant (an expert witness about society) and as a respondent (an object of study in him- or herself). In this

oscillation between respondent and informant modes, the conflicts, coherences, contradictions and drawn and blurred boundaries between the person-in-itself and understandings of her/his external contexts were meant to be illuminated. My particular focus was thereby put on the respective person's perceptions, ideas and meanings ascribed to music practices, as well as on the person's experiences, preferences and concepts of music in its various dimensions as related to the person him/herself and to otherwise experienced or imagined ideas held about music.

Finally, I also conducted several group interviews, of which some were set up in a more formal setting while most simply occurred "in the heat of the moment" – which I then documented via notes and recordings. In line with Wolfe & Haefner (1996: 136), this particular method of data collection proved a prime means in order to "clear a space for a living social group other than critics to account for its consumption of a media text in a group members' 'own words' and to investigate what a media audience understands of a text". As these discussions occurred predominantly in rather informal and (for my concerns) extemporaneous situations and settings, it was mainly – and unfortunately – during these most informative encounters and discussions that the language barrier became most palpable and impeding. While I have had a sort of research assistant, mostly I relied on his – invaluable – expertise and assistance during my regular excursions into Freetown's night life while I conducted almost all of my (daytime) interviews alone. About halfway through my fieldwork period, my passive Krio – the lingua franca of basically all Freetonians – became good enough in order to conduct interviews by asking questions half in "broken Krio" and half in English and by receiving (and understanding) answers given in Krio. However, in many instances my interviewees felt (or appeared) comfortable enough talking in English. In cases in which this was not the case, I encouraged my counterpart to speak in Krio and looked for translation of central interview passages (that I did not understand) afterwards.

## PART II

### From class to mass – Freetown’s music and society in historical perspective



The Daylex Dance Band and fans, Freetown, mid-1970s  
(courtesy of Michael “Dr. Daddy” Loco)



## Introduction

In a rather peripheral remark to Barber's (1987: 100) seminal essay on *Popular Arts in Africa*, Frederick Cooper poses the somewhat rhetorical question "whether popular arts have a history as well as a sociology". As suggestive and trivial Cooper's question might appear (particularly to historians and sociologists, at least those after Montesquieu), as vital its implication is for the study of African popular culture and its (popular) branch of music studies. Cooper's remark stems from the fallacy to present forms of African popular culture on superficial grounds by connecting them to the most recent social and political developments only, thereby implicitly evoking the (Hegelian) ghosts of a historicity and of an antecedent socio-political and musical stasis, or vacuum, from which popular culture evolved in Africa. Arguing in a similar direction, Collins & Richards (1989: 12) write, "the study of West African music suffers, in particular, from the fact that without their history the sounds are robbed of much of their significance and meaning". For the understanding of a society's contemporary (popular) music and of the social meanings and significance it yields and is ascribed, it is imperative to examine historical depths, temporal dimensions and developments, the paths and trails through which sounds evolved into their current, contemporary forms and meanings. As essential history is to sociologically inclined perspectives on contemporary (popular) music forms, as important it is, in turn, to conjoin the historical examination with sociological investigations. To borrow a phrase from Hugh Trevor-Roper (1969: 12), we need to run the sociological model through the dimension of time and the historical model through the dimension of (changing) social relations. With regard to the socio-historical perspective upon a society's music, this exercise is then, primarily, a study of the so-called "social production of music" (Longhurst 2007); that is, of the contexts and modes in which music is produced, disseminated and consumed.



Thus, before delving into the relations that mark Freetown's contemporary society and (popular) music, in this second part I attempt to discuss, with the broadest of strokes, the history of changing social contexts and relations in which, and from which, the current relations emerged. For that I combine two objectives: On the one hand, I outline the history of major social developments that marked Freetown's society from its earliest forms as a colony for freed slaves to the latest changes after the second post-conflict elections in 2007 and up to the "ethnographic present" of my fieldwork in Freetown in late 2009 and early 2010. On the other hand, I connect these broadly outlined social developments with the interspersed developments and changes that occurred in Freetown's music life and which marked the city's soundscapes during these two centuries. It is important to stress that in this second main part of this book my principal concerns are heuristic and my conclusions provisional. Rather than assuming anything definite, I aim to put down, firstly, some preliminary markers for further, more in-depth analyses, and secondly, to prepare the historical (back)-grounds on (and against) which I will then discuss the contemporary scene in the following two parts.

The body of literature on Freetown's social and musical history is marked by a somewhat paradoxical relation. On the one hand, Freetown is one of the most thoroughly studied cities in Africa, in sociological perspective that is. Many successive generations of researchers have bequeathed piles of books and articles on the city's social life, covering (more or less) meticulously the whole historical stretch of social developments from the emergence of the first settlement in the late (18<sup>th</sup> century up to the very present. Yet, astonishingly little has been researched and published on Freetown's (popular) music. With a few exceptions – these exceptions being constituted mainly by the works of Naomi Ware (1970, (1978), Christian Horton (1985) and Wolfgang Bender (1985, 1987, 1988, 1989, 1991, 2002) – the study of (popular) music in Freetown is a desideratum. With regard to the daunting volume of sociologically oriented studies and the concomitant dearth of music-related works, I discuss only a narrow range of the sociological writings and pay more attention to the few accounts given on Freetown's music life, which I will critically complement and update with findings from my own field research. Accordingly, my main contribution to a (sociologically informed) historiography of Freetown's music life concerns rather recent developments from the 1960s onwards. However, by compiling notes on musical developments that are scattered around the piles of sociological writings on Freetown and which I found in various accounts on West Africa's (popular) music history – to large parts in the works of John Collins – I attempt to draw a, however sketchy, line of Freetown's music history from the earliest beginnings to the most current changes.

I have structured this part along a chronological order and divided it into five separate chapters. Obviously, this structure has merits as well demerits. On the one hand, the, admittedly rather disputable, segmentation of Freetown's social and musical developments into five separate "eras" provides a tangible framework for the discussion of major changes and ruptures as well as of historical continuities and connections. On the other hand, it is this very periodization of musical and social developments which, at times, suggests a fractionation too rigid to comply with reality's fluidity and which tends to overemphasize the diachronic, or chronological, dimensions at the expenses of the equally important synchronic dimensions. Neither social relations nor music develop or change in clear-cut phases. Freetown's musical sounds, styles, forms, instruments and so forth did not evolve in a developmental, "evolutionary" manner, whereby a newly emergent musical style or genre after the other would somewhat supplant preceding styles and genres. Some newly emergent (popular) styles in fact "oust" older ones. Generally, though, Freetown's music scene, and its repertoire of existent music styles, is marked by a continued process of expansion and amplification. New styles continuously emerge on the scene, are adapted to new contexts, and lose their novelty soon after they sprung up. At the same time, older styles continue their lives by, on the one hand, being somewhat "preserved" in the play of musicians and the memories and memory devices (i.e. recordings) of audiences and, on the other hand, undergoing never-ending processes of musical "extensions", adaptations and variations.

While the periphrasis of Freetown's soundscape as a sonic palimpsest fits the situation only with reservations, it nevertheless comes closest to a trenchant description of the city's soundscape. Like the palimpsest, we can imagine Freetown's soundscape as a paper on which new (sonic) texts are continuously written on without erasing the imprints of the old, thereby yielding an ever-increasing variety of sounds, songs, melodies, lyrics and voices. However, unlike the palimpsest, Freetown's musical forms are not layered upon each other, whereby new music forms would somewhat eclipse, or "scrap over", the older ones. Rather, the continuous influx of new sounds, and new musicians and audiences, ekes the evermore confused picture in which some formally distinct musical elements are merged into new forms while their precedents remain, adding to the unutterable sonic bricolage that marks Freetown's music life.

Besides tracing back Freetown's musical developments in the light of changing social contexts and relations – thereby following up with the histories of sounds and styles that were successively added to the city's ever-growing sonic palimpsest – in this part I furthermore attempt to reconstruct the trails of what I describe as the progressive shift from a class-music culture to a mass-music culture. This theme serves as the common thread of this second part. It embraces

three main, connected developments. Firstly, I will discuss how patterns of “sonic segregation” became progressively blurred as the musical sounds, tastes and practices of the city’s different social groups and strata became increasingly harmonized. In close relation to that, I will, secondly, trace the growing “democratization” of music production, dissemination and consumption – especially with regard to the growing availability, affordability and spread of music-related media and technologies, particularly in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century – which further reinforced the alignment of musical practices and tastes of otherwise (that is, socially and economically) disconnected groups. Thirdly, while, throughout the city’s history, Freetown’s different groups use different sounds to express differences in identity, status, prestige and belonging, to large parts Freetown’s mixed society and its sounds stems from the same, common source; that is, the (black) Atlantic world. It is this shared diasporic origin and the orientation towards, and connection with, the (black) Atlantic that the foundations of an aligned, social boundaries-crossing mass-music culture were laid.

## Early developments – the 19<sup>th</sup> century

Freetown society grew out of a highly eclectic conflation of people settling and being settled on the peninsula from across the Atlantic world and from the African interior. This increasingly eclectic socio-cultural assembly of “overlapping diasporas” (Lewis 1995) or “diasporas within the diaspora” (Zezeza 2005: 53), eked an equivalently eclectic pastiche of music forms. The variety that marked the emergent city’s music soundscape grew proportionally to – or, in fact, exponentially with – the first main waves of settlers arriving in the Colony from the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. These occurred in the three main phases, yielding an ever-broadened amalgamation of sources for the subsequently evolving variety of music forms present in Freetown and for the accruing practices of conflation, mixture and segregation of people and sounds.

### First sounds and settlers

In the beginning there was the Christian hymn. After the first, rather infelicitous initiative of British philanthropists to establish a “happy asylum” (Sharp 1820: 335) for freed slaves in 1787, in which the settlement of the “Black Poor” settlers from London was burned to the ground by a local ruler, the foundations of the Freetown colony were laid in 1792. Some eleven hundred liberated American slaves who had supported Britain in the American War of Independence, the so-called Nova Scotians, were shipped to the “Province of Freedom”. Descending from generations of black slaves in the Americas who had demerged from their African cultural heritage, the Nova Scotian settlers brought with them values, behaviours, habits and musical forms evolved in adaptation to the New World. Christianity formed the focal point for their cultural – and musical – orientation. The founding myth of Freetown well underlines the strong devotion to Western cultural patterns on which the first Freetonians build the Colony. As the story goes (Elliot 1851, in Fyfe 1964: 119-120), after arrival, the black settlers had to

clear the bush land to build their first settlement. When the toiling was done, all the Nova Scotians assembled around the big cotton tree and began singing:

Awake! and sing the song, of Moses and the Lamb  
Wake! every heart and every tongue  
To praise the Savior's name  
The Day of Jubilee is come  
Return ye ransomed sinners home'

Henceforth, Christian music traditions had a secured place in Freetown's music landscape. The chapels became the "vital centre of public opinion and communal action, and the preachers to a large extent the key to government" (Peterson 1969: 37). Assisted by the leagues of missionaries from Europe and the Americas, the Nova Scotians organized themselves into various church-branches – mainly Methodist, Baptist, and the Huntingdon's Connexion (Walls 1959) – through which they promulgated God's word in devotional harmonies of psalms and hymns for Christian worship (Ingham 1968: 319-330). Reinforced by the patronage and favour of the British administration, the life style of the Nova Scotians was soon to become the high prestige cultural pattern copied and striven for by the following groups of incoming settlers (Porter 1963: 12).

In 1800, the second main group of settlers arrived. These were the Maroons, blacks who had revolted against their British masters in the West Indian island of Jamaica. The Maroons were of a different cultural mould than the Nova Scotians. Instead of psalms and hymns, they brought new styles of drumming with them. The large drums of the Maroon settlers – *gomes* or *gombey*s – became not only a main new feature in the colony's musical life but, much later on, also in the annals of African popular music forms. Collins (1989: 221), in his genealogy of highlife music, even refers to the Maroons' gombey drumming as the source of "Africa's very first popular-fusion music". As Collins argues, gombey was in fact not imported to Africa but brought back to the continent. Earlier forms of gombey were first taken to the Americas by slaves who originally came from West Africa. In the New World, gombey went through various changes in adaptation to the new environment and, after some centuries, found its way back to Africa through the resettlement of freed slaves in Freetown.<sup>1</sup> Collins calls this process "a centuries-old trans-Atlantic musical feedback cycle" (*ibid.*). African musical forms fed the Americas and (black) American musical forms fed back on Africa. The emergence of popular music styles out of the African heritage in the New World (e.g. ragtime, jazz, blues, swing, soul) had thus its equivalents in Africa, where in turn "diasporic" influences led to the emergence of popular music styles. This sort of (black) Atlantic transactional music connection is

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<sup>1</sup> Akintola Wyse (1989: 1) speaks of the *talla* dance that the Maroons practiced in the West Indies and which, with their migration to Sierra Leone, developed into gombey. See also Spencer-Walters (2006: 249).

essential for the understanding of the evolutions and diversions that mark Freetown's diversified music soundscape.

After its "return to Africa", that is Freetown, gombey drumming was continuously fed with new musical influences from across the Atlantic world and from Sierra Leone's hinterland. Freetown's character as a major West African harbour town, connecting the Atlantic world of the Americas, Europe and other parts of coastal Africa with the African interior strongly reinforced these processes of musical conflation. Foreign seamen, both blacks and whites, added a range of new instruments to gombey drumming; these were mainly portable instruments used aboard on ships, such as the guitar, banjo, harmonica and accordion (Collins 1989). It was then in Freetown's dockside bars that gombey drumming was first fused with these imported instruments. From the harbor bars, the newly emerging fusions spread across the growing city and into the hinterland. There, in turn, the "original" fusions further merged with other musical forms and instruments, leading to yet other musical innovations which then again re-influenced further developments and new musical forms in Freetown and beyond – continuing a never-ending musical feedback cycle (*ibid.*).

The third and largest group of settlers was made up of liberated Africans freed from slave ships by the British anti-slavery squadron. They started to embark in Freetown after the British abolition, the Slave Trade Act of 1807. This development was significantly aided by the establishment of Britain's West Africa naval base in Freetown and the transfer of the colony to the Crown of Great Britain in 1808 (Alie 1990: 63). Until 1865, when the last shipload of human cargo destined for the trans-Atlantic slave market was brought to Freetown, about 50,000 were freed in the colony (Fyfe 1964: 165). Unlike the first groups of settlers, this group comprised of African-born people and brought a wide range of African-derived music forms to Freetown. The group of the Recaptives, as they were soon to be called by the first settlers, comprised of a great variety of people. The liberated slaves came from as far north as Senegal and as far south as Angola and thus significantly added to the ever-growing socio-cultural, religious – and musical – mixture of Freetown in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. John Peterson (1969: 185-186) describes some examples of the newly introduced and soon-to-be localized musical forms brought along by the liberated Africans, ranging from variously shaped drums to other African percussion and string instruments through to instrumental variations improvised by the arrivals on the spot.

A good number of the Recaptives were of Yoruba origin, enslaved after the Owu War in 1821 (Porter 1963: 12). The Yoruba Recaptives, or "Aku", a name derived from their greeting (Clarke 1863, in Fyfe 1964: 149), added a significant range of new musical forms and practices to Freetown. Among others, they introduced *ashiko*, yet another form of frame-drums which became most known

in its popular fusions with, first, the musical saw and, later, with the guitar and accordion (Collins 2002). A larger, more cohesive group than any other, the Akus were the most troublesome migrants from the point of view of church and government. John Nunley (1987) discusses various elements that were at the heart of the Yoruba Recaptives' reluctance and resistance to Westernization efforts promoted by missionaries and British colonial officials. Central to both the social cohesion and the challenging of the colony's religious and political authorities were the Akus' Yoruba-rooted secret societies, mainly the Egungun and Hunting society (*ibid.*: 24-31). They had their most vivid expressions in the masquerades the Akus regularly performed on Freetown's streets, by which new music and dance traditions were introduced to the city, too. Ogun, the Yoruba deity of hunters, was at the center of these masquerades and caused horror and evangelical frustration on the side of the missionaries (*ibid.*: 13). As Nunley argues, it were these hunting associations, "transplanted" (*ibid.*: 14) from the Yoruba country to Freetown in the course of the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, that helped to form the solid institution on which a new cultural and economic elite emerged from among the Recaptives (*ibid.*: 31-37); and, furthermore, whose structures and practices served as prototypes for the emergence of so-called Ode-lay societies in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, which, in turn, helped generations of rural migrants from the Sierra Leonean hinterland – who were denied membership in the Hunting societies (Nunley 2002: 223) – as vehicles of socio-cultural integration and adaptation to a tough urban environment (Nunley 1987: 61). The "devil"-masquerades, as the processions are referred to today (a term reflecting the 19<sup>th</sup> century missionaries' association of the practices with paganism), remained a central part of Freetown's cultural and musical life. The contemporary forms into which the masquerades and their societies evolved into in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are discussed in Chapter 15.

The secret organization of the "devil" societies, which served the Akus as a means of social inclusion – as well as exclusion – in a new urban setting, reflected similar practices of the Sierra Leonean local, rural population that looked at a long – and well-studied (Butt-Thompson 1929; Gittins 1987; Jedrej 1980; Little 1965 & 1966; MacCormack 1979; Phillips 1995) – tradition of secret organizations. These secret societies, as their rural counterparts, are called "secret" because their internal activities and knowledge are (ideally) unknown and inaccessible to non-members. Modeled on and reflecting both the Yoruba and the local societies, a vast number of integrative, urban voluntary associations, or sodalities, developed from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century onwards in Freetown. These associations served a variety of functions. Their main role, however, developed from the needs for commonality, integration, purpose and belonging of the dislocated and estranged Recaptives. Peterson (1969: 259-271) describes

various types of these sodalities that had emerged by the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. Benefit and welfare, economic, and funeral societies were the most common. They provided their members with first assistance after arrival, allowed new incomes to move into Freetown trade, made arrangements for marriages, supported them with care and assistance in case of illness, and catered for a proper funeral in case of death. In the 1840s, Freetown's society was structured along a plethora of sodalities which both united and divided the city. Referring to a magistrate of Freetown, Peterson (1969: 262) distinguishes two broad types: "the so-called 'big company' was a general society comprising members of several tribes while the 'little companies' were much smaller in number and were restricted to members of one specific tribe". Musical activities formed the core of cohesion as all voluntary associations or sodalities staged dances either for the respective occasions (e.g. marriages, funerals) or for the sake of the dance – and the reinforced cohesion – itself.

### Cultural amalgamations and socio-musical stratifications

The earliest Colony settlers, predominantly the Nova Scotians, had been encouraged to build an extension of British Christian middle-class life, founded on the church, education and expanding commerce. The incoming Recaptives were to adopt these cultural forms and to "civilize". The small but influential group of white English administrators fostered these developments significantly. However, the liberated Africans never assimilated Western cultural forms completely but made certain selections. The Akus reluctance to an imposed acculturation added to these processes. By the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a good number of Recaptives had succeeded in adopting and modifying the earlier Settlers' culture and folkways while, at the same time, influencing the Settlers' cultural developments. Progressively, the lines separating the Nova Scotians, Maroons and Recaptives disappeared. The last of the original settlers from the New World were dying out. In spite of the fact that their elders often frowned disapprovingly, young people of all migrant groups intermarried. In opposition to what was perceived as a common danger – the Africans indigenous to the hinterland of Sierra Leone – the settlers increasingly identified with each other. This increased blending of formally distinguished cultural groups and of adjusted and incorporated cultural forms eventually produced a new culture, namely that of the Sierra Leonean Creoles (Fyfe 1962; Porter 1963; Spitzer 1974; Wyse 1989).

Despite the abundance of historical sources, the Creoles are hard to delineate. In the scholarly attempts to define the Creoles and to understand the diverse composition of the group, ambiguities abound. In some cases, it has even been argued that the Creoles never existed, but that some kind of Creole identity was invented in the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century. Thus, Skinner & Harrell-Bond (1977) argue that



Creole identity developed when the elite of the Colony came under pressure and that historians, notably Christopher Fyfe (1962) and Arthur Porter (1963), simply projected such identity onto the past. The accusation of an “invention” of the Creole identity and community calls into mind Maurice Halbwachs’ (1992) assumption about “the politics of the past in the present” and Terence Ranger’s theory of the “invention” (1983) or “imagination” (1993) of the past (and the therein engrained “tradition”). In Halbwachs’ and Ranger’s approaches, the past loses its positivist appeal of an unmediated, bygone reality. It turns into a complex relation whose characteristics are the product of a multitude of successive policies, tactics, agencies, and their respective, interrelated and interdependent narratives and imaginings. Yet, these useful critiques should not be turned into axioms, thereby rendering the arguments tautologous that whenever the past appears in the present, it must be serving present interests only, and that all past, and all communities and communal identities, are the product of mere inventions and imaginations (Anderson 1991). These self-suspending forms of functionalism and constructivism were eloquently dismissed by John Comaroff (1996: 166), who, in turn with recourse to Karl Marx, states that once the respective identities “are constructed and objectified, [they] take on a powerful salience in the experience of those who bear them”; they adopt “a real materiality, an objective, lived-in quality – notwithstanding that it can be deconstructed”. Without delving deeper into the issue of the “Mythology of Origin” of the Creoles,<sup>2</sup> I will hang on to Comaroff’s conciliative position. As for the problematic of speaking of the Creoles in the latter 19<sup>th</sup> and up to the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, I adopt Abner Cohen’s (1981: 19) equally mediating approach that a “collectivity of men and women who share politico-economic interests, and who sustain a specific life style, is a distinct corporate group, irrespective of their publicly declared label, or even whether they are conscious of their identity and exclusiveness”.<sup>3</sup> Thus, rather than attempting to distil a Creole identity I will mainly stick to the more loose notion of a Creole culture, which designates the loosely defined, syncretic cultural practices (and life styles) that evolved in and marked Freetown’s society from the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

An important element for the emergence of Creole culture was laid in the economic success many Recaptives achieved. It was primarily through trade that the liberated Africans began to participate on an equal footing in the society the first Settlers had created, and eventually to reshape it. With time, the people with wealth began to assume leadership in the various spheres of society and to validate their newly acquired position by inter-marrying with the old status

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<sup>2</sup> For a recent discussion of the “Creole-problematic“, see Dixon-Fyle & Cole (2006).

<sup>3</sup> Arguing against Skinner & Harrell-Bond, Davidson (1985) provides some archival evidence for the use of the term “Creole” in the spoken language of Freetonians at the turn of the century.

groups and by displaying other forms of social success. However, not all liberated Africans achieved economic success and not all Settlers remained in the superordinate position they were initially ascribed by their philanthropic British patrons. There was a sizeable proportion of upward and downward social mobility among both descendants of new and old world immigrants (Porter 1963: 13). The parallel processes of, firstly, the growing cultural hybridization and, secondly, the increasingly dynamic socio-economic stratification Freetown's society experienced from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century onwards was mirrored in, and reinforced by, the musical practices and tastes the respective groups developed and displayed.

Freetown's newly emergent, creolized black elite fostered a musical life based around Christian and European music traditions. These included choral groups singing Bach, Mendelsohn and Victorian hymns. Chamber ensembles and "music societies" were formed which played a repertoire comprised of older and contemporary European composers (Spitzer 1974: 16). These self-conscious replications of European (high) cultural forms were kept firmly separate from what the elite perceived to be the "savagery" implicit in the lower classes musical conceptions and experimentations. The abhorrence Freetown's white community conceived for "African" music forms thereby served the Creoles' upper crusts as a focal point for the formation of a class-conscious rectification of musical practices and tastes. Mrs. Melville, the wife of a British official who spent several years in Freetown during the 1840s, gave a brief description of her ideas about "the African's" music. Tellingly, she entitled the respective subsection in her *Letters from Sierra Leone* "Freetown noises":

In the evening, too, we have the everlasting *tom-tom*; at times diversified by the ominous stroke of the Mandingo kettle drum, a hollow booming sound, which, in spite of its sameness, somehow or other contrives always to convey to my mind the idea of dark deeds of savage and treacherous warfare. Then there is the dull inharmonious singing of the natives; words such as 'Yah!-yah!-oh! Yah! Oh!' being repeated with little change for hours together. (...) certainly the majority of the population seem to delight in uncouth, noisy, and what we should term ridiculous sounds. (Melville 1849: 27)

The assertion of African musical forms as "uncivilized" or "backward" and – by implication – of European music as "civilized" and "progressive" complied with the broader ideological endeavour of constructing the primitive African Other as a defining antipode to the enlightened Western Self, and vice versa. In pursuit of emphasizing their economically derived social distinctiveness, the emergent class of elite Creoles adopted these dichotomous perceptions. The black elite became increasingly sensitive to musical activities which Europeans might label "African", thus "uncivilized". Many were inhibited about participating in dances which could be associated with the lower classes and, together with the community of white administrators and missionaries, frowned upon the

drumming and suggestive gyrations involved in their performances. Leo Spitzer's quotation of an editorial published in a Creole newspaper in 1858 gives a lively expression of these class/"civilization"-conscious sentiments and social views: "Gumbey dancing in all its forms is notoriously the cause of many vices. It therefore behooves the wiser and better portion of the people to avoid it" (in Spitzer 1974: 23). This "wiser and better portion", the upper class Creoles, then marked their distinctiveness in more "civilized" social events, cultivating an intriguing conjunction of moral rigidity, reminiscent of Victorian prudishness, and socio-economic hierarchization. "Dignity Balls" and "Soirées" were the names for the exclusivist dances at which Freetown's "high" society asserted its morally, socially and economically distinct position (Spitzer 1974: 23).

While the black elite and its white counterpart were delighted in the latest piano concertos and ballroom dances and, most decently, twirled to waltzes and polkas, the lower layers of Freetown's mixed society engaged in trailblazing musical experiments. The elite's patronizing presumption of African music's "uncivilized", "backward" and thus unprogressive nature passed rather unheeded amidst Freetown's non-elite musicians and music audiences. "Innovation", change and process were key-elements in their play, which was promoted by the continuous incorporation of new, foreign and "exotic" instruments and styles into their repertoires. As Collins & Richards (1989: 18) write, musicians "attain(ed) prominence by claiming to be the *first* with a new instrument or style of playing". Above-mentioned gombey, first (re)introduced to West Africa by the Maroons in 1800 and later despised by the new Creole elite around the mid-century, was at the forefront of musical innovations and confections Freetown's underclasses induced during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Palm wine music was another prominent musical fusion created among the city's lower social ranks. The name speaks for itself. Palm wine music was created in low-class bars where the fermented juice of the palm-tree is served (Collins 1985: 39). Corresponding to the character of its birthplace, palm wine sounds' main characteristic is an alluring tipsiness. Pa Rogie, a veteran of Freetown's classical palm wine (bar) music, explained to me the origin of the peculiar sound by pointing towards the form of payment many palm wine musicians received for their performance. Hired for the entertainment of rather impecunious drinking guests, palm wine musicians were mostly compensated in kind, that is in palm wine, rather than receiving hard cash. "The better you play, the more drunk you get", as Pa Rogie put it.

In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, musical practices and tastes became distinct markers of socio-economic identity and aspirations in Freetown's growingly diversified and stratified society. In fact, the very sound of music a group produced and consumed and the form of dances it performed indicated their respective socio-economic status. The upper classes pursued copies of Western

(high culture) musical forms, dancing at “grand cocktail-less cocktail parties” (Spitzer 1974: 24). Meanwhile, the underclass engaged in more conflating musical practices, “indigenizing” the play of various types of imported instruments in low-prestige drinking shacks and dancing to the rhythms of gombey drums.

While the musical practices and dancing procedures of the elite and the underclasses differed significantly, at root both shared the same orientation towards the (black) Atlantic world that marks Freetown’s soundscape until the very present. Carrying forward Paul Gilroy’s (1993) endeavor to deconstruct the idea of the black race, to divorce it from any African essence, and to emphasize its fluidity, mutability and modernity, we might state that in Freetown’s 19<sup>th</sup> century society Gilroy’s concept of the Black Atlantic culture – in which he describes music as “a central and even foundational element” (*ibid.*: 75) – found its very avatar, its most tangible embodiment. Freetown society itself emerged out of the transoceanic transactions in which creolized and hybridized experiences, ideas and cultural artifacts were exchanged, adopted and acculturated to new contexts. However, for Freetown’s anticipatory case of a place of transnational, transatlantic cultural construction, its “space of (un)location” (Ang-Lygate 1997), Gilroy’s emphasis of the *Blackness* of this cultural straddle appears too restrictive. As much as the diverse elements that made up Freetown’s cultural landscape derived from the brutal historical conditions of the slave-trade (and its abolishment) and thus reflected black experiences, as much did these defining elements also transcend the very Blackness, striving for the (white) Victorian role models of Western cultural patterns as expressed in the elites’ anxieties about being labeled “African” and their “being black, feeling English” attitude (Spitzer 1974: 39). Freetown’s culture grew on oxymoronic grounds, embracing both “dramatic discontinuity” (Fyfe 1987: 411) and continuity with its diverse roots, real or imagined conformities, mixed and recreated traditions. In line with this paradoxical attribute of Freetown’s cultural identity, I propose to bracket Gilroy’s notion of the (black) Atlantic culture, thereby also nominally underscoring his theme of the “*double* consciousness” of diasporic Blackness in its navigation of multiple (and multicolored) belongings.

## Socio-musical approximations – 1900s to 1930s

### Harmonizing sounds

The pronounced segregation – or *disconnection* – between the Western-style music of the upper classes and the fusing, “Atlanticized” musical forms of the lower classes began to show first clear signs of blurring in the years of the First World War. As in many other port cities, wartime brought money, people and new musical influences to Freetown. Already in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a number of popular dance orchestras, mainly brass and fife bands, existed. Sibthorpe (1970: 61) recalls a brass band that “enlivened” an official’s dinner party already in 1842. These bands, which recruited their musicians from among Freetown’s school and church choirs, played on prestigious events (Horton 1985: 33). Their musical repertoire comprised of military marches along with various kinds of Western ballroom dances. However, by the late 1910s, the bands started to include Afro-American ragtime music and Latin-American ballroom styles like tangos, sambas and rumbas into their repertoires as well (*ibid.*: 35-37). Ware (1978: 300) points towards the influence the Royal West African Frontier Force Band had on these musical changes, as many members of the British Forces that were stationed in Sierra Leone from 1900 onwards were black West Indians (Turay & Abraham 1987: 30). The cultural ties parts of the Creole community kept with the Caribbean further fostered these adaptations. Collins (1989: 223) describes similar developments in Ghana, where he explains the “transformation of European march time into a syncopated African beat” with the presence and influence of West Indian troops as well.

While the upper-class bands started to take up Caribbean influences, rather down-market versions of dance orchestras began to proliferate among the lower classes who in turn adapted and “indigenized” the sounds played by the elite

bands (Collins & Richards 1989: 26). The direction of musical influence went also the other way around, ascending the social ladder, as the elite bands started to include more and more local sounds into their repertoires. Highlife music was a prime example for the social class-boundaries-crossing dynamics from which much of Anglophone West Africa's early 20<sup>th</sup> century popular music styles emerged. Collins' (1989: 224-225) description of highlife's baptism well illuminates these processes:

[I]t was in Ghana during the 1920s that these high-class orchestras first began playing an occasional palm-wine, *gombey*, or *ashiko* song – which is when the term “highlife” was first coined. For the poor people who congregated outside prestigious black élite clubs in Accra (...) suddenly began to hear their own local street music being orchestrated by sophisticated bands and they gave this music the name “highlife”.

Even though the term “highlife” appeared to gain prominence in Freetown only in the late 1950s (see E.T. Mensah's account of his visit to Freetown in 1958, cited in Collins 1977: 54), the broad musical fusion that highlife represented – bringing together, among others, elements from swing, Afro-Cuban jazz, military brass bands music, and various local popular music forms – was present and proliferating in Freetown already during the 1920s (Ware 1978: 300). A growing number of emerging so-called Jazz Bands were the vanguards of these new fusions. The most prominent ones among these new bands were the Cuban Swing Band, the Mayfair Jazz Band and the Triumph Orchestra (Horton 1985: 35).

It is in this slow but steady harmonization of upper-class bands' music and the “poor man's” versions occurring in the years during and after the First World War that the first tentative signs of an emerging mass-music culture can be traced. A process of mutual musical “rapprochement” began that, above all, complicated the sonic relations between Freetown's simultaneously complicating social-class composition.

## Urban reactions

These approximations of music tastes and practices between Freetown's various socio-economic layers were founded on, and profoundly enhanced by, the rapid social diversification the society experienced from around the turn of the century. Hitherto, Freetown was demographically dominated by the Creoles – or, more cautiously worded, by the descendants of repatriated and liberated blacks from the New World and Africa – who set the pace in the fields of commerce, education, (black) clergy and civil service not only for Sierra Leone but for all of West Africa (Porter 1963: 51-65). By the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, as new trade routes opened further up the Colony's hinterland, the upcountry inhabitants began leaving their homes to seek paid employment in the city (Banton 1957: 132). In

1891, the Creoles still made up about two thirds of Freetown's population. In the 1920s, these proportions were turned upside down (*ibid.*: 24). Henceforth, the city's population-balance swung increasingly in favour of the indigenous, non-Creole population. Simultaneously, the distribution of, particularly, economic power of the Creoles started to fade. Changing economic policies of the British colonial administration discriminated against Creole professionals and businesses (Cohen 1981: 48-51). Seeking to reduce Creole power, the administration encouraged Indian, European and especially Lebanese businessmen to replace the Creoles in trade (Leighton 1992; Mukonoweshuro 1993: 31-42). The rise of racist ideology and the propagation of social Darwinism on the side of the British added to the increasing rejection of the Creoles (Wyse 1989: 60; Spritzer 1974: 45). Bandury's *Sierra Leone, or The white man's grave* (1881), with its scorn for African capabilities and the derogation of Creoles, was an early and clear indicator of these changing attitudes. In 1902, the most visible manifestation of Britain's rejection of the Creoles was implemented in a new policy of residential segregation. Justified as "health segregation" in order to decrease the incidence of malaria among European's, Hill Station was founded as an exclusively white settlement, located on a plateau about 250 meters high and some four miles from the center of Freetown (Spitzer 1968; George 1998). A growingly influential class of "Protectorate Africans" trained and educated overseas further contributed to the gradual loss of the near-monopoly the Creoles had enjoyed in the past decades. The establishment of the Bo School in 1906, a secondary school for the sons of Protectorate chiefs created in order to rear a loyal rural class, was a prime vehicle for these developments (Walton 1985). Many of Freetown's future political and economic elite members were educated in that school.<sup>1</sup>

The changes of demographic relations in the course of urbanization, and the reshuffling of social hierarchies these changes entailed, showed several major effects on Freetown's cultural and, especially, musical life. In response to the new urban situation, many of the incoming migrants from the Sierra Leonean hinterland began to organize themselves in voluntary associations, which reflected the forms and functions of the various voluntary associations, sodalities, and societies existent in Freetown throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, as well as the traditional secret societies in the provinces. The above-mentioned Ode-lay societies, emulating the Aku's Hunting societies, began to spring up in these years (Nunley 1981: 61) and soon outnumbered their role models (Kreutzinger 1966). As their earlier exponents of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, these voluntary associations,

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<sup>1</sup> Mukonoweshuro (1993: 8) adds the somewhat controversial argument that the eagerness to invest in education many Creoles exhibited, by for example sending their children for advanced studies to England, in fact added to their gradual demise as "the lateral investment in education meant that the future reproduction of this class [the coastal bourgeois; Mukonoweshuro] would no longer occur in the fields of trade and commerce".

or mutual benefit societies, served various functions for and needs of the migrants, such as economic, religious, health, and social purposes (Banton 1957: 184-195, 1966). Kenneth Little (1974: 89-90), who describes the emergence of voluntary associations as a common “reaction” to urbanization processes in the whole of Africa, ascribes these associations a central role in serving as “a link between the traditional and the urban way of life”, launching “adaptive mechanisms”, and providing “for the rural migrant a cultural bridge, conveying him from one kind of social universe to another”. In Freetown, this bridging-function was particularly successfully performed by so-called “compins” (from the English word “company”) – public dances organized by newly emergent migrant organizations (Banton 1957: 164-178). The dances became very popular among members of various groups from the hinterland and provided a foundation on which the culturally subordinated, indigenous strata of Freetown’s society could come together, foster and express cultural values and a common identity (*ibid.*). In order to heighten the appeal and attractiveness of these dances, the predominantly young organizers introduced “modernist” elements to the dances by, for example, including newly imported, Western instruments into the band’s arrangement that provided the music for these occasions (*ibid.*: 173). These popular dances added significantly to the advance of a growingly diversified and rapidly progressing urban music culture in Freetown.

On the other side of Freetown’s growing and diversifying social strata were the Creoles. Confronted with the loss of demographic domination and an increasing forfeiting of political and economic influences, the Creoles “responded” with a somewhat contradictive reaction. On the one hand, the Creoles reasserted their cultural superiority over the incoming African “tribesman”, which at times even resembled the xenophobic-racists attitudes displayed by white settlers in the colonies of Southern Africa (Spitzer 1974: 72). On the other hand, the rejection from the side of their former British mentors led many Creoles to question the validity of the Western norms and ways on which their culture was based and to reappraise their African heritage (Alie 1991: 184). The rejection of European names and the adaptation of African names gave a clear indicator of the African roots and identity many Creoles had newly “discovered”. Among the first to adopt this practice was polymath and precursor of African Nationalism James Horton who changed his name into Africanus (Edwards & Dabydeen 1991: 185-186).

While the Creoles became more and more politically and economically marginalized, their culture continued its socializing task as it served as a prime model for the upwardly mobile. The prevalence of Creole language, Krio, is the most expressive testament to the enduring, and expanding, hegemony of Creole culture. Though there are two large indigenous languages spoken in the country,



Temne and Mende, it was Krio that, in the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, evolved into a lingua franca for daily speech, trade, national discourse on radio and television, in election speeches, and popular arts in the whole of Sierra Leone. It is today the only language that is common, or potentially common, to all Sierra Leoneans inside and outside the country (Oyètádé & Luke 2008; Sawyerr 1994).

Krio language provides but one example of the enticing prevalence of Creole culture in the years of the Creoles' "eclipse" (Wyse 1989: 105). In his seminal study on the *Politics of Elite Culture*, Cohen (1981: 143) illuminates the underlying dramatic processes of the, as he calls it, "cultural 'mystique'" that enabled the Creoles' prolonged role as a national (cultural) elite. Marginalized in commerce and politics and incapable to mobilize any physical force (police or military), the Creoles have maintained and, with increasing intensity since the ascendancy of non-Creole elites from the 1920s onwards, further developed a distinctive cultural apparatus by whose utilization they managed to remain their position as an elite. At once an arsenal of publicly exposed symbolic behaviours and a dense network of multiple private contacts and amity relationships linking and cross-linking their various families, the Creoles' "elite culture" was sustained, enhanced, and dramatically "enacted" during various occasion of social gatherings at church services (*ibid.*: 158-164), in Masonic lodges (reflecting the sodality-based organization of Aku Hunting Societies; 118-125), at funerals (166-175) and, in its most emphatic "staging", at dances.

The Creoles' musical practices exposed most clearly the dialectic between, as framed by Cohen (1981: 146), their particularistic and universalistic interests and duties, simultaneously serving, and mediating, their own group coherence, identity and power while functioning as a basis to stage a (elite) culture paragon for the wider society. On the one hand, Creole musical practices and tastes served as a focal point of cultural and musical orientation for the new Protectorate elites, along with the labour seeking migrants from upcountry, who perceived Creole dances and music as carriers of "modernity". The Creoles furthermore strengthened the (cultural and musical) links with the upcountry folks by partaking in and staging "African" musical activities. At the same time, Creoles also fostered their status of a farouche cultural elite through exclusive dances. Cohen gives several examples for these elite dance gatherings (*ibid.*: 23-29, 166-171, 179-186), which were mostly arranged by a circle of well-educated Creole ladies who for these purposes organized themselves into "clubs". One organizer of a particularly exclusivist and "mysterious" ball – staged by the "Moonlight Club" without any advertisement and tickets being distributed only among a well-chosen circle of invited guests who were before "examined" by the club's committee – explained to Cohen (1981: 24) that their club

had been founded by women whose aim was to inculcate “comportment” in the public, particularly among the men. (...) the club had come into being when some ladies had noticed with alarm that manners had been deteriorating in Freetown society, that men no longer knew how to approach women respectfully, and that civilized living generally was being threatened by the “masses”.

From this paradoxical practice – to organize a rigorously exclusive and private dance gathering for a few members of the elite so to impinge on “the public’s” manners and behaviours – Cohen (1981: 186) deduces the “dualistic” nature of Creole culture “with the same men and women partaking in both types of symbolic activities, even though they may express criticism of the one type or the other, betraying an underlying contradiction in their cultural and social life”. Eldred Jones (1968: 199-200), defending Freetown society from accusations of its cultural rootlessness, trenchantly subsumes the dualistic, or in fact multiple, cultural orientation as exposed in the Freetonians’ musical life. He writes:

[T]hose who are part of the society (...), as they celebrate their weddings with *gumbe* music, or dance in evening dress to the strains of western-style bands, or talk to their dead during an *awujo* feast,<sup>2</sup> or sing Bach in the choir on Sundays, seem quite unaware of their “rootlessness”, and display a surprising self-confidence which is perhaps the source of outside irritation.

For the staging of this dualistic, and syncretic, culture and its inherent “mystique”, musical practices served the Creoles as a main “dramaturgical technique” (Cohen 1981: 210), combining European and African types of music and thereby countering their loss of economic and political power with symbolic practices and yielding a somewhat surrogating domination of Freetown’s cultural life.

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<sup>2</sup> The *awujo* (also “*awoojoh*” or “*awujoh*”) is a feast held by both Christian and Muslim Freetonians on special occasions, as before a marriage, after the birth of a new child, or after a death. The practice was introduced to Freetown by Yoruba slaves. It expresses the belief that during the ceremony the partakers, usually a family, connect to their ancestral spirits (see Porter 1963: 105-106; Spitzer 1974: 27-28).

## The heydays of local popular music – 1940s to 1970s

With the Second World War, the pace of new musical developments – in particular what, by now, might well be described as developments in *popular* music forms – increased significantly. Freetown’s music scene was brought to new highs. From the 1940s onwards, a continued boom captured the city’s music life, led to a growing diversification of music genres and to a mushrooming of musicians and bands. The boom lasted until the early 1980s. In fact, rather than ascribing the year of independence 1961 as a major turning point in Freetown’s popular music developments – as Ware (1978) and Horton (1985), the two main chroniclers of Freetown’s popular music history, were inclined to do – it is in the years during and after the so-called “Hitler War” that several decisive shifts in the music scene started to occur. However, many of the developments in the afore-described decades provided the foundation for this boom. Thus the question rises whether we should speak of a major turning point altogether rather than of a sequence of interrelated developments marked by cyclic highs and lows.

### Stars, recordings, and technological “democratizations” (1940s and 1950s)

The boom started during the years of the war as Freetown became the headquarters for the British Royal Navy and the Royal Air Force in West Africa (Jackson 2006: 227). The foreign servicemen raised the money-flow and introduced new waves of latest, mainly Western music styles to the city along with the associated dance styles and fashions. As Ware (1978: 300) points out, it was particularly “Latin” music – merengue, calypso and latest Latin jazz variations – that enjoyed a great popularity in Britain and the US, whose influence in Freetown was most audible. Other newly introduced styles reflected the latest musical fashions in the US as well, namely swing-jazz, rhythm and blues, and Tin Pan

Alley sounds (Horton 1985). Triggered by the risen demand for musical entertainment the troops created, more local Jazz Bands started to spring up on the scene. With the increased pace and width of dissemination of globally disseminated, mainly Western, musical forms, (black) Atlantic music gaining more and more momentum across the various layers of Freetown's society, fostering the growing alignment of musical modes and practices between Freetown's elite and "the rest" of the city's mixed population.

In the late 1940s, Freetown saw the emergence of its first popular musicians who could be dubbed "stars". Tejan-Sie, Earl Scrubbs (or "Dirty Scrubbs") and Ebenezer Calendar were three first major exponents of these early forms of music stardom. Tejan, Scrubbs and Calendar weaved together latest Afro-Cuban sounds, mainly calypso, with the already fused elements from palm wine and gombey. The overall result was dubbed maringa (Bender 1989). The popularity of Tejan, Scrubbs and Calendar can be explained by the double role they took on. As Collins & Richards (1989: 26) point out with regard to Scrubbs and Calendar, in addition to their role as (popular) music entertainers both musicians acted as "purveyors of news, history and social and political comment". In this respect, Scrubbs, Calendar as well as Tejan can be seen as modernized – and urbanized – versions of West African jalis musicians (or griots). Eric Charry (2000: 91) explains the role of jalis as "musicians, singers, public speakers, oral historians, praisers, go-betweens, advisers, chroniclers, and shapers of the past and present". Tejan, Scrubbs and Calendar fitted every of these categories, and added a new dimension of stardom to the genre. This emergence of (modern jalis) "music stars" implicates a further stage of Freetown's tentatively emergent mass music culture. With Tejan, Scrubbs and Calendar, Freetonians began to listen to their very own music heroes. Their fame in turn speaks of the progressively aligned music tastes of the audiences.

In the decade prior to independence, the 1950s, advances in music-related media and technologies began to further widen the scope of popular music present in Freetown and to broaden the channels of music's dissemination. The two main developments concerned record players and the radio. Both mediums were already present in Freetown for decades. Earliest forms of wind-up gramophones brought to Freetown date back to the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Enlisting the titles of sheet music sold in Freetown in 1886, Spitzer (1974: 24) noticed that from the available musical assortment "there is nothing to suggest that the shop (Sawyer's) was located in tropical West Africa, catering for black Africans whose ancestors had been slaves, rather than located in the heart of London where white Victorian Englishmen formed its clientele". With the advent of the Freetown Rediffusion Service in 1934, an avenue was created for connecting to oversee radio services such as the British Broadcasting Empire Service and the United

States armed forces-built Radio Brazzaville (Decker 1956). Farid Anthony (1980: 79) gives a first-hand account of Freetown's wired "connection to the world". However, before the 1950s, record players and radio receivers were fairly limited in number and mainly served the diversion of the wealthiest citizens.

These relations were not exactly turned upside down during the 1950s – it was still mainly the upper-class who could afford the newest technologies. Several developments nevertheless indicate a slow but steady "democratization" of technologies related to music production, dissemination and consumption. In 1955, the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Service (SLBS) was launched. The broadcast aired a variety of musical programs and music request shows (Ware [1978: 301] counted seven daily music shows for 1961). Besides a popular mixture of hits from West African, European, US- and Latin-American groups, the shows played music from local bands and musicians as well (*ibid.*). Regularly, local groups were given airtime to perform live in the SLBS studios. Others had their own shows, such as the Comedian and bandleader of the Rokel River Boys, Chris During. In fact, During's Rokel River Boys emerged from an initiative of the SLBS director. They were formed, as Horton (1985: 35) writes, to serve the need "for bigger performing groups that could be better projected to reach more people".

It was also in the SLBS studios that many popular local musicians recorded their songs. In the early 1950s, Scrubbs and Calendar pioneered Sierra Leone's first popular music recordings, which were organized by agents working for the British Decca label (Bender 1988).<sup>1</sup> Two of the recorded songs, which exemplify their double role as entertainers and social commentators, are Calendar's "Double decker busses" (commemorating the introduction of such busses in Freetown<sup>2</sup>) and Scrubbs' "Cost of living nar Freetown" – singing: "The cost of living get so high it is cheaper now to die". New popular variations of calypsonian-like styles followed suit and brought some Freetonian musicians even to international fame. Among the most prominent ones were Bliff Radie Byne and Ali Ganda, the latter being crowned "West Africa's Calypso King" in the late 1950s (Bender 1991). Both were invited for recording sessions in Melodisc's studios in London (Templeton 1999). Melodisc and Decca installed a branch in Freetown for some years in the 1950s and '60s. From the late 1950s onwards, several private recording studios emerged as well, producing 10-inch shellac

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<sup>1</sup> Though, Ware (1978: 301) mentions recordings of songs in Temne and Mende dating back to the early 1930s – most probably recorded by the Gramophone Company. However, she leaves it at the brief mentioning without giving further details or data.

<sup>2</sup> Bender (1989: 56-58) somewhat un.masks Calendar's early fame, which was mainly based on this recording, by debunking that it was not Calendar himself who composed the song but that he copied it from another local artist.

records (Nugatone and Bassophone being the most successful local recording studios; Bender 1987). The output of these recording studios appears to have been fairly large. It reflects the steadily broadening variety of musicians, bands and music styles present in Freetown. Collins (2002) speaks of almost three hundred songs Ebenezer Calendar alone released during the 1950s. A somewhat shamming advertising practice further increased the number of active recording bands. According to Bender (1988), local recording entrepreneurs drew upon a core stable of “session players”, assembling them in various combinations, and releasing the records under a variety of band names. Horton (1985: 41) discusses a broad range of rather trivial and short-lived songs (“Tin Pan Alley in nature”) which stemmed from this sort of music line-production practices. Bender’s (1987) meticulous inventory of SLBS’s Gramophone Library further testifies the relatively broad output of popular records, both local and from other African countries, during the 1950s and early ‘60s. Besides the mass-produced Tin Pan Alley sounds and the growing number of released maringa, highlife, calypso, palm wine etc. songs, Freetown’s music and recording scene of the 1950s was further eked by a number of traditional musicians from upcountry. The B-Side of Bender’s (1988) collection of 1950s’ recordings from Freetown indicates a wide range of musicians from the provinces who came to the city’s studios to record their performances.<sup>3</sup>

### The generation of 1961 and the non-politics of pop music (1960s)

On the eve of Sierra Leone’s independence in 1961, a wave of popular dance music styles from across the Atlantic world swept over Freetown and captured in particular the city’s younger music audiences. The popularity of international dance music was both reflected and reinforced by the growing circulation and availability of commercially produced recordings. These developments were further enhanced by the emergence of so-called “amplifiers” – complete sets of equipment for playing records at public dances (Ware 1978: 301). At the same time, a new generation of local bands emerged, imitating the international styles and heralding the start of what many Freetonians today refer to as the “live band era”.

A first main stimulus to these developments was given in 1958 by the “King of Highlife”, E.T. Mensah, who toured Freetown with his Tempos. Mensah has trimmed down the large highlife orchestras of the post-war years to a smaller swing-combo size and added the electric guitar to the ensemble. Collins (2002) speaks of a new “dance band highlife” Mensah thereby helped to initiate. The

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<sup>3</sup> Bender’s collection includes songs performed by almost all major ethnic groups of Sierra Leone; that is by Mende, Temne, Limba, Mandinka, Lokko, Fulani, Kono, Kissi and Susu musicians (Bender 1988).

Tempos' blend of swing-jazz, calypso and Afro-Cuban percussion is said to have created a great stir among Freetown's audiences.

The description Mensah gave about his visit to Freetown exemplifies the growingly complicated relations between social class-divisions and popular music tastes that underlined Freetown's music scene in these years:

[A] thing we noticed during our stay was a class distinction between personalities. The upper class consisted of lawyers and doctors who would not like to mix up with the working class. If we wanted this upper class to attend our dances, we had to raise the entrance fee or charge two separate fees and provide two separated dance-floors to accommodate the two classes of dance fans. (cited in Collins 1977: 54)

On the one hand, Mensah's short account points towards the increasing approximation of musical tastes and practices of Freetown's elite and the city's underclasses. The music was no longer a specific marker of class-difference or of ethnic or cultural affiliation. Mensah's popular dance music appealed to the upper class and the urban poor, crossed ethnic lines, and brought various respective groups into the same music venues. While Freetown's diversified societal layers began to listen and dance to the same music, other means for segregation were deployed (the separated dance-floors and entrance fees). At the same time, the growing number of local dance bands who adopted The Tempos-styled dance band highlife began to cater for the masses, playing in newly arising working class nightclubs rather than in upper class saloons (Collins 1977: 54).

On the other hand, Mensah's revamped highlife style was still strongly in line with older and already present music trends. It was a musical renewal rather than a musical revolution. The revolution came to Freetown from across the Atlantic as, around the time of Mensah's visit, new US-American pop music, mainly rock 'n' roll, twist, soul and funk, entered the scene. In the course of this progressively advancing globalized mass-music culture, the most pronounced division in terms of musical tastes and practices appeared to arise along generational lines rather than along socio-economic lines.

Joseph – a 70-year-old veteran of Freetown's nightlife – vividly remembers the youthful dance music scene around the years of independence. His description of the public dances illuminates the class boundaries-crossing dynamics the new, youthful music styles entailed:

Of course class was important. We had the aristocrats and the area boys, the big bosses and the small borbors from the mining fields.<sup>4</sup> But when rock 'n' roll came, everybody learned to jive and boogie. The music was bushfire. Elvis (Presley) captivated the young. James Joseph Brown – like me, Joseph. I was telling this to the girls and they say I was a classic. They were classy girls, from the top. We all jiggled at the beach clubs together. (...) Dancing you could not tell who had the money and who was the thief. When you danced good, you were taking all girls, the rich and the poor. It was like today, the music was young. The old people

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<sup>4</sup> "Area boy" is a term common in Anglophone West Africa, it usually refers to a sort of responsible-minded, "communal" gangster. "Borbor" is a Krio term referring to a boy.

were not catching up. They had their country-western-meringue-calendars and bush drums for the poros<sup>5</sup> and they danced their bush dance. They could not dance like we.

Inspired by the new, somewhat rebellious dance music, a growing number of local bands started to spring up, imitating the Western styles. The bands, commonly referred to as soul dance bands, further reinforced the generational gap that divided Freetown's popular music audiences. The league of "country-western-meringue" musicians, like Calendar, Scrubbs and During, tended to be at least in their forties. With a few exceptions, the newly emerging soul dance bands – among the first were the Cisco Kids, Edie Ewa and the West Africans, and The Ticklers Dance Band (Collins 1985: 42) – comprised of musicians (mainly men and a few women singers) between eighteen and thirty (Ware 1978: 310).

In the early 1960s (probably 1962), yet another new and youthful dance music style was added to Freetown's popular music repertoire as the Congolese group Ry-Co Jazz came to town. The guitar-based rumba variations of Ry-Co Jazz, known popularly as Congo music, brought together a wide range of current dance music trends from Africa, Europe and the US, anticipating the upcoming Afro-pop era of the later 1960s. One of my informants spoke of Ry-Co Jazz as "the African Beatles". Together with the above-cited mentioning of the popularity of Elvis Presley by Joseph, this reference to the (white) Beatles indicates the broad Atlantic orientation Freetown's music audiences continued to exhibit. By including white popular musicians into the repertoire of popular music tastes, Freetown's popular music culture of the 1960s transcended Gilroy's narrower "black" Atlantic (music) culture. The Ry-Co Jazz left behind a strong impression on Freetown's dance music scene. All of the youthful soul dance bands incorporated Ry-Co Jazz songs into their repertoires, often even copying their Lingala lyrics. The Heartbeats (formed in 1961), which were to become Sierra Leone's greatest musical sensation of the 1960s, are said to owe their glory mainly to their innovative adaptation of Ry-Co Jazz' style (LaVoie 2008).

The Ry-Co Jazz band influenced yet another group which, on their part, significantly added to the popularization and proliferation of young soul dance bands in Freetown: the Golden Strings. Formed in 1963, the repertoire of the Golden Strings mirrored Freetown's popular music tastes of the 1960s. It can be divided into four different styles: covers of Congolese songs; covers of British and American popular music, such as hits from Cliff Richards, The Beatles, Otis Redding, Wilson Pickett and James Brown; covers of popular Afro-Cuban hits; and their own materials in which they further merged the three other influences with local elements. However, the peculiarity of the Golden Strings was not so

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<sup>5</sup> "Poros" denotes the main rural male (secret) society in Sierra Leone and Liberia. The Bundu or Sande society is the complementary institution for women.



much their musical orientation but rather their impact on the perception of popular musicians. All four band members came from respected families, graduated from secondary school, and were working in “more serious” jobs while engaging in careers as popular musicians.

Even though Freetown’s popular musicians were admired as cultural innovators (or importers), they nevertheless carried the stereotype of being school drop-outs, prone to drug abuse and other forms of improper behaviour. Ebenezer Calendar and “Dirty” Scrubs, for example, both quitted their education at primary school level, while the latter earned his nickname (Dirty), as Horton (1985: 36) explains, due to “the unkept state with which he carried himself around especially when he was out of business”. Many parents strongly discouraged their children from associating with popular music or becoming musicians themselves (Ware 1978: 313). The Golden Strings broke the spell put on popular musicians and their common perception as drop outs and scallywags. The leading vocalist of the Golden Strings, Dr. Cecile Blake (holding a doctorate in communication studies), explained to me the class-related constraints that the group met at first:

It was very difficult at the beginning, because all of the band members graduated from secondary school. And we all were from very respectable families. My family was considered among the aristocrats. We could not do things like that. It was an anomaly for us to decide to play music, this kind of music. We were considered doomed. It was like “oh, we have become lumpens, like rarray boys”. But the band became very-very popular very quickly and that helped us a lot, and it helped our families. We had a mass-following. The university students and the illiterate. The youth admired us, and the old respected us. And we influenced many-many young groups who followed our example.<sup>6</sup>

The Golden Strings set the stage for a growing number of new dance bands formed by young musicians from both upper and lower sections of society; The Academics, Purple Haze, The Echoes, and The Red Stars being the most renowned follow-ups. They recruited their main audiences and admirers from among the youthful section of Freetown’s society, to which most of the musicians belonged themselves. Speaking of the musical changes occurring in Africa around the years of independence, Hauke Dorsch (2010) puts forward the thesis that much of the music, and the social contexts it evolved in and helped the (re)create, can be approached as revolutionary – “given that we understand revolution in its original meaning as ‘revolvere’, thus as a return to a former, ‘proper’ social order” (*my transl.*). In Freetown of the 1960s a (socio-)musical revolution occurred indeed. Though this revolution was anything but revolving backwards, it was a most progressive, aspiring movement, “rebelliously” defying the social stratification and the culture and manners of segregation set up by

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<sup>6</sup> Blake (2009: 3) briefly mentions the “devastating contradiction” his engagement with popular music posed to his family in his latest book, *The African Origins of Rhetoric*.

parental generations. Ironically, while Freetown's young "beat generation" began to break down barriers erected between lines of class, they simultaneously forged new divisions drawn along generational lines. Ismail Rashid trenchantly summed up Freetown's "new culture [that] separated the colonial from the post-colonial generation in music, attitude and behaviour" as "[i]conoclastic and avant-garde, the emerging cultural landscape supported soul, rock n' roll, disco, reggae, Afro-beat, drugs, Afro, mini-skirts, bell-bottoms and platforms shoes – cultural staples consumed by youths internationally" (Rashid 2004: 73).

Whereas Rashid presented his short retrospect in a political prism, tracing the origins of political conflict in a cultural-generational conflict, Freetown's 1960s popular music scene was in fact marked by a pronounced lack of political dimensions. With regard to the musical developments that occurred during that period in other African countries, Freetown appears to be an exception. After gaining independence, many governments across Africa began to actively support local music in line with attempts to strengthen national identity and social coherence across ethnic boundaries (Collins 2002). Many popular musicians in turn celebrated their political leaders as, for example, the Guinean Band *Bembeya Jazz National* that paid homage to Sékou Touré with their highly popular album "Regard sur le Passé". Sierra Leone's government made some attempts in this direction too, but did not find much support from the side of the musicians. Ali Ganda and Bliff Radie Byne released a couple of breezy calypso songs with patriotic appeals, celebrating "Freedom, Freedom Sierra Leone" (Ganda) and "Victory for Sierra Leone" (Byne). Following the examples of Guinea, Cameroon, Senegal and Mali, in the year of independence Sierra Leone's government initiated the formation of the National Dance Troop, which was created in order to represent the country's cultural heritage. Apart from that, nationalist or patriotic sentiments were marginal to non-existent in Freetown's popular music scene.

As Golden Strings' vocalist Cecile Blake recalls for the 1960s scene, "[W]e never had political music. Neither did our contemporaries. We sang about love, about adventure and women. Everybody was into exploring life and love and dancing, not into thinking about politics." With regard to the increasingly pronounced ethnicization of national politics during the 1960s (Kandeh 1992), the political significance of the bands appeared to be mainly their lack of ethnic and political affiliation and enmity.

Since the late 1950s, Sierra Leone's political map is characterized by the schism between the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP), which is a party representing people in the southern and eastern provinces (mainly Mende), and the All People's Congress (APC), which is a northern people's party (mainly

Temne).<sup>7</sup> Despite that political division drawn along ethnic and regional lines, the issues of tribe, ethnicity or political affiliation played no role in Freetown's popular music scene of the 1960s. This appears particularly striking since most of the popular dance bands were dependent on wealthy patrons who in turn were often highly involved in the political game. Albert Margai, the country's second prime minister under the SLPP, patronized his own and fairly popular dance band Akpata Jazz, named after the prime minister's nickname *Akpata*<sup>8</sup> (Collins 1985: 42). However, despite being indebted to the Mende/SLPP head of state, the eight band member's represented a highly mixed ensemble of ethnic groups, including three Temne musicians (Jones 1968: 203). Ware (1978: 317) found a similar mixture in the ethnic composition of the Sabanoh Jazz Band, one of the most popular bands of the second half of the 1960s. As Ware (*ibid.*) further concludes for the scene in 1968/69:

The noteworthy feature of the Freetown popular-music scene thus appears to be a lack of true nationalism or tribalism. What identity exists is more that of a loosely defined 'Africans' or blacks. This is not to imply that regional or foreign music styles are not recognized as such; rather, they are not regarded as significant in any other dimension other than musical.

### Principles of antinomy: The politics of decline and the golden years of popular music (1970s)

Until 1967, the country experienced relative economic prosperity and political stability. On the political stage, things started to become turbulent as Sierra Leone's democratic process was punctured by a military coup which took place right after the general elections held in March 1967. One year later, a counter-coup brought the APC, which in fact had won the elections, into power. Under the authoritarian rule of Siaka Stevens, the APC commenced a progressive and increasingly aggressive centralization of power. Until his resignation in 1985, Stevens fostered a strategic use of political-economic patronage relations and repressive, often violent, practices to destroy or neutralize opposite groups, labour unions, student unions, and the press (Alie 1991: 70-113; Bangura 2004; Koroma 1996). An increasing politicized corruption of the army and the police further assured the strong position of Stevens and the APC (Alie 1991: 99-100). Alfred Zack-Williams (1985) trenchantly summarized Stevens' APC era as *The Decline of Politics and the Politics of Decline*.

The economic situation started to worsen from 1971 onwards. High level corruption, nepotism, clientelism, patronage, the over-centralized state machinery,

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<sup>7</sup> This political divide along ethnic lines was particularly underscored in the results of the general elections in 1967, in which the SLPP won almost all seats in the south and east, while the APC won all but two seats in the north and west (Cartwright 1970: 249).

<sup>8</sup> "Akpata" is a Yoruba word referring to a reliable person.

the oil shocks of the 1970s, and a number of other factors had adversely affected most sections of society (Alie 1991: 105-109). In 1978, the centralization of power under Stevens reached a peak. After a manipulated referendum, Sierra Leone was declared a one-party state and the APC the sole legal party in the country.

Chris Squire (1996: 69) enlists the “mechanisms of vices” that lay at the roots of the political and economic demise Sierra Leone experienced from the early 1970s onwards: “subordination of the interests and authority of the nation, deception, greed, hypocrisy, callousness, opportunism, exploitation, corruption, and sycophancy”. Along with other analysts (Keen 2003; Kandeh 1999), he points towards the new state elite as the main culprits for what he – again in line with other authors (Koroma 1996) – describes as the *Agony* that began to befall the country. This new elite was mainly formed and sustained through a political patronage system chiefly conducted by Stevens himself. As Richards writes, political patronage, or patrimonialism, involves “redistributing national resources as marks of personal favour to followers who respond with loyalty to the leader rather than to the institution the leader represents” (1996: 34). Stevens’ patrimonial rule triggered three main effects. Firstly, a (in fact constant) reshuffling of the composition of the political-economic elite, as servants loyal to his rule were as quickly rewarded with generous shares from the exploitation of the country’s rich natural resources as they were dumped – and often imprisoned or executed (Kandeh 1992). Secondly, this sort of economic inbreeding of a hand-picked elite led to what William Reno (1995) termed the “shadow state”, or “informal commercially orientated network” (Funke & Solomon 2002: 1). By (re)lying on the global recognition of state sovereignty and systematically weakening bureaucratic and civic structures, Stevens’ (shadow) state elite manipulated external actors’ access to both formal and clandestine markets (mainly the diamonds fields), enriched themselves, and gouged the state and its citizens. Thirdly, this elitist “conspiracy of state vandalism” (Squire 1996: 74) increasingly put the majority of Sierra Leoneans – that is, all those who did not partake in Stevens’ power-money reciprocities – into the position of a wretched economic minority. The marginalization of the youth many authors emphasize in this context (Rashid 1997; Richards 1995; Peters & Richards 1998; Zack-Williams 2001; Abdullah 2002b; McIntyre *et al.* 2002; McIntyre & Thusi 2003; Maxted 2003; Keen 2003) was thereby only one, though central, aspect in Stevens’ overarching politics of power, which in fact increasingly led to a marginalization of the masses.

Until the late 1970s, however, these deteriorating political, economic and social developments showed no apparent effects on the popular music scene. In fact, some of my interviewees who experienced the 1960s and the 1970s speak of the latter as the actual “golden years” of popular music in Freetown. A thriving

industry of so-called recording studios emerged. Rather than doing actual “recordings”, these businesses were in fact cassette-copying shops – pioneers of music piracy in Freetown. As most of these “recording studios” were run by entrepreneurs with links to merchant shipping, through which they imported music albums from abroad, Freetown’s harbour proved once again a main source of musical innovation and a juncture to the (black) Atlantic music culture. The shops provided the city’s music market and scene with a constant inflow of relatively cheaply sold copies and compilations of latest international hits.

At the same time, live bands continued to proliferate and dominated Freetown’s dance music scene throughout the 1970s. Many of the young musicians who began their careers in imitative pop dance bands in the 1960s continued their activities in the ‘70s. Together with its musicians, the scene began to grow older and became more “mature”. A number of ongoing reshufflings of musicians and consecutive split-ups, breakups, reunifications and re-emergences of bands added new dynamics to the scene. From a partly brake-up of The Heartbeats, for example, which in turn started out from a partly breakup of the Ticklers, emerged The Masokoloko’s, who at times also performed as the Jazz Leone’s or Afro-Rhythms. Albert Margai’s Akpata Jazz, which broke up in 1968, reintegrated into the Sabanoh Jazz Band. Gi Body Water, which existed already in the late 1950s, restarted after some of its former musicians returned from prolonged tours across West African countries in 1971. In the early 1970s, Vox Afrique, Mueyeh Power, and The Daylex Dance Band all entered the scene, bringing together old and new musicians. In 1975, a part of the former Sabanoh’s reunified into the newly emerged Sabanoh 75, which in turn incorporated musicians from Purple Haze, a popular band from the ‘60s.

Musically, Freetown’s popular dance band scene mirrored the developments in other parts of West and Central Africa – taking up the “Afro prefix” as a main point of musical reference; including fusions and variations of Afro-pop, Afro-soul, Afro-rock, Afro-funk, and Afro-beat. As Horton (1985: 47-48) observed, Freetown’s 1970s live band scene witnessed the disappearance of many “Western type popular bands and pleasingly enough the appearance of other dance bands which were more Afro in composition and repertoire”.

Among the numerous groups that gained prominence in the 1970s, the two most popular ones were the Afro National and Super Combo. Both groups had fairly large fan bases which developed a passionate rivalry. On the one hand, this rivalry divided the city in Combo and National fans. On the other hand, it also functioned as an agent of social bounding. The respective rival fan groups’ composition crossed all boundaries drawn between social, economic, ethnic, religious and political lines. As Sunny, owner of an old-established bar in central

Freetown remembers, the reasons underlying the choice to support one of the two groups were most arbitrary:

It was like with the football clubs today. I support Man United, he supports Arsenal. I refuse to accept that his group can play as good as mine. But nobody can tell what difference it really makes. They were both brilliant. But at the end of the day, we have something to argue about. (...) Everybody had to pick one [band]. Boy, girl, old, young, rich, poor, Temne or Krio or Soso or whatever, you had to be Afro National or Super Combo. (...) I supported Super Combo, because of Freddie Green, he was the best solo guitarist in that country. But secretly I also loved the Nationals, because of their fantastic singer.

Neither the available literature nor my own data about these years gained from interviews provide a sufficient basis for a definite explanation of the heydays Freetown's popular music continued to experience in the light of a growingly aggressive and repressive state power. Two speculative fragments of an argument might be put forward. Firstly, the celebrated local popular musicians and bands might have fulfilled, however subtly, the function of socio-political appeasement – a distracting musical diet of bread and circuses. Secondly, until the 1980s Stevens' patrimonial system was in fact kept relatively afloat and sustained, above all, the metropolitan elite which in turn might have well made available the financial means for sustaining a relatively thriving music scene – in Freetown that is. In connection to this, we might further speculate whether and to what extent Freetown's more "matured" live band scene was directly partaking in the patron-client arrangements.

With regard to the conjuncture of popular music and the socio-political meanings it yielded and carried in the 1970s, reggae music bears a particularly interesting – and intriguing – example. As across the African continent and the rest of the world, reggae emerged on Freetown's music scene in the early 1970s, with Bob Marley, Peter Tosh and Bunny Wailer as its main precursors. On the one hand, reggae became widely popular with those who felt marginalized by APC politics; above all, Freetown's unemployed youths and parts of the intelligentsia, mainly students from the Fourah Bay College (FBC). In so-called "potes" – popular gathering places in Freetown's ghettos – the two groups came together to hang out, to smoke marijuana, and to listen to reggae while discussing the revolutionary and "conscientizing" lyrics of the songs. This particular phenomenon of Freetown's youth (and music) culture was getting relatively much attention in the scholarly discussion about the origins of the RUF. Several scholars, among others, Abdullah (1997, 2005) and Rashid (2004), argue that it was in these pote-assemblies "wherein rebels were made" (Abdullah 2005: 174). Within these two groups, reggae became a means for the expression of opposition and aversion against "the system" – a sonic symbol of social and political non-conformism. On the other hand, reggae was soon incorporated into Freetown's popular dancing and live music scene. By the mid-1970s, many of

the famous dance bands included reggae songs and styles into their repertoires. The music score of Sabanah 75's "Arata poison", for example, was a one to one copy of The Wailer's 1973 hit "Stir it up". In this rather broad appeal, played on Freetown's major musical stages and listened to by Freetown's elite, the music appeared not to bear any obvious political or subversive connotations.

This ambiguous and contradictory role of, and meanings ascribed to, reggae calls into mind Quayson's (2003: xviii) concept of "intersectional and conjunctural phenomena", of which music can be thought of as a prime example. Freetown's 1970s reggae was multidimensional and "conjunctural". The music's significance for extra-musical domains – mainly in its relation to the socio-political set-up of Stevens' autocratic and repressive state – depended on the respective "actors" (that is audiences) that appropriated (i.e. listened and danced to) it. The "same" music was perceived by different people for different uses in different contexts, which in turn resulted in different and contradictory meanings of the allegedly similar musical phenomena. In the poves, reggae was a symbol of opposition. On the city's big music stages, it went in line with the entertainment practices of those "who were opposed". While the sounds resembled and in fact duplicated each other – thus connecting its divided listenerships on a sonic level, the contexts of their perception and consumption made their meanings diverge and contradict each other – thus disconnecting its listenerships again. By exhibiting these simultaneously interconnected and diverging trajectories of meaning, reggae revealed the foundational contradictions the social polyphony "inflicts" on music. As Adorno (1975: 186) put it, music's idiom expresses, more than any other artistic medium, the principle of antinomy and the absence of firm meanings.

## Popular music in the time of decay – the 1980s and 1990s

### Economic breakdown, technological advancements, and world music (1980s)

In the 1980s, Sierra Leone was descending into insolvency. Growing foreign debt, rampant inflation, currency devaluation, budget deficit, grand-scale corruption and declining exports wrenched the economy to several successive low-points and resulted in chronic shortages of food, fuel and electricity (Alie 2006: 109, 120-121). The public and government institutions were increasingly deprived of capital derived from natural resources, which the political elite used in order to sustain their patron-client relations. Very few public utilities were functioning. Social services, especially health and education, were degenerating. The country's infrastructures in general deteriorated (Conteh-Morgan & Dixon-Fyle 1999: 93-95). In the course of the 1980s, Sierra Leone's status in the UN system relegated from a low income country to the least of the less developed, and, by 1990, to the very least developed country in the world (UNDP 1990).

Unlike in the 1970s, the economic decline of the 1980s severely affected the music scene and market. Generally, the boom of locally produced popular music that characterized the two precedent decades came to an end. The era of live bands started to fade out already from the late 1970s onwards. Most live bands could not generate enough revenue to continue to be viable. Those who were successful and popular enough, left for other West African countries, to Europe or the US. The bands that did not manage to leave abroad slowly disappeared from the scene.

The collaboration between popular musicians and the political elite came to the fore more pronounced as a number of live performing groups remained on the scene through their connection to the state. Until his death in 1985, Ebenezer



Calendar and his band were the musical mainstay of most official celebrations and of radio and television broadcasts. A rare example of a popular dance band of the 1970s that managed to survive was Muyeh Power who, after an unsuccessful attempt to launch a career in the US, aligned with the political elite, changed their name into the APC Dance Band, and continued playing throughout the 1980s. The bands of the police, the military, and the prison, which existed already since decades but were eclipsed by the youthful dance bands of the 1960s and '70s, experiences even a sort of rebirth. Their revival was mainly connected to the 1980 OAU meeting, which was organized in Freetown and whose costs and the high-level corruption involved precipitated the country's subsequent economic collapse (Koroma 1996: 29-30). Dr Daddy Loco, who was appointed the new leader of the Prison Dance Band in 1979, told me that in the run-up to the meeting, all three bands were equipped with new instruments at the expense of the state and given an almost free financial rein to hire renowned musicians from the resolved popular dance bands. Daddy Loco made munificent use of this offer. He engaged eighteen musicians and managed to convince legendary guitarist Freddie Green to join them, who before played with the Super Combo. During the OAU meeting, the revamped bands then served as musical entertainment for the visiting head of states and their entourage. The Prison Dance Band was chosen to welcome the political celebrities at their arrival. Daddy Loco recalls the ceremonial:

I had many great musicians with the Prison Dance Band. So before the (OAU) meeting they came to me and ask me to compose a song for the OAU. I composed the music. When the meeting of the African Union came, they took us to the airport. For every president and prime minister who came down, we played the song for him. *Oh-yu, oh-yu, oh-yu, yu come down na Sierra Leone.*

The sharp economic decline that struck Sierra Leone's popular music scene in the 1980s was somewhat contradicted by the rise and rising affordability of new music-related technologies. The introduction of better and cheaper sound systems and instruments, most notably a new generation of audio amplifiers and the electronic keyboard, further aided the general decline of live band music. The set-up and engagement of a live performing band was an expensive enterprise. Some of the 1970s' ensembles consisted of up to ten or more musicians who all needed their instruments and payment. A single amplifier including speakers, two tape decks, a mixer and often a microphone, was easy to use and, most importantly, much cheaper. The so-called recording studios that sprung up in Freetown back in the 1970s made a reasonably good business renting out these sound systems for parties. They provided the music too. From their sales, we can get an impression of Freetown's popular tastes during the 1980s.

Pat Paul (Patrick Bangura) owned the most successful "recording studio" in the 1980s. I interviewed him about his main sales back in these years.

The best-selling records were the latest American soul artists. I always read the US charts. Then I knew what music people were coming to ask for the next day. The black music from America was very popular, Lionel Richie, Luther Vandross, Tina Turner, Jimmy Cliff, Michael Jackson – he was very big. (...) But we were selling much more. Soul was not the only music. You see, in Sierra Leone people don't like to listen to one music only. They want variety, different types. (...) We had our African music too, the dance music was going a lot: Congo music, Cameroon, Nigeria, Senegal, Accra, South Africa. (...) Reggae music: Jimmy Cliff, Burning Spear was big at that time, Bob Marley and Peter Tosh, many many many. (...) Then we had the world music, like Boney M., ABBA, Pink Floyd. There was a lot of them. People came asking for everything, like even for Mozart, Chopin. During some years, there was this choir from Finland, people were asking for them. And we found their record through a connection in England and we were selling it.

Pat Paul's recital of artists popular during the 1980s – which he, some thirty years later, was able to recall impromptu – well demonstrates the impressive diversity of music tastes and preferences that mark Freetown's soundscapes. The city's (black) Atlantic music culture expanded beyond its already wide shores into international ("world music") waters. Freetown's music audiences were keeping up with the latest international music trends (e.g. Michael Jackson) and exotica (e.g. Finnish Christmas carols) and steadily broadening the repertoire of songs and styles present in the city. From the late 1970s onwards, Pat Paul also began to import and sell cheap Chinese-produced cassette players (selling them for the 2.5-fold price of one cassette), thereby further enlarging its clientele and widening the channels for the dissemination of mass-produced music in people's homes. However, the music Pat Paul was apparently not selling throughout the 1980s was music from Sierra Leone. The recording of local musicians ceased almost completely. A few Sierra Leonean artists who lived and worked abroad made some recordings there. In most cases, though, their albums did not make it back to their home country. The relatively successful careers the musicians Ansumana Bangura and Seydou forged in Germany and Spain respectively appeared to have passed completely unnoticed in Freetown.

That is not to say that Sierra Leonean music was all gone. Various long-standing streams of local music were to be found in Freetown. Wandering guitarist played palm wine sounds around bars. Gombey continued its musical evolution, evolving into its latest offshoot miloh jazz – an accelerated, jumpy version of gombey, characterized by the sounds of emptied Milo-chocolate cans filled with stones (Nunley 1987: 164-167). Temne-originating bobo-music played on horns and pipes (e.g. exhaust pipes) had made its ways into Freetown. Mende-accordionist Salia Koroma and the Temne-musicians Bassie and Sorie playing the *kondi*, a local version of the thumb piano, were fairly famous in Freetown and throughout the country (Hinzen *et al.* 1987: 315-324). Their music, though, was confined to social gatherings and events, like weddings, funeral wakes, social club celebration, ceremonies of secret societies, and the regular

masquerades.<sup>1</sup> “Street music” and “traditional music” are the rather pejorative terms several of my informants used when speaking of local music in the 1980s. With the disappearance of popular dance bands, Freetown’s local music was set back to a rural, “traditional” character. It could not match up to the modernist appeal of internationally-produced pop music, which became increasingly widespread with the introduction of better and more affordable technologies. However, despite the dearth of local recordings and some derisive comments by future generations, the number of music styles from the Sierra Leonean provinces present, played and listened to in Freetown speaks of the perpetual appeal the music had – and still has – to the townfolk. Not least, it further underlines the city audiences’ characteristic drive for musical variety and diversity.

### War (and) revival (1990s)

In the long history of scholarly work on Freetown’s and Sierra Leone’s society, the 1990s are doubtlessly the decade which triggered most interest and the greatest output of publications produced within various disciplines. However, this increased interest was almost unitarily focused on aspects related to the civil war (1991-2002). Popular music disappeared from the academic agenda. The few authors who included some references to popular music focus exclusively on the influence of foreign music in relation to war-related issues; for example, Marc Sommers (2003) and Jeremy Prestholdt (2009) who both speak of the imaginary and symbolic dimension 2Pac’s music had on the RUF. The developments in the local music industry attracted basically no attention. In the few works that deal with the popular music scene after the war, in turn, the preceding period of the 1990s is vaguely described as continuing the doldrums into which local popular music went in the 1980s (Alexander 2007; Djedje 2000; Posthumus *et al.* 2006; Spencer 2008).

On the one hand, foreign music – mainly music from across the (black) Atlantic world (US, Latin-America, West and Central Africa) – was in fact very prominent in the 1990s scene. However, this was not any new phenomenon but rather in line with developments going as far back as to the very foundation of the Freetown colony in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century. The growing availability and affordability of music-related technologies, first and foremost the steadily increasing presence of cassette-players and radio receivers which began to be imported and distributed on an ever-broader basis from the late 1980s onwards, further fastened the alignment of Freetown’s music audiences to international music scenes. On the other hand, it was in the 1990s that a new industry of local music

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<sup>1</sup> For a more exhaustive account of traditional instruments and music styles played in Freetown in the early 1980s, see van Oven (1982).

recording emerged. Particularly with regard to the decline that marked the 1980s, the local popular music scene and the music market experienced a relative, if not outright, revival during the 1990s. One of the main factors that enabled this development was the introduction of yet newer and more affordable music-related technologies.

Tellingly, the revival started in 1991 with a *Tascam Portastudio* – a cassette-based, four track recording machine. A Nigerian businessman imported the machine to Freetown and transformed his music tape-copying studio, the Music and Disco Center (MDC), into an actual recording studio for local musicians.<sup>2</sup> MDC's initial output was fairly limited. The releases proved nevertheless immediately popular. For the first time in years, Freetown had its very own music hits pressed on cassettes which circulated around the town's bars, clubs and homes. While the era of MDC lasted only for two years (its owner left the country in 1993), the enterprise of local recording was taken up by another company: Super Sound.<sup>3</sup> Before its launching in Freetown, Super Sound operated as a music production studio in Monrovia. As Charles Taylor's forces approached Liberia's capital in late 1990, the company's owner fled to Freetown, taking along his recording and production equipment. From its first releases in mid-1992, Super Sound became a mainstay of Sierra Leone's local music industry.

Prompted by this newly arising recording industry, Freetown's cassette sellers came together and formed the Sierra Leone Cassette Sellers Association (CSA). The CSA then aligned with Super Sound and consecutively first centralized then monopolized the music production and distribution market in Freetown and subsequently in the whole of Sierra Leone. From 1992 onwards, basically all local music manufacturing was carried out by Super Sound while the distribution of local music, and later on of most foreign music as well, was in the sole hands of the CSA. In the course of the 1990s, the CSA grew from a couple of dozen members at the time of its formation in 1992 to about two thousand members by 2001.<sup>4</sup> During the same period, Super Sound produced and released about six hundred and fifty albums of some four hundred different local artists and groups. Given, firstly, Sierra Leone's population size (about five million in the 1990s) and, secondly, the virtual standstill of local music recording during the 1970s and 1980s, the music production numbers of the 1990s are in fact suggesting not only a revived but even a fairly thriving industry and market.

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<sup>2</sup> The information about the history of MDC recording derives from an interview I conducted with a former MDC employee.

<sup>3</sup> The information about Super Sound's early beginnings derives from an interview I conducted with its sales manager.

<sup>4</sup> From CSA's membership-records, which I examined in early 2010, the growth reads as follows: about 20 members in 1991 growing to about 1,000 in 1996, to 2,000 in 2001 and reaching some 4,500 members by the end of 2007, the recent economic peak of Sierra Leone's local music market.

From its outset in 1991, this newly revived local music industry entangled in a contradictive relationship with the civil war. On the one hand, the gravely destabilizing effects the war had on all spheres of Sierra Leone's society obviously obstructed developments of the local music market. The instable and further deteriorating economy, the succession of turbulent political changes, the climate of violence and fear, the vast number of dislocated and dispossessed people etc. all hindered the flourishing local music industry. On the other hand, the war – or rather the topos of war – also served local musicians as a sort of gateway into the music scene, not least because it gave artists plenty of material to sing about, and to sing against.

This indirect symbiosis between the reviving local music industry and the war was particularly evident in the career of Steady Bongo (Lansana Sherrif). Born in the eastern province of Kailahun, Steady came to Freetown in the late 1980s, where he rambled about Freetown's night clubs as a solo-performer backed by a small keyboard. In 1990, he was discovered by the owner of the MDC and became their very first release – Sierra Leone's first locally produced hit-cassette "Ready before you married" (1991). Subsequently, Steady became Sierra Leone's most popular musician of the 1990s, recording a new album every year and tirelessly touring up and down the country, that is as far as the circumstances of the ongoing conflict allowed him to. The story he told me about his first album release exemplifies the intricate connection between the newly emerging generation of popular musicians and the unfolding war, which simultaneously hampered many music careers while also promoting them.

I released my first album in early 1991. And that was when the war broke out. I was in Freetown from where I went to Kenema. I wanted to go further to Kailahun, my home. I had about five cartons of cassettes. And I wanted to launch them in my hometown. But when I reached Kenema, I got the message that the rebels attacked.<sup>5</sup> So I stayed at Kenema and just sold my album there. From then on, most of my songs during the war were about peace; about how to bring the war to an end. My songs were very popular because they were important. I was singing against the war. Every year a new album against the war. During eleven years of war, I made ten albums against it. Now I have the blessing of the people, because I did something good. My music helped to bring the war to an end.

Steady Bongo spearheaded the local war/peace music scene throughout the decade. Hundreds of others followed his example. In a rather indirect but nevertheless marking way, the conflict began to "feed" the reviving local music scene. This development is well-documented in the catalogue Super Sound kept about its releases, which is (almost) complete until the beginning of 2001 and which I inspected and recorded during my fieldwork. In around one third of the albums Super Sound released during the 1990s (that is, about 250 out of 650

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<sup>5</sup> The RUF invaded Sierra Leone from Liberia crossing the eastern border near Kailahun on March 23, 1991.

albums), the musicians made strong references to the war. At times, these references included only a single song which then often became the album's catchy title. Often, a whole album's track list was an apposition of songs for peace. It furthermore appears that, in the course of time and of the enduring conflict, local musicians even began to take the "singing against the war/for peace" as a sort of teaser to promote and sell their music. From the mid-1990s onwards, more and more album covers were somewhat "adorned" with slogans such as "stop the war" and "we want peace" while the respective albums' (lyrical) contents not necessarily dealt with war or peace. Thus beside the obvious ideological intentions to help promoting peace and to end the war the musicians exhibited, an apparent commercial, marketing-oriented aspect came to it too.

The rest of the albums Super Sound released during the years of war, which in fact formed the larger group, can be assembled under the vague but common characteristic of *not* making any references to the war or peace. This "group", in turn, points towards an aspect which appears to be widely undermined if not even somewhat concealed in many scientific (and non-scientific) representations of Sierra Leone's and Freetown's society in the 1990s, namely that despite the ongoing war there was an ongoing "normality" as well. This striving for normality, mirrored in Super Sound's diverse music output, expressively contradicts the somewhat vulgar but fairly common representations of the country in that period as a hatchery of anarchy – exemplarily formulated by Robert Kaplan (1993) who depicted Sierra Leone as an archetypical example for Africa's post-Cold War "new barbarism"<sup>6</sup>. Besides staging musical protests against war and violence, the 1990s' generation of Sierra Leone's new popular (recording) musicians expressed a strong drive for keeping up with developments in international pop music trends and styles, for recreating and localizing global symbols and imaginaries of modernity embedded in and transmitted through new media, and – most importantly – to add their own imprints onto its surfaces. In their music they sang about things as "banal" and "ordinary" as love and sex, about new notions of masculinity, about adolescence, money, adventures, dance, gossip, football, food, consumption etc. In a context in which global media and academia reduced Sierra Leone to a sort of abbreviation for Africa's new barbarism, the *not*-singing about war and peace, the "omitting" of the topics of violence and war by Sierra Leonean artists became a statement in itself. It expressed, on the one hand, a nascent and increasingly pronounced war fatigue and, on the other hand, forthright outcries for recognition of their belonging to the post-Cold War, (post)-modern world order.

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<sup>6</sup> Paul Richards coined the term in his critique of Kaplan's thesis (Richards 1996: xiii-xxv).

Musically, the new recording era embraced Sierra Leone's extensive and exponentially growing variety of both old and new styles and genres. Religious music had begun to merge into popular music forms, encompassing a wide range of musical styles and expressions, and soon catering for the biggest record output. A broad variety of traditional musicians from Sierra Leone's provinces recorded their music on Super Sound's cassettes. Recordings of late musicians were re-produced and re-released in the new format. Numerous variations of "traditional pop" – that is, music based more or less on traditional music styles but performed in a popular format and often with new electronic instruments (mainly the electronic keyboard) – sprung up. Gumbey, palm wine, bobo, maringa and other older styles were revamped. Meanwhile, the youngest layers of the new generation began to take up and experiment with various forms of latest Western music styles – particularly rap and hip hop, which had their first local adaptations in the early 1990s. Reggae music, often fused with local styles, had a steady output of albums. The somewhat peculiar local genre of "sentimentals" emerged, including most tawdry love-ballads and "broken hearts" compilations. Latest variations of US-American-influenced disco-funk, R&B, and country music entered the scene. Central African soukous music, present and popular in Sierra Leone since the 1960s, accomplished a last stage of localization and turned into "slouk".

### Erratic politics and a defiant music industry

With regard to political and economic developments, the 1990s were a most erratic era. In 1992, a young military junta ousted the APC. The country in general, and the youths in particular, welcomed the coup plotters and gave them their support in the belief that the new military regime, which adopted the name National Patriotic Ruling Council (NPRC), would introduce positive changes after years of failed leadership and a ruined economy (Richards 1996: 9). In the first months of the NPRC administration, Sierra Leone experienced a relative economic recovery. With the help of loans from the IMF, the World Bank, and the European Union an economy recovery program was launched. Salaries of all public sector workers (civil servants, teachers, security personnel) were substantially increased; mining contracts were revised; the institutional support for farmers was strengthened; the health sector rehabilitated; and for the first time in years, Freetown enjoyed continuous supply with fuel and electricity (Alie 2006: 141-143).

With parts of the new state authorities – including the state leader – being well under thirty years of age (the new head of state, Captain Valentine Strasser, was only twenty-five years old), the influences on the music scene were significant. The youths of Sierra Leone could easily relate with the new regime, and vice

versa. They shared similar social backgrounds, went through similar experiences, and appreciated the same kinds of culture and music. The symbolic dimension that youth music took on during the NPRC era became evident at the day of the coup, as the SLBS played continuous reggae and hip hop. Soon after that, Captain Valentine Strasser's personal musical favourite, Nigerian Sonny Okosun's "African Soldiers", became a major hit in Freetown. Bob Marley, Peter Tosh, 2pac Shakur and other popular music heroes became the emblems of the new regime. In spontaneous outbursts of admiration, youths began to paint the portraits of popular music figures next to the portraits of the leaders of the NPRC revolution across the walls of Freetown and the country (Opala 1994). A form of greeting derived from reggae culture – by saying "one love" (from Bob Marley's popular song "One Love"), pressing one's own fist against the other's, and pulling its back to one's chest – became a solidarity symbol of the new administration. Even though the smoking of marijuana became not legalized, its prosecution was virtually suspended. Music that used to be a main element of a subversive youth subculture in the 1970s and '80s, mainly reggae and later on American rap and hip hop, suddenly became (political) mainstream. Unprecedented in Sierra Leone's history, and maybe even in modern world history, youth culture and youth music became identified with the political establishment. However, the NPRC's "revolutionary aura" (Opala 1994: 197) did not last long. Despite the good beginning, the regime soon fell into the same morass of false promises and corruption that characterized the old administration (Abraham 2004; Alie 2006: 145-146).

In 1996, new hopes were raised as the first free election since more than two decades were held. The newly elected government was vehemently pursuing peace talks with the RUF, leading to a first peace agreement in late 1996. At that time, an estimated fifty percent of Sierra Leone's rural population was displaced (Alie 2006: 162). As hundreds of thousands sought refuge in the capital, Freetown adopted the unofficial title of the "largest refugee camp in the world". The new administration faced a host of daunting challenges (*ibid.*: 169-175). Politically, the country was in a deep crisis as many influential supporters of the before ousted APC regime were in keen opposition to the new administration. Despite the peace agreement, the war aggravated again and led to a worsening security situation. Economic considerations created a powerful interest in keeping the conflict going. Apart from the RUF and their foreign allies, soldiers, disgruntled politicians, local and foreign business people did not want the war to end quickly, for pursuing selfish motives (Harding 1997; Keen 2003). The economic condition was no better. Export earnings had slumped; debts were as high as never before; most sectors of the formal economy were at a standstill.



Despite – or *in spite of* – the manifold political, economic and social problems, the local music scene continued its relative revival. As before in the 1980s, the increased availability of new and more affordable media and music-related technologies played a central role in that development. In the early 1990s, first private radio stations emerged and provided additional channels for the dissemination of, particularly, locally produced music.<sup>7</sup> Several new recording studios started to emerge in Freetown as well, giving the local music production further impulses. In 1994, a British returnee (Sam Jones) introduced the very first digital recording equipment to Freetown. In 1996 Sierra Leone saw its first release of a Compact Disc (though, the CD was produced in the US): *Steady Bongo's* by then eighth album “Kormot bi en me”. In the same year, Super Sound's release output reached a new record high with around 90 new releases (between 1993 and '95, the annual release output was around 50 albums). The production of “war/peace music” reached new peaks as almost every second album included some comments on the ongoing war. Super Sound and the CSA became more active in promoting their artists, regularly organizing album launching shows and so-called “Discoramas”, parties that served local artists as performing venues.

### The AFRC coup's contradictory effects

The musical revival came to an abrupt halt in May 1997. An army break-away group staged a coup, ousted the recently elected government, and formed a junta – the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). Major Koroma became head of state. He suspended the constitution, banned demonstrations, and abolished political parties. The AFRC linked up with the RUF and invited the rebels to come out of the bush and join them to administer the country. The AFRC coup, coupled with the coming of rebels to Freetown, was characterized by extreme lawlessness and widespread looting (Gberie 2004).

Generally, the violent months of the AFRC revised many developments the local music scene had achieved during the preceding years. Freetown's night life ceased abruptly as the AFRC enforced a curfew. Apart from a few and fairly unpopular “soldier discos”, no concerts or parties were being held. Yet, some party organizers subverted the curfew, secretly staging “curfew parties”.<sup>8</sup> To-

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<sup>7</sup> In 1992, the Christian station Believer's Broadcast Network went on air in Freetown. In 1994, Kiss FM started its broadcast in Bo; the same year, Sky radio began its broadcast in Freetown. In 1995, former BBC reporter of Sierra Leonean origin, Hilton Fyle, launched his WBIG radio in Freetown.

<sup>8</sup> James, who attended several of such “curfew parties” during the AFRC era, gave me the following description of the proceedings: “People were invited to come to the appointed spot in the early evening, before the curfew started. As the curfew began, the doors were closed and people danced throughout the night until the end of the curfew, knowing that they could not go out on the streets were rebels were looting and killing people. In the early morning, when the curfew was over, the doors opened again and people were going back to their homes again.”

gether with the majority of business people, professionals, and others who could afford it, many musicians fled the country. The newly emerged private radio stations were closed down as most of the employees and DJs refused to comply with the junta. SLBS, the national broadcasting service, became a mouthpiece of the new regime (Gberie 2004: 148). The trade embargo put forward against Sierra Leone by the ECOWAS and supported by the international community severely affected all sections of society and the economy. The local music production was halted completely. Many bars, clubs, and music shops were looted and shot down.

There were, however, two related developments that somewhat contradicted the general decline that characterized the music scene during the AFRC time. Two months after the coup, a clandestine radio station, Radio Democracy 98.1, was launched at Lungi airport near Freetown. The radio station was an initiative of the ousted (SLPP) government with assistance from the ECOMOG troops (Gberie 2004: 156). It became a stronghold for providing opposite views on the political situation and developments and for propagating against the AFRC – Olu Gordon called it “guerilla journalism” (2004: 188). Several of my informants told me that many people made a lot of effort to listen to the station. As one of them, Patrick, recalls:

It was a very powerful station; in Freetown and in the provinces. Everybody was eager to listen to their encouraging voice. People were buying those small-small radios and make a great effort to find the batteries for it. People would mount wires high up trees and they would hide them. Because, by that time, people were harassed by the junta not to listen to this radio. And if they [the AFRC] see that you tried to catch that signal, they would loot your house or even kill you. So people would hide the wires in the trees, wind it around the trunks secretly, dig it under the ground and connect it secretly with the radios in their houses so that they could listen.

The popularity of Radio Democracy was also grounded in the music the station played. King Millan (Mohamed Bangura), today a famous Sierra Leone’s television and radio presenter, remembers the music selection the station made:

They were playing freedom songs, liberation songs, so that the people have the idea that the AFRC was an illegitimate government and that the people should build up the courage to free themselves out of the kind of bondage the AFRC put them into. They helped a lot in popularizing many songs. And the songs also helped to popularize the station. It was a lot of reggae music they played, conscious music; many of the big Jamaican artists, Bob Marley and Buju Banton. Steady Bongo’s music had a lot of airtime. The biggest hit was the sinking ship song [by *The Gypsy*, 1986], a calypso from Trinidad. It was all very meaningful music.

While the junta caused the local music production drop to zero, chased away musicians, and generally left Freetown’s population in a state of shock, by triggering the emergence of Radio Democracy, the AFRC indirectly also aided the broadening of popular music’s appeal and reach – and thus audiences. Although the prime reason for people to buy a radio and make the effort to listen

to it was not the music Radio Democracy played but their “encouraging voices”, the “freedom songs” helped to bear the experienced distress and suppression. In fact, the paradoxical relation between, on the one hand, a life in fear and extreme hardship and, on the other hand, the emergence of new channels for the dissemination of music that characterized the AFRC period can be seen as summing up the similarly contradictory patterns that marked the 1980s and 1990s. New music-related technologies, combined with people’s volition and necessity to carry (and *musick*) on, defied the otherwise adverse circumstances Freetown’s music and society experienced since the early 1980s.

### Too stubborn to surrender

ECOMOG troops ousted the AFRC from Freetown in February 1998 and returned the exiled SLPP government to power. Nine months of AFRC rule had completely ruined the economy and whatever social infrastructure they had inherited. The security situation was still much tensed. The AFRC forces had been defeated, but not eliminated. The notorious brutality many Freetonians saw and experienced during the AFRC junta had stricken the town with fear. Material and psychological recovery was a long way to go. The local music scene and market, which had sustained a substantial set-back, began their recovery and in fact facilitated the economical and mental retrieval in gaining traction. Some night clubs, which began to reopen in patches right after the ECOMOG reclaimed the city, attempted to stimulate Freetown’s population to go out at nights, and visit their parties, by reviving the well-tried custom of so-called “Ladies’ Nights” at which female visitors had free entrance what in turn was meant to attract more male visitors. Super Sound and the Cassette Sellers Association restarted their album releasing and distributing business, and progressively began to reforge their old structures. In dearth of new local recordings, they raised the output of foreign albums. Two new waves of foreign music were at the forefront of the late 1990s scene. With the increased troop deployment of the ECOMOG, which consisted to most parts of Nigerian soldiers, new popular music from Nigeria newly gained in prominence. The returning refugees from camps in Guinea, in turn, brought francophone sounds with them.

As the music scene further gained momentum during the festive season around Christmas and New Year’s Eve in 1998, RUF/AFRC rebels attacked Freetown in the morning hours of January 6<sup>th</sup>, 1999. The rebels devastated the city, opening prisons, killing and abducting thousands of people, and burning down many parts of the city (David 1999). In the course of their burning and looting-campaign through Freetown, the aligned rebel forces also destroyed Sierra Leone’s national musical archives which were attached to the SLBS studios. Several generations of recordings burst into flames. The RUF/AFRC invasion left Freetown’s popu-

lation panic-stricken. Easy Eye, a musician and radio DJ, trenchantly subsumed the effects the two successive shocks of the AFRC junta and the January 6-invasion had on Freetown's society and music scene:

The (AFRC) junta turned the clock backwards fifty years, seriously, one hundred years backwards into the Dark Ages. Everything was going down. We, the musicians, lost our profession. But we returned. The city started to breathe again. (...) When the rebels returned January 6<sup>th</sup>, things turned very bad again. They turned the clock backwards to the Stone Ages. But we returned again. We were too stubborn to surrender.



*Photo 9.1* At Pat Paul's recording studio, Freetown, early 1980s (courtesy of Pat Paul)



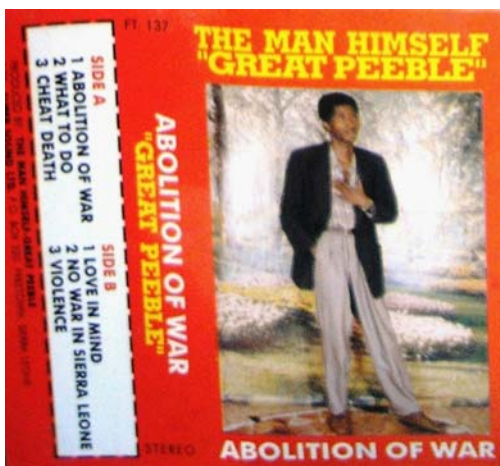
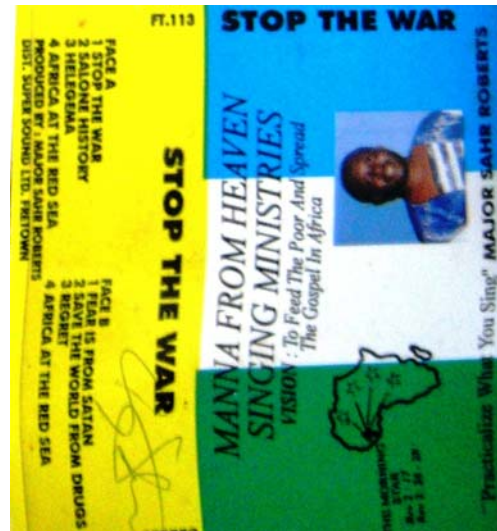
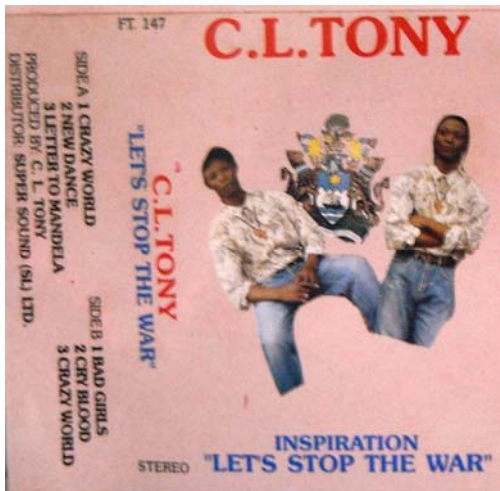
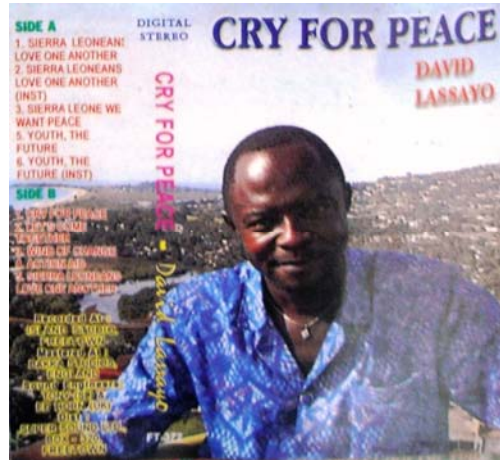
*Photo 9.2* Dr. Daddy Loco & his Miloh Jazz Band, Freetown, mid-1980s (courtesy of Michael "Dr Daddy" Loco)



Photo 9.3 Cassette stall, downtown Freetown, September 2010.

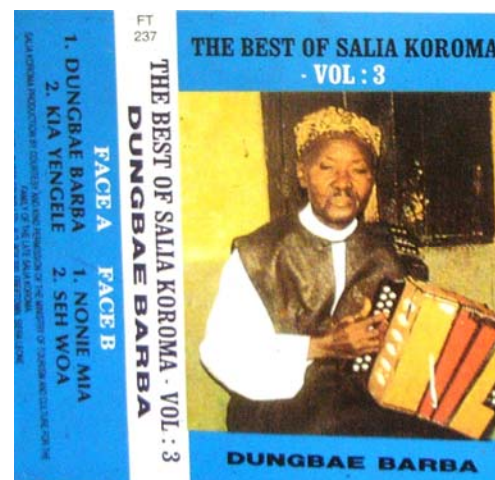
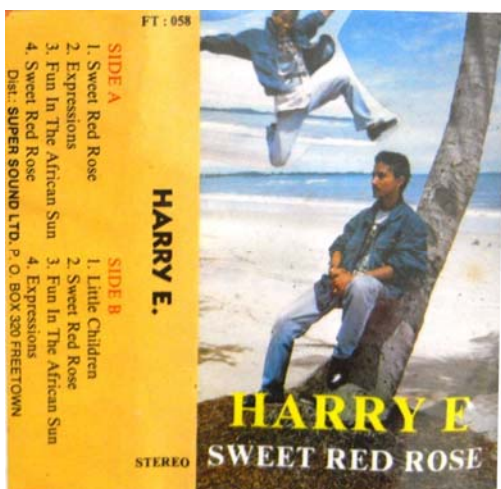
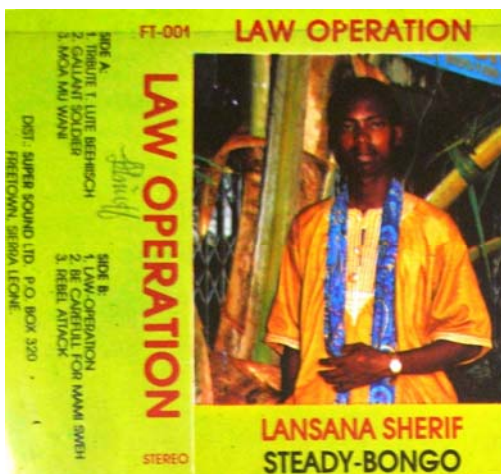


Photo 9.4 Street (re)recordings, Freetown, September 2010.



Photos 9.5-9.10 Examples of Super Sound 1990's "war/peace music" album covers. Year of release (read anti-clockwise from top left): 1995, 1995, 1994, 1995, 1994, 1998.

Chapter 9: Popular music in the time of decay



Photos 9.11-9.16

Examples of Super Sound 1990's "non-war/peace music" album covers. Year of release (read anti-clockwise from top left): 1992, 1993, 1993, 1997, 1996, 1996.



*DISCO*nnecti*o*ns



*Photos 9.17-9.20* Freetown's cassette seller, 2009/10.

## Post-war boom and post-election decline

### A new beginning

After the shock of the January 6<sup>th</sup> invasion, Freetown's local music scene in fact revived relatively quickly. The new millennium brought the scene to new highs. Already before the official declaration of the war's end in January 2002, developments in the local music scene had anticipated the general mood of euphoria and expectations that came along with the conclusion of peace. The reiterated revival started in 1999 with the return of Jimmy B. (Jimmy Bangura) to Freetown. Local media often describe Jimmy B. as the "bedrock", the "pace setter", or even the "godfather" of new Sierra Leonean music. Sierra Leonean-born Jimmy B. left for the US in the late 1980s. After a quite adventurous life of travel and music making in the US, the UK, and finally South Africa, he returned to Freetown and brought with him a lot of new music and marketing know-how, new digital recording equipment, and, not least, money. He set up a recording studio called Paradise Records, which became the launching pad for many young musicians. In 2000, Paradise Records released a first compilation featuring 15 different groups and artists, entitled "Best of Sierra Leone". The album triggered what might be called the "post-war boom" of Sierra Leonean music.

In a relatively short time, hundreds of new artists emerged. The numbers of locally produced, released and sold albums reached new records. A couple of thousands of music sellers – in most parts still organized in the structures of the CSA – made a relatively good living with their business. The airwaves and dance floors were soon dominated by local music. Some commentators even spoke of the music business as "one of the country's fastest growing industries" (Graham 2007). The boom of locally produced music lasted from 2000 until its sudden decline after the general elections in 2007. The wide popularity local music and musicians enjoyed in these years is difficult to explain. A number of factors appeared to have played a role in the processes involved. The initial impulse

Jimmy B. and his Paradise Records gave was certainly an influential factor, but not the only one.

Several of my interviewees from the local music industry tried to explain the vast and sudden popularity of Jimmy B. and the musicians he fostered by pointing towards two factors: (1) the modern digital recording technology he brought into Freetown's music scene; and (2) the strong orientation towards (many called it bluntly "copying of") popular western music styles, mainly American hip hop and R&B and Jamaican reggae and dancehall music. The first factor, the sophisticated recording, might have well played a role in the initial popularization of Jimmy B.'s artists and their music. Compared to many local recordings of the 1990s, Jimmy B.'s productions were indeed characterized by a new and more sophisticated quality. The second explanatory factor, however, the "copying" of western music, appears rather unsustainable as Freetown's popular musicians were successfully adopting Western popular music styles already since decades; that is, at least, since the late 1950s when many live bands started to adopt the styles of Western pop music stars. The strong orientation of Sierra Leone's local popular musicians towards Western music, in particular the music of the (black) Atlantic, is a historical constant.

A number of other, interrelated factors further added to, and facilitated, the after-war boom of Freetown's music scene in general and of locally produced popular music in particular.

## Spirit of renewal

With the conclusion of peace, a cautious but nevertheless tangible optimism captured most Freetonians. Michael Jackson (2004: 70-71) describes the sanguine atmosphere that prevailed shortly after the end of the war in the following way:

Poda podas were called Better Days Are Coming, Human Right, and O Life at Last. A fishing boat on Lumley Beach had been named Democracy. People were wearing t-shirts saying "Forgive and Reconcile for National Development." And everywhere there were vehicles and offices belonging to NGOs and UN agencies, with *reconstruction*, *rehabilitation*, *reconciliation*, and *resettlement* the recurring words. One could not help but be affected by the ostensible spirit of renewal.

Sierra Leone embarked on a transition process. After many years of authoritarian rule, military regimes, a ruined economy, and a devastating war, expectations were high for political and socio-economic changes and a more stable future. "Peace and Nation Building" became central notions for local and international policy makers. In the implementation of nation-building programmes, local musicians were ascribed the role of intermediaries. With the financial sponsoring of international donors, NGOs engaged many local musicians in several so-called peace concerts and festivals, using the musicians' voices to

spread the message of peace, reconstruction and reconciliation, but also engaging them for the recording of albums. Examples of these peace concerts in which popular – and newly popularized – musicians toured the country include the big UNAMSIL-sponsored concert of Jimmy B.’s artists in 2000, which took place in the northern town of Makeni; the annual “Search for Common Grounds” concert organized by NGO-founded Talking Drum Studio from 2001 to 2005, in which a large group of local popular musicians, spearheaded by Steady Bongo, were engaged to tour the whole country; and the UNDP-sponsored “Artists for Peace” concerts before general elections in 2002 and 2007 (Spencer 2008). Through their engagement in nation-building, and with the international community’s sponsoring help to widen the channels of local popular music’s dissemination, many local musicians gained fame as advocates of a new era.

The significantly raised influx of money into Sierra Leone added another stimulating force. In the post-war years, billions of dollars were made available by international donors for reconstruction, nation building, reconciliation etc. (some 2,500 million US dollars between 2002 and 2007).<sup>1</sup> This, partly very unsustainable, boosting of Sierra Leone’s and, in particular, Freetown’s economy stipulated the local markets – and by this also the local music market. One of the most tangible effects of this boost was the literal mushrooming of newly opened and reopened night clubs that took place in Freetown from the early 2000s onwards (see Chapter 16). The soaring number of NGO employees present in the country, which comprised of both expats and locals, further added to the increase demand for (musical) entertainment.

## Radio, recordings, and re-recordings

Yet another factor was the fast and vast growth of increasingly affordable technologies and media for music production, dissemination and consumption. This facilitated in particular three related developments which added significantly to the post-war boom of the local music scene and market.

Firstly, in the years after war Sierra Leone saw a virtually explosive proliferation of new, private-run radio stations. In 1999, only about five stations existed in the whole of Sierra Leone. In Freetown alone, about three to four new stations entered the airwaves every year from 2000 onwards. While several stations closed down almost as quickly as they were opened, the total number climbed to some twenty four local radio stations by the end of 2009. Dozens of other private and community-run stations sprung up in the provinces (BBC 2006: 31-33). In line with the role of nation builders local musicians adopted, radio DJs

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<sup>1</sup> The estimate is calculated from the figures about the official development assistance (net inflow), see Statistisches Bundesamt (2009, Table A 25.4).

began to foster local music as well. After the war, several newly emerging radio stations specialized on the play of local music. By creating new and broadening existent channels for its dissemination, they significantly helped to popularize locally produced music. Subsequently, a sort of domino effect was triggered. As local music became more and more popular, the proliferating local stations played it as well, thereby further adding to the popularity of the music, and reinforcing the circle of playing what is popular and making popular what is being played, that is local music.

Secondly, the proliferating radio stations were continuously fed with newly produced local music from the ever-faster growing number of emerging recording studios and record labels. In the mid-1990s, there were about five recording studios in Freetown. With the subsequently fastened pace of the “democratization” of recording technologies, and spurred by the general trend towards local music, the number shoot up to approximately sixty recording studios in Freetown by the end of 2009.<sup>2</sup> Many of these are fairly basic home-recording stalls, equipped with a computer, a microphone, a keyboard and a mixer. In many instances, the quality of these home-grown recordings is not particularly up to scratch. Owners of small studios hold down the costs. Engineers are often as inexperienced musically – and technically – as many of the recording artists, resulting at times in template-like sound-tracks used for many different artists in which only the singing differs. On the other hand, the extremely fast developing digital recording and mastering technologies increasingly diminish the disparity between expensive, sophisticated recording technologies and cheaper down-market versions run on PCs. The “democratization” of technologies – that is, the growing spread and affordability of computers, hardware and software – promoted a “democratization” of recordings. During the new heydays of Freetown’s locally produced popular music in the early 2000s to late 2007, dozens of new songs and singles were produced every day.

Thirdly, with the advancing of new, “better” and cheaper recording technologies, the means for duplicating music became more widespread as well – music piracy began to flourish. In fact, music pirates were not a particularly new phenomenon in Freetown. Since at least the late 1960s the so-called recording studios provided the city with copied cassettes. During the 1980s, Freetown’s music record market was basically run by pirates. However, in these years, pirates were mainly engaged in copying and selling foreign music. Local music was not much affected because new records of local musicians barely existed, while older local recordings were not much in demand. During the 1990s, as a new local recording industry emerged, piracy was still not much of an issue because the CSA and Super Sound were holding the reins over Sierra Leone’s

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<sup>2</sup> I derived this number from estimates music producers and musicians made in interviews with me.

music production and sales. It became an issue in the course of the post-war boom. As the market grew and diversified, more and more music (re)producers sprung up, undermining the structures of the CSA/Super Sound monopoly, and began to supply many sellers with copied versions of both international and local albums. The presence of pirated records soared with the proliferation of CD players and computers around the mid-2000s, which made it increasingly easy to produce hundreds of copies of an album or to compile a selection of latest hit songs.

It is a commonplace that music piracy considerably thwarts any local music industry's progress (though, there are some substantiated arguments against this assumption; e.g. Fisher 2004). Pirates sap the monetary chain of investment and profits which keeps music producers, distributors, (official) sellers and artists in business. These dynamics were also at work in the boom Sierra Leone's music industry experienced after the war. However, the undermining effects piracy has on the local music output in other, more formal market structures were not that clear-cut in the case of Sierra Leone's music market. On the one hand, the emergent business of piracy did deprive many investors, producers, sellers and artists of their revenues. On the other hand, piracy was a central force in creating the conditions in which local music became (re)popularized in the first place. By undercutting the official prices for albums and by introducing hit-compilations of local music (compilations of international records were among the main business ventures of the tape-copying "recording studios" from the 1960s onwards), pirates vastly broadened the scope of record consumers. In short, through the pirates' bargain, the less privileged layers of Freetown's society began to purchase records as well. In some cases, young, (yet) unknown musicians began to creatively adapt to the new market structures pirates created. Instead of following the production, release and distribution paths set by Super Sound and the CSA – which became increasingly unfavourable for the musicians, leaving them with puny shares of the sales-profits – musicians began to cooperate with pirates, who supplied them with "bootlegged" versions of their own songs. One of Freetown's major pirates explained to me the procedures this clandestine cooperation follows:

The CSA price control is too expensive for the artists. Many artists only record one, two songs. They don't make the full album at once. It is too expensive. So many come to me with one, two songs, so that I put their songs on compilations to make them popular. Some call them "underground artists". But they are not really underground, they are just poor. And sometimes, when I play their songs, they become popular, their songs hit the city. And people demand this album. But it is only a single, they don't have the whole album. But if people demand it, they will produce the whole album. This is how it goes.

## Musicalizing protest, politicizing music

A last main and maybe the most decisive single factor that aided the post-war boom of locally produced popular music was the new political dimension much of the music took on. In line with the (mediatory) role musicians began to assume in the process of peace and nation building – thus as promoters of democracy – more and more local singers also began to act as protectors of democracy. Protest music entered the stage and became a major force of traction and attraction for the burgeoning local music scene and market.

Initially, the musicians were not taking side for any political party or faction. Their critical lyrics railed against the state of the State as such. A young trio, the Jungle Leaders, pointed the way with their 2001-release “Da System”. Tellingly, the group was formed in one of the refugee camps in Guinea many Sierra Leoneans had fled to during the AFRC era. The experience of war laid the foundations for much of the new protest music. The songs reflected the growing awareness and fear that the political class was about to lead back the country into the fatal combination of rampant corruption, misrule, and mass poverty that preceded and eventually led to the armed conflict. However, in the early 2000s, as the first protest songs began to enter the scene, the phenomenon was still at the musical margins, eclipsed by the optimism and expectations that came with the conclusion of peace. The results of the 2002 general elections markedly underlined the prevailing sentiments. The incumbent SLPP scored a resounding victory, as Kandeh (2003) assumes, mainly because they were credited as the architects of the country’s relative peace and tranquility.

Soon, though, the climate among the Sierra Leonean public began to change. The feeling of elation brought about by the end of the war was progressively superseded by disillusionment with the political and socio-economic realities of the post-war years. As the expected social changes and improvements did not arrive with the promised pace, protest music gained more and more momentum. The songs provided an expressive valve for the population’s rising levels of anger with the ruling class who proved incapable of leading the fight against the scourges of corruption and mass deprivation. To large parts, the vast appeal of the music was propelled by the satirical tinge through which the artists conveyed their political engagement. As traditional singers in the chief’s entourage were debunking their ruler’s decision through lyrics and as earlier recording artists of the kind of Dirty Scrubbs gained fame by rhyming about social malaises, the latest generation of protest musicians wrapped their critiques of those who (mis-) govern in ridicule, subjecting their bad politics to derision. Their mocking lyrics about Sierra Leone’s ruling class were at times so poignant and sharp that rumours started circulating whether the young artists actually came up with the

verses themselves or if they were written by some creative and censorious seniors from the university.

Reminiscent of Nigerian Yabis music (Olatunji 2009), the danceable rhythms most of the songs were sang to further spurred the success of many “protest song stars” and their music. Among the numerous figures who emerged within this new genre, Emmerson (Emmerson Bockarie) made the most waves. He brought to perfection the combination of satire, trenchant critique, and “danceability” that characterized and popularized much of the new protest music. In one of his first hit songs, “Borbor Bele” (literally “little boy’s belly”) released in 2003, Emmerson portrays the country’s politicians by the allegedly unmistakable token of their swollen stomachs, grown fat on the proceeds of their illicitly earned wealth. In “Borbor Bele”, Emmerson implicitly exposes and subverts the intimate linking of status and stature inscribed into Sierra Leonean imaginaries of power. Jackson (2004) stresses that aspect by referring to traditional rhetorics of power that are kept alive in the collective memory through, for example, rumors about Big Man eating children’s organs in order to augment their power. He writes: “The logic ran as follows: children, women, and cattle were wealth. A man’s capacity to father children, to marry many women, and to acquire cattle were signs of power” (*ibid.*: 42). This capacity was intrinsically connected to physical bulk, which in turn spoke of a man’s commanding presence, social standing, and political power. Similar to Emmerson, Jackson (*ibid.*) senses the subtle irony in the relation of corpulence and its socio-political meaning:

[I]t amused me that so many Big Man were immobilized by their own obesity – sluggish, unwell, and impotent. Was this why they were so preoccupied with the virility and appetite of young men? If so, the young men (...) seemed to find little consolation in the fact that what they lacked in status they made up for in strength and vitality.

It is in the jauntily lilting, upbeat conflation of maringa, calypso and dancehall rhythms that Emerson’s “Borbor Bele” emphasizes the strength and vitality of young men’s – and women’s – (slender) bodies and, conversely, the Big Man’s sluggishness and impotence. The song’s fast beat requires quick dancing steps – a challenge most obese politicians are not able to stand up to. In this way, the lyrical ridicule and subversion of the power-holding class are complemented and augmented by the performative dimension of the song’s beat and rhythm. In fact, musically “Borbor Bele” is almost indiscernible from Emmerson’s other major hit, the feel-good dancing tune “Tutu Party” – whose lyrics praise the skillful manoeuvres dancing women perform with their buttocks.

In the run-up to the 2007 general elections, protest music – and many of its musicians – became increasingly incorporated into the devious political game it was initially set out to debunk. Songs critical of the establishment and of the ruling class were adopted by the major opposition parties (APC and PMDC) and



re-appropriated as musical critiques of the governing party (SLPP). During political campaign rallies, music was used rampantly by the various contestants, and the sound of music turned out an effective way to gather large crowds on the street. A local newspaper called it “the musicalisation of Sierra Leonean politics”. Similar to the peace/war-music wave of the 1990s, the success of many political/protest musicians triggered a bandwagon effect as dozens of new musicians entered the stage, singing for as well as against the government. As politicians became involved in a musical derby, musicians got in a political one. The Jungle Leaders, who before were among the first to rail against “the system”, released two albums in 2007, urging the ruling party to “Pak n Go” and proclaiming that their time is up (“Time Don Don”). In July 2007, one month before the elections, the song “Injectment Notice” was released by the then-unknown musician Innocent. Taking cues from the real-estate vernacular, the song called for Sierra Leoneans to put the incumbent party on notice for impending “ejection” (or “injectment”), raising many allegations about the party’s politicians and, in particular, about the president’s concealed and corrupt practices. At the day of its release, “Injectment Notice” was adopted by supporters of both major opposition parties and became the sonic trademark of their campaign (Alexander 2008). Not even a week later, a musical counter-attack was launched: “The Notice Nor Go Rayt” (“The notice was not a reality”; a phrase used by a tenant who refuses to accept a pending notice), praising the ruling SLPP for its achievements, who in turn adopted it as the soundtrack for their rallies. Rumours started circulating that the singers were paid by politicians. The latter song’s composer, Oba, soon admitted that he received payment for the song by the SLPP (Sahid 2007), very much to the discomfort of the party leaders who would have better liked the music to appear as an “authentic” expression of the public’s voice. Dubious figures, supposedly political backers, roamed about the streets of Freetown, distributing free copies of the songs among the people, and “dashing” bus and taxi drivers to play them during their rides.

On the one hand, the musically expressed political engagement assisted in bringing about political change (Kandeh 2008: 627). The incumbent SLPP, at which most of the musical critiques were aimed, lost the elections. The politicization of local music (and the musicalisation of national politics) significantly facilitated the post-war boom of local popular music and brought it to unprecedented highs. In an interview in mid-2007, local music icon Jimmy B. claimed that “today 99.9 percent of the music you hear on the radio or see on TV is Sierra Leonean music” (in Graham 2007). While Jimmy’s estimate was certainly exaggerated, it nevertheless gives a valid impression of the dominance local music had reached on the eve of elections.

On the other hand, the musicians' strong orientation towards political causes and their growing alignment with the (new) political ruling class turned out ill-fated. Popular protest music and politics – whose relation was before marked by opposition – entered into symbiosis. Politicians benefited from the influential mediums of expression musicians made available while musicians benefited from the equally influential mediums of power (and money) politicians made available. After this successfully staged mutual assistance, the audiences started to turn their backs on local musicians, and so did the politicians. With the blurring of the boundaries between musical protest and musical propaganda, local protest music deprived itself of the trait of being the candid and critical “voice of the voiceless” its initial appeal and success were grounded in. Right after the 2007 elections local music experienced a sharp and abrupt drop in popularity and presence on the airwaves and dance floors. Almost all of the local songs that hit the city in the forerun to the general elections were characterized by a distinct “expiration date”. With the elections, most of the songs lost their meaning and significance. With the sudden downturn of Sierra Leone's (politicized) popular music from late 2007 onwards, internationally produced music captured the scenes and markets.

### The late “naughties”

At this point, I will close the description of Freetown's long chain of successively changing dominant popular music styles by briefly discussing the contemporary scene; that is, the dominant music trends and contexts of music production and consumption I found in Freetown during my fieldwork in 2009/2010. A more detailed discussion of Freetown's contemporary music scene (which can be said to include the situation since the 2007 election), its audiences and society in general (i.e. Freetown's “music audiences as society writ large”) follows in the next two parts of this book.

The situation Freetown's local popular music was in after the 2007 elections appeared odd if not downright absurd. Never before were there so many music artists active in Freetown. The newly formed National Association of Sierra Leonean Artists (NASLA), an umbrella association for all performing artists, had about 200 musicians registered. The NASLA's chairman estimated the number of active unregistered musicians to be at least three times as big.<sup>3</sup> Never before were there so many official and unofficial music sellers to be found in Freetown. In the past years the CSA has grown almost exponentially, and by the end of 2007 comprised of some 4,500 official members nation-wide, of which about half were registered in Freetown. Some two dozen local radio stations filled the city's

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<sup>3</sup> In an interview I conducted with the NASLA chairman, Claudius Roberts.

airwaves with sounds. Music recording studios had sprung up at every other corner. The structures for the production, distribution, dissemination and consumption of local music were as good as never before. The local music scene had reached its top – and, apparently, went over this very top. Freetown’s audiences turned away from their artists and vaulted local popular music into a sobering recession.

The downturn affected many music producers, distributors and sellers – above all, CSA and Super Sound who faced a severe crisis. Rumours about CSA presidency’s corrupt practices and involvement in music piracy added to the organization’s floundering and eventually led to the dismissal of its president in late 2007. The explanations – and (mutual) recriminations – for the thorough setback were manifold and, at times, quite fancifully. Stories began to circulate about a conspiracy led by the Sierra Leonean ruling class and backed by Nigerian bootleggers trying to undermine the political strength and unionizing potency of local musicians and music sellers. While the idea of a plot by local politicians and Nigerian smugglers appears rather ludicrous, at root this conspiracy theory complects two notorious facts that constrain the local market. As many street music sellers confirmed to me, Freetown’s piracy business is in fact to large parts funded by Nigerian “investors” who supply most of the technical equipment (mainly computers) needed for the duplicating enterprise. The politicians in turn failed to tackle the piracy-issue from a legal side. Despite repeated announcement to pass a bill that would make piracy a punishable offence, until today no law against copyright infringement exists in Sierra Leone, making music piracy technically a legal part of the cottage industry. Increasingly, many official sellers and musicians themselves began to act as vigilantes, vandalizing stalls and equipment of sellers who market pirated material.

On the side of the pirate sellers, this vigilantism caused a reaction which in itself might have further advanced the downturn of local music: they stopped playing Sierra Leonean music at their stalls. With this, local music lost a main channel for its popularization. A seller of pirated music, whose stall is located in central Freetown, explained to me his concerns:

Before the elections we played Sierra Leone music a lot. So that people could hear it. And they would come for it and buy it. We made many new music famous. After the elections it changed. We can’t play more Sierra Leone music. Because when we play it on the street, they will come and harass us for “piracy, piracy, piracy”. That is why we don’t play it, not at all.

However, while the CSA, Super Sound, many producers and musicians almost univocally blame pirates for the downturn local music experiences since late 2007, the pirates in turn – who in fact have become the most powerful force in the music sales market – point towards the audiences and costumers who simply do not demand for local music any longer. Basically all radio and club DJs I

spoke to confirm that trend from within their own niches. Whether on Freetown's dance floors or in call-in shows on the radio, the audiences do not request local music any longer but predominantly opt for international sounds. The playlists in clubs and the radio expressly underline that tendency. In a trenchant manner a music seller framed one of the main reasons for the audiences' renunciation from local music by rephrasing then-president Kabbah's famous 2002-proclamation "di war don don" (meaning "the war is over"), he said: "music-politics don don". The association of popular musicians with politics in general and with the political ruling class in particular appears as a central explanatory factor for the post-election decline. DJ Budju, one of Freetown's most famous radio DJs, links the post-election doldrums of local music with people's disappointment with politics:

After the elections, when the new government came in, there was suddenly nothing left to sing about, nothing to criticize. The political music died down. It is like the SLPP came down together with all the political music. The political songs of before had expiring dates. With the new government, they were out, spoiled. Not that the situation improved. It didn't. But Sierra Leoneans are not stupid. They want to wait and see what is going to happen first. Because you need to wait, to see and watch what these new guys were up to. But they didn't do much good. All their promises. Now people are disappointed again, more than before.

King Millan points towards people's surfeit with political discourses and the sort of counter-reaction that grew out of this surfeit:

People are fed up with politics. After the war there was too much talking. Nothing happened. Now people are fed up with the talking. Everybody wants to sweat. Sierra Leoneans love to sweat. Everybody wants to shake their buttocks. You see it in the music. Before, all music was about the massage. People wanted to listen to the meaningful music. When they were dancing, they were listening to politics – crazy! Now it is all about carnival and fun and love and sex. So much sex in the music. It's very naughty music indeed.

The music I found when I entered the field in August 2009 (and when I left again in February 2010) streamed onto Freetown's dance floors, into the city's air waves, its streets and homes from three main directions: the USA, the Caribbean and Nigeria. Freetown audiences' uncoordinated, collective choice of these three main strands of (black) Atlantic music culture were not mere reflections of the dominant position US pop occupies in the world and Jamaican and Nigerian music in Africa. In a striking historical continuity these three main sources Freetown's contemporary music feeds on go in line with the origins of the three main waves of migrants who formed the settlement of Freetown from the late 18<sup>th</sup> to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century. The period after the end of the war was characterized by self-reflexive, politico-musical explorations of the state of the State and society. After the 2007 elections, the city's music audiences made a sort of retro-reflexive turn towards their deeper cultural and musical roots that lay in the (black) Atlantic. Two hundred years ago, the sounds of the US, Jamaica and (what today is) Nigeria were brought to Freetown single-handedly, so

to say, by the first settlers (Nova Scotians<sup>4</sup> and Maroons) and the Recaptives (the Akus) respectively. Throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the progenies of the first settlers and Recaptives – the Creoles – continued to keep the cultural and musical ties with their parent countries. After the electoral deflation of local music in the latter half of 2007, (black) Atlantic music came through the channels Freetown’s new media environment had equipped itself with. The accelerated access to globally produced and disseminated music through internet and satellite television revised the bequeathed cultural and musical links Freetown kept with the western shores of the (black) Atlantic. In the city’s newly digitalized mass-music culture this link was in fact re-invigorated.

As King Millan mentioned, much if not most of the new foreign music Freetown’s audiences chose is noticeably marked by a carnal character; in Millan’s words: “naughty music”. Two topoi are most perceptible and audible: romantic love and sex. Especially the latter category’s lyrics are often of a rather smacking type. The chorus of one of Freetown’s late-2009 hit songs, which soon turned into a sing-along song – Jamaican Dancehall artist Tony Matterhorn’s “(Fuck me) when it rains” – reads as follows:

I fuck you/ You fuck me baby/ You feel the same  
You have you man/ Me have mi girl (...)  
Gal (girl) you fuck me in the rains  
You fuck me when it rains  
Gal you fuck me when it rains

Besides Jamaican “dirty” dancehall and ragga, Freetown’s contemporary popular music scene is further spurred by the Caribbean’s other main music export: The reggae offshoot lover’s rock. As before in the 1980s, much of Freetown’s music reflects the latest US billboard charts, with US-American sentimental pop, R&B, hip hop, and “hip pop” tracks being the current favourites. The seemingly never-ending output of pop-dance tracks produced by Nigeria’s rampantly growing music industry adds the third main component Freetown’s late 2000s popular music scene is build upon. However, these are only the most dominant streams. The diversity that marked the city’s soundscapes in prior decades continued – and continues – to grow as well, making any attempt to map out the city’s present sounds and tracks virtually impossible. Among the mass of old and new music styles that are to be found in Freetown, gospel music is taking the front rank in popularity, prevalence and sales. Gospel encompasses a wide range of musical expressions, absorbing many influences from Western soul and

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<sup>4</sup> Though at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century Nova Scotia belonged to British America, and is today a Canadian Province, most of the so-called Nova Scotians that came to Freetown in 1792 were before evacuated from New York after joining the British in the American War of Independence; see Schama (2005).

R&B, cross-pollinating them with local rhythms and grooves, and yielding sub-genres such as gospel-highlife, gospel-reggae, gospel-jazz, or gospel-hip hop.

In stark contrast to most of the popular music Freetown's audiences listened to since the end of the war, the new, post-2007 election music bore no references whatsoever to the topics of war, violence, politics, or the state. As the local war/peace-music of the 1990s transformed into political music in the 2000s, war fatigue – which was already perceptible in the 1990s scene – evolved into political fatigue. The audiences' disinclination to listen to local artists after the 2007 change implicitly entailed a turning away from the domains of the public and the state – and from their most notorious embodiment: politics. This sudden volte-face brought the audiences to the realms of the non-public and the palpably non-political; that is, to the realms (and sanctums) of the private and intimate – thus, love and sex. A longer fragment from an interview I conducted with Isaac, an eighteen-year-old Freetonian pupil, well elucidates several dimensions of the way many Freetonians, especially the younger ones, relate to, and make sense, of popular music.

You know, for some years after the conflict we had a lot of these musicians that were dealing with all this reconciliation and peace and so forth. They were touring the provinces every year and telling people what to do and what not to do, like teachers do. Steady Bongo was big in business. Then it became all about this political song, like from 2005. They all didn't attract me at all. You know, I am neutral. I do not belong to any political party here. Not that I don't care. But it is just not my case for this music. You know, for me it is more about those things that matter to me: Love, loosing love, searching love.

M.S.: Do you have a girlfriend?

No. As for now, I don't. I want to have one. But it is difficult, you know. You need to be somebody. You need some jewels and stuff, some bling-blings. I don't have them now. But I am very much in love – all the time! I am always liking some girl. But I can never give her anything so there are no girls for me. I don't have the money for real love. I mean, I can't even buy myself food, you know. I eat with my mother. I can't be with a girl like this. (...) Politics have contributed a lot to the bad situation of this country. You can say that politics are the roots of my problems. You see, politicians take all the money, they have all the jewels and diamonds. And they have all the girlfriends, but I don't. But seriously, it is now time for the people to politicize less and to love more. And that is also the interest of the people now: The entertainment world. People are more interested in love music, dance music, movie stars. People are now more interested in life-matters. They don't want more politics. (...)

M.S.: What is the music you like?

I do like reggae music at times, lover's rock. Not that I am a Rasta man, but I like their tunes. It's sexy music. But mostly I like listening to sentimentals. You know, this music dealing with love. It speaks for me. That is also what most of my friends like. Like "Yori Yori", you know, this song makes me feel ... sexual. When I hear its beat, I feel sexual. And all the girls like it, so it is good if I like it too.

## Conclusion – beyond the ephemerality of style

If we are to approach Freetown society by the use of such a heuristic device as the long-termed evolutions of its changing (popular) music styles and social relations (as I just presumed to do), the city presents itself as somewhat consistently constituted by contradictions. The initial pathway for that was laid out in the founding of Freetown. It is a city firmly embedded in and connected to (black) Atlantic history and culture (or rather: histories and cultures). Arisen from allegedly philanthropic intents and utopias of freedom, Freetown's roots were laid in the violent translocations of tens of thousands of dispossessed people. In Freetown's founding history, figments of "enlightened" imaginations unveil the dialectics of hopes, deceptions and miscarries brought about by the spirits of (Western) modernity's rational thoughts Horkheimer and Adorno (2002) are speaking about. And yet, in its idiosyncratic amalgam of new practices and institutions, of new ways of living, and of new forms of malaise, Freetown – and its first, truly "inveterated" citizens: the Creoles – carved their very own place in the kaleidoscope of alternative or "multiple modernities" (Taylor 2002: 91).

With the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the concomitant turn of the city's demographic relations, "upcountry people" added new dimensions to Freetown's socio-cultural composition and orientation and created new links with its West African interiors. Freetown's alternative modernity slowly transformed into an *alter-native* modernity, transfiguring new and old connections and disconnections between the Upper Guinean forests of upcountry Sierra Leone and the (black) Atlantic worlds straddled between the coasts of Britain, the Americas, Nigeria and beyond. In these states of constant flux and transition, Freetown's (new and old) citizens were (and are) continually compelled to find new ways to live with each other, to re-structure their lives in changing social, political and economic environments, and to re-negotiate new identities for themselves and for the place

and space they share and create, that is the city. Freetonians were (and are) thus constantly compelled to redefine what it means to be a Freetonian. And “being a Freetonian” almost inevitably eludes definition, at least a definition that does not accomplish the feat of consistently integrating contradictions. “Being a Creole” is maybe what comes closest to this feat. Asked about “what it is today to be a Creole”, the late Freetonian comedian Chris During gave the following, consistently contradictory definition of it:

Today it’s just a name; but not a form, not a way of life. Creoledom and Creole identity is (...) you should know how you came about it; what you are; what it is all about. It’s a way of life. In short, it’s not the dress you wear; it’s not the book-learning. It’s a way of life; it has its own (...) like I asked a chap the last time. I said, “As a Creole, what would you do if a bereavement and a wedding should take place simultaneously in a Creole home, what would you do?” He said, “Well (...) since the bereavement has taken place, we’ll postpone the wedding.” Well, he was looking at the sad part of it. But the real Creole would not postpone the wedding; they wouldn’t even announce the death of the member of the household; they would go about their wedding. And after everything is finished then they would announce the death. That’s a way of life. Other people have their own way of doing it. But with the real Creole, they’ll hide it; they’ll go about everything. (*In an interview with Heribert Hinzen, March 3, 1987; in Hinzen et al. 1987: 337*)

Contemporary Creoledom, or “Freetoniandom”, is: going about everything but still having it your own way; being not a way of life but being a way of life; having your cake and eating it but still going hungry. Freetown’s music is in line with these ambivalences constitutive of the city’s diverse folks and character(s). As it is, there is no “Freetown music” as such. All music *in* Freetown is Freetonian music, but none of it is of a “genuinely” Freetonian kind. Freetown’s music is, so to say, essentially anti-essential, an expressive denominator and sonic signifié of Freetown’s genuine diversity and its implicit contradictions, which, by their very “nature”, deny any common denominator. The broad and blurred notion of (black) Atlantic music is as far as the commonality gets, and it marks out just an orientation, a proclivity maybe, rather than any sort of definite category. In the ephemerality of the musical moment, the respective styles, trends and fashions still “speak” of a defined and definable origin. The Nova Scotians brought the hymns, the Maroons gombey drumming, palm wine music (arguably the only “authentically” Freetonian music style) emerged from the “cosmopolitan” concurrence of alcohol, guitars and idle seamen, wireless broadcasting “brought” soul and rock ‘n’ roll, Mensah’s Tempos introduced dance band highlife, the Ry-Co Jazz Congo music, and Nigerian bootleggers modern manifestation of Igbo and Yoruba styles. Though, once the music is “released” on Freetown’s grounds, it inevitably starts its own, independent career and (hi)story and is added to what I, at the beginning of this part, called Freetown’s sonic palimpsest.



However, beneath these ephemeral moments of progressing music styles and fashions, long-term social relations and “templates” are reproduced as well as changed. In the above evolved outline of Freetown’s musical and social history, it became clear that the latter, the “deeper rooted” social relations and their changes, impinge on and somewhat navigate musical changes. The successive introductions of new musical styles into Freetown’s soundscape with the successive waves of first settlers and liberated Africans yield the clearest examples for this. That society makes and changes music, however, was never really an issue at stake. The (much) more intriguing question is whether music also “makes” and changes society, or, as trenchantly put by Christopher Waterman (1990: 6), whether music “may be more than icing on an infrastructural cake”, whether it “may not only mirror, but also shape other social and historical processes”. While it exceeds the scope of this book to (even only attempt to) answer the question *to what extent* music may change society, several of the periods in Freetown’s socio-musical history discussed above indicate music’s potential to at least interfere in and contradict the presumably deeper rooted relations and changes of social realities. The various antimonies between socio-political and economic developments and music’s concurrent “defiant” evolutions suggest evidence for that: the apparent non-political orientation of popular music during the politicized years after independence; the continued heydays of locally produced (and, again, non-political) popular music in the years of increasingly stinging social, political and economic decline during the 1970s; the revival of local music during the decade of war. Music’s impact on social and historical processes was, maybe most clearly, indicated in the “musicalization of politics” in the period leading up to the 2007 elections. The ensuing, thorough set-back (politicized) local music experienced and the rise of carnal music, in turn, speak most clearly of music’s “mirroring” dimension.

With regard to the main concern of this book in general (musical patterns of social dis/connection) and to this part’s main thread in particular (the shift from a class- to a mass-music culture), the historiography given above revealed some longer-term dimensions of music’s dialectical “mirroring and shaping”. Throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, certain musical forms, styles and practices coincided, at times to a lesser and at times to a greater extent, with certain social groups that were circumscribed and distinguishable by economic, ethnic *and musical* markers. While the respective “congruences” between social groups and musical forms varied over time – as both the social groups and the musical forms conflated and diversified – the logics of social differentiating via musical distinction remained nevertheless valid, and so were, vice versa, the logics of musical differentiating via social distinction in force too. In other words, the very sounds of music a group produced and the forms of dances it performed to the(ir)

music indicated their respective position in Freetown's internal socio-economic hierarchies and "civilizational distinctions" – and the other way round. The Nova Scotians had their Western styles, the Maroons their trans-Atlantic "pop-fusion drumming", the Recaptives their "African imports". With the growing socio-cultural amalgamation and socio-economic stratification, a more vertical line was inscribed into Freetown's congruent socio-musical divisions. As groups differentiated by socio-economic traits identified with and listened and danced to distinguishable music styles, music both reflected and helped to shape society's divides. Freetown's music (the plural form, "*musics*", would be a more convenient term here, if it would not be so distressing) was different music *of* different classes of people *for* different classes of people – thus, a class-music culture. The lines and imprints (of sounds) drawn onto Freetown's sonic palimpsest could be read as lines (of social, economic and otherwise constituted divides) drawn between Freetown's population.

Around the turn to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the structure of the palimpsest's imprints began to become increasingly promiscuous. The sounds of different groups were progressively harmonized and diffused, as, for example, notable in the spread of popular forms of Latin music among upmarket and down-market dance orchestras, and audiences, around the First World War. At the same time, Freetown's socio-economic relations began to reconfigure. The monopoly the Creoles had established in various spheres of Freetown society in the later parts of the 19<sup>th</sup> century began to corrode. As a reaction to these corroding processes, which came along with and were partly caused by the increasing rush towards urbanization, the Creoles' "politics of elite culture", as described by Cohen (1981), came into force and set up a cultural role model for the (demographically, politically and economically) ascending groups of upcountry people in Freetown. Musical forms and practices, which played a marking role in these processes, were increasingly overlapping across Freetown's various groups. The Protectorate elites in and outside Freetown, along with the new urban "riff-raff", took the Creole orientation towards the (black) Atlantic music culture(s) as a new, modern focal point of musical orientation. The Creoles, on the other hand, aligned their musical practices with the "African's" forms, accentuating the "underlying contradiction in their cultural and social life", Cohen (1981: 186) and Jones (1968) noted. As music's "mirror" (of society and its divides) became more and more "untransparent" and elusive, Freetown's class-music culture came under threat.

From around the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century onwards, developments in music-related media and technology began their rise. Broadening access to music production, dissemination and consumption widened the scopes of music audiences, while the audiences, on their part, widened the scopes of their music consumption. Soon, everybody (in Freetown) could potentially listen to everything, and many

did make use of their broadened choices. It is in this combination of, on the one hand, an elitist musical-cultural paragon set up by the Creoles, with its strong orientation towards the (black) Atlantic world (and music), and, on the other hand, the “democratization” of music production, dissemination and consumption that Freetown’s class-music culture, and its elitist Creole materialization, turned into a mass-music culture. Using, and revising, Cohen’s formula, *politics of elite culture* turned into *politics of mass culture*. The (musical) cake is, now, owned and eaten by everybody (while most still remain hungry). Once again, Creoledom – the “(non-)way of Freetonian life” – is identical with Freetonianism.

After more than two centuries, Freetown’s sonic palimpsest developed into a Babel of imprints (of sounds). The initial congruences between different social groups who practiced and listened to different musical forms have, to large parts, vanished, along with the differentiating logics of social and musical distinction respectively. Everybody listened to the sounds of politicized local pop music in the run up to the 2007 elections (and most also danced to it), just like everybody is now listening and dancing to the carnal sounds imported from across the (black) Atlantic. Of course there are nuances and variations, niches and sub-niches, subtle and less subtle distinctions. But, taking on a heuristic point of view once again, the “mirroring” of social division in music styles and forms blurred beyond recognition. That is not to say that the social and economic segregations and disconnections are erased – far from it. But it is not along the lines of musical styles and forms that the dividing lines are drawn or could be read. The primal question is thus not *what* music is listened to, but *how*, *with whom* and *where*? The context is the key. And it is to this context of music consumption – as the main indicator and “perpetrator” of social disconnections drawn along lines of music consumption – that I will turn to now.

## PART III

### Disconnection – social dynamics in the spaces of music



In front of a dance bar, Freetown, January 2010



## Introduction

The third part of this book is built around three main elements and their interaction in the realms of collective music consumption: (1) *sounds* – of music; (2) *spaces* – of the city, of music consumption, of imaginations, and of social interactions; and (3) *relationships* – between people and sounds, between people and spaces, and between various groups of people and the(ir) world(s).

Immanent in the (physical) relationship between sound, matter and space is a somewhat telling paradox. For the generation of sound, as waves of oscillating pressure, matter is indispensable. Sound cannot exist in vacuum. Matter, in turn, is inextricably linked with space, for without the occupation of space, matter can be neither thought nor existent. However, once matter and space are present, sound is potentially able to traverse through all of a given matter's spaces and dimensions. As long as its defining pressure deviates from the pressure level of the surrounding matter, sound will continue its transmission. In other words, as long as a sound is loud enough, it can be heard. Thus, while sound depends on matter and space, it is not restricted by them. As “physical” sounds can traverse through distinct and distant (physical) spaces and thereby create a (sonic) connection between divided spaces, *musical* sounds can “traverse” through (physical and otherwise) divided *social* spaces and in turn create a (musical) connection between these divided spaces and worlds.

As essential space is for the physics of sound creation and dispersal, as vital it is also for social relationships. “[A]ny space implies, contains and dissimulates social relationships”, as Henri Lefebvre (1992: 82-83) notes. Space shapes the nature of relationships between and behaviours of people. An encounter between two strangers might develop in dramatically diverging ways depending on whether they meet in a church or a prison cell, in a discotheque or at the market. Social relationships and behaviours, in turn, are prone to shape the spaces in which they occur; in fact, they “produce” space. A changing set of social relationships might well transform a given space with a circumscribed form,

function and social meaning (e.g. a church) into a newly defined and used space (e.g. a prison, disco or market). Lefebvre named this process “diversion (*détournement*)” (*ibid.*: 167).

In *Production of Space*, Lefebvre (1992) reconciles, and complicates, the concept of physical space with the concept of abstract, or mental, spaces. In this way, Lefebvre’s “spatial dualism” parallels the dualism of physical and mental concretizations of music constructed (and dissolved) by Ingarden (see Chapter 3). In Lefebvre’s concept, physical space is the spatiality in which nature and society exist and evolve. Abstract spaces are formed around the sets of relations between things and people by which society generates and defines its institutions, beliefs and meanings. His central notion of “social space” derives from a combination of physical spatiality and the ways human actions and interactions take place therein, relate to it, change it, and are changed by it. Social space is “what permits fresh actions to occur, while suggesting others and prohibiting yet others” (Lefebvre 1992: 73). Social space, and its (social) production, evolve out of a complex of processes and relationships in which ideologies (abstract spaces) pro-create and “divert” architectures and environments (physical spaces) while, at the same time, ideologies are being pro-created by architectures and environments. The key words here are *processes* and *relationships*. The processes by which a society’s existent relationships are confirmed and sustained or subverted and changed are bound to the spaces in which these relationships are situated. Continuance and change in society relate to continuance and change in a society’s spaces, and the other way round. In Lefebvre’s wording, “new social relationships call for a new space, and vice-versa” (*ibid.*: 59).

Following Small (1998: 13), the act of musicking “establishes in the place where it is happening a set of relationships, and it is in those relationships that the meaning of the act lies”. In Small’s theory, places of musicking occupy a special role in the broader social framework in which humans live, interact, relate to each other and to the world. This speciality derives from the peculiar sort of relationships between people – that is, musicking participants – which are established in acts of musicking. In Small’s wording, the act of musicking, “while it lasts, brings into existence relationships that model in metaphoric form those which [the participants] would like to see in the wider society of their everyday lives” (*ibid.*: 46). Translated into Lefebvre’s notions, places of musicking contain *special social spaces* in the broader set of spaces a society produces and exists in. Music “diverts” social spaces and the relationships that take place therein. Spaces of musicking stimulate imaginings of ideal social relationships, and, for the period of the event, enable the participants to enact these (ideal) relationships, to explore, affirm and, at times, subvert them again.

That these imagined and enacted relationships are ideal ones is, as Small argues, because acts of musicking are essentially sorts of rituals. “In a ritual,” as Geertz (1973b: 112) puts it, “the world as lived and the world as imagined, fused under the agency of a single set of symbolic forms, turn out to be the same world”. Richards (2005, 2006, 2009) has drawn up a theory in which music and dance (or: musicking) are approached as kinds of ritual activities, too. Drawing on Durkheim’s notions of the “rite” and its “effervescence”, Richards interprets acts of musicking as significant kinds of collective action – meaning-generating acts that stir shared emotions and generate incorporating group identities. In this way, music and dance can be (and are) utilized to stimulate societal capacities to bring back into alignment social worlds that had been fragmented socially or politically (as in the case of Sierra Leone during and after the war, from which Richards develops his theory). This idea has been metaphorically paraphrased in the counterintuitive assertion that belief – that is collective representations, meanings and imaginaries – is not the cause of actions, but its very effect: “We believe because we pray, not the other way round” (Richards 2006: 654). Translated into the realities of collective music performances, understood as ongoing experiences of collective actions of individuals, the *act* of musicking can be thus apprehended as a distinct means to strengthen and (re)create the social representations and imaginaries of its participants and practitioners – an acting-out of social meanings.

For these meaning-generating acts of musicking, two elementary settings can be distinguished which entail two different forms of collective musicking rituals: the ritual among intimates and the ritual among strangers. In general terms, the intimates’ ritual of musicking is one that is found predominantly in rural communities; the ritual of musicking among strangers is one existing mainly in urban contexts. The line drawn here is, of course, a fairly vague one: Not all members of a village community dance are necessarily familiar with each other just as not all inhabitants of a disco-night in a city are strangers to each other. However, in both settings of musicking encounters, people are brought together in spaces that isolate them from the world of their everyday lives. Entering a music or town hall for a concert, a discotheque for a night of clubbing, or the village square for the annual harvest dance resembles crossing the threshold into another world. At the same time, this “other world” reflects and resembles the larger world it is embedded in – though, in a swayed, often enchanted and labile way. Relationships that are valid and established in the “outside world” are continued “inside” the world of musicking encounters while their implications are, for the moment being (and dancing), abrogated and susceptible to subversion and recreation. Social divisions, segregations, and lines drawn along hierarchies of economic and otherwise defined statuses and positions existent in the world(s) outside the



space of musicking are reproduced inside musicking spaces as well but become more porous, more permeable for crossing and subversion. This has to do with the sort of communities that are created in and through the spaces of musicking rituals.

In rural settings, the crossing into the “other world” of musicking rituals usually implies entering an acquainted social circle, and space, and to strengthen an already existent bond of community and of shared beliefs and meanings (Small 1998: 39-40). While this form of ritual does as well allow for the exploration of new relationships, it is mainly one in which existing relationships are renewed and reinforced. In contemporary urban societies, people who cross the border to, and assemble in, spaces of ritual musicking are, in many but not all instances, strangers to each other. Within the superordinated social texture of impersonal relations that characterizes cities, this coming-together of musicking strangers entails the emergence of a temporary community, of a community of strangers, or in fact of a community of “intimate strangers” (Ndjio 2006). In the amorphous, fluid and heterogeneous societies of urban Africa – as Freetown’s – the social spaces created through musicking are potent sites for shared expressions and experiences of a commonly created but otherwise dispersed reality of urban life. As Barber (1987: 28) puts it, they are sites for the “on-going collective process of urban consciousness-formation” – and reformation, as we might add. It is in the combination of, on the one hand, the processes of urban consciousness-(re)formation and, on the other hand, the temporary character of communities of “intimate strangers” created within urban spaces of collective musicking that the outside world’s relationships, divides and hierarchies become more permeable and open for renegotiation.

Sites of collective music consumption – as *special* social spaces formed in musicking rituals of (intimate) urban strangers – are spaces that, in Lefebvre’s wording, permit fresh actions to occur and call for new sorts (and imaginings) of social relationships. It is along these coordinates of dis/connecting sounds of music, of (Lefebvre’s) social spaces, and of (Small and Richards’) acts of musicking as rituals (of intimate strangers) that I organize the following chapters. I begin with some methodological and ontological reflections upon the study and the character of music events and music event audiences in contemporary Freetown (Chapter 13). Thereupon I map out and discuss the broader contexts of Freetonian music consumption (Chapter 14) and draw up a tentative typology of music events (Chapter 15). In the following two chapters (16 & 17), I describe and discuss various musical and extra-musical factors that make up Freetown’s music event scene and the patterns of social connection and disconnections that are created, affirmed and subverted therein. Before ending this third part with an attempt to summarize its central findings (Chapter 19), I give an in-depth

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description of two related, large music events that I attended during my fieldwork (Chapter 18).

## (Night)life at the edge of chaos

### Dance floor complexities

Music events are complex social phenomena. During a music event a great many independent variables are interacting with each other in a great many ways. They involve a mix of, among others, ritualized and idiosyncratic behaviours, of independent and interdependent actions, of motions and emotions, fantasies, anxieties, economics, and, of course, sounds. The broader social, musical, political, economic, seasonal, historical etc. contexts the respective music event takes place in further add to its complexity. Because of the constant interplay of all these, and more, variables, the social (night) life that takes place in the realms of music events displays a good deal of randomness, disorder and unpredictability.

Consequently, the study of music events is an intricate endeavour. In the first place, the difficulties I faced in the study of music events in Freetown stemmed from the sheer number of music venues. The city is bulging with drinking and dancing bars, improvised and established music spots, bigger and smaller clubs, indoor and outdoor events, regular and irregular concerts, parties, parades, carnivals etc. In the course of six months, I visited about ninety different places that would qualify as music venues. Many of them I visited up to a dozen times, some more often. However, I would estimate the number of Freetown's regular music venues alone – and by 'regular' I mean a geographically fixed location where music is played either on a daily, a weekly, or any other regular basis – to go well into the hundreds. If we add irregular and singular music events to it – meaning music events with changing times and locations and one-time events that took place in the course of my fieldwork – the number jumps into the thousands.

In addition to the daunting quantitative dimension of music venues and events in Freetown, the study of music events is further complicated by the apparent fathomlessness of sociologically relevant traits of the actual subject of study – the music event as such and as a field of research. The complexity of social

realms constructed within and around a music event is voluminous. A dance floor alone is a field of intense social promiscuity. Once it is filled with dancing people, it yields an abundance of fleeting encounters, of rapidly changing sets of relationships, of displayed symbols, coded behaviours, casual and ceremonial actions and reactions. A discotheque's dance floor is a social world en miniature, a field for reinforcing or subverting established social identities and relations and for testing and playing with new ones.

The very act of dancing, even in the allegedly trivial form of "leisure" or "entertainment" dance that takes place in a discotheque, calls to mind the complexity implicit in the relations between people and music, in the relations between people created in the realms of music, and in the relations between people and the(ir) world(s). Dance involves patterns of body movements, motions, gestures of individuals and of groups of individuals that speak of particular meanings. To dance is to perform, and to perform is to enact certain forms of meanings. As a sort of non-verbal communication, dancing invokes a practical and kinetic "rationality". Drewal (1991: 2) speaks about the "rhetoric of performers". As all performers, the participants of "ordinary" disco-dancing are staging a temporal, open-ended, processual and thus fairly complex activity. Dancing is an action which enables people – that is dancers – to become "agents in the ongoing processes of constructing social realities" (*ibid.*). Modifying Agawu's (2001: 4) statement that the medium of sound "enables people in so many African communities to sing what cannot be spoken", we might state that the medium of dance enables people to *perform* what cannot be spoken. Dance "speaks of" and can be "read" (or "misread") as an expressive manifestation of affects and desires, of competition and rivalry. But dancing – "the penultimate expression of the body in motion for its own sake" (Drewal 1991: 25) – also transcends the very frame of meaning-and-sense-making. Not all dancing bears meaning beyond the act of the dance itself. Taking the dance assembly of an "ordinary" Saturday night discotheque as an example, for each individual dancer, the motivations to dance, and the meanings he or she ascribes to it, can vary and change from one moment to the other. Some dance to relax, others dance to show off, yet other dance in order to attract attention, to conquer the opposite sex, or the same sex, or both.

Dancers continuously connect and disconnect. On the discotheques' dance floor, the dancers form a "kinetic community", their bodies align in the commonly perceived pace of the rhythms that fill the air, patterns of movements are adjusted, grooves are shared, people connect in matching dance-steps. At the same time, no two movements are actually identical. Every dancer embodies and expresses the shared grooves differently. The adjusted "kinetic community" is again fragmented in the abundance of individual adaptations, variations and

reinventions of the commonly perceived patterns of sounds and rhythms. In this way, the dancers also disconnects from each other and their surroundings. Dancing is thus both collective and individual. It creates the grounds for shared experiences and for expressions of collectivity while it also divides these very common grounds again, reflecting every dancer's individuality and yielding a current of monadic moves and motions. It is in this dialectic of individual and collective moves that the dance's complexity and elusive social structure are revealed. And it is, furthermore, in the (e)motional confliction staged in collective dances that (collectively induced) order is balanced with (individually precipitated) chaos.

Besides, and outside, the activities on the dance floor, there is a great deal of other relevant and interrelated factors that form the music (and dance) event and that make it happen in the first place. In the case of a commercial music event, for example, such as a dance-club, these comprise of four broad components. Firstly, there is the composition, action and interaction of the audience. This, in turn, involves the audience's relations of age and gender, their social, cultural, religious and economic backgrounds, their motives and intentions to attend the event, their established and newly formed relationships, their activities (beside dancing), their codes of behaviour, dress, hairstyle, verbal and non-verbal communication etc. Secondly, the number and functions of the service personal plays a role as well. These can include doormen, bar tenders, waiters, cleaners, professional dancers, and, depending on the respective venue and occasion, many more, such as cigarette sellers, cooks, car-park wardens, semi-employed prostitutes, drug dealers etc. Thirdly, there is the management which organizes the event, employs the above listed personal, owns or sublets the location, makes spatial arrangements, takes care of promotion etc. Finally, though by far not exhausting the list of relevant aspects and activities that form and make the music event, there is the music. The music comes along with a myriad other, relevant and interrelated aspects and questions. These involve, among others, the number and sort of performers (bands, solo artists, DJs), their musical styles and genres, the forms and mediums in which the music is performed (live or lip-sync, with instruments, turntables or a simple music system, arrangement and volume of the sound speakers, light system and other gimmicks), the order of songs, playlists etc. All these factors and actors are interconnected with each other, each adding its part to the diffused and dynamic structure of actions, interactions and relations that make up any ordinary dancing night.

### Wayward audiences

Another practical obstacle I faced in the study of music events in Freetown resulted from the apparent arbitrariness that characterizes the patterns of attendance

in Freetown's music event scene. To foresee which location or event would attract people at what day and hour, and which not, often resembled a game of chance. While an empty dance floor is data as well, it necessitates a contextualization of its emptiness and to find out which other dance floor was filled in return, if any at all. In some, rather exceptional, instances, this was less difficult. During several annually celebrated and institutionalized (or "tradition-alized") music events, for example, times, locations, procedures and activities were often, though not always, relatively fixed and known. So were the patterns of attendance in some of the most established dance-clubs. In general, though, Freetown's music event scene is marked by a salient flightiness; a trait which may also explain the relative fast series of successive bankruptcies and changes of ownership several of Freetown's major music venues went through in recent years.<sup>1</sup>

My research assistant and I were often flabbergasted by the unpredictability Freetown's night life, particularly its participants and audiences, exhibited. At times, we found a dance locality bursting with people on an ordinary Sunday night, with the present folks celebrating far into the Monday morning. Nothing indicated any sort of extraordinary occasion (e.g. a national holiday, a wedding celebration) that could have induced the audiences to appear in such a large number. As we went back to the location the very next ordinary Sunday night, we found the place deserted, with deafening music banging across the empty dance floor as the only vague momento of past Sunday's withered splendor. In two complex and inscrutable lines of coincidences people adjusted and adapted their decisions, once resulting in a coming together of a crowd of strangers who staged a wild party, the other time dispersing all potential attendees to any place but the dance spot in question. Both processes, and the underlying self-organization of masses, happened uncoordinated, without apparent incentives or disincentives – as though by magic. The imponderability that characterizes Freetown's night life reflects and reminds of the uncertainty with which the (daily) lives of many Freetonians are burdened. The low and irregular wages many people receive, if they receive any at all, forms only one though a major factor in the host of interdependent variables that make up the unpredictable and instable nature of Freetown's night (and day) life.

The arbitrariness and unpredictability of Freetown's music event scene – and of its audiences – became particularly salient in a concert that took place in Freetown in late October 2009. Bracket came to town, a Nigerian duo closely associated with its irrepressibly catchy song "Yori Yori". Already since the mid-

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<sup>1</sup> To name but two of many examples: What today is the *Old Skool* night club was, a couple of years ago, *Rumours*, and before that *Bacadi*; what, right after the war, became *Sans Souci* turned first into *Buggy's* before it changed to *Aces* in mid-2008.

year, Bracket's hit-song was an unavoidable part of everyday life in Freetown. It was played in seemingly never-ending repetitions on the city's dance floors, on the streets, in the markets, in shared taxis and busses, in people's homes, and many other possible settings. "Yori Yori" was omnipresent. Throughout the months, the song and Bracket's popularity persisted and, in fact, increased. The level of popularity the group had reached by October appeared as a sufficient safeguard for the pricey venture to fly in an international music act for a performance in Freetown, secure enough for its Sierra Leonean and Nigerian organizers at least. Some fifteen local musicians were booked as an additional attraction for the audiences. As the organizers anticipated a heap of attending people, the show was staged in the national stadium, Freetown's biggest venue. The proceedings of the advertising machinery were started in save advance, some three weeks before to concert. Posters were canvassing the event all across town. On radio and television the group's songs were played in an ever-heightened frequency. So-called club rallies were organized in which some of the local performers of the show toured the city's night clubs to tout for the big concert to come.

Despite all efforts and promotion, it did not work out. The concert became a dead loss, for its organizers, for the performing musicians, and for the few people who in the end decided to attend it. On the night of the concert, the stadium was empty. Only three of the announced fifteen local musicians performed. The Bracket duo sang its hit-song, added one other number, and disappeared from the stage. A local newspaper estimated that the organizers lost some fifty million leones (around 10,000 euros) with the show, a substantial amount in terms of music event-budgets in Freetown. As exemplary for Freetown's wayward music scene the unexpected non-appearance of the audiences was, as typical were also the rumours about corrupt practices, scams, and deliberate acts of sabotaging the event that soon started circulating. I followed the ongoing discussions and rumours from the head office of the CSA, where many of the involved actors regularly passed by to vent their anger and chagrin. Musicians accused the organizers of bad organization. The organizers accused the musicians of bad performances. Both pointed at the local media and accused it of bad promotion. The stadium authorities were accused to miss out to refund the organizers a couple of millions of deposit these had paid in case of damage. The Nigerian promoter made a compensation claim for millions of leones. However, the point was that there was not really anybody who could be blamed or charged or sued for reimbursement. It was "the people", this erratic and volatile mass of Freetown's music audiences, who simply did not attend the event. The reasons people told me for their non-appearance were as inconclusive as they were individual. In many instances, people even expressed the wish to attend the show but explained

to me that they simply missed the date, others argued that the ticket prices were too high (which, compared to the prices for most other, much more ordinary concerts, was not the case), yet others said they just heard that Bracket had come to town.

Spontaneous self-organization is one of the main hallmarks of complex systems. Atoms form chemical bonds with each other and organize themselves into complex molecules. Birds adjust to their neighbours' actions, preparing to take off to fly to their place of seasonal migration, and eventually, and unconsciously, organize themselves into a patterned flock flying towards the south. The diversity of actions and interactions, of singular and collective, conscious and unconscious, planned and unplanned decisions underlying the music event scene in Freetown surmounts these "natural" complexities by far. The causes and reasons for a well-attended or a non-attended music event are as diverse as the involved individuals' combined, personal choices to take on the ride to the venue or to stay at home – and the capricious, over-fluctuant life-worlds these choices are made in and constrained by. The complex, unpredictable and potentially chaotic structure of Freetown's night life reflects the complex, unpredictable and potentially chaotic structures the lives of its citizens are founded – and embroiled – in.



## The seasonality of music

Despite the apparent flightiness, there are several discernable factors that give Freetown's music event scene, the city's music market, and the patterns of audiences' attendance a broad but nevertheless identifiable structure. In fact, we can even speak of a rhythmic pattern that structures the city's music life into an annual cycle. Four broad factors determine this cycle. These are the climate, agricultural planting and harvesting seasons, legal and religious holidays, and seasonal migration. These four factors form the broad coordinates within which Freetown's music scene is balanced between order and chaos, between a fragile stability and unintelligible turbulences, between a semblance of predictable regularity and the total dissolution of any planning into a most wayward, spontaneous and unpredictable randomness. As these four factors and the implicit broad, annual rhythm they bestow upon Freetown's music scene were neither discussed nor mentioned in any earlier writings on the city's music life, I will in the following section discuss each of the four in more detail.

I assembled, or "discovered", this list of four determinants via various sources and insights. To a certain extent, it was through interviews with Freetonians, in which I attempted to gain a broader knowledge about patterns of attendance, that several elements of the four respective factors were brought to my mind. In the first place, however, it was the very haptic experience of visiting music events – or struggling to visit music events – that opened my eyes for these broader patterns.

### Rains, heats and breezes

As I arrived in Freetown in early August, the first and in fact the main determining factor literally subdued me and my research to its overwhelming powers, that is: Freetown's extreme climate. For the first four weeks of my stay, the weather manifested its hegemony over Freetown's night (and day) life in the

form of heavy rains. Furious pelting beats incessant tattoos on iron roofs. Soaked pedestrians caught outside wade knee-deep through sudden torrents. At the climax of the rainy season, which occurs around July and August, rains can take on dramatic scales – with an average of 894 mm and 902 mm per day and twenty-seven and twenty-eight wet days per month in July and August respectively (BBC 2010). Given the city's poor sewerage, housing and transport infrastructure, a single heavy rainfall can often flood whole neighbourhoods and cause large parts of road traffic to stop for hours and in some areas even for days. The risks that a music event may be rained-out, that its audiences may be rather busy rescuing their goods and chattels from the floods, or that no transport is available to bring people to the respective location are among the most elementary, and natural, factors that make organizers of music events think twice before they schedule an event in these months.

At the other end of climatic conditions and their music-related constraints is heat. During the hottest months of the dry season from February till May, temperatures can take on similarly dramatic scales. The most sizzling months come in March and April, when temperatures can reach 40 degrees and more. During most of the dry season, the temperatures deviate little around an average of 31 degrees Celsius; tables crack, everything dries out, and Freetonains generally forget there was ever a time it was cool and wet. Together with the constantly high humidity, which seldom falls below 80% (BBC 2010), the dry season's heat literally tranquillizes the city's reveling folks.

These two extremes of Freetown's binary climate are somewhat interrupted by the season of the Harmattan, which, in the months of December and January, combines relatively cool temperatures with washed out skies.

Freetown's music event calendar reflects these three seasons and can be divided along their lines. Roughly, the musical cycle consists of three different periods: a low, a medium, and a high period of music events. The low music event period, with only sporadic performances, parties, festivals, carnivals, parades, concerts, album releases etc., starts around February. That is after the Sahara wind stops cooling down the air and when temperatures begin their slow but steady rise. The low period further stretches throughout the rainy season and ends after the heaviest rains cease around the months of August or September. The medium period of music events lasts from the end of the main rainy season until the beginning of the Harmattan season in late November. During these months, the frequency of rains slowly decreases while the frequency of music events begins to rise. As the rains cease, the Harmattan approaches, and the violent heats are not yet to come, a period of about three months of relatively moderate climatic conditions opens. The peak-season of the music event calendar falls into the coolest weeks when the Sahara winds make night-temperatures drop

at times beneath 20 degrees Celsius. During these weeks from late November till early January, the city celebrates basically every night.

The climate, though, does not always follow the anticipated seasons. In late October 2009, for example, a surprisingly late occurring heavy downpour turned a concert staged in the East Side of Freetown into a mudbath. A group of local artists organized a collective album release in a bigger outside venue. Around the time the first audiences began to appear, rain started to fall. Even before the first artists entered the stage, the rain had flooded the sandy football pitch the audiences' assembled on, converted the ground into one big pool of sludge, and eventually led to a blackout of the poorly sealed hi-fi equipment. The concert was cancelled and the soaked audiences sent home.

### Seasons of dearth, seasons of plenty

The main pattern of climatic seasons determines agricultural cycles as well. The seasonal cycles of planting and harvesting, in turn, have a considerable influence on the music market in general, and on the music event calendar in particular. Charry, in his work on West African Mande music, briefly mentions the approximation of musical life with the seasonal calendar of weather and farming. He writes: "The rainy season is a time for agricultural labour and little else. (...) during the dry season (...) activities shift from agriculture to social" (Charry 2000: 200). Charry's observance refers to a rural, "traditional" context of music life. In fact, he states that urban areas are not subjected to these cycles (*ibid.*). However, the connection between the seasonality of weather, agriculture and music is palpable in the "modern" city of Freetown too. Both rural and urban cycles of music life are following the same broad patterns. A Sierra Leonean agronomist explained to me the relation as follows:

The rain season is a time when many people just look for getting food for the day. That is often difficult enough. Not much is happening. The main crops have been planted. Everybody waits for the harvest; even here in the city. People don't sell much. And people don't buy much. Money is scarce. People don't go out much. This is the season of dearth. After the rains comes the harvest. That is in the early dry season. The harvesting of rice begins in October. Coffee is harvested from November. (...) The sellers move in from upcountry to sell their crops. The buyers come and buy the crops. Day-workers have their share helping out with the transport. The markets are full. This is the time when people have food, when people eat and drink, when people go out and celebrate. Money is flowing. People have money, and they spend it. This is the season of plenty.<sup>1</sup>

Agriculture contributes to half of Sierra Leone's total GDP (2005 estimates, see CIA 2010). However, the country's main hubs of agricultural production are in the provinces, thus outside Freetown. While Freetown's flows of money feed on many other sources (services, industry, trade generated by alluvial mining,

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<sup>1</sup> For a more detailed description of Sierra Leone's farming calendar, see Banton (1957: 44-46).

international funds), the seasonal dimensions of agricultural production nevertheless effect the city's economy and thereby also the high and low periods of music events and of the music market.

On a smaller scale, the cyclical effects stem from farming practiced in Freetown itself. Even though agriculture in the Freetown area is restricted to rather small cultivation, in the past two decades urban farming became increasingly important. The war was a main incentive to this. Migrants seeking refuge in the capital started cultivating crops in the city, so did many workers who lost their jobs. During the international trade embargo against the AFRC regime (1997-1998) and in the course of rebel trade-blockades between Freetown and its hinterlands, food shortage became acute and triggered urban farming as a basic survival mechanism. After the war, urban farming remained practices and even found its place in policies for urban development (Winnebah & Cofie 2007). With the continued role urban farming plays in Freetown, the agricultural seasons of dearth and plenty remain having a direct impact on marketing, income and spending – and thus on the periods when food is available and people spend, and celebrate, more and when food is getting more expensive while money becomes scarce and celebrations seldom.

Sierra Leone's agricultural seasons are not the only parameters of agricultural life that affect Freetown's music market and event calendar. The country's only major wharf (the Queen Elisabeth II quay) is in Freetown. All major import and export activities thus take place, at some point, in the capital. During periods of harvest, money-flows rise upcountry and raise the demand for consumption goods. Freetown, in turn, provides the middlemen that cover the demands. It is through their mercantile intermediation that Freetown partakes in the provinces' harvest-induced money-flows. From the major importer of goods from abroad to the long chains of middlemen trading the goods through to the street sellers and hawkers – all make more money, and spend more.

Thus, as agriculture is connected to, and determined by, the seasons, so are the low and high periods of music events. In this way we may in fact speak of an underlying natural cycle of Freetown's music scene. As the seasons change annually from wet to dry and cool to dry and hot, and as the agricultural rhythm changes from seasons of dearth to seasons of plenty, so do the seasons of music events change annually – in “harmony with nature” – from low periods to high periods and back to low periods.

## Feasts and fastings

Beside climate and whether, and therewith connected agricultural and economic seasons of dearth and seasons of plenty, Freetown's annual music event calendar is as well influenced by a range of legal and religious holidays. These can be

divided, on the one hand, into holidays occurring on fixed dates, which go along with the annual rhythm of the music event calendar, and into movable feasts that somewhat “disturb” the regularity of the “natural” annual rhythm, on the other hand. Among the fixed holidays and festivities with the biggest influence on music events in Freetown are the Christmas days (December 24-26), New Year celebrations (December 31 & January 1), Valentine’s Day (February 14), Independence Day (April 27), and the day of Bob Marley’s death (May 11). The movable feasts are, beside Christian Easter, mainly the Islamic month of fasting (Ramadan), the Festival of Sacrifice (Eid al-Adha), and the feast for the birth of the Prophet (Mawlid an-Nabi).

The fixed holidays more or less comply with the rhythm of the annual music event calendar. The days between Christmas and New Year mark the most densely scheduled festive period. During this week, several big parties, concerts, carnivals etc. take place every day and in a multitude of locations all across town. In 2009, this became particularly salient with regard to album launchings, a quite popular form of music shows in which artist launch the sale of their newest release. Throughout the year, barely any local artist and his and her management made the effort to organize such a launching. With the Christmas week approaching, suddenly the whole city was plastered with announcements of upcoming launchings. For the four days (and nights) from the 23<sup>rd</sup> to the 27<sup>th</sup> of December alone, I counted nine announced launching shows which not only competed with each other but also with the mass of parties and other shows taking place in the same period. The days around the Christmas break were literally overbooked with music events and festivities.

The relative recent inclusion of Valentine’s Day into the festive calendar announces the final ending of the main festive season. The nationally celebrated Independence Day and the fairly informal but nevertheless widely celebrated day of Bob Marley’s death, which both fall into the latest stages of the dry season, mark, together with Easter, three rather exceptional festive dates in the midst of the tranquillized season of dearth.

With an estimated sixty percent of Sierra Leone’s population being Muslim (CIA 2010), the annually moving Islamic feasts form, depending on the respective year, the sharpest contrast to the otherwise rather naturally, or climatically, determined high and low seasons for music events. The Eid al-Adha and the Mawlid an-Nabi are both public holidays. Many parties, concerts, carnivals etc., of which the vast majority is of a secular character, occur on the respective night of the holiday as well as at the nights before and after the holiday. The Ramadan forms the most thorough caesura in Freetown’s annual festive and music event cycle. In the eastern parts of the city, all bigger clubs, and most regular music venues shut down altogether. The Nigerian owner of one of the East Side’s most

popular discos (*Diva's*) described the period with the phrase “No game, no gain. Everybody’s sleeping, nobody’s dancing, I am losing money.” In the other, central and western, parts of town, the bars and clubs continue operating but reduce their activities significantly. During the twenty-eight to thirty days of fasting, basically no bigger concert or party takes place in Freetown.

However, the last nights before the start of the fasting and the night at the end of the fasting period (Eid al-Fitr) are among the most widely and excessively celebrated dates in Freetown’s annual festival calendar. The Eid al-Fitr is a public holiday whose accompanying secular celebrations, by both Muslims and Christians, have taken on an almost legendary character in the city’s festive season with many music performances all around town. The days and nights before the fasting are a rather informal occasion on which many Freetonian youths celebrate before the period of abstinence begins. The last night before the Ramadan (Laylat al-Qadr), however, used to be celebrated on a bigger, more formal scale with street parades and accompanying celebrations in bars, clubs and houses. Since the late 1980s much controversy arose from that practice. Islamic leaders, together with political figures, condemned the celebrations as inappropriate in the dawn of the fasting period. Cecil Fyle (1997) states that between 1988 and 1992 the government even officially banned the celebrations. Jenny Oram (1998: 96), however, collected evidence that the celebrations nevertheless did take place in the years 1988 to 1990.

When I was in Freetown in 2009, the city appeared divided over the issue of secular Laylat al-Qadr celebrations. In the evening hours of that day, the eastern parts of Freetown were already swathed in silence and demureness, with closed clubs and empty bars. In the central and western parts, however, the music venues and locations were exceptionally over-crowded. Even though rumours circulated that a parade would take place, despite a couple of thousand people waiting for the parade along central spots in town no parading occurred. The waiting folks nevertheless celebrated in the surrounding bars and spots.

Two weeks into the Ramadan, I interviewed a club DJ, Yellowman, who played at two venues in the West End of town during the night of Laylat al-Qadr. As a practicing Muslim he observes the fasting himself. Living his whole life in Freetown’s East Side, Yellowman is well informed about occurrences and rumours in his neighbourhood. When I asked him about the happenings in the night of the Laylat al-Qadr, he explained that several appeals came from different sides (mainly from clerics) to begin the fasting quiet and contemplating. While these official appeals led to the closure of clubs in the east, many young Muslims – just as Yellowman himself – decided to sidestep the appeals by moving to venues in the west.

## Season of migration to the clubs

The last main factor contributing to, and co-determining, the annual cycle of music events in Freetown is seasonal migration to the city. Roughly, two main groups of seasonal migrants, or visitors, can be discerned: (1) people from Sierra Leone's rural sides; this group consists to most parts of traders, peasants selling their crops and livestock, and day labourers; and (2) visitors from among the large Sierra Leonean diaspora living mainly in the USA, the UK and other parts of Europe, and, to a smaller degree, in other African countries and the Middle East.

Economically, the two groups stand in marked contrast to each other. The rural migrants are amongst Sierra Leone's lowest-income and education groups. Many members of the diaspora, in turn, belong to the most educated nationals (though, many took on foreign nationalities) who collect their paychecks in pounds, dollars or euros. Whereas the migrants from the rural side come in search for work, trade and thus earning, the visitors from overseas are mostly coming for holidays, family gatherings and thus spending. Both groups, however, contribute in their way to an increase of Freetown's money flow which in turn influences the music market and scene. And both come, in their largest numbers, during the peak of the festive season around December and thus further increase the demand for the already heightened frequency of music events.

As for the seasonal migrants from the rural sides, the main incentives to come to Freetown are connected to the above described agricultural cycles. Most come in the months after the harvest, from early November onwards. They leave again as the main planting season starts in February and April respectively, depending on the region. Traders and peasants come to market their goods. Day labourers come to cover the risen demand for carrier, packer, gofer, watchmen etc. While their spending capacities are kept within low limits, their presence nevertheless adds to the generally risen demand for music and entertainment, particularly in the poorer eastern parts of town where many of the upcountry migrants live during their stay. I interviewed Amadou, a wholesale food merchant, who regularly moves between the countryside and Freetown. After the harvest, he employs many of the seasonal migrants for his business.

In Freetown, there are some rich people who earn by month. They can go out every night, because they always have the money. But others only earn after the harvest. That is still the majority in Sierra Leone. They depend on the weather. When the rains come, it is difficult to move. But in November and December, they come to Freetown and sell their things and look for work. They have their brothers here in Freetown who help. I help many of them. And whatever comes out at the end of the day, many of them spend it during the nights, and this it is usually more than what they make during the rain season.

During December, so-called market carnivals are regularly organized in and around market stalls of the East Side's major markets. These small-scale festi-

vities attract many of the visiting traders and labourers from upcountry, who spend much of their time around the markets. At times, the seasonal migrants organize these parties themselves. The setup is fairly simple. On one market carnival I visited in mid-December, all that the organizing group of young men needed to provide was a rented music set, including one large speaker and a CD player, and a large catering pack of so-called “paper packs”, Ghanaian-produced gin in small plastic packs, which were then cheaply sold to the attendees.

The influence of the visitors from among the diaspora is decisively higher, especially, but not only, in economic terms. The annual number of Sierra Leoneans visiting from abroad may go well into the thousands. Most of the diaspora Sierra Leoneans come during the holiday period around Christmas and New Year. The dimension of this annual pilgrimage became evident in the course of the so-called siege of Freetown, the invasion of the city by aligned rebel forces of RUF and AFRC on January 6, 1999 (see Chapter 9). As I was told by several Freetonians, during the attack, most foreigners, as well as many locals, fled into the West End parts of the city. The USA sent a rescue team to evacuate a couple of dozens of US-citizens they expected to be present in the country and to fly them out. However, it turned out that a couple of thousand Sierra Leoneans with US-citizenships, the annual diaspora visitors, had gathered in the Mamy Yoko hotel which served as a safety basis secured by ECOMOG troops. The US had to send a warship to move their citizens into safety to Dakar.

The relationship of Freetown residents to the annually visiting Sierra Leonean diaspora is ambiguous. It comprises, on the one hand, envy, admiration and reliance, and, on the other hand, mocking and exploitation. An extract from an interview I conducted with an older Freetonian well illustrates that ambiguity.

There are mostly men coming from the West. In America, when you have a four-wheel drive, it is nothing, nobody considers you. But here, you only come and park your jeep and people will have respect for you. So they usually come to show-off that they are from there. Because when you are from there, that means you are a Big Man. So they come, bring their cars, and collect those girls around town to have them with them. They can just give them one hundred dollars like that, and the girls all go for it. But most of us here cannot afford that. So they come down, enjoy themselves, meet their old friends and make many new friends. They spend all their money, and at the end of the day they have to sell their cars and jewelry again to pay for their fare to the airport.

A popular term used in reference to the visitors from overseas is “J.C.” – an abbreviation for “just come”. In 2009, a female musician from Freetown (Miss Sarah) released a song entitled “Mi JC” – my JC. An extract from her lyrics reveals – in quite a blunt way – some of the JCs’ characteristics the above-quoted interviewee mentioned, but from the side of what he called “those girls around town”.



*DISCO*nnecti*o*ns

<i>Way December kin reach, you day see den baby</i> <i>Day change den color, day fet for short skirt</i> <i>skirts</i> <i>For move din JC for gie den dollar</i> <i>them</i> <i>Some kin go up en down nar different night club</i> <i>Day check for JC for gie den dollar</i> <i>If you meet up bad boy</i> <i>E go lef you wit sic</i> <i>E go lef you day cry, you regret you life</i> <i>life</i> <i>If you meet up good boy, lek mi yone JC</i> <i>E go gie you d dollar en gie you to taste (...)</i>	(English translation) <i>In December you see these young girls</i> <i>Bleaching their skin, scrambling for short</i> <i>skirts</i> <i>For attracting the JC to get dollars from</i> <i>them</i> <i>Some go up and down the different night clubs</i> <i>They look for JCs to give them dollars</i> <i>When you meet a bad boy,</i> <i>He will leave you with sickness</i> <i>He will leave you crying, you will regret your</i> <i>life</i> <i>When you meet a good boy, like my own JC</i> <i>He will give you dollars and please you</i> <i>[sexually] (...)</i>
<i>You change mi price from leones to dollar</i> <i>Mi hair style nar dollar</i> <i>mi short skirt nar dollar</i> <i>Mi G-string nar dollar</i> <i>En mi body nar dollar</i>	<i>You changed my price from leones to dollar</i> <i>My hair style is (bought with) dollars</i> <i>My short skirt is dollars</i> <i>My G-string (mini briefs) is dollars</i> <i>And my body is dollars</i>

Not only are Freetown's night clubs filled by the dollar-spending JCs themselves, they also attract (especially female) local visitors who in turn roam the clubs in search of dollars. The diasporic visitors, who in many cases deem themselves to be as local as locals, tend to expose behaviours that are meant to mark their distinctiveness and for which local Freetonians, in turn, ridicule them. One such exposed behavioural practice emerged in recent years and can still be observed around the Christmas season on Freetown's streets. Because of the supposedly unbearable (December) heat, many, especially young and male, JCs equip themselves with two gimmicks: a huge bottle of mineral water and a white towel wrapped around the neck so to "fetch" sweat. While this apparent showing-off (a liter of bottled water costs about fifteen-times as much as the ordinary sachet-packed water) and marking of distinctiveness (the "sweat-towel" in the coolest period of the year) still causes much laughter among local Freetonians, it as well introduced a new trend that soon found its local followers. Thus, while the newly arrived (just come) are mocked for their oddness, their odd behaviours, backed up by both symbolic and factual economic power, nevertheless appeal as examples of newly arrived (just come) trends and styles.

As indicated in the extract from Miss Sarah's JC-song, a considerable number of the visiting diaspora comes, firstly, on holidays and, secondly, with considerable amounts of forex to be spent on leisure and to be distributed among their local peers and "playmates". Because of that, the city's music market undergoes a substantial boost during their annual feasting. Many music events particularly target at the affluent diaspora by, for example, including their appearance into the respective night's title or programme. In one of Freetown's most popular West

End clubs (*Paddy's*), Christmas Eve became a traditional night for a show coined "JC vs. Homebase", in which diaspora members compete with locals.

Furthermore, the diaspora forms one of the most valuable (and generous) customer groups for locally produced music. Music sellers became excited when telling me stories about JCs who purchase complete assortments of latest local releases without engaging in hard-fought negotiations about the price and with an unacquainted eagerness to buy original CDs instead of the cheaper bootlegs and compilations. As Sierra Leone's tourism industry remains way below its potentials,<sup>2</sup> the annually visiting Sierra Leonean JCs fill in the important gap of a financially strong and rather unheeding group with lots of free time and with an urge to celebrate and flaunt. With regard to the vast amounts of money pumped into the local music market by the visiting diaspora during, mainly, December, one might even raise the question whether Freetown's musical and festive peak-season attracts the diaspora or if the diaspora itself creates this peak.

A last main factor connecting the diaspora and Freetown's music market and events cycles are the amounts of remittances sent by Sierra Leonean abroad to local family members and friends. The remittances are mainly "packed and delivered" during the weeks of the main festive season in December. The long queues in front of Freetown's diverse internationally operating, person-to-person money transfer outlets in the weeks before Christmas lively demonstrates that point. That money, in turn, fuels the respective recipients spending (and celebrating) capacities and thus adds yet another (economic) factor that fuels the musical season of plenty. A more detailed account of how some Freetonians make use of these remittances during the "Christmas festive-mania" is given in Chapter 17.

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<sup>2</sup> For the (low) numbers of tourist visitor, see Sierra Leone Statistics (2010).

## Building, binding and dividing

Music events in Freetown, as elsewhere, occur in a wide variety of contexts. Generally, a music event can be understood as referring to any form of performance that involves musical elements, regardless of whether this performance implies the play of instruments, of records, or none of these; whether it involves only musicians, only audiences, or both; and, furthermore, whether the music is at the center of attention or just provides a sort of aural backdrop for other activities. A musical performance can thus occur in many guises. It can be a street parade with dozens of live bands and tens of thousands of participants, the more exclusive, fee required club-party, the odd assembly of a transient community in a small bar with some vague sounds buzzing from a radio, or the classic singing under the shower.

### Music's building material

At the outset, we may distinguish two basic categories of music events: the impromptu and the organized. I will begin with a short reflection upon the former. Impromptu events can be described as music performances which occur spontaneously and without any longer-term organization or planning. Every day, there are myriads of impromptu music events occurring in Freetown. The city's public transport provides the setting and place for many of these everyday life music events. In the following passage I give a more or less telling Freetonian example for such an everyday life "event".

On a long ride in a *poda poda* – Freetown's shared mini-busses – during rush hour traffic, I observe a young women sitting in front of me. We drive from central Freetown to the city's northwestern shores at Aberdeen. Due to the heavy traffic, the journey lasts for some one and a half hours. The denseness of slowly moving cars outside on the streets is surpassed by the denseness inside our vehicle. In every of the five lathy seat rows at least five people are cramped next

to and onto each other. The young woman in front of me is stuck between two corpulent men, and, in addition, carries a young girl on her lap who in turn carries a huge plastic bag with what appears as living content (a chicken?) inside it. The bus is equipped with an impressive loudspeaker positioned beneath the last seat row. In fact, this last seat is nothing but a bare wooden board fixed on top of the large speaker. Deafening, bass-empathic sounds of a Nigerian hit-compilation blare out of it and coerce us into silence. As we approach one of Freetown's most notorious traffic hubs, the Congo Cross, "Yori Yori" is played. The driver further turns up the volume and subsequently fails to hear a passenger's shouts to drop him off before the crossroad. The young woman in front of me – drained in sweat, clogged and compressed by the load of co-passengers, with her arms clumsily wrapped around the little girl's head – begins to "dance". First, she tenderly sways her head in circular moves to the music's rhythm. Then, tentatively exploring and exploiting the tiny, invisible spacing around her, she sets her whole upper body in harmoniously oscillating moves. I press my face, which is already almost touching her hair, a bit closer and hear her, scarcely audible, singing in the song's catchy chorus. It is a moment of dear intimacy. Her "dancing" and "singing" equals an escapist move towards the music, towards a sonic creation and clearing of space. The scene is also a metaphor for the spatial realities in Freetown: Closeness due to impasse, intimacy due to an aporia of space. Huddled, crowded and thrust by neighbours and tin (here, the bus's roof), every free space – material or acoustic – turns into a welcomed hatchway and refuge.

Exploring the dimensions of music's place in everyday life and in the constitution of the self, Tia DeNora (2000) argues that music is involved in the construction of feelings not only for the expression of given internal emotional states but also as a mode for preventing the onset of moods and feelings that are not wished for. Music does not simply act upon individuals. Music's "effects" come from the ways in which individuals orient to it, make sense of and use it (*ibid.*: 61). "Music is a device or resource to which people turn in order to regulate themselves as aesthetic agents, as feeling, thinking and acting beings in their day-to-day lives" (*ibid.*: 62). Music in everyday life, DeNora continues, is a "building material of self-identity" (*ibid.*). The young woman's "singing and dancing" in the cramped *poda poda* gives a vivid illustration of music's role for people's self-constituting and "self-regulatory" acts in everyday life contexts. In her impromptu organized music performance she re-configured her body and self in relation to the music. She "used" the music as a means (or "building material") for an escapist move towards another, most probably imagined, place. Although we might only speculate about her internal emotional state (I missed to talk to her, given that that could have brought about some insides about her internal

states at all), her sonic clearing and creation of space appeared very much like a preventive counter-act to the mood and feelings most of us squeezed passengers were in.

There are many more examples and types of impromptu music events that can be found in Freetown. The number of sources and occasions for impromptu music events is indefinite. I was often the cause for their occurrence myself. As I wandered around the streets of Freetown, met and interviewed people about their music preferences, tastes and practices, the very talk about music regularly prompted my interviewees and others present to start singing the songs, melodies and lyrics we discussed. Often, people would also render their own compositions. In a later chapter (20), I return to everyday life music events in my (calibrated) reading of contemporary Freetown's meta-genre of love music. For now, I shift the focus towards the second basic category of music events which are also the prime concern of the following chapters – the organized events.

### A short typology of music events

In the following, I draw up a rough scheme of forms of organized music events in Freetown. For this I will further differentiate four categories of music events: the private, the social, the public, and the commercial. I derive each category from the main context a music event is organized in and the respective scope of audiences it incorporates, or is meant to incorporate. The four categories can be described and distinguished as follows.

A *private* music event is one whose (intended) composition of audience is limited to a however broad or narrow circle of friends and family members; a birthday party, for example. The audience scope of a *social* music event is wider than that of a private event. It incorporates members of a social group which is defined by other (social) parameters than that which define a family or circle of friends and which would not yet qualify as including the broad public; a school party would be one possible event of that sort. Evidently, most if not all music events with more than one participant can be understood as social in character. However, in the herein evolved scheme the term “social” is used in reference to the form of (non-kinship) groups that take part in music events rather than to the form of interaction that takes place within these groups and events. The *public* music event is one that transcends the scopes of the two former categories of audience groups and events and which potentially includes all members of society; an annual carnival that takes place on the street would fall into that category. Potentially, the *commercial* music event includes all members of society as well but differs from public events by its orientation towards economic profits; for example, the common dance-club.

In practice, the boundaries between the categories are, of course, not that fixed but fluid and often overlapping. However, these four categories are not an end in itself. They are not meant to establish definite groups of organized music events. Rather, they serve as a means to draw up an initial scheme of forms in which music events are organized in Freetown and the respective scopes and compositions of audiences they (aim to) incorporate. In many instances, the organization of a music event and its composition of audiences may well combine elements of several or of all four categories. Yet another sort of market carnivals – which share the same name with actual carnivals organized at and around market stalls as described above but which differ in terms of the place they are celebrated at – can be seen as music events that potentially belong to all four categories. These market carnivals are organized by befriended, mainly young and male, petty traders who work in sorts of informal trade-cooperations selling their goods on the streets of central Freetown. They are thus organized by a group of friends who follow the same trade – thus an initial private composition of organizers and attendees who are furthermore defined as a non-kinship or “social” (and in fact economic) group as well. Each December, groups of these young petty traders organize such market carnivals on the respective streets where they follow their trade. While the celebrations are then divided into carnivals of shoe, jeans, shirt, etc. sellers, everybody is welcomed and no admission fee is charged – thus making it a public event too. Often, the young organizers also advertise their carnival by, for example, fixing large banners that tout for their party on central spots in town. A commercial trait is added to many of these market carnivals since in many cases the organizers align with drinks-selling shopkeepers who then share their profits for that evening with them.

From the above-evolved scheme of four prototypical types of music events an initial overview of the scales of social segregation and integration that are (re)created in the realms of music events can be derived. In the given order, the first three categories – private, social, public – can be read as declining in segregating dynamics and as rising in integrating dynamics respectively: Private music events are strongest inclined to host an exclusive audience; the social music event is less restrictive in terms of admission and belonging but still confines the respective audience to some form of narrowed composition; the public music event is most prone to bring together and incorporate a wide range of different people and groups of people, or in fact groups of strangers. The commercial music event stands out as an exception to this order. Potentially, commercial music events – that is events organized in order for the organizers to gain profit – do include all sections and groups of society. However, as admission fees are mostly a main means to collect the profit, these events often imply (very strong) segregating dynamics as well. I explore the integrating and segregating dynamics

of commercial music events and the role music plays in these in the following chapters. With regard to the role of music in the first three categories, a sort of underlying rule can be observed and put into the following hypothetical “formula”: The less exclusive (or: the more inclusive) the social composition of a given audience in a music-related event is, the more central is the role music plays in that event. Three examples will have to suffice to illustrate this “rule”, which, admittedly, has many exceptions to it.

### The private, the social and the public

On a party I attended which was organized by an affluent Freetonian family for the occasion of the oldest daughter’s twentieth birthday, music fulfilled the mere function of a fill-in. The guest list for the party was fiercely exclusive as the daughter literally dictated whom she wanted to have at her birthday celebration and whom not. Because of the restrictive invitation – with some exceptions (of which I was a main one), the young lady invited only her closest friends – the attendant group of people was highly acquainted with each other. Even though a large stereo system was rented for the occasion, for most parts music was played only in-between and at the end of the numerous points of the rather formal protocol; that is, various laudations for the birthday child, an almost solemn presentation of gifts, a first official round of drink-serving followed by dining, a more loose socializing of the present guests, and finally the dancing which lasted only for about one hour as most guests already started to make their ways home.

The music at this party was exchangeable with, or virtually the same as, the music played at basically *all* other types of music events I attended in Freetown throughout my stay. At the young women’s birthday, it was mainly the boys who were responsible for the music selection. However, this gender-bias appeared not to result in any difference in terms of the selected and played music. The party guests listened and danced to well-known hit-songs of what we might call the trinity of Freetown’s post-election (black) Atlantic music: Nigerian love-pop tunes, Jamaican lover’s rock and “dirty” dancehall, and a rather narrow choice of recent US-American billboard chart songs. To put it colloquially, in Freetown’s contemporary music event scene, the music is the same difference.

So-called outings are a main example for what I distinguished as social music events. While outings can comprise many different forms of outside celebrations (in past decades, these celebrations were called “moonshine picnics”), in their most common form they refer to a party on the beach. On every weekend during the main festive season in December, almost every (accessible) beach along the Freetown peninsula witnesses one or several outings. While there are some outings which could be described as private, for example in the case of a larger family celebration, generally the attendees’ (or “audiences’”) composition is

social in character. Outings are usually organized by already acquainted (non-kinship) groups of people: by work- or schoolmates, by college and university fraternities, church youth groups, and by the heap of various social clubs existent in Freetown. However, as outings often comprise of a hundred or more people, the internal acquaintance of the group is of a relatively loose character. Furthermore, in order to minimize the costs for every participant, outing organizers regularly seek to invite people from outside the respective group's internal circle, thereby further widening, or "estranging", the group's composition. Thus, while an outing's initial composition of participants is marked by a relatively exclusive character, in many cases this initial exclusive composition is dissolved through the inclusion of participants who are only loosely related to the core group. The group then rents one or several busses (and a music system), heads off to a beach in the early morning hours, and is picked up again by the busses in the later evening. The "programmes" of the several outings I attended varied. A certain pattern nevertheless prevailed. The relation, or "quota", of musical and non-musical elements and activities was balanced more or less fifty-fifty. Longer "intervals" when music is played and the group dances are intermitted by collective eating and swimming and by various sorts of playful competitions (chanting, running and fashion competitions, for example). While at the young woman's private birthday party, music played more or less the role of a mere interlude, during outings, it is a central though not the only central element of the celebration.

The music selection made at all outings I attended was, to emphasize that point once again, virtually the same: the hit-mix from the (black) Atlantic trinity. However, as the frequency and duration of music played, listened and danced to was higher than at the birthday party, another phenomenon characteristic of Freetown's music event scene can be introduced at this point: The at times almost notorious repetition of major hit-songs in loops of up to ten reiterations. The selection of these over and over repeated songs itself varied in the course of time. Some new songs were added to the list of apparently infatigable tunes, while other, older ones slowly decreased in the number of played repetitions. The overall number of current "evergreens" is kept stable, and assessable, at about half a dozen songs. The notorious reiteration of a hit-song usually occurs at two distinguishable moments during public dances: firstly, when people are to be animated to start dancing; secondly, when the given assembly's dance-frenzy reaches a climax.

During one outing I attended outside Freetown at Lakka Beach, the success of song-repetition had struck me especially. The outing was organized by a broadly inclusive social club from Tengbe Town, a central district in Freetown. Everybody could join the club for a minimal fee and for this partake in all of the club's



activities, mainly parties. The outing comprised of a highly diversified group of about one hundred and fifty people from various social backgrounds, from different neighbourhoods in Freetown, and of a broad scope of age ranging from about fifteen to forty year olds'. Every time the group was to be animated to dance, the hired DJ played one of Freetown's currently two most popular hit-songs: Bracket's "Yori Yori" and D'Banj's "Fall in Love", both of Nigerian origin. While he alternated the song he played at every new beginning of a dance, every time he repeated the respective song several times in a row – and was successful with this. People started dancing and it appeared that the more often the song was repeated, the more people appreciated and reveled to it. As the dancing folks were vitalized again, the DJ played other songs as well (though, all from inside the avowed trinity). Once the dancing became frantic, the repetitions started again and carried the dancers to yet greater heights.

The deliberate and, on the side of the audience, highly welcomed repetitive play of hit-songs adds a sort of perpetualness to Freetown's dance music scene. From a more heuristic point of view, the hit-song-reiterations contrast and in fact challenge the salient flightiness of both Freetown's night life and the (daily) lives of many Freetonians. Thus, whereas the city's music event scene at large – as, for example, with regard to the patterns of attendance – is marked by uncertainty, change, fluctuation and hence unpredictability, the redundant playlists at many if not most music events in Freetown are, reversely, characterized by permanence and an almost outright predictability. The imponderable (life) contexts in which the music is played and consumed are reversed and literally turned upside down in the selections of songs played.

Another, culturally somewhat "deeper-rooted" function might be ascribed to the hit-song reiterations. Simon Ottenberg (1996: 120), in his study of three blind musicians in the north of Sierra Leone, makes the following observation relevant to our issue of repeatedly played dance songs.

When each song is repeated for perhaps ten or fifteen minutes, often with little variation on the instrument, the meaning of the words apparently becomes quite secondary (...), if the audience bothers to understand them at all. What becomes important is action, particularly bodily action – the singing, clapping, and dancing and the movements of the instrumentalist. (...) During the performance, the audience appears to feel a mild state of dissociation from the everyday. This state is probably stimulated (...) by the repetitions of a song with only minor variations (even consecutive songs may be fairly similar) and by the participants' common musical experience (...).

Borrowing a famous formula from media theorist Marshall McLuhan (1987), we might thus state that, at least at times, "the medium (of music) is the message". And the medium is, in this case, the well-established rhythms, beats and melodies of songs that in a most playful way defy the taxing coordinates of the unestablished and unpredictable day-to-day lives of its musicking participants

and foster social bonding through the common musical experience and its associated, common bodily action. Before I propose a wider analysis of the processes involved in musicking's social bonding, I will first present the last exemplary case in my three-part categorization of (non-commercial) music events in Freetown, the organized public music event.

The clearest examples of public music events in Freetown are the devil-masquerades. The practice goes back to the early 19<sup>th</sup> century as freed slaves from Yoruba land brought the masquerades to Freetown (see Chapter 7). As in the former decades and centuries, the masquerades are organized by various sorts of "secret" societies – today usually referred to as "devil business". Every of these societies, which resemble urban voluntary associations and in some cases also fulfill similar functions (e.g. social security), is associated with their respective "devil": a lavishly decorated costume, representing hunting deities and consisting of a horned headdress and a vest-like garment covered with a variety of adornments. During the regularly staged masquerades, the societies compete with each other. Every society parades across central streets of Freetown, at times covering the whole city from east to west, where several tens or even hundreds of thousands of people await and celebrate them – and themselves. During the parading, the devils are accompanied by the members of the respective society, including a group of musicians who provide the drum-beats to the devil's dances and capricious, often provocative acts. Even though the devils form the apparent reason for the whole celebration, they are not the focal point of attraction – most probably, not any more. Trucks, busses and cars equipped with large sound systems follow the same routes as the devil procession and literally steal the devils the show. According to my inquiries with some members of a devil society and with one organizer of such a "sound truck", the vehicles and sound systems were introduced to the parades after the war – initially as a supplement to the main attraction, the devils. However, in recent years this relation turned upside down. Now it is the devils and their drummers who appear to supplement the sound systems and who in fact provide the mere pretext for their shows. During the two main masquerades of the year I attended, on Boxing Day and New Year's Day (masquerades take place about seven times a year), the discrepancy between the attraction caused by the devils and by the trucks, busses and cars was obvious. All of the "sound trucks" were frightfully overloaded, with as many dancing folks gathered on the vehicle's platforms, roofs and large speakers as possible and hundreds or even thousands of others following the trucks on the street. The imaginative clothing of some of the truck-participants (or their lack thereof), together with the electronic dance-beats crashing from the surcharged sound systems, called to mind a Freetonian version of the Berlin Love Parade. The devils and their company of percussionists, on the other hand, ap-

peared lost and even disoriented in the crowds of celebrating people. At times, the vehicles' loud music sounds drowned out the drumming and forced the devil and his followers to stop and wait until the truck, bus or car passed by.

However, the point is that the music forms the very epicenter of the masquerades. While the devils had been (more) central to the celebrations in the past, also their performance was and is strongly driven by musical elements and pivots around the dancing of both the devils and their audiences. With the "sound trucks" apparent usurpation of the masquerades' throne, music came to the fore even more clearly – with this, also the hit-mix of songs from the (black) Atlantic triangle played on the vehicle's sound systems. The audiences' composition in turn is the most wide, open and inclusive of all celebrations in Freetown. Especially during the two main masquerades on Boxing Day and New Year's Day, virtually the whole city of Freetown populates the streets, sidewalks and bars along the parade's route and partakes in the festivity.

### Music's binding material

With regard to the three main examples given above (of a birthday party, outings, and devil masquerades), a correlation can be thus observed between, on the one hand, the centrality (or marginality) of music in a given, organized, non-commercial music event and, on the other hand, the scale and rigidity (or elasticity) of exclusionary dynamics in the composition of the audience at the respective event. In other words, the less exclusive the setting and audience, the more important the music becomes. Another sort of hypothetical "formula" seems to emerge from the three examples given above: the more exclusive the composition of audiences at a (non-commercial) "music-event" is, the less it is a *music* event altogether.

Of course one could think of many exceptions to both of these formulas. A group of rehearsing musicians or a rehearsing choir, for example, may be quite exclusive in their composition and with regard to whom they admit to their (rehearsing) music event, whereas the music would be very much at the center of attention. One could further think of a concert performed for a close(d) circle of family members or friends. On the other hand, not all music-related events with "mixed" audiences necessarily pivot around the music. Political rallies on Freetown's streets, for example, in which music appears to have become quite an important element in recent years and which attract a wide variety of different people (often also from the respective opposing political side<sup>1</sup>), obviously – or at least supposedly – pivot around non-musical activities. However, the two for-

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<sup>1</sup> See the political opportunism – or "watermelon politics" – observed by Maya Christensen and Mats Utas (2008: esp. 530-532) during the electoral campaign for the 2007 general elections.

mulas *do* find validation in many other cases of Freetown's broad range of (organized, non-commercial) music-related events. The three chosen examples described above are anything but exhaustive. They could be complemented by a long list of other types of music event; including wedding celebrations, wake keepings, funerals, name-giving ceremonies, *awujo* feasts (see Chapter 7), numerous kinds of (non-commercial) carnivals, balls and parties organized by work and voluntary associations, fraternities, sororities, old-boys associations, and masonic lodges, celebrations introduced to Freetown by secret societies from upcountry Sierra Leone (mainly Poro and Sande), the annual floating parade (see Oram 1998), and, of course, the immense number of daily occurring church services in Freetown. While a further description of the city's non-commercial music events would exceed the scope of this chapter, the two hypothetical "formulas" stated above find validation not only in the three given examples but also in many other comparable occasions and settings of non-commercial music events in Freetown.

So, what can we derive from that? Before, I referred to DeNora's idea about everyday life music's role as a "*building material*" of self-identity. Music was presented as a means to constitute – or "construct" – the self by using it accordingly to the needs created and caused by different moods and feelings of an individual, and against the odds posed by everyday life (as, for example, in a long and tedious *poda poda* ride). Taking up DeNora's metaphor and extending it to the sphere of (non-commercial) organized music events with many participants, we may state that, in these, music can be approached as a "*binding material*" for collectivity – a means to strengthen collectivity by using it *accordingly to the needs created and caused by the collectivity in question*. The idea and argument of music as a means to bring individuals together and foster their alignment is anything but new. I have explored several dimensions of, and arguments for, music as a "tool" for social bonding, or as "the pattern that connects", in the first part of this book (Chapters 2 & 3). After presenting and discussing several aspects of and (social) dynamics at work in commercial music events in Freetown, I return to the patterns of social dis/connections as they unfold in the spaces of collective musicking (Chapter 18). At this point, I consider the issue of music's social dis/connectivity with regard to the two hypothetical "formulas" stated above.

As stated before (Chapters 3 & 12), collective musicking – understood as making, listening and dancing to music – can be approached as a meaning-generating act, a kind of ritual that stirs shared emotions and generates incorporating group identities (Richards 2005, 2006, 2009). In social spaces filled, created and "diverted" by music, musicking people strengthen existent social relationships and foster new ("imagnations about ideal") social relationships

(Small 1998). Following a neurologically informed approach, Benzon (2001: 23) puts forward a similar thesis in his exploration of various dimensions of music as “a medium through which individual brains are coupled together in shared activities”. Therein, he particularly emphasizes what he calls the “histories” of successive states in a nervous system (*ibid.*: 126). According to Benzon, it is through these “brain histories” that individuals and groups of individuals are formed and distinguished from each other, *and* – once the respective brains share in the same activities – through which individuals and groups of individuals are also *aligned with each other*. Music plays a particular role in these processes of (brain) alignments. Benzon writes: “Each brain has a unique history, which means (...) that each engages the world in a unique way. But when a group of people commit themselves to a musical performance, they are committing themselves to share in one history. (...) that shared history is the same for each other” (*ibid.*).

In the three examples of collective musicking during (non-commercial) music events in Freetown described above, three different scopes of audiences’ pre-existing states of internal social coherence, acquaintance and bonding have been distinguished and juxtaposed with the centrality (and marginality) of the role music played in their respective celebration. Whereas in the celebration of the already acquainted and bonded group (the birthday party assembly) music played only a marginal role, in the highly diversified, unacquainted and un-bonded group (the audiences at the devil masquerades) music was the very focal point of action and attention. Taking up Richards, Small and Benzon’s ideas about music and dance’s role in generating incorporating group identities and bringing about “shared histories”, we might put forward the following thought: when a given group of people already has some bonding – that is, a common group identity and “history” – music’s function to strengthen that bonding is not as much “needed” as in the case of a more diversified, non-acquainted, un-bonded group. In the acquainted social circles of, for example, the village community dance or the exclusive assembly of friends at the young lady’s birthday celebration, the musicking participants already share a common history. In the case of many of Freetonian outings, the respective groups of people usually form a looser but still relatively bonded collectivity. During the devil masquerades, the respective participants represent one of the most fragmented audiences to be found at a music-related event in Freetown. The crowds at the devil (and “sound truck”) parades form a temporary urban community of “intimate strangers” per excellence, sharing the intimacy of musicking together – and markedly *seeking* that intimacy of collective musicking. Music’s binding materials, it thus appears, are “used” in relation to the respective musicking group’s pre-existent bonding and cohesion. However, whether a group of participants at a music event takes a however

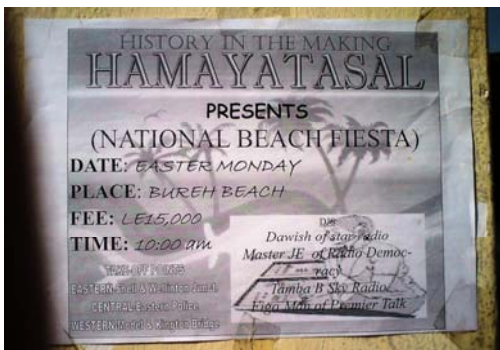
conscious, sub- or unconscious “decision” about the (central or marginal) role they ascribe to the music – as a means of bonding (or binding) and according to their “need” to strengthen their social ties and to create shared (neural) “histories” – is left to speculation.

With regard to the broader societal dis/connectivity brought about by the three exemplary cases of (non-commercial) music events in Freetown, two parallel dynamics can be observed. On the one hand, the strongest societal *disconnection* occurred in the setting of the group with the strongest internal cohesion: the birthday assembly, which, by definition, marked the most exclusive of the three examples. The main disconnecting force was an extra-musical one (the assembly’s wish to remain among themselves), while the music was only at the margins of collective actions. On the other hand, the strongest societal *connection* occurred in the setting of the group with the weakest internal cohesion: the street devil audiences, who made music and dance the center of their collective action. It is, however, intriguing to note that the very songs played at all three assemblies – the “*music per se*”, so to say – were almost outright identical: all three events were fuelled by the trinity of Freetown’s post-electoral (black) Atlantic hit-mix. Thus, while the music *per se* in fact creates the strongest, however abstract or “aural” connectivity, it is the extra-musical context and factors that disconnect the respective groups and assemblies again from each other.

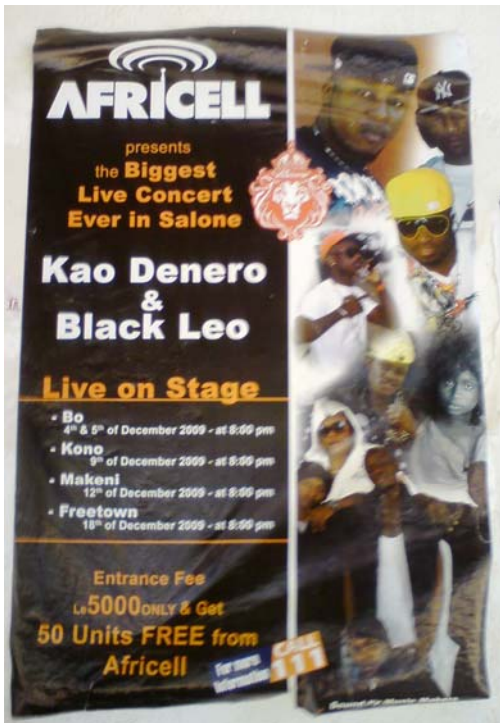
Bearing these preliminary thoughts, observations and speculations in mind, we now turn towards Freetown’s commercial music even scene. I will begin with a short excursion into the conjunctures of Freetown’s geography and its therein inscribed social imaginaries.

DISConnections

Photos 15.1-15.13 Posters, canvas and mural paintings. Advertising music events. Freetown, 2009/2010



Chapter 15: Building, binding and dividing





## A topography of Freetown's social imaginary

### Geographies of dreams

Reflecting upon one of his first excursions into the tributaries of the Amazon, Claude Lévi-Strauss philosophizes about the “nature” of towns and the inherently metaphysical qualities of space they exhibit. He writes:

And then there was that strange element in the evolution of so many towns: To drive to the west which so often leaves the eastern part of the town in poverty and dereliction. It may be merely the expression of that cosmic rhythm which has possessed mankind from the earliest times and springs from the unconscious realization that to move with the sun is positive, and to move against it negative; the one stands for order, the other for disorder. It's a long time since we ceased to worship the sun; and with our Euclidean turn of mind we jib at the notion of space as qualitative. But it is independently of ourselves that the great phenomena of astronomy and meteorology have their effect – an effect as discreet as it is ineluctable – in every part of the globe. We all associate the direction east-to-west with achievement (...). (Lévi-Strauss 1961: 125-126)

In Sierra Leone, this “cosmic” drive towards the west transcends the spaces of towns and cities. The normative, dichotomous perception of west and east and the therewith connected associations of achievement and wealth (*west*) and of failure and dereliction (*east*) find expression in various geographical relations and geographically bounded (and inspired) imaginations. These relations and their concomitant dreams are layered hierarchically in a tripartite order. Freetown, which is the most *Western* place in Sierra Leone not only in geographical terms, represents a much longed for destination but not the final gratification in that (cosmic) drive towards the west. The latter lies across the Atlantic – in the ultimate embodiment of the West itself: the United States of America.

The story of Moses exemplifies all three layers of that perpetual drive towards the ever-better (imagined) west. Moses is a thirty-six-year-old relatively successful trader working in Freetown. Born in a small village near the Liberian border

(thus in Sierra Leone's very east), Moses dreamt his whole life about the (various) West(s) he wanted to go to. His dreams found their progressive – but yet unfinished – realization in his incremental migration towards the west.

I went to Kenema when I was twelve to finish my schooling. After school, I went to Bo. In Bo I started my business. When I had enough savings, I came to Freetown. That was my big dream. For me, Freetown was like England or America. When you come from the provinces, Freetown is like small-London. It is the big world in Freetown. (...) For many years I was living in the East Side of Freetown. This is where you get when you come from the provinces. You live in the east, where the poor people live. Because in Freetown, the lodging system, the renting system, it is a big problem. The good living is only in the west. But it is very expensive to live in the west. So we stayed in the east for many years. When my business grew, me and my family we moved to Aberdeen, that is in the West End of Freetown. (...) I was always saving to go to the better places. Now I am saving again. I want to have the chance to go to the US to work in a warehouse. This is where I want to live now.

In Moses' short biographic account, the geography of, and the imagination about, "the better places" concur with and complement each other. Dreams are inscribed into places; places are inscribed into dreams. Achievement and success are ultimately associated with the move towards the west. And in fact, by moving geographically westwards, Moses moved socially upwards. The structure of these spatially oriented dreams (about and towards the *West/west*) consists of three main relations and directions: (1) from the provinces towards the "big world" in Freetown; (2) from Freetown's deprived eastern parts towards its affluent West End; and (3) from this side of the Atlantic towards the other side, the (even) "bigger world": the US. In a talk I had with a Freetonian scholar who travelled to and fro all sides of these three "dream"-relations, he added a fourth direction to what he described harshly but poetically as Sierra Leoneans' "pathological longing for the outland". I remember him saying: "First, they sell their mothers to get to Freetown. Here, they sell their wives to get to America. There, they sell their daughters to fly to the moon."

I will revisit these broader (trans-Atlantic) "geographies of dreams" in the Part IV of this book (Chapter 20). For now, I return to Freetown's social geography (along with its spatially inscribed dreams and realities) and to that strange phenomenon Lévi-Strauss (1961: 126) marvelled at "that every town is affected by the westward drive, with wealth gravitating to one side and poverty to the other".

## Moving to the west

In Freetown, the east-west-divide – and its concomitant associations with poverty and wealth – is a historical constant. From the earliest beginning as a settlement for freed Blacks in the late 18<sup>th</sup> to the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Freetown's spatial dispersal and residential pattern reflected ethnicity as well as socio-economic class and therewith connected status and privilege. The earliest divisions were drawn

along the lines of the respective new arrivals of first settlers and separated the emerging town into allotments for Nova Scotians, Maroons, and Recaptives. In the latter half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, more and more migrants from the Sierra Leonean hinterland began to settle in the Freetown area and added a new dimension to the spatially-inscribed distinctions of social and economic class. As most of the “native migrants” came down the Sierra Leonean river, they settled along the shores of the river at the town’s eastern fringes (Banton 1957: 83) – the main gateway to the Freetown peninsula from the hinterland. Meanwhile, the town grew also farther west. There, the higher classes from among the socially and economically growingly diversified descendants of the first settlers, the emergent Creole elite, constructed their houses and mansions (*ibid.*). Wealth “gravitated” to the town’s western side, while in the east poverty “aggregated”.

In 1902, Hill Station was constructed as a settlement built exclusively for whites some two miles west of Freetown’s then-western border on a 250 meter plateau (Spitzer 1968). Anew, social distance was translated into geographical distance – and altitude. Since the commercial and administrative center was located in central Freetown, a venturesome and costly adhesion railroad was constructed on the steep hill, connecting the exclusive white suburb with the center (*ibid.*). However, the demographically growing and spatially expanding town soon absorbed the clearance between Hill Station and the rest of Freetown. Around the time of the Second World War, new residential areas had been constructed further west of Hill Station’s slopes in what today is the Wilkinson Road area (Banton 1957: 83). With the further increased distance to the commercial center, only those who could afford to run the newly introduced cars settled in these quarters – thus creating yet another posh area in Freetown’s newly expanded West End (*ibid.*). Porter (1963: 99) points towards this geography of (western) prestige, writing that it “became increasingly fashionable to live outside the city municipal boundaries on the western side. The feeder villages to the east of the city did not, however, confer the same distinction”. The prestigious location, and the location of prestige, was in the direction of the move of the sun.

From the 1950s onwards, Freetown attracted an ever-growing number of migrants from Sierra Leone’s rural areas. While more and more rural migrants populated the city’s eastern and increasingly also the central parts, those who could afford it moved out to the suburbs further west (Banton 1957: 87). The area around Kroo Bay in the western parts of the center, for example, which used to be one of the best Creole residential areas, was slowly taken over by the rural migrants (*ibid.*). This steady move towards the west, advanced by the elites with the rest of the city’s growing population slowly but steadily straggling behind, left its imprints on Freetown’s cityscape. Throughout the eastern and central

parts of town it is striking how (formally) prestigious buildings and ramshackle huts jostle one another for space: on one plot may be a two-storey concrete house with verandah and corrugated iron roof, while on the next stands a dilapidated mud and wattle shack.

With the extreme centralization of politics and power under the APC rule from 1968 onwards, and with the simultaneous economic deprivation of the countryside, the stimuli to seek the proverbial greener pasture in Freetown became increasingly bigger. As the war broke out, the rush towards urbanization soared even further. Hundreds of thousands of dislocated people searched refuge in the capital. As Abdullah (2002a: 208) wrote at the end of the war, “[w]hole new cities have sprung up within the city of Freetown. These cities of subalterns are expanding the frontiers of the ghetto from the East End to the west and central area. Every space in the city is under siege from subalterns”. Before the war, the mountains surrounding Freetown were deeply forested, partly even right into the city’s territories. Today, the hill-scenery is speckled with little red steps and road serpentine. Tin roof structures and concrete constructions are tamped onto the mountain slopes. In the east and central parts of Freetown, people build shanties right up to the mountains’ top. On the western side of the city, affluent folks do the same with multi-storied edifices. In the waterfront area, improvise ramshackle settlements are erected on alluvial land and on piles of washed up, compressed trash. Others began to conquer some of the last remains of free space in Freetown – and seized land at cemeteries.

Today “subaltern cities” penetrate all free spaces in Freetown’s east, center and west. However, the marked east-west-cleavage and its respective associations and imaginations outlasted (or “survived”) the war. The western parts of town are further on regarded as the desirable, affluent and prestigious ones. The east is thought of as being squalid and deprived and often referred to as a sort of expletive. Between these two extremes, the central area around the commercial district emerges as a buffer and as a space for collision and merging. The East Side swelled by tens of thousands of displaced people during the war – which fortified the area’s reputation as being rough, dangerous, unsanitary and generally ill-served by any sort of infrastructure; the post-war influx of expats into Freetown’s western districts conversely re-enhanced the west’s positive reputation. Foreign professionals, diplomats and senior NGO-workers reside almost exclusively in Freetown’s West End districts – thereby literally epitomizing the strong association of the city’s west with (Western) affluence and achievement. The divide is also reflected in the rent index. In the overcrowded East End, where landlords often divide existent rooms into small cubicles by the erection of partitions, the rent for one such partition may cost 100,000 leones a year, about 25 US dollars. Somewhat factitiously spurred by many expats’ blank-check poli-

cy for rental agreements, a single room in a hillside house in the West End may cost up to 800 US dollars per month.

It is against this background of real and imagined socio-economic geographies deeply inscribed into Freetown social imaginary – with prestige, wealth and order associated with the one (western) side and with deprivation, poverty and disorder associated with the other (eastern) side – that Freetown’s music venue and event scene(s) has to be approached.

## A music venue census

In November 2009 I compiled a rough census of Freetown’s regular, commercial music venues with a fixed location and an estimated capacity to host about one hundred or more people. I counted seventy-two. Fourteen of these were in the eastern parts of town, twenty-two in the center, and thirty-nine in the west. This estimate arose from a rather eclectic data collection I assembled about commercial music venues through, mainly, my own excursions into Freetown’s night life, through interviews with several key-informants (mainly DJs and event organizers), and through notes taken from advertisements and reports in newspapers and the radio. While the number might be flawed (I would mainly assume it to be generally too small), it nevertheless gives a valid impression about the spatial dispersion of bigger music venues in Freetown.

A first main finding can be derived from these numbers when we juxtaposed them with the 2004 estimates about the population figures in the three parts of Freetown (Statistics Sierra Leone 2006a: 11).<sup>1</sup> The largest number of bigger, commercial music venues (40) is located in the area with the lowest population size, the West End of Freetown (113,294). And vice versa, the lowest number of bigger public music venues (14) is located in the area with the highest population size (East: 451,509). While Freetown’s central part lies in-between these two (population 208,070; 22 venues).

This somewhat inverted relation between population size and the number of bigger music venues reflects the highly disparate spatial distribution of wealth and capital that characterizes Freetown. In short, most of the bigger, commercial music venues are where the money is; that is, in the West End of town where most of Freetown’s affluent residents live. The economically deprived East Side of Freetown, on the other hand, hosts, despite its large population, the fewest

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<sup>1</sup> The official ward boundaries, as defined by Statistics Sierra Leone (SSL), differ slightly from the ward boundaries I draw for my music venue-census and from the popularly known partition of Freetown into east, central and west. While SSL includes the area between Congo Cross and the west tip of Siaka Stevens Street into the western parts, most Freetonians define that area as central. So did I in my music venue census and, accordingly, in my calculation of the respective population figures.

*Chapter 16: A topography of Freetown's social imaginary*



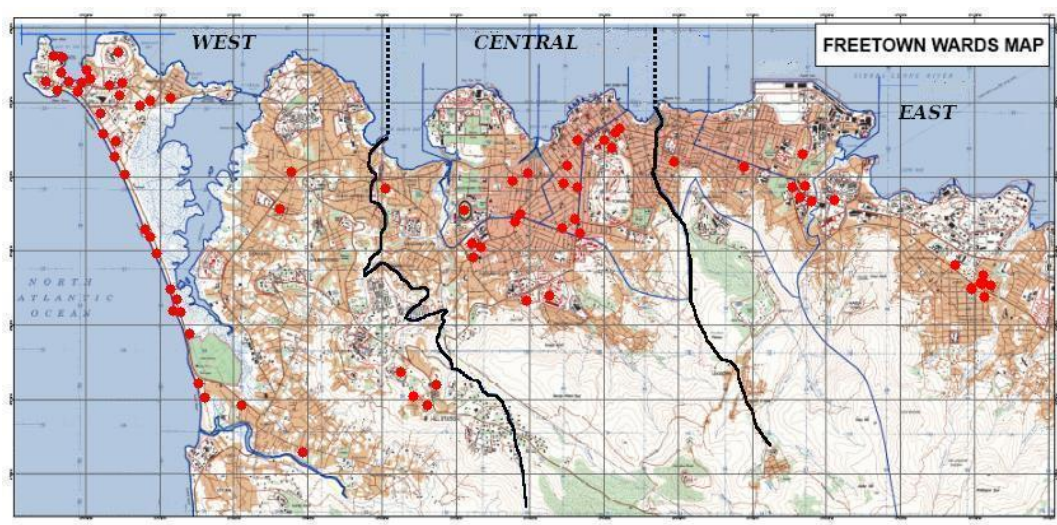
*Photo 16.1* Shanties at the hillside, central Freetown, January 2010



*Photo 16.2* Shanties at the waterside, central Freetown, February 2010

bigger music venues. However, this does by no means implicate that there is only a dozen of music venues in Freetown's East Side. The whole area is speckled with spots where music is played (on a stereo). But these are predominantly small-sized, improvised plywood-and-tin-constructs that often serve simultaneously as shops selling basic miscellaneous (sardine tins, cheese spread, water, liquor) and as informal spots for dancing and drinking.

When we take a closer look at the music venues' respective distribution in each of Freetown's three main areas (see Map 16.1), we see that in the east and west music venues form clusters while in the center a relatively dispersed array of music venues strikes the eye. In the East Side two clusters are formed around two major traffic hubs: the so-called Texaco Junction and Ferry Junction. This condensed allocation of music venues around central intersections stems from fairly pragmatic reasons as these two spots can be reached relatively easy by a large number of people.



*Map 16.1* Freetown “disco map” (The dots mark regular, commercial music venues with a capacity to host about 100 or more people)

In the center, the dispersed allocation of bigger music venues reflects the similarly dispersed distribution of business, trading and administrative centers in central Freetown and of the various main roads cutting through the center from east to west. In the center's north-eastern parts, music venues are located along Siaka Stevens Street, downtown's main avenue with many government buildings, offices, banks, and major stores, and in the area between PZ, Freetown's busiest trading zone, and Tower Hill, where the parliament is; in the center's center several main music venues are located along and within the triangle of main roads formed by Pademba Road, Campbell Street and Sanders Street; on the

southern fringes of the center, a number of big venues are located along New England's main street, with the national radio and television's main broadcasting house on the one side of the street and the Special Court for Sierra Leone on the other; in the center's western parts, venues cluster around the Youyi Building, a huge complex hosting many government ministries.

In Freetown's west, the highest density of bigger, commercial music venues is on the north-western tip of the Peninsula, in Aberdeen, where most of Sierra Leone's top-end hotels are located. Along the West End's attractive, four kilometers long beach, partly detached from the rest of city by a vast creek, numerous music venues are strung like a string of pearls. More than half of the bigger music venues in Freetown's west are located right at or nearby the beach. The rest of West End's main music venues are at Wilkinson Road and in the city's most posh area Hill Station.

Thus, in the East Side of Freetown, the spatial dispersal and allocation of bigger music venues follows a sort of pragmatic logic (road accessibility); in the west the respective logic is linked to the respective place's appeal and attractiveness (beach side and posh hillside), and in the center music venues cluster around the various points of dense social commingling (offices, main markets and streets).

Furthermore, the overall geographical distribution of Freetown's bigger, commercial music venues both reflects and reinforces the city's inherent distribution of "spatial prestige". The ascription of prestige to the city's music venues follows the above described east-west-cleavage. In line with this geography of prestige, music venues in the western parts of Freetown are generally ascribed a higher prestige than venues and events in the east. A sort of self-fulfilling prophecy underlies these perceptions; or, when approached from the eastern parts of Freetown, a self-defeating prophecy. Impelled by the believe that the "west is the best", artists and managers who seek success and recognition, as well as those already having success and recognition, do their best to ensure a venue in the West End for their performance. A manager of several local music artists revealed to me the calculations involved in the marketing of his artists. "If I make them play in the east, I can get some fun. But I don't make money. I waste it. But if I make them play in the west, at Paddy's or Buggy's or Old Skool,<sup>2</sup> it is investment. There's the big show. Sometimes I need to pay the guys (owners) to let them play there. But it pays off."

As a matter of course, bigger music events usually take place in bigger music venues. Concerts of popular artists performing in Freetown, for example, are almost exclusively bound to bigger music venues. This is also due to the respective facilities a venue provides. These involve, in the first place, the intake capacity of

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<sup>2</sup> *Paddy's*, *Buggy's* and *Old Skool* are three major clubs in West End Freetown; *Buggy's*, however, recently changed its name into *Aces*.



the location, and furthermore the technical prerequisites needed to stage an act (e.g. music speakers big enough to fill the location with sound, lightning system), a stage or provision for space for a stage, and some sort of spatial arrangements for the audiences (dance floor, chairs, tables, a resting area etc.). While technical equipment can be borrowed, a stage built up on the spot, and spatial arrangements for the audiences improvised, the hiring, delivering, installing and arranging (of speakers, light, cables, a stage, chairs, tables etc.) can all raise the costs of organizing an event significantly. In the majority of bigger music venues in the city's east, the conditions are fairly rudimentary. In fact, most East Side venues I included in my count are rather regular bars which extended their capacities through an outside allocation of seatings and which provide a large sound system where recorded music is played (loud) for the drinking folks to dance. "Enlarged dance-bars" would be a fitting designation for the latter venues. In the majority of bigger locations in Freetown's west, on the other hand, sufficing technical facilities, a stage, and spatial arrangements are all in place, which is yet another reason why bigger music events are taking place predominantly in the western parts of Freetown.

However, there are two main but somewhat straitened exceptions to this. Freetown's two biggest music venues are both not in the west. These are the two main stadiums, in which, on ordinary weekends, Sierra Leone's rather unheeded football teams meet up for a kick. At irregular intervals, and with an increasing frequency during the peak festive season in December, both stadiums serve as well as locations for music events.

The smaller, so-called mini stadium is located in Cline Town, a neighbourhood in the East Side of Freetown. It can host some 10,000 people. Its facilities, though, are fairly rudimentary. The mini stadium is a dusty football field enclosed by a concrete wall. While the wall is high enough to prevent a passer-by to steal a glance at the field, it also invites many to climb up and watch the match or concert without paying admission. Furthermore, the mini stadium provides no technical equipment, no fixed stage, and no special spatial arrangements for the audiences. Equipment has to be installed anew every time, the stage has either to be built up or improvised on the ground, while the audience just randomly assembles standing on the field. Due to this somewhat unpretentious and unglamorous setting, the mini stadium is mainly used for rather low-prestige events with either (yet) unknown or upcoming artists. At times, some more popular artists do perform at the mini stadium. These performances, though, are usually just a sort of run-up a couple of days before their main show, which then takes place in the more glamorous setting of a venue in the center or, mostly, the west of Freetown.

The national stadium, located between Congo Town and Brookfields in central Freetown, is Sierra Leone's largest public venue with a capacity to host some 45,000 spectators. It was built as one amongst many prestigious projects connected to the OAU heads of state meeting which took place in Freetown in 1980. While the stadium's lavish architecture and sheer size in fact create a prestigious if not pompous impression, its vast and vacant spaces also obstruct its function as a venue for music events. Because of the generally low budgets organizers invest in music events in Freetown (which correspond with the generally low revenues from ticket sales), the provided sound systems are simply not good enough to fill the stadium's huge spaces with adequate sound. In Chapter 18, I give one in-depth example of a large concert in the national stadium and discuss the constraints posed by the stadium's vast spaces. Given these two main exceptions, the prevailing rule is that most of Freetown's prestigious, big, commercial music events take place in venues in the West End of the city.

## At the crossroads

Bourdieu (1984: 124) writes:

A group's chances of appropriating any given class of rare assets (...) depends partly on its capacity for the specific appropriation, defined by the economic, cultural and social capital it can deploy in order to appropriate materially or symbolically the assets in question, that is, its position in social space, and partly on the relationship between its distribution in geographical space and the distribution of the scarce assets in that space. (This relationship can be measured in average distance from goods or facilities, or in traveling time – which involves access to private or public transport.) In other words, *a group's real social distance from certain assets must integrate the geographical distance*, which itself depends on the group's spatial distribution and, more precisely, its distribution with respect to the 'focal point' of economic and cultural values. (*my emphasis*)

As indicated above in the mapping of bigger, commercial music venues in Freetown, there is a clear disparity between the city's geographical distribution of bigger music venues and the geographical distribution of the city's population. The disparity reflects the unequal distribution of economic – as well as of cultural and social – capital in Freetown's geographical space. Most of the bigger music venues are in the affluent West End, while more than half of Freetown's population lives in the eastern parts of the city, a predominantly poor area. A majority of Freetown's population has thus to cross the city before attending a concert or party in one of the bigger venues. This journey is among the first and main obstacles many Freetonians take into consideration before deciding to have a night out in a location outside their own neighbourhood.

Mobility is a precious and straitened resource in Freetown. Measured from the eastern fringes of Kissy to the western shores at Cockeril Bay (the West End beach), the city of Freetown expands over some seventeen kilometers in length.

In theory, this is a relatively manageable distance. However, there are only two main routes covering that distance: one running closer to the Atlantic, the other closer to the hillside. To reach from one end of the city to the other during daytime, it might take up to three or more hours. Freetown's limited and narrow roads are, to say the least, overcharged with cars.<sup>3</sup> The daily scenery on Freetown's roads gives a vivid impression of the thoroughly disproportional distribution of capital among the city's population: A few brand-new private cars carrying a single person, often driven by a hired chauffeur, are contrasted with the torrent of shagged out public transport vehicles crammed with passengers.

Those who can and do afford private transport are the affluent minority residing mainly in Freetown's western parts. They are formed by professionals (e.g. lawyers and doctors), internationally operating businessmen, high-ranked government officials, diplomats, senior staff of aid agencies – and their respective extended networks of family members and otherwise connected “clients” and “beneficiaries”. On Freetown's roads, the three latter groups stand out with a fleet of shining-white jeeps, while the group of businessmen and other wealthy individuals often impresses with extremely luxurious car models (the Hummer being a current favourite).

The vast majority of Freetown citizens rely on public transport, which comes in three forms: (1) the cheapest options are *poda podas*, minibuses that cover longer, fixed routes; (2) shared taxis which run as well on fixed but much shorter routes while charging the same price as *poda podas*; and (3) motorbikes, so-called *okadas*, whose prices are negotiable but the most expensive and which, theoretically, can take a passenger everywhere.<sup>4</sup>

A trip with public transport from the East Side to the northern tip of the West End beach, where a good number of Freetown's most popular music venues is located, is a long and tiresome exercise. Using *poda podas*, at least two single rides have to be made, and paid. With taxis, one would need to switch, and pay for, vehicles about four or more times. While the journey would be fastest, though not very convenient, on a motorbike, the charge for a bike could easily rise to the ten-fold price for a bus or taxi. During the day, the crossing of the city with public transport may take hours due to heavy traffic. At particularly busy spots and during rush hours, the journey is further burdened with the struggle to get into a bus or taxi in the first place, when crowds of people haste after every

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<sup>3</sup> In 2003, some 24,000 vehicles were registered in Freetown of which some 9,000 were declared as private (Statistics Sierra Leone 2006b: 11.2). Given the significant increase of registered vehicles between 2000 (15,367) and 2003 (24,143) (Statistics Sierra Leone 2006b: 11.2), the current number of cars driving on Freetown's limited roads most probably rose well beyond 30,000.

<sup>4</sup> In October 2009, the Freetown City Council banned *okadas* from all major streets across Freetown. While thousands of *okada* driver were thereby deprived of the ability to earn a livelihood, many Freetonians lost a main means of conveyance. The indicated reason for the ban was road safety.

free seat. While traffic usually calms down in the later evening hours, busses, taxis and motorbikes reduce their presence on the streets as well. This, in turn, can make it difficult to find any form of transport at all. Since I had no private transport myself, the questions of how to reach the night's respective music venue, or venues, and how to come back home afterwards were an ever-present issue. At times, good planning of times and journeys proved a suitable solution. Mostly, though, I had to resign to waiting, hoping, walking and good fortune.

Among most groups of my informants, the question of transport was a constant concern, especially but not only in the planning of nightly leisure activities. Many discussions I experienced about whether or not to go to a party or concert, which, due to the disproportional distribution of venues, very often took place in the West End, usually followed a recurring pattern in which two main pairs of factors were weighted against each other. On the one hand, the time and money needed to reach the venue (transport) and to attend the event (pay the entrance, among other). On the other hand, the somewhat incommensurable values of social and musical prestige ascribed to the event and its venue as well as the pleasure expected from the attendance.

Of course, in every single case the process of decision-making is not at all that structured and rationalized. An inscrutable web of individual and situational factors, concerns, restraints, incentives, affects, desires etc. play a role in it and can turn the decision-making process into a most arbitrary affair.

The example of a clique of young men well illustrates these ever-situational and ever-inscrutable processes involved. The group of four men between eighteen and twenty-four worked as money changers for busses and taxis at a central street in Freetown. Because they worked and lived very close to where I lived, I visited them during their work almost every other day. Throughout December, they shared their plans with me to go to the West End beach to join in the celebrations of the festive season. The main targeted dates for the long-planned and long-awaited excursion were the days around Christmas. In mid-December, I interviewed Mohammed, the oldest of the four. The expression "merry-merry", of which he made a lot of use during our talk, is used by the clique as a ludic and partly ironic periphrasis of partying, dancing and being with girls.

Christmas we go merry-merry. On Christmas everyone is merry-merry. We go merry-merry with all the pretties at the beach – big time. We go West End. (...) I am waiting for this long time. I save special money when I can. Every day some special money for the big Christmas-show. Before the days, we go get the pretty dresses. First, we go to the beach-party and get the merry-merry girls. With the girls, we go merry-merry in the good clubs the whole night.

Their plans were anything but wishful thinking or idle boast. A few days before the "big Christmas-show", Mohammed and his friends had indeed made their preparations, including new haircuts and occasion wear, and more or less detailed plans – in which I was involved by then – about when to travel how to

which location. The exclusively aimed destination was Freetown's West End, its beach and night clubs. As I once asked them, why the western clubs were so much more preferred by them than spots in the center or east of town, the answer was as clear-cut as indicative about Freetown's geographically-oriented social imaginary: the West End clubs are the most expensive, therefore they are the best – and vice versa. At the big day, however, they sadly explained to me that they could not go. During the Christmas days, business was running too good to be missed out. Their work, in which they chase down the street in the midst of heavy traffic for up to twelve hours, does not permit to be exhausted from an afore-night's partying – and from the additional struggles to get to and from the party. It was then not until early January that Mohammed and his friends finally made it to a club at the beach. The occasion, though, was a rather sad one. One of the four had injured his foot and, since he could not do the work anymore, decided to head back home to his family outside Freetown.

It is in this flightiness and whimsicality of (Freetonian) life that the generally unpredictable patterns of attendance of Freetown's music event scene, which I described at the beginning of this third Part, are grounded in. A previously taken decision to attend an event may be made void by an unexpected earning – or, reversely, the unexpected earning (or injury) may revise the previously taken decision not to attend an event. In a similar manner can an unexpected loss of earning make somebody decide to rather stay at home, or to go out, drink and dance despite and in defiance of loss and grief. The involved processes can often resemble acts of caprice not least because the libido may play a decisive role too, which can unexpectedly revise any formerly expressed and taken decision. Mustapha, for example, a twenty-seven-year-old student living in Freetown's East Side, somewhat blatantly described his only reason to visit night clubs by referring to the girls he encounters there. "Normally, I don't like going to clubs. I don't know how to dance. But when I need a girl, I put on my fancy attire, get myself ready to shake, and go for the bitches on the dance floor."

However, speaking of more general patterns of motivation to attend an event rather than of singular rationales and circumstances involved in the decision-making process, a certain formula nevertheless prevails: the bigger and more exceptional the event, the more popular the performing artists, and the more prestigious the location, the bigger become the incentives to take on the often tedious travel to and from the venue.

The respective person's or group's economic capital and, to use Bourdieu's wording, the therewith connected position in social space – which in Freetown is almost intrinsically linked to the position in geographical space – plays a decisive role in whether, how and under what burdens these incentives can be realized. Furthermore, it is within these relations of economic capital and position in social

and geographical space that the social meanings the respective person or group ascribes to the attendance of music events have their main coordinates. The example of Mohammed and his friends proves the point as a limiting case. As money changers for busses and taxis they belong to one of Freetown's lowest and least secure income groups and thus occupy a position close to the margins, or bottom, of Freetown's economic and social spaces. Even though they work and live in Freetown's center, thus not at the margins of geographical space, their (marginal) position in economic and social space, and their obscured mobility, virtually amortizes that (geographical) non-marginality. From their socio-economic and geographical "point of departure", the night out in a dance club at the West End beach becomes a long-wished for, long-awaited and, in fact, long-deferred momentary elopement from the social, economic and geographic realities they live in, are bound and constrained by.

With regard to the role transport plays in these relations, we might thus conclude that the closer a group's geographical location is to the respective "focal point" of cultural assets, in this case of music venues in the West End of Freetown, the less the issues of (effort, time and money spent on) transport play a role. And the other way round, the further away a group is geographically located from the "focal point", the more does transport become an issue. On the broader picture, the generally unequal distribution of economic and social capital that already characterizes Freetown thus *reflects* the unequally distributed chances to "appropriate a rare asset"; in this case: the chances to attend an exceptional music event. On the other hand, it also *reinforces* the inequality of chances already present by putting the already favoured into a more favourable position. Those who do not have to bother much about transport issues, because they own private transport, are already the ones living closest by anyway. While the ones living most far away, the majority of Freetown's population from the East Side, have to bother most because they rely, in most cases, entirely on public transport.

While the geographical distance adds to the burdens and restraints involved in attending an event, it as well adds value and exceptionality to it. That is to say, the further the distance is that needs to be traversed to attend an event, the more exceptional and meaningful the sheer attendance of the event becomes. This in turn further complicates the pattern of pros and con's involved in deciding whether or not to attend an event. For somebody from the West End, the attendance of an event in the west is of less exceptionality than for somebody from the east. For the person from the east, additional exceptionality and meaning are, so to say, "added on the road". The effort, time and money needed to attend an event in the west are material investments which, once they are made, bring forth symbolical values of prestige. Boundaries of vertical socio-economic hierarchies inscribed into geographical space are, even though only for the night, dissolved

and literally traversed. With regard to some of Freetown's most posh clubs located at the steep mountains of Hill Station, the translation of geographical distances into (vertical) social distances finds its ultimate realization through the additional geographical altitude on which the clubs are situated.

### A car park's indices

Besides being a factor that needs to be taken into account for defining a group's "real social distance" from certain musical assets, the combined elements of geographic location and means of transport are as well main indicators to estimate an audience's social diversity at a music event. Given the methodological difficulty to make tenable estimates about the socio-economic composition of a crowded dance spot's audience, the variability of transport an audience uses to get to and from a venue is in fact one of the few means to indicate the variety of socio-economic classes present at an event. Furthermore, these car park indices are a main means to reach outside the networks (and limits) of the (non-random) groups of my informants and to see who else is attending the parties.

This indirect method to deduce the socio-economic composition of a music event's present audience by looking at the respective means of transport people use struck me during two of the first excursions I made into the night life of Freetown's East Side and West Side respectively. This was in mid-August, on two consecutive nights a couple of days before the beginning of the Ramadan. Even though heavy rain clouds loomed over the city, the folks ignored the weather threat and moved off in masses to the clubs. My assistant John, with whom I made both tours, explained to me that especially in the East Side, people were eager to seize one of the last opportunities to revel before the tranquilized fasting period. On the first night, we headed to the East Side's main bar and club side, the area around Texaco Junction.

As we arrive round eleven pm, the numerous spots just begin to get filled with drinking and dancing guests. People commence their celebrations in the "enlarged dance bars", of which several are located on both sides of the main street. At the time the road traffic soothes around midnight, the bars are increasingly packed with people. From every spot's large set of speakers, the familiar sounds of Nigerian and Jamaican dance-hit-compilations echo across the street. The music is played by the respective bartenders, who mostly content themselves with pressing again the play-button once the music stops. As more and more people populate the small dance floors inside and the sets of plastic chairs and tables outside the bars, the bartenders-cum-DJs begin to regulate the volume too, and turn it up as far as the cawing speakers allow them to. Around two o'clock in the morning, also both dance floors of the near-by, two-storey discotheque are filled. The disco, *Diva's*, is located just a stone's throw from the main junction at

a four-lane highway, Freetown's main gateway to the provinces. The broad street's conspicuous emptiness forms a striking contrast to the lengthening queue of people in front of *Diva's*. While the disco and the numerous bars are filled with visitors, the whole area is devoid of vehicles. The roads are empty and no car is parked in front of any of the spots. The apparent lack of transport indicates the neighbourhood-character of the venues and their crowds. Most if not even all of the present people – with the exception of John and me – live in walking distance. Residents from other parts of the city appear to be neither present nor attracted by the venues around Texaco Junction. Also public transport is rare. Around three o'clock, we set off back home. *Diva's* is jam-packed and still more people wait at the front door to enter. The smaller bars are full as well. At every other corner, groups of youths stand around and disport themselves in chatting, drinking, smoking and dancing. Other people stagger from one bar to the other. In the middle of the night, the spaces around Texaco Junction turned into an entertainment district. Yet, despite the present crowds, no transport whatsoever crosses the streets. After some thirty minutes of waiting at the roadside, we count ourselves lucky to flag down a taxi that was heading in the opposite direction and convince its driver to take us downtown.

The following night, we moved to the other side of Freetown, to the bars and clubs at the West End beach. Here, the picture reverses. Private cars dominate the scene. At several stretches of the beach road, around some of the most popular beach bars, dozens of private cars are strung together on both side of the road and appear almost as an integral part of the coastal scenery. In many cases the cars are in fact an integral part of the celebrations. Groups of people rally around, inside and on top of the often stately vehicles, whose hi-fis compete with each other and with the sound systems of the respective bar around which the cars are parked. Once again I am stunned by the narrow range of songs being played in the cars as well as in the bars. It is the same mix of Nigerian and Jamaican dance-hits interspersed with a few US-American chart songs that we listened to throughout yesterday's night in the east. The few audible exceptions prove the rule of Freetown's somewhat monotonous devotion to the musical trinity of post-electoral (black) Atlantic hit-mix. The spots located in the middle of the long beach road attract the most people, and cars. These bars bear exclusivity already through their relatively remote location and the hassle to reach them, without private transport that is. Public busses stop at the beach road's northern and southern tip respectively and do not make the way down the beach. Unless one waits for one of the few taxis, which cover the beach stretch only sporadically, or charters a motorbike, the main option to reach the bars at the middle of the beach is to cover the two to three kilometers to the spot by foot, and to walk back to one of the main crossroads again. Being here almost inevitably means being mobile,



and thus being in possession of a precious resource. However, John and I did the walk. In some instances, particularly mid-way down the beach, one may even estimate the number of people inside the bar by merely counting the number of cars parked in front of it and on the parking sites that many of the spots provide. Some time after midnight, the beach bars begin to empty out and around one o'clock in the morning, the beach road's lane leading towards the north is blocked with cars. The folks head in flocks towards the discotheques located at the northern tip of the beach and create a bizarre nightly traffic jam. We walk in the same direction, "overtaking" the jammed cars. At the northern beach's main crossroad, chaos reigns on the streets as drivers content with each other for parking spaces. Despite all the cars, we have to wait a long time until we find a taxi and head for home.

### Subverting boundaries

The scenes and impression from these two nights recurred throughout my stay in Freetown. Around the bars and clubs in the East Side, the sight of a private car was a rare occurrence. At later hours, also public transport was difficult to come by. Around the West End's venues, on the other hand, late-night traffic jams were quite a common sight. As for the venues between the West End and the East Side, a sort of observable rule applies that the further a spot is located in the west, the higher the ratio of private cars parked in front of it to the number of people inside.

In general, and on the (roads') surface, Freetown's geographically inscribed socio-economic divisions, which are both reflected and reinforced by the distribution of bigger music venues and by the respective group's chances to reach them, thus match with the prevailing patterns of who is attending which venues as indicated by the forms of transport the respective audiences use. In short, the well-to-do's drive up their cars to the fancy clubs in the rich west while the poor walk to their neighbourhood spots in the east, and each respective group predominantly stays within its own clime.

Theoretically, the rather fixed positions Freetown's groups occupy in terms of social and economic classes (their respective position in social space) and in geographical distribution (their respective position in geographical space) comply with the locations of music venues the respective groups attend. The broader patterns of social division – and disconnections – are reproduced within the patterns of attendance of music venues – thus of going to discotheques.

In practice, however, there appear to be so many exceptions to these patterns that one could well start doubting whether to dub them exceptions in the first place. The boundaries drawn by a venue's location and by the distribution of capital and therewith connected means for transport are regularly subverted. For

example, in an interview I did with the former owner of a major club in the East Side (*Diva's*), he insisted that, despite the rare sight of a private car around his former venue, some of his most important clientele were groups of young (rich) men from the West End and from among the visiting diaspora.

They are the ones bringing in the cash. The East End crowds barely afford to pay the entrance. But once you have the big men coming from the west, they pay for everything. It's the ladies. They come for our ladies. They know we got the best ladies. That is why they come on Wednesday's. On Wednesday's I had my ladies' night. I always had my pimps out looking for the beautiful Fula girls to bring them in. It was the best ladies' night in the whole country. (...) The chic boys from the west didn't come with their cars; they are too afraid. They take *chacha* [hired taxi; from "charter"]. They come, buy the drinks, spent the money, and look for the ladies.

With regard to the patterns of attendance at the West End venues, on the other hand, the geographically inscribed and economically fortified boundaries appear to be subverted much more frequent and on a much broader basis. On particular nights and throughout the peak of the festive season in December, in front of the West End significantly increased diversity of means of transport venues can be observed. The East Side rushes to the west. During these nights and periods, busses queue up in front of many western venues and offer its passengers rides far into the east of Freetown. By providing the East Side's audiences with affordable means of transport, and by conveying them to and from the West End venues, the bus drivers become accomplices in the subversions of geographically inscribed and fortified social boundaries.

But also on rather ordinary nights, when the streets around most West End venues are devoid of busses, many, predominantly young, Freetonians from the east of the city find, or create, loopholes to overcome their straitened mobility and to attend parties in the West End. Having, finding or making friends who either have private transport at hand or from whom money for a taxi or motorbike can be "extracted", is one of the tactics employed. Another strategy is to look for acquaintance with taxi and motorbike drivers who are working at nights. Girls appear to be particularly successful in this. At times, this calculating "befriending" can take on somewhat rampant forms. After a big concert show I attended at the West End beach, for example, tumultuous scenes took place in front of the venue as groups of girls started to thrust themselves upon potential (male) candidates who could give them a lift. This "befriending" comes in various forms and variants. Although many Freetonians I talked to refer to these practices as just another form of "prostitution", and to the respective girls as "prostitutes" (or, in the Freetonian figure of speech: "rarray girls"), the matter is more complicated than that.

In fact, sexual relations do often follow from this sort of exchange. The resources of transport and mobility conflate into a currency "convertible" into

intimacy, and vice versa. Several of the above-given quotes from male actors, who are involved in these reciprocal exchanges, underline that point. Mustapha, who spoke of going for “the bitches on the dance floor”, was referring to “rarray girls”. So was Mohammed, the money changer from central Freetown, who spoke of getting “the merry-merry girls” and taking them to the clubs. However, the notion of “prostitution”, with its stigmatizing connotations, describes these relations and exchanges only very inadequately. The notion and concept of “transactional sex” several scholars introduced recently (Hunter 2002; Cole 2004) fits the context better. Mark Hunter (2002: 100-101) gave the following short definition: “participants [in transactional sex relations] are constructed as ‘girlfriends’ and ‘boyfriends’ and not ‘prostitutes’ and ‘clients’, and the exchange of gifts for sex is part of a broader set of obligations that might not involve predetermined payment”. In the “befriending” practices Freetonian girls apply in order to find potential “chauffeurs”, (direct) payment is indeed not necessarily involved in the exchange – and neither is sex. The point of view of a Lola (a sort of “artist name” she adopted for her nights out), who avails herself of these exchanges, elucidates that point. Lola lives together with a female friend, Binta, in Freetown’s east. They are both around eighteen-years old. After I encountered her several times at nights in West End clubs, where I told her about my research, it was her who persuaded me to meet her during the day for an interview since the night club was, as she put it, “not the place to talk proper”. Here is a telling fragment from our talk:

I and Binta we like going out too much. But we don’t like going to the East End parties. The place is too dangerous. When the men see us, they say we are rarray girls and want to harm us. The men there they think they can do what they want. In the West End clubs we have freedom. In the west we have many boyfriends, serious men with cars and money. (...)

M.S.: How do you get to the clubs in the West End?

When we want to go to the club, we call our men. If one is not there, we call the next. They come and take us to the club. If they can’t come, we know plenty okada boys. They take us to the club because they take us as girlfriends. We make them take us as girlfriends so they can talk to their friends about us. But really we don’t take them as boyfriend, they are only our small brothers. We don’t sleep with them.

M.S.: Do you sleep with the serious men?

Sometimes. But we don’t sleep for money. Only when we like the man. But some like to give me money. And some like to buy me things. But I go choose when I like. I have one I sleep with him because he is pretty. One I have because he knows to dance very good.

Lola and Binta do not fit the category of prostitutes; neither seems “transactional sex relation” to be the adequate description. Rather, the girls engage in partnerships of convenience, or, to borrow an expression from Margaret Mead (1928: 37), in “amorous exploits”. Sex and money are not the central elements in their often short-lived and multiple engagements. From the side of the girls,

mobility and freedom – two inherently connected “goods” – appear as the primal goals in their exploits. Though, what they give the men, and boys, in exchange for these “goods” is neither predetermined nor obligatory. The girls decide. Reputation, on the other hand, seems not to bother them too much. The practical “use” of the *okada* boys for conveyance apparently outweighs the boys’ “talking to their friends” about them. Thinking about Lola and Binta, another line from Mead comes to my mind: “But the seventeen-year-old girl does not wish to marry – not yet. It is better to live as a girl with no responsibilities, and a rich variety of emotional experience. This is the best period of her life. (...) What she loses in prestige, she gains in freedom” (*ibid.*: 38).

The freedom gained by Lola and Binta is intrinsically connected to the freedom to move to West End clubs more or less at will. It is the freedom to cross spatial boundaries and, by this, to subvert boundaries drawn along socio-economic lines. In the wide spectrum of “tactics” people from Freetown’s east and center employ, and loopholes they create, in order to overcome their straitened mobility and to attend venues and events in the West End, Lola and Binta’s deliberate amorous exploits are among the most elaborate ones. A less sophisticated but probably the most used strategy is what I employed, or had to employ, myself, that is: simply to stay in the club until the early morning hours when regular public transport starts running again. This means for the incursion of vertical socio-economic hierarchies inscribed into geographical space, in turn, is mainly “convertible” for what many of East Side’s un- or underemployed youths often have in abundance: plenty of time. As the practices of “befriending”, this “strategy” is also observable in many clubs in the West End. Once the bulk of visitors disperses in the early morning hours, small groups, particularly of young men, remain in and around the venues’ premises and bear up until the club finally closes.

Beside the inventive exploit of amorous engagements, patience and stamina are thus two other, central means many East Side residents deploy in order to circumvent their limited capacities for appropriating rare assets, that is: to attend particular music events in the West End of Freetown. While their social distance from the economic “focal point” is both reflected and reinforced by their geographical distance to these “assets” – that is: to most of Freetown’s bigger music events and the venues that stage them – the various “strategies” employed to traverse the geographical distance despite straitened mobility implicitly speak of attempts to challenge their position in “social space” too. It is, to refer once more to Bourdieu (1984: 110), the ever-present dialectic established “between dispositions and positions, aspirations and achievements”, whose forces are at work here. Aspirations to upward socio-economic mobility – ultimately expressed in the (cosmic) drive towards the west and the achievements the east-to-west move

is associated with – are impeded by the realities of socio-economic stasis the lives of many Freetonians, particularly from the East Side, are marked by. Their position in geographical space (the east) expresses their position in socio-economic space (the economic margins), and vice versa. In the nightly jaunts to West End venues and parties, constraints of socio-economic and geographical positions are suspended. Barriers that obstruct the realization of aspirations to – social, economic and physical – mobility can be overcome, even though only for the night.

## The politics of price, prestige and consumption

Besides – and in addition to – the distance to be traversed and the transport to be paid to reach a music venue, the second major obstacle many Freetonians face when planning a night out in a music venue are the financial expenditures in the venue itself. These include, mainly, spending on drinks and, in certain though often rather exceptional occasions, on entrance fees. In this chapter, I discuss several dimensions these expenditures take on in Freetown’s (night) life, particularly with regard to, firstly, the implied patterns of social segregation and integration expenses imply, secondly, several strategies Freetonians employ in order to reduce or omit the burdens of financial expenditures while partaking in (commercial) music events nonetheless, and, thirdly, the broader social meanings leisure “consumption” carries and evokes.

### Playgrounds for exposure

Vast parts of Freetown’s society are impoverished. A great many people struggle to gather enough resources to meet basic needs of food, clothes and shelter. For many, access to basic infrastructure and services (especially education and health) is acutely limited. In this context, leisure, recreation and entertainment – of which the attendance of music events is a main example – take on an ambivalent character. On the one hand, leisure activities may appear extravagant, especially if they are associated with financial expenses. On the other hand, leisure and recreation are as well vital elements in the formation of a person’s identity, of the social groups and networks this identity is created and affirmed in, and of a person’s very state of mind. Following Johan Huizinga’s famous concept of the *Homo ludens*, Chris Rojek (1995: 175) ascribes leisure an existential role in human life. He writes: “leisure is something that human beings need just as they need food, shelter, warmth, security and production”. In her study of

leisure in colonial Brazzaville, Martin (1995: 7) distinguishes two basic forms of leisure activities: firstly, “non-obligated activities”, which she paraphrases as “‘time for amusement’ or non-productive time”; secondly, “activities that involve fulfilling *social obligations*, such as membership of an association or visiting relatives”. Speaking of colonial Brazzaville, Martin states that while the societal dimension and significance of the latter, the obligated activities, were somewhat self-evident, the former, the activities during time for amusement, were also “full of significance (...), they were to do with choice, control, identity and security as people mediated and contested social relations” (*ibid.*: 8). The very same is true for present-day Freetown. Either in a poor or in a rich society, and either in the poor or the rich sections of a society, leisure is “a consistent feature of life” (Rojek 1995: 175), particularly of social life.

The amounts of time and money a person invests in and spends on leisure and entertainment are distinct indices of social class and aspirations. Commercial music events bear particularly insightful leisure-related realms in which social class, status and aspirations, thus social relations and the person’s respective position therein, are being staged, exposed, negotiated – and contested. The respective politics of price – including entrance fee, prices for drinks, food and other assets and activities (e.g. cigarettes, billiards) – a venue adopts are telling hallmarks of, on the one hand, the classes of people the venue targets to attract and, on the other hand, the classes of people that are attracted by and attending these venues. Socio-economic class and status are, so to say, ingrained in particular venues and events. By the mere act of entering, for example, an expensive dance club, by proofing able to pay the entrance fee and to meet other access-prerequisites (e.g. a certain dress code), an implicit statement about one’s social and economic class is made. While the attendance can correspond with the factual socio-economic class of a person (as measured, e.g. by the person’s income), it must not. In the game of staging and exposing socio-economic traits, for which music venues provide a sort of public playing field, the class-statement made through attendance can as well – to use a somewhat problematic term – be “pretended”. A dance club’s doorman does not ask for the attendee’s payroll. Once the entrance gate is past, whether by paying the fee or by other means, the game is on, if not already won.

In Freetown, the socio-economic classes commercial music venues target at by adopting certain politics of price stratify along a gulf between two extremes. On the one end are music venues whose price standards, or politics, are most moderate. These spots charge no entrance fee and sell drinks and food near purchase price. A bulk of the before-mentioned “enlarged dance-bars” falls into this category. Free entrance and cheap prices are, theoretically, meant to attract visitors from a widest possible range of socio-economic backgrounds. However, the lack

of prestige and exclusivity that follows from the orientation towards broad social inclusion deprives these venues from clientele that looks for prestige and exclusivity – whether to affirm their allegedly elitist position, to stake out claims to an upward position in the social hierarchy, or to “feign” them. On the other end are music venues that do charge entrance fees and which often adopt exuberantly high prices for drinks and food. The prestige and exclusivity of these venues comes with the prices.

The social segregation implied in politics of entrance-prices Freetown’s music venues adopt can thus be divided into two broad groups: Venues that do not charge any entrance and venues that do charge entrance. The former group of venues (without any entrance fee) is by far the most common across town. It includes basically all bars, whether in Freetown’s east, center or west, and a couple of bigger dancehall-like spots. (One major night club also adopted a free-entrance policy; an exception which I will discuss below.) The latter group (with entrance fee), which is significantly smaller in number, is formed by venues that stage most of Freetown’s bigger and more exceptional music events, in particular shows and concerts, and includes basically all of Freetown’s night clubs where many shows and concerts are staged. Thus, while the majority of music venues are, theoretically, accessible to everybody, the events taking place in these venues are predominantly of a less exceptional character. Once people are asked to pay for entering a venue, in most cases the occurring event will be an exception or a bigger night club party. To partake in it, one thus has to afford it. Adopting, and slightly modifying, a central statement from Situationist theory, in Freetown “the spectacle” (Debord 1970), in this context understood as the exceptional music event, is a social relation among people mediated by *money*. It is, in fact, a spectacle of consumption. Inclusion into it – and exclusion from it – are regulated by the capability (and incapability) to spent money. Or, as one day labourer slogging on the streets of downtown Freetown once expressed it to me: “The money, it is always the money. The problem is always the money. They have the money, they can go many-where. We have the poverty. But poverty don’t take you nowhere, not so?”

### The affluent poor

The overall range of regular entrance prices charged by Freetown’s bigger, commercial music venues is relatively narrow. The proportion of entrance fees of, for example, one of the most popular dance clubs in the East Side (*Diva’s*: 5,000 leones) and the equivalently popular dance spot in the West End (*Paddy’s*: 10,000 leones) is 1:2. The prices charged by other venues for regular events fall only slightly below (e.g. *China House*: 3,000 leones) or above (e.g. *The Office*: 15,000 leones) the set marks respectively, thus making the overall spectrum of



regular entrance prices relatively comparable across town. With regard to the dynamics of social integration and segregation, these standards of entrance prices generate two ambiguous effects: They promote segregation – thus disconnections – while they also foster social inclusion – thus connections.

The first effect stems from the stinging impoverishment large parts of Freetown's society are caught up in. Even the nethermost entrance price of some 3,000 leones is a threshold many people are either not willing or not able to cross, at least not for the regular, "ordinary" event (though, every "ordinary" event becomes exceptional once the required financial expenses sap disproportionately heavy on a person's budget). One exemplary calculation from the "bottom" of Freetown's socio-economic spectrum illustrates that point.

Jinnah is twenty-six years old. He came to Freetown from a village near Koidu, a town in the eastern provinces. As he says, he fled the village for two reasons:

The people that make me to come here were the rebels. But I wanted to come myself. Because in the village, the only thing you can do to find money is to brush the bush. Or you climb the palm tree. That is the only thing you can do in the village. That is why I left there. But in the city here, you have many jobs to do. Everything you want to do you can do in the city, only in the city. But in the village, only to brush.

Since he came to Freetown, Jinnah works as a so-called *omalanke boy* – a sort of carrier-cum-gofer who roams the streets around market areas in search of a temporary employment to carry loads.

Every day you find me here in the streets, jungling downtown, looking for my daily bread. But before stealing someone's property, I decide to carry the load on my head. I carry the load on my head and when I drop it, you will give me what you give me. So, this is the way that makes me move around in life.

M.S.: How much do you make a day?

Maybe two thousand. Maybe you can get three thousand or four thousand. And if the work is available, you can get even ten thousand, if the work is available, if the customers are available and willing to pay. But in the day, at the end of the day, by God's grace, I make my three, four, five thousand.

Under God's favourable auspices, Jinnah may earn some 150,000 to 200,000 leones a month. According to many talks I had with Freetonians, this is about the average income for a larger part of Freetown's (employed) underclasses. However, under less favourable auspices, which are much more often the case, Jinnah's monthly balance might be some 60,000 leones. With the assistance of an informal saving group, he manages to collect the 340,000 leones a year for the rent of his room. The rest is, once again, in God's hands. Given his highly restricted financial scope, leisure becomes a precious and equally high restricted resource. Fairly regularly, he visits a drinking spot near his house at Kissy Road in Freetown's east. Once in a while, he also makes his way to the West End and

spends some time at the beach. However, paying for admission to a venue is a luxury that, for most parts, exceeds Jinnah's financial capacities. The exceptional occasions on which he visits an admission-required event depends on anticipatory planning and his ever-uncertain daily incomes.

The time I go to the big music show is in the festive season. I love music. Like next month [December], we have many artists launching. And I go to the stadium for the launching. I prepare myself to collect the money. But sometimes, when I have planned to go, my work forbids me when I don't get the payment. But on other times, the day is good to me and I get plenty payment so I go.

Among Freetown's numerous semi- and low-skilled day labourers, Jinnah's case is no exception. Every day, thousands of young men hustle for jobs downtown. Temporary employments are rare and struggled for in tough competition. The wage rates are poor, and constant harassments over housing and social welfare are added to the burdens. On these premises, the participation in Freetown's spectacles of consumption-cum-bigger music events becomes an ever-deferred aspiration that grants only sporadic, unforeseeable gratifications. The dynamics of exclusion and segregation from that spectacle start right at the streets of downtown Freetown. And, in a striking way, they mirror the processes of in- and exclusion many impoverished Freetonians experience in their daily lives.

However, the relatively narrow spectrum of entrance prices charged by Freetown's commercial music venues brings forward the (ambiguous) effects of social inclusion, too. In this respect, the realms of music events transform into spaces for the (temporary) transcendence and subversion of exclusion-dynamics that mark and form Freetown's everyday life. As noted above, the entrance fees for regular music events, such as the regular dance party at a night club, are relatively comparable across the city's various music venues. While a difference between entrance prices does exist, the effects of segregation implied within the very category of venues that do charge for admission are rather faint. Once the decision is made to attend an event and to pay an entrance fee anyway and once the coordinates of unpredictable (economic) fate are propitious, a difference of two, five or even ten thousand leones does not necessarily make the folks chose the cheaper spot. On the contrary, once the money – and be it only enough for that one night – is available, often the more prestigious location is preferred; and more prestigious usually means, firstly, more expensive and, secondly, more westwards and more “Western”. The story of David well exemplifies the sort of occasional “financial intemperance” that underlies these dynamics.

David, a secondary school graduate, is in his late twenties and un- or rather under-employed. He lives with his aunt, a cloth merchant, in Freetown's East Side. Every once in a while, she employs him for some temporary work at her business and “dashes” him some obolus for his help. That money, though, is barely enough to allow David to meet up with his friends in a small palm wine

bar near his house, where I also met him. During our first encounter, David told me lengthy stories about his deplorable situation and the troubles to pick up a livelihood. That was in early September. After a few more, accidental encounters in the following weeks and months, we met for an interview in early December. Suddenly, David's stories changed and he told me about the various excursions he recently undertook into Freetown's night life. Stunned by that apparent and sudden transformation of his way of life, he somewhat "revealed" to me that every early December, his cousin (his aunt's daughter), who is living and working in England, sends him an annual "allowance".

That's the good thing if you have a serious relative overseas. Many people here have relatives in US and England and now in the Arab world. With them, it is different. Like my cousin, she is helping me out. Because she knows that it's difficult here to live. But man has to enjoy life, no? (...) Every year, like now in December, she sends me her allowance. Like one hundred pounds. That is a lot. Like six hundred thousand bucks [leones]. More than I have throughout the year, you see? Sometimes I get even more, like one hundred fifty pounds. Man, that is when my good-living starts.

M.S.: So, you take that money to party?

Well, yes. But I also have this girl. When people ask me, I usually give them this math-equation: Plus one minus one. "Plus one minus one" means: In a sense, I have a girlfriend but I don't have a girlfriend. We have been going for quite some time, but usually we are only close in these weeks, like in the carnival season. Because in the year, she has her things and I have my own. And all is very uncertain. But now, we just enjoy life. So we go out almost every night. I take her out. We go to the West End beach. We go to the West End clubs. Take the taxi-ride. Big time. You know, some good-living for once.

M.S.: And you do this already since when?

Basically, since my cousin sends me that money. Maybe five years. I know, maybe I am the wasteful type. But if it comes, it comes. I better waste my money than my life. And after that, live still goes on. She is a costly girl. But she is a good type.

M.S.: And how much money do you have left after the carnival time?

Not much. You see, maybe one hundred pounds is a lot. But if you take your girl out every other night, in the end, there is not much left.

Up to the 1960s, a common view economists held about people in poor countries was that they were guided by tradition or culture and did not respond to economic incentives. Caught up in "static" structures, their poverty, it was said, had its main cause in inefficiency. Development economist Theodore Schultz demolished these long-standing arguments (see Schultz 1964, esp. Chapter 3). A central thesis of Schultz's work was that people in poor countries are "efficient but poor" (or, as many put it, "poor but efficient"), meaning that they make efficient use of their few resources. According to Schultz, poverty was not the cause of inefficiency but, in fact, poverty was the very cause of efficiency because the poor, unlike the rich, have to be very efficient in what they do in order to sustain their however deprived lives and livelihoods. In his 1979 Nobel

Price Lecture (he won the price for his groundbreaking thesis), Schultz (1980: 639) reemphasized the importance of what might be called the hermeneutics of poverty: “People who are rich find it hard to understand the behaviour of poor people. Economists are no exception, for they too, find it difficult to comprehend the preferences and scarcity constraints that determine the choices that poor people make”.

While Schultz’s work, which was mainly focused on the economic rationality of rural farmers, has received various objections (e.g. Ball & Pounder 1996), his central theme became incorporated into the mainstream of economist and policy makers’ theory and practice. It is not my intention to join Schultz’s critics. In many instances during my field work, I found his “efficiency theorem” most applicable. The above-described case of *omalanke boy* Jinnah was one central example for how a poor Freetonian efficiently economizes his meager income and balances it with the (somewhat incommensurable) values of musical recreation and leisure.

David’s case, on the other hand, complicates the efficiency thesis. Throughout most of the year, David apparently fits into Schultz’s category of the “efficient but poor”. However, during the collective carnival-mania that captures Freetown in December, David’s economizing makes a volte-face. Triggered and enabled by his cousin’s annual allowance, David seemingly defies efficiency and, in a most inefficient manner, spends within a month a sum as big as or maybe even bigger than what is at his disposal in the remaining eleven months of the year. The point, however, is not so much that David therewith turns into a “poor but inefficient”. Rather, it appears, he is suddenly blessed with (temporary) affluence and makes splendid use of it. He turns into a (temporarily) *affluent poor*. Throughout most of the year, the gap between his potential aspirations (towards the “good-living”) and his means to realize these aspirations is simply too large (and he simply too poor to afford taking his girl out to parties). Once he receives his annual one-time “financial injection”, the gap at once, and for once, disappears. The relative narrow spectrum of entrance prices charged by Freetown’s commercial music venues significantly fosters the then commenced inclusion of Freetonians into Freetown’s commercial music event scene, who, for most parts, are excluded from it.

### You pay, you pass

The admission procedures of most music venues across town, in turn, that is: The “gate politics” and security measures applied in order to sort out those who get in and those who do not, further add to the potential overcoming of exclusionary dynamics implied in, for example, the geographical distribution of Freetown’s bigger venues and the majority of its population. In most cases, the gate politics

are relatively tepid. As one doorman working for a night club in the West End's hill side (*Old Skool*), one of the most posh venues in town, put it simply: "You pay, you pass." While this statement and the sort of laissez-faire attitude it implies contradict the gleam of exclusivity most West End clubs claim and impute, the practice proves the doorman's point. Once the entrance ticket is paid, the door opens. Occasionally, an "indecent appearance" or dress – a very arbitrary concept which may apply to sandals, shorts or a haircut – can be a reason for denying somebody admission. However, the general attentiveness Sierra Leoneans put on neat and decent clothing, which at times can take on almost obsessive traits, impedes most dress-related concerns about admission to music venues.

An exceptional and particularly interesting admission-policy is carried out by one club at the West End beach: *Aces*. In most regards, the discotheque-like spot is comparable to basically all bigger, commercially oriented, regular music venues in Freetown. It operates throughout the week and offers changing party themes for every night, with the music being very much the proven mix of dance-hits from the (black) Atlantic trinity. Prices for drinks, food and other assets and activities offered are in line with price-standards set in Freetown's West End. However, unlike most other comparable venues, the club does only charge entrance at particular busy nights (e.g. at the Eid al-Fitr). For the rest, the admission is free. For some time, this free entrance-policy, which was introduced after a change of ownership some one-and-a-half years ago, made the club one of the most frequented in Freetown and proved economically profitable since (more) people were spending more on drinks. However, the potential limitless admission of people from all sections of society increasingly also deprived the club of the distinct appeal of exclusivism most West End venues – and their audiences – nourish, what in turn, subsequently and consequently, also led to a slow decline of attending (solvent) audiences.

In an interview I conducted with two female college students, this fading appeal of the club is well illustrated from the side of the audiences. Christine and Florence, both in their early twenties, are avid for dancing pursuits. They estimate the frequency of their night outs at about two to three times a week. Their selection (and categorization) of venues is navigated along the thin (and complicated) line drawn between clubs and events with a certain "gleam" and esteem and those without.

*Christine:* This is because the club you go tells the people about who you are. And this is really complicated. You have to know when a place is good and when not, but this is changing. But usually, the places that charge (for entrance) are good. Because there, people will not say we are like prostitutes when we go there alone. So, we can just go and enjoy ourselves.

M.S.: So, *Aces* is not a "good place"?

Chapter 17: The politics of price, prestige and consumption

*Christine:* You see, *Aces* is fun. It is a very popular place because it is for everybody. But when we go there, we have to be careful.

M.S.: Careful about what?

*Florence:* Because of the *kongosa* (rumours). When some people here know we go to the *Aces*, they will start the *kongosa*. They will tell we are not sober, that we are *chak* (drunk), like prostitutes. This is why we don't go there too much. When we want to enjoy freely, we have to go to the clubs that charge.

*Christine:* This is all pretending. We are all pretending all the time.

M.S.: What do you mean? What are you pretending?

*Christine:* We are pretending that we are sober – but we are not! When we go out, we like to enjoy, we like getting *chak*. Why will I go to the club to be sober? But in *Aces*, we can't just enjoy as we like, so we have to go to other places.

In order to sustain, or regain, a more refined “gleam” and appeal, by late 2009 *Aces* began to progressively introduce a stricter gate-policy, or what appeared to be a stricter gate-policy. Struck by these changing admission procedures, I regularly sat with the doormen and observed their handling of the broad variety of visitors. Before the first changes were introduced, two casually appearing doormen basically just waved everybody through. With the passing of time, three doormen were employed and began to halt and “interrogate” certain visitors about their legal age, dress, behaviours, drug consumption, or the intention to purchase drinks. These interrogations, however, did not follow any established code but were conducted according to random principles of who should and who should not be “checked”. In virtually all instances the interrogated person was let in nonetheless. At times, a sort of warning concerning dress or behaviour was remarked. The next strategy deployed by the club was to place a big signboard next to the entrance gate on which unwanted behaviours were enlisted. The text read “no fighting. no abusive language. no stealing.” A few weeks later, the doormen were equipped with metal detectors with which all visitors were briefly scanned. The signboard's factual effect is hard to estimate. The metal detectors' effectiveness, on the other hand, was fairly symbolic as the devices were used despite regularly discharged batteries.

The allegedly stricter gate-policy introduced by the club was a farce played in order to regain a more exclusivist appeal *while* adhering to the (economically) profitable free-entrance policy, which in fact proved increasingly less profitable as more and more (solvent) audiences stayed away. In January 2010, a, for the moment being, last measure was taken by the club's management and an “exclusive VIP area” opened in an upstairs premise. Access was granted only to “invited members”. The “invitation”, though, was nothing but a ticket that needed to be bought. However, neither did this measure yield the anticipated fruition. According to one of the club's doorman, by February barely anyone had asked for an “invitation” to the VIP area. The point was not to create a separated space

fenced off from the club's "innards" but, if anything, to separate the club's spaces from the city's "outers", to *disconnect* the disco from the "unrestrained" mingling of people that marks Freetown's spaces.

The example of *Aces* demonstrates the sort of dilemma many of Freetown's bigger, commercial music venues are in. Since the end of the war, the city saw a proliferation of night clubs which in turn significantly raised the competition among these clubs. In order to defy this tightened competition, the venues must maintain the appeal of exclusivity many Freetonians, like Christine and Florence, ask for (or, in fact, "are asked for" by their social environment which otherwise reacts with dreaded *kongosa*), while at the same time they must also attract customers and make a profit. It is to open your doors while closing them at the same time, or at least appearing to close them. As a consequence and "solution" of the dilemma, many venues that do charge for entrance adjust their entrance prices to the city's standards while "minimizing" the implied dynamics of segregation and exclusion (and thus of deprivation of customers) through a relatively tepid "gate policy". Thus, while segregation implied in the politics of entrance prices does exist, in its overall effect it is of a rather blurred character.

### Bottled prestige

A subtler means for social segregation than that of entrance price-politics is implemented by the prices for drinks. From both the prices of drinks as well as the kinds of drinks available at the respective venue, a sort of "pattern of prestige" can be deduced that characterizes Freetown's music venue scene.

With regard to alcoholic drinks served at the city's diverse music venues, the scale ranges from locally produced palm wine and sachet-packed, high percentage liquor, which are served at the cheapest spots, to locally produced bottled beer and imported canned beer through to imported bottled beer and other luxurious drinks such as imported wine and champagne, which are sold at the most prestigious bars and clubs. A sort of social status-hierarchy of alcoholic drinks can be sketched along the five-tiered line from (1) (palm wine) cups to (2) sachets, (3) cans, (4) bottles, and (5) (wine and champagne) glasses. The last line of division is drawn between the prices charged for the respective drink. In regard to the cheapest drinks (palm wine and sachet liquor), which are almost exclusively served in the least prestigious locations, the prices vary only insignificantly. The prices of bottled and canned beers, which are sold in basically all venues throughout the city, imply the highest differences. The same brand of a bottled beer can vary from some 2,500 leones (approx. 0,50 euro) at a venue in the East Side to some 15,000 or more leones (approx. 3 euros) in a posh club in the West End. Purchasing a drink for a cheap price speaks of a basic (drinking) practice without too much symbolic ado (though, the level of symbolic meaning

inherent in drinking a “modestly” priced beer can vary thoroughly, depending on *where* and *with whom* the beer is purchased and consumed). The fivefold price for the very same drink charged at a different venue, on the other hand, is highly “symbolic”. The bottle virtually “speaks” of class and status. The socio-economic status exposed in – and staged by – buying and holding a drink thus depends, firstly, on the respective drink and, secondly, on the respective place the drink is being consumed at.

From the Situationists mentioned above, it is a short skip to the early work of Jean Baudrillard. In his *System of Objects*, Baudrillard (1996) applies the Saussurean system of *langue* and *parole* to approach social order from the side of consumption of objects. In this approach, consumption turns into a language-like system (*langue*): The relation of objects to each other (e.g. cups of palm wine to bottled beer) resembles the relation of effects of speech (*parole*). The meaning of the object lies in the relationship the object stands in with all other objects (as does the meaning of a speech act lie in its relationship to other speech acts). The meaning of consumption lies therefore not in the consumed object itself, but it is in the relations to other consumable objects that the respective “consumption act” gains its meaning. Thus, not objects are consumed, but relations between objects. And these relations between objects, in turn, *signify* social standing. As Baudrillard (1996: 209) writes, “objects work as categories of objects which, in the most tyrannical fashion, define categories of persons”. With further borrowings from semiotics, Baudrillard distinguishes an object’s denotation, that is its use and function (with regard to alcoholic drinks: appeasing thirst, causing jolliness and nausea), from its connotation: the context-dependent, ambiguous sets of meanings ascribed to the object by its consumers (*ibid.*: 10). It is in the field of connotation that objects circulate as signs of social status, wealth, prestige etc. The consumption of objects reflects capacities (and incapacities) to spend, and thus reenacts existent hierarchical socio-economic divisions in society. Social status, wealth and prestige are signified through differences in consumption – drinking a bottled beer means *not* drinking a cup of palm wine, which means having (or assuming) a higher social rank than that of the palm wine drinker; using a “blackberry<sup>®</sup>” mobile phone means *not* using a “bleckbarry” counterfeit; driving a white-shining jeep means *not* driving (in) a poda poda, and so forth.

However, while this consumption-oriented strategy of class-differentiation implies an organization of social groups along differences in consumption (and thus along spending capacities), it simultaneously renders possible the subversion of this very organization and its constructed hierarchies. When social class, status, wealth etc. are signified (and stratified) by objects of consumption, the elite is not “protected” from the “rabble’s” interim emulation and appropriation of signs of (the elite’s) wealth and status. Although for the underclasses the



respective financial expenditures are much higher than for the elite, they too can consume signs of wealth, which for them are costly but not inaccessible, and thus undermine the logics of class-differentiation. The consumption-based logic of class-differentiation is not immune to subversion not least because to consume and expose objects that connote wealth, prestige etc., one does not necessarily have to actually *purchase* them; an expensive drink, mobile phone, car etc. can also be stolen, borrowed, or otherwise appropriated (which is not to say that the elite would always acquire their objects lawfully).

Now, returning to the Freetonian patterns of prestige engendered in the (public) consumption of alcoholic drinks, it should be first clarified that, certainly, Freetown society does not define its socio-economic classes through drinking practices, not solely at least. Other class determining and connoting practices and parameters are at work too. Status inscribed in Freetown's geographical spaces, as discussed above, is one main parameter; lineage, age and gender three other. Jackson (2004: 46) broadly outlines the hierarchies of these, more traditional or "tribal" as he calls it, calculi of social distinction: "People were superior to animals, firstborn were superior to second-born, men were superior to women, adults were superior to children, the patriline was superior to matriline, rulers were superior to commoners" etc. However, in present day Freetown, (Baudrillardian) class-differentiating logics of consumption do find manifold applications. And in these, (public) drinking practices and their implied strategies to signify status, wealth etc., to reenact existent hierarchical socio-economic divisions, and to subvert these hierarchies and division again, play a central role. The main stages for the enactments of these "roles" – for the acting out of the relations that signify the social meaning of drinking a bottled beer and a cup of palm wine respectively – are commercial music venues.

Generally, in the prices for drinks Freetown's upmarket and down-market music venues adopt, the social class-differentiating and segregating logics of consumption do function in compliance with the elite's desires. "Town and gown", as Abdullah (2002b: 32) once coined Freetown's two main socio-economic groups, that is: The poor and the rich, are kept apart by the often astronomical gradient that marks the prices in different venues – at least to some extent. One example from among each side of the general socio-economic divide that characterizes Freetown's society and the reenactment of this divide through drinking (and spending) habits shall suffice to exemplify this relation

Sandy is a thirty-three-year-old who migrated to Freetown from the southern provinces some seventeen years ago. Even though he came to the city in order to continue his schooling, he did not further his education but got caught up in low-paid, daily labouring on Freetown's streets. He lives off Mountain Cut, a relatively poor area at the border between the central business district and Free-

town's East Side. Neither married nor with children, Sandy spends a fair amount of his time in drinking and dancing spots. He likes "hustling around" in the nights. But for this, he says,

I have to calculate. Because when I want to enjoy myself, I need to brush myself – I need to get some alcohol in my veins. Every time I go out, I think: How much I spend on transport? How much I spend on the door? How much have I left for some booze? (...) Because I am never loaded (with money) and it is hard for me to get loaded (drunk), I look for the cheaper way. Any bar around where I can get my six block (600 leones) gin will do the job. (...) When I have more money, I don't waste it on the big stout (bottled beer). I better waste it on more gin. That is more fun.

Sandy's pragmatic attitude towards drinking (and spending) practices marks one end on the scale of how a person's socio-economic class determines his or her nightly recreational practices. In a somewhat "adjusted" manner, it also verifies Schultz's "poor but efficient" thesis. With regard to the class-differentiating logics of (alcohol) consumption and their signifying relations, his drinking corresponds with, and reenacts, his social standing and position in the existent hierarchical socio-economic divisions. Sandy does not aspire to drinks (or: objects) that signify upper-class status but settles for the "six block gin" served in a plastic sachet.

Victor represents the other end of the scale. I met Victor in an upmarket club in the West End where we had a fairly informal talk. During our conversation, Victor constantly emphasized the importance, as he calls it, "class" plays in his nightly activities. Born into an affluent Creole family, thirty years old Victor speaks of himself as "a player". After graduating from college, he started an import business which well supports his wife and two sons as well as himself and his various amorous escapades. Victor enjoys his nights out as regularly as Sandy. However, rather than being anxious about spending too much, he is concerned about maintaining his image of a lavish "player". In fact, Victor appears anxious about not spending enough and, especially, not being seen and recognized spending. The right drinks in the right spots for the right (symbolic) prices – and with the right, "classy" people – are the main means to this goal. In the course of our one hour chat, Victor did not only invite me and several others of his present acquaintances to numerous drinks but was furthermore adamant that we drank his type of beer, the club's most expensive import beer, served in appropriate glass mugs. Victor masterly exerted the differentiating logics of (alcohol) consumption from the position of a member of the upper-class. Through his drinking (and spending) practices he verified and enacted his position in this class. Furthermore, he emphasized his position at the top by choosing the prestigious, top end-priced drink and by insisting on having only this and no other drink.



*Photo 17.1* A sumptuously laid table, Freetown 2009 (courtesy of Mustapha Dumbuya)

The cases of Sandy and Victor can be taken as two examples for the general correlation between, on the one hand, a person's level of material wealth (or material poverty) and self-ascribed status and, on the other hand, the respective music venues this person is prone to attend, the respective drinks this person is prone to choose, and the respective position in the socio-economic hierarchies connoted by the objects (i.e. drinks) consumed this person will occupy and aspire. Mostly, this general correlation applies in music venues that do not charge any entrance fee, that is: the majority of regular, commercial music venues across town, but which stratify their clientele by different price-standards charged for drinks and the kinds of drinks at offer. For the bare "going out for a drink" the respective socio-economic groups stick to "their own" drinks and spots. The cobblers do stick to their lasts – and to their regular bars selling medium-priced beers, the day labourers stick to their roadside shacks flogging cheap liquor, and the professionals to their terrace-bars sipping (symbolically) over-priced drinks while enjoying the view over town or sea.

## Refilling the bottles

However, in many other instances Freetown's night life yields exceptions to this. It is in these exceptions that the class-differentiating logics of (alcohol) consumption are subverted and, so to say, turned against themselves. Even though, or maybe *because*, Freetown's society is sharply divided across the socio-economic line drawn between the affluent minority and the impoverished majority (and across the music venues targeting at the respective group), within the realms of many music events these divisions are regularly crossed and subverted. The subversions occur predominantly on the part of the deprived majority and mostly during exceptional occasions such as bigger club parties and concerts. Thus during events when the enacting of social class-differences through consumption becomes most significant as different classes (of consumers *and* of objects of consumption) are gathered in the same place and as the social class-signifying relations between objects of consumption become most exposed and most "vulnerable" to renegotiations.

I observed one particularly successful act of renegotiation during a weekly staged concert party in a sort of half-upmarket, half-middle class venue in central Freetown (*China House*). Every Friday, the party attracts a broad variety of visitors in respect of age and socio-economic backgrounds. The latter can be deduced from the diversity of transport people use to get to and from the venue. Beside some extravagant four wheel drives parked at the spot's guarded car park, the streets around and in front of the venue are regularly cramped with numerous private cars, while *poda podas*, taxis and *okadas*, plying both west- and eastwards routes, contest for passengers right in front of the venue's gate. The entrance fee (3,000 leones) balances on the threshold between broad inclusion and subtle exclusion of a mass audience. The music is – exceptionally for Freetown's music event scene – provided by a live band, the Super Combo International Dance Band, a reminiscence of the successful 1970s' Super Combo. Similarly exceptional is the almost identical list (and order) of songs the Super Combo renders during their weekly show: a whole bunch of old "Congo classics" are alternated with some Sierra Leonean, Nigerian, Cameroonian, South African, Latin- and US-American dance and disco hits from the 1970s. As at basically *every* other music event held in Freetown in late 2009/early 2010, the Super Combo crowned its weekly performances with an idiosyncratic interpretation of a range of contemporary mass-attracting hits à la Nigerian "Yori Yori" and "Fall in Love", which make *China House's* dancing folks go wild too. Two, usually well-filled dance floors are surrounded by a large number of equally filled groups of chairs and tables, which provide the setting for our scene of the enacted renegotiation of class-differentiating logics through the (public) consumption of drinks – or in fact its emulation.

A group of three young men wander around the venue, jesting, chatting, occasionally dancing, and apparently looking for some new female acquaintance. They approach several groups of young women but are rejected one after the other. Later in the evening, I see them taking a seat at a table, still talkative but in a less frolicsome manner than before. At the next table sits a group of two older (Big) men accompanied by two women. Unlike the young men's table, which is and remains empty as the group did neither purchase a drink before nor appears to have the money to do so, the (Big) men's table is filled with beer bottles and glasses. As the group of (Big) men and their ladies leave their table and the club, the three young men sneak over and occupy the just abandoned table along with the bereaved vestiges of splendid consumption. The bottled prestige assembled at their new table alters their moods and self-esteem. Swiftly, they single out some still half-filled bottles, take hold of them, and begin again to talk and laugh vociferously. A young waiter who passes by and attempts to clear the remains from their table is flagged away with a token gesture. Geared up with new signs of wealth and prestige, the young men recommence their initial advances and, soon, succeed: Two girls react to their flirt and sit with them.

As much as their action can be read as a parody of a lower class group's somewhat desperate attempt to aspire to and acquire the signs of the dominant class' wealth and prestige, as much was it, for the moment being, an actual appropriation of these signs and their signified socio-economic position. By claiming (and "pretending") the consumption of objects that they could not purchase (read: consume) themselves, they turned-over and subverted the consumption-based logic of class-differentiation. Before, the signifying relations between the various objects, of which they could not afford any, had put them into a subordinated position in *China House's* implicit hierarchical divisions of classes of people – reflecting and reenacting existent hierarchical socio-economic divisions in the society of "the outer world". "In the most tyrannical fashion", their category of person was defined by the category of (consumed) objects, or in fact their lack thereof. Since this consumption-based logic of differentiation remained valid also after their subversive "usurpation" of bottled prestige, their position and status were, at a single stroke, turned upside down, or rather down-side up.

There are many other strategies people with low spending capacities contrive to omit paying for the over-priced drinks while having them nevertheless – and thus in order to play in the "spectacle of consumption" staged at Freetown's bigger, commercial music venues. During one major event in an upmarket venue at the West End beach, for example, drinks selling street-hawkers played a central role in the lower classes' emulated spectacle. A successful Sierra Leonean businessman living in Nigeria, who organized the concert, brought together an

assembly of Sierra Leonean and Nigerian music stars – an exceptional line-up for a music show in Freetown. Because of the anticipated financial loss the promoter would suffer (the Nigerian artists' return flights alone exceeded the possible revenues from ticket sales by far), local newspapers dubbed him Freetown's "entertainment philanthropist". The event attracted several thousand attendees, bringing together various groups from both sides of Freetown's hierarchical socio-economic division. Whereas the entrance charge was, for an event of this caliber, relatively moderate (15,000 leones), the venue raised the drink prices, which were already fairly expensive during ordinary occasions, exorbitantly – charging 12,000 leones for the cheapest small beer. While that price-increase might have been a strategy to mitigate the overall financial loss, it resulted in a scenario in which only the present upper classes consumed, who were seated at the exclusive front row tables and served by waiters, while the venue's bar remained empty and the large majority of attendees empty-handed and drouthy. In the course of the show, however, the afore-said hawkers began to clandestinely "cater for" the present lower classes' desires to partake in the likewise present upper classes' spectacle of consumption. First, a few of the street vendors managed to sell some of their much cheaper wet goods to the inside folks by serving the drinks over the venue's walls. Later on, some dauntless sellers even climbed above the walls themselves, offering their services on the venue's very premises, of which many of the show's audiences furtively but avidly took prompt advantage.

Further strategies for the re-negotiation of existent socio-economic division through the (public) consumption of alcoholic drinks, which I observed during other events, involved, for example, smuggling in own liquids. That might happen either in form of single cans and bottles to be drunk at the spot or in larger quantities for the refilling of emptied bottles. Yet another strategy was simply to hold on to one's own purchased drink for the whole night. Of course, the above described "befriending" practices play a major role in these enactments too. Not seldom is a rejected appeal for a lift responded with a plea for the allegedly minor "benevolence" of buying a drink. While these strategies are adopted by youths around the world, it is through the pronounced chasm yawning between Freetown's affluent minority and impoverished majority that the Freetonians' adaptations of these tactics become particularly meaningful, significant and telling. And it is, furthermore, particularly in the realms and spaces of bigger, commercial music events that both the chasm and its interim overcoming (or subversion) can be staged, exposed, reenacted and re-negotiated.

## The king and his followers

During the weekend right before Christmas, a popular local artist (though, living in the US) performed two shows on two consecutive nights in two different venues – for two fairly different audiences. I attended both shows. In this chapter I give two in-depth descriptions of both events. Subsequently, I will juxtapose and contrast the, on the one hand, timely and musical proximity and connectivity of the two events with the pronounced social differences and dis-connectivity inscribed into the shows contexts and conduct. I begin with the first concert, which took place on a Friday night in Freetown’s biggest music venue: the national stadium.

### Extravaganza

Together with crowds of thousands of people, we shove our way towards the stadium’s main entrance gates. It is past midnight. Beside the little oil lamps with which the roaming street vendors illumine their goods, the only lights flicker from two halogen lamps. They indicate the way. One lamp shines above the only opened ticket desk, the other above the closely-guarded entrance gate. Sweating police officers wave around improvised batons made of branches and command people senselessly from one crowded spot to the other. Despite their aggressive demeanor, the atmosphere is peaceful. The crowds rejoice in excitement and some sort of incipient solidarity. We all came here for the same purpose: to take part in the “biggest hip hop concert ever in Salone”, as placards all around town were promising us for weeks. Tonight’s show is an annual highlight. “The king of Freetown”, as Kao Denero is usually referred to by his followers, is coming to town. And it will in fact turn out a very big concert. Some thirty thousand mainly young people attend the show; a number with which only “spiritual restorations” led by Nigerian televangelists can compete with in Sierra Leone.

Kao Denero (Amara Turay) is an indisputable part and parcel of Freetown's social imaginary; a modern cultural hero. In the mid-1990s, while still being in high school, Kao was amongst the first Sierra Leonean artists who started to rap. In today's perception of many young Freetonians, he basically invented hip hop music in Sierra Leone. This perception, and his popularity, is inextricably linked with his personal history. As the AFRC took over in 1997, Kao, still a pupil, migrated to Pennsylvania, United States, where he is living until today. With this change of residence, his image converted from an early local forerunner of a new music trend originating from the US to an embodiment of this very trend and its concomitant imaginary of a new lifestyle. Kao is a contemporary epitome of Freetown's long-standing cultural orientation towards the (black) Atlantic world. The two most common denominators used by his fans, "The King of Freetown" and "Kao the King", are telling hallmarks of the transnational, trans-Atlantic setting his image and appeal are grounded in. The fact that Kao resides in the US state of Pennsylvania, and not in Freetown, is to be considered a reason for his "kingship" rather than contradicting the foundations of his title. Also, it explains his vast appeal after the thorough post-election downturn of Freetown's local popular music. Neither is Kao a local nor a foreign, or "global", musician. He embodies and transcends both categories simultaneously – a "*glocal*" artist perched in the (black) Atlantic.

Above-introduced *omalanke boy* Jinnah, who, as many if not most of my informants, made a great effort not to miss the concert, gave me the following explanation for his adoration of Kao which he, tellingly, contrasts with his dislike for (other) local artists:

I am not fond very much of our artists. I love the American artists. But our artists, they are not in the same syllabus. They don't reach there. I compare the music and the Sierra Leone artists, they are not grammatical. But American music, I love it. And Kao – he is our King. He makes the music I love. Like "Baby Luv", hip hop, R&B. That is a song by Kao Denero – King of Freetown. Kao is a big artist. He won a big award in America. He knows how to sing. He is living in America, in Babylon. He is the King of Babylon. No artist for Kao Denero in Sierra Leone.

In his music, which Kao sings in a blend of Krio, a sort of a clichéd African American English, and a plentitude of hybrid idioms and neologisms, he presents Sierra Leonean themes in an US-American packaging. This combination of Sierra Leonean content and US-American form has, for large parts, very practical reasons. Since Kao lives in the US, almost all of his songs and video clips are produced there. His audience and market, in turn, are almost exclusively Sierra Leonean.<sup>1</sup> This gulf between the sites of production and sales results in, for

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<sup>1</sup> The award Kao won in the US, mentioned by Jinnah, was given to him at a music show organized by the Sierra Leonean diaspora in the US, Kao's second main target audience. It was the "Sierra Leone



example, a video clip like “Baby Luv”, in which Kao extols the beauty of a Sierra Leonean woman while standing at New York’s Times Square. Since the late 1990s, Kao institutionalized a visiting-relation with his Freetonian followers. Each December, during the annual peak of the festive season, he visits Freetown to perform on several shows and to release his latest album. In the course of time, his annual visits became a ritualized sermonizing of the newest hip hop trends. This year, he set his main show in the national stadium strategically at the last weekend before Christmas.



*Photo 18.1* Kao Denero, “The King of Freetown”; scene from the video clip “Baby (Luv)”

In spite of its chaotic appearance, the crowds in front of the stadium are actually well organized into two long queues. It takes us about half an hour to pass the first line to the ticket desk and another forty minutes until we reach the entrance at the end of the second line. While waiting, I begin to distinguish groups of individuals among the crowds. I estimate the majority to be between fifteen and thirty-five years of age. The scene is dominated by young men. Within this dominance of male visitors, the few present women seem to evoke particular attention. Right at the center of the stadium’s entrance square, a lowered, black car is parked. It serves as a setting for a flamboyant gathering which the lines of by-passing people observe in half-straitened, half-adoring manners. Three men lean against the car. They wear sunglasses, heavy neck

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Music Television Award” for the “2008 best male hip hop artist”, given out by the Sierra Leonean run diaspora web-page sltv.com.

chains, and white undershirts which well underline their upper body's brawny physiques. Each of the men is accompanied by a girl in scarce clothing made up of a tight top, hot pants or a short skirt. Watching the scene, I recall a music video from US "pop-rapper" Lil Wayne in which a similar conflation of muscles and breasts is presented in front of fancy automobiles. Thud beats blast out of the car's system. They originate from the New Orleans-based Cash Money recording studio, Lil Wayne's record label. As we move forward in our line, I spot an imprint on the car's bonnet; written in white italics is *EXTRAVAGANZA*.

In Freetown's contemporary mass music culture, mass music events are providing the most explicit playgrounds for the exposure of imagined and "ideal" relationships. Vertical social boundaries drawn along "the outside world's" socio-economic hierarchies are suspended, subverted, re-negotiated and re-invented again. In the midst of the crowds outside the stadium's main gates, the group of six "car-poser" form but one main example in the abundance of re-inventions and imaginations of status and prestige that take place tonight. Later on that night, I meet two brothers, whom I know from their work on downtown's streets where they peddle pens and notepads to bypassing business people. Compared to their blue-collar worker-appearance in everyday life – wearing worn-out slippers and a most basic combination of slacks and undershirt – tonight they are virtually masqueraded: a white-shining pair of sneakers, a shining-new baggy pants embellished with the giant-sized (counterfeited) token of an exclusive fashion brand (Gucci), an ironed, open-necked shirt exhibiting the same token, a stiff white, pin-striped baseball cap claiming *NY*, all punctuated by the huge replica of a silver chain.

A few weeks later, as I encountered the two brothers again downtown, I asked them how they afforded the fashionable outfits they wore at Kao's show. In a detailed description, they listed to me the locations of all the street vendors who sell the precious items at low rates, the best strategies and moments to negotiate the prices, and the long-term calculations about savings they had to accumulate for each piece of clothing respectively. It is a neatly planned socio-visual mimicry, an averment upon upward social mobility – against all odds of socio-economic stasis – expressed in the appropriation and exposition of shining (fashion) models of Western prestige. Objects of status and prestige, acquired in painstaking efforts, are shown as they are shining. The class-differentiating logics of consumption and its "tyrannical" definition of categories of people through objects of consumption (Baudrillard 1996) are turned against themselves.

## The show

As almost all major public events in Freetown, also tonight's show is being sponsored by one of Sierra Leone's mobile phone operators. Due to that dubious liaison, the entrance fee is extraordinarily cheap, 5,000 leones (about 1 euro). On the one hand, the cheap entrance allows many who would not be able to spend more to attend the show. On the other hand, everybody present will have to endure a notorious and seemingly never-ending chain of advertisements for the phone company. The marketing starts right at the entrance. Instead of a ticket, everybody is given a small piece of a card which carries 50 top-up units for the sponsor's phone network. A young man standing next to me in line comments on the gift: "Maybe inside they will dash me a phone. Then I could even use my new credits."

The final entrance procedure has something of a rite of passage. The only operating entrance gate is guarded by about a dozen security guards. The ungrateful job of two guards is to scream at everybody who approaches the gate to hold up his top-up card. Obviously irritated by all the screaming, many fail the hold up their cards and are first pushed harshly away before returning with their hands stretched far into the sky, holding up their top-up cards. As I pass the first guards, another bunch of gate keepers-cum-mobile phone promoters pulls me forcefully into their midst. First, another card – now a SIM phone card – is pressed into my free hand. Then, two guards push me against a wall for a thorough body-search. My bag is taken away from me and searched, too. Finally, I am handed over my bag and pushed inside the stadium's grounds.

Rather than telling anything about the actual propensity for violence or any potential upheaval of tonight's crowds, the tight security speaks of the event's uncommon encounter between, on the one hand, one of Sierra Leone's biggest corporations, the mobile phone operator, and Kao Denero's most prominent followers, Freetown's so-called marginalized, impoverished, male youths, on the other hand. The applied measures and procedures – the closing of all but one ticket desks and entrance gates, the aggressive police clerks and security guards, the humiliating body scan, the search through pockets, bags and the crotch – all rather tended to provoke the very attitudes and practices that they purport to prevent and control. The audiences nevertheless remained calm throughout the night. In some instances, though, this misguided relation between expected behaviours and preventive measures turned upside down. Right after I entered the stadium, a young man got engaged in a loud argument with some security guards. He accused the guards of stealing his phone while searching him. Before making any further attempts to express his maltreatment, police guards chased him from the scene. They chased him inside the stadium where he disappeared in the



Photo 18.2 A Kao Denero fan, wearing a pin with Kao's Picture, Freetown, January 2010

crowd. Inside, no police or security guards appeared. The space was left in charge of the audiences.

One more hour is still to pass before the first music act will appear on stage. Instead of waiting for the announced acts to start inside the main bowl, many people gather at the grand outer terrace which frames the stadium's oval shape. Whereas on other events the terrace serves as a bare passageway into the stadium, tonight's audiences turned it into a mixture of a concert hall-like foyer, a catwalk, and a dance floor. The terrace's long and wide hallway is packed. Groups of people walk up and down watching other groups leaning against the balustrade who in turn watch the ones passing-by. The spectacle has long since started. As I appear to be the only white visitor of tonight's show, my presence prompts many reactions. On my walk through the terrace, a passer-by calls on me, shouting "white leo" – a playful alteration of Kao Denero's label name, Black Leo – after which he intonates a choral, singing repeatedly the same two words. Many others join him in his singing. The atmosphere among the terrace's crowds is excited, at some spots frenetic. For many, this evening is one of the rare occasions on which they attend a music event of this caliber. The obstacles that

restrict the “marginalized majority” to spending their free evenings and nights in bars and gathering spots in their neighbourhoods or not to go out at all – lack of time, mobility and money – are, for once, overcome. This overcoming of limits in turn attaches a lot of significance to the night when one manages to actually make his or her way to the big concert party. The sheer attendance of a show, the being-there, taking part in and being part of the event, implies a fruition of otherwise scarcely available resources (of time, mobility, money). Being there bears the meaning of freedom, of an exemption from the restraints of a harsh reality, even if it is only for the night.

Around two in the morning, the masses from the terrace join those who were waiting inside the main bowl. The stands positioned closest to the stage are crowded far beyond their capacities. With the exception of the so-called presidential seats, the only stand with seats and roofing at the straight side of the stadium’s oval, the entire tribune is packed. Tickets for the presidential seats were sold at the tenfold price of the ordinary ticket. The few figures sitting in that stand form a grotesque contrast to the over-crowded stadium. This image is enhanced by the bright spot light that illuminates the presidential seats, while the rest of the stadium is covered in darkness. From the attendance-ratio of (empty) first-class presidential seats and (overcrowded) ordinary stands, it appears that representatives of Freetown’s upper classes did not show up at the event. The relatively empty car park on the side of the stadium indicates an absence of affluent participants as well. In the case of Kao’s show, however, these impressions (and deductions) might be deluding. On the one hand, the multitudinous number of attendees made car park-deductions a vague method for the estimation of socio-economic classes. On the other hand, at least among several circles of FBC students – a group which despite the numerous hardships many Sierra Leonean college students have to sustain can be counted among the country’s upper-class – tonight’s concert was a big topic already weeks ahead. Also my two companions of that night, both avowed Kao Denero fans, are last year undergraduates from the FBC. Due to the special occasion, we decided to pay for a hired taxi to get to the stadium. Not least, the presidential seats might have remained empty simply because in the exclusive (and excluded) seating area one would miss the main attraction, which is – tacitly though doubtlessly – taking place amidst the crowds.

At two-thirty in the morning, the opening acts begin. Before Kao’s main show, several local artists are to perform. It is hard to spot who enters the stage. The rather tiny podium of some ten times ten meters is positioned on the sideline of the football field, right in front of the empty presidential stand. The meager sound system, two piles of speakers on both sides of the stage, is facing the empty seats as well. We are far afield from the stage and its speakers. Distances

by the height of the elevated stands, a running track, and the football field, watching the performance from our seats resembles following a table tennis match from a tower's rooftop.

The first part of the show follows a strict code of procedure. While a DJ starts playing the music, the respective artist enters the scene and asks the DJ to turn down the volume. In a few lines, he introduces himself (no female artist performed at tonight's show), expresses thanks to the organizers and sponsors, and asks the DJ to turn up the volume again. Then the lip-synching starts. Each artist performs two songs. In between the performances, a presenter recites the advantages of using the sponsor's phone network. The spectacle turns more and more into a well-calculated and tightly priced advertisement show – a literal spectacle of (enticing) consumption. In fact, the constant onslaught of radio-like adverts played from a tape and the interludes of “live-performing” mobile phone promoters on stage take up at least three times more time than the musical parts of tonight's show. As the opening acts come to an end, a longer intermezzo of a lottery-like advertisement-show follows. The stadium's crowds are asked to use their newly acquired SIM and top-up cards to call “the winning number”.

While ignoring the advert-show, one of my companions pointedly and fairly cynically comments on the preceding music performances: “We listen to somebody we don't hear and we look at something we don't see, and they aren't even really singing.” His disillusioning verdict seems justified. The stage literally gets lost in the stadium's wide venue; some artists don't use a microphone to pretend they are singing; the speakers' volume fails to fill even their near-by stands with adequate sound. Though, nobody seems to be hampered by the poor staging and the notorious advertisement. On the contrary, the longer the show progresses, the more boisterous the audiences become. In regular attempts to challenge the defying and defining chasm between stage and crowds, the artists and promoters appeal to the people's reactions, screaming “give me some noise!” The crowds reply promptly with an overwhelming roar. At three-thirty, the erratic and absorbing forces of collective action are at its peak. People burst out in spontaneous dancing, some shout for the sheer excitement of shouting, others express their excitement by hugging and squeezing their unknown neighbours.

At the moment of the audiences' full blooming excitement, Kao enters the stage. The thirty thousand commence a persistent roaring which does not cease until “the King” disappears again – some 25 minutes later. His musical performance barely makes any difference to the performances of the preceding opening acts. Kao praises the sponsor, hails the audiences, and asks the DJ to start the music. He lip-synchs, or in fact: “lip-raps”, five songs and leaves the stage again. After that, Kao sallies out to a “victory lap” around the stadium, in

which he rids himself of his shirt, necklace and red cap and throws them into the crowds. Then, almost as sudden as he appeared, he disappears again.

Despite Kao's fairly curt and rather unspectacular performance, his audiences were excessively excited. For about the thirty or so minutes Kao was within sight (not necessarily within hearing though), the stadium was literally shaking. The sort of thrilling-joyful hysteria that seized the present folks (even though I struggled to remain calm, I was not excluded from it) appeared particularly striking given the very physical as well as the broader societal conditions the performance took place in. The large, vacant spaces of the stadium isolated the performers from their audiences and disconnected the audiences from the performers. Kao's "victory lap" and the preceding performers and promoters' "invocations" for the audiences' noise were but desperate, single attempts to overcome that defining chasm. The inapt technical facilities, above all the low level and quality of volume and sound, further enlarge the gap between stage and stands. Once Kao entered the podium, people's enduring shouting drowned out the music's sound almost completely. The musicians, as well as the audiences, faced the big challenge of creating any sort of relationship and bond, of evoking interaction and respond. The character of the present crowds added to the dilemma. It was a vague and impalpable mass. Apart from a similar age group, the audience was constituted by heterogeneity. It was a microcosm of Freetown's agglomeration of people estranged by different social, economic, political, religious, ethnic and linguistic backgrounds. And yet, most palpably and evidently, "some" form of binding and bonding occurred. But was it Kao himself and his (tape-backed, short-lasting) music performance that could have evoked it?

## Ritual in the making

In his seminal work on the nature of crowds (and of human's anti-social nature), Elias Canetti (1984: 15-16, 18) writes:

There is nothing that man fears more than the touch of the unknown. (...) All the distances which men create round themselves are dictated by this fear. It is only in a crowd that man can become free of that fear of being touched. That is the only situation in which the fear changes into its opposite. (...) As soon as a man has surrendered himself to the crowd, he ceases to fear its touch. Ideally, all are equal there; no distinctions count, not even that of sex. The man pressed against him is the same as himself. He feels him as he feels himself. Suddenly it is as though everything were happening in one and the same body. (...) The more fiercely people press together, the more certain they feel that they do not fear each other. (...) Only together can men free themselves from the burdens of distance; and this, precisely, is what happens in a crowd. (...) It is for the sake of this blessed moment, when no-one is greater or better than another, that people become a crowd.

In the setting of Kao Denero's stadium concert – performed for an exceptionally large crowd of people – a hollow space was produced. Various forms of

emptiness reigned the night: the stadium's vast and empty spaces, the inadequate and "empty" sounds of music, the socially unbounded, unacquainted "empty" mass of people, and, not least, the dark emptiness the thirty thousand participants outside the (empty) presidential seat's spotlights disappeared into. All factors combined resulted in a thorough hollow space that yawned in-between the stage and the crowds. These "emptinesses" and vacancies, in turn, were where the present crowds projected and invented common grounds and understanding onto, where the(ir) sense of belonging was evoked and a community of "intimate strangers" erected – despite and *because of* all music- and sound-related obstacles and constraints. The barely perceptible music and musicians provided a trigger for the collective auto-ignition of community. In fact, the very spatial distance to the stage and its performers was so large that, at several instances, people around me mistook some of the opening acts for Kao and already initiated their joyful hysteria. As the music (and sound) failed to create a bonding, the audiences themselves, their collective imaginary combined with their collective physicality, took over.

"The King of Freetown" and his lip-synching and advertising compatriots were not much more than a pretext for the actual spectacle, a spectacle which was performed by his followers. Although, without the music and without the audiences' commonly shared imaginings about the music and its performers, the whole event would not have taken place. The music and its musicians did bring the crowds together. By promoting a (however latent) bond of shared tastes and of a shared social imaginary (and imaginings) and by providing the physical space for, and the affordable admission-price to, this mass-assembly, Kao (and the mobile phone provider) prepared the premise on which grounds "the rest" evolved. And "the rest" that is: the very physical experience of filling up the large empty spaces of the stadium together, of belonging to the crowds, of diverting the stadium's vacant physical spaces into an arena of a mass-rite, of losing the fear of Otherness and the Other, and of experiencing the subsequent freedom from distinctions and boundaries this "loss" brings forth. The "blessed moment" of becoming a crowd, of which Canetti speaks, was stipulated by Kao. The momentum that eventually led to and sustained the "blessed moment" was brought about by the very crowds themselves, by their mass-attendance and within their own "autarchic" spectacle.

During that half-hour-"moment", and, to a lesser extent, during the hours which framed that point of over-heightened collective excitement, the crowds carried out their musicking ritual. Emotions were stirred up (high) and shared. Imaginings about new (ideal) relationships were tested, played with and enacted. The rite and its "effervescence" bound the loose crowd and brought the fragmented social worlds of its participants into the alignment of a commonly shared



and commonly created musicking world on the other side of everyday life's experiences. For the time being (and musicking), the imagined and the experienced world turned out the same. Though, the ritual was under constant construction. Beside the assumptive instrumentation of performance and advertising time by the event's organizers, no procedures were fixed and no conventions existed. The crowd, left to itself by the police and drowned in spotless darkness, trialed its uncommonly large encounter and its rites. It was a ritual in the making.

As happy and excited the moment of collective ritual-making and of casting off the yoke of (interhuman) distance is, the joy remains short-lived. The rite's effervescence is, so to say, evanescent. The crowd contains its decay within itself. In quite a sobering way, Canetti (1984: 18) depicts the aftermath of a crowd which loses its binding crowdness:

But the moment of discharge, so desired and so happy, contains its own danger. It is based on an illusion; the people who suddenly feel equal have not really become equal; nor will they *feel* equal for ever. They return to their separate homes, they lie down on their own beds, they keep their possessions and their names. They do not cast out their relations nor run away from them.

### What a difference a day makes

Not even half a day after the early morning concert in the stadium, I attended another performance of Kao Denero. This performance was staged at an expensive, commercial music festival at the West End beach. The contrast to the stadium's setting and show conduct was profound. The differences started already in the show's advertisement. Unlike for Kao's stadium show, for which posters were hanged at walls and stalls *all* across town, posters advertising the beach concert were hanged solely around Freetown's West End. Additionally, individual text message-"invitations" were sent to all subscribers of Sierra Leone's most expensive mobile phone operator, which – as at the stadium concert, where another, cheaper operator was "in charge" – served as the show's main sponsor.

Contrasting the (late) night beginning of the stadium concert, where the majority of guests arrived after midnight and where Kao's main act started around four o' clock in the morning, the West End party opened its gates at noon and ended around midnight. The entrance charge of 25,000 leones, the five-fold price of the stadium's admission, was installed at a benchmark well beyond the average East Sider's spending capacities. While in the night before, it were mainly social relationships that diverted the stadium's spaces into a musicking arena, at the exclusive beach setting it was the physical space that was diverted into a music-festival ground. On an area of about one hectare, exclusively located at the southern tip of the main beach and surrounded by a large wall, a village-

like structure of small bamboo-huts was constructed especially for that event. In some of the small huts various merchandize were sold, others served as restaurants, yet others as bars. The “shopping and dining village” represented an extraordinary setting for the ensuing spectacle of consumption, with the price-standards comparable to the ones at Freetown’s most expensive night clubs. Six large assemblies consisting of some several hundred tables and chairs were scattered around the area. On the northern side of the terrain, a huge stage was erected and framed by two large towers of speakers.

While the whole arrangement was made for some two thousand or more visitors, only about six hundred guests came – making the protruding scenery appear even more exclusive. The relatively assessable assembly of guests was joined by a disproportionately high number of service and security personnel, which, as the whole make-up of the event, indicated a wrongly anticipated (or wrongly hopped-for) number of visitors. About fifteen gate keepers and “hostesses” welcomed the guests at each of the two large entrance gates. Another fifteen security posts guarded the unfenced beach side. Some thirty girls dressed up in white uniforms roamed the respective table-and-chair-areas as waitresses and “animators”. Each of the sales-, restaurant- and bar-huts was equipped with about three sellers, cooks and bar tenders respectively. Finally, a fair number of technicians and other stage-related personnel was added to the mass of servants and staff members.

The attending visitors were recruited from among Freetown’s upper classes and expat community, and, since it was the weekend before Christmas, complemented by a relatively high number of diaspora Sierra Leoneans, or “JCs”. The elitist character of the attending guests was boldly underscored by the array of four-wheel drives which congested the streets around the venue. While several large family gatherings were present, the scene was – as in the night before – dominated by groups of young men in their twenties and early thirties. US-American phonetics filled the air around the largest assembly of tables and chairs in front of the stage, where a majority of guests took their seats and chatted amidst and across the variously formed groups. Although the present guests were not all acquainted with each other, the exclusive setting fostered an atmosphere of being “among one’s own kind”. Quickly, the gathering’s participants became conversant with each other and appeared as a sort of coherent family getaway, with people walking around the tables and switching seats and conversations at will.

As the mingling of guests increased in number and intensity, the simultaneously proceeding music show turned more and more into a mere backdrop against which Freetown’s elite conducted its socializing, establishing new and deepening existent bonds with each other. Dancing was, for the most parts, left to

the gaggle of hostesses and waitresses. The stage-program consisted of several musical attractions. From two in the afternoon onwards, each hour one different local artist performed for about thirty minutes. Four out of six of these performers were already present as opening acts at the preceding night's stadium show. All musical acts were kept in strict line with the announced time table and combined with animating interludes of two show master who announced the acts and cracked jokes. The longer the show proceeded, the more frenetic the two presenters advertised the following act. In these somewhat increasingly desperate attempts to engage the present guests in interaction and reactions, the two presenters tirelessly and repeatedly recited the exclusivity of the performing artists ("only the best Sierra Leonean music stars") and the superiority of the technical equipment, which was allegedly provided by "Africa's biggest event organizer". The quality and volume of sound also marked the clearest – and the most audible – contrast to the stadium show. In fact, the quality and volume of the West End beach concert's sound system, which was installed for about one thousand participants, by far exceeded the quality and volume of the sound system at the stadium – even though the latter was attended by some thirty thousand people.

At nine o' clock sharp, Kao Denero came on stage and performed – "lip-rappingly" – the exact five songs in the exact same order he had played at the stadium the night before. For the first time during the whole event, the guests' attention became predominantly focused on the activities on the stage. While dancing or other forms of expressive participation were still kept at a minimum – most visitors remained on their seats – Kao's performance did cause some interest. It was, though, difficult to estimate whether this redirected attention resulted from the music itself or from the sound volume which, for Kao's centerpiece performance, was turned up to a deafening level. After his five songs, however, Kao did raise some applause. He then spared the "victory lap" and his dashing out of shirt, necklace and cap and instead mingled with his elite audience.

Kao's two performances – on two consecutive nights in two different venues for two different sections of the city's music audiences – illustrate, in a most telling way, Freetown's defining socio-musical *dis/connection*. The music itself and Kao's (curt) performances were the very same on both nights and thus *connected* the stadium's crowds with the exclusive upper class gathering at the West End beach. Approached from a somewhat "purely musical" side, the tape-backed sounds to which Kao "lip-rapped" his songs were even identical. The differences and *disconnection* were, on the one hand, somewhat "hidden in the details" and, on the other hand, stridently pronounced in the context and conduct of the respective event. The price (5,000 vs. 25,000), the location (Center vs.

West End), the very time frame (late night and early morning vs. daytime and evening), and the advertising practices marked the outmost factors in the context-derived divide. The divides “hidden in the details”, in turn, included the striking difference in sound quality and proximity of artist to audiences, as well as the more “sociological” aspect of the dynamics and processes involved into the respective audiences’ creation of social bonding and the role music played in these.

Above (Chapter 15), I put forward the hypothesis that music’s binding material is used by its musicking participants in relation to the respective musicking group’s pre-existent bonding and cohesion. Exemplified in three examples of non-commercial music events (the birthday party, the social club outing, and the devil and “sound truck” parades), it was alleged that the more unbounded and diversified the respective musicking group is, the more the music is at the focal point of action and attention and (however sub/consciously) “utilized” by the group in order to strengthen its social cohesion. With regard to the two examples of large, commercial music events presented in this chapter, this hypothetical thought’s implications become blurred and more complicated. The central point, though, retains. The highly diversified crowds at the stadium strongly “utilized” Kao’s performance and music – or, in fact, the collective imagination poured in and projected onto the hollow space created by the barely perceivable artist and his hardly audible music – and bonded its member to each other. For the moment being, and musicking, the crowds’ members freed themselves from the “burdens of distance” and became bonded in the “blessed moment” (Canetti 1984) of its musicking ritual-in-the-making. A thorough “shared history” was created by some thirty thousand individual brains coupled together in the common activity of musicking together (Benzon 2001), and of collectively imagining and staging new and “ideal” relationships together (Small 1998).

During the much smaller and much more exclusive event at the West End beach, the music was ascribed a much more peripheral role in the processes of binding and bonding. Despite the much more present music (as clear and *loud* sounds), the beach audiences’ temporary social bonding was created primarily by the relatively elitist and extra- or non-musical setting of the event. Their musicking ritual, in turn, appeared accustomed and familiar. Their “brain histories” and the social alignment these histories brought about were less fragmented and less distinguished from each other – at least, less in comparison to the thirty thousand present at the stadium. Both their “outside world’s order” and its reflection in the world of musicking were founded on similar processes and structures of exclusion (of the Other and the lower classes).

However, also in the case of the relatively well isolated and “shielded” beach concert, “intrusion” into and subversions of the installed socio-economic class-

boundaries took place. As I left the area around eleven in the night, the party was still continuing, now supported by a DJ (who, of course, played the typical song-mix fed by Freetown's (black) Atlantic music trinity). Outside the venue's main gates, a whole regiment of people was assembled, many of which had climbed up the roofs of the (elite's) cars to look over the wall and onto the venue's grounds and stage. Others just danced on the street, joining in the sounds echoing from inside. In fact, a second party was taking place right outside the venues grounds, supported and created by the very same music but disconnected from the inside party by the large wall and the high admission fee. Just after I left the entrance gate, a group of four young men and women approaches me, asking for the small ribbon around my wrist that served me as the entrance ticket. I offer it to them, whereupon one man cautiously severs it at the seam and fixes it at his companion's wrist. Equipped with four freshly fixed entrance-ribbons, the group sets off to join the party inside and easily passes the supposedly strict gate control.

## Conclusion – dis/connections

Karin Barber (1987: 48) writes:

The aesthetic of immediate impact in African popular arts seems to arise from conditions similar to those in which nineteenth century English music hall flourished. The large, heterogeneous, unknown African crowds – so large the performers may entertain them in football stadiums – nonetheless have latent values and experiences in common: the experience of living in a society undergoing rapid change and dislocation in which they, the majority, are in increasing danger of being trampled down. The audience is not necessarily gathered in one place. A stream of customers looks successively at the pictures which create the good time communal ambience of bars and hotels; the crowd at the motorpark looking at the decorative motifs on mammy-waggons is in constant motion. Individuals buy booklets, magazines, and newspapers in public places but take them home to read. Yet this audience, however volatile and scattered, is still reached by the techniques of immediacy, of an emotional "obviousness" that deepens and reaffirms common values. Through popular art, expression is given to what people may not have known they had in common.

In the preceding seven chapters, I have taken a thorough look at various social patterns and dimensions of music consumption in contemporary Freetown. I commenced with the introduction of notions central to the subsequent discussion of musicking practices, such as sound, space, place and relationships (Chapter 12). Thereupon, I mapped out the broader context and setting in which forms of musicking occur in present-day Freetown (Chapters 13 & 14) and provided an initial framework and categorization of Freetonian music events and performances in general (Chapter 15). From there, I turned to the centerpiece of the third part of this book: collective musicking encounters in the setting of commercial music venues and events (Chapters 16-18). Throughout these chapters, and particularly in the course of the last three chapters, I explored several aspects and dynamics of how patterns of music consumption reinforce, reflect and defy patterns of social integration and segregation, and furthermore how social structures and concerns are reflected, often in contradictory ways, in the realms and practices of collective music consumption. In other words: I looked at how social

*dis/connections* are reified and subverted in *discotheques*, as well as in other places of collective music consumption.

Despite the wide scope and range of the above-presented and -discussed data about contemporary Freetown's realms and practices of collective music consumption, my account does – by no means – claim to be approximately “complete” or exhaustive; far from it. A multitude of other related and relevant aspects of collective as well as of individual musicking practices were either not taken into account altogether or simply exceeded the confined spaces of these pages. To name but a few of many other left out aspects: the complex and dynamic processes of individual and collective music taste formation were mostly left unmentioned; so were the intriguing realms of music-related identity formations. Particularly with regard to my specific approach – to look at music through society and not the other way around – the analysis of individual interpretations, meaning-ascriptions and “usages” of (popular) music were left more than a little on the short side. (Though, I will touch upon certain aspects of how Freetown's audiences make meaning of their music in the following and last part of this book.) It is important to stress that with this third part I have set out not much more than a preliminary outline, a first tentative approach towards a field of study that deserves a much more in-depth and detailed investigation and analysis; that is: the diverse intersections and interactions of (popular) music and society and the diverse (inter)relations between the social and the aesthetic realms of (popular) music in urban Africa in general and in contemporary, “post-war” Freetown in particular.

Because of the wide and partly widely diverging range of data presented above, the given account somewhat defies a concise summary. A central point that recurred throughout the preceding chapters should be accentuated nevertheless; to wit: the question how music both unites and divides people – thus the central question and leitmotif of this book. Before attempting to sum up the answer(s) to this question, I will first briefly resume the foundation for an answer, which mainly builds on the findings presented in part two.

As I argued in the historical overview (Part II), in the course of the past decades Freetown society evolved from a class-music culture to a mass-music culture. Latest since the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the congruence between socially differentiated groups and different music sounds, forms and practices dissolved, or in fact entangled. The “music-itself” – meaning: particular musical styles, songs and genres – somewhat lost its feature and function of mirroring societal divisions. The underlying historical processes that led to the approximation and “confusion” of the music of various, socially and otherwise distinguished groups of people resulted from two main factors: Firstly, the ever-progressing “democratization” of music-related media and technology, which

allowed an ever-growing portion of Freetown society to listen to and consume the “same” music; secondly, what I dubbed the elitist musical-cultural paragon set up by the Creoles, whose strong orientation towards the (black) Atlantic world and music was adopted, or “captured”, by the majority of Freetonians. (Black) Atlantic music, admittedly a fairly vague category, is what makes up the bulk of Freetown’s soundscape.

Since the “2007-rupture” Freetown’s music went through after the general elections, whose factors, causes and consequences I have discussed in chapter ten, the city’s soundscape is largely made up of what I called the trinity of (black) Atlantic music-mix, comprising Nigerian, Jamaican and US-American sounds and songs. By and large, in contemporary Freetown’s music scene, the music is, or makes, the same difference. This aspect of the “interchangeability” of sounds and songs across Freetown’s musicking spaces and places became clear at various points and in various descriptions given in the chapters above. Whether in the exclusive settings of upper-class house parties or at freely accessible street parades, whether at beach parties organized by workmates and social associations or around the hubs and traffic jams downtown, whether in elitist West End night clubs or in small informal drinking venues in Freetown’s East Side – the sounds and songs either resemble each other or are, simply put, the same. The proximity – and, in fact, identity – of songs played and listened to by groups distinguished by, among others, social and economic traits became maybe most palpable and clear in the description of the two concert shows of Kao Denero – the local epitome of Freetown’s (black) Atlantic music culture – which he performed at two consecutive nights in two different venues and for two exceedingly different audiences. The music played and listened to at both shows was, literally, the same.

Contemporary Freetown’s soundscape – as reified in the realms of collective musicking encounters – is thus marked by a sort of class-divides-transcending, musical universality. The same music is played at basically all music events. Freetown’s music thus *connects* its audiences. It unites its listeners across various socially- and otherwise created segregations. It cuts across lines drawn along and between spatial, social, political, religious, ethnic etc. divides. As noted by Barber (in the above-given quote; 1987: 48): While its audiences – volatile and scattered as they are – are not necessarily gathered in one place, it still reaches them through the “techniques of immediacy”, by an “emotional obviousness that deepens and reaffirms common values”. Within the trinity of (black) Atlantic music sounds that provide the sort of overarching frame of Freetown’s musical connections and unifications, it is the sounds of carnal and love-music that serve as the main “excipient” of that immediacy, as the most pronounced binding material. (A further and more in-depth analysis of the social meanings and



“function” of the peculiar meta-genre of love music will be presented in the following part of this book.)

The music thus integrates Freetown’s otherwise highly segregated society – on a sonic level that is. It thereby contradicts, forthrightly, any “logics of socio-musical differentiation”; meaning: the music preferences of contemporary Freetonians do *not* correspond with the constructs of social, economic, political etc. class. Freetown’s (black) Atlantic music, especially in its form of carnal sounds, transcends classes as well as social and geographical spaces. It serves society as a sort of sonic and (however) subtle “currency” of integration and participation. It disseminates relatively easy across society’s spaces and societal boundaries. People can, relatively independent of their social or economic backgrounds and positions, “acquire it” relatively easy – by, for example, listening to the sounds played on the streets or radio. In the realms of collectively visited, created and experienced music events (whether in the setting of drinking spots, concert parties, street parades, or night clubs), this relatively freely accessible currency is then “redeemed”. In the ceremonials of collective musicking encounters, the diffused members of various groups and overlapping “communities of taste” come together and (re)create, deepen and reapprove their latently existent collectivity. In the realms of collective musicking encounters, the loose “aesthetic formations” (Meyer 2009) of Freetown’s sonically connecting and connected (black) Atlantic music audiences take on a more refined, a more narrow, a more physical appearance – and, temporarily at least, *unite*.

However, while the “music-itself” transcends societal segregations and exclusions and potentially promotes social connectivity and inclusions, there are several “extra-musical” factors which in turn jib at and against “sonic unifications” and which disconnect Freetown’s musically connected audiences again. In the preceding chapters I have discussed two main and broad factors of disconnection, which can be roughly summarized by the notions of *space* and *price*. These – often interrelated – factors and forces of disconnection restore and re-enact within the realms of collective musicking encounters segregations and divides that define Freetown’s society at large.

The factor of *space* or – more precisely, of spatially reified segregation – reflects the wider geography of socio-economic division drawn between Freetown’s economically deprived and overpopulated East Side and its affluent and relatively sparsely populated West End. In the realms of bigger music venues and events, this division is re-enacted in, first and foremost, the spatial distribution of these very venues. As shown in the “disco map” in chapter sixteen, more than half of Freetown’s bigger commercial music venues are located in the far west of the city – while more than half of the city’s population lives in the east. Combined with the factor and force of mobility, the geographical (mis-

)distribution of bigger music venues and of the bigger, more exceptional music events they host serves as the most obvious and most effective factor of exclusion. As a majority of Freetown’s population lives in the East Side and is, to large parts, deprived of the means to traverse across the city, space, distance and (im)mobility restore and reinstall disconnections that were created by the “music-itself” in the first place.

The factor of *price* follows a similar dynamic and complements the dividing factors and forces of space and (im)mobility. In the intriguing complex of the politics of price, prestige and consumption – and the related, similarly intriguing dynamics and strategies of class-differentiation –, social connections created and promoted by the “music-itself” are countered through the disconnecting forces of prices charged for admission to music venues and events, as well as through the prices charged for drinks and other assets. In other words: While potentially everybody can listen and dance to the same sounds and songs and, even more, while tendentially everybody does listen and dance to the same sounds and songs – and thus connects on the level of sounds and songs – it is in the sounds and songs’ respective contexts in which the connections between people and groups of people are disconnected again – as not everybody can or does afford to reach the music venues on the other side of town, to pay the required admission fee and for the overpriced drinks and food.

Finally, these patterns of social dis/connections in the realms of collective musicking encounters are crisscrossed and complicated by yet another force: the *subversions* of the respective, contextual or “extra-musical” factors of segregation and disconnection. In Chapters 16 and 17, I discussed several central loopholes and strategies that many Freetonians create and employ in order to overcome the extra-musical factors of disconnection – and thus to re-connect again. These included some more inventive and sophisticated “techniques”, like, for example, the utilization of “amorous exploits” in order to gain mobility, and some less sophisticated strategies, like the “utilization” of “vacant” time, patience and stamina. These strategies have been, furthermore, interpreted as attempts of Freetown’s economically deprived social groups to challenge their (static) position in “social space” and to realize aspirations towards upward socio-economic mobility (be it only for the night).

From the herein evolved summary of the findings presented in Part III, a tripartite formula emerges which might be described as a sort of three-layered (and confused) dialectics: Patterns of social dis/connection that define Freetown society are defied and overcome in the realms of the “music-itself” and of collective musicking encounters; meaning: by the trinity of the (black) Atlantic music-mix that Freetown’s dispersed music audiences – here understood as Freetown society writ large – listen and dance to. Music thus connects (and

*DISCO*nections

unites) people. At the same time, various extra-musical factors and forces that are at work in these very realms of Freetown's collective musicking encounters recreate and restore the otherwise (that is: musically) connected audiences (as society writ large) and thus disconnect (and divide) them again, reflecting once again the broader patterns of social dis/connection that define Freetown society. These disconnected (music) connections are yet again subverted by various means and at various occasions – thus in turn and once again connecting what was dis/connected before.

## PART IV

### Topia of utopias



Central Freetown, November 2009



## Dreams vs. reality

### From the school of hard knocks

With his fabulous deconstruction of Western philosophy's commonsensical notion of common sense, Geertz (1983: 77) gives an illuminating example for how anthropology can be of use for approaching fundamental philosophical questions (such as the question of the "nature" of common sense). He writes:

Anthropology can be of use here in much the same way as it is generally: providing out-of-the-way cases, it sets nearby ones in an altered context. If we look at the views of people who draw conclusions different from our own by the mere living of their lives, learn different lessons in the school of hard knocks, we will rather quickly become aware that common sense is both a more problematical and a more profound affair than it seems from the perspective of a Parisian cafe or an Oxford Common Room.

Jackson (2004) heads into a similar direction. Towards the end of his account on post-war Sierra Leone, he entangles his ethnographic descriptions with some reflections upon the (fundamental, philosophical) questions of trust and betrayal – thereby also enriching the oeuvre of philosophical reflections upon these questions (and their answers). His concern with these questions arose from his everyday life and fieldwork in Sierra Leone. As he writes, “[h]ardly any day passed during my stay in Freetown that I was not confronted by the vexed issue of trust” (*ibid.*: 192) – or, in fact, by the “endemic lack of trust in Sierra Leone” (*ibid.*). Unlike other ethnographers who tried to explain the peculiar Sierra Leonean manifestation of the universal phenomenon of trust (and betrayal) by approaching it via psychological paths and depths (e.g. Ferme [2001] and Shaw [2002] who both point towards the traumatic memories of the slave trade deeply inscribed into Sierra Leoneans’ collective imagination as an explanatory factor), Jackson cuts the long (or “deep”) path short and approaches trust via ethnographic observations of everyday life. From these observation and lessons taken from “the school of hard knocks”, he derives an explanation of the “trust issue”

as plain as pellucid: Sierra Leoneans' preoccupation with trust and with the lack thereof, he writes, is

a consequence of scarcity – of the “hungry time” during the last couple of months of the growing season, when people tell “white lies” about how much rice they have in their granaries lest the little that is left for their own needs will be claimed by hungry neighbours and distant kin. Or as a fear of in-marrying women and visiting strangers, whose loyalties and intentions can never be readily divined [...]. (Jackson 2004: 193)

As Jackson mainly aimed at delving into the matters of the history and aftermaths of war and violence, his ethnographic lens in Sierra Leone was, at least for this particular account and fieldwork, calibrated on these very matters of the history and aftermaths of war and violence in Sierra Leone. And, as it might be alleged, from these matters and the however implicit, underlying ethnographic lens he took on in order to study them, it is a short skip to the issues of trust and betrayal – which are both fundamental to the realms, histories and realities of war and violence. Jacksons' observation of the phenomena of trust and betrayal – and his *daily* encounter with them –, it might be further alleged, stemmed from and were promoted by his ethnographic intentions and interests. As he was looking for the remains of a war, the vexed issues of trust and betrayal were not far off his daily tracks.

During my fieldwork in Freetown, the ethnographic lens I had taken on had quite a different calibration. Mainly, I aimed at delving into the matters of Freetonians' musical practices and preferences and at exploring how social structures and concerns are reproduced and subverted in the realms of music consumption. With this ethnographic lens, and with its (i.e. my) underlying intentions and interests, the encounters I made in Freetown and the realms and realities I delved into were of quite a different “caliber” than Jackson's. Unlike him, I was not much concerned or confronted with the matters of trust and betrayal. I did, however, encounter a particular phenomenon virtually during every day of my stay in Freetown and which – as I would in turn assume with regard to my own ethnographic lens – mainly stemmed from and was promoted by my interests in people's perceptions and practices of musicking; that is: dreams and hopes.

In this last part I propose a short reading of the phenomena of dreams and hopes which I, again in parallel to Jackson's encounters with the trust-issue, perceived to be present in Freetown at an almost endemic if not “epidemic” scale. I present my reading of Freetonians' dreams and hopes against three inter-related “backgrounds”: *music* – as obvious and delusive its connection to dreams is; *reality* – though without much philosophical ado about reality's (d)elusiveness but understood and approached from a however plain (and epistemologically naïve), ethnographically- and sociologically-informed perspective; and the maybe most awkward of all constructs: *future* – here understood as the future imagined, dreamed of as well as feared by my Freetonian informants. It is thus

my task to juxtapose – inside the overarching realms of music(king) – two broad realms with each other that are as closely and intrinsically connected as they diverge from and contradict each other: dreams and hopes, on the one hand, and “the school of hard knocks” – reality that is – and its equally hard-knocking future(s), on the other hand.

To most parts, the following “calibrated” reading of Freetonians’ dreams with their musical practices and daily life realities derives from my particular methodological *modus operandi*, which – as discussed in the first part of this book (Chapter 4) – follows one main theoretical position: In short, (1) that in the study of society and music (and esp. of “popular” music) the main point of departure ought not to be the music (and “its inscribed meanings”) but “the people” – and the meanings they ascribe to the music; (2) that we will not gain too many insights neither about society nor about music(‘s role therein) by looking and interpreting society’s music itself. People tend to “misinterpret” music in various, wayward ways which might, and often do, differ decisively from any “apparent” meaning “inscribed” in the music itself and that a (however professional) music-interpreter or researcher might find in the music. Though, the notion of *misinterpretation* is obviously out of place here. There is no *wrong* interpretation. There is just a multitude of *different* interpretations, usages and meaning-ascriptions. In this approach, music can be conceptualized as a sort of “hollow space” – a “vacancy” that invites its “occupants” (i.e. audiences, listeners, practitioners etc.) to fill it up with (their) experienced and established as well as projected, invented, negotiated and *dreamed of* meanings. And these meanings – “popular meanings” deriving from “popular interpretations” of (popular) music – are what I will in the following briefly explore and calibrate with the extra-musical realms, that is: with Freetown’s and my Freetonian informants’ realities and imagined, hoped for, and feared futures. As the main gateway to the following reading, I will look at and calibrate the realms of dreams with the realms of reality through the prism of a peculiarly intriguing phenomenon that inhibits both realms: love.

## Falling in love

A field-note I made about a Saturday night’s encounter in a popular night club in Freetown is putting the diverging strings of dreams, hopes, (hard knocking) realities and futures well into one paragraph: I’m sitting right at the club’s entrance and next to Ahmed, a twenty-five-year-old Freetonian in search for employment as an English teacher. We just met and chat a bit. Though, Ahmed is rather interested in looking out for girls than in talking to me. In what appears to be the most natural manner, he hits on every girl that passes by. While some ignore his approaches, many seem to play with his intentions, which in turn are



quite straightforward. After a somewhat formalized exchange of one or two banalities, Ahmed comes straight to the point: “How much do you take for the night?” Soon a girl takes on the implicit offer and starts arguing with him about her price. During their discussion, Freetown’s currently most popular song echoes from the inside: Nigerian D’Banj’s “Fall in love”. As the music approaches its rather unspectacular chorus-climax, the girl starts moving slightly to its beat and to sing silently with its lyrics. And while she melodically whispers the romantic text for or to herself, she makes Ahmed face her final, imperative declaration: “I don’t fuck under 20,000” (some 3,50 euros). Ahmed confirms her offer with a silent nod. The two disappear in the dark while the DJ shouts some up-heating words to the dancing crowd and starts playing the song all over again.

What struck me most about this short encounter was the enlightening moment when the two spheres of (music-related) dreams and fantasies and of a (non-music-related) somewhat brutish side of Freetonian reality, which at the same time speaks of many Freetonians’ futures, in a way collapsed into each other in the girl’s listening to, singing and “performing” a dream (of love) while bargaining about her hard-knocked, material realities (of money). The scene bluntly illustrates the greater ambivalences and often painfully contradictory relation between dreams and realities in Freetown, and how these ambivalences and contradictions in turn find a prime manifestation in the realms of musicking.

In short, this relation can be described as consisting of two linked but opposing elements. Firstly, the hyper-presence and -popularity of music that deals with love or, more precisely, of music that is widely understood and interpreted as dealing with love as well as with love’s “collaterals” (longings, desires, sex, anxieties, marriage, interrelated notions of man- and womanhood etc.). Secondly, the sort of absence of stable emotional, sexual and “love-relationships” in the perceptions and live experiences of those who made and make the “love music” popular in the first place. The notion of a “absence of love” is hereby not meant to invoke the ghosts of ethnocentric ethnography’s erroneous representations of love in Africa (respectively of love’s absence therein), which go back a long history of (particularly Western) projections in which African men and women were depicted as hypersexual, over-libidinous and “thus” devoid of emotional depth (see Thomas & Cole 2009). The notion of love – as well as its phenomenological manifestations and embodiments – certainly do exist in Freetown. In fact, during my fieldwork I perceived “love” – understood as the sentiments of attachment, affection and attraction that bind people together – to be a most desired and longed-for relation of many if not most of my informants, especially but not exclusively the younger ones. And as much as love is wished for and dreamt about, as much is “its” absence perceived to be daunting and painful – and speaking, in turn, of the sort of inverted relation between the (hyper)presence

of dreams and fantasies about love and its absence in reality and reality's anticipated future(s).

The young Freetonian pupil Isaac, whom I introduced at the end of part two (Chapter 11), represents but one of many examples that speak of the inverted relation between dreams (about love) and realities (of love's perceived absence). Isaac's music preferences go in line with the music preferences of the broad majority of Freetonians. His preferred music, as he enlisted it to me, consists of (Jamaican) lover's rock, (US) "sentimentals", and, generally, what he referred to as "music dealing with love", including (Nigerian) "sexy music". On the other hand, these (i.e. his) love music preferences and his expressed desires for love ("I am very much in love – all the time! I am always liking some girl.") are bluntly opposed by his deferred ambitions for realizing his love-dreams, which he in turn explains by pointing towards his deprived material condition – thus his material (or economic) reality: "But I can never give her anything so there are no girls for me. I don't have the money for real love."

Emanuel, yet another young Freetonian whom I introduced at the very beginning of this book (Chapter 2), told me the following story about his disappointed love-ambitions:

For long I was in love with this one girl who lives next doors to me. For many years she was my dream. But she didn't think of me, not as in love-thinking. Last year, she came to my house at one evening. First I was very happy. But she said that things are difficult and if I could help her out with something little, like a 1,000 leones or something. I invited her in. I had no money on me. But luckily I was fortunate to have this mega cola, this soft drink. So I gave her that and a bread and a boiled egg to it. She ate it all. And after that she stood up and went straight to my bed and lie down. She undressed all her clothes. For once, I was surprised. But the lust overcame me and I went to her and sexed her. I believe what she got from me was less than some 2,000 leones; just the cheap mega cola, bread and egg. But when she left, I felt a big regret inside. Here is a beautiful woman, my lady-dream and big time love. And she just gives me her body for this stupid egg and bread. I don't even give her any money. She just sleeps with me for this bread and egg. Like she is no value. After that night, I could not love her anymore.

As Isaac could not fulfil his dreams about love because of a lack of material resources, Emanuel's love-dream disintegrated because of his "lady-dream's" lack of material resources and the sort of deterioration this has brought about to his emotions, aspirations and dreams he nourished for her. A chasm yawns between Isaac and Emanuel's dreams, fantasies, aspirations and expectations, on the one hand, and their realities, possibilities and anticipated futures, on the other hand.

Franklin proves the structure from another side. Unlike Isaac and Ibrahim, Franklin has a job and the relative financial security his job provides him. He is a college graduate and in his late twenties. His love-experiences, however, speak of the very same sort of structural chasm between dreams and realities as Isaac and Emanuel's. And also in his case the prime cause of the chasm is of a material

nature. As I asked him about his relational status, he began by speaking, or in fact cursing, about his country:

You see, I hate this country. You can call me anti-national if you like. Because of the whole story with women and men here. It is not working any more. Maybe in the past it was working. But now it is over. For this I hate this place. I hate it because of this damn poverty. It is the poverty that breaks us apart here. Either you are poor, or the other is poor, or you are both poor. Relationships don't work for that. For this, I have never been in love really. I have a girlfriend. In fact, I have more than one, many. And I had many, many others before. But this is just for the pleasure-leisure. You know, just to sex. But there was never any love to it.

M.S.: What do you mean with "love"?

Well, I cannot really say because I never had it. But it is that with these girls (...) the conversations never last. And they are not the right conversations. Not the right words. And the looks, the way she looks at you, the looks were never the right ones. (...) That what we got in all our music, you know the music?

M.S.: Which music do you mean?

All the music you hear everywhere. It is all about love. We know all the love, but we don't find it. (...) And I am now getting old. But there is still time. Who knows, maybe tomorrow I will fall in love forever. Maybe tomorrow I will find my *yorì yorì*. You can never know.

With his remarks about the omnipresence of love-music, Franklin hit the mark of what I attempt to argue for here. The popularity of love music in contemporary Freetown appears to be grounded in an inverted correlation – a “dissonance”, so to say – with the life- and love-realms of its audiences, thus of those who choose the music and who make it popular. While the music chants about eternal and exclusive love, and while its audiences continue listening to it, singing with its lyrics, and dancing to it, their lives and (sexual) relationships in turn “speak” of the more or less exact opposite: a sort of emotional and relational hyper-mobility, instability and uncertainty. The music formulates – and, more important, is perceived to formulate – that *what there is a lack of*, in Franklin's words: that what is known but what cannot be found: dreams of love.

On the side of Freetown's young women the “symptoms” somewhat reverse while the overall picture remains the same and even becomes clearer. For example, during the evenings I spent with Christine and Florence, the two college girls whom I introduced in Chapter 17, love was, so to say, omnipresent – in their media consumption that is. Hanging around on free evenings with them and their female friends at the FBC dormitory, the media we listened to (music) and watched (movies) was chosen almost exclusively along the lines of formulating emotional, “sentimental” and, at times, sexual contents. Basically all music Christine, Florence and their friends listen to revolves around the topics of either emotional love or its alleged physical manifestation (i.e. sex). The movies, in turn, of which they watch about at least two every other day, might be described as global modernity's ultimate narratives of “real love” – understood as the

“universal” romantic ideal of an involuntary, singularly and “eternally” committed emotional attachment – that is: Bollywood musicals.

On the other hand, their real-live loves are an “eternal” source of anger, disappointment and despair. Love is longed-for, continuously dreamed and fantasized about, discussed for hours and evenings on end, but virtually never found. Christine and Florence’s realities of love cannot match up with their dreams about love. Both girls, as most of their female college friends and mates, have boyfriends – or rather: A long chain of continuously changing boyfriends. As Christine once somewhat secretly “revealed” to me, the coming and going of her boyfriends, the permanent flux of changing relationships she finds herself in, stems mainly from material concerns. She thereby distinguishes two basic scenarios: Either her boyfriend has the material means – then he turns out, after some shorter or longer time, as unfaithful and cheating on her with other women. Or he has not the material means – then it is, again after some shorter or longer time, in turn herself who decides to leave him, or cheat on him with other men. Dreams of steadiness and “eternity” are countered and contradicted by reality’s steady and “eternal” flux.

At times, the flux of relationships takes on a sort of a professionalized scale. Lola and Binta, about whose “amorous exploits” I talked in chapter sixteen, represent a somewhat playful and benign form of professionalized “transactional relations”, in which sex *and emotions* are transferred for money, mobility, fun *and emotions*. Janet, a Fula girl in her mid-twenties, represents a less playful and benign form. According to her own account, she is an orphan who fled to Freetown as the war reached her town in north Sierra Leone in the late 1990s. I met her for the first time during a lunch in an upper-class restaurant downtown, where she approached me in an unambiguous manner of the kind one would expect from an upper-class prostitute. While I denied her approaches, I did not let off talking to her, hoping to win her as an informant. It was, however, not until our fourth coincidental encounter on a concert party at the West End beach that she appeared to understand that my intentions were not sexual but somewhat “scientific-personal”. During the conversation we had that night Janet completely astonished me with her story about her love-life. She told me that, currently, she has fourteen boyfriends. The number fourteen, as she explained to me, was a deliberately chosen maximum. It allowed her to “operate” her partners on a two-week rotational system – without the respective man finding out about the dozen other men. Despite manifold obstacles and complex organizational challenges, she manages – or rather: administers – the situation satisfyingly, as it is usually her who decides which man she stays with and which one she leaves. She developed a complicated “monitoring” system of which her simultaneous handling of five mobile phones is but one of many elements.

Despite the outright absurd number of her boyfriends (which I never attempted to verify, but which certainly points towards the actual sum, even though it was probably exaggerated), Janet appears to strive for the same love-dream as her contemporaries Christine and Florence, and shares the very same preferences for music and movies. Janet is in fact looking for emotional stability and certainty, or “real love” as she, just like so many of my other informants, put it. Though, as she further explained to me, she currently just “cannot afford” to be in only one relationship. For one relationship only would be too much of a risk to rely on and invest in alone. Because if the (one) man would leave her, she would lose her support, and livelihood. And as Janet cannot afford to have a stable relationship with one man only, so do many young Freetonian men cannot afford to have any stable relationship with a woman – and so do both men and women poise in a situation in which their dreams (about “real love”) are deferred by reality’s adamant (material) obstacles into an out of reach, fantastic, immaterial and unattainable future.

This last point brings us to another closely connected domain: that of notions of womanhood and manhood, of the notion of their wider structural equivalent: Adulthood, and of its structural opposite: youth. For as all of the above introduced Freetonians belong (or are ascribed) to the category of youth and, because of their partly already advanced age, can be seen as sitting in a sort of waiting room for adulthood. The culturally and socially opposite, or dichotomy, between the notions of youth and adulthood in Sierra Leone has recently, since the war that is, received much scholarly attention (e.g. van Gog 2008; King 2007; McIntyre *et al.* 2002). In line with other recent theorizing approaches towards the socio-cultural category of youth, in which a sheering off from ideas about youth as a developmental, chronological or biological stage of life is proposed (e.g. Honwana & de Boek 2005; Christiansen *et al.* 2006), also in the recent works on Sierra Leonean youth the positions of social constructionism prevails. Therein, youth is, in short, not defined by the socially arbitrary category of age but through the complex of socio-cultural, political and economic processes and interactions in which the category unfolds and is negotiated in. And as the notion of “youth” is culturally and socially constructed, so is the notion of adulthood, along with its gendered versions of womanhood and manhood. Janneke van Gog (2008: 57) trenchantly summarizes the socio-cultural and economic requirements for Sierra Leonean youths to leave that very category of “youth”, and juxtaposes these requirements with the wider renitent structures that defy these (youth) aspirations:

[F]or young men, their potential for becoming a proper adult (or ultimately an elder) within the community lies in their social-cultural, political and economic achievements. (...) their inability to do so, due to social and political exclusion together with lack of development, creates a large group of youth with problematic access to education and a minimum of

economic opportunities. (...) the crisis of youth for young men also represents a crisis in cultural and social fulfilment of personhood. (...) For women, the status of social and cultural adulthood, or more specifically womanhood, is linked to marriage and motherhood. (...) a women's social and cultural status is much less related to her individual achievements in the public domain but predominantly depends on her role as a wife and mother. Fulfilment of these particular – reproductive – roles lies primarily in women's socio-biological capacities which are less dependent on the socio-economic context.

Given the above-described hardships and material constraints many young Freetonians face in their lives, these two sets of “achievements” that male and female youths need to fulfil in order to leave the category of youths and become “proper” adults turn out as creating an outright trap. Manhood implies socio-cultural, political and economic achievements – meaning, mainly, to be(come) a socially respected and accepted “man” through the “virtues and deeds” of proving responsible by marrying, having a wife and children and providing sustainable livelihoods for them, which all in turn revolves around having a secured income and thus a secured job. To be(come) a socially respected and accepted woman, in turn, a socially respected and accepted man is required; thus somebody who can marry the girl (or woman-to-be), who fathers children with her, and who is able to provide a sustainable livelihood for his family. While, as van Gog put it, a woman's required “achievements” are in fact less dependent on the socio-economic context *than the man's*, this thus not mean that she would be independent from them, or him. For what she needs is a man who can fulfil his requirements before he can “assist” her in fulfilling hers. And that is the crux of the matter in contemporary Freetown. Women do not find “proper” men-cum-husbands because those who would potentially meet the requirements of the



Photo 20.1 Omalanka boys waiting for customers, Freetown, December 2009

category do not find the required means to become “proper” man. Many “boys” cannot become “men” – and, therefore, many “girls” cannot become “women”. What is left to both is dreaming about finding the right means (boys) and the “right one” (girls) in order to leave the trap of potentially eternal youthness, one day in an unforeseeable (fantastic) future.

## Topia of utopias

In the following, I will structure the above-presented fragments of young Freetonians’ dreams about love and adulthood and their lived-in and perceived realities of love and adulthood’s absence in a concise scheme. In this scheme, an analysis of the broader setting and context of the contradictive relation between dreams and reality will be put forward and the various spheres of (popular) music, love, notions of wo/manhood, dreams, reality and future calibrated with each other and with the broader contexts they are evolved in. I divided the scheme into five separate steps, each headed by a set of guiding questions.

- (1) What is the music that echoes loudest in and across Freetown’s diverse social layers? Which is the genuinely most popular music in contemporary Freetown; meaning: which music is most popular with most people?

The answer is unmistakably clear: it is music dealing with love – thus *love music* – in all its genre-and-class-crossing variety of forms, styles, origins etc. and of age, gender, social groups etc. While, in fact, it does contradict my theoretical and methodological position to speak of music that “deals” with love (since it implies that the topos of love is somewhat “inscribed” into the music), it is a sort of “analytical sacrifice” I have to make for some initial clarity. The music I am speaking of is, in broad terms, music that *my informants* (as well as me, for the most parts) understand as dealing with love. It consists of, mainly, the post-electoral trinity of sounds and songs imported from across the (black) Atlantic: latest variations of Jamaican reggae and dancehall, the up-to-date musical hit-extract from the US billboard charts, and the equally up-to-date top music exports from Nigeria. While there is a magnitude of other songs that fall not into these three categories, the (black) Atlantic connection of Caribbean, US and Nigerian music hits might be described as forming the most important icing on the diverse infrastructural cake Freetown’s overall soundscape is made of. One striking feature about Freetown’s love music is that it is anything but bound to any however circumscribed musical genre. The popularity of love music I found during my fieldwork cuts across all locally differentiated music styles. There is no one distinguishable love music genre as such. Rather, it is that in each (locally differentiated) music style and genre the songs that deal with love – or: that people understand to be dealing with love – are the ones that, as a common local expression trenchantly puts it into words: “hit the city hardest”.

- (2) Which (popular) interpretations are people making of the music in question? Which (popular) meanings are they ascribing to it? How is the hollow space that the music creates and provides filled up with social and other meanings?

The answer is tripartite: (a) love in a multitudinous diversity of different kinds, forms, experiences and imaginings – past love, present love, future love, sad love, good love, devoted love, physical love, lustful love etc.; falling in love, marriage, crying and lamenting about love, partnership, close companionship, trust, lust, sex, emotional stability and reliability etc.; (b) the somewhat concomitant topics and topoi of lies, fear, jealousy, envy, anxiety, frustration, loneliness, woe, grief, affliction, anger, betrayal, separation, exclusion etc.; and (c) the rather non-verbally expressed meanings of having fun, going out, dancing, singing, musicking, flirting, “coupling”, drinking, smoking, and enjoyment and pleasure in general – which all in turn revolve around meeting potential and actual partners (either for short-termed sex relations or longer termed “love” relationships).

- (3) What are the most salient social realities of love music’s audiences with regard to the realms formulated in (2)? Which social realities and practices correspond with or relate to the whether implicitly or explicitly, verbally or non-verbally exposed meanings ascribed to the music?

This step in the scheme is what might be dubbed the first *calibration* of the social polyphony (of love music’s audiences) with its (love) musical counterpart. It is also at this point that we can begin to include the above-described cases and stories into a reading of the broad, social meanings of love music in contemporary Freetown. The answers, derived from the above-described cases, speak mostly of the central chasm between many young Freetonians’ dreams and realities: a widely and commonly experienced and perceived lack of (“real”) love, of steady and firm relationships, of emotional stability, of trust and partnership etc. Furthermore, what might be described as a widespread social or “socio-sexual” flux, implying a “steady fluctuation” of sexual partners, a multitude of partnerships, and its inbreeds: uncertainty in all its associated (emotional) domains, including fear, grief, anger, disappointment, frustration, anxiety etc. Various forms of “transactional relations”, involving the often over-complex exchange-forms of material and immaterial “assets” like money, mobility, fun, emotions, physical pleasures, prestige, status, and, not least, dreams. And yet further, and more generally: the widely varied inability to sustain or even attempt to create stable relationships, to engage with the opposite sex in a steady partnership, to marry, get children, become adults – that is: to engage with the other in a common, prosperous and sustainable *future*.

- (4) Which further social, political, cultural, economic etc. realities can be connected with the phenomena described in (3)? What is the broader context in which the chasm of dreams and reality yawns?



Given the potentially inconceivably wide scope of relevant contexts, the answers to this set of questions – from which the second calibration evolves – must, perforce, remain in the sphere of tentative approaches, a venture rather than anything definitive. However, the main gateway to a possible set of answers appears to lie on the material and economic side of Freetonian life. It is in the chronic economic instability and insecurity, in the outmost deprivation of economic opportunities of huge bulks of Freetonian society, especially but not only of its younger spheres, that dreams – however (un)realistic they might be – become rejected in the first place, and that they remain where they are: in the very spheres of dreams fiercely disconnected from the sphere of reality and realization in present and future. It is, furthermore, in the heavily disproportional distribution of capital within the highly congested socio-geographic space that Freetonians share with each other that a vast majority of its population is left almost completely deprived of any chances to accumulate capital while some small groups live in splendid abundance. This proximity of lives lived in abundance and lives lived in dearth in turn aggravates and elevates expectations of those who have not but dream about having. Effects of the war, both direct and indirect, add further elements to it: be it through the vast rural exodus that occurred during the 1990s and the unsustainable scale of urban migration that exodus caused, or through the loose social bonds and networks the rural migrants in turn “imported” (and continue to import) into the city, leaving many of them without any nets of (extended) families and other forms of social backups. All of these factors in turn result in a growing and growingly aggressive state of all-encompassing competition for jobs, money and space, just as for sex, partnership and love. What is left, for many, is the mere hoping for change and opportunities, and the hopes that their dreams – however distant and far – might one day get closer to reality. Until then, the ever-growing presence of internationally operating charismatic churches, sects, crusades and televangelists – à la “operation raise millionaires” and “restoring order to your life” – provide the last tracks on which the realization of far-off dreams can still be hoped for, in and through prayers.

- (5) How can the respective relations and inverted correlations as formulated in (1) to (4) be conceptualized? How can we frame the jelling complex of love music’s ubiquitous presence and love’s apparent ever-absence? What does the love music tell us about its listeners, and how can we relate the lives, realms and realities of its listeners “back” to their music?

This is thus the quest for finding notions and for putting the confusedly connected phenomena described above in a conceptual frame. Above I spoke of music as a “hollow space”, a sort of “vacancy” that can be – and is – filled up with various forms of projections, experiences, ideas, imaginings and dreams. In contemporary Freetown’s relations between love music’s presence and love’s

experienced absence, the notion of a hollow space appears a suitable approximation to a conceptual frame. Realms of music and realms of life relate to each other laterally reversed. In the realms of music, and in the meanings its Freetonian listeners ascribe to and make of the music, a world of stability and steadiness is framed. The songs sing about what there is a lack of: the (successful) falling in love, the one “real love”, the exclusive, committed, singular love, safety and certainty, marriages and partnerships, all in turn projected unto an idealized model of eternity. They formulate a literal vacancy in the lives of those who make them popular, a sonic formulation of dreams and fantasies. The lives and experiences of love music’s Freetonian audiences, on the other hand, are where these dreams and fantasies, the longings and their concomitant fears, anxieties and frustrations find their initial formulation in. As relationships – in real life – cannot be “pinned down” and as a world unfolds that is fraught with overwrought socio-sexual mobility, of instantaneousness, flux and uncertainty in interpersonal and, even more, in sexual relationships, love music takes on the form of a *utopia* – the better, imagined, unrealized but dreamed of and wished for place. Music’s tendentiously dualistic nature – being a material, physical sound occurrence while at the same time being a mental and “immaterial” perception of sounds – bears a further notion with which the love-in-music and love-in-society-(dis)connection can be framed. For this, the etymology of “utopia” is of use. Derived from ancient Greek’s οὐ τόπος, “utopia” combines “non-” (οὐ) with “place” (τόπος), hence the *non-place*, an unrealistic if not impossible idea(l) of a place. The idea of a utopia implies a paradox: while the non-place itself, the utopia as such, is out of reach, the idea itself, the space for its formulation and imagination, requires a place, a reachable space of imagination – hence the *topia* where the *utopia* can be framed in, where it can be made up and dreamed of in the first place. Music matches this structure: as a sonic (hollow) space, it provides its listeners with a realm to invent, imagine and project their ideals, their dreams and fantasies unto – music provides the place (*topia*) for the imagining of the non-places (*utopia*); hence: *music as a (sonic) topia of (society’s) utopias*.

The ubiquity of love music gives but one example for the “endemic” presence and persistence of dreams in contemporary Freetown. The structure of *topias of utopias* – thus of places (*topias*) that serve as “hollow spaces” for the imagination of dreams and hopes, for the projection of non- or out-of-reach-places (*utopias*) onto reality’s surface – is in itself ubiquitous. It includes the omnipresence of European football matches broadcasted non-stop in Freetown’s countless informal “movie theaters”; or the equally omnipresent informal betting offices set up at every other corner in Freetown’s east and center, where every day long queues of young men can be found betting on these European football matches, hoping and dreaming about “the one, the right” bet. It includes, furthermore, the

hopes and dreams to become a football star, or a music star, or a “star preacher man” many of my informants told me about. In recent years, the dream about being recruited by an American private security company based in Iraq or Afghanistan began to circulate around Freetown, triggering many young men to fill in online applications for employment while nurturing hopes and dreams similar to those about drawing a prize in the lottery, or about winning a green card.

Another main example in which the structure of topia of utopias is applicable can be found in the sort of “eternal” (or “cosmic”) drive towards the west. As described in Chapter 16, the geographically bounded (and inspired) dreams and imaginations about the West (as being “the best”), with the USA representing the ultimate embodiment of the dreamed-of (utopic) West, is a historical constant in Freetown’s social imaginary. It might be even stated that Freetown is in fact build upon the very dreaming about the west and the striving to realize these dreams. The topia – the tangible place – is thereby represented by the (tangible, reachable) geographical west, be it in form of Freetown as the better place when seen from the provinces, or Freetown’s West End when seen from Freetown’s East Side, or, ultimately: America. The utopia – the imagined, somewhat intangible non-place, the very dream inscribed onto and represented by the topia – is the dream of affluence, of material wealth, and of the therewith associated salvation from “eternal” poverty, scarcity and dearth. Not least, the west does represent the very place of chances and possibilities – be it for luck or for upward social and economic mobility. As trenchantly described by one of my informants, life in the USA – understood as both a place and a dreamed of non-place – represents that what for most in Freetown and, even more, in Sierra Leone, is unthinkable: to “raise from rags to riches” – thus, the very “American dream” per se. With regards to the associated dreams about the “self-made man”, it is a minor but nevertheless most telling anecdote that Jimmy B. – Sierra Leone’s most prominent and successful post-war music producer – started his career in show business in the US. As the story goes, Jimmy, who migrated to the US in the late-1980s, came across a casting for a Hollywood movie production and was, due to fortunate circumstances, given a small role. The money Jimmy earned from that one-day engagement, he invested into music recording equipment – the beginning of his eventual fame and fortune as a music producer. The movie was (again: most tellingly) Eddie Murphy’s enactment of an African prince who heads to the US in hopes of finding his “real love”: “Coming to America”.

## A thick layer of dreams

However, these dreams are – as the notion bluntly implies – nothing but dreams. They are wishes and hopes projected unto an out of reach future; utopias constructed around vague points of reference on this side of life and reality, be it in the sounds of love music, or in the few West Africans who made it into Europe’s football leagues and into MTV’s global music channels, or in stories and rumors about contemporary Freetonians who drew the right bet, or the right lottery ticket, or the right (green) card. Most Freetonians – independently of how much they might dream about their utopias – will not be that lucky. They will not all go to America or Europe. Most of them will not even make it into Freetown’s West End. Neither will all of them become professional and successful football players, nor music stars, nor televised preacher man. A win in the lottery will remain as much a (utopic) dream as drawing the right football bet with the right odds. And even the employment by private security companies fighting America’s 21<sup>st</sup> century war in Iraq or Afghanistan will, for the vast majority, remain nothing but a dream.

So, what are their “realistic dreams”? What are the realistic prospects and hopes for the future of most Freetonians? Where will they be in ten or twenty years from now, realistically? And how should they reach that “realistic future” – once the “alternative” plans constructed around utopic dreams turn out nothing but utopic dreams?

When I made my informants face these somewhat more sober and more somber questions about their dreams and future prospects, most often I received reluctant reactions in return. The “realistic future” was a not much welcomed construct, an unwanted memento of an unwanted reality. Often, I perceived their dreams about future to be structured in several, at times more at times less distinguishable layers. Often, my questions about their dreams beyond (or beneath) the utopian lottery draw resembled sorts of excavations, a bitter peeling of an onion-like-structured layer of dreams. On the surface, I found the above-mentioned (utopic) dreams about lottery bets and heavenly fortunes. On deeper (less utopic) layers, there was a whole gamut of escapist dreams and hopes for escape – from Sierra Leone, from Freetown and its deprived neighbour- and livelihoods, from the current un- or underemployment, or from the current flux of transactional relationships many of my informants are caught up in. On what might be described as the deepest and “most realistic” layer of dreams, the onion’s most inner ring, there were dreams about normality, about what is perceived and constructed as a “normal” life. The notion of (“real”) love often played a central part in these most realistic dreams and hopes about a better future. So did the achievements associated with the stages of adulthood, of becoming and being regarded as “proper” men and “proper” women. These were

thus “dreams” about finding “the right one” – to marry, to father and give birth to children, to provide for sustainable livelihoods, for a decent home, for an “ordinary” family. It is far beyond my capacities to estimate or speculate about for whom of my informants these “dreams about normality” are more realistic, and for whom they are less realistic. Differences certainly exist. The young and well-educated girls from the FBC will most probably face fewer obstacles in fulfilling their dreams about finding “the right one” and about achieving a dreamed of normality than Janet, the semi-professional “exploiter” of amorous relations.

However, the disturbing and unsettling point about this “thick layer of dreams” is that, in many of the cases described above as well as in many other “cases” I encountered during my fieldwork in Freetown, normality itself represents nothing but another far-off dream. A huge bulk of young Freetonians is stuck in the here-and-now, thrown under the wheels of Freetown modern reality’s “Juggernaut” (Giddens 1990: 151), trapped in stagnating existences which neither allow for a forging out of “sober” plans about the future nor for accumulating enough or any capital in order to build for that sober future. It is, for many, a life lived from hand to mouth; a daily struggle for survival, fed by the hopes to at least continue dreaming and hoping. And of dreams and hopes there is, as we saw above, no lack of – neither for utopic nor for “realistic” dreams. What there is a stinging lack of, however, is reality’s (material) structures, “real” paths and opportunities that would allow for and sustain the realization of these dreams. It is because of that lack – of opportunities, of paths to a better, more sustainable, more bearable future – that yet another chasm and discrepancy yawns between dreams about future and future’s potential reality. What remains is – to hope, to wish, to dream, and, not seldom, to pray: for “something” to change, for some unexpected turn, for a lottery win, a good job opportunity, or a “real” love.

As Jackson (2004) speculates about Freetonians’ preoccupation with the issues of trust and betrayal as born out of scarcity – maybe even as a sort of “necessity of scarcity” – a similar speculation appears to suit an explanation for the presence and persistence of dreams and hopes that I found during my fieldwork in Freetown – as most prominently expressed in the popularity of (utopic) love songs. Dreaming, hoping, wishing, longing and praying for the better future, for the better lot and reality, is as well born out of reality’s scarcity. It is a compensation for reality’s present dearth, for the persistent lack of things and possibilities, a surrogate for reality’s endemic absence – of opportunities, of wealth, of chances. A surrogate also for the lack of what is perceived as “normality”, of the “normal” life, a life lived without the ever-present constraints of an ever-stinging scarcity.

Jinnah, the twenty-six-year-old *omalanke boy* I introduced in Chapter 17, gives a telling example of a life lived in stagnation and without the prospects of

achieving even the most “ordinary” dreams (such as about “achieving” manhood). Jinnah fled from the eastern provinces to Freetown about a decade ago. Even though his initial impulse to leave his home was triggered by the war, he in fact wanted to come himself – following the dream of a “more proper” occupation, more proper than in the provinces, where, as he refers to it, “there is just brushing the bush or climbing the palm tree”. Since he came to Freetown, he got caught up in badly paid, insecure and backbreaking temporary employments (mostly as a carrier), striving and struggling every day to get by. In my last encounter with Jinnah, we spoke about his future plans and prospect, as well as about his dreams. Unlike many of his Freetonian contemporaries, Jinnah appeared to have somewhat discarded, or lost, dreams of utopic kinds, if he had ever nurtured them altogether. As I asked him where he sees himself in ten years from now, Jinnah replied with a most modest expectation:

All in all, where I will be? God knows, but I hope I will be still alive. But I am not interested like these other guys who kill themselves to get to the Americas. It is not mine. I am not wasting my time hoping for the good father to take me away. If I make it, I make it here. But if it comes, god knows I will not say no. But, really, it is not coming. Live is not like that.

After more than ten years of partaking in what might well be described, especially from Jinnah’s perspective, as Freetown’s “rat race”, he peeled off utopic dreams and expectations of a blessed future overseas. Neither is he nurturing any dreams about any prosperous future “back home”, in the provinces that is. As small and meager his chances and opportunities to “make it” in Freetown are, “back home” they are even smaller.

There is nothing for me there. The family I got there is no more my family. When you come back, you don’t come back without a thing. So I will be here in the city. Maybe I will jungle less, God knows. What I wish for is some good job, something that can make me live properly. You know, to get by better than now. (...) I want to be married then. I won’t have a girlfriend then. I will only have my wife. I will find a girlfriend and make her my wife. If I will have the chance, I will go and marry her. Now I don’t have the money, that is why I can’t marry now. I don’t want to marry without money. But when I marry, I want to have a boy pikin and a girl pikin. Only two. For now, I don’t have children.

As I asked Jinnah how he plans to get to this future, which paths he plans to follow in order to reach that kind of “modestly” dreamed-of future – a future in “normality”, a future of having an ordinary job that will enable him to provide for a wife and two children – he replied by telling me a story. His story, in which he appears to merge (or confuse) an Anansi folk tale with a legend about medieval King of Scots, Robert the Bruce, and with Defoe’s narrative about Robinson Crusoe (and his “Man of Straw”, Friday), touches upon a vital element in Jinnah’s as well as many other contemporary Freetonian’s lives. It is, at bottom, a story about *trying* – here understood as not giving up, as striving and struggling and fighting on, and, ultimately, as not ceasing to dream and hope however modest the dreams and hopes might have become.

*DISCOnnections*

So we live in Africa. We are the generation like monkeys: the monkey generation. The monkey in the bush, everyone try for himself. If the monkey has the cassava to eat it, no one can come to eat with him. Unless he leaves it, unless he is tired eating and he leaves it. Then one can come and finish it. So we live in Africa. But just like Robin Crusoe during the time he was in the war, and he was fighting for his straw-man, and they took the straw-man from him, and they had already discouraged him. But he fights against those people that took his straw. So he fights for his straw, but he is not succeeding. He goes twice – failure. He goes three – failure. He goes four – failure. So after four time he goes, he decided to surrender. But one day he goes into the bush, and he sees a house, and he send his eyes up and he sees a spider trying to build his own house. The spider tries to build his net in the roof of the farm house. So the spider tries. But he cannot make it. Every attempt that he make, he drop. So Robin Crusoe, he watches the spider, and the spider tries: One time – he falls. Two time – he falls. Three time – he falls again. But then four time the spider tries – and he succeeds. And he says: “Ah! An animal like this, an insect like this: Try, try, try. It will not stop until he will finally succeed. So I, as a human being, I will try again – I will try until I will succeed! So he also decided to go and fight back like the spider. He fights back and back and back until he finally succeed. (...) Trying is not a crime, not so? Keep on trying – maybe one day you will succeed. We shall see.

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