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Diaspora and Diversity: An Ethnography of Sierra Leoneans living in South London

By David Rubyan-Ling

DPhil Thesis

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Statement

I hereby declare that this thesis has not been or will not be submitted in whole or in part to another University for the award of any other degree.

Summary: Diaspora and Diversity: An Ethnographic Study of Sierra Leoneans in South London

By David Rubyan-Ling (20913685)

My thesis is an ethnographic study of Sierra Leonean living in London. I examine the interrelationships between diasporic orientations and the specific locality in which people are living. As such, my research is at the intersection between literatures on African diasporas, and research on new immigration and diversity, two fields which I argue deal with the same 'problem' – that of the incorporation of migrants into some form of nation-state identification.

In my empirical chapters I explore Sierra Leoneans encounters with diversity in a range of places within London, and engage with Brah's (1996) conception of diaspora space, as well as recent work on the topic of super-diversity (Vertovec 2007) as a way to elucidate such these interactions. I focus on key sites within Sierra Leonean London – a popular street market, the religious spaces of a church and a mosque, and the temporary spaces used for the celebrations of the 50th anniversary of Sierra Leonean independence. I explore how individuals manage the twin pressures of incorporation from both the UK and Sierra Leonean states, and how these pressures reconcile in efforts to create lives in the interstices of two cultural systems. I look at how a specific cultural heritage shapes their engagements with each other and with outsiders, and how encounters with others and the experience of life in London affect their relationship with their country of origin.

The thesis argues that Sierra Leoneans living in London manage these pressures using a cultural imaginary rooted in postcoloniality – i.e. shaped by the enduring effects of colonialism and its aftermath. This legacy has resulted in a profound ambivalence towards both London and Sierra Leone, as poles of this relationship, with many Sierra Leoneans coming to see the diaspora as "home": a productive '"third space" with resources and opportunities beyond that of their home country. The dependence of these diasporic spaces on the contributions of diverse 'others'

provides broader affiliations, that result in a less tightly-held national identity, with Pan-West-African and African identification, becoming increasingly salient.

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Chapter 1: The place of Sierra Leone in London

It is October, 2008, early evening. I am sitting on a plastic chair in a church hall in Southwark, South London. Across the aisle to my right, a middle-aged man in a polo shirt has just stood up to ask a question to a government minister. The microphone isn't working properly, and there are several moments before he can be heard.

The event I am attending is billed as a 'Forum for the Diaspora'. It has been organised by a London based Sierra Leonean organisation, as an opportunity for members of the Sierra Leonean community living in London to learn more about how they can contribute to the development of their home country. The venue is a Methodist church, which I later learn is regularly used for community events such as these, with a sizeable Sierra Leonean congregation. The hall itself is full. Those arriving too late to claim a seat crowd the sides, or stand at the back, taking advantage of the free biscuits and coffee. Most of the audience are in their 40s and 50s, and wear dark business clothes. We have just heard a speech from a minister in the government of Sierra Leone's newly established "Presidential Office for the Diaspora", who is now taking questions from the floor. Most of these are technical questions; details about setting up bank accounts and updates on government infrastructural projects. The minister is sitting at a broad table at one end of the room, facing the audience, alongside the chairlady and two representatives of Sierra Leonean investment banks. Many prominent members of the London Sierra Leonean community are here, including the high commissioner, and leaders of other diaspora organisations. The person sitting on my left is a banking executive. Earlier, while I was waiting for proceedings to begin, I mingled and received business cards from several doctors, lawyers and professors, while a projector screen at the front of the hall showed silent tourist brochure-style footage of Sierra Leone itself - white sandy beaches, bustling market places and verdant forests.

Finally the microphone kicks in and the man in the polo shirt can be heard properly. His question causes immediate uproar. He says that he can't see many Sierra Leone Peoples Party members in the room, and could the minister assure discerning investors that their money wouldn't be diverted to projects in the North of Sierra Leone, where the governing All People Congress draws their support. Straight away several heavy-set men leap to their feet, and demand that the microphone to be taken from the man. Indignant cries can be heard from the audience: 'This isn't a political gathering!', 'this man doesn't speak for us!', while the questioner is moved to insist that 'We're all Sierra Leoneans here!'. Eventually the chairlady manages to restore order, after scolding the questioner for bringing politics into the meeting. The minister responds coolly, with an example of a particular project in Pujehun district (on the Liberian border) that he felt refuted any suggestion of regionalist bias.

This anecdote illustrates the complex ways in which a particular local place can become enmeshed in complex social relations crossing thousands of miles. The eruption of Sierra Leonean politics into a musty church hall off the Camberwell Road is outwardly remarkable, until one considers the context. According to one recent statistic, the borough of Southwark has the greatest concentration of people born in Sierra Leone in the country (Born Abroad, 2005). Three of its councillors are from Sierra Leone, one of whom was also previously mayor. The fact that the meeting was held in a Methodist Church with a strong Sierra Leonean congregation reflects the social role of the Methodist Church for the Krio professional class, and the historic influence of Methodism in missionary education in colonial Freetown, (Fyfe, 1962; Cohen, 1981). The minister's speech, and the commotion caused by the question posed by the man in the polo shirt, reflects not only one of the long-standing tensions within Sierra Leonean party politics, but also the tension between the ideal of a national diaspora, and the cynicism of others at perceived government patronage and corruption at home. The retort, 'We are all Sierra Leoneans here', while

factually inaccurate (I'm not Sierra Leonean), could be interpreted both as a claim for individual recognition, and a demand that the government act in the interests of a broader constituency.

In *Transnational Urbanism* (2001), Michael P. Smith argues that globalisation should always be understood in terms of a *local* politics of cultural translation. Rather than proceeding as an inexorable force, 'behind peoples backs', or above their heads, global flows of capital, labour, ideas and commodities are always grounded in particular social practices and relationships, and shaped by specific histories and conflicts. Cities, as particular hubs of historical connection and intermixture play a powerful constitutive role in this process. Thus it *matters*, when researching African diaspora politics, whether the site of study is London, or Paris or indeed Freetown or Accra or Cairo. In wanting to research Sierra Leoneans in London, I was interested in the particular forms of translation and intermixture that occur, when two highly differentiated but intimately connected places - which, as Massey (2005) argues, are also *trajectories* - meet and interact. According to the UN's Human Development index, Sierra Leone is ranked as the poorest country in the world, with a life expectancy of 42, infant mortality at 1 in 4, and 70% of the population living below the poverty line (World Bank, 2007). The country is still recovering from ten years of brutal civil war, in which transnational actors – rebel militias, multinational corporations, private security firms, Nigerian peacekeepers, aid agencies - played a major role in further incorporating the country into long distance networks of exchange and extraction, not always in the best interests of the country itself (Keen, 2004; Richards, 1996). As in much of West Africa, migration is a widespread livelihood strategy upon which people are becoming increasingly dependent (Akeampong, 2000). In 2012 the value of official remittances to Sierra Leone was over US$80 million (IOM 2013). Therefore the presence of a growing Sierra Leonean population in the UK, particularly in London, has a powerful significance.

London is the context in which this new population is making itself known. Sierra Leoneans make up just one of the over one-hundred nationalities that have settled in the city, which has become the site of such proliferation of immigrant settlement that it has begun to be described as something altogether new, a city of 'super-diversity' (Vertovec 2007). West African communities make up a significant part of this diversity, particular in areas of South and East London. In the year 2000, in the list of the top 20 languages spoken in the city, Yoruba (the most widely spoken Nigerian language) came in at number 10, whilst Akan (The main Ghanaian language group) was at number 14 (Storkey, 2000). Such immigration from the sub-region is not new; London had been a popular destination for West African students, aspirant politicians and holidaying middle-classes – Sierra Leoneans included - from the 1950s and earlier (see e.g. Harrell-Bond 1975, Killingray 1994, Fyfe 1962). The 1990s and 2000s however saw increasing numbers of so-called 'economic migrants', people moving to the UK to earn money following the economic collapse of many West African economies in the 1980s and 1990s following the implementation of structural adjustment programs. Sierra Leone was not immune to this trend, although a significant part of its increase in immigration to the UK came as a result of the 1991-2002 civil war. One of the features of the new super-diversity, according to Vertovec, is not just the increase in ethnic and national diversity, but also a more diverse range of experiences in terms of legal status, migration trajectory, degree of transnational activity, religion, and position in the labour market. This trend is evidenced in the new forms of migration from Sierra Leone and West Africa. As a consequence, Sierra Leoneans settling in London are coming into contact with other Sierra Leoneans, other African communities, native British people, as well as migrant communities from around the world with whom they may share some, many, or none of the same experiences. In this context, the demands of the Sierra Leonean government and obligations to family and extended kin back home become balanced with new demands, relationships and obligations, to the locality of where people are living. Understanding how people interact in such

circumstances where questions of spatial scale, social distance and cultural competence are interwoven poses a serious challenge

In this study I want to explore how Sierra Leoneans living in London are engaging with this diverse context. Sierra Leone, its history of encounter with the wider world, and the context of migrant settlement in South London, all have a role to play in shaping this engagement. While this is a study of migration in the broad sense, I am less interested in movement per se, than the place of 'Sierra Leone' *in* London – and the place of London in producing and shaping Sierra Leoneans' own engagement with their country of origin.

This has been a particularly opportune time to consider the role of immigrant places in London as the period of my fieldwork coincided with a number of high profile events in which the capital city sought to define itself according to its diversity and its uniformity (Silk 2011). The London Olympics were very much in preparation during my fieldwork year, and the organisers sought to highlight the diverse nature of the capital as a thing that made it special. This diversity, its increased autonomy from the rest of the UK following the creation of the elected office of Mayor, and its relative inoculation from the worst of the 2008 recession, has seen London become something of a city apart from the rest of the UK. At the same time, the Olympics, and the transformation and redevelopment of – predominantly working-class - areas of East London formed part of a larger project of urban redevelopment that sought to maximise London's status as a cosmopolitan 'Global City'. This process was occurring in South London as well, where I was based during my fieldwork, with the area around Elephant and Castle – a busy junction that linked the Southern boroughs to the centre of city, and symbolised by its idiosyncratic 1950s-vintage 'Shopping Centre' - earmarked for extensive redevelopment (BBC 2009). This area had been the site of large social housing estates, such as the Heygate, into which the local working class population had been relocated after the Second World War, and its demolition and the projected construction of 'mixed' private

accommodation as part of a plan to attract a younger professional class of resident. Diversity, then, was being promoted and celebrated, alongside a wider transformation of the image of the capital in the interests of private development (See Davidson and Lees 2010 for further discussion of this process).

Finally, the August riots of 2011, that occurred while I was on fieldwork, in which the shooting of a young black man by police in North London led to widespread looting and disorder across the capital. While the motivation of much of this violence – beyond the initial protest - seemed to be linked to urban anomie and disconnection from wider society, rather than any explicit political agenda, much of the commentary could not avoid using the language of gangs, law and order, and criminality, that had led to the demonization of the so-called inner-city through the 1990s and '00s. What was occurring at the time of my research, then, was the emergence of a discourse of popular diversity that stood awkwardly alongside policies that aimed at the transformation of urban space in the interests of wealthier sections of society.

I was personally attracted to studying Sierra Leone during a volunteer work placement in 2007. I was living in a refugee community that was predominantly Liberian in nationality, and I met and became friends with a small group of Sierra Leonean refugees who had settled at the camp. I was struck by the difference between the Sierra Leoneans and the Liberians – the former having a more British cultural influence in contrast to the strongly America–centric focus of the latter, and they reminded me of my own home at a point when I was starting to miss it after 2 months in West Africa. Upon my return I became intrigued by the history of Sierra Leone and its relationship to Britain, and the history of colonialism that drew much of the region into intimate encounter with Britain and Europe. Postcoloniality, the persistence of the colonial relation after independence, seemed to become more visible to me as a result, and the contrast between the precarious lives of my Sierra Leonean friends as they

waited for the right time to return home and my own oblivious existence in the UK challenged my own conceptions of difference and geography and drew me to wanting to study this area in greater detail.

Sierra Leone is an interesting country to focus on due to its small size, high internal diversity – 13 different language groups, and long relationship with the UK. Furthermore Sierra Leone has an instructive history in terms of the study of encounters with diversity; it was founded as colony for emancipated slaves by a group of British philanthropists in the late 18th century, and over the next 100 years became home to a wide range of peoples from along the West African coast. These different groups intermarried and formed what became the Krio, a creole social group with cultural influences from their mixed African heritage and European missionary upbringing, such as protestant Christianity (especially Methodist and Anglican), and the importance placed on higher education and membership of the professions. The Krio were instrumental in the spread of these values throughout British West Africa, and they can be seen as forerunners of a particular brand of West African diasporic culture that still endures. Moreover, the Krio language, an Anglophone creole composed of a blend of English, Arabic, Portuguese, Hausa, Yoruba and other African loan words, has become the lingua franca of Sierra Leone more generally, and provides a common ground for the diverse groups to interact and communicate. For all its recent history of internal strife, Sierra Leonean society has many elements conducive to social harmony, including a remarkably pluralistic religious environment, with Christians and Muslims tending to have excellent relations, unlike some of the other countries in the region (Richards 1996). This heritage thus already complicates relations with others encountered on settlement in the UK, because many Sierra Leonean already lead lives shaped by the presence of difference.

Sierra Leone also remains understudied in the context of migration, compared to other West African countries, perhaps reflecting its comparatively small size

(a total population of 5 million people) and the overwhelming focus researchers have paid to issues surrounding the civil war, peacebuilding and reconstruction. While countries like Nigeria and Ghana have become significant regional economic powers, and the Gambia has become a popular holiday destination for Western tourists, the experience of the war has meant that Sierra Leone has languished in poverty and relative obscurity. In the diaspora, while the London population is significant in Sierra Leonean terms, especially in areas such as Southwark, in terms of the wider West African community it is small, and as a result relies on this broader regional community for much of its social infrastructure. Despite its small size, it has – or had - a disproportionate political voice in the UK, thanks in part to the British military intervention that helped bring an end to the Civil War in the year 2000, but also to the personal interest of high-level Labour politicians such as former Prime Minister Tony Blair, Harriet Harman, and the current Liberal Democrat MP Simon Hughes. I will discuss this in more detail in Chapter 3.

This thesis is comprised of 8 chapters, including this one. Chapter 2 outlines the central research questions and provides the key theoretical context to the thesis, while Chapter 3 provides some historical background on both the Sierra Leonean diaspora in the UK and the local context of South London. Chapter 4 discusses the key methodological issues raised by my research question. Chapters 5-7 offer the main empirical material generated from my fieldwork, focusing on three sites within the landscape of Sierra Leonean life in London: a street market, the various temporary spaces put to use for the 50th Anniversary of Sierra Leonean independence, and a variety of religious spaces including a local church and a mosque, both with large Sierra Leonean populations. Finally, in chapter 8, I summarise my arguments and consider their implications for both academic research, and the ongoing efforts to incorporate the Sierra Leonean diaspora into national development.

Chapter 2: Integrating Diaspora and Diversity

As I have just discussed , this study is concerned with the Sierra Leonean migrant community in London, how it's members engage with the specific locality in which they are living, and how this engagement shapes their own cultural practices and relationships to their country of origin. As a result, this thesis is placed at the interface between two broad fields of study – that of contemporary 'diasporas', on the one hand, and that of super-diversity as it relates to new immigrant groups on the other. These two areas, I argue, deal at heart with the same key question - the question of incorporation. That is to say, they both look at the challenge posed by international migration to the nation-state, and how the state seeks to adapt to re-embed international migrants into some form of governance. At the same time, these questions also raise the issue of individual agency: while migrants' lives are shaped by external demands, people nonetheless attempt to pursue their own agendas and goals in often difficult circumstances.

What this study aims to show is the effects of these pressures of engagement on Sierra Leoneans living in London in the construction of a specifically Sierra Leonean-London diasporic subjectivity. In exploring how Sierra Leoneans engage with locality in the diaspora, I will be drawing on theories of integration and transnationalism, geographies of belonging, and the concept of 'diaspora space', and engaging them productively with the specificities of Sierra Leonean historical and cultural experience. In this chapter I will discuss this theoretical material in order to show how it can improve our understanding of migration and inter-cultural encounters in contemporary situations. I begin by discussing the concepts of locality and integration as they relate to theories and discussions of transnationalism and international migration. I then explore the idea of diaspora in terms of how it relates to the current context of complex immigrant diversity in contemporary London, before introducing the concept of 'diaspora space' (Brah, 1996) as an integrative frame for understanding such situations. In

the final section, I explore the implications of using this frame in the context of Sierra Leonean immigration to the UK.

2.1: Locality in Migration studies

The concept of the transnational has allowed researchers to explore the ways in which contemporary migrants are able to maintain social relations with their country of origin, and other sites that are not bound to the confines of the nation state. Transnational ideas enable researchers to think across definitional lines and also highlight how state boundaries, ideas of national belonging and identity are produced through specific social practices, rather than being somehow 'natural' (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2003) . In the case of West Africa, national boundaries exist often more in the abstract than in any physical sense, and people regularly move in order to trade, visit relatives, look for work and pursue their livelihood. Thus this concept both highlights how social ties are maintained following settlement in another country, but also breaks with established habits of assuming the nation-state to be the definite locus of social activity.

While transnationalism has greatly extended the conceptual repertoire available to scholars seeking to understand contemporary forms of migration, the limitations of this optic have also become apparent in recent years. While it seeks to describe activities that transcend national boundaries, ironically it has also been criticised for focusing on the 'national' scale, paradoxically reifying the nation state (Hannerz 1996; Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2003) and ignoring how much cross-border movement is based on mundane, local and everyday spaces. Others have criticised it for overemphasising movement and connectedness, ignoring how mobility is unevenly distributed, and the fact that while connections across borders are becoming easier, regular transnational activity is often the preserve of a minority (Massey, 1994; Wilding 2007; Guarzino et al 2003; Mohan 2006, 2008; Portes et al 2008). Language is

sometimes at fault in describing how contemporary migration works. Terms like 'networks' and 'flows' can give a false impression of migrant communities as integrated and communicating evenly across space, whereas in reality they can be unintegrated, haphazard and fraught with obstacles and barriers to connection (Mercer, Page and Evans 2008). Culture also plays a role. In the case of African migrants, obligations to family often form part of the impetus to travel, in order to send money home in the form of remittances. However, these same obligations can also become a burden, and individuals may delay their return or even avoid contact with family if they feel they cannot meet these expectations (Mohan 2008).

In response to this, in recent years researchers of transnational migration have sought to move away from a focus purely on mobility to a more nuanced understanding that takes into account the fact that much of migrants' everyday life is spent in a particular locality of settlement (e.g. Conradson and Latham 2001; Walsh 2006). Transnational activities, when they do occur, take place in particular contexts for particular purposes, and these are inevitably shaped by these contexts. Money, 'success', legal status or lack of it, work commitments, relationships, and geographical location all influence the ability of people to re-engage with their country of origin. For many Sierra Leonean migrants with children, trips home are shaped by the curriculum of the school year and summer holidays. Thus few are able to engage in a sustained transnational to-and-fro for extended periods of time, if only because of the cost of air travel, something that is particularly true of migrant communities from the developing world. Therefore an appreciation of the role of place and processes of local incorporation is essential in understanding how transnational migration works. Place, from a geographical perspective, can be understood as a 'meaningful space' (Cresswell 2004). It has been a concern in debates on the geography of globalisation, in particular the issue of whether a place lens is inherently conservative, existing always in opposition to the abstract world of flows, of capital, labour and information (Harvey 1996, Massey 1994, Smith, 2001). This debate has resulted in a re-conceptualisation of place as open and

interconnected. Doreen Massey's (1994) now classic essay on Kilburn high road argues for a progressive sense of place, in which emotional connectedness to a particular locality goes hand-in-hand with an awareness of broader physical connections to places elsewhere. Gielis (2007) argues that places can be looked upon as cross-sectional confluences of a range of networks, and that they can complement research on transnational networks because they allow an awareness of the multiplicity of connections that exist in place. I discuss his contribution in more detail later.

There has also been a move towards attempts to 'ground' transnational processes through a greater appreciation of the specificities of place in producing them. Michael Peter Smith's (2001) concept of transnational urbanism is one such attempt, focusing on the importance of cities as spaces where transnational movements are produced and shaped. Smith argues that globalisation should always be understood in terms of a *local* politics of cultural translation. Rather than proceeding as an inexorable force, 'behind peoples backs', or above their heads, global flows of capital, labour, ideas and commodities are always grounded in particular social practices and relationships, and shaped by specific histories and conflicts.

 One of the central concerns of this thesis is on the role of London as a particular place that shapes Sierra Leoneans' engagement with their country of origin. Arguably London is a unique place within the United Kingdom, both a global city-state that lends itself to the reproduction of transnational lives, as well as a city of villages, with sub-localities with their own particular histories and public identities (see Chapter 4 for more discussion of the locality of Walworth in South London).

Elsewhere, Ruben Gielis (2009) has argued for a focus on 'place' in migration studies as way to provide greater analytical distance to explore the external complexity of migrant social networks. Gielis draws on Massey's (1994)

understanding of 'a global sense of place', formulated as the product of a particular intersection of wider historical and spatial forces, along with Appadurai's (1997) notion of 'trans-localities' – places that exist as nodes of outward connection to places elsewhere. These two complimentary ideas allow us to view place as both site of presence and convergence – place as meeting place – and absence – place as trans-locality. It also grounds the study of migration in the material world of migrants' everyday lives, and avoids vague analogies such as 'diaspora' and exile. Arguably, presenting 'place', as an alternative to 'network' creates a false dichotomy. However, if we follow the implications of considering places as relational and open, then it is possible to understand movement itself as occurring through place, and to position places and networks as interconnected concepts.

2.2 Integration and transnationalism

A focus on locality and place in migration raises a parallel area of debate: that over 'integration'. Much of the above work can be seen as a response to anxieties in the country of settlement about migrant transnationalism as potentially undermining the nation state and inhibiting integration[1]. However, the idea of integration needs some careful qualification. As Erdal and Oeppen (2013) point out, the term is frequently employed in a normative fashion as part of a state-enforced programme whereby individual migrants are expected to conform and adapt to meet certain societal expectations, and abandon any cultural practices or attitudes that are seen as incompatible. In contrast to this, integration can also be understood in more modest terms, as the process by which individuals develop relationships and connections within a place of settlement so as to generate feelings of belonging. This twofold distinction

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[1] On the other side of the coin, much of the work on diaspora and transnationalism, at least in the African context, sought to achieve the same reassuring effect – that Africans abroad were not abandoning their countries, and the 'Brain drain' could be seen as a 'Brain gain' as migration brought remittances and positive social change (e.g. Peil 1995, Akeampong, 2002). See section on diaspora below.

applies equally to processes and projects of diaspora, where state-led efforts at mobilising overseas populations through emotional appeals to patriotism have their corollary in everyday emotional connections to home. This analytical distinction – between the top-down incorporative expectations of states, and the subjective feelings and everyday practices of individuals - is helpful in explaining the ambivalence felt by diasporic populations to state-led inducements to engage with their homeland (see chapter 5 for an exploration of the Sierra Leonean independence anniversary celebrations and the emotional tensions experienced by the participants).

In a review of this literature, Erdal and Oeppen (2013) argue that the consensus of recent research has been that transnationalism and integration do co-exist, and that what remains is exploring the nature of this co-existence in specific contexts in order to develop new theoretical understandings of the phenomenon. They suggest three possible ways that integration and transnationalism could interact: as additive, as synergistic, or as antagonistic An additive relationship would be that transnational activity and integration occur alongside each other without affecting each other – these activities are effectively compartmentalised. A synergistic relationship would mean that transnational activity and integration are mutually supporting, and that an increase in one would bring about an increase in the other, while an antagonistic relationship would mean the opposite, that integration and transnationalism conflict with each other in some ways, and that engaging in one activity negatively affects the other.

It is my argument that in order to develop an understanding of how integration and transnational inter-relate, one needs to pay attention to the role of place and locality, as these are the arena whereby relationships are formed and individuals can establish connections that deepen their embeddedness, as well as the specificities of the sending country and its relationship with the receiving

country. One important way of articulating place to understandings of integration and transnationalism is the concept of belonging.

2.3 Belonging

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, Belonging is defined as a relationship, that includes a subjective, personal, component (membership), and an objective, external one (acceptance). In its everyday usage, belonging also includes feelings of attachment to *place* (as in 'a sense of belonging', or the negative 'I/you don't belong here'), as well as to *things*, objects of ownership, or possessions ('belongings'). This common-sense, personal understanding perhaps makes it ideal for misappropriation; belonging often features in used in the patriotic discourse of the nation-state, especially in political discussions over multiculturalism and assimilation of those deemed 'other'. In the UK, cultivating a sense of 'shared belonging' to locality and nation has been a stated goal in recent years to healing the apparent divisions in British society manifested by 'ethnic' violence in Bradford, Burnley and Oldham in 2001(e.g. Independent Review Team 2003). To add to the confusion of meanings and uses of belonging, the term has also been adopted by social scientists as a useful way of thinking about the politics of identity. Like diaspora and integration, belonging as a term has an emotional component and therefore needs to be unpacked before it can be used to understand social behaviour.
According to Mee and Wright (2009):

> 'Belonging connects matter to place, through various practices of boundary making and inhabitation which signal that a particular collection of objects, animals, plants, germs, people, practices, performances or ideas is meant 'to be' in a place' (2009:p772)

Thus Belonging can be expressed in both material and spatial terms. Furthermore, belonging also has an affective, personal dimension – a 'longing',

in Probyn's (1996) words, for place and order that shapes and gives meaning to individual lives. This desire for belonging is expressed through performed practices of dress, speech, physical attitude, as well as through collective rituals where bodies and spaces are inscribed with a particular set of values (Bell, 1999; Fortier, 2000). This affective element makes it central to the understanding of integration, which as previously discussed, is emotionally charged both at the subjective and the structural dimensions.

The performed aspect of belonging points to the fact that identity is not innate or essential, but is always actively produced. Belonging, as a longing for an identity, is a desire that can never be fulfilled, because one is always in the process of becoming other than what one was. The implication here – one that is more explicitly stated in the Queer Theory from which performativity is derived - is that such performances can be challenged and dominant orders of belonging disrupted. However, agency is by no means free and easy; the weight of social expectation and the desire for coherence provide powerful constraints. In her study of Italian immigrants to Britain, Fortier (2000) describes how the disruption caused by emigration becomes productive, as individuals are forced to account for their changed selves and circumstances through historical narratives, cultural practices and rituals – 'belongings' - that actively (re)produce a sense of Italian expatriate identity. These narratives are grounded in the physical spaces of the community: at the Women's Club, the Church of St. Peters in south London, the Centro Scalabrini mission, where the rituals of community life work to inscribe the values of the community onto the bodies of its members.

Thus we are back to the overlapping and regimes of incorporation that migrants experience, as I mentioned in the first section of this chapter. The expectations placed on individuals by states inscribe a particular form of belonging, one that does not necessarily coincide with the subjective experience of the individual concerned. Belonging expresses both 'subjective' attachments

to particular places, beings and things, and also 'objective' taxonomies of where places, beings and things are meant, logically, to reside. In a sense then, belonging transcends the division between dominant discourses and localised 'common sense', showing them both to be manifestations of the desire for order, and the ordering of desire. It is thus highly relevant for studies of migration, as it offers a lens that can be applied across a range of spatial scales to observe the different practices of attachment and exclusion affecting migrants' lives. At the individual level, it becomes possible to explore the everyday, mundane expressions of attachment and exclusion and to trace the ways that identity is performed and challenged across material surfaces and physical spaces. While belonging, as both relationship to place and object of ownership places the focus squarely on the material, it highlights the deeply *im*material, emotional relationships that such material connections evoke. (Conradson and Latham, 2005; Walsh, 2006; Mee and Wright 2009).

More broadly, at the level of the collective, belonging is expressed through public discourses and collective rituals; for example, in Britain, the state has begun to formalise belonging through ceremonies of citizenship, in which a ritualised performance of belonging adds emotional power to the legal incorporation of an individual which define the rights and responsibilities of those who belong to a particular territory. Citizenship offers the promise of equality, subordinating other forms of affiliation under a universal system of rights to all those included within the group. However, it is also exclusionary. Citizenship rights are territorially bound and national belonging is rarely simply a matter of legally recognised residence, but is articulated in terms of cultural values, or even racialised notions of indigeneity. As the history of the concept has shown, those deemed to not 'belong' face discrimination and often violence (Gilroy, 2000; Heater, 1999; Isin & Wood, 1999). Even in cases where one's official belonging is recognised, racism and exploitation can result in feelings of being excluded from the rest of society, of being a 'second-class' citizen, pushed to the margins. Belonging is therefore a contested concept,

where the boundaries of the group are asserted and challenged in situations of unequal power.

2.4 Sites of Belonging

2.4.1 Home

If the concept of belonging defines the particular emotional contents of broader phenomena such as diaspora and integration, the associated concept of Home points to how such contents can be materialised in particular places. (Blunt and Dowling, 2005). Walsh's (2006) study of British expatriates in Dubai shows how the production and maintenance of 'home' through everyday practices, such as cleaning, shopping, watching DVDs, allows for the reconstitution of the self, reflecting gender discourses whilst simultaneously creating a space of intimacy and relaxation in opposition the foreignness of public life. However, 'home' is not limited to the physical place of dwelling. Blunt and Dowling (2005) define home as having three distinct elements. Firstly, home can be seen in terms of a dwelling – a physical structure in which a set of domestic relationships and practices are carried out and which, over time, ideally, generate the sense of belonging or attachment. Home in this sense is both material and immaterial, a physical site that shapes and is shaped by particular idealised images of what a home means in a particular cultural context.

Secondly, home, like any 'place' is open and relational (Massey 1994); it is intrinsically gendered, being seen as the site of social reproduction, as well as shaped and bounded by lines of class, 'race' and sexuality. Finally, home is also open and existing across multiple scales. Home does not simply refer only to a house or dwelling, but in different contexts can refer to a neighbourhood, city, region, nation, or even continent. Like belonging, home crops up in the language of the nation, and the threat seemingly posed to it by immigration. 'Home' is a useful concept in that it combines the theoretical perspectives on belonging and place, by focusing on a site that is both material and idealised.

'Homes' are constructed and placed physically according to wider social relationships based on gender, class and 'race', yet they are also places where people live, sites of attachment where people seek to build meaningful senses of themselves as subjects.

Furthermore, it is important to point out that the concept of home exists across different scales, from the intimate – a physical dwelling, house, or flat in which people live – to the more broad, such as a neighbourhood, street or village, city, or indeed country. The construction of home according to these different scales is a concept process directly related to processes of integration. I suggest that the more 'integrated' a person is on a subjective level, the broader the scale over which home is expressed. This everyday 'commonplace-ness' and metaphoric reach gives it flexibility in exploring the links between the everyday and wider discourses and practices of belonging. This links to the concept of the national home, or homeland, encapsulated in the concept of diaspora. I discuss this in more detail below. For now, I focus on the idea of the diasporic public space, as a useful counterpoint to the mundane understanding of home as private.

2.4.2 Diasporic places

Diasporic public space can be understood as particular sites through which the political project of diaspora – collective allegiance and concern with a homeland – is expressed and debated. The particularity of these spaces – churches, public rooms, peoples' homes, embassy buildings, nightclubs, and the street – reflect the attenuated nature of diasporic expressions in the host country. While these spaces are crucial for the formation of a collective identity rooted in the absent homeland, their particularity and the often- marginal position of diasporic communities –the Sierra Leonean community being a good example - inevitably make them hybrid and shaped by compromise. The materiality of diasporic spaces thus impact of the narratives that are expressed and shape the relationships of participants with the homeland. In the following chapters, the particularities of different places – a public street market, the rented halls and

spaces used to host the 50th Anniversary of Sierra Leonean Independence, and the hybrid space of a Methodist church – illustrate how space shapes the cultural narratives and identities of those present.

2.5 Understanding 'diaspora'

Diaspora, as commonly understood refers to a migrant population displaced from an original homeland to two or more host countries or places of exile, which continues to identify itself with the homeland and to seek (perhaps in the future, perhaps now) its restoration and their eventual return (Safran 1991, Cohen 1997). In the last 20 years the use of the term has expanded beyond its original meaning, to refer to a wider and wider range of migrant communities and groups, to the point where some contemporary thinkers have criticised it for being a 'catch all' term for any group that engages in transnational migration (Brubaker 2005). Its theoretical use within the social sciences has also been somewhat flexible, with those who continue to utilise it terms of straightforward typology (labour diasporas, conflict diasporas, colonial diasporas and so forth, e.g. Cohen 1997), to the more politically inflected approach of scholars such as Stuart Hall (1990) , Paul Gilroy (1993) and Avtar Brah (1996), who see diasporas and diasporic identity, as experienced typically in the lives of Black and Asian people living in Europe and the United States, as having the potential to initiate a new form of progressive hybrid ethnicity that transcends the boundaries of race and nation.

Once again, the picture is complicated further by the use of 'diaspora' by national governments and members of migrant communities themselves, in describing relationships (sometimes more normative than actual) between overseas communities and their countries of origin. In the case of the Sierra Leonean diaspora, the use of this terminology is a phenomenon that emerged following the end of the Civil War in 2002, as the civilian government sought to reach out those Sierra Leoneans living abroad – especially educated professionals – to encourage them to re-engage with the country, especially

through investment and return. This has been part of a trend across Africa more broadly, as governments tried to re-engage those who had travelled to Europe following the economic collapse of many African countries in the 1980s and 90s. Mohan (2006) has argued in the context of the Ghanaian diaspora that its invocation is indicative of a new neoliberal developmental state in Africa. I would argue that the attraction of 'diaspora', as a descriptive term in this context doubtless reflects its emotional component, enhanced by its previous association with the 'first' African diaspora - the narrative power of a people displaced from its homeland serving to unify and, to some extent, exploit the real emotional experiences of homesickness, nostalgia and alienation of felt by overseas migrants.

The cumulative effect of this adoption of diaspora by migrant communities themselves, along with the definitional and theoretical issues described above, is that it can be hard to find solid analytical ground. Are diasporas really-existing entities, or political constructions, or both? Where do they apply? In the case of the Sierra Leonean community in London, I argue that diaspora can be understood as a political project, much in the manner of the Sierra Leonean nation-state is a political project, in the sense that it is used in conscious manner to define a 'we', a Sierra Leonean collective identity, to which people can sign up and participate. As we will see, the characteristics of this national identity, as presented in particular historical invocations and imagery, are contested, and the idea of 'Sierra Leone' being challenged by those in London whose perspective is at odds with the official line. This disconnect shows that, again, there is a subjective element to diaspora, formulated in terms of diasporic consciousness, typified by feelings of nostalgia, dislocation and yearning for some kind of reconnection with home.   In terms of its use in scholarship, it can therefore also be helpful to separate its state-led and subjective elements.

Much of the literature on 'New African diasporas' (cf. Koser 2007) has focused on the interactions between sending states and their countries of origin and the

question of the role of such diasporic communities might play in development (e.g. Mohan 2006; Davies, 2007; Mercer, Page and Evans 2008). However, in common with shifts in perspective towards grounding transnationalism in locality, recently attention is beginning to be paid to the context of diaspora itself, the daily engagements with the host society that constitute everyday life for most overseas migrants. Page and Mercer (2012) have called for a recalibration of research on diaspora and development to focus more on everyday diasporic practices, such as transferring money, attending diasporic events, cooking food, as sites where the relationship with the homeland is revealed in its full complexity. Elsewhere, McGregor (2007) has focussed on childrearing practices amongst Zimbabwean professionals, whose anxieties about the effect of life in the UK on their children lead them to articulate so-called 'African Values' This shift in perspective makes room for a reintegration of the more host-country focused theorizations of diaspora. Meanwhile, Binaisa (2013) has argued for the persistence of the cultural experience of colonialism as constitutive of Ugandan migrants' attitudes towards settlement in the UK. In each of these cases, the particular context of the receiving country is shown to be productive in the emergence of a diasporic identity that is rooted in cross-cultural encounter.

2.6 Understanding 'super-diversity'

In connecting ideas of transnationalism and diaspora to the particularities of specific places, this research intersects with a growing body work on what has been termed 'super-diversity', that is the increasing diversification of immigrant diversity that has been seen in cities such as London over the last 15 years. This phenomenon has been conceptualised most clearly by the anthropologist of migration Steven Vertovec, who argues that this shift demands a new appraisal of diversity in both academia and in the public sphere, as existing frameworks of analysis and policymaking, based on assumptions of a few relatively large ethnic minorities from former colonies, have become inadequate (Vertovec 2007,

2008). Vertovec has argued that the central feature of super-diversity is the emergence of such 'new, smaller, less organised, legally differentiated and non-citizen immigrant groups' that are challenging this framework. Vertovec's central point is that not only has ethnicity become more diverse, but that this 'diversification of diversity' crucially extends beyond 'ethnic' or national categories to include cultural, linguistic and religious diversity, as well as forms of ascribed identity borne of the migration process, such as diversity of legal status and migration channel. Gender, place of residence, social class and status, and degree of involvement in transnational activity are also highlighted as important variables conditioning the new picture of diversity. The focus on these variables are not entirely new – much of the literature on diasporic communities over the last 20 years deals with this 'internal' diversity, particularly around gender and class. Nor is this picture simply a chaotic melting pot of difference (or different differences?) all mixed up together; rather it refers a complex, structured landscape in which different concentrations of people associate according to various forms of identification and difference. In theorising super-diversity, it is possible to take a variety of approaches. Vertovec himself has argued for what he calls a 'revised situational approach' that seeks to unpack local happenings by examining them from an increasing range of spatial scales (see chapter 5 for more details).

However, this picture is distinctly different from the 'traditional' understanding of diversity that many British people grew up with, where a few relatively large and well-organised immigrant 'communities', from the Caribbean and South Asia, made up 'ethnic Britain'. This poses a challenge to theorising and understanding how the new picture of diversity works (or not) in practice; particularly how groups interact and define themselves according to others and to the host society. Much of the literature on 'diaspora', has explored how this happens, with much emphasis on how group identity is socially constructed and contextually mediated (e.g. Fortier, 2001, Werbner 1998). In this thesis, I explore the emergence of the Sierra Leonean community in London and the UK

more widely as a particular aspect of super-diversity as a phenomenon. Sierra Leoneans are relevant to the study of super-diversity for a number of reasons. Firstly, Sierra Leoneans in London could be considered emblematic of the 'new, smaller, less organised, legally differentiated and non-citizen immigrant groups' described by Vertovec, although an increasing number of people are becoming British citizens. While, as previously mentioned, there has been a long history of Sierra Leonean migration to the UK, the contemporary community has been profoundly shaped by the Civil War of the 1990s, transforming it from a largely elite group of professionals, students and their families to a community drawn from a broad section of Sierra Leonean society, many of whom arrived via the asylum process. Secondly, the small size of the Sierra Leonean community and the diversity of the neighbourhoods in which they have settled mean that encounters with other groups can be seen as an important influence on it.

Aside from this population, Southwark, the area of London in which I did my fieldwork, has several other ethnic minority groups (See Chapter 3 for more details). In particular there is a broad Latin American community as well as a small but growing Vietnamese community. The area has seen an influx of middle class British professionals and students who work and study in central London. More relevant to this case, particular areas of Southwark, such as Walworth, Newington, Peckham and Old Kent Road have a large West African community, especially Nigerians and Ghanaians, and a significant number of people of African-Caribbean origin who had been living in the area since the 1970s and earlier. The result of this is that Sierra Leoneans are able to make use of social amenities and institutions provided to this broader group. As will described in Chapter 5 and 7, a pan-west African cultural identity emerges in particular spaces such as grocery shops and churches. East Street Market in Walworth is a particularly important local landmark providing space for entrepreneurship and public sociality that is widespread in West Africa but more constrained in the UK. This space is a diverse space, with traders from a wide variety of countries of origin, and the relationships that have emerged are

an instructive case for exploring how super-diversity works in practice. In considering the role of place in shaping Sierra Leoneans trans-local belonging, such diversity has an important role.

2.7 Urban encounters and cosmopolitanism

The processes and effects of diversity in urban space has been explored in literature on urban encounters, which connects to earlier debates around social cohesion and 'belonging' discussed earlier in this chapter. One of the central questions has been over the efficacy of the so-called 'contact' hypothesis; that is, that regular contact between people from different groups results in better understanding and less prejudice (cf. Allport 1954; Home Office 2001; Amin 2002; Valentine 2008). Markets, being part of the public realm with relative equality of access, could be seen as ideal spaces of inter-group contact. However, scholars who have focused on the value of 'contact' have argued that there is little evidence to suggest inter-group contact necessarily has positive results (see e.g. Amin 2002, Valentine 2008). While urban spaces do result in mundane interactions between different groups, it is difficult to read positive attitudes from apparently positive encounters.

As Valentine (2008) has argued, civility in public space is often based on social expectations of politeness that don't necessarily refer to a love of difference, and indeed can be a mask for more negative, ambivalent feelings ranging from indifference to outright hostility. Following Les Back, Amin (2002) has also argued that positive encounters can best be achieved in spaces where interaction is compulsory, so called 'micro publics', such as the workplace, sports clubs and arts projects. In more uncontrolled situations, he argues, it may be more fruitful to let people from different groups interact or not as they see fit, whilst supporting a public sphere in which an agonistic politics of constructive conflict and compromise can be pursued by all. Furthermore, it may be short-sighted to focus purely on encounters without an appreciation of the wider

context that shapes these interactions. From this perspective, the success or not of diversity in practice can be seen to be linked to the underlying social structures that shape interactions.

Arguably the multiplicity of the new immigrant diversity transforms this calculation, as the boundaries are no longer simply those of ethnicity and race/religion, or across a binary 'us' and 'them' divide. The real question is whether such a situation is fostering a new form of 'vernacular cosmopolitanism' (Kothari 2008), or whether encounters with diversity result in indifference, ambivalence, alienation, or friendship and love. More broadly, are there cross-cutting forms of conviviality that enable to people to engage across and even transcend categorical differences? Again, it might be important to look beyond the 'encounter' itself for factors that lead to more or less cosmopolitan attitude. Cosmopolitanism, the active appreciation of and openness cultural diversity, can take different forms, from an aesthetic appreciation of 'otherness' to the practical adoption of an attitude of openness to increase business, to a love of humanity rooted in a specific religious ethic. For Sierra Leoneans in London, their encounters with others in London are shaped in part by their cultural inheritance, as members of a West African society whose history has been shaped by migration, displacement and resettlement. Moving to London was often one of many such movements, and the competences developed by such movements may be redeployed in this new context. This inheritance is something to which I now turn.

2.8 Postcoloniality as Subjectivity

In focusing on the interplay in host and home country in forging diasporic identities, it is important at this point to remember that most contemporary African states, in common with many around the world, have themselves been shaped profoundly by their experience of colonialism and decolonisation, with continuing effects today on the culture and outlook of many of its citizens. In

West Africa, the political culture, educational systems and religious life often differ from country to country according to who was the former colonial power. While it is important not to overemphasise this fact, and to point out the effects of colonial rule were uneven and complex, as well as there being other powerful outside influences and connections outside of Western colonialism, notably Islam, the point I would like to make is that diasporic identities are bound up in the continuing effects of postcoloniality. This is an important corrective to a potentially over-simplistic and mechanistic binary opposition of home and host country in theorising diaspora. In Sierra Leonean context, this ongoing experience of postcoloniality is perhaps most evident in its language. While there are at 18 indigenous Sierra Leonean languages, the lingua franca of the country is Krio, an English creole language formed out of the interactions between the freed and recaptive slave settlers of the 19th century, spread through trade in the hinterland. The UK remains one of Sierra Leoneans most influential international partners, and its primary aid donor. More profoundly and painfully, much of Sierra Leone's recent history, including the Civil War that engulfed the country in the 1990s, can be read as a working out of the effects of its incorporation into the global political economy, and the contradictions of the system established by the colonial administration.

Thus, Sierra Leone's relationship to the UK is longstanding and cultural interchange is nothing new. Recent anthropological engagements with Sierra Leone have focused on the persistence of such history 'writ large', in peoples' daily rituals, practices and material lives. Rosalind Shaw's 'Memories of the Slave trade' (2002) focuses on how Temne ritual acts of divination contain within them, in their imagery and interpretation, residual social memories of pre-colonial violence associated with slavery. Accusations of human sacrifice and witchcraft, for example, are seen as bearing a moral logic that criticizes sudden and inexplicable accumulation of wealth as anti-social and evil, something that Shaw suggests reflect the effects of the trans-Atlantic trade where human lives really were 'sacrificed' to accumulate wealth. Similarly,

Mariane Ferme's (2001) luminous study 'The underneath of things' explores the same violent historical legacy embodied in everyday practices and material culture of a Mende village, where the location of settlements, and practices of mobility within extended families, and relationships between in-laws reflect a history of enslavement and warfare. In both of these accounts, subjectivity is shaped by social practices such as initiation, marriage, which themselves have been altered by broader scale social processes of displacement, slavery, migration and war. As such, the idea of 'identity' is seen to be something that is socially ascribed and imprinted with historical meaning. Shaw uses Bourdieu's notion of habitus (1990) to conceptualise how history is memorialised through social practice. Habitus can be defined as a set of dispositions based on one's social and historical position, which shape and constrain individual agency. In both of the above studies, the authors show how such structuring works in a far subtler way in the sometimes mechanistic reading of class/race/gender onto social behaviour and encounters.

Contemporary Sierra Leonean diasporic identity can be seen in similar ways, through the workings of memory, collective ritual, material culture as well as encounters with the transnational urban environment. I argue that the Sierra Leonean diasporic 'habitus' bears the imprints of previous engagements with postcolonial modernity, through education, religion, popular mass culture such as football, fashion and music, as well as a developing reflexive understanding of African-ness and cultural/national specificity. The ways in which Sierra Leoneans engage with and interpret diverse encounters in London are shaped by previous encounters with urban life, which in practice has often meant multiple displacements and migrations before arriving in the UK. For example, Alhaji, a market trader and one of my key informants, made several moves in his life before arriving in Southwark, spending much of his early life as a trader in Monrovia, Liberia, during the 1980s, where he became the official Headman of the Temne tribal community. His experience, as detailed in Chapter 4, reveals a longstanding culture of migration, shaped by the articulations between city

and country formed in the colonial era, in which ties of ethnicity and age group allowed people to find mutual support in situations of displacement. Elsewhere, the disciplinary environments of Freetown's mission schools such as Sierra Leone Grammar School and the American Wesleyan Methodist Hartford Academy for Girls created forms of social capital and distinction as well as nostalgia for many of the professionals who made the overseas community such an important constituency for the Sierra Leonean government. Much of the social life of the diaspora –its dinner-dances, church thanksgivings, outings, and beauty pageants - was based on cultural forms that were imported directly from Freetown itself, and which reflected that city's missionary heritage (I discuss some of this history in more detail in the chapter 3). Therefore it is impossible to look at Sierra Leonean diasporic identity in the UK without taking into account the postcolonial inheritance of the country. This shapes encounters with others, as 'difference' in the case of the British state and society is also in many ways deeply familiar, and the boundary between it and Sierra Leonean society is more permeable and ambivalent than home-host distinctions suggest.

When the analysis of subjectivity focuses on a situation of rupture, such as in migrants in London, what is interesting is how everyday practices become transformed again by the constraints, limitations and opportunities of life in a foreign culture. JoAnne D'Alisera (2004) discusses the transformations that occur for Sierra Leonean Muslims in Washington DC, whose contact with their home culture are dependent on media images, imported food, and carefully orchestrated social events in peoples home. The effort involved and the possibility of inauthenticity in reproducing Sierra Leone in the diaspora reinforce the ambivalent emotional content of this life.

In discussing the concept of diaspora in the Sierra Leonean context, I hope that I have made it clear that I am taking a flexible approach to this term, seeing it as both a political project on the part of the Sierra Leonean Government and its representative overseas, but also as a way of understanding identity that is

rooted in social relations and in history as well as immediate environment and the challenges of the present. In order to connect it to the preceding discussion on locality and place, I now move to a discussion of 'diaspora space' as first defined by the Feminist sociologist Avtar Brah (1996). I offer diaspora space as a concept that can offer an integrative frame to understanding the intersection of multiple histories and typologies of belonging in the same location.

2.9 'Diaspora Space' and the Sierra Leonean experience

In understanding Super-diverse encounters, I have chosen to engage with the concept of 'diaspora space', as articulated by the Feminist Sociologist Avtar Brah. Drawing on an understanding of identity as processual and contextualised, itself based on her own political and theoretical engagements with the experience of British Asians in the 1980s and 90s, Brah argues for an understanding of the diasporic that goes beyond focusing on specific communities that unwittingly reinforce understandings of 'us' and 'them'. diaspora space places its emphasis on *space*, which, as Doreen Massey (2005) has argued is the site of encounter with the other, and 'diaspora', defined as the specific historical transformations of colonization/decolonization, displacement, urban transformation that have brought people into contact across widely differing cultural and social settings. Diaspora space is space that has been (trans)formed by migration and cultural encounter, and Brah makes the point that London/England constitutes such a space. She defines it as:

> 'the intersectionality of diaspora, border, and dis/location
> as a point of confluence of economic, political, cultural, and
> psychic processes. It is where multiple subject positions are
> juxtaposed, contested, proclaimed or disavowed; where the
> permitted and the prohibited perpetually interrogate; and
> where the accepted and the transgressive imperceptibly
> mingle even while these syncretic forms may be disclaimed

in the name of purity and tradition' p.208

This is an understanding of space that resonates with previous discussions of the postcolonial, claiming the 'host' society as itself shaped by interactions with the colonial other. In this analysis, the development of London as a global city can be seen in a broader historical context of its position as imperial metropolis and mercantile centre over the centuries. The transformations of the city were fed themselves by the spread of European capital and culture across the world. West Africa was a key part of this process, from the Slave trade and legitimate trade that supplied the docks, to the evangelical revivals of the 18th and 19th centuries, itself a response to the industrial revolution and the conditions of the new urban working class, that led to the philanthropic enterprise to establish a colony in Sierra Leone in 1796. Diaspora space therefore takes full account of this history, challenging the temptation to see migration as a series of clashes between discontinuous 'cultures' to provide a viewpoint that has connection as the underlying basis of analysis.

In practice the concept of diaspora space focuses in on the particularities of peoples' lives as the bearers of this history. This is based on an understanding that all identity is contingent, multiplex and continually shaped by social structures and encounters with difference. It has the strength of having equal applicability both to members of the settled population and to 'diasporic' groups, highlighting the fact that those who appear settled have complex roots, and those who arrive from elsewhere are more intimately-connected to the place of origin that appearance would initially suggest. In looking at super-diversity, it is helpful to remember that the categorical differences that have become so multiplex in recent years are experienced and expressed as subjectivity by those concerned. Focusing on subjectivity allows for a more nuanced understanding of how people are negotiating diversity on a daily basis, and how peoples' identifications change over time and across different situations. This emphasis on everyday processes of entanglement highlights

how, in daily life, complex identities takes specific forms and meanings for those concerned. As Brah notes:

> 'similarities and differences across the different axes of differ-
> -entiation – class, racism, gender, sexuality and so on, - articulate
> and disarticulate in the Diaspora space, marking as well as being marked
> by the complex web of power'p209

In the Sierra Leonean case, the entanglements of life in London, encounters with the urban environment and with diverse others are shaped by peoples' own cultural heritage and experiences with diversity and otherness in the past, both in Sierra Leone and elsewhere, as well as the immediate circumstances of migration and settlement. London, and the British mode of life, are not unknown to many whose lives from an early age have been shaped by educational, religious and social institutions that continue to bear the mark of the colonial experience. For some, this experience has been highly advantageous, allowing them to progress in professional careers in teaching, law, and social work. For others, cultural resources, such as religious affiliation and practice, are brought into play in London, allowing access to broader communities of support.

The above discussion has focused on the continuing presence of history in the everyday practices of Sierra Leonean migrants in London, as well as the impact of engagement with the host society and the limitations and opportunities of life in the city on peoples' subjectivity. These can be described as 'migrant balancing acts' (Erdal and Oeppen 2013), the ways in which individuals navigate the twin pressures to engage with host and home societies.

Several important questions emerge from the above consideration of Sierra Leonean Community in the context of super-diversity in London:

1) How are individuals managing the twin pressures of incorporation from both the UK government and the Sierra Leonean state represented by the Sierra Leone High Commission?

2) How do these pressures reconcile with individual efforts to create liveable lives in the interstices of two cultural systems? What does this reveal about the relationship between integration and transnationalism for West Africans in the UK?

3) How does the specific cultural heritage of Sierra Leoneans shape their engagements both with each other and with those non-Sierra Leonean others they meet in London? How is this heritage itself being transformed by these encounters?

4) How do encounters with others and the experience of life in a diverse setting affect their relationship with their country of origin?

I aim to explore these questions in the remainder of this thesis.

2.10 Conclusion

To conclude, in this chapter I have sought to integrate scholarly debates around Diaspora and transnational connections on the one hand, and integration, locality and place on the other. I have argued that these two principles have a dialogical relationship with each other, and that this relationship can best be studied by focussing on subjectivity and the everyday lives of those caught in their confluence. I have argued that concepts like diaspora, belonging, and integration are distinctive because of their emotional/affective component, and it is important to distinguish between their use as tools of political mobilisation by states, and their descriptive value for elucidating the everyday lives of migrants. diaspora in particular is a heavily loaded term; however I argue that

it has a theoretical richness derived from 2 decades of research and debate from a variety of standpoints that allows it to shed important light on the relationship between people, history and place.

In the context of super-diversity, where multiple perspectives of people from a range of social positions and backgrounds come into contact, an understanding of encounters needs to draw on more that the immediate dynamics but also the histories of people and places that go into them. Thus I discussed the importance of a postcolonial perspective that took into account the longer-term entanglements between Sierra Leone and the UK in the context of postcoloniality and how these entanglements have shaped the cultural inheritance, or Habitus, of those migrating. Finally, I drew upon Avtar Brah's (1996) concept of diaspora space as a particularly useful integrative frame for reconciling these diverse conceptual materials, based as it is on a radically inclusive understanding of space as where 'one encounters the other' (cf. Massey 2005).

Settlement is always a form of place-making, the construction of somewhere where people can feel at home, or at least, secure in themselves. When such a home is to be shared with others, the potential exists for a range of responses in order to manage difference. The Philosopher Zygmunt Bauman, in writing about the encounter with the stranger, argues that the main emotional response to such encounters is one of ambivalence – the failure to categorize as either friend or foe, and the disruption of the known world by 'the man who comes today and stays tomorrow' (Simmel, 1908, p143 cited in Bauman 1991 p59). I would argue that ambivalence is also a function of the conflicted self, torn between the circumstances of encounter – shaped by historical forces beyond ones control and the encounter itself, in which difference presents the possibility of change.

Sierra Leoneans encounters in London are the latest twist on a long history of interactions with the outside world. The broad sweep of this history is covered in more detail in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Migration, urbanisation and creolisation: The postcolonial heritage of the Sierra Leonean diaspora

In the previous chapter, I reviewed existing literature on diasporas, exploring the growth of interest in 'super-diversity' and the creation of diasporic space as a place of flows and networks rather than stable, 'integrated' communities. In this chapter, I offer some background to the development of an African diasporic space in the UK. I will begin by detailing the history of Sierra Leonean migration, before discussing recent literature on so-called 'New' African diasporas, and the recent emergence of diaspora as an object of concern for African governments. In this overview I place special focus on Freetown, Sierra Leone's capital city, with the justification that, although the country's rural areas were by no means insulated from its incorporation into the global economy, the forms of life developed in this urban space have shaped many of the social practices that exist today in the diaspora, and that most, if not quite all, of my informants travelled to the UK either directly from or via Freetown and consider this place 'home'. The 'diaspora space' of Sierra Leone in London can be seen thus to have developed out of this particular urban inheritance, shaped by colonial rule and its aftermath. I then provide an overview of 'super-diversity' not just as a concept, but as a social practice, with specific reference to the borough of Southwark, where large numbers of my informants lived.

3.1 The Sierra Leonean diaspora in historical context

To understand the contemporary Sierra Leonean diaspora, it is first important to understand the historical processes which gave rise to it. While migration and mobility were – and continue to be - a feature of much of west Africa, I argue that the establishment of colonial rule, and the growth and development of Freetown as a particular kind of urban centre, i.e. one connected to a wider global imperial economy centred on Western Europe and London in particular, have played a particular role in shaping the forms in which contemporary international migration and settlement takes place. I do not suggest it is the

only process – indeed, other forms of urbanisation, urban imaginaries and routes of migration have also been important, particularly those associated with Islam, as well as specifically African trading geographies related to pre-colonial empires and kingdoms. However, in the context of this study, the particularity of London as the place of settlement means that some background on British colonialism in Sierra Leone is required.

As I have suggested, the migration and settlement of Africans outside of their places of origin was widespread before the arrival of Europeans. In West Africa, successive migrations caused by warfare, trade and political expansion resulted in regular encounters between 'indigenous' people and incoming strangers (e.g. Schildkrout 1978). Furthermore there are several nomadic and dispersed groups within the West African sub-region that share many of the characteristics of groups labelled diasporas. One example is the Fula, whose migration from central Africa westwards, as pastoralists and then as warriors during the 18th century jihads and then later still as traders and political refugees, resulted in their being widespread today in many of the countries of the region, including Sierra Leone (Rodney 1970, Banton, 1957). This is also the case with other trading and pastoralist groups, such as the Hausa, from northern Nigeria, the Mandingo, as well as artisanal fishing groups such as the Fante and Ewe of south-eastern Ghana. These groups spread along the coast and throughout the region, establishing enclave settlements and trading amongst local peoples. Furthermore, the ethnic makeup of Sierra Leone today is the result of a history of migration, settlement and displacement, from the North and East. The largest ethnic groups in the country today, the Mende and Temne, trace their ancestry to outside of the region, as part of the expansions of the Mande polity based in the Sahel (Rodney 1970). As a consequence of this migration, explicit customs and etiquette for the treatment of 'strangers' are widespread here as they are elsewhere in West Africa, through the allocation of specific town neighbourhoods or village land for their use. In Mende country in Southern Sierra Leone, it is customary for the chief to keep special houses for

the use of such strangers, in exchange for gift offerings and patronage. Such practices, more than arising from simple hospitality, are as much about managing potential threats to the community order posed by unattached strangers (Ferme 2001, Leach 1994).

The incorporation of the area now known as Sierra Leone into long-distance trade routes underpinned its development into a modern state. The Atlantic slave trade was an important part of the economy of coastal West Africa throughout the 18th century, precipitating wars, raiding and political instability, as well as wealth and political power for those states that were able to act as intermediaries to the trade. The continuing effect of this period of history on material culture and everyday practices in the region is explored in depth by much of the recent ethnography of the country, in particular Mariane Ferme's (2001) *The Underneath of Things*, and Rosalind Shaw's (2002) *Memories of the Slave Trade*, which I discussed in Chapter 2. Furthermore, Sierra Leone, or specifically the chief slave fort at Bunce Island on the mouth of the Sierra Leone river, was a staging post for the Atlantic trade - slaves taken from Sierra Leone were sent to the Caribbean and the southern states of the USA where they were explicitly valued for their rice cultivation skills. The plan by a group of British Abolitionists to found a colony for destitute freed slaves on the Sierra Leone peninsula, followed up by further settlers from Nova Scotia and rebel ex-slaves from Jamaica, added to an already complex picture.

Following the abolition of the Slave trade by Britain in 1808, the Royal Navy used Sierra Leone a convenient base to resettle the liberated cargoes of intercepted slave-ships that continued to ply the Atlantic. These Africans, originating from all along the West African coast, were settled in ethnic 'towns' and villages around the Sierra Leone peninsula, and mixed with remains of the original settlers to form their own society, known as the Krio. The Krios were a potent force in West Africa during the 19th Century. Educated in schools provided by the Church Mission Society and other missionary organisations,

the Krios were a Europeanised elite that identified strongly with Britain and European culture in opposition to the 'primitive' societies of the interior. Concentrated in Freetown, they were active in regional trade, developing networks that connected the city to other coastal hubs such as Lagos and Fernando Po, as well as missionary work, and provided a literate, anglicised workforce for the British colonial administration throughout the region. Education was prized highly, and wealthier trading families invested their money in sending their children to British universities and boarding schools. Fourah Bay College, established in 1827 as the first higher education institution in West Africa, was affiliated with Durham University in 1876 (Fyfe, 1962).

Throughout the 19th century, the British, from their base in Freetown, engaged in the so-called legitimate trade in forest products such as palm oil, timber, and piassava connected forest farms of the interior Sierra Leone to the merchant houses of London, Liverpool, and Amsterdam. Such trade provided opportunities for Krio businessmen, but also precipitated urban growth. The annexation of the hinterland to form the Sierra Leone Protectorate in 1896, and the construction of a railway through the forest belt, originally conceived as a way of protecting trade – threatened by a number of violent rebellions against colonial rule that became referred to as the 'Hut Tax' War - had the additional effect of facilitating mobility within the borders of the new territory. The railway led to the growth of towns such as Bo and Kenema. These provincial hubs provided many of the first secondary schools outside of Freetown, and were attended by the sons of chiefs, resulting in a new educated rural elite that would eventually form the first government of independent Sierra Leone under the SLPP in 1961 (Richards, 1996).

The annexation of the protectorate and the construction of the railway led to an increase in migration from the interior to Freetown. This influx of rural migrants worried the colonial administration. Between 1901 and 1947 the population of the city grew from 34,000 to 64,500 (Banton, 1957). In 1904 the

government instituted a system of administration whereby the 'native' population in the colony was ruled through elected headmen. This corresponded to the system of indirect rule through paramount chiefs that had prevailed in the countryside since 1896. Under this system, chiefs were given the authority to settle disputes, collect taxes, command labour and allocate land for farming. In the city, migrants were made to register with their particular tribal representatives, who had the authority to settle disputes and repatriate those who had left their home areas without permission. Such a system was troublesome to the colonial authorities, as it brought into relief the contradictions of their administration, where so called natives were excluded from civil law. Michael Banton's 1957 case study, *West African City*, focuses on this trend of tribal settlement in Freetown, which he describes as a 'problem of administration'. Tribal immigrants in the Colony posed a problem under the colonial legal framework as they technically were foreigners, the protectorate being seen as a distinct entity from that of Freetown and its environs, and the colonial authorities sought to deal with the situation by instituting a system of Headmen or Alimamys, analogous to the indirect rule of the hinterland. Alongside the 'tribal' associations, Banton (1957) notes the emergence of other groupings such as young men's dancing associations, mutual aid groups, church groups and trade unions, seeing them as new forms of association he marked as stages of transition towards a modern, urban, civil society. Many of these forms of associational life were still in existence during my stay in Sierra Leone, and some, like Sweissy Union, Peckham Base, and a variety of home-town and descendents associations, had established branches in London when I was there doing my fieldwork (see Chapter 5 for more details of this phenomenon). Meanwhile, the Krios jealously guarded their position as inheritors to the British missionaries' vision of enlightened, Christian, African modernity within the British Empire, and many regarded the Tribal population as illiterate savages.

Indirect rule, and the appointment of headmen and paramount chiefs by the colonial authorities, had a pernicious effect on the long term governance of the country. In his discussion of indirect rule in the countryside, Fanthorpe (2001) has argued that this system 'ossified' the existing importance of lineage membership in gaining access to local resources, and cemented the power of the chiefs at the expense of young men and 'strangers'. The manipulation of the chieftaincy became one of the key ways that Siaka Stevens cemented his control over the country during his single-party rule in the 1970s (Richards 1996). However, in the city, the system of tribal headmen was far less effective in controlling the movements of young migrants, and the emergence of unoccupied gangs of young men known popularly as 'rarray' boys became the source of some unease (Banton 1957). Interestingly, this period of history immediately before independence was remembered fondly by some of my older informants. In these days, Sierra Leone was connected to the wider world through membership of the British Empire, and as the British sought hurriedly to prepare the country for independence, many educated young people were able to travel to the UK to study. While internal migration was a source of anxiety for those in the central administration, the deepened articulation of the country into the global economy offered a source of opportunities and personal adventure for those able to take advantage of it.

This resentment was intensified by the steady increase in Protectorate immigration to Freetown, to engage in trade but also to find seasonal work at the docks and in construction. The First and Second World Wars resulted in an economic boom that drew many rural people to Freetown. Sierra Leonean recruits – drawn mostly from the Kono, Kuranko and Kissi peoples from the far North-eastern interior – fought for the British in Cameroon (WW1), Burma and North Africa (WW2). After the Second World War, the government attempted to repatriate these ex-servicemen to their home regions. However, many drifted back to Freetown, to swell the growing numbers of rural youth who had migrated there (Banton, 1957). Others headed for the diamond mines in

Yengema and Kono that were booming following the discovery of rich deposits of industrial-grade diamonds in the 1930s, or the Marampa iron ore mines, north of Freetown.

While Freetown in the 19th and early 20th centuries was a space of diversity, like many 'plural' societies it was rather hierarchical, increasingly so along lines of 'race'. At the time of Banton's book, Freetown society constituted a hierarchy, with Europeans at the top, Lebanese and Syrian businessmen existing as a clique just below them, then the Krio, themselves internally divided according to wealth and status, with the so-called 'Tribal' population. From the beginning of the 20th Century, the attitude of the British had shifted from general tolerance to increased irritation at the Krios' dominance and irritation at what they saw as their aping of British culture (Fyfe 1962). Like in many of their colonial possessions, the British often had greater affection for the so-called 'unspoilt' tribes of the interior, while those who became urban dwellers were often regarded as somehow degenerate (Mamdani 1996). This shift corresponded to the development of racialist theories in Europe at that time, as well as new medical developments about the role of physical proximity in the spread of tropical diseases. Malaria and Yellow Fever had decimated generations of colonial officials, and the identification of the anopheles mosquito as the source of infection, thought to live in moist, humid areas, resulted in the deliberate segregation of the 'white' population away from the low-lying neighbourhoods of Freetown. Social segregation was justified on health grounds, with the construction of a Hill Station for Europeans, away from the 'unsanitary' city centre and its inhabitants (Banton, 1957; Fyfe, 1962; Cohen, 1981). The Krios, at least some of them, responded in kind, by re-emphasising their African origins through the assumption of Yoruba or other African surnames and a shifting to more traditional forms of dress, or attempting to build political links with members of the protectorate elites. Others sought to bolster their position by investing even more heavily in education and real estate, or formed Masonic Lodges in which to develop their group solidarity (Cohen 1981). However, the

increased penetration of foreign business, notably from the growing Syrian and Lebanese community, undermined much of the Krios' trading power (Conteh-Morgan & Dixon Fyle, 1999), and the British decision to finally merge to colony and protectorate in anticipation of eventual independence finished them politically.

While the political and economic power of the Krios declined significantly over the course of the 20th century, culturally, through their central institutions of church and school, and through their delicate balancing of African cultural forms with European values, they can be seen as pioneers of a particular kind of middle class Sierra Leonean modern sensibility, with a strong emphasis on education, cultural sophistication and Christian faith. Thus, by the 1970s Barbara Harrell-Bond (1975) was able to speak of the Sierra Leonean 'Professional Class', which did not correspond to a particular ethnic group, but held many of these features in common with the Krio. This was also the group which, until the 1990s, were most likely to engage in international travel to the UK for education, holidays and work. Perhaps the most powerful influence of the Krio on Sierra Leonean culture has been through the Krio language, which operates as the lingua franca if not the de facto national language, used widely by members of every ethnic group as a useful medium of communication for trade and casual conversation.

Following independence in 1961, Sierra Leone underwent a brief period of relative stability that was followed by a lurch into authoritarian rule. The Sierra Leone Peoples' Party (SLPP), which had led the country at independence, was replaced in 1968 by the All Peoples Congress (APC), a broadly 'left' populist party that drew much of its support from the areas neglected by the development that had occurred along the line of rail in the South East, and from excluded rural youth. The APC stood in parliamentary elections in 1968 and won a narrow majority. Disputes over the results led to a brief takeover by the military, which handed power back to the APC and its leader Siaka Probyn

Stevens the following year. Once in power, Stevens became increasingly intolerant of opposition and, over the next few years, consolidated his power through co-optation, intimidation and elimination of his political opponents. As his grasp over the country became tighter, he made use of the country's diamond wealth to extend his neo-patrimonial control over the rest of the country, declaring a one-party state in 1978. Paul Richards (1996) describes this as the time of the 'shadow state', where the apparent functioning of government was a veneer beneath which an informal system of clientelism, secret deals, bribery and repression maintained the political status quo.

The decline of Yenguema and Marampa mines in the 1980s resulted in a shift towards the artisanal mining of alluvial diamonds in areas such as Kono and Kailahun in the Eastern hinterland, which drew young men from all over the country with the promise of easy riches. Having done away with the Sierra Leone Selection Trust, the national body that sought to maintain some control over the Diamond Trade, most of the wealth was siphoned off by Lebanese contractors, local chiefs and APC politicians, who used their position as a source of personal enrichment (Riddell and Harvey, 1972; Richards, 1996; Zack-Williams, 1995b). Some of these young people would provide willing recruits for the various armed factions during the Sierra Leonean Civil War that erupted in 1991.

The effects of neo-patrimonial rule under the Stevens regime included: a further marginalisation of traditional agriculture, a factor that was a major contributor to emigration to the cities, and the deepening resentment of those youth who were excluded from the neo-patrimonial system (Richards, 1996). On the economic front, the decision to host the 1980 Organisation of African Unity conference, despite the country's parlous finances, effectively bankrupted the country, resulting in a further decline in the ability of the state to function. Between 1980 and 1985, per capita income declined by 6 per cent annually, and

inflation was at 80% by the end of the decade (Conteh-Morgan and Dixon-Fyle, 1999).

3.2 The Civil War (1991 – 2002) and increased migration to the UK

The causes of the Sierra Leonean Civil war are still the subject of academic debate. The facts, however, are this; in 1991 a small force of armed dissidents and Liberian mercenaries calling themselves the Revolutionary United Front crossed the border from Liberia into Sierra Leone. Their stated aim was the overthrow of the APC regime, then-ruled by Stevens' successor, President Momoh. However, these objectives were abandoned and the RUF contented themselves with looting, extortion and the brutalisation of civilians. The Sierra Leone Army – under-resourced for several years - was sent to intervene, and became locked in a protracted jungle campaign with the rebels. In 1993 a group of junior officers who were dissatisfied with the lack of supplies and inadequate wages launched a coup d'état, forming a military Junta calling themselves the National Provisional Ruling Council. The junta paid the South African private security firm Executive Outcomes to prosecute the war against the rebels, achieving notable successes which led to the cease fire of 1995 and democratic elections. Following the elections, however, an alliance between RUF rebels and members of the military threatened to overwhelm the country again, as fighting returned with renewed brutality in 1997. By 1999, the government had all but lost control of the country, as rebels entered Freetown from the East and began the wholesale ransacking of the city centre, accompanied by widespread violence against civilians. Finally, the deployment of a small British force – ostensibly there to evacuate British nationals caught up in the fighting - was able to secure the capital city, and the government was re-instated. The RUF surrendered in 2001, and peace was formally declared the following year. Casualties in the war numbered approximately 50,000 people, with some 500,000 people displaced. Many of those fleeing the violence came to Freetown; the population of the city expanding to around 2 million people by 2002. Others

fled to neighbouring countries, including Guinea, and further afield to the Gambia and Ghana. Others were able to travel to the UK. The shocking nature of the violence caused widespread incomprehension and dispute amongst observers; however, the Civil War can be seen as the nadir of what constituted several decades of political decline (Keen 2002; Richards 1996).

3.3 The UK diaspora

A modest Sierra Leonean population already existed in the UK prior to the civil war. As mentioned above, the Krio elite held a strong attachment to Britain and sent their children to British Universities, while seafaring groups such as the Kru had established communities in the dockside areas of London and Liverpool by the early 20th century (Banton, 1955; Frost, 2002). Later studies confirm that for many of the professional elite, Britain was a regular destination for education, holiday and business during the 1970s (e.g. Harrell-Bond, 1975; Cohen, 1981). However, the Civil War greatly increased the population of Sierra Leoneans living in the UK. The UN estimates that some 2 million people were displaced by the violence, with up to 500,000 fleeing to other countries. Most of this latter group fled to neighbouring countries, in particular, where there were an estimated 83,130 in 2002. Figure 1 (below) illustrates the number of Asylum applications to the UK for people of Sierra Leonean origin since 1991. The peaks correspond with the period following the overthrow of the APC government by junior army officers in 1992, and the rebel assault on Freetown in 1999. Between 1991 and 2001, the official Sierra Leone-born population of the UK grew from 6280 to 16,972 (Born Abroad, 2008). Recent figures from the Office of National Statistics suggest this number has continued to rise, with approximately 22,000 Sierra Leoneans officially resident in the UK in 2008[2].

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[2] Sierra Leone diaspora network, personal communication 3/3/09: www.sldn.org.uk

Fig 1:UK Asylum Applications from Sierra Leonean Nationals 1992-2007 (total 12, 320)
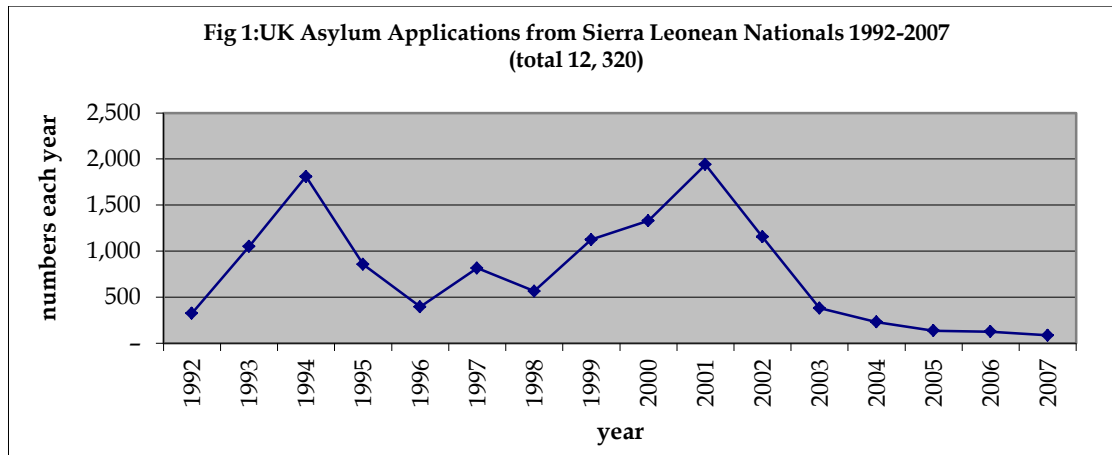
Of the 12,320 applications made in this period, 4,380 have been recorded as being granted Refugee Status, Exceptional/Discretionary Leave, or Humanitarian Protection[3] (Home Office, 2008). Those granted refugee status become eligible to apply for UK citizenship if they have been resident for 5 years. Since 1997 this has become increasingly popular: approximately 10,000 people of Sierra Leonean origin were granted British Citizenship over the last 11 years. The largest concentrations of Sierra Leoneans are found in London, particularly in areas of Peckham, Southwark and Bermondsey. The report describes small populations in the North West and East of England as most likely the result of refugee dispersals (Born Abroad, 2008).

Due to growing interest from the UK and Sierra Leone governments in mobilising the diaspora as a possible agent of Development, there have been some fresh attempts to understand the complexity of this population. Heath (2008) describes members of two Home Town Associations (HTAs) based in Southwark, South London, as follows:

'… many have been to University either in Sierra Leone or the UK,

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[3] Asylum and Immigration data reproduced courtesy of Home Office Statistics: Crown Copyright 2008: Data available online at www.homeoffice.gov.uk/rds. 'Humanitarian Protection; and 'Discretionary Leave' replaced 'Exceptional Leave' as categories of status in 2003. They refer to those who do not qualify for Refugee Status under the terms of the 1951 UN Convention or 1967 Protocol but who are judged to be at risk in their country of origin. People with HP or DLR are eligible to apply for indefinite leave to remain after 3 and 6 years resident in the UK, respectively (Home office, 2007).

some own land, some own alluvial diamond licences, and some are related, if remotely, to chiefly families, and many are related to each other… There are a few lawyers, doctors, accountant and teachers among them, but at least 70% of the UK members are health and social workers, or clerical staff in the social services. Most of the respondents described themselves as middle class in UK terms – but could also be described as part of SL's missing middle… whose absence continues to hamper the country's economic and political development'

(2008:xix)

While this is a description of a specific group, many of the features described can be found elsewhere in the recent literature. Rajkotia & Addy's (2008) survey of remittance activity between the UK and Sierra Leone found that the typical respondent was based in the South East of England, was educated to degree level, and employed in the professional sector. However, a look at the census data from 2001 shows there is also considerable diversity in education and employment amongst the 'official' Sierra Leone population (see Fig. 2 below).

Fig.2 Sierra Leoneans in Britain: Occupation by Sector (2001 census)

8 Plant and machine operators and assemblers 4%

9 Elementary occupations 17%

1 Legislators; senior officials and managers 9%

7 Crafts and related trades workers 2%

2 Professionals 12%

3 Technicians and associate professionals 16%

5 Service workers and shop and market sales workers 23%

4 Clerks 17%
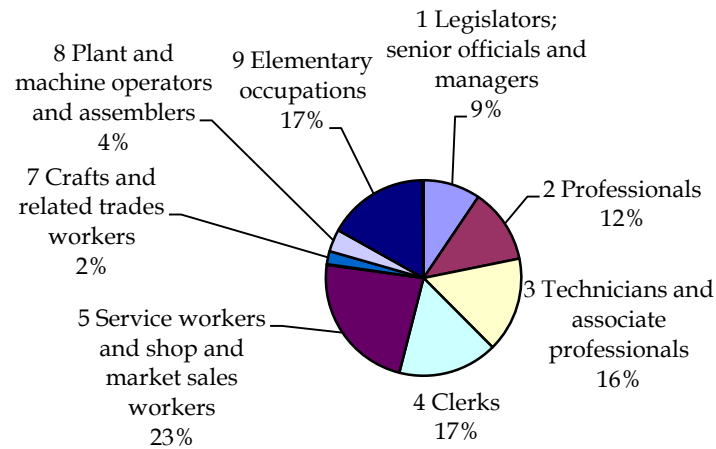
Jackson's (2008) essay to some extent confirms this. *The Shock of the New* follows a day in the life a young Kuranko man ('Small S.B.'), the nephew of one of Jackson's old informants who has moved to London to study accountancy. It vividly describes the large Sierra Leonean migrant community based in Peckham, with its African video-rental shops, greengrocers and Krio spoken in the streets[4]. The encounters described in this essay suggest some Sierra Leonean migrants are decidedly not elites, but are scraping a living working as security guards or selling pirated CDs, confronted by racism and intimidation by local gangs, and constantly afraid being caught by the police and deported.

While the civil war has been the primary cause for people leaving the country to come to Britain in the 1990s, they are by no means the only group present in London. I met people who had arrived as students or graduates in the 1980s; others who had retired in London after successful business careers in Sierra Leone's mining industry in the 1970s. One distinguished older lady had arrived

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[4] Jackson states how 'Sierra Leoneans referred to Peckham as Kru Town Road after an old quarter of Freetown…'(p69)

in the post-independence 1960s initially to study, and ended up getting a job for Barclays bank and never went back. Still others had arrived since the end of the conflict, to study, work, or rejoin family who had already arrived. Such diversity immediately began to blur the concept of Sierra Leonean, if not for those peoples' continuing identification with the country and culture of their birth and upbringing. Overall, it is possible to designate some rough 'groupings' into which members of the Sierra Leonean community fell. These are: The pre-war professional diaspora; those who arrived during the war through the asylum process; and those who arrived since the end of the war composed of a mixed group of students, economic migrants, and those joining family members. Of course, these groupings are purely heuristic – it is possible to find people who do not fall into these categories, such as musicians, aspirant politicians and members of the diplomatic service, workers for international NGOs, and others. The war embedded Sierra Leone in a 'problem economy' of international NGOs, academic institutions, agencies such as the UN and DFID, journalists and missionaries, as well as private businesses, mining companies, security contractors - all of whom had a vested interest in Sierra Leone and engaged in regular travel to and from the country. This constellation of interests overlaps with and form part of the broader Sierra Leone diaspora today.

In many respects, many of those living in London fit the designation of 'diaspora', defined by Cohen (1997) and others, as an expatriate group based around the shared commitment to an ancestral homeland. Some would even describe themselves using this term. The emergence of the diaspora as a social entity came about in the late 1990s, following the lead of several other African countries including Ghana in their attempts to reach out to those nationals who were living and working in the developed west. In 2003 the African Union went so far as to agree to include the global diaspora as a '6th region' of Africa, and the governments of a succession of African states, such as Rwanda, Ghana, and South Africa, have begun courting their expatriate communities by establishing human resource banks of qualified professionals, and organising homecoming

events and diplomatic missions to try to lure them back (Styan, 2007; Mohan 2008). In Sierra Leone, the trend towards engaging the diaspora began following the inauguration of President Ernest Bai Koroma in 2007. As part of the ongoing reconstruction of the country, a bundle of policies dubbed 'the Agenda for change' were introduced, focusing on strategic areas, such as investing in agriculture, mining and tourism, improving power generation and roads infrastructure, and improving basic health provision for the most vulnerable. Koroma established a Presidential Office for the Diaspora, with its own minister, and established a 'skills bank' which advertised jobs for suitable qualified Sierra Leonean professionals (Office of Diaspora Affairs 2013). The president also made a number of high profile visits to London and to the Sierra Leonean communities in the US, where he appealed directly for patriotic Sierra Leoneans to return home to join in the work of rebuilding their country (see e.g. Cocorioko 2013). As in Ghana, and in corroboration with the Heath's description above, the 'diaspora' was implicitly defined as middle class, educated professionals, such as those who had left the country in the 1980s and 1990s following the economic stagnation and had stayed as a result of the war. However, as I have indicated, they are by no means the only aspect of the Sierra Leonean community living in London.

Members of this group are themselves quite motivated in terms of their interest in Sierra Leone, maintaining social networks based on church and school affiliation, and a busy social calendar of church thanksgivings, dances and outings to the seaside. Internet messaging boards and Facebook groups devoted to news and comment about Sierra Leonean politics provide another forum for association. When I asked my friend Juma, a community worker at Southwark council, whether Sierra Leoneans in London tended to hang out together, his answer was an emphatic yes. However, as I spent time in London I became aware of a broader pattern of demographic de-concentration as those with the means to do so started moving out of the city to the suburbs. Alongside this was a recreation of some of the social divisions in Sierra Leone and Freetown in

particular, with a creolized middle class living in the West end of the city and the more 'rough' urban working class living in the East. This process was reflective of how class identity was reproduced after migration. This brings us to one of the key areas of interest for me in this study: that of how the particular social order at the site of settlement shapes the production of diaspora. An understanding of the local context is therefore required.

3.4 'super-diversity' in South London

'*It's like living in a third world country*'
Overheard conversation, Elephant and Castle, November 2011

The above quote, taken from my field notes, was an overheard comment from a young British man in his early twenties, who I took to be a student, to his parents as he dragged two suitcases through the underpass at the Elephant and Castle. It reflected more than just a an off-hand observation of the 'otherness' of the neighbourhood, with its large African population, but also reflected one of the other vectors of diversification occurring in many parts of the capital – that of middle-class settlement in a historically working class neighbourhood through processes of urban regeneration and gentrification.

In the last decade London has emerged as one of the world's most diverse urban centres. People of some 140 different nationalities, speaking different languages, with different religious practices and live and work in the city. London's diversity has become a central part of its international image. It was a key component of its successful bid to host the 2012 Olympics (Vertovec, 2007, Silk 2011), and has been celebrated by the capital's politicians and in the media. At the same time, such diversity has provoked anxiety, over questions of social cohesion and integration – with so many people from such diverse backgrounds, how will they all get along, and how will the institutions of

society respond to accommodate such a wide range of needs, for example in providing translation services?.

This concern has been reflected in new academic literature as well. As noted in chapter 2, 'super-diversity' is a term that has been coined to describe the new picture of immigrant settlement, of which London is a prime example (Vertovec, 2007). It refers to the diversification of the factors of immigrant diversity, as 'new, smaller, less organised, legally differentiated and non-citizen immigrant groups' transform the urban landscape. It aims to reflect more accurately the transformation that has taken place in the UK and other developed countries from a situation where ethnic diversity consisted of one or two established ethnic minority communities, often from former colonies, to one where a broad variety of nationalities and ethnic groups, often with no pre-existing tie to the host countries, are found living in the same place. Furthermore, alongside this broader ethnic/national diversity, a broader variety of factors of diversity such as legal status, labour market position, religion, and language that explode easy assumptions around 'community' and have the potential to generate new forms of association as well as prejudice. As Vertovec puts it in his seminal article:

> 'significant new conjunctions and interactions of variables have arisen through patterns of immigration to the UK over the past decade; their outcomes surpass the ways – in public discourse, policy debates, and academic literature – that we usually understand diversity' p1025

A new discourse and literature is therefore needed to grasp this new picture of diversity. The central claim of super-diversity studies is that the social life of cities like London can no longer be comfortably apprehended through a simple 'ethnic' or other single categorical lens. Such is the breadth of difference both within and across categories that a more nuanced approach is required, that

takes into fuller account the complexity both with and across lines of ethnicity, nationality and race. In this study I argue that one of the most promising elements of a super-diversity lens is this re-activation of a grounded, situational understanding of identity and inter-group relations. This argument has been made within feminist geography, critical race and urban studies in the last 20 years, in discussions of inter-sectionality (see e.g. Valentine, 2008, Jacobs and Fincher, 1998). A super-diversity lens has the potential to expand on this theoretical work by looking at real world situations of complex diversity where the vectors of differentiation include not simply the staple concerns of race, class, gender and sexuality, but legal status, migration cohort, religion, and profession. Furthermore, understanding super-diversity can be improved by taking a look at the role of institutions in forming identity and the relationship between categorical groupings. Like 'diaspora', 'diversity' as a term does not simply exist as a neutral conceptual tool used only by academic researchers; it has a social existence; it is employed by local governments, businesses, churches, and school with a particular set of social meanings that have particular consequences in the real world. The fact that diversity is seen as automatically 'good' by a particular strand of liberal opinion should not be accepted unproblematically.

Southwark, the site of my fieldwork, was a place in which the idea and reality of diversity was very much in evidence. Located on the south bank of the Thames, opposite the financial heart of the City of London, Southwark was a demographically mixed borough with a high rate of deprivation relative to the rest of the city. Its seeming popularity for the Sierra Leonean community seems to be based on the presence of large social housing estates, particularly in Walworth, Camberwell and Peckham, along with a significant amount of private rented accommodation. It also has a relatively large Black African population, composing some 16% of the total, or 39,350 people (London Borough of Southwark 2006; see also figure 2 below)

Figure 3: Ethnic Diversity in Southwark, 2006 data taken from
London Borough of Southwark (2006)

Bangladeshi 1%
White and black Caribbean 1%
White and Black African 1%
White and Asian 1%
Other Ethnic Group 1%
Other Mixed 1%
Other Asian 1%
Pakistani 0%
Chinese 2%
Indian 1%
Other Black 2%
White Irish 3%
White Other 8%
Black Caribbean 8%
Black African 16%
White British 52%
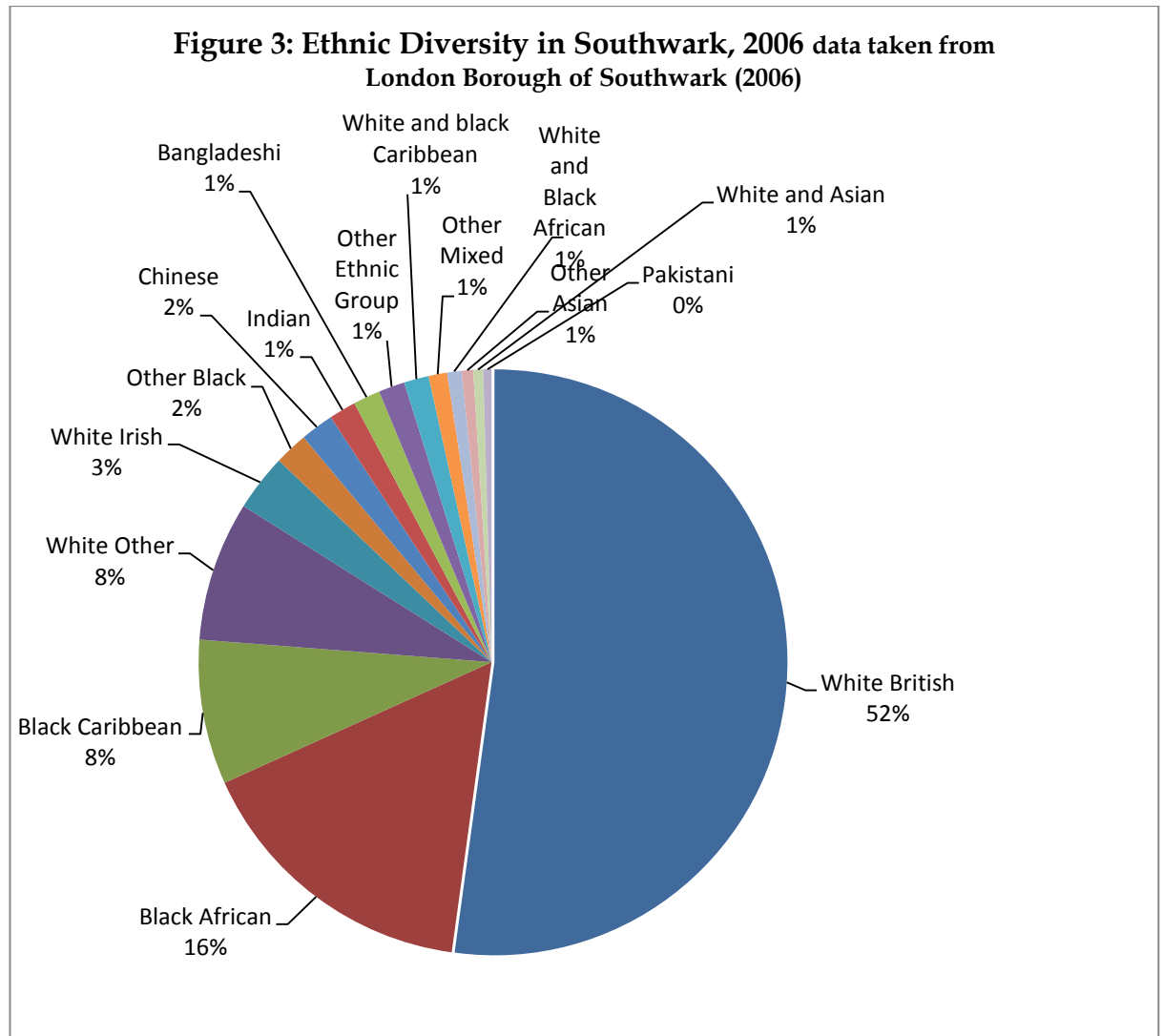
Southwark has started to capitalise on its diversity, with events such as the
Fiesta del Pueblo Latin American carnival, an annual event celebrating the Latin
American community. However, the term is also used elsewhere in official
literature, to refer to the new residential patterns created by the multi-million
pound urban regeneration projects. In Southwark this has meant the planned
demolition of formerly council maintained social housing estates and their
replacement by new developments emphasising mixed forms of tenure. At the
time of my fieldwork, the area around Elephant and Castle, a major road
junction and tube terminal, was undergoing a process of redevelopment, with
the demolition of the Heygate housing estate and several new apartment
complexes aimed at students and young professionals. My own

accommodation, a few blocks off the New Kent Road, was a shared house on one of the few remaining pre-war terraced rows. Private landlords had bought up much of the street, and those remaining council tenants, such as my next door neighbour, an elderly lady by the name of Dorothy, were fighting a battle to keep their homes. The coincidence of increased immigration with the destruction of the Heygate and the redevelopment of the area has been interpreted by some long-standing local residents in causal terms. As Ray, a market trader claimed to me early in my fieldwork, it was believed by some that 'They use these people', in order to run down the area so it can be bought out by private firms. This is explored in greater depth in Chapter 5.

Southwark is also associated with more established debates to do with youth criminality. South London has a negative image as a result of widely reported stories of youth gangs, knife crime and delinquency. Damilola Taylor, the school boy of Nigerian parentage who was stabbed by members of a local gang, had lived in Peckham – a plaque honouring his memory exists outside his former school. In August 2011 the area along the Walworth road, which was the central thoroughfare of my field site, was the site of rioting and looting by local people in response to similar disturbances elsewhere in the capital following the shooting by police of a young black man in north London. The riots, which affected business in Camberwell, Peckham and Walworth Road, provoked widespread outrage and hand-wringing by politicians and the media. Gang membership was proposed and later dismissed by media commentators as a cause of the disturbance, while attempts to label rioters as politically or class-oriented foundered on images of sheepish looking rioters walking off with shopping bags full of branded sportswear (BBC News, 2011). For my Sierra Leonean informants, the riots provoked a mixed response – bemusement as well as righteous indignation and the articulation of 'African values' in response to what was interpreted as a morally corrupt host society (see also McGregor 2008) .

These processes form the context in which many of my Sierra Leonean informants are living their lives. Race, class, gender, generation, legal status, ethnicity and nationality, and religion all frame their lives and shape their choices on a daily basis. How these different vectors of identification play into each other is the subject matter of my research.

3.5 Conclusion

In this chapter I have sought to provide some background to my analysis. I have described the history of Sierra Leone and its diaspora, aiming to provide an understanding of the cultural context of Sierra Leonean practices in London today. I have argued that the experience of colonialism and its aftermath have shaped the perspectives of Sierra Leoneans as they attempt to build lives for themselves in London. I have also provided a description of the current community, arguing that they constitute a more diverse grouping than assumed by some of the literature on diaspora and development, and some historical context to the interest of African states in involving their overseas populations in national development. Finally, I discussed some of the local context of the borough of Southwark, highlighting how this area itself is undergoing significant change, and that these changes, along with arrival of African and other migrants to the area in the 1990s, is being interpreted negatively by some local residents.

The complexity of this case raised here created a number of issues for me as I was preparing my research. In particular, as this chapter has shown, the relationship between Sierra Leone and the UK has a long history and I needed to be aware that my research inevitably formed a part of this history. My positionality in relation to this history, as well as some of the practical issues of researching a migrant community in South London are issues I consider in more depth in my next chapter.

Chapter 4: Fieldwork in a diverse setting: Methodological issues for conducting ethnography on a African community in South London

As discussed in previous chapters, this thesis seeks to explore how a Sierra Leonean diasporic subjectivity is being shaped by its position in the particular locality of super-diverse London. To do that requires a methodological frame that allows the researcher to be attentive to place, and to grasp complexity in everyday situations. Ethnography, as 'the detailed study of limited areas' has long been the method of choice for those interested in researching particular places; however it has been subject to much internal critique over the last 20 years in response to many of the changes that form the backdrop of this research – the disarticulation between culture and space, increasing mobility across borders, and a renewed emphasis on complex urban situations. The outcome of this critique has been the partial disavowal of the bounded field sites in favour of a focus on networks, flows, and mobilities. Research on super-diversity is similarly poised between a focus on particular networks (e.g. Meissner 2011), and a broader scale focus on interactions between different categorical groups (Wessendorf, 2010). In exploring the relationship between the different incorporative pressures and impulses of Sierra Leonean migrants on the level both of ideology and the everyday, the methodological approach I chose needed to be attentive to different scales, intimate and collective, local and transnational.

While ethnographic methods have traditionally focused on specific places, I argue that transformations of these places in the face of increased international mobility have provided new opportunities for ethnography, rather than undermining it. For example, such mobility brings into stark relief the constructed nature of place and locality, and the anxieties that come about from confrontation with the exotic 'other'. Ethnography has the advantage of being able to capture such simultaneity, relationality and context in social behaviour, as well as uncovering to a greater extent the 'emic', 'local' perspective through

its commitment to long term engagement with the field site. However, on a practical level, the use of ethnographic methods in an urban, transnational, super-diverse context does raise a number of issues that warrant discussion before proceeding: namely the dispersed, mobile nature of research informants, the amorphous boundaries that exist in urban ethnic communities, the related issue of methodological nationalism, and finally questions of the positionality of the researcher. These are the subjects I discuss in this chapter, firstly in general terms in relation to the broader literature, then in specific relation to my fieldwork.

4.1 Ethnography as a research method

As the 'detailed study of limited areas', Ethnography provides a highly useful method for exploring how 'local' places are shaped and made meaningful by those who inhabit them (Herbert, 2000; Lees, 2002, Davies 2009). Broadly speaking, ethnographic fieldwork can be characterised as long-term empirical research in particular social environment, based on the development of personal relationships by the fieldwork so as to obtain a 'deep' understanding of the culture. As traditionally conceived, it depends upon the physical presence of the fieldworker, who, through participation in the everyday life of a defined community over an extended period of time, is forced to abandon his or her cultural assumptions and develop a degree of competency and understanding in another culture. The ethnographer is thus a 'professional stranger' who turns his or her own social being into the key instrument of obtaining knowledge (Hammersley and Atkinson, 1983). Rabinow (1977: 154) describes the fieldwork encounter as 'a process of intersubjective construction of liminal modes of communication', whereby the ethnographer and informant work together to construct a working knowledge of a particular cultural milieu.

4.2 Fieldwork in the City

Conducting ethnographic fieldwork in an urban context poses particular problems for researchers. One of the principal challenges is the fact that the

target population is usually highly dispersed and mobile, only meeting together – if at all - at specific times and in specific places, making in very difficult to observe the daily round of events (Sanjek 1978). This problem is only intensified in today's trans-nationalised, globalised urban spaces. The ethnographer must therefore find ways of defining his or her target population and locating and accessing potential informants that often go beyond the simple 'deep dwelling' in a single defined place that has constituted most non-urban ethnographic research. What this inevitably brings up is a different understanding of place and place-making in the urban context, that is dependent on the access to physical capital – buildings and neighbourhoods - and the financial resources to claim and maintain them. This connection between place and the wider urban economy means that ethnographies of the city need to find a way to refer to these wider processes.

In the ethnographic literature on African transmigration, Stoller (2002), and D'Alisera (2004) offer distinct solutions to the challenge of doing fieldwork in contemporary urban spaces. In his fascinating and wide-ranging study of West African traders in New York City, Paul Stoller used a strategy of deliberate low-intensity, 'unassuming' participation in the field, periodically 'hanging out' at the 125th street market in Harlem. From initial contact in the clearly defined public space of the market, he was eventually able to gain access to more private aspects of his informants' lives:

> 'I told the traders from the start that I was an anthropologist
> who had spent a lot of time in Niger and I gave them
> examples of my work. I told them I wanted to continue my
> visits and eventually write a book about their experiences in
> New York City… After two years of low key interactions,
> one of the traders invited me to his apartment. After three
> years of intermittent fieldwork, an older trader told me how
> he treated his compatriots with herbal medicines… These of

course, are far from extraordinary field activities. I am
convinced, however, that had I adopted a less open-ended
and more intensive field approach the results would have
been more limited.' (2002: 26)

Stoller possessed several advantages that enabled him to take this approach. Firstly, he had had long experience in the traders' own culture having previously lived for 7 years in Niger; he was fluent in Songhay; and he was already safely ensconced in an academic position that gave him the time to pursue this low-intensity form of fieldwork. In contrast to this, JoAnne D'Alisera's experience in locating her research population took a different angle. After being forced to abort her original research in the typical anthropological site of a village in Northern Sierra Leone because of the outbreak of civil war, she found herself attempting an alternative project looking at Sierra Leonean migrants in Washington DC. In contrast to Stoller's place-based approach she was able to utilise her existing social networks at her university to access the expatriate Sierra Leonean population. Through following these contacts, she eventually identified the Islamic Centre in Washington DC as a key site of her fieldwork. Like Stoller, she was able to utilise previous experience in Sierra Leone – an earlier pilot study – and her cultural knowledge of Islam to gain the trust and goodwill of her informants. This demonstration of good faith allowed her to make friends within the Islamic centre; building on these relationships, she gained access to peoples working lives, accompanying them as they drove taxi-cabs or sold kosher hotdogs on the streets of Washington.

In different ways, Stoller and D'Alisera utilise the mutually constituting nature of places and networks to gain access and unfold the complexity of their informants' lives. Stoller was lucky in that his target population, although mobile, were visible and grounded in a particular place. He was able to forge relationships in this place that allowed him to explore the far-reaching social

networks the traders used to conduct their business. D'Alisera had a particular feature of Sierra Leonean life that she was interested in – Islam – that she was able to follow along her existing social networks that eventually led her to the Islamic centre, which led her again to a wider array of networks. These examples provide a useful model of how to make use of the complexity inherent in migrant social networks to construct a sample that best responds to one's research question.

A further challenge to urban ethnography is to adequately account for the specificity of the urban context. Eames and Goode (1977) distinguish between Anthropology *in* the City, that merely studies the culture of a group who happen to live in an urban environment, and Anthropology *of* the city. The latter takes the urban as a key variable in the analysis. Site selection becomes especially important in this case, as it must correspond to a research design that foregrounds the role of place in the social life of a particular group. In practice this involves awareness of broader urban processes and events that impact on the particular group in question, and their response to it. As my research question concerns the role of locality, this was something that I had to keep in mind as I was conducting fieldwork. The relationship between the broader urban context and the specifics of the community I am studying raises issues of how to delineate the boundaries of the field, especially as urban settings are often highly dynamic. Vertovec, in setting out his agenda for studying super-diversity, has argued in favour of a 'revitalised situational approach', based on pioneering urban anthropological approach of the Manchester school in the late 1950s. This approach utilises a frame whereby a particular practice, event or behaviour is analysed at different spatial scales, firstly looking at the *set* of events, the *situation* or meanings applied these activities by those involved, and finally the *setting*, or structural context in which the events occur (Vertovec 2008, p10) in order to place it in context and show how it is influenced by wider forces. This has the advantage of being both systematic and nuanced, allowing for ethnographic detail as well as broader social analysis.

An alternative response to the exigencies of conducting fieldwork in an era of globalisation is Marcus' (1995) work on multi-sited ethnography. This approach seeks to distinguish itself from situational approach outlined above, by calling for the use of the creative juxtaposition of multiple sites, in order to 'map' ethnographically and theoretically a section of the global political economy. Thus it refuses to draw a distinction between the ethnographic 'action' and the broader context, instead using the ethnographic method itself as a theorising tool. This kind of approach has been utilised in other disciplines, such as Cindy Katz's (2001) work on 'topographies of power' in critical geography, as well as Glazer and Strauss' (1967) grounded theory, where theory emerges from the accumulation and comparison of data over time. In terms of the issues described above, the value of a multi-site approach is it allows site selection to emerge from the fieldwork process, working from initial contacts. The disadvantage of this approach is a tendency toward excessive complexity, as well as the potential subordinating of the perspectives of research subjects to a broader thematic or theoretical purpose that bears little resemblance to their daily lives. In practice, both these approaches could be utilised to allow for a more balanced view that allows for both flexibility across space as well as providing relevant context at different analytical scales.

In my case, I did not have the advantage of several years' experience in Sierra Leone to allow me to move easily into close confidence with my informants. In many respects my position was similar to that of D'Alisera (2004) – a junior researcher who had to prove one's sincerity and intentions. I was able to remedy this issue somewhat with the chance to take 5 months language training in Sierra Leone, which I undertook in the first half of 2010. This experience, in which I lived in Freetown and spent long periods of time making friends and hanging out in the local neighbourhood, as well as taking formal Krio language classes, gave me a vital sense of what life was like in the city, where, it emerged, many of my London informants hailed from. Knowledge of

the geography of the city, an appreciation of the local cuisine and street life, and an understanding of many of the problems facing Sierra Leoneans on a daily basis – electricity shortages, unemployment, dilapidated or non-functioning public services, and widespread poverty – gave me an invaluable frame of reference for when I eventually arrived in London. I was also able to take time to visit the countryside, and get an appreciation of the difference between urban and rural life, as well as the persistent damage caused by the civil war.

When it came to undertaking my fieldwork, I did not take an explicitly multi-sited approach as advocated by Marcus (1995). Rather I followed a similar methodology to D'Alisera, working through existing contacts in London to identify three key sites of analysis – the market, the mosque and the multiple spaces of the 50th Anniversary of independence. During the first three months I spent much of my initial time at the market, as it was easily accessible to me from my house, and the public nature of the space made it easy for me to hang out. However, as things progressed, I found it necessary to expand to multiple sites, partly to avoid wearing out my informants but also because it enabled me to contextualise the information I gathered from each site. I also utilised some of Stoller's approach of regular light 'hanging out' with friends on the street and at Sierra Leonean nightspots, where my previous experience in the country enabled me to more easily develop relationships with people. I discuss the nature of these relationships later in this chapter.

4.3 Defining boundaries

A related issue to the problem of locating one's research informants in an urban setting is the problem of defining analytical boundaries around a research population that is both mobile and heterogenous. This problem arises from the basic principles of the ethnographic approach itself. Ethnography has a tendency to draw boundaries and locate communities, due to the emphasis placed on dwelling in place over a long period of time. As a result, the

processes by which a place is symbolically constructed as local can often be ignored. According to Appadurai, ethnographers are thus:

> 'drawn into the very localization they seek to document… most ethnographic descriptions have taken locality as ground not figure, recognizing neither its fragility nor its ethos as a property of social life. This produces an unproblematized collaboration with the sense of inertia on which locality, as a structure of feeling, centrally relies' (1997: p182)

Locality can be seen as a synonym of belonging, as never 'natural', but always the product of symbolic action, requiring constant re-emphasis. This is visible in the studies of the politics of landscape (Mitchell, 2003; Trudeau 2006) the apparent naturalness of landscapes masking the social relations and struggles over belonging that constitute them. As mentioned, the construction of locality in an urban setting is rendered even more problematic as it requires access to physical capital that allows for the production of spaces that create a sense of belonging and ownership. For migrant groups, this can be a struggle and the basis of much of their daily activities.

Disputes over the meanings of place and the relative belonging of different groups come to the fore in ongoing urban regeneration projects and debates about so-called 'gentrification', most famously in London's docklands (Jacobs, 1996). Therefore it is necessary to examine the various processes by which locality is produced, proclaimed and delimited. In South East London, the Sierra Leonean community has been able to claim a measure of belonging and legitimacy through both weight of numbers, length of time and also through the development of relationships with the local authorities and wider population. These processes have allowed them to carve out a space for themselves in Southwark. However I needed to resist the tendency to naturalize this relationship to place, partly because it still remained contested by some in

the wider population, but also that many Sierra Leoneans themselves were resisting such an affiliation for their own reasons. Place and locatedness was an area of continuing upheaval and transformation, and I had to remain attentive to these transformations throughout my project.

4.4 Methodological Nationalism

Methodological nationalism refers to the reification of the nation state by the social sciences. It occurs through various means, often by un-problematised adoption of national groupings as units of analysis, but also through the emphasis on international migration over other forms of mobility (Wimmer and Glick Schiller, 2003;). In chapter 3 I attempted to highlight how a 'Sierra Leonean' national identity has been produced by migration, often precipitated by acts of violence, including the slave trade, and the imposition of British colonial rule. Furthermore, the establishment of the Sierra Leonean nation-state is still in many ways an ongoing process after the upheaval of the civil war. Many studies of 'diaspora' often proceed un-problematically on the basis of national groupings. As some recent studies have argued, diasporas are not 'natural' phenomena but political projects based on the idea of collective belonging to a particular place, or 'homeland' (Brubaker, 2005; Kleist, 2008; Axel 2004). Like national and ethnic narratives of identity, diaspora narratives are structured by ways of remembering and forgetting, of inclusion and exclusion (Yeoh, 2003). In my case, the only way I could minimise the tendency towards methodological nationalism was to acknowledge it directly, bringing it centre-stage to show how it is constituted in everyday practices. The value of a place-based methodology is that allows one to explore how these processes are grounded in particular spaces, and how the use of such spaces reflect the negotiations, conflicts and exclusions that constitute them. As I discuss in more detail in Chapter 6, national identity and the forging of a national diasporic identity is a contested process, with different sections of the community appropriating narratives of nationhood for different purposes.

4.5 Locating the Researcher: Issues of Positionality

During my preparation for my fieldwork, one area that I was conscious would be problematic was the question of positionality – that is, the aspects of my social and economic position vis-a-vis my research project that would shape my perspective and behaviour in the field. In particular, I was conscious of a fair amount of cultural baggage around my relationship to Africa and my interest in it as a subject of research. Thus I tried to reflect not only my personal experiences around my research subject but also understand the history of European academic engagement with the continent. This lead me to engage literature on postcoloniality as well as the history of British colonial rule in Sierra Leone. Africa has been the object of the European gaze for a long time, even, as Mudimbe (1988) argues, its unwilling product. European colonial representations of Africa since the 18th century have circulated around the related themes of savagery, unchecked desire, childishness, and irrationality. These themes have served to reinforce a White, Western sense of self as civilised, rational, and modern, creating an opposition that itself masks considerable ambiguity and desire (Bhabha, 1994; Mbembe 2001). Such stereotyping does not necessarily have to be negative; it can manifest itself in ideas of the noble savage, the entertainer, the uninhibited, 'happy' native. All the same, such accounts reinforce racial categories of difference that contribute to wider social regimes of exclusion and violence.

I spent time reflecting on my personal relationship to Africa, I was conscious that it had been shaped in part by a media counter-narrative that had been reacting to the imagery of the continent as an abject space of famine, poverty and war. This itself had been a feature of my childhood, with events such as the Ethiopian famine and Live Aid creating the image of Africa as a place that the privileged west needed to think about and help through charitable donation. In reaction to this, I remember watching a BBC documentary that sought to portray 'the positive side of Africa', its vibrant everyday culture and history,

and this, along with a surge in popularity of African music – in which I participated - during the early 2000s, caught my imagination. Both of these factors influence my decision to study International Development as an undergraduate. While I have long regarded my love of black music as an overwhelmingly positive thing, it therefore should not be seen as unproblematic. Rather it contains aspects of the middle-class, liberal Western tendency to celebrate and romanticize 'the other', to project onto it one's own repressed desires. In many ways it could be seen as going too far in the opposite direction. During my visit to Sierra Leone in 2010, my enthusiasm for being in West Africa was tempered by the very obvious poverty and dilapidation of Freetown, and the deforestation that had scarred much of the countryside. In *Global Shadows* (2006) James Ferguson makes the point that an enthusiasm for culture can sometimes lead rich outsiders into the trap of culturalising what is in fact highly material poverty and deprivation. During my stay in Sierra Leone, we visited Banana Island, a sleepy place off the coast of the Freetown peninsula where an ecotourism lodge had been set up by a Peace Corps volunteer. Many of the houses on the island were traditional Krio clapboards, with raised roofs to allow air to circulate, and to my eyes had a dilapidated charm. One morning when we were preparing to go for a hike across the island, we passed one such house. The owner, an old man, came up to us and pointed at the house. 'See how poor we live!' he said.

In reflecting on my personal experiences in relation to Africa I can see that there may have been a tendency in me to romanticise and exoticise – in a positive way – the cultural attributes of Africans that might lead me to being somewhat uncritical. During my fieldwork I did have a generally positive attitude to my informant's lives and activities. The choices of my field sites reflected this bias to a degree, being generally places I found 'exotic' and exciting – particularly the colour of the market and the exuberant services at the Methodist Church. However once I left the field I believe I was able to exercise a clearer critical eye based on physical and emotional distance.

While the topic of my research was the Sierra Leonean diaspora, London as a field site had a particular importance in my research, as I described in Chapter 2. This social setting was broadly familiar to me as someone who had grown up in the UK, although I had never lived in London previously. What I had to come to terms with were my class-based attitudes to the city, particular a poorer part of South London where I had decided to live. The process of my moving to and getting settled in London in particular –locating a place to live, dealing with issues of isolation and stress, incorporating fieldwork into a workable routine - was very useful in allowing me to reflect on how belonging is differently achieved. My decision not to live with a Sierra Leonean family but to rent a room in a shared house with a group of young professionals more or less within my social background was made with an view to minimising stress, giving myself some space to reflect, as well as to avoid being too closely associated with one person or family and so maintain neutrality. On reflection this might have reduced my opportunities to experience private life within the Sierra Leonean population. However, it also highlighted issues that offered insight into my project; my rented accommodation for much of my research period was on a street that was in the process of being bought up by a range of private landlords who wanted to let their properties to the middle-class professional incomers also targeted by the redevelopment of Elephant and Castle. There were still a few publicly-housed residents – including my next door neighbour - who were resisting being moved on. It also made me reflect more on my own class anxieties around urban space. The Heygate housing estate, referred to in the introduction, was at the end of my road and was in the process of being demolished while I was living in the area. One of my flatmates, a police officer called Neil, described to me how the area 'used to be a shithole' but since the demolition things had 'gotten better'.

Ethnography has been traditionally based on the opposition between two idealised places: 'the field', where data is recorded, and 'the academy', where the data is analysed, connected to wider theoretical questions, and written up. Gupta and Ferguson (1992; 1997) have criticised this cognitive separation of the field and the academy, as well as the implicit equation of 'the field' with the exotic, non-western, and remote, arguing that it amounts to the 'spatialization of difference', underscoring a colonial world picture that places the modern West at the centre and obscuring the way marginality and remoteness are constructed. My decision to remain in my cultural comfort zone when I was not in 'the field' may have inadvertently maintained this opposition of white middle class 'normality' with the exotic spaces in which my Sierra Leonean informants lived. In reality, the 'normal' house that I was living in was implicated in broader processes of social change that were affecting the lives of everyone I spoke to in the area. I discuss this in more detail in chapter 5.

As expected, my position as a white British researcher also had an impact on my relationships in the field. While I was able to narrow the social distance between myself and my informants somewhat through visiting Sierra Leone and learning Krio, I remained an ambiguous figure, a guest and a stranger whose cultural understanding was a source of amusement and surprise. Other people tried to position me according to their previous experience of foreigners with an interest in Sierra Leone. One person, a young man who had claimed refugee assistance at the end of the war, assumed that I was a soldier, reflecting no doubt his experience of the British Army contingent of IMATT (International Military Assistance and Training Team), present in Freetown during much of the 1990s, while Granddad Sesay, regularly referred to his encounter with a Peace Corps Volunteer on a bus in the Northern province 'He could even speak the deep Limba' (a local language spoken in the North East of the country) – I was unsure whether this was meant to be a favourable comparison or whether he was trying to cast aspersions on my language skills. Another friend tried to encourage me to go into business with them, assuming that as a Westerner I

would be interested in investing in the agricultural sector. These roles reflected the white western presence in Sierra Leone to which I was a participant. As Edward Said's argues in *Orientalism*, (1978) Western scholars cannot ignore 'the main circumstances of [their] actuality: that [they] come up against the orient as a European or American first, as an individual second' (p11). This retains its relevance when applied to Africa.

I was often referred to as the representative of my society, and quizzed on the validity of such concepts such as child rights, the welfare state, the kings' English, and the monarchy. Colonialism, and Sierra Leone's colonial inheritance was a frequent topic, and my position as assumed apologist for British rule was made clear. Non-Sierra Leoneans made similar assumptions of me. One regular interlocutor, a British market trader, would regularly make veiled or occasionally explicit comments to me about the non-white pedestrians filling the street, while attempting to gain my assent; 'you know what I'm talking about don't you'. My reluctance to agree with his stance moved him to consider my class background. 'You university people, I mean this with no disrespect but you're living in a dream world most of the time. You wanna come down here and see what it's really like'. Similarly, just as I was about to start my interview with the leader of the market trader's association, I was deftly put in my place, when the older gentleman remarked that I'd left my wallet on the table of the cafe – even though we were tucked in the corner, and no one was paying any notice of us. 'You'd better put that away. This isn't Kensington you know'. My position in Walworth was viewed as similar to other middle class incomers looking for a touch of the exotic.

In terms of my positionality, my research was also shaped by West African conventions as to the division of the sexes. My closest friends and most reliable informants were those similar to myself – young, unattached men who were relatively low on the status hierarchy, or 'gatekeepers' whose involvement in local government or international NGO institutions placed them closer to me culturally. To older men and women, such as Nafi and her father, I was

regarded as a benign anomaly, often treated as a 'boy'. 'Stranger' is a specific category in Sierra Leonean society with particular conventions regarding their treatment. Hospitality towards strangers was seen as a positive national characteristic, although as I was aware, such an attitude was as much a means of fixing and controlling a potentially disruptive alien element as it was an act of generosity (cf. Ferme, 2001). Thus I was treated hospitably but also kept in my place as an outsider.

My Britishness – with its colonial associations - was often celebrated but I was also taken to task and quizzed about aspects of my culture that were seen as problematic. Grandad Sesay would refuse to be impressed by language skills, regularly referring to my Krio as 'not bad', comparing it to the multi-lingualism of a Peace Corps volunteer he had met as a youth and ask when I would be going back to Sierra Leone to really get it properly. Mohamed was generally critical when I made a mistake with my language. Alhaji Conteh, the market trader referred to as 'Chief' was guarded, asking to see my student ID before agreeing to an interview. A joke that was used occasionally was that I either did work or was going to work for the Home Office following my research, and my understanding Krio and my research was going to allow me to better identify those deemed necessary to be deported. Ultimately, I was largely accepted and treated well, but I was made aware of the responsibility of my position. As one gentleman said to me, soon after the London riots had many of my informants decrying the hypocrisy and moral decay of the Imperial motherland –

> '...You people went over to Sierra Leone, took our gold, our diamonds for the queen of England's crown, she is sitting there in Buckingham palace doing nothing… now there was also Industrial Revolution, we came here to work for you, and pay for again with our taxes. Well, I hope you won't be biased. Please. You have tasted our potato leaf, our crain-crain (vegetable green popular in stews), our groundnut soup, so please do not be biased!' (field notes excerpt, Camberwell road, Tuesday 10th August 2011)

Referring to my experience in Sierra Leone, I was partially incorporated but still potentially dangerous, 'biased' as a result of my colonial heritage. While my positionality was heavily loaded by this historical and class-based ascription, I found that on many occasions it lead to valuable insights including some of those detailed above.

The point of all this – hopefully not too self-indulgent – rumination on my personal relationship with Africa is to uncover some of the ways in which my research may have been shaped by my own cultural and political biases. Haraway (1988) has argued strongly that the practice of objectivity that ignores the situatedness of the researcher amounts to a 'God trick'; a false perspective that claims to 'see everything from nowhere'. The alternative is not relativism, which similarly obscures the researcher, but the 'passionate detachment' of reflexivity. Reflexivity acknowledges the position of the researcher in the landscape, and uses it as a legitimate base for constructing knowledge that is necessarily partial, but can contribute to a more equal conversation about the social world (Rose, 1997). Such a position demands a commitment to dialogue, of taking multiple perspectives to see more clearly.

4.6 Issues of ethics and representation

The above question of positionality places my research in its broader context of the political and social relations connecting Sierra Leone, West Africa, London, Sussex University and British academia in general. Having revealed some of the situatedness of my research project, I was left with the ethical questions of what I intended to do with my research, how I would protect my informants from harm arising from the conduct of my ethnography and its eventual publication as a PhD thesis and how if at all I could repay those who I would come into contact with. Ethnographic fieldwork is, fundamentally, based on the face-to-face encounter between the ethnographer and his or her informant, grounded in the social world. This encounter is an intersubjective, liminal space of communication, albeit sometimes haphazard, where knowledge about the

social world is produced across the lines of difference (Rabinow, 1977; Benson & O'Neill, 2007). Such intimacy demands that ethnographers consider closely the ethical basis of their research – intimacy requires trust, which is all too easily betrayed.

At the outset of my research, therefore, I was concerned with being rigorously reflexive, and being careful to ask permission from those who I wanted to interview, offering anonymity and avoiding bringing up subjects – such as legal status - that might put my informants in danger or compromise their lives in London. I intended to be absolutely clear about my role and intentions in doing research, and allow people the right not to participate, and to withhold information that they feel will leave them compromised. The growing body of research on African migration to Europe in many ways reflects the considerable anxiety with which they have been received by European states. Much of this research has sought to challenge dominant racist misapprehensions about African migrants (e.g. Bakewell, 2008; de Haas, 2006). Yet these anxieties, reflected in the narrowing of legal pathways to entry in the UK, made it likely that I could encounter individuals whose legality of residence in the UK may be in question. Given that I was interested in issues of belonging and integration, such issues could have conceivably come up during my project. However, I made the decision not to pursue these lines of inquiry in the interests of my informants, as well as to compromise the trust I hoped to develop. As previously mentioned, one of the assumptions made of me – and jokingly expressed - by several of my informants was that I either already worked for or was planning to work for the Home Office, and my trip to Sierra Leone and learning of Krio was the behaviour of a spy. I did my best to reassure people and used my University ID card as proof of my benign intentions.

However, the fluid nature of ethnographic fieldwork often made it difficult to achieve full consent from everyone I spoke to. For example I went to a number of events associated with the 50th Anniversary of Independence in which I was

a member of the audience, and with my note taking I was easily taken to be a journalist. As many of these events were impromptu, it would have been impractical to ask the organisers for formal permission beforehand. In the end, I tried to be as up-front as possible with people about what I was doing there, and treat the information I gathered with care. Despite this, I did encounter a number of 'grey areas' in which the data I was gathering may have placed the person concerned in an unflattering light. For example, in Chapter 5, I describe a number of British market traders who used veiled racist language when describing the African immigrants who had settled in the local area. In this case, the informants in question were clear about my intentions and I took the opportunity to ask if I could include our conversations in my thesis. They were happy for this to be so – their view of me as a naive University type who didn't understand the real world meant that they saw themselves as educating me, which indeed they were. Nonetheless, I tried to contextualise their statements as best I could.

Anthropologists concerned about the representational politics of fieldwork have called for a more dialogical approach in producing ethnographic texts (e.g. Clifford and Marcus 1986; Marcus and Fischer, 1986). However, this can be a difficult manoeuvre, especially in urban contexts where populations may be highly mobile, or unwilling or unable to contribute large amounts of time to developing an ethnographic argument. It can also place an unnecessary burden on people, or even put them at risk (Nelson, 1997; Wolf, 1991). In my case, I was aware that the commitment to reflexivity I had made at the start of my research would have to extend to the production of my finished thesis. However my appreciation of the busy lives of those who I had come into contact with meant that involving others in my early drafts would have been impractical. As referred to previously, my response to issues of representation was to ensure adequate contextualisation and avoid judgement of those who I interviewed and quoted at length.

Another way I could avoid misrepresenting those who I have studied is to make my research publicly available to allow a right of reply to those I have written about. This was an aspiration of mine during my research preparation period. However, during the period of analysis and writing up, I found that it took me some time to develop my conclusions, and to avoid misrepresenting myself to those who I had written about I decided against making the research accessible beyond my circle of peers at the university. This does not mean I am anxious about my conclusions. Rather I felt it was important to take responsibility for my conclusions before I could initiate a productive conversation on them. I acknowledge that even a year of fieldwork plus five months in Sierra Leone will have provided me still with only a limited picture of Sierra Leonean diasporic society. Therefore I take responsibility for any errors of interpretation.

4.7 In Practice

As previously mentioned, my research involved 3 distinct phases. First was a period of preparation, which involved 5 months difficult language training in Freetown, Sierra Leone. This was an invaluable experience as it gave me an entry point when I began meeting people in London as part of my fieldwork and a frame of reference that expedited conversation and helped me develop trust. I moved to London in September 2010, initially to a shared house near Elephant and Castle, where I stayed for a period of 11 months. I then moved house, to a place further south, near Camberwell Green, which was still within a short bus ride from my main field sites, and began writing up while in London in November 2011. I returned from the field at beginning of 2012, when I began analysis of my data and writing up in earnest.

For the Sierra Leonean community in Southwark, I was faced with a choice to focus either on a particular singular person or family and follow them through their daily routine, or instead focus on a wider spectrum of sites in order to get a broad picture of the community in action. Such a choice had its downsides, sacrificing depth for breadth. Yet overall I feel it offered the best approach to

researching the community which was indeed spread out in both space and time. The mobility problem mentioned above meant that much of my fieldwork centred on particular regularised spaces of encounter where I could be sure of meeting people from my target population: the market place, Walworth Road Church, the mosque, Stella's Night Spot', Bakks internet cafe, and Choumert Road in Peckham. The selection of these spaces meant that the data I received was largely of a 'public' nature – news, banter, gossip, haggling, flirting and joking – that presented a broad picture of the Sierra Leonean community in the borough as it coalesced around particular nodes of connection. More intimate details about particular persons' life histories and privately held opinions were less forthcoming as a result. Many of the same people appeared and reappeared at different locations, my relationship with them developing in a haphazard, piecemeal fashion. As mentioned, this focus on explicitly Sierra Leonean spaces would have created a selection bias, and potentially a distorted picture of the Sierra Leonean community in that it presented people that were largely involved in the life of the diaspora on a regular basis. This was unavoidable, although over time I did meet a number of people whose involvement with the broader Sierra Leonean community was more selective. The advantage of ethnographic research focused on a particular area is this growing awareness of layers of complexity over time.

 The 'public' nature of my fieldwork sites had another effect on my data: It meant that the focus was on day-to-day social concerns – the Independence anniversary, the problems surrounding sourcing authentic Sierra Leonean food, authentic versus inauthentic religious practice – that were specifically Sierra Leone-focussed or diaspora focussed in their orientation. In terms of understanding how Sierra Leonean identity relates to other forms of ascribed identity, such as race, gender, legal status, and generation, I had to rely largely on accounts of my informants rather than from direct observation. Methodological nationalism, the unconscious reification of national categories in academic discourse, was difficult to overcome. Perhaps this is because such categorizations become increasingly important in conditions of exile from the

national homeland. My experience in London was that Sierra Leoneans did continue to cleave together for social solidarity as much to make life bearable than out of any particular burning patriotism, although that was sometimes present as well. Even those like my friend Joe, owner of a sportswear shop who was openly contemptuous of his countrymen's naivity when it came to earning money, would make a point of going for a beer at the Sierra Spot at the end of the week. The prism of nationality was one that I struggled to escape, but then so it was for many of my informants.

In terms of writing up, I found that my choice of specific key sites gave natural focii for my empirical chapters. The fact that the 50th Anniversary of Sierra Leonean independence occurred during my fieldwork year meant that I could hardly avoid this topic in my ethnographic work. However in some cases the themes at play were somewhat different, and so I had to work hard to uncover some of the cross-cutting themes beyond the general fact that they were 'Sierra Leonean'.

4.8 Conclusion

In this Chapter I have discussed the methodological issues that arose for me both prior from conducting research, both initiating my fieldwork and during the fieldwork itself. I have argued that ethnographic research is challenged by situations where the population under study is geographically spread out, and only coming together at specific times and specific places. However I also feel that this offers an opportunity to highlight the constructed nature of locality that is especially true in urban situations. Other issues include the problem of methodological nationalism and how best to draw conceptual boundaries around a population that is internally heterogeneous as well as mobile. I discussed how I tried to deal with my positionality as a researcher and the ethical issues that came from conducting research on an often vulnerable migrant group, and the issues of representation that arose after the fact. Ultimately, I feel that many of the methodological issues I considered before my

research was underway were well-founded. In particular, the questions of selection bias and methodological nationalism prompted me to pay particular attention to how national identity was being articulated. However I believe this awareness led provided me with useful insights that enriched my research findings. The pages that follow, therefore, are the product of my having to wrangle with some of the difficulties that arose from dealing with the specific case I chose to study. I hope that I put them to productive use.

Chapter 5: Trading places: Ambivalence, business and encounters with difference on East Street Market

In this chapter I explore the intersecting lives of a group of Sierra Leonean traders and small businesspeople as they work and interact in the particular space of a public street market in South London. I look at the relationship between Sierra Leonean traders' diasporic affiliations and the 'commonplace diversity' (Wessendorf, 2011) of the marketplace itself. In engaging with trading activities, Sierra Leonean settlers make themselves uniquely visible, as they arrange their products and stall in such a way to attract the maximum number of customers. Like many ethnic entrepreneurs across the world, their position is one of 'mixed embeddedness' (Kloosterman et al 1999) – embedded both in the specific social and economic structures of the Sierra Leonean (and I argue, broader West African) migrant community, and also in the economic, legal and cultural spaces and structures of London itself. As such they stand on the boundary between the cultural particularity of the West African/Sierra Leone community and the broader diversity of Southwark as a borough. In this chapter I explore the relationships that form across this diversity, how they are maintained and how they are shaped by the broader social and economic environment.

The Sierra Leonean population in London, as already discussed, is multi-faceted, but a large proportion of the recent arrivals live in the South-East of the city, where there is a significant amount of low-rent and social housing, as well as transport access to the centre. In this context, street markets, with their relatively low entry costs, flexibility in terms of working hours and possibility of quick profits, are places where new migrants can earn money and connect with their fellow nationals in a more salubrious manner than in other areas of the urban economy, such as cleaning or construction work. As a consequence, they make for opportune spaces to explore how 'diversity' is negotiated on an everyday basis. I focus on two particular traders whose presence at the market

makes it a particular draw to the wider community. Nafisatu Conteh, a mother of 3 who gave up an office job at an oil company to run a grocers shop on East Street, and Alhaji Sesay, aka 'the chief', a respected figure in the SL community at large, who sells shoes from a regular pitch on the market itself. Through discussing their stories and efforts to run their businesses, I hope to illustrate how the twin pressures of membership of a diasporic community and the imperatives to raise families and pursue their ambitions in the UK result in a marked ambivalence in terms of their relationships to the place itself and the relationships they form in the market place.

I also explore the nature of diversity on East Street itself, and explore the relations that are forming across different categories of difference. My informants formed working relationships with a wide variety of non-Sierra Leoneans, both as customers, fellow traders and business partners. These relationships were often formed out of mutual self-interest and, often with aspects of identity 'in common' such as religion, and are significant but complex in their nature, shaped by a wide variety of external social forces and pressures. Alongside such connections are social antagonisms, shaped by the market's tenuous existence and uncertain future. I begin by providing some context to the market as a place, and the growth of the Sierra Leonean community who trade there. I then focus in on two of the traders previously mentioned, then explore the relationships that occur across boundaries of diversity.

5.1 Analysing diversity in context: Vertovec's 'revitalised situational approach' and the mixed-embeddedness of ethnic businesses.

As I discussed in Chapter 2, the lives of Sierra Leoneans living in London are shaped by their interaction between two overlapping areas of incorporation – that of the receiving country, with its pressures to gain legal status, obtain work, engage in local structures of integration such as the education and health

systems, and abide by new cultural norms, and increasingly, that of the sending country as well, through expectations to engage with diasporic or migrant community structures, send money home, participate in community events and so on. As such, 'super-diversity', understood to mean the emergent picture of complex immigrant diversity in places such as south London, needs to be seen in the context of these wider processes of incorporation. Factors of diversity, such as legal status, ethnicity, language, gender, class and 'race' come to the fore in particular situations and at particular times, such that a purely descriptive observation of these different factors of diversity is inadequate to appreciate how relationships are built and boundaries are formed in everyday life. In the case of ethnic shops and businesses, the overlapping nature of different forms of incorporation is given material form, visible and accessible to the wider city space. The concept of 'mixed embeddedness', derived from the literature on ethnic entrepreneurship (Kloosterman et al 1999), is useful in capturing this ambivalent positioning. While factors such as location, and a variety of physical boundary-making activities and marketing techniques, affect the degree of accessibility and openness, the ambivalent positioning of ethnic retail outlets, especially in the location of a public street market, places into relief the structural tensions underpinning the diverse interactions taking place more generally in the surrounding space.

In outlining his research agenda for super-diversity, Vertovec (2007, 2008) has argued for a 'revitalised situational approach', drawing on the situational analysis developed by Manchester School urban anthropologists J. Clyde Mitchell and Max Gluckman in the 1950s. This approach seeks to try to understand a particular situation through increasing scales of analysis, firstly focusing on the setting, that is the cultural and ideological meanings people have about this particular activity, and finally the situation, that is the broader structural forces and determinants that given rise to the event in the first place. In this chapter I draw on this kind of analysis, specifically in looking at the relationship between the ideological and practical manifestations of diversity

on East Street, and the broader processes of urban change and economic decline. This raises an important issue I want to discuss briefly before I go on, namely the social promiscuity of the term diversity itself. Like 'diaspora', diversity has a life outside the confines of academia, where it is employed by a range of individuals and actors for a range of purposes. Thanks in no small part to the success of multiculturalism as an ideal of public policy, diversity is actively pursued by local authorities as well as businesses as a means of adhering to anti-discrimination legislation. In the case of the market, the local government has sought to link its markets policy to wider imperatives around encouraging Black and Ethnic Minority (BME) businesses in the borough. Diversity is also a concern in relation to the redevelopment of Elephant and Castle and the projected demolition of the Aylesbury and Heygate housing estates, in the name of 'social diversity' and a new affluent class of young professionals and students (see Lees 2009). These new groups have their own understandings and definitions of diversity, sometimes related to an appreciation of the outwardly exotic and different, and the appreciation of urban life as spectacle, something that is often found in recent literature on urban cosmopolitanism. As we shall see, this understanding of diversity is at odds with the local experience of some of the longer standing traders at the market, whose own experience of the new diversity is somewhat different.

Ultimately, what emerges from the following analysis is, I hope, a picture of a lived diversity that is framed and structured in particular ways, and responds to the sudden events and gradual processes that typify urban life.

5.2 The context: Sierra Leoneans on East Street Market

Large numbers of Sierra Leonean and other West African migrants arrived in South London in the mid-1990s. East Street market, located between the major thoroughfares of Old Kent Road and Camberwell Road, had already long served customers from the surrounding area, and as refugee arrivals settled in the neighbouring housing estates, new traders from these communities began

to appear at the market to cater to these new settlers. These traders initially sold cheap commodities such as bags and shoes; following the end of the civil war in 2002, and the establishment of greater freedom of movement between Sierra Leone and the UK, Sierra Leonean foodstuffs began to be imported as well, forming part of a network of food traders encompassing Walworth and Camberwell, and more established shops further south in Peckham and Brixton. Today, East Street Market is an important site within the everyday geography of Sierra Leoneans in London because of the presence of specialist grocer's shops supplying the staples of Sierra Leonean cuisine – *plassas* (vegetable greens), dried fish, and palm oil. These shops are themselves part of a growing number of African or 'Continental' food shops, offering butchery and specialist vegetables as well as offering side-lines in money transfer and mobile phone services. Alongside the grocery businesses are a range of small businesses, both shops and semi-informal enterprises, selling things such as clothes, shoes, music CDs, cooked food and services such as hair braiding and styling, tailoring, dressmaking and child-minding. There is a rough gender division amongst these Sierra Leonean run businesses: women specialising in grocery, hair braiding and dressing, catering and child-minding, men in tailoring, designer clothes and shoes, and internet services. Furthermore, as the following narratives will illustrate, the Sierra Leonean trading community on East Street market reflects some of the diversity of migration and settlement within this population more broadly.

At the time of my fieldwork there were two established food shops, NafNaf's Soul Food, and Kadia Moses's Champion store, at opposite ends and opposite sides of the road. Of the market traders, Alhaji Conteh was the most established. He sold shoes from a casual pitch which he had operated for 15 years. In addition, there were two male traders selling womens handbags, and two women traders selling foodstuffs and cosmetics. While the traders knew each other, visiting each other's stalls and directing customers to them when they

could, each had their own particular agenda and ambition and their own particular relationship with the Sierra Leonean and wider London population.

East Street Market itself is over one hundred years old; however, trading in Walworth dates back to the 18th century, when the area was a market garden supplying fresh produce to the city of London. Drovers from Kent and Surrey camped on Walworth Common, where the Aylesbury housing estate presently stands, and enterprising city-folk would travel down across London Bridge to take advantage of reduced prices. As the city spread southwards in the 19th century, Walworth became a populous suburb. During the 1860s traders operated all the way along Walworth road from the Elephant and Castle to Westmoreland Road near Camberwell Green, until the construction of a tramline eventually forced the market traders onto permanent sites on what was then called East Lane, and on Westmoreland Street. The market was given official status by the corporation of London in 1880. Charlie Chaplin, the comedian and movie star, was born on East Street around this time, (a blue plaque fixed to the upper floor of the row of council properties that line the road commemorates this fact). The Second World War saw extensive bombing in the area, while post-war redevelopment moved many of the local population into large-scale social housing estates, reducing both the size of the market and the number of traders. However, the post-war period is regarded as something of a golden age by some of today's traders, when the market was thriving and was seen as a repository for a particular kind of Cockney working class trading culture. Period footage from the 1970s shows East Lane still thronged with customers inspecting stalls selling glassware, crockery, clothes, furniture, and fruit juice[5]. Centenary celebrations from 1980s caught the national headlines. 'A proper Cockney knee's up' the Sun reported at the time. This period was exemplified in the popular 1980's television comedy series *Only Fools and Horses,* in the opening credits of which East Street features. The central character, Derek 'Del Boy' Trotter, in his constant scheming to make his fortune, was in many

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[5]Available online at http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J8bubvzoVPs accessed 23/09/12

ways emblematic of a particular kind of upwardly mobile, 'wide boy' working-class trading identity which still exists. Significantly, the series did not shy away from portraying the transformations underway in this area of South London neighbourhood with the construction of high rise flats and the presence of West Indian immigration. Today, East Street's status as a historic landmark and informal public space for the area has been enshrined by the presence of two blue plaques, one marking East Street as Chaplin's birthplace and another for the market itself (Wallerton, 2011).

At the market entrance on the corner of Walworth Road, an elegant wrought iron sign reads 'Welcome to East Street Market'. As of 2008 East Street is the largest publicly managed market in the Southwark, with 160 licenced traders and many more operating casual pitches, Tuesday to Sunday, 8 to 4. It operates a two-tier trading system, with licensed traders paying a monthly rent of 300 pounds for a regular pitch. Temporary traders pay a daily rate, of 30 pounds, plus insurance for stock and storage at the council-run lockers at the top of the road. Given the capital outlays required, it seemed that few of the permanent traders were recent immigrants; rather they tended to be white-British, and generally male, with stalls often inherited from fathers and grandfathers. The temporary traders were more likely to belong to an ethnic minority, and had a more transient relationship to the market, with a relatively high turnover of new entrants.

After beginning fieldwork and talking to some of the regular traders, it became apparent that the market was in steady decline. This had apparently been the case since the 1990s, with factors such as competition from supermarkets, the advent of online retail, as well as lack of public investment in infrastructure and marketing (Wallerton 2011). However, the last few years seemed to have been particularly bad. In 2008, a council report on the health of Southwark's markets advocated outsourcing of management of East Street to a private company (Zasada and Rhodes 2008). This move, intended to make the market more

efficient at promoting itself, instead saw pitch rents rise and the market's healthy profit turned into a deficit (Wallerton, 2011). According to another trader, the aggressive use of bailiffs to clamp down on infractions particularly soured the situation. By 2011, the market had returned to Council management. Meanwhile, the long planned closure of the nearby Heygate housing estate in preparation for demolition in 2009 and 2010 hurt trade by removing many of the market's regular customers. These problems were exacerbated by the effects of the 2008 economic recession, that damaged business more broadly in the local area and having a knock-on effect on foot traffic; In the space of a year, three local pubs had shut down, the Good Intent, the Beaten Path on the corner of Walworth Road, and the Bricklayers Arms, while in 2011 a branch of Poundland opened on Walworth Road. The store, which sold everything from tinned food to Christmas decorations and sports gear at knock-down prices, directly added to the competition the market already faced by the presence of a Morrison's and Tesco supermarkets (Boyle, 2014) .

East Street, still one of the most viable markets in the borough, was seeing the slow departure of many of its long term traders, many of whom had worked there for generations. Those who remained thus felt embattled and demoralised. As we shall see, the arrival of large numbers of African and other new migrants to the area in the 1990s and 2000s, and the subsequent growth of ethnic businesses and shops was thus interpreted conspiratorially by some – though by no means all – of the long-time market traders on East Street. However, as the following portraits indicate, many of the new traders faced similar problems caused by the economic climate.

5.3 NafNaf's Soul Food

Nafnaf's Soul Food Shop is an airy, unobtrusive place. For the pedestrian, perhaps browsing the market for fruit and veg or simply taking a shortcut home from the Morrison's supermarket on Camberwell Road, it doesn't

particularly stand out amidst the gaggle of African grocers, pubs, newsagents, greasy-spoon cafés, and fried chicken fast food shops that line the road.

Its shelves stock litre and half litre bottles of thick red *banga* palm oil, as well as pre-packed gari and fufu flour, tinned luncheon meat, jars of peanut butter, canned sardines and palm kernels. A rattly refrigerator unit boasts gnarled cuts of dry-fish, pink vacuum-packed hog-foot and cow foot, while another stocks *kanda* (dried cow skin), and palm-leaf parcels of *ogiri*, or ground sesame. Stacked up like sandbags by the counter are sacks of Vietnamese and Thai white rice; Kola nuts, bitter-tasting stimulants popular throughout West Africa are available, kept from damp under a cloth in a tray by the till, as is snuff tobacco and medicinal bark used to treat stomach complaints. Cassava bread, fried fish, akara (fried doughballs) in plastic takeaway boxes are also available for sale for those after a tasty snack. But most popular are the bundles of green leaves that, on a good day, when the Air-Maroc flight from Casablanca has been on time, bulge from cardboard boxes stacked invitingly on a trestle table at the front of the shop. Cassava Leaf, Potato leaf, crain-crain, Greens, Sawa-sawa, to be chopped and boiled with dry fish and palm oil and pepper, served up with rice, create, for those who crave it, the authentic taste of home.

There are a small number of Sierra Leonean grocers in London, reflecting the small size of the population, but their role is crucial in maintaining the foodways of the Sierra Leoneans who have migrated to the UK. These shops are similar in many ways to the more prevalent Nigerian and Ghanaian grocers that are found throughout London and increasingly in other UK cities as well; they stock many of the staple ingredients that are eaten across the West African region, and more widely, such as palm oil, ground cassava or gari, which is used to make fufu, dried fish, offal such as cow and pig-foot, and preserved and canned goods popular throughout the continent, such as powdered milk, luncheon meat, canned sardines, groundnut paste. National distinctiveness is maintained by subtle variations of foodstuffs available. In the case of Sierra

Leoneans, a key indicator is *plassas*, vegetable leaves that form the rich soups that are the basis of Sierra Leonean cuisine. They also provide advertising space for Club nights, dances, beauty pageants and thanksgiving services that serve the cultural and social needs of the Sierra Leonean community. In London, where space is highly enclosed and regulated, the comparatively relaxed spaces of small retail outlets such as food shops work to domesticate the urban world, transforming its forbidding anonymity and impersonality into familiarity and warmth. Food marketing in the West African context is traditionally the preserve of women, who can become powerful and influential entrepreneurs within the wider community; as 'female' spaces, food shops offer an alternative locus of discussion and sociality to the drink-spots and political gatherings frequented by men.

5.4 Nafi's vision

Nafi has worked hard to get to where she is today. Moving to Britain in the early 1990s, she attended secondary school and university and found a job as an employee of a computer networking company in Reading. However, the strain of working 9 to 5, with a daily commute, whilst trying to raise two young children, began to take its toll. Eventually, a trip back to Freetown provided a wake-up call:

'I wasn't able to spend any time with my kids. Sometimes it was 7, 8 o'clock when I got back. And when I went to Sierra Leone for 3 months, it really hit me, how much I was missing out on not being with them. So when I came back I said to my husband – "I want to work here in London instead".

She took a job at the Exxon-Mobil office in the city, but something still wasn't quite right. Eventually she summoned her courage and spoke to her husband.

'I told him I wanted to sell food at the market – he laughed! The thing is though, I always knew I could be anybody I wanted. And you know, with market work

I could mix with all different kinds of people… because I like all different kinds of people, like I'd go back to Freetown and I'd end up stopping traffic because I'd see some crazy person who I recognised, and give them a big hug, and people would be staring wondering what I was doing. But they're all just people! So I ended up going to *Tong (Freetown)*, buying some one-two small things to sell, and started up with a little table. I didn't have half the things most grocery shops sell, I didn't really know what I was doing. And it was cold! But I thought to myself – I've started this so I might as well see it through. And after a while things got going…'

From her days as a casual trader, she got talking to Ahmad, a trader and refugee from Afghanistan who ran the shop behind her stall. They got along, and eventually Ahmad offered to go into partnership with her. Since then the business has expanded, the shop now sourcing pre-packed and frozen ingredients direct from Freetown, Lagos, Banjul and Accra. Today her vision is much more ambitious. She wants to expand into internet sales, and cooked food.

'I'd love to do home delivery, for people who can't remember the last time they had African food. I mean not just Sierra Leonean food – Nigerian, Ivorian - There are loads of them out there. I want to make it so they can go online, and they can order it and we deliver it to their homes, even to the school gate'.

Nafi isn't the only Sierra Leonean trading on East Street, although she says she was one of the first. Kadia Moses sells a similar array of plassas and imported processed foods at her 'Champion' store at the other end of the road. Other West African nationalities are served by places such as Kumasi Market, TJ's continental grocers and East Street grocers, all of which specialise in African staples such as Cassava, Yams, plantains, rice, scotch bonnet chilli peppers and sweet potatoes, dried fish, and sacks of white rice. Three large fishmongers, Afghan- and Kurdish-owned, cater for the continent's taste for seafood, while the Ghanaian-run Abba Fresh on the corner of King and Queen Street serves

West African specialities such as jollof rice, plantains and beans, okra soup, or fried fish as well as saveloy, steak and kidney pie and fish and chips. When the market is running, a half-dozen Sierra Leonean market traders work casual pitches selling cosmetics, shoes, bags, and foodstuffs, alongside other traders from Nigeria, Ghana, among others. African-run businesses can be found on Walworth Road as well, including Sierra Spot, a popular bar, and Nivla, a upscale restaurant popular with Sierra Leonean politicians and journalists, and members from the nearby Methodist Church. Thus Nafi's spot on East Street is ideally situated for the large number of West Africans who live in Camberwell, and the as well as those who have moved out of town, but commute into London to work or attend church and social fellowship meetings.

Nafi herself, however, is less personally invested in place that appearances initially suggest. Her family, while by no means super-rich, hail from the more affluent west end of Freetown and are of high status. Her father, 'Granddad' Conteh, who assists in the supervision of the shop, was a former footballer who represented his country at the international level, before working for many years in a diamond mining company. Her professional background has given her an ambition and a restlessness. While she lives locally, both her and her husband's income have insured that she has been able to send her son to a fee-paying private secondary school on the outskirts of London. Her decision to quit her job to go into business reflected a self-confidence as well as a desire to escape the 'rat-race' and reconnect with one's cultural roots, and a more wholesome style of life. Such values might be associated with those of middle class Londoners more broadly, and in this sense it set her apart from many of the other Sierra Leonean traders I met on East Street and elsewhere in South London. Nafi's engagement with Sierra Leone was a conscious decision, similar to that of the returned diasporans who I met both in Sierra Leone and London, who had enjoyed the benefits of life in the UK and were now seeking to re-engage with Sierra Leone on their own terms.

Nafi, by her admission, 'liked to mix with different people', and the market gave her that opportunity, to escape the rat race of her professional life and live more fully in the world. Similarly, my own first encounter with East Street and its market was refreshingly alive and exciting, its tangle of canvas-covered stalls and cacophony of different musics and languages appealed to me on an aesthetic level. Street Markets such as East Street evoked in me mixed associations; on the one hand, they stood for diversity, vibrancy, and colour; on the other, a sense of place, of urban community. Such romantic associations connect with middle-class, liberal ideals of the intrinsic value of difference as well as a longing for roots. May (1996) describes a similar attitude expressed by middle-class incomers in the north London borough of Stoke Newington, reflecting an attitude towards place characterised by aesthetic appreciation as well as a certain distance. In Nafi's case, such an appreciation is more marked to a personal feeling of nostalgia for her own childhood in Freetown, and memories of the hurly burly of Freetown's central market, where petty traders, mostly women, hawked fresh produce to noisy crowds. Her antipathy towards the 'rat race' seemed to have led her to draw on a different set of values derived from her African upbringing, of a more communitarian urban world, as well as tapping into the established role of the successful female businesswoman . However, in practice, the fulfilment of this ambition was by no means straightforward.

5.5 Ordering plassas

While Nafi nurtured her ambitions of expanding the business, for the time being, the shop provided the basic essentials. And that meant plassas. Unlike rice, palm oil and dry fish, the other basic staples of Sierra Leonean cuisine, the perishable potato and cassava leaves, crain-crain and greens needed to be fresh. Any delays, such as a missed connection at Casablanca or Brussels, could result in spoilage. Yet getting plassas leaves from Sierra Leone was often a frustrating experience.

'I'll call them up and ask for so many boxes of crain-crain, and they'll say 'oh, well you see, crain-crain time has finished,' Or they'll say it'll will be 50 kilos, which costs a certain amount, even though they have no idea how much it will weigh, so when it gets to the airport it is often overweight so we have to pay more. If I call Ghana it's so much easier, they'll have what I want and take it to the airport, if one flight has already gone they'll call me and tell me when the next flight is coming, British Airways, direct, they even have cold storage so I don't have to worry about the stock going bad.'

By contrast, orders from Sierra Leone often had poor packaging, increasing the risk of spoilage, while inefficiency and corruption at Sierra Leone's international airport at Lungi slowed down the ordering process ('they see us, people who haven't been back for a while, and they know they can play us'). Meanwhile the policy of the main airfreight companies to only allow one customer's order per flight meant that a shopkeeper could order in vegetables on a Thursday in time for the weekend, only to find that they had to wait until Monday for a slot to become available. Such an arrangement could cause tension between retailers over flights. Furthermore, the cost of a flight from Sierra Leone was higher than more popular destinations such as the Gambia, something that was a particular bugbear of many in the London diaspora who tried to visit home on a regular basis. Reasons offered by the main air and shipping companies were that low passenger numbers, rising oil costs and the slow turnaround of flights because of the awkward location of Lungi international airport meant that additional costs would inevitably be passed on to the consumer. However, these reasons failed to assuage many Sierra Leoneans in South London, and during the period of my fieldwork a petition was launched to press the High Commissioner to intervene on their behalf.

Yet even once the order arrived, problems could emerge. One large grocer in Peckham had its entire freight impounded and destroyed by UK customs and excise because of a supposed blackfly infestation. Then there are the rumours of

drug smuggling. Nafi described a recent incident where UKBA seized a haul of cannabis disguised as bags of frozen cassava leaf. The main travel agent providing direct flights from Freetown has refused to carry Sierra Leonean vegetables, reportedly for this reason, although retailers themselves were keen to distance themselves from any suggestion of wrongdoing.

As a result, shops such as Nafi's resorted to sourcing most of their plassas from the more efficient commercial farms in the Gambia and Ghana. Even then, after a few days sitting out front exposed to the elements, the perky triangular and hexagonal leaves tended to shrivel up and become unsaleable. Preserving the plassas was possible, by pre-chopping it and keeping in bags in the shops' deep freeze, or ordering it in ready frozen, but affected the taste. Therefore much of the work for Efie – a friend and employee of the family - and Granddad involved sorting through the orders to pick out the rotten or sickly leaves. Still, Nafi's customers keep coming back in search of a fresh bundle of potato leaf, or cassava leaf. If they are unlucky, they may try Mariama Moses' shop up the road, or one of the big shops in Peckham.

Nor are the other staples, namely palm oil and dried fish, necessarily easy to obtain from Sierra Leone. In 2009 the government of Sierra Leone issued strict ban on all but a few licenced exporters of palm oil, in an attempt to prevent food price inflation within the country itself. This provoked consternation amongst retailers whose customers prized Sierra Leonean oil as 'the best in the world'. There was also some suggestion that those awarded licences happened to the wives and relatives of senior government ministers. One trader, who wished to remain anonymous, showed me a bottle of commercially produced palm oil from Ghana. She indicated the red plastic bottle, as evidence of the poor quality of the oil. Then she showed me a bottle of 'Sierra Leone palm oil', in a clear plastic bottle, the thick viscous oil leaving a dark red-orange stain on the side.

'Look how they do it – the bottle itself is red, so people can't see the quality. Look at this one – you see how dark it is? The problem is the government. They aren't investing in agricultural production.' The same trader confided to me that some people deliberately mis-label palm oil as Sierra Leonean when it was from elsewhere, although whether discriminating customers could tell the difference was unclear.

A friend of mine from a local Methodist church insisted to me that he only ever used Sierra Leonean palm oil. 'I don't know, I'm just used to it. I tried Nigerian palm oil and it wasn't the same…'

Inevitably the problems around the supply of foodstuffs increases the price at the till. A two - litre bottle of palm oil at Nafi's costs 12.99. A kilo of dried fish, 7 pounds – a bundle of plassas leaves – 2 pounds. While it is commonplace for such a meal to last several days, this along with increased awareness of health issues around eating palm-oil heavy foods, coupled with the forced sedentarised lifestyle of London, have prompted some people to change their diets. One older lady, Auntie Maggie, an enthusiastic cook, and connoisseuse of Sierra Leone produce, admitted to me that her high cholesterol had prompted her to shifting to so-called 'white' stews and soups that require less palm oil. The changing tastes of children attending schools in the borough have meant that 'British' foods such as fish and chips, beef burgers and fish fingers are also on the menu.

The taste for authentic plassas, however, remained strong. One younger woman, as she waited for Granddad to weigh up a piece of dried fish to add to the ingredients in her bag, confided that she had been feeling home sick. 'I've been thinking about my Grandmother, so I wanted to eat something that reminded me of her, something from back home'. Cassava leaf was the most popular dish amongst the people I met, and was a source of patriotic pride when people discussed the differences between different national cuisines. 'Nigerians, when

they came to Sierra Leone as part of ECOMOG [the regional peacekeeping force sent to Sierra Leone during the Civil War], first they banned their boys from eating Cassava Leaf, in case it was poisonous. But we told them 'no no – this is our local dish' and they tried it, they couldn't get enough of it!". One of my friends, a young man named Berek, who worked in a hospital laundry, told me how his colleague, who was from Slovenia, saw him eating *Yebe*, a spicy stew made from mangoes, cassava, and dried fish, and asked to try some. 'Now he is asking me if I cooked today… he is just used to beef and potatoes'

The controversies and high emotions associated with sourcing authentic Sierra Leonean foodstuffs reflect one of the central problems for those living in the diaspora, that being the discrepancy between the idealised images of the home country and culture, borne of feelings of loss and nostalgia, and the difficult and upsetting reality of the country today. Food is still a central marker of Sierra Leonean identity in London, providing a sense of cultural distinctiveness that marks it apart from the other, larger West African diasporic communities. However, given the greater resources available outside of the country, whether in the UK or in the broader West African region, 'home' for these diasporans is becoming, in a practical sense, the diaspora itself. This is a theme that I will return to in Chapter 6 and 7.

5.6 Alhaji

Whereas Nafi's engagement with the market reflected a desire to reconnect with an idealised cultural heritage, Alhaji Conteh was more concerned with the future. Alhaji worked as a casual trader 4 days a week and sold women's shoes and boots from a market stall that backed onto the pavement in front of Nafi's. A big man with a boxer's build and doleful eyes, he had been trading since 1997, and was well known amongst the other traders. As prospective customers examined his stock, he would bluffly encourage them.

'That one is just 5 pounds'.

When I was doing my fieldwork, Alhaji was working 4 days a week at the market. His stall, which sat on the road just in front of Nafi's shop, was dominated by a display of assorted women's shoes, ranging from, at the front, plastic and faux-leather sandals known in Sierra Leone as *haf baks*, to leather slippers, and boots in various lengths of cut from ankle to calf to knee length, sourced from the big wholesale shops in Shoreditch and Dalston in East London. While his customers were likely to be any of the browsing patrons of East Street Market, many of them are Sierra Leoneans and members of the other migrant communities, looking for something smart to wear on their next trip home, or to give as a gift to expectant relatives.

On one occasion, a portly older gentleman stopped at the stall and idled over a pair of orange and yellow women's slippers. He was going home at the end of the week. He inquired to Alhaji about the shoes, he thought for a moment, and declared he would come back in the morning. By and large, the trade in designer clothes was occupied by young men, some of whom would carry their small stock in sports bags to sell at drink spots such as Stella's on Camberwell Road, or outside the food shops and hair salons on Choumert Road in Peckham. On East Street, Alhaji was joined by two other Sierra Leonean market traders, Frank and Eric, whose particular stock in trade was designer handbags. Conspicuous consumption, particularly of smart designer clothes and shoes, was the hallmark of the 'JC's - returnee migrants who sought to declare their successful sojourns to England or the US through crisp white trainers, blue jeans and branded t-shirts. Such items were traded informally through contacts in the UK and the US, to an eager customer base of young people in Freetown. When I stayed in the city in 2010, I was introduced to the boys at 'Peckham Base', a trade's association-cum-social club that ran a number of boutiques on Free Street in the centre of the city and specialised in branded clothing and accessories from the UK. Its name, plastered on the side of buildings along with a union jack and dolce and gabbana logos, spoke of the glamour associated with

life abroad. While food shops like Nafi's sold an authentic taste of Sierra Leone to the homesick diaspora, the designer clothes trade sought to cash in to another idealised form of place, that of the glamour and power of the developed West.

Given the close proximity between Alhaji's stall and Nafi's shop, it was easy for me to pay a visit to both traders when I was doing fieldwork at the market. The enclosed space between the overhanging front awning of Nafi's shop and the back of Alhaji's market stall created an impromptu social space where other Sierra Leoneans – usually young men – would hang out and chat, as long as the weather wasn't too bad. It also made it relatively easy to see the contrasts between the two traders. While Nafi was very much a well-to-do member of the professional class, Alhaji had a more streetwise background, hailing from the poorer East End of Freetown and having spent his life doing trading work since he was a young man in the early 1980s. His attitude to market work and his working life in general was couched in a sense of personal destiny, as despite his humble background he was the grandson of a chief, whose brother had made the pilgrimage to Mecca and from whom Alhaji had gotten his name. Referred to by his fellow traders as 'the chief', Alhaji was a significant figure within the Sierra Leonean community, being a member of the Sweissy Union, another traders association similar to Peckham base, who had established themselves in London as a registered charity working to support Sierra Leonean youth. He was also part of the council-backed Sierra Leone community forum, and had ambitions of going into politics back in Sierra Leone.

Business used to be brisk on East Street, back at the end of the 90s when Alhaji first started working and people started first arriving in their numbers. These days, however, the customer was most likely inspect the shoe, shrug and move on. It didn't used to be this way. The economic downturn that had begun in 2008 had affected demand, putting pressure on the traders, whose profit margins for running their pitch were very narrow. As mentioned, the market

operated a two-tier system, of licenced traders, who had permanent pitch for which they paid a flat £350 pitch rent a month, and casual traders who paid a daily rent of around 30 pounds. While this system allowed new traders to enter the market at relatively low cost, if business was bad, then it was easy to make a loss. And business *was* bad. According to Alhaji:

'Receshon de *bayt*, man. It's because of this immigration cap. African people coming here, they work, they *buy* – presents for family, friends back home, nice clothes. Even if they're doing that undercover work, working when they shouldn't be working, they pay tax, they spend money. But the government have closed the door to people from Africa. Back before I used to make sometimes £1500 a day, now I'm lucky if I make 50 pounds'

'This is why there's a recession?' I asked.

'Exactly. Europeans *den* they are different. They earn money, and just carry it off with them to set up businesses in their own country. Like the Portuguese, Portugal, you see it now, it's a holiday place, restaurants, hotels, bars. But Africans, they like to enjoy themselves. I know you know what I mean! They like to look nice. In Sierra Leone, when you get a good job, you don't want to work anymore'

Alhaji had been trading all his life. He learned it from his mother, who sold *rice-pap,* a sweet gruel made of rice flour and sugar, to the pregnant women lining up outside the maternity hospital in the East end of Freetown. During the economic collapse of the early 1980s he left Sierra Leone and went with a friend to Liberia. There, he started working as a market trader in Monrovia's central market. Not only did he prosper, but his concern for fellow Sierra Leonean migrants, particularly the youth, led to him becoming official Headman of the Temne people in Monrovia.

'People were coming from Sierra Leone every day, some would just come with a plastic bag in their hand with their clothes, they were lucky I was chief, I used to receive them, so the drivers were very happy because of our organisation when they bring them, if they don't have money to pay I tell them to leave them, now, the driver come back 5 o'clock, I would get a list like this (raises sheet of paper), put my name like this, chief, ten dollar, if they say like, the transportation is 50 dollar, then I start my own contribution, 10 dollar, then maybe you're my vice chief we have an organisation, say, vice chief put 5, she would put 5, we stop, then when the driver comes at 5, we pay him, the vehicle drivers were happy because they knew they would get their money, when they bring anybody now, they were happy to say chief this is your subject, so, it was good, it was… nice, we used to do it very well'.

When the war broke out he returned first to Sierra Leone, then to the Gambia, before arriving in London, in 1993. Alhaji first started working at East Street in mid '90s, the first Sierra Leonean to do so, just as his compatriots first began arriving in Southwark in large numbers. He remembers the fear and paranoia amongst the community in those days.

'People *den* they were afraid. They didn't want to talk Krio, they wanted to speak like the Jamaicans, who had free visa access… at that time if you were a Salone man you'd come and buy from me, if you were speaking English I'd pick out your accent, I know you're from Sierra Leone, so I'd say 'let us talk Krio', so they begun to stir confidence in that, because, for them, to see a Sierra Leonean, for the first time, 'wow!' with a stall, it was like, there was not a lot of us around'

As more Sierra Leoneans continued to arrive, business became brisk. Alhaji, capitalising on his previous experience as community leader in Monrovia, became involved in community activism. During the year of my fieldwork he was on the organising committee for the 50th Independence Anniversary

Celebrations. Like Nafi, Alhaji had plans to expand his business, wanting to go into international trading back in Sierra Leone. Such plans were secondary to his real ambition, to go into politics, to stand as MP for his home neighbourhood of Kissy Road on the Eastern side of Freetown. This, he admitted, would be difficult - he'd have to join the APC ruling party if he would have any hope of getting put forward as a candidate, something that requires connections. He was dismissive of the government in Sierra Leone, and more so of the High Commission in London, who he saw as out of touch with the community. When he was headman in Monrovia, he had a close relationship with the Sierra Leone High Commissioner there. This natural authority he believes he inherited from his Grandfather, a Temne Chief.

'To lead and to work in the community is part of me… even when I was small, back home we used to get organisations, I used to be the chairperson, making sure that they go well… for me my aim is to help… I like to help the vulnerable, it's not for the money, in Liberia I was not counting on '*tros*' (favours) , become a chief because I need[ed] money, No, I was there to secure peace, to help the vulnerable'

For all his evident pride and patriotism, Alhaji hadn't been able to go back to Sierra Leone since he left in 1991, although he spoke to people on the phone. Despite having lived in the UK for over 17 years, Alhaji was only finally given refugee status in 2001, and was perhaps fearful of losing his place here if he were to leave. From his experience of being given a council flat in England, he was passionate about what he saw as the desperate need for affordable housing in Freetown. Alhaji's house, a ground floor flat on the Aylesbury Estate, 20 minutes-walk from East Street, was his pride and joy, material proof of his success in the UK.

As trade at the market began to decline, Alhaji decided to cut back on the stall to look for some more stable, salaried work. When I met him had just applied

for a course to become a security guard. I ask if Security work is better paying than market work.

'It's not bad. Its regular money, that's the main thing. If the bank can see I've got a regular 1,200, 1,300, every month they're more likely to give me a loan.'

Alhaji's attitude to market work and to his home country of Sierra Leone was arguably a reflection of his long experience as a migrant trader, a job he went into out of necessity and made his own. Unlike Nafi, he was not seeking to reconnect with a particular lifestyle or mode of living that he left behind him in Sierra Leone, rather he was using his experience as a market trader to pursue his ultimate ambition to be a 'big man', a figure of respect and authority in the wider community. His success in the UK was instrumental to this aim, although as he had been unable to return to Sierra Leone, he, like Nafi, was dependent on the diaspora for his status.

His relationship to the wider diversity of East Street was one of pragmatic acceptance, along with an awareness of the idiosyncrasies of his Sierra Leonean compatriots. While Nafi's cosmopolitanism is romantic and based on nostalgia, Alhaji's was more practical, a result of long years 'on the road', living abroad and acting as intermediary between his people and the local authorities. Uma Kothari's (2008) description of street traders in Spain, with their vernacular cosmopolitanism that served ultimately to further their personal ambitions, fits Alhaji Sesay well in this regard.

The differences in background reflect much of the internal diversity present within the Sierra Leonean diaspora – Nafi is very much a member of the educated professional class, who are being specifically courted by the Sierra Leonean government to encourage them to return home. Alhaji, while he is possibly more engaged and personally concerned with the fate of his homeland and its people, is from a more humble background. Such internal diversity is

characteristic of many West African migrant communities, with historical elite migration joined in the 1990s and 2000s by poorer incomers seeking a way to support their families. Such nuances are only imperfectly understood by many of the non-Sierra Leonean traders at the market, whose view of the African arrivals is shaped by their own experience of upheaval and change. It is these traders I turn to now.

5.7 Ray and the Permanent Traders

On my visits to East Street, I would pass under the wrought iron entrance and by a regular stall that sold bags of popcorn and fresh doughnuts. One day, intending to buy some donuts to share with my friend Frank, one of the Sierra Leonean traders who sold bags, I stopped off at this stall and got chatting with its owner. He was a middle aged English guy with grey hair, clean shaven and a sharp and inquisitive face. I asked, offhand, how was business, to which he responded with a scowl and a nod at the milling crowds that continued to pass by the stall.

'I mean *look at it.* People aren't spending money like they used to. You've only got to look at what they're buying. This area's going down. I've seen it change, since I've been here. Like, they want to knock down the Heygate, that's 4000 customers, gone. I mean they say they want to redevelop it, but what does it do to the area in the meantime? I'll tell you something else, they *use these people*. Bring them in here to bring the area down, then they clear them out and sell it off for a profit. I've seen it happen in Brixton as well. I'm not being racial. I feel sorry for them, I do.'

Ray was bitter in large part because of his memories of East Street in the old days, when he worked as a teenager on the stalls and the area was thriving. While he no longer lived in the area, he commuted in every day from his home in rural Sussex. Commenting on the rioting that had just broken out in North

London, he compared it to his youth. Even the quality of violence had deteriorated, it seemed.

'… in the old days, you wouldn't get that, I mean, you'd sometimes get fist-fights but they weren't anything, I mean I remember this one time – it was so funny - a couple Irish guys started fighting – I mean a fistfight, and this guy had the other one in a headlock and he was trying to put his head through the pub window – but the glass wouldn't break! He was trying and each time his head went 'bmp, bmp' against the glass, it was like a comedy routine…'

'Now it's more serious?' I asked.

'yeah they've got their guns and knives, I mean who do they think they are? I think they've been watching too much TV and playing too many computer games – look at this what's been happening in Tottenham, what do you think that's about? Seriously, people's attitude is terrible…'

In my regular discussions with Ray, he would paint an overwhelmingly negative picture of life in the capital. While he reserved most of his ire for the political class, he would regularly make veiled comments about the new immigrants, seeking my complicity with knowing looks and hints such as 'you know what I'm talking about, don't you'. However, it was not simply an issue of difference that caused consternation amongst some of the English traders, rather it was the cultural dissonance that occurred as a result of unfamiliar buying practices, not least the issue of haggling, that were interpreted as wilful rudeness and disrespect. One trader I spoke to was particularly vociferous on this point. When asked about the biggest change in the market in recent years, one man was quite open about what he saw as the problem:

'The clientele's changed, the customers have changed, they're all bloody Africans, and I tell you what, I'm not being anti-Semitic (sic) but they are RUDE

and ignorant and some of them are fucking pigs… what do they do, they buy stuff up and where does the money go? Back to bloody Africa. It's not our country any more... I tell you what, like they're always trying to undercut you, they don't understand like we're trying to make a living, and if something's five pounds they are like 'Oh-I give-you four pounds – what-you-mean? I am your good customer'… you can't talk to the customers here anymore'.

The descriptions of decline were expressed in terms of moral standards, and manifested in the physical habits and behaviours of the new immigrants. Dirtiness, rudeness, lack of consideration for the traders own boundaries, were seen to be embodied in practices such as haggling, where the value of goods were assumed to be open to negotiation. Physical dirtiness ('some of them are fucking pigs') was a theme that echoed colonial era accounts of African cities as spaces of corruption and pestilence, an enforced through shared accounts of some of the more extreme examples of what Mary Douglas (1971) would describe as 'matter out of place'. On a separate occasion, Ray recounted a story to me, told to him by a friend, of an immigrant neighbour who had apparently disposed of their child's dirty nappies by throwing them out of the tower block window. The unverifiable nature of such accounts did not matter, as they fed into an existing narrative of moral decline whereby old norms and categories, such as the price of goods on display, and the understandings between customers and sellers, were no longer respected. This association between physical and moral corruption was heightened by widespread suspicions that some of the new ethnic businesses on East Street were operating on the murky side of the law. During a tour of the street given to me by the head of the market traders association, a row of shops was pointed out that, for all their (to me) colourful displays of yams, sweet potatoes and sacks of rice, all seemed to be selling the same thing. My guide described how the street had once boasted an impressive variety of businesses that had vanished.

'You used to have a pet shop, toy shops, electrical shops, upholsterers, and that brought people in here… Now, it's all continental butchers, I mean, look over there, that's three continental butcher's in a row – there's got to be something funny going on'.

Vertovec (2011) describes a popular structural functionalism present in the UK and other countries of the developed west that equated particular cultural practices with the wholesale importation and invasion of alien cultures. African businesses, particularly food shops, seemed to play this role in Walworth, symbolic to some of a disappearance of a vibrant community, of a diversity that had been replaced with a shallow diversity masking corrupt processes at work. Interestingly, the synechdochal role of ethnic shops had its own positive version, in my own initial appreciation of them as symbols themselves of vibrant diversity and exoticism.

However, this was not universal. While the effects of the demographic changes in the area were unsettling for many of the English traders, others had begun to adapt and make personal connections that altered their perspective. Andy, a trader in shoes who worked on a pitch just opposite Ray's, was enthused when he heard I was writing about the Sierra Leonean presence in the area, and approached me one day when I was having a cup of tea in one of the local cafes.

'You're writing about Sierra Leone? It's just two of my best customers are Sierra Leoneans… Rosie and John'

He smiled as he mentions them.

'They're lovely people… they enquire about the price, don't give you any hassle, polite, just their attitude, they're lovely people, Ghanaians as well, it's like they're always happy… I dunno, but with Nigerians it's like 'I'm the boss, you will do as I tell you', you know what I mean? I'm sure there's nice ones as

well… It's just the way they're made. Rosie, she's one of my best customers, she buys from me wholesale. She used to have a stall here, we had the same supplier but she knows she can get it from me cheaper… she's got a big warehouse over there, she ships stuff out there, John, he's got a shop, he's showed me a video of it, he's like a bit flamboyant, but nice bloke, he's like a TV star… let me give 'em your number. Alhaji, yeah I know him, he's been here ages'

What is interesting here is not the blanket reversal of ethnic stereotyping, but the emergence of nuance based on further information. Similarly, while Ray was dismissive towards many of the migrant settlers in conversation, he actually knew and got on relatively well with Nafi. It is perhaps significant that, due to business being bad, Ray was no longer able to leave his stall and go and chat with many of the other traders apart from of on rare occasions. Another trader, a bullish, slick haired purvey of household cleaning products, who had exchanged sharp words with one of my Sierra Leonean friends on one occasion, had himself married a Nigerian woman and was engaged in international trade there, and who I overheard responding in thick, sarcastic Pidgin to a couple of African men who had made enquiries at his stall. Thus, attitudes between African traders and the established British traders were an ambiguous affair, mediated by narratives of community decline and moral decay, by not determined by them. Counter-narratives, of flamboyance, friendliness and happiness appeared to mark more positive interactions and engagements. Yet inevitably these stereotypical images obscured more complex realities.

5.8 Conclusion

In this chapter I have focused on the intersecting lives of 3 traders, each with different backgrounds, and each sharing a number of similarities as well as differences with each other. In terms of understanding the relationship between diaspora and diversity, it is clear that Sierra Leonean traders operate in an

ambiguous space between overlapping regimes of incorporation – that of the sending and receiving countries. Both of these claims are imperfectly realised, and the failures of such incorporation result in the individuals concerned seeking to build a life within the diaspora itself. For Nafi, it provided a place where she could pursue a more authentic and balanced existence than working 9 to 5 in an office, although her reconnection to Sierra Leone through working in a grocery shop and sourcing authentic foodstuff ultimately resulted in feelings of alienation and frustration. For Alhaji, the market was a continuation of the work that had supported him since he was a young man, enabling him to be close to 'the people', although ultimately it was a stepping stone to bigger things. The differences apparent within the Sierra Leonean community were imperfectly understood, to say the least, by the English traders such as Ray and Andy, although the fact of proximity and contact was resulting in more fruitful relationships across the lines of difference.

The relationship between the different traders at East Street was complex. Ethnicity, race and class, not to mention religion, clash and congeal in bewildering array. The presence of large numbers of new traders from non-European backgrounds, with unfamiliar and unsettling habits undoubtedly entrenched a view amongst some of the English traders as embattled indigenes fighting to keep their values alive. For Ray, much of his ire was directed not at the newcomers themselves but at the government, whose ill-conceived welfare and immigration policies had forced hard-working folk like him into a corner. On the other hand, both he and several of his English fellow traders had good working relationships with particular traders, Sierra Leonean or otherwise. Andy's enthusiasm for his Sierra Leonean clients and Ray's own valorisation of politeness as the basis for good relations is indicative of an everyday cultural negotiation that was in some instances allowing for better understanding. The perilous economic situation placed a burden on everyone, although some were seen as being better able to bear it. What was clear is that the emotional fallout of displacement – nostalgia, cultural dissonance, alienation - is not solely the

preserve of the migrant community, but is felt in different hues by those who consider themselves to be the original inhabitants. In many ways, the market can be understood as a 'diaspora space', in the sense defined by Avtar Brah (1996), that encompasses both migrant populations as they struggle to deal with the effects of the broader social-economic upheavals that brought them there. She writes:

> "Diaspora space, as a conceptual category is 'inhabited' not only by those who have migrated and their descendants but equally those who are constructed and represented as indigenous. In other words the concepts of diaspora space (as opposed to that of diaspora) includes the entanglement of genealogies of dispersion with those 'staying behind' (Brah, 1996: p 181)"

The key terms at work here: intersectionality, diaspora, border and dis/location are present in the lives of the trader described above. In terms of understanding super-diversity, what this chapter shows is that an appreciation of the interactions between different groups as well the response of a specific minority group to the broader life of the city depends on an understanding of space and with broader spatial processes and regimes shape interactions. While work on diversity self-consciously seeks to add complexity to debates about difference inherited from the multiculturalist discourse of the 1990s, I argue that the theoretical capital of this previous era continues to have value, as they highlight how different facets of identification are rendered visible through interaction in particular spaces. The spatial component to identity is something that is stressed in much work on geographies of race and gender in the 1990s, such as Brah, cited above, but also Rose (1997) and Valentine (2008). Vertovec's own schema for understanding diversity, through a situational approach that seeks to understand an activity or event through focusing on, can be enhanced through such insights.

In terms of the Sierra Leonean community in London, then, the marketplace is one of the sites where a diasporic identity emerges through encounters with other co-nationals and the buying of specific goods that link them to Sierra Leone. However, the market is also a place where difference is apprehended, relationships are struck up with a diverse range of others, and more cosmopolitan values are pursued that are not available back home. The consequent tension results in the complex specificity a diasporic consciousness, something that is explored further in my next chapter.

Chapter 6: Rebranding Sierra Leone: Technology, style and the 50th Anniversary of Sierra Leonean Independence

2011 was a significant year to be a Sierra Leonean, marking as it did the 50th anniversary of the country's independence from the UK. While Independence Day – 27th of April – had been celebrated in London on previous years with official and non-official events, this year was being promoted as something big. In common with fellow West African states' jubilee celebrations, the occasion of the anniversary was being used by the Sierra Leone High Commission and the Sierra Leonean government to reach out to those living in the diaspora - in particular, the elite professional class living and working in London and the US – to encourage them to invest in the country and perhaps even return. This appeal was accompanied by an emphatic call for the need to 'rebrand' Sierra Leone, to promote a positive image of the country and to challenge the country's association with violence and poverty in order to attract international investment. Such positivity was also seen as necessary to counter the dissatisfaction and disenchantment felt in some quarters about the county's ongoing troubles.

Like the public celebrations around the wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton, an event with which it also coincided, but more like other 'jubilee' ceremonies such as the Queen's diamond jubilee held in 2012, the independence anniversary was intended to be an act of popular commemoration, that was also performed, calling into being a sense of 'we', of collective Sierra Leone-ness, rooted in a specific historical trajectory and destiny. Reconstruction was also emphasised, with subtle and not-so-subtle prompts for people to get involved and raise money for national development. For a state as fragile as Sierra Leone, symbolic nation-building was inevitably and necessarily tied to actual, practical need for reconstruction and development. National identity was a significant factor in Sierra Leonean social life in London, in part due to the small size of the diaspora compared with other West African communities.

However, I found that this national identity was accompanied by an attitude of ambivalence, sometimes bordering on hostility, towards the nation building project. Lentz and Budniok (2007) and Nieswand (2012) have discussed of 50th Independence anniversary celebrations in the context of Ghana and its diaspora. They demonstrate how these events provide fora for the conscious articulation, discussion and disputation of ideas of national identity, politics and development, bringing them into focus where previously they lay diffuse or dormant. While these events are couched in terms of national unity and harmonious celebration, in practice they render visible the social cleavages and animosities that lay behind the facade of national unity. The Sierra Leonean Independence anniversary was no different in this regard.

In this chapter I describe how a Sierra Leonean diasporic national discourse emerged during the period of the independence anniversary with the aim of enlisting people in the service of national development. In particular I will focus on the idea of 'rebranding' as it emerged in the social events surrounding the anniversary, to explore how it related to popular ideals of sophistication and style. Branding, whether through media, fashion or commodities of consumption, such as the Sierra Leone palm oil mentioned in the previous chapter, was an unescapable aspect of life in the diaspora, condensing and in a sense commodifying a Sierra Leonean identity in order to communicate it across the indeterminate spaces of South London. Arvidsson (2001) writes of brands that they operationalise the everyday interactions of social life in order to generate new forms of informational capital. For the Anniversary, the prevalence of branded imagery, from the official 'Sierra Leone@50' logo to the wristbands, t-shirts and baseball caps sold to commemorate the event, provided Sierra Leoneans with a means to generate diasporic space in London.

However, while the embrace of diaspora-branded fashion and media was widespread, engagement with it reflected the ambiguity of the position of many people. For many young people of Sierra Leonean origin living in the UK, the

anniversary and it's symbolism was important as part of their ongoing self-construction of an African diasporan identity that marked them out in cosmopolitan London society. For others, namely those who were on the edges of the diasporic community, engagement with the diasporic community had its own inherent value as a way of building a sense of self, and enlivening the drudgery of life in the UK.

I begin by focusing on the preamble to the anniversary itself, before looking at different constituencies for which the official events had meanings other than what they intended.

6.1 Rebranding Sierra Leone: some background

Branding can be described as a form of informational capital that utilises peoples' capacity to create social worlds through interaction and relationship, in order to generate surplus value (Arvidsonn 2008). An example would be Harley Davidson Motorcycle clubs, where loyalty to a particular brand is the glue for a tight nit social community. Country branding is a more recent phenomenon, where governments of developing countries seek to project a particular image or a set of attributes in order primarily to attract international investment, but also tourism and other forms of high-value immigration. In the case of Sierra Leone, the idea of rebranding has become commonplace within debates about national development because of the profoundly negative image of the country in international media since the end of the civil war in 2002. This conflict was characterised by particularly gruesome violence towards civilians, such as the systematic amputation of limbs, the use of child soldiers and slave labour in the extraction of so-called 'Blood Diamonds'. These images, provided by documentary footage such as Sorious Samura's 'Cry Freetown' (Samura, 2000) that showed the aftermath of the rebel assault on Freetown in 1999, and by the feature film *Blood Diamond*, created an image of Sierra Leone, and indeed much of Africa in general, as a place of violence, poverty and brutality.

In 2007, following the election of the opposition All Peoples Congress, the new President Ernest Bai Koroma declared that Sierra Leone would be 'open for business'. President Koroma, who had no previous experience in Sierra Leonean politics, had a background working as an insurance broker in the US, and his campaign emphasised his credentials as a businessman, while his detachment from the party political arena marked him as a trustworthy figure, who could reassure foreign investors in particular that Sierra Leone was now a worthwhile place to invest. Once in power, the President pursued policies designed to encourage such private investment from overseas. A very public war on corruption and graft was pursued, with high-profile sackings of government ministers and exposes led by the President and the newly created Anti-Corruption Commission. When I was in Sierra Leone in 2009, the national television broadcaster would regularly show live footage of the President in a cabinet meeting, castigating members of his team for not doing their job properly. At the same time, laws were passed to facilitate foreign investment and setting up of businesses. The diaspora, where much of the country's educated professionals and entrepreneurs now resided, was openly courted to encourage them to bring their skills back to help rebuild the country.

The importance of images to promote a particular vision of Sierra Leone was central in the diaspora. JoAnne D'Alisera, in her (2004) book about Sierra Leonean Muslims in Washington DC, focuses on the role of symbols such as the Cotton Tree, a central landmark in Freetown, in condensing and codifying a particular diasporic subjectivity. Films such as 'Cry Freetown' with their graphic portrayals of rebel violence, were sometimes the only contact that overseas Sierra Leoneans had with their home country, and fed into narratives of decline and disillusion that had long been felt by exiles since the political repression and economic stagnation of the 1980. At the time of my fieldwork, this situation was in the process of being challenged. New government departments, such as the Presidential Office for the Diaspora, sought to offer

incentives and information to encourage Sierra Leoneans abroad to engage with the country, ideally to return. Influential patrons, such as the former British Prime Minister Tony Blair, began to speak optimistically about the country's potential for tourism and investment ('Sierra Leone Rises again', The Guardian, 2009). Meanwhile, a younger generation, who were able for the first time to visit the country, also began to seek ways of articulating their sense of belonging, often utilising the positive affirming discourses of pride and self-betterment found in broader black British culture, and that utilised images, particularly film and video. As I prepared to move up to London to begin my fieldwork, a plan had been underway to make an updated version of Samura's 'Cry Freetown', entitled 'Shine Freetown,' in which a group of British Sierra Leonean young people would make the trip back to the capital to highlight the good things that were going on. Other film projects had already been realised. In October 2008 I attended a viewing of 'the Lion Mountains', (Buckley 2006) a documentary that was part investigation, part personal journey, as it followed a young black British man travelling to the country to explore the history of slavery and colonialism. The 2005 film 'The Sierra Leone Refugee Allstars' (Niles and White 2005), focussing on a group of Sierra Leonean musicians living in a refugee camp in Guinea and their journey back home, evoked a similar narrative of renewed hope evoked through youth and creativity. Such films, along with the burgeoning West African popular music scene, reflected a new atmosphere of an aspirant, engaged, creative diaspora who were concerned using their talents to explore their own relationships with the country.

As the Independence anniversary approached, these two constituencies attempted to join forces. The High Commission had set up an organising committee to plan the year ahead, and had appointed several members of the broader community to oversee key areas such as publicity and fundraising. However, in many ways their narrative approaches clashed with the realities of life in Sierra Leone and the diaspora. In the next section I describe one of the first events related to the anniversary I attended in late 2010, a 'press briefing'

where the organising committee presented their plans to journalists from various online magazines. As will be shown, various techniques were used to promote the desired 'rebranding' of the country that the 50th anniversary was supposed to encourage.

6.2 'We're all in this together - to succeed'

The official independence anniversary celebrations in London were being organised by staff and volunteers at the Sierra Leone High Commission[6]. They themselves were taking their lead from the main organising committee in Sierra Leone, led by the then Minister for the diaspora and several prominent academics and businesspeople. A press briefing, to be held in November 2010, would lay out the plans for the year. I had received my invitation to the briefing from Alhaji, the market trader, who had been appointed chairman of the fundraising sub-committee for the London celebrations and was using his stall on East Street to disseminate information. His involvement in the organising committee had been elicited somewhat against his wishes, however, as senior member of Sweissy Union and a well-known figure in the Sierra Leonean community he admitted he felt obliged to participate. Now he was on board and was doing his best to make the event a success. His main initiative, which he was in the process of organising, was a raffle, first prize being (he hoped) a brand new Mercedes Benz car, or, failing that, a return air ticket to Freetown.

The venue for the press briefing was located in Walthamstow, north London in the studio space of SLTV-online, an internet television channel, at 6 o'clock on a cold Saturday evening. The venue turned out to be an anonymous brick building on an industrial estate. Outside, a banner had helpfully been draped, with the 'Sierra Leone @ 50' official logo and the slogan 'We're all in this together - to succeed', words that appeared to be inspired by those of Britain's coalition government - 'We're all in this together'. Inside, in a small foyer by

some stairs, a reception table had been set up where a smart dressed young woman asked us to register our names, and supplied us with name labels and information packs which included flyers detailing the year's events. Inside, a long hall had been furnished with three banks of chairs, at either end and in front of a small raised stage on which stood a table, laid with a tie-dyed, green white and blue tablecloth, four microphones and four corresponding bottles of water. Despite the fact that the event was scheduled to start at 6:00, it was 6:15 and there were few people here. Mohamed, nonetheless, had managed to bump into an old friend, a year-mate from his student days at Njala University, who was now working at the High Commission, and disappeared off to talk to him. I sat down on one of the chairs to wait.

The briefing was a fairly similar to the other 'diaspora'- oriented events I had experienced in London in the year and half before starting my fieldwork. In 2008 and 2009 I had attended a 'Forum for the Diaspora' and the launch of a Sierra Leonean community forum, both held at a church hall in South London. Like them, this event was styled as a press conference, with a discussion panel on a dais, information packs at the front desk, projector screens displaying images of Sierra Leone, and a general atmosphere of business-oriented seriousness, in contrast to the anonymity of the location.

Tonight, the projector screens were showing 'the Sierra Leone Story', a black and white film dating from Sierra Leone's formal independence in 1961. Grainy footage showed the handover ceremony, with the new Prime Minister Dr Milton Margai receiving the instruments of sovereignty from the Duke of Kent. Other footage showed the capital city Freetown in its 1960s heyday, with white-gloved traffic wardens, double-decker buses, the railway station at Dovecote, as well as scenes of market women trading. These scenes were cut with interviews with some of the ministers in the new SLPP government. John Karefa Smart, the Foreign Minister, outlined the new governments' foreign policy as one based on an 'open door' economic policy and an attitude of friendliness to all nations

'until such time as those nations reject our friendship'. The country's sole woman MP laid out the need for more and better health care and education services, so that women could stand alongside men as equal citizens in the new country. She also made a telling rejection of Communism and 'those who would come to interfere in our internal affairs'. A Krio academic, Henry Eastman, described the historical origins of the Sierra Leone colony, while the Governor General described its educational heritage, and the role the Theological college at Fourah Bay had played in the spread of Christianity throughout West Africa.

What was striking about the film, apart from its historical interest, was the degree of similarity in the range of concerns facing Sierra Leone in the 1960s as compared to today. The policies on offer: an open door economic policy to encourage external investment, an emphasis on health and education, were similar in many ways to President Koroma's agenda for change. The problems – political strife, economic imbalances – provided a melancholic undercurrent to the narrative. The 'open door' policy of the post-independence government resonated with the current strategies pursued by the APC to make the country an attractive destination to do business. However, political concerns of the era also featured. The narrator explained that Sierra Leone operated a trade deficit, which would need to be corrected. In another scene, the arrest of members of the breakaway APC party, who wanted to hold an election before independence, was explained and justified. In showing this footage, the organisers were clearly seeking to draw a line of continuity between 1961 and the present, to evoke the nostalgia that so many Sierra Leoneans did feel for the early years of independence before the country lurched into authoritarianism and economic decline. Independence was a new dawn, a fresh start. The language of the announcer, and the comments of the politicians interviewed, was full of terms of infancy, of growing up, joining the family of nations.

Finally the film was cut and the panellists, three men of middle age in dark suits, and one woman in a demure turquoise dress, members of the organising committee, took their seats on the stage. The room had just begun to get full, as clusters of people wrapped up in winter coats emerged from the foyer to sit down; among them, Alhaji in his usual tracksuit and leather jacket. A group of journalists sat front and centre opposite the dais, while a man with a camcorder, stood up and went about trying to find a decent angle. Someone stood up and delivered prayers in English and in Arabic, and the briefing began.

For the next 25 minutes, the panellists described the objectives of the 50th anniversary to the room. Education was emphasised so that people would have the opportunity to learn about their history and preserve it for future generations. A second objective was the provision of a legacy to perpetuate the impact of the anniversary 'legacy projects' to memorialise the event, although it was too early for anyone to say what they would be. The third element of the anniversary was the need to present a 'positive image' for Sierra Leone, after a particularly brutal civil war. This was a theme that was returned to through the course of the evening. The High Commissioner laid out the criteria along which they were hoping to organise the Anniversary, as specified by the government. It was to be Independent and non-partisan, 'drawing inspiration from the successes of Sierra Leone – such as its successful peacebuilding - rather than its Failures', and, mobilising the resources of all Sierra Leoneans to rebuild the image of the country. While he was speaking, a couple of guys, unaware of the irony of the gesture, appeared from the back of the room with a rolled up Sierra Leonean flag, which they planted in its stand onstage behind the speaking Commissioner.

After the High Commissioner was finished speaking, a second 'Short Video Presentation' was shown on the projector screen. This was a specially produced film for the anniversary, and mixed up some of the old newsreel clips seen in 'Sierra Leone Story' with modern footage of the country set to a funky

soundtrack. At one point, the old footage segued cleverly into the modern when, what appeared to be a black and white film of the Lungi ferry arriving at Kissy dockyard turned to colour, revealing it to be from the present day. The footage showed colourful scenes of Freetown marketplaces and women winnowing rice, and ended with the logo for the anniversary, a golden 50 with streamers of green white and blue and the legend '50 years forward: celebrating a new Sierra Leone'

After the video presentation, the moderator introduced the various subcommittees working on the anniversary preparations. Several of the subcommittee chairs are given similarly lavish introductions by the moderator. Then the microphone was handed to the minister from the office of diaspora Affairs, who laid out the 'mandate' given to them by President Koroma.

Firstly, it should be a year-long celebration ('not a year-long party'), with 'an undivided focus on and commitment to the progress and development of Sierra Leone'. The minister stressed that while there was a need to 'acknowledge the challenges' the focus should be on the positive aspects of Sierra Leone history, which they hoped to build on.

'If we remain rooted in the past we will never progress'.

The minister referred to the negative image of Sierra Leone in the international media – 'blood diamonds', civil war, corruption, nepotism – and the efforts of the President Koroma to change that image to one of a 'resurgent and confident' nation ready for investment. His 'Agenda for Change', the second of the Poverty Reduction Strategies since the end of the war, praised by Tony Blair and George Soros, focused in part on the 'untapped' touristic potential of Sierra Leone, that Blair had described in a recent Guardian article as 'second to none' (Blair 2009). As for the question of youth, he acknowledged the challenge of

providing employment to the youth 'the major perpetrators and victims of the conflict'

The minister was keen to emphasis the progress the current APC government had been making since it came into power in 2007. He pointed out how SL had climbed up the UN's Human Development Index rankings, from 171 to its current position at 157. He spoke of the strides that had been made in rehabilitation and resettlement of ex-combatants and displaced persons. The government sought to use the occasion of the jubilee year to make an impact, with what he described as 'legacy projects' to be undertaken in every district of Sierra Leone. What these were, and who would be undertaking them, was not specified, but the idea seemed to be similar to the 'legacy' promised as an outcome the forthcoming London Olympic Games.

He then introduced the official logo of SL 50th independence, already visible on the promotional material in the information pack - a big golden '50' with a SL tricolour curling out from the '0' and the slogan, '50 years forward: celebrating a new Sierra Leone'.

The final mandate, inevitably, was accountability and transparency. As if to allay what people might be thinking, the minister insisted that this will be of the highest priority. 'We want anyone to worry about where their money is going and what it is being spent on'. He went on to reference President Koroma's very public intolerance of corruption, where there would be 'no sacred cows or scapegoats'.

From there, the minister slipped straight on to encourage donations from those present, pointing out there are over 1 million diasporans world-wide, and at least 200,000 'if not more' in the UK:

'Imagine if everyone gave 10 pounds, what a contribution to the development of Sierra Leone that would be…'

Explaining that 'we are all ambassadors for Sierra Leone', he described how he was at a 'town hall meeting' with the diaspora in Maryland, US where they had begun a '50 for 50' campaign – each person telling 50 people about the Independence celebrations. Social media played a prominent part of this campaign, and he would love to see something similar occur in the UK.

He finished his speech with a neat summation of the hoped for tone of the Independence Anniversary. 'This is a time to reflect on our past, to acknowledge the challenges but also the positives and to build on them to build a positive future for Sierra Leone'.

The events schedule for 2011 was read out by the moderator, and included some ambitious proposals, as well as some more modest. A 'family Fun-day', on Blackheath common, would present cultural performances, dancers and the like. A fashion show 'showcasing the talents of our young people', plays - 'there need to be more plays written and performed about Sierra Leone', and then, 'the crowning glory', a Grand Banquet and Grand Ball at the High Commission, with the possibility of the Queen attending. However, he ruefully added that given that Prince William and Kate Middleton would be getting married on the 29th of April, and Sierra Leonean Independence is on the 27th, this might not in fact be possible.

He then tried to address some of the potential objections people may have to having a year-long celebration. The 'very brutal' Civil War might be offered as a reason for people not to want to celebrate. While he accepts such objections he feels that there are things to celebrate – the history of education in Sierra Leone, its tradition of 'social interaction', its talent in relation to its size 'it has given a lot in terms of talented people, contributed to the development of the world' He

describes how Nigeria and Liberia both had Sierra Leoneans in their civil service for many years. 'We have given the world some of our pride'. We are responsible for singing the praises of Sierra Leone, 'because no one else will do it for us'.

The Press briefing showcased the range of narrative techniques the High Commission sought to employ to engage the broader Sierra Leonean community in the anniversary celebrations. Film and video played a prominent role, in accessing historical material and highlighting the continuity between the hopes of 1961 and the new start promised by the current government. In Freetown, banners for the independence anniversary displaying the face of Sir Milton Margai alongside President Koroma made a similar claim: that the President was following in the direct footsteps of Sir Milton, one of the more universally loved leaders Sierra Leone had had. Appeals to social media and references to other, more widely known public celebrations such as the Olympics aimed to provide further legitimacy to the campaign. Each of these aimed to achieve the underlying mission of changing the public image of Sierra Leone by providing memorable, spectacular re-articulations of its national story.

However, these attempts were ultimately challenged by many of those present. The question and answer session that followed the briefing displayed some of the fissures already emerging in the consensus around the celebration. One journalist present had raised his hand to ask what events would be prepared for the youth of the country.

The press briefing had much in common with previous diaspora-oriented events I had attended in London. Occasions such as this, where a senior minister, and sometimes the President himself, would come to London to seek to mobilise the expatriate Sierra Leonean community, as well as attending Fora for investment, and academic conferences had occurred throughout 2010 and in

the years following the end of the Civil War in 2002. Like these previous events the aim of the press briefing was to inform, to give the official plans for the anniversary year and the underlying narrative the celebrations sought to convey, but also to try to recruit people in London to participate in Sierra Leone's national development. It did this in part through the bringing to bear media technology in the articulation of a particular idea of Sierra Leonean nationhood. This process was part of a wider range of practices that recreated 'Sierra Leone' as a touchstone of identity and self-formation in the UK, with a direct link to the Sierra Leonean state overseas.

Those who attended the press briefing would have had at least a passing interest in such national-level agendas – the London diaspora was full of academics, former civil servants and ex-members of government, NGO and community development workers and businesspeople who had engaged in these issues in the past and considered doing so again. The Diaspora Forum I had attended in 2008 hosted a minister from the newly-created 'Presidential office for the Diaspora', delivering a lengthy speech detailing improvements the country had made and was making under the (then new) APC government of Ernest Bai Koroma. Generous terms were being offered to professionals seeking to return, such as free shipping of personal effects. These events indicated that this was a priority for the Sierra Leonean government, but also that there were at least some people who were interested.

The briefing can thus be viewed as a performance of power. The use of space and ritual was important in this regard: the briefing followed the typical conventions of the government press conference - the 'panel-discussion' format, the lengthy introductions of speakers, the moderated question and answer session at the end in which the panel gave carefully worded answers – knowledge and power were both displayed and withheld. Its specific targeting of the '4th estate' - the diaspora media, both print and online, to disseminate the information, and its location at the studio space of an online Sierra Leonean

television channel, the briefing not only created a sense of formality and officiality, the 'reality' of the Sierra Leonean state working through its representatives in London, and more importantly, a wider Sierra Leonean 'viewing public' both present in the room and virtually present over the Web.

And yet, the power the briefing projected was not simply one of diktat, but of recruitment and exhortation, seeking to bring on board members of the audience by appealing to patriotism and national loyalty. Referring to the negative reputation of Sierra Leone in the International media, as a place of conflict, poverty and violence, the speakers appealed to the personal remembrances of the audience, and the aspects of Sierra Leonean national life that they could feel proud of. An imagined community of diasporan co-nationals was evoked through reference to the community in Maryland, as well as the Netherlands, Germany and Belgium, and the '1 million diasporans worldwide', each contributing their 10 pounds to rebuild Sierra Leone. This device was similar to the charity appeals of large international NGOs for 'just one pound a month', the mobilisation of individual consumer power to effect social change. Also present in the rhetoric were the International community, represented by the figures of Tony Blair and George Soros, as well as the everyday non-Sierra Leonean world of those who needed to be informed about the progress the country was making by these activist – ambassadorial diasporans.

The video presentation, and the screening of 'Sierra Leone Story', incorporated both these techniques of power, both as evidence of the professionalism and technological know-how of the organisers, and the discursive power of their content. This sought to recruit those watching to the cause by utilising emotive imagery – historical images of places associated with Sierra Leone's early days as an independent nation, such as the train station at Dovecote, that connected the capital to the cash-cropping areas of the South-East, and people such as John Karefa-Smart, Foreign Minister and later Senior diplomat at the United

Nations. These images, juxtaposed with contemporary images of Sierra Leone and present politicians, created a sense of continuity between past and present, or rather between the present and a particular, idealised past of the post-independence era. The international legitimation of Sierra Leone as a sovereign, independent nation on the path to modernity, that was at the heart of 'Sierra Leone story' was no doubt something the current government sought to replicate.

Overall in its attempts to project state power and construct a Sierra Leonean diasporan public, the briefing was perhaps not entirely successful. Again, the politics of space intruded. Despite Alhaji's best efforts, the event was not particularly well attended, a fact that he blamed on its awkward location – at the northern extreme of the Victoria Underground Line, far from the main concentrations of Sierra Leoneans in Southwark, Lambeth and Dalston. As for the online viewership, this was unclear. This can be explained by its difficult relationship to 'the past'. As the minister stated boldly, 'If we remain rooted in the past we will never progress'. In glossing over the violent history of Sierra Leone, specifically the violence of the civil of war, the members of the high commission laid themselves open to criticism for burying more problematic memories and events from Sierra Leonean history – namely, the legacy of political repression and neo-patrimonialism exemplified by the single-party rule of the APC under Siaka Stevens.

6.3 'What is there to celebrate?'

The press briefing encapsulated the basic hopes of the High Commission on what kind of Sierra Leonean identity the Anniversary would promote – one that was engaged, nationalistic and compliant with the official narrative of forward-looking positivity. The use of technology, and media technology in particular, was central to painting this picture of modernity. However, this contained with

it elements of a contradiction, in that the forces of technology and media slickness were themselves sites where the ambivalent nature of Sierra Leone diasporic engagement were already being expressed. Around this time the news in London was already becoming dominated by the unfolding popular uprisings in North Africa, as 24 hour news websites streamed footage of crowds of demonstrators filling Tahrir square in Egypt demanding the fall of President Mubarak. I was at Nafi's shop where Ahmad's brother Ali had been showing live BBC footage of the Egyptian revolution on his computer, of government-sponsored thugs attacking protesters, and Egyptian Army tanks creeping along public thoroughfares. The possibilities inherent in the Egyptian and Libyan revolutions had not gone unnoticed by Sierra Leoneans. I remember talking to a young DJ who was hoping to get involved with a public debate I had been helping to organise at the local University on the subject of 'Sierra Leone @ 50: What is there to celebrate?'. He was extremely enthusiastic about the opportunity to discuss the anniversary in a more critical manner, and scathing about the complacency of the 'big men' in charge of the official events:

'Yeah man I was at this event last week in Birmingham and there were all these old guys going on about 'the country the country', they don't even understand what it's like for the youth, all these half-educated leaders… I mean I love my country, cut me and I bleed green white and blue, but we need to be critical, like what's happening in the middle east these days, that's what we need, we need the youth to stand up and say to these guys 'we will hold you accountable'… but some people just look at that and they just see it as a negative question'

The position of youth within Sierra Leone and the diaspora more broadly was an issue that reared its head on a regular basis. How it was addressed, or not addressed, was instructive. At the debate, held a month after the anniversary celebrations itself, a representative of 'Sierra Leone Young leaders' gave a long speech about how the youth needed a voice in the country, and the

government. During the question and answer session, one older man sitting in the audience, raised his hand and asked, why should the youth be given a voice, 'when they were just thugs'. At the press briefing a journalist had posed the question on how the youth would be involved in the celebrations. A portly, 60 something man stood up painfully and addressed her, saying that he was himself a youth-leader and had lots of experience in that area. The chairperson interjected and pointed to a planned 'family fun day' on Blackheath common. From these statements it was clear young people's realities were not well understood. Talking over the phone to Nick, one of the young members of the publicity team, 6 weeks after the event, he expressed his dismay at this rather lame idea.

> 'To be honest, it's a bit of a battle of mentalities, between
> those who say 'listen to us, this is the 21st century, we can
> do this this and this' and the older people with what I suppose
> are old ways of thinking, who've got that old-school of African mentality
> of like 'you're young, we're the adults so you have to
> do what we say'… I mean there are a few who are a bit more
> receptive to new ideas but they're a small minority, the majority
> are really hard to get through to, so it's a struggle.'

He had come to the UK as a small boy and grown up here. Charismatic, slick and motivated, his involvement in the Independence anniversary was part of a burgeoning roster of media projects, which included SLTV online, the web based TV channel. For him, there was potential for using utilising diaspora consciousness in much a more radical way:

> 'I mean with Sierra Leoneans you've got intelligent ones
> and not so intelligent ones – the intelligent ones are able to
> read up, do research about Salone and find things out for
> themselves, the rest are a bit passive… but when you're

talking about your average Sierra Leonean kid, in Peckham

or Bermondsey, or Elephant and Castle, who

lives in the blocks, no sense of identity, they are the one's

who you need to get through to, you need to understand

where they are coming from… '

Another of his many projects was to shoot a documentary, entitled 'Shine Freetown', intended as a positive update of 'Cry Freetown', where a group of young diasporans would return to the city for the first time. A Facebook page was posted, although nothing had happened as of yet. Another was a music video for the single 'We are Africans', by British African R&B group JJC. The song was a thundering, Pan-African call to arms, with the shout-along chorus of 'Africans, Awoo!'. Nick had shot a suitably rabble-rousing video in the style of a US marines drill chant, complete with the JJC crew in army fatigues standing to attention being blared at by a Sergeant-major while attractive black women in combat dress and sunglasses stood in the background giving the black power salute. Currently he was promoting a new rapper, another young diasporan by the name of Triple C : 'Yeah he's my main man, he's going to be massive this year.'

By February 2011, things were moving forward, albeit slowly. In January there had been a 'town hall' style community meeting at a venue off the Ilderton Road in Southwark. The High Commissioner had attended, and had taken questions about the anniversary to a far larger gathering than at the press briefing. There had been drinks and live performances from popular Sierra Leonean musicians including Abdul TJ, Collins Pratt and Jungle Leaders, and dancing had gone on into the small hours. Triple C had done a 15 minute spot to promote his forthcoming album, entitled Salone Borbor ('Sierra Leonean boy'). Word was getting around, although in his opinion, not as quickly or as effectively as he would like.

At his performance at the Town Hall meeting, Triple C took to the stage in a hooded top with a 'I luv Salone' logo emblazoned on it, and a green white and blue flag draped over his shoulders, and raced through a medley of songs from the new album, rapping over a taped backing track. The music was lean and gritty, somewhat different from the bouncy Krio-inflected club music proffered by Sierra Leonean artists like Jungle Leaders, who were previous on the bill. Relatively unknown, his performance was applauded politely, people not really dancing. Watching from the back of the hall, I wondered whether Triple C's music, in songs like 'In da West', a 'Concrete Jungle'-style condemnation of life as an African youth growing up in Hamburg, was a step too removed from many of those here, first-generation immigrants who had strong ties to home.

I interviewed Triple C after his performance. Triple C, also known as Charles Cecil Coomber, lived and recorded most of the time in Hamburg in Germany. Raised in the Eastern Police area of Freetown, he left the country after primary school to rejoin his father who was working in Germany as a chemist. Like many Krio Freetonians he had been involved in music from a young age through the church, his father being an organist. Uprooted and lonely in an unfamiliar city, Triple C turned to music to vent his frustrations, releasing singles over the internet and even scoring a top ten hit in Australia. A popular festival artist in Germany, his music was located squarely in the North Atlantic rap genre, all sinewy beats and social-commentary, performed in English. His album, 'Salone Borbor' ('Sierra Leone Boy') had marked his first re-engagement with his country of birth, and features songs such as 'Tumba Dance' featuring collaborations with homegrown Sierra Leonean artists, as well as sampling the work of older musical luminaries such as SE Rogie, the palmwine guitarist and singer.

> 'Sierra Leone was always me, it was something that never
> left me, although I wasn't very knowledgeable about it at
> the time… so felt like I owed it something… I wanted to

give something back. This new album it's the first one I've
done in Krio, it's just me… I've even started including Sierra
 Leonean musicians on it. One track I even sample SB Rogie…
I went to Freetown, I walked around a lot, I met [popular
musical acts] Emmerson, Jungle Brothers, Alonso. Did some
radio interviews, SLBS, did some shows… We really need to
up our game, make music that can appeal to everyone…'

He told me he had decided he wanted to set up an Art school in Freetown, to
help kids further their creativity, and cited his cousin, an inventor, as an
example of the innate creativity of Sierra Leoneans.

'Salone Borbor, the songs have a sentimental value, it's me
trying to touch base with Sierra Leonean culture. Some of the
 tracks on the album are about highlighting issues, like *'Real
Tok Freetown'*… I mean when I went there in 2009, it was a shock
you know, I wouldn't say I was disappointed, but its changed
quite a lot from what I remember… I asked my uncle how people
can manage, and he said 'we make life with what we have'. That
sums it up really. I mean growing up in the west its easy, you
expect when you flick a switch you've got electricity, hot water,
 and going to Sierra Leone it would be easy to look down on
things, but I made up my mind I'm here (in Sierra Leone) to
 learn… I learned that we shouldn't take things for granted.'

'The album, there's no fiction, it's all from some kind of
experience… it has to be as real as possible, you've got to
be true to who you are. And I want to give something back
 because I'm so lucky to have this opportunity; I'm blessed to be here.

Triple C clearly was coming to Sierra Leone from a remove, from the life 'in da West' that, despite its inherent problems, had provided him with his career and his success. His re-engagement with the country was for personal, artistic reasons as much as it was for any deep seated patriotism, something he clearly sought to prove with the album title and heavy use of the Sierra Leone flag on his promotional material . Tellingly, while this album was a homage to his Sierra Leonean roots, in terms of his future projects, he was not going to be pinned down.

> 'I want to work with different musicians – the next album
> will be 90% English.

Triple C and Nick can be seen as part of the new generation of diaspora-born Sierra Leoneans. Unlike those who had grown up in the country, their experiences in metropolitan Europe had created a distance between them and their country of origin. Both in their 20s, they had chosen to re-engage in Sierra Leone, as part of intensely individual journeys of self-discovery. Triple C's music seemed to be only a temporary excursion into specifically 'Sierra Leonean' music, as part of his blossoming career as a recording artist. His outlook was far more global. Similarly, Nick was highly engaged with the plans for the Independence Anniversary, and had embraced the idea of promoting the country to the wider world. Yet his relationship to Sierra Leone was interesting, as it seemed to be expressed most clearly in his various projects. In person he was very much the hip young London media tycoon in the making. His interactions with the High Commission revealed a frustration that was familiar to me who had struggled as an outsider to accept the sometimes antiquated bureaucracy when I lived in Freetown. From his location in London, with the full gamut of media technology at his disposal in his studio, he seemed fully at home as part of the 'diaspora'.

Sierra Leone was not the first West African nation to have celebrated its Jubilee. Ghana, in 2007, and Nigeria in 2010 both expended large amounts of money in their own celebrations, each focusing on a particular theme (Celebrating Excellence, in the case of Ghana) and each provoking specific anxieties. Nigeria in particular, a country with close cultural and historical links with Sierra Leone, provoked similar ambivalence amongst commentators who pointed out the prevalence of corruption and underdevelopment in what remains Sub-Saharan Africa' most populous country. Both countries had been making overtures over the preceding years to its overseas population after several decades of professional and elite emigration, and the 'global' nature of their celebrations as well as their strong, self-confident presence of Ghanaian and Nigerian communities in London (exemplified by the massed crowds attending the England versus Ghana International football friendly), placed a degree of pressure on Sierra Leoneans to follow their lead.

On a more mundane level, significant interaction with fellow West Africans at school, at church and the mosque, and at the regular 'versus' club nights around south London (Sierra Leone versus Ghana etc.) prompted many Sierra Leoneans into adopting more a self-conscious national identity. Some younger people, particularly those who had grown up in the UK, felt more affinity with their fellow British African peers than perhaps with their parents. A 'Pan-African' youth cultural identity, in which the flag, the national history and a certain quotidian experience of travel to and from the region was combined with the technological and cultural resources of British youth culture – especially film and music - was particularly visible as distinct contribution at Sierra Leonean events. This was a need to 'show people wi koltcha', to *represent* Sierra Leone, both in the sense of making it visible, but also portraying an image to the outside world, the everyday non-Sierra Leonean world present in Southwark and in the UK more broadly. Those involved in this work were often those whose successful building of urban lives in the UK had perhaps distanced them from the lives of their older relatives. Nafi, with her single-minded

ambition to market to the West African diaspora more broadly, could be seen as fitting into this group. These were the 'diaspora' that the Sierra Leonean government were looking to come back, and who were the most receptive to appeals based on national patriotism. Ironically, they were also the ones who were perhaps the most settled in London, and often the least prepared to deal with the reality of the national home.

6.4 'Mind the Gap' (or '50 years backward?')

The motto of the anniversary, '50 years forward: celebrating a new Sierra Leone', indicated the reluctance towards dwelling on the past, and a determination to move forward in time towards a modern, prosperous future. It resonated with the development policy of the APC government, whose 'Agenda for Change' called for 'a complete transformation of our economy'. The video footage and narrative tone of the press briefing aimed to create a more positive image of Sierra Leone, self-consciously tying it to the optimism of the first anniversary in 1961. Modernisation, transformation, 'attitudinal and behavioural change', 'zero tolerance' to corruption, these were the new slogans of the government, backed by support from the UK's department for international development. Given the violence of the civil war, and the persistence of extreme poverty and deprivation in Sierra Leone today, such an attitude was understandable. However, such forward thinking optimism was not universally shared amongst people in London. This was due to the persistence of memories of the past, in particular the political violence and repression of the 1980s, and the continuing inability of many in the political establishment to listen to the voices of the young people. In their everyday reflections, Sierra Leoneans I spoke did indeed share their valorisation of the 1960s, but the tone was melancholic, at best stoic, faced with the unsettling changes to the country in the meantime. The reality of the 'imagined homeland' was that it no longer recognised as such by several of my informants, who preferred therefore to dwell in the past. This section engages with a few of their

memories. These narratives contrast with the myth-making engaged in by both the High Commission and diaspora artists such as Triple C.

Joe G.B. was in his late sixties, although looked perhaps 10 years younger. Plump and energetic, he had a slightly shrill voice and a combustible temperament, and lived with his wife on the Aylesbury estate. I had gotten to know him after I had met him at a meeting of the Sierra Leone Fellowship at the nearby Methodist Church. Occasionally he would stop by the shop on his way home from church to spend time chatting with Granddad, who was a friend of his. Before leaving Sierra Leone he worked for many years as a senior civil servant, a district officer in Kenema district in the South-east of the country, during the Presidency of Siaka Stevens. His experiences under the determinedly kleptocratic Stevens regime has left him with an enduring sense of injustice and a fondness for correct procedure, qualities that earned him a certain amount of reproach at the Fellowship meetings, where they came across as obstructionism. Yet he would respond with a mixture of stoicism and defiance – 'I am alone here'.

Today, a warm spring day, he was wearing a khaki coloured bush shirt and trousers, similar to those worn by minor officials in Sierra Leone, and shiny black loafers. Cecil John was there as well, sitting on a stool. At fellowship meetings Mr John would often try to antagonise Mr Bassie by making fun of his provincial background. Today, there is little friction as talk turns to the Independence celebration preparations. Alhaji had been charged with organising a fundraising raffle, his hope for first prize being a brand new Mercedes Benz car. Unfortunately, due to lack of interest, the raffle draw had to be cancelled:

'These people are not serious' scoffs Granddad. Cecil John spotted a younger man in a red hooded sweater crossing the street towards the shop. His name turned out to be David, and he'd been helping Alhaji at his stall. He had an

edgy, somewhat unhinged manner. Granddad asked him if he was going back to Freetown for Independence Day. He scoffed.

'What do you mean, 'Independence Day'?! When I was growing up it was Republic Day… Why should we be looking backwards? I believe in going forwards, I don't believe in going backwards'

Mr Bassie tried to talk him round. 'Independence means that, our masters have left us, so now we must stand up for ourselves'

'Independence, when we can't even manage our own affairs? No, I'm not falling for it'

'So, you are one of Siaka Stevens' boys, then?'

'I was in APC youth, it's true'

After a few minutes he left the shop. Mr Bassie, who had kept quiet during David's tirade, now spoke up.

'I tell you, Siaka Stevens, he *don pwel (*ruined*)* Salone, he don pwel wi kontri (he ruined our country). The Margais, when they left they left us with a solid foundation, for 10 years. The SLPP was the only democratic party in Salone, because they lost elections and gave up power, two times… I tell you, before Stevens, our money was strong, we were tied to Sterling, the Leone is was worth 50 cents, so it was stronger than the dollar… the railway was a single gauge track, it would have been very cheap to upgrade it to a double gauge track which is the International standard, instead, what did he do? He pulled up the line, sold it to a German company!

'What was his book? '*What Life Has Taught Me*' he says that was the one thing he regretted, pulling up the railway'

'I tell you the APC they slaughtered people like chickens. Anybody who was on the other side they would be shot… and they are still in power! What's his name, he is the ambassador to ----, I remember him in the 1970s, with an AK47, and a… what do you call them? A Rocket Launcher… and that other guy, the one that would dance with the devils, he's an ambassador… these boys are still around!'

Like some of the other older Sierra Leoneans I met in London, Joe G.B.'s experiences in the 1970s and 80s had left him with little but disdain for the activities of the current APC government, many of whose members he claimed were part of the Stevens' regime in the old days. Of the general direction of the country since Independence, his view, like many others I spoke to, was of a country that has lost its way. He told me he was currently writing a book, entitled 'Mind the Gap', - part memoir, part history ('you'll have to read it to find out which Gap I mean', he told me).

His indignation towards the political class that came in during the Stevens regime was indicative a more widespread sadness and nostalgia for the way things used to be. The press briefing itself touched on this nostalgia with its screening of Sierra Leone story. Others confided in me their memories of the days when Sierra Leone – or, more specifically – Freetown, was an orderly, elegant city, connected to the outside world. Financial parity, with the Leone tied to sterling, as well as allowing for the cheaper purchase of foreign goods, allowed the members of the bureaucratic and political elite to consider themselves part of the rest of the world. Infrastructure, in particular the railway that connected the capital city with the South Eastern provinces, similarly became a symbol of proud modernity.

One older man, whose father had been a senior diplomat when Stevens first became prime minister in 1968 described the history of post-independence Sierra Leone as composed of two eras:

> 'The thing is, if you talk to these younger people, 30, 35,
> they won't know what to tell you because they don't
> remember what it was like. You can divide Sierra Leone into
> two periods. Electricity, and no electricity. Some of these
> people come here, they've never seen a train! They wouldn't be
> able to tell you what time the train would leave to the Protectorate,
> because they don't know.'

> Fellow, I'll tell you something, in the old days, 1967, 1968,
> Freetown was the most beautiful place. No traffic, [there was]
> running water, electricity. The permanent secretary would
> be at work 15 minutes before time. Messengers would go to
> work in pin-stripe trousers, and crepe-sole shoes. The crepe
> would be whiter than your teeth! People had to be at the
> Office 15 minutes before time, or they'd be sent home without
> pay. You know the people selling on the street, almost all the
> way to the office – they weren't there, if you wanted something,
> you'd go to a shop like this, go inside and buy what you wanted.'

Granddad and Efie described to me their memories of electioneering in the 1960s, where candidates would go door to door, 'each party had their own office but it was all peaceful - everyone was singing and dancing'. Yet the halcyon view of the 60s sometimes masked the social tensions that were present at that time. For much of the first half of the 20th century, only Christian children were allowed to attend the mission run schools in the Colony. This effectively meant that children of the protectorate were excluded on this basis, and while the British administration sought to remedy this in the latter years of

colonial rule, this elitism laid the foundations of much of the inequality that persisted after Independence. An older Krio lady, who had left Sierra Leone in the 1960s to work for Barclays Bank, similarly feels nostalgic about the railway. However, it is population changes that have unsettled her picture of Freetown.

> 'Things were very good back then, there was lots to eat,
> markets were busy, trains were going and coming, unloading
> goods every day. And we had different qualities of rice, 4
> types of rice from the farms. People lived very well, we would
> have two meals on the table every day, nobody went hungry…
> I tell you David, things have really changed for the worse, some
> people are lucky if they have one solid meal a day… and there
> is no more railway line, so what do you expect. How can a
> country survive without transport? … who is it who plants
> foodstuffs in the protectorate – they don't like you calling
> it that now – *kontri boi, kontri gyal*, they are all in Freetown,
> and they are all accusing us now, saying now it's our time…
> we can't hire them as servants anymore, we used to have maids,
> servants to help around the place… Now they are in power…
> Sir Milton Margai, he was a Mendee (sic), Siaka Stevens was a Limba…'

Memories such as these, of Freetown in the 1960s; clean, efficient, well-maintained, connected to the wider world – implied their grimy opposites, the city as was today, its population swollen by refugees from the provinces, many who lived in large shanty neighbourhoods of *pan-bodi* corrugated zinc houses like those at Kroo Bay, or on the foundations of half-built mansions abandoned by their wealthy owners during the war years. Lumley, where I stayed in 2010, was formerly a sleepy village west of the city centre; since the war, it had been transformed into a busy junction, its roundabout regularly clogged with traffic as returnee commuters headed home for their new houses in Goderich. As for electricity, during my stay in 2009, night-time in Freetown still buzzed with the

sound of 'Kabbah tigers', gasoline-fired generators named in sarcastic honour of post-war president Ahmad Tejan Kabbah.

On 6th January 1999 the AFRC, a junta composed of military and RUF insurgents, entered the capital from the East, and began a systematic brutal sack which left thousands dead and much of the city in ruins. The brutality of the attack was captured in Sorious Samura's harrowing (2000) documentary 'Cry Freetown'. Across the river the Western neighbourhoods of Aberdeen, Lumley, Wilkinson Road and Murraytown, where Nafi's family were living, were protected by the presence of ECOMOG troops at Congo Cross bridge, yet here too the pall of violence and destruction would have been all to evident in the presence of refugees and the sounds of gunfire and shelling. Footage such as this and the stories that filtered back were all that some of the long-time settlers in the UK, like the older lady quoted above, had to connect them to their former homes, and it added to their despondency. For many Sierra Leoneans who arrived in London in the 1990s, their memories of home consisted of a particular time period of the 1960s and 70s when they were young. Yet while the High Commission sought to activate these nostalgic associations with place to mobilise people to act, for some it had the opposite effect. This jarring gap between the promise held by the country in 1961 and the way it is today was too much for some people to bear.

Cecil John, now absent from the country for 40 years, had no intention of returning, preferring a life in relatively comfortable exile. The persistence both in government and indeed, in London itself, of 'these boys', members of the old APC youth wing, who had been employed to intimidate and ultimately silence political opposition during the 1970s, was just one destabilizing echo of Sierra Leone's troubled post-independence period that still lingered. Neither the governing APC nor the opposition was immune to criticism on these grounds. In the run-up to the 2012 presidential elections the nomination of former NPRC coup-member Julius Maada Bio as SLPP flag bearer drew similarly outraged

criticism from the pro-government online press, claiming he would send the country back to the 'bad old days'.

People's personal memories of the 1960s, and the subsequent 'fall from grace' that had become materially manifest in the disordered character of Freetown revealed to those who had been home since the war also challenged the idea of a 'new Sierra Leone' promoted by the government. In many ways, newness was the problem – the old days, the way things used to be, was the ideal that people cherished. While such memory-work could be admonished as being inhibiting to progress, ('if we are rooted in the past we will never progress'), such memories are themselves part of the stories that prompted many people to migrate in the first place. The language of renewal, of 'looking forward' was thus in tension of being undermined by peoples' memories of the past, and their experience of the reality of modernity both in Sierra Leone and in the UK. Yet in some cases this tension was productive. Renewal and revival were themselves powerful tropes amongst people I spoke to, as was the recovering of historical birthright. These were the subjects of artistic creation and political passion for many in the diaspora, and the language of religion, the subject I turn to in the next chapter. For now, it remains to discuss Independence Day itself, and how it all turned out.

6.5 'Olman get sho'

Sierra Leonean Independence Week occurred in a London that was already gearing up for the outdoor celebrations for the Royal wedding of Prince William and Kate Middleton. The coincidence of the two events was somewhat frustrating for the organisers of Sierra Leone @50, because some had hoped, and slightly rash rumours had been circulated to the effect, that there would be a Royal presence at the celebrations, to mirror the participation of the Duke of Kent at the original ceremony in 1961. This anti-climax was exacerbated by the apparent disunity and scandal that had emerged around the organisation of the

events itself. News from Freetown spoke of corruption within the national organising committee, after the chairman had been accused of spending much of the budget on new cars and expensive trips to the US. This story, reported on online newspapers and printed off for informal distribution, confirmed the suspicions of those who saw such large events as excuses for well-connected politicians to make money. Rather than a replay of 1961, as President Koroma's government had hoped for, the anniversary was evoking memories of a less celebrated event, that the notorious Organisation of African Unity Summit, held in Freetown in 1980, for which President Siaka Stevens emptied the country's cash reserves to pay for a state of the art conference centre and hotel for the delegates. Such largesse had effectively bankrupted the country and was one of the leading factors behind the economic crisis that gripped Sierra Leone for the rest of the decade. For those involved in organising the UK events, such comparisons were frustrating.

'People aren't happy' Alhaji confided to me when I visited him at his stall. 'They see what is happening over there with this guy (X) - they think it we are going to do the same thing'.

When I asked people what they were doing to celebrate, the response was one of cynicism 'Wetin wi get fo celibret?' (What is there to celebrate?). Meanwhile, in London, there was disorganisation and disunity. As April approached, the exact nature of the plans for the official celebrations had still not been made clear. By as late as March, publicity materials had yet to be circulated. A rumour spread that the organisers were running out of money already, with the High Commissioner himself having to go back to Freetown to beg the government for extra funds. The High Commission had organised its own fundraising banquet at a plush hotel in Bayswater, central London. On the flyer, celebrity guests included the footballer, West Ham United's Carlton Cole, the R&B singer Neneh Cherry, and President Koroma himself. In the event, only Cole had appeared, and the number of guests attending the black-tie, red carpet event

numbered to less than 100. Out of defiance or indifference, or perhaps impatience, several other groups had begun to put together their own plans for the holiday. London's annual calendar of Association thanksgivings, outings and Dances, organised by the dozens of hometown, neighbourhood, church and alumni associations meant that many small groups had already made substantial plans for parties well in advance. Some feared that this would dilute the character of the anniversary.

'*Olman get sho (everyone's putting on a show)*', Efie complained to me when I visited Nafi's on the Thursday before the Independence week. 'We should have just one party, let us come together to celebrate'.

'Where you and me come from, if you lived on one road and I lived on another road, when holidays come around we would meet at the junction. That's how we do it… Here, people just do their own thing… that's the culture here… I tell you, it's just selfishness. We should come together. We are one people'.

This dismay at the fragmentation was accompanied by a sense of self-consciousness, as Sierra Leoneans compared themselves to other groups who seemed more articulate at expressing their identity in cultural celebrations around the borough. Nafi mentioned the example of the Latin American Festival del Pueblo, which had taken place at Burgess Park over the previous years, as an example of an immigrant community that had got its act together. Even within the Sierra Leonean diaspora worldwide, reports that the community in New York City had even organised a street masquerade made the UK's efforts seem a bit unimaginative.

Sweissy Union, where Alhaji held a position as chairman, was one of the more active Sierra Leonean associations in South London. It had its origins in a mutual aid association founded by a group of informal traders in central Freetown, and named after a Lebanese gold trader who had allowed them to

utilise the space around his premises and supported some of their early ventures. I myself had seen the bold murals advertising its presence on the side of mobile phone charging stations in the city, as well as posters promoting their annual beach outing. Sweissy Union UK had been behind many of the previous year's anniversary celebrations, however, this year the High Commission had elected to do without their services. This had riled many of the members who saw themselves as the authentic voice of the youth and had built the Union's reputation on these events. In the end, Sweissy had organised their own dance, as had SL4U, another diaspora organisation, as had several other crews in various areas of South London. The official event, a Dance at the Lighthouse on Camberwell Road, had been put together at the last moment. Inevitably for the cash strapped Sierra Leonean community at large, this plethora of events meant that people had to pick and choose which ones they went for.

Independence Day fell on a Thursday. I took the bus from the corner of East Street and Walworth Road down to Peckham, where I hoped to meet a friend who was a fashion designer and producer. As I jumped off at Peckham Rye, I noticed that amongst the bustling crowds of this otherwise normal Thursday afternoon, here and there, people were sporting green white and blue t-shirts, scarves, head-ties, baseball caps, football shirts, like on the afternoon before a football game. On other days I had visited this neighbourhood, such as the Black History Month event I attend over a year previously, I had walked through Peckham and wondered to myself who among the milling black faces was from Sierra Leone, and how I would make contact with them if they were. Today, however, it was obvious. While there were no official events for the majority of people to attend until the Dinner Dance on Saturday, people had taken it upon themselves to declare their patriotism. It was a long way from the fear and distrust recounted to me by Alhaji when he described how people tried to pass themselves off as African-Caribbean for fear of being deported. Up at East Street, one of the Sierra Leonean traders had cooked up a pot of pepper soup for passers-by to join in the festivities. Out on Choumert Road, guys and

girls had begun to gather in preparation for the various parties that would be going on around the borough, slickly dressed in their best gear, teetering heels or crisp white trainers. I met my fashion designer friend who escorted me over to a nearby tailor shop where I could get myself adequately kitted out in a commemorative green white and blue scarf. Wrapping the itchy scarf first around my neck, then winding it around my arm where it was more comfortable, I immediately began to draw cackles of amusement from passers-by and incredulous stares from young people on their way to the party.

By marking myself in this way, I had attempted to partake in the solidarity and pageantry that the Independence Day called for. By this point I was ambiguously positioned to those who knew me as an honorary Sierra Leonean but with unavoidable outsider status, by my white skin and knowledge of Krio; the scarf no doubt made me even more incalculable and ridiculous to the strangers who smiled and giggled at me on the way back home. Wearing the scarf projected my association with the country beyond the intimacy of personal conversation and language, into the public realm. Similarly, the wearing of these clothes by others was a statement to the world at large, of pride, of deliberate affiliation with a particular place, of an intimacy with the idea of Sierra Leone that was reflected by the proximity of the uniforms with the skin of the wearer, which recalled the popular nationalism of football matches and sports events. Earlier in the year, the Ghanaian football team had come to the UK to play a friendly against England, and the away support had been swollen by large numbers of diasporan Ghanaians decked in their national colours, waving flags and signs which declared 'Jollof Power', a reference to the ubiquitous spiced tomato rice dish that was the hallmark of West African cuisine. Despite the numerous misgivings of Sierra Leoneans around the notion of the anniversary as celebration, there was, nonetheless, evidently something powerfully attractive and necessary about representing their country to the wider city at large. By moving this desire to represent into the public realm in

the form of personal attire, it staked a powerful claim for recognition from the wider community.

That evening, I accompanied my friend Musa to an independence party at Stella's nightspot off Walworth Road. Unlike the cavernous hall of the Lighthouse, Stella's was small, dark and intimate, and most of the year served as a venue for the watching of Premier League football matches and the drinking of post-work beers. However, tonight the place was heaving with people in various stages of inebriation, and the sound system played Sierra Leonean pop hits at a deafening volume. In the tiny de facto dance floor women in halter tops and tight jeans and blue white and green hair-ties gyrated enthusiastically to the music, while regulars sat squeezed behind the picnic tables at the sides eating roast-meat kebabs and drinking bottles of Guinness and Heineken. Every so often a group of people would stagger out of the mêlée of dancers and out the front door, to catch their breath or to have a cigarette. Musa and I chatted loudly and otherwise stood around or tried to dance in the confined space. At one point a fight broke out in the middle of the dance floor, and the antagonists had to be separated by their friends. However, the atmosphere as a whole was genial, drunken and celebratory.

Suddenly, the music changed, from one of the cheesier pop hits to a repetitive, call and response chant, a hypnotic rhythm, and an odd refrain made by what sounded like a child's recorder or a penny whistle. A commotion at the back of the room led several people to hurriedly make for the exit, as there suddenly emerged a tall, horned, antlered figure that bobbed and swayed menacingly in the half-light of the bar. It was an ojeh devil, a masked dancer I had encountered in Freetown during the Easter Monday celebration the previous year. The central power of the ojeh initiation society, which had been brought to Sierra Leone by Yoruba re-captives in the 19th century, it was a regular feature of street parades and celebrations in Sierra Leone, but something I had hitherto not seen in London. Hidden beneath an elaborate and grotesque mask, with a

deer's head complete with antlers and studded with shells and goats horns, the dancer moved to the centre of the room where it began to bob and whirl to the music, the previously dancing crowd parting to make space for it. A half-dozen mobile phones were produced from people's pockets to record this surprise intrusion, as the devil spun and danced, while being desperately fanned by an accomplice as another brandished a wooden witch gun signalling for people to keep their distance. Musa tapped me on the shoulder and insisted I take his picture while the devil was dancing, while others in the crowd whooped and sang along to the backing music. Finally, the devil retreated and people cheered and stared at each other in satisfaction and amazement.

The appearance of the ojeh devil put a stamp of authenticity on the day that had so far been somewhat generic. Where the national flag provided the formal, official and public face of Sierra Leoneans in London, the ojeh devil was in many ways its counter-weight. In Sierra Leone, the power of initiation societies, that taught young men and women the lore of the community, was respected up to the level of the president, and their broad influence, that pre-dated colonial rule, made them a symbol of authentic legitimacy as well as potential danger. Moreover, while the public articulation of Sierra Leonean national identity through branded clothing sought to declare openly the persons membership and subordination to the power of the national community, the masked devil worked in a similar, opposite way; the wearer was not simply obscured, rather they became the devil who was the representative of unseen world behind the visible, the power beyond the political power of the state. Yet while in Freetown these masked figures would be objects of real fear and threat, causing shopkeepers and children to run for cover, in London their power was muted, contained by the real indeterminacy of an uncomprehending wider society. Within the safe confines of Stella's nightspot the power of the ojeh devil could be tasted if only for a few minutes. Outside, it would have been a different matter.

6.6 Conclusion

In this chapter I have explored some of the conflicts over memory and representation that were prompted by the 50th anniversary of independence. I argue that the conscious articulation of an activist diasporic Sierra Leonean identity, in the sense of a collective, united by a commitment to restoring the by the High Commission, and its partial adoption by members of the community in the UK, reflected a similar attempt to build a workable sense of historical agency following the upheaval and destruction of the civil war. Both young Sierra Leoneans living in the UK, and the Sierra Leonean government, are engaging in the wider world of media technology in order to gain access to that world and the power it represents. The resort to a two dimensional 'branded' identity necessarily resulted in the condensing of complex, ambivalent personal history and memory into a 'clean' image that transcended place and time.

As we have seen, this attempt to articulate such a clean narrative was challenged by members of the broader community whose personal memories, experiences and political persuasions made them dismissive or uncomfortable with this whitewashing of history. 'What is there to celebrate?' was a common response to queries about the celebration, with mention made of the party political bias, personal greed or incompetence of those organising the event. At the same time, even those who were critical accepted the need for some kind of community gathering. As Mercer et al (2008) argue in the context of Cameroonian and Tanzanian home associations, such groups are as much places where those in the diaspora can come together for mutual support and fellowship, as they are consciously patriotic agents of homeland development and uplift. In London, this tension between the official call for diasporic engagement and personal and collective grievances, trauma and suspicion of many in the community, was mirrored by the ambivalence where vocal critics nonetheless took part in the gatherings and parties of the community.

What emerged in these events was the appearance of a diasporic space in which the actuality of the homeland was transformed into an ideal that served to provide fellowship and enjoyment for those in the UK. Like in the previous chapter, the space of the diaspora becomes home through such enactments of belonging. The power of branding, specifically in the use of the items of clothing in the national colours, allowed people create forms of collective solidarity and distinctiveness in the anonymity of the city, just as the artistic endeavours of musicians such as Triple C allowed them to articulate a personal distinctiveness and sense of rootedness, whilst fully enjoying the opportunities of life 'In Da West'. While the message of the anniversary articulated a particular 'brand narrative' of positivity and renewal of 'back home' by ambassadorial Sierra Leonean diasporans, this was rearticulated into a performance of collective solidarity and claim for recognition within London itself.

Chapter 7: 'God na wan': Religion, universality and negotiating and transcending diversity in the Sierra Leone Diaspora

In this chapter I focus on the issue of religious expression and identification amongst Sierra Leoneans in the diaspora, in order to explore how religion shapes Sierra Leoneans' interactions with others. I argue that in practical terms, religious affiliation and practice, particularly in the two world religions of Christianity and Islam, offer frameworks and spaces for Sierra Leoneans to negotiate encounters with difference in London. At church or at the mosque, appeals to forms of universal power and truth allow believers to situate themselves in the world and engage with others according to a stable framework. As has been observed elsewhere by scholars of religion and migration, religion has both a conservative and adaptive role for migrants (Cadge and Ecklund, 2007, Pasura, 2012); by shoring up group identity, and giving the opportunity to engage with the 'other' both in the institutional environments of church and mosque, and outside of these arenas, on the street and at work, via the moral frameworks supplied by each faith. Religious practices can also provide the means by which migrant groups can inscribe urban space with their own meanings and narratives (Garbin, 2012, 2013, Ugba, 2006), and even claim institutional authority and influence within its collective spaces (Fumanti, 2010). However, I argue that its role should be seen as wider than these somewhat functionalistic attributes. I argue in this chapter, as I stated in Chapter 2 and 3 that the engagement between migrants and non-migrants cannot be divorced from historical, in this case colonial and postcolonial, underpinnings. The missionary, transcultural heritage of much Sierra Leonean religion means that religious practice in this context operates as a form of power and knowledge which can be used to critique the host society, but also Sierra Leonean society itself. Concepts such as nationality, ethnicity and race are thus unsettled by religious practice even as religious institutions provide the venues for their expression. Religious affiliation is therefore neither

simple nor unproblematic in its effects and feeds into Sierra Leone's still unfolding nation-building project.

The 2001 census reported that 71% of Sierra Leonean born respondents were Christian, 24% were Muslim, with a small number listed as 'other' or 'no religion' (2001 Census). Through my fieldwork it quickly emerged that for Sierra Leoneans in London, religious affiliation was often a central part of social identity, providing a support group and a source of contacts, often embedded within culturally more distinctly 'West African' social occasions. Moreover, religion, God and spirituality were common reference points in everyday discourse. Many of the associational activities that Sierra Leoneans engaged in had a religious element and most public events and meetings, whether they were religious or non-religious in character were presaged by prayers, both Christian and Muslim. Most (although not all) people I spoke to attended some form of religious service, whether church or mosque, of various denominations on a weekly basis. More generally, the year was peppered with festivals and get-togethers, some centred around life cycle events , such as weddings, *berin* ('buryings' or funerals), memorial services, *pul na dor* (naming ceremonies), as well as the great annual festivals of Easter, Christmas, Ramadan and Eid-ul-Fitr (see D'Alisera (2001) for an example of a child's naming ceremony). Alongside this, religious experience and expertise, such as the respect due to Granddad Sesay as a Haji, or the ability to lead prayers or play the church organ, were valued as sources of social prestige. On top of this, was an enduring, ambiguous relationship with African spiritual traditions, exemplified by the widespread membership of Sierra Leoneans in Secret societies, and reference to devils, 'juju', and witchcraft in popular culture, rumour and gossip. Religiosity, and belief in the supernatural or spiritual realm, was thus a key feature of Sierra Leonean public discourse (Shaw, 2002).

I begin this chapter by exploring the background of Sierra Leonean religious encounters, and the role of religion in the history and development of the Sierra

Leonean state. I then explore the role of religion in the everyday discourse of Sierra Leoneans in London, before focusing on two specific religious events recorded in my field notes – a 40-day Sara, a mourning ceremony that draws on Islamic practice as well as traditional ancestor worship; and a church sermon on the occasion of the 50th independence anniversary. I have chosen to include both Christianity and Islam as foci of analysis as they are both regularly co-present in everyday life, alongside the vestiges of 'traditional' spiritual beliefs and practices. In this chapter I argue that Sierra Leoneans' religious expressions can be understood in terms of ongoing pragmatic engagements with various forms of spiritual power and knowledge, engagements that I argue that world religions such as Christianity and Islam offers access to a form of universality, of 'truth', which exists as both power and knowledge and through which individuals can choose to engage and critique wider society, both in Britain and Sierra Leone. This contrasts with traditional understandings of knowledge as secret, hidden 'underneath the surface' of everyday practices and within language (Ferme 2001). I argue that religious practices, while they do enable actors to engage with a wider world and transcend established social categories, also reflect unresolved tensions and ambiguities within Sierra Leonean social life, and as such they need to be embedded within wider historical processes.

7.1 Religion and the Sierra Leone Diaspora: Some background

Religion was at the heart of the initial project to establish a colony for freed slaves in Sierra Leone. Many of the figures behind the establishment of the Sierra Leone Company, such as Granville Sharp and Henry Clarkson were prominent British evangelical Christians, as was the case in the wider movement calling for the abolition of the slave trade. The early settlers, liberated slaves from Nova Scotia, were devout Christians, typically from Baptist and Methodist denominations. Missionary Societies, particularly the Church Missionary Society, as well as the Wesleyan missionary Society and the American United Brethren in Christ, were active and influential in later years in

shaping the governance of the Colony, especially in the area of education (Kalo 1980, Fyfe 1962). As described in Chapter 3, the Krio community's sense of identity was forged in the encounter between their inherited African cultural traditions, and missionary education and religion. In the Sierra Leone Colony, mission schools were instituted for the education of the recaptive former slaves redeemed by the Royal Navy following 1808. Education was seen as the preferred means of Christian evangelisation in British West Africa, as it enabled a more effective break from traditional society than the laborious task of convincing individuals to abandon the practices of their kin (Kalo 1980). The aim of the early colony was to produce an enlightened, Christian 'civilised' African community that would be the bridgehead to the eventual evangelisation of the continent. Freetown and its cultural institutions, above all its educational institutions such as Fourah Bay College, aimed to produce this new type of Christian Africans to carry this project forward. Islam, by contrast, was present as a cultural force rather than an organised movement, although Muslim trading groups such as the Fula and Mandinka did establish themselves on the coast, connecting the Colony to the Islamic kingdoms of Futa Jallon in the Guinean highlands of the interior (Banton 1957). Islam was also present in the hinterland, spread by itinerant Islamic healers and traders, and as a legacy of the Fulani jihads of the 18th and 19th century (Fyfe 1962, Rodney 1970). An added element was the arrival in Freetown of Yoruba Muslim recaptives in the mid-1800s, whose common ethnic and religious identity forged them into a distinct group known as the Aku Marabout (Falola and Childs 2004). The arrival in the early 19th century of Yoruba Muslim recaptives in the Sierra Leone colony caused widespread protest from the Christian Krios and concern from the colonial authorities who responded by threatening to having them expelled. A group of Muslims were nevertheless able to establish an informal mosque with the assistant of an expatriate British businessman, and the Muslim community was eventually able to establish itself at the eastern side of the colony at Fourah Bay. This urban Muslim community was able to resist the disapproval of the colonial authorities partly through the relative

cohesiveness drawn from their common Yoruba background. Cole (2004) documents how this community itself became internally divided over the issue of Islamic practice versus the continued practice of Yoruba cultural traditions such as membership in esoteric societies and ancestor worship. This split the Fourah Bay community, between those who cleaved to a more rigorous Islamic orthodoxy and those who felt no conflict between their faith and the traditions for their ancestors. However, the overlap between ethnicity and religion allowed for the development of a gradual softening of religious divisions. When the Anglican bishop Samuel Ajayi Crowther, a Yoruba Krio, went to the Fourah bay Mosque to preach in the Christian gospel in Yoruba, he was met by widespread approval from people who valued his achievements within the Christian church as well as the fact he was speaking in their native language (Cole, 2004). More intransigent were divisions between those in the Colony and the 'natives' of the protectorate. Until the 1940s, Western education in the colony was only available to baptised Christians, effectively barring access to those in the protectorate; however, one way to overcome this restriction was through fostering arrangements with Krio families in the city, where a rural youth would live and receive 'training', and was often given a new Christian name to signify their new status. Thus processes of inter-religious contact and mixing were well established by the end of the 19th century, with ethnic and familial relationships often providing the glue by which new connections were made.

Underlying these developments was the enduring power of traditional religion. This was most evident in the continued initiation of young men and women into esoteric societies. This remains a fact of Sierra Leonean social life today. As mentioned, membership of esoteric societies, whether imported as in the case of Ojeh and Hontin, or indigenous, in the case of Poro and Sande, overlaps with, blurs with and often contends with peoples' membership of so-called 'world' religions (Ferme 2001; Shaw 2002). Belief in a spirit world that underlies the world of the living is commonplace throughout this area of West Africa.

Stephen Ellis (1999) has described the spiritual worldview of the Upper Guinea coast as one in which the everyday world is underpinned by a spiritual realm of unseen power, that has a direct influence on everyday events.

As has been documented elsewhere, Islamic cosmology is present in practices of divination, magic and healing which had their roots in local African spiritual traditions (Ferme 2001; Shaw 2004). Many people who were avowed Christians or Muslims also availed themselves of these practices, consulting Morimen, diviners, and initiating their children. The process of initiation, which is still widespread in Sierra Leone today, is accompanied by strong gender specific taboos and secrecy, which as Ferme (2001) has argued, was an integral part of how spiritual power was generated. Knowledge, specifically secret knowledge, often buried in ambiguous turns of phrase and riddles, underpinned the forms of social authority that regulated daily life in the region. This secrecy entailed its own spatiality, with the demarcation of forbidden or sacred spaces closed to outsiders, in the Poro or Sande 'bush'. In Southern Sierra Leone where I visited in 2009, the society bush – forbidden for me to enter - was part of the town, its visibility enhancing its forbidden power. The power of secret societies was evident to even the Christianized Krios, many of whom responded through enrolment in Masonic lodges, which became viewed as the 'White man's society' by the Sierra Leonean public (Cohen, 1981).

In London, these sources of power, although rendered remote by the process of emigration, continue their hold on the imagination, through the presence of enterprising 'marabouts' and spiritual healers, mostly from Guinea and Mali, advertising their services through the assistance of employees passing out business cards at Elephant and Castle tube station, to the re-enactment of street masquerades in Sierra Leonean nightclubs. The power of 'white man's society', in its magnification through the ever-present power of the British state, has also produced a broader moral critique based on cultural values of reciprocity and correct discipline, which emerged following the rioting of August 2011. These

institutions of power formed part of the everyday moral and spiritual landscape for Sierra Leoneans in London. In this next section, I focus on the everyday realm and explore how spiritual ideas form part of normal discourse outside the formal institutions of religion.

7.2 'Chris-Mus' – the case of Ibrahim: Pluralist Religion as pragmatic engagement with power

It's a cold, bright October day on East Street. The market is out, a few lunchtime shoppers picking their way through the stalls. When I arrive at Nafi's, Granddad is sat behind the counter, counting out some change to a waiting customer. I'm here to enquire about a gentleman who had come in the other day, a former officer in the SL army who remembers the events around the 1968/9 military coup. He's not around, and by Granddad's account, a bit unreliable. I step outside to talk to Ibrahim, a wiry, nervous man in his early 40's, a former school teacher from Bo who had been doing casual work at Alhaji's shoe stall. I ask him how he's doing. He's in a playful mood.

'Thank God. You see, we SLs are religious people. If we feel sick and pray to god, we don't feel sick any more. If we feel the cold, we can pray to God, and we don't feel it anymore.'

I remark that he's also wearing an extra layer today. He giggles: I ask him whether he is a Christian or a Muslim.

'Actually I am a "Chris-Mus". I can go to church Sunday's – I pray there. I go to the Mosque – I pray there. You see, I am an economist, I am risk-averse…'

' - So you like to diversify?!'

'Exactly!'

Ibrahim wasn't entirely joking either. Every Sunday he played the organ at a nearby Catholic church in Walworth, and was hoping to attend a Catholic University College in Texas. His high school, CCK grammar school, was a Catholic school. At the same time, he was deeply conversant with Islam and was in many respects a Muslim. When I went to visit the main Sierra Leonean mosque in Brixton Ibrahim went along, giving me detailed instructions on how to comport myself, and the importance of ritual purification before prayer. At the Masjid, Ibrahim participated wholeheartedly and was visibly moved by the simple prostrations. The two religions were worn lightly but his relationship with each was sincere and profound.

At the same time, a more ambivalent relationship existed between these faiths and the indigenous religious/spiritual practices of the country, such as initiation societies and masking, even as adherents participated in them in their daily lives. JoAnne D'Alisera, in her (2001) study of Sierra Leonean Muslims in Washington DC, found that as her informants encountered a more 'Global' Islamic community in the US, along with new material resources, such as religious texts available in English, their relationship vis-a-vis Islam, the West and Sierra Leone was transformed, to the point where some would describe themselves as 'born again Muslims'. In London, such an encounter was also happening, with both Muslims and Christians being forced to re-examine their religious heritage in the light of their experiences with a different culture, which in many cases, was also familiar as the source of Sierra Leone's colonial and missionary heritage.

Ibrahim's religiosity was intertwined with his personal and professional self-identity, that of a teacher and scholar. He spoke to me often about his experience as an economics teacher in Bo, and his conflicts with senior members of the faculty there. His current mission in London was to earn money while he awaited the response to his own University application, which was delayed awaiting the supply of relevant papers from Sierra Leone. He would speak

learnedly about current affairs, such as the US government's efforts to pass an economic stimulus package, and would pull me up on my rudimentary Krio on a regular basis. His academic experience and sensibility meant that his life in London, scraping together part time work as a private tutor and market traders' assistant was a significant drop in status, and he often cut a doleful figure, hanging out outside Alhaji's market stall trying to keep warm. His activities as church organist at the local Catholic Church and occasional prayer leader at Muslim mourning ceremonies gave him an outlet for his learning and skills, but he was clearly frustrated.

The idea that, not only were Christianity and Islam both valid spiritual paths, but that one could be a Christian and a Muslim at the same time, was not uncommon in Sierra Leone. Many people assumed that I was a Christian, and would declare magnanimously that we worshipped the same God, that we were children of Adam. Interestingly enough, other faiths, such as Buddhism and Judaism, were regarded with puzzlement or even contempt. Thus inter-religious culture was borne out of the specific historical trajectory of the Upper Guinea coast and its entanglement with the outside world. It both reflected the multiple forms of power – spiritual and political – that have vied for control over this area of West Africa, as well as the agency of individuals seeking to negotiate a social world characterised by violence and instability. In the case of Ibrahim, his experience seems to stem from his education. A Mende from Bonthe district in Southern Sierra Leone, is the son of a chief, and thus eligible to contest the chieftaincy in his home district. Like nearly all male Sierra Leoneans he is initiated into the Poro society. He is also highly educated in Western educational institutions. He was sent to Bo School, the first educational institution offered to children of the Sierra Leone protectorate, and CCK College, a Roman Catholic higher educational institution of which he is still an enthusiastic alumnus. His multiple memberships of various forms of educative institutions, both Western, religious (Islamic or Christian), and Mende (poro), constitute the diversification I mentioned in the introduction. Education and

religion overlap, as they do elsewhere in the world, providing means for the transformation of the self, membership of a broader fellowship united by a shared set of experiences and rituals, and a means for transmitting cultural knowledge from one generation to another.

While this was surprising to me, such religious co-existence was not unusual in Sierra Leonean society, where relationships between adherents of the two world religions were tolerant, even warm. Christians and Muslims attended each other's festivals, were often of the same family, and often intermarried. Such tolerance was a point of national pride, something which contrasted sharply with the situation in other West African countries, such as Nigeria. Several of my other informants displayed similar pragmatism around religious belief. Efie, who helped at Nafi's shop, although raised a Muslim, had attended a mission school in Freetown and similarly combined devout respect for Islamic practice with continued observance at one of the missions' branch churches in Peckham. Granddad Sesay, as mentioned, was a devout Muslim who, until his pilgrimage to Mecca later in life, had been a prominent member of Freetown's Hontin society. This society, regarded as one of the more well-to-do secret societies in the city, was of Yoruba origin and distinguished itself with its palm leaf headdresses and imposing masked devil, with its deer's head, and multiple protruding horns and shells. On public holidays such as Easter Monday, the Hontin devil would emerge and wander the streets, followed by a train of drummers and attendants including a herald brandishing a 'witch gun' that could shoot curses at disrespectful onlookers.

Granddad had been the chairman of Hontin for a number of years until his pilgrimage, and his changed status meant that he had to retire. However he still talked fondly of the society and would laugh derisively at my lack of understanding and knowledge of this aspect of Sierra Leonean culture. When I started attending the Methodist church on Walworth Road, I would follow the service by walking up to East Street to talk to Nafi and Granddad, who would

commend my apparent conversion, then enter into long discourses on the similarity between Christianity and Islam.

Yet in contrast to Ibrahim's enthusiastic embracing of religious forms, my friend Frank, the market trader, confidently held no religious beliefs whatsoever. Frank was not his 'Christian' name; his other name was Aruna, which he was called by Efie and others in their complaints about his ridiculous behaviour. Frank had led a somewhat transient life, moving from Freetown, to the Gambia, to various places around Southeast London, and was regarded as something of a vagabond by Nafi and Granddad. His great gift was his personality – characterised by raffish charm and an absurdist sense of humour – to bridge the gaps of difference and persuade people to buy from him. He would adopt many of the sales techniques of some of the English traders, declaiming the quality of his 'designer' handbags and referencing popular TV shows and news stories to draw attention to himself. For Frank, religion was a source of social division and conflict. His indifference to religion could partly be explained by his marginality both back in Freetown, where he worked as a construction worker in the East End, and in London. His lack of access to formal institutions of power and his mobile lifestyle gave him a different perspective, and a skill at adapting himself to different conditions. On one occasion I was hanging out with Frank at his market stall. Frank was stamping his feet to keep warm. A small throng of women shoppers had gathered round his stall while he attempted to sweet talk them into buying from him. He held up a faux-brown leather handbag for one of the women to examine.

'This bag here – are you a Christian? – this bag is perfect for church, you can put your bible in there, you will be a big person in the church with this bag. Buy it. Last chance, we're closing'.

The women chuckled and scowled at him, and a few went to leave, although one stayed behind, declaring she would like to buy a bag. It was 7 pounds, and she counted the coins into his hand.

Ibrahim and Frank were in many ways opposites to one other, although they were acquaintances and were on relatively good terms. Once, Ibrahim arrived at Frank's stall one Sunday morning; he was wearing a smart black suit and blue tie, checked shirt and fishing hat. He'd just come from church, where he once again played the keyboard. He joined at the back of Frank's stall where we were sheltering from the cold. It being Sunday, he asked me if I'd come from church myself. I told him I hadn't gone that day being too tired.

'It was the devil.'

'What was the devil?'

'That made you too tired to come to church. You should come to church!'

'Well, you know I'm not a Christian…'

I told him I'm a Buddhist. He asked me what Buddhists believe ('Where does their faith lie?'), and I told him it's hard to explain, but it's about not causing harm and reducing suffering.

'So really it is about Peace and Love. If I do not love you, from the bottom of my heart, there will be no peace'

He went on to talk about Saint Augustine.

'He wrote a tract, which said that religious matters should be seen as a mystery. This is why I do not like religious arguments. The holy trinity – the Father, Son and Holy Ghost – you cannot understand it, it is a mystery'

Frank was listening to our conversation, leaning in over the table. After he while he interjected and explained his take on religion, specifically his lack of and contempt for it. The conversation that followed was revealing.

'It's the preachers. You and me could be brothers, you are a Christian, I am a Muslim, but we are taught to hate each other. This is why people are planting bombs and blowing themselves up. You cannot fight for God, I don't know god, but I would fight for you, if saw some people harassing you I would fight them. But I can't fight for God. He is supposed to fight for you.'

Ibrahim was listening and was anxious to get his riposte in.

'Aruna, to be very frank, that is why there are some churches I do not go into. Some churches are like NGOs, others are really just moneymaking places. They will ask you to give ten percent of your income to the church, and I go there and I could preach better than the preacher himself.'

The argument went on a bit longer than it should. Frank said something about it not being God, but maybe our hearts that are responsible for the problems of the world.

'God gave Africa riches, but gave white people sense'.

I told Frank I disagreed with this statement. Ibrahim joined me and told a story he'd heard about a guy in Bonthe who'd invented a type of submarine canoe, out of a hollowed out tree. He was discovered and taken to see President Momoh, who feted him in the press… and then, nothing. In Europe people

would have given him support but the jealousy of the big people in Sierra Leone meant that they would rather stifle a talented person than see him overreach them.

'It is not a lack of talent, but just selfishness, which is what is preventing us from going forward.'

'That is what I mean, it is our wicked hearts'

In the unsystematic way of most everyday social discourse and from differing standpoints, Frank and Ibrahim charted the terrain of Sierra Leone's engagements with and invocations of religion as a means of interpreting the world around them. Both agreed the problems of the world were the fault of peoples' individual flaws, their 'wicked hearts', their 'selfishness'. This critique was echoed by many other people I spoke to in London, in reference to the country's ongoing poverty, often aimed at members of the political establishment, but often claimed as a failure of the country itself. Frank repeated a version of what James Ferguson (2006) has described as the 'curse of Ham' – the idea that African poverty is the result of an inherent unworthiness, a kind of racialised original sin. All of this spoke of a struggle to understand and make sense of the upheaval and violence of migration and social change, with language that drew on the country's historical engagements with the wider world.

Morality was most often the frame in which these problems were couched, which made the popularity of spiritual solutions through membership of a Church or conversion to Islam understandable. Engagement with an organised religion can be seen as one response to upheaval, however as Frank demonstrated, rejection of religious distinctions in favour of a form of cosmopolitan humanism, was another. In all, the plethora of different religious viewpoints I found in the diaspora, from syncretism, traditional belief,

Christianity, Islam, participation in initiation and masking societies, and sceptical atheism reflect some of the instability of Sierra Leone's history, as well as the ongoing attempt to understand the confusion of its present. In London, this search for stability was played out in a situation where national identity was itself bracketed through the present of diverse 'others'. In this context, the tension between the universality of religion and the specifics of history and culture was made more visible.

7.3 The Sierra Leone Mosque

I first went to the North Brixton Islamic cultural centre – referred to informally as the 'Sierra Leone Mosque' with Ibrahim. I'd planned to go for some months but felt I needed a chaperone to give me some credibility. We took the bus from Walworth Road, and Ibrahim used the journey to instruct me on the various ritual ablutions required of me before I could enter the prayer hall. Physical purification, he explained, through the washing of hands, forearms, feet and ankles, face, neck, ears, nose and mouth, was accompanied by a demand for spiritual purification, through sexual and dietary forms of abstinence and propriety. Failure to do these things would prevent God from hearing ones prayers.

The bus dropped us off at a junction and we walked a couple of blocks to where Ibrahim said the Mosque should be located. From the outside, the building was indistinguishable from the other semi-detached townhouses lining the Brixton road, save for a modest sign with a short koranic description above the door. We rang the bell and were met by a short Sierra Leonean man in a white gown who confirmed we'd come to the right place. We were ushered across a narrow landing to the front office, where one of the brothers informally manned a telephone line from which inquiries and requests were called in throughout the day. It being a Tuesday afternoon the centre was largely quiet, with a few men waiting for the afternoon prayer to begin. We waited in the front office and it was largely empty save for one of the administrators, who offered us some

biscuits and orange squash. Although it is not usually advised to eat before prayer, he explained, an exception was apparently made if one is particularly hungry. 'Your mind needs to be on God, not on your stomach' he explained. We waited for the appointed time, until we heard the sound of the muezzin reciting the call to prayer over an intercom system, at which point I followed Ibrahim across the landing and down a flight of stairs to the main prayer room in the basement. This was a smallish room, lined with a low shelf containing Islamic texts including copies of the Koran and framed pictures of the Great Mosque at Mecca. The direction of prayer was marked on the floor by a white line in one corner, and a youngish man in skullcap, Islamic robes and black jacket was poised, hands folded across his stomach, ready to begin. Aside from him, there were only a few other people there, a middle-eastern looking man and his son. We lined up facing the direction of prayer, and I followed Ibrahim's lead as we did the prostrations. Afterwards, we washed and got our shoes and left quietly.

The simplicity and order of the Mosque, with its rules for personal comportment, its segregation of the sexes and minimal furnishings, was accompanied by a stress on universality, which was emphasised over nationality or ethnicity. Although I knew the place was frequented by Sierra Leonean Muslims, I did not get a sense of its national character until I returned the following Friday, for the jumaa prayers. On this occasion the masjid was full to overflowing, and I had to wait outside for the hall to be cleared of people before I could go down to pray. The pavement in front of the mosque was crowded with people chatting and socialising, and women had set up stalls selling Islamic literature, prayer gowns, DVDs and traditional Sierra Leonean snacks like rice pap or groundnut cake.

The Sierra Leonean character of the place was not emphasised, and those in charge were keen to stress its universal character. However, such a stress, in keeping with Islamic principles, was not entirely met in practice. On another

occasion I spoke to the Chairman of the Mosque, who had been formerly a politician and diplomat before retiring. He described the early history of the building, in the early 1990s. Again, he was keen to stress its universalistic policy in terms of ethnicity, however, underlying it were unresolved issues relating to the boundaries of the national diaspora:

> '...at first time we called it the Sierra Leone Muslim Cultural Centre, but later we decided to change the name to the North Brixton Islamic Cultural Centre, We embrace all the Muslims, as Muslims we don't care about whether you're black or red or white or yellow, we are for everybody, we're a universal religion, so Arabs-den are coming here, Pakistanis den are coming here, Asian Muslims come here, Nigerian, Gambian, Sierra Leonean, they all come here to come and do their prayers... we have even got English man to come here – the ones who have married Muslim woman, you know you must become a Muslim yourself first'

The origin of the mosque was to provide an alternative place to pray to the main Brixton mosque, further along the road near the police station. This venue, apparently, was frequented by a mostly Pakistani and later Somali membership, and Sierra Leoneans did not feel comfortable there. However, once established, the change of name from a national to a specifically local designation was significant – restoring the ideal of Islam's universality through its pure locality. Sierra Leonean national identity, so important in the early days of the mosque, could now be set to one side, now that the place was flourishing.

The official ideals of the mosque were that it was a place for all to come and practice Islam, a practice that embodied, through its practices of purification and comportment, the erasure of hierarchical and national distinctions in favour of a version of a 'purified' humanity. However, the

fact of the centre's majority Sierra Leonean membership still undoubtedly gave a particular flavour to the place; inside the mosque, there were few 'ethnic' markers, aside from the occasional poster on the notice board advertising a Sierra Leonean cultural event. However, subtle reminders of an enduring Sierra Leonean cultural influence remained. I was fortunate enough to attend the mosque during the last days of Ramadan, which took place in August 2011. On the last night of the fast, the community gathered together in the prayer hall to feast. Great trays of food – Sierra Leonean food, rice, cassava leaf and groundnut soup - had been prepared and were being served to all present, who tucked in heartily. National culture was being offered to serve the wider community.

D'Alisera (2004) describes how her informants, coming into contact with the transnational sphere of global Islam, in the US, began to re-evaluate their own religious practice as a result. She described how one declared himself to be a 'born again Muslim', having been exposed to new information such as copies of the Koran in English. In London, this new 'globalised' Islam was also in evidence, through the popularity of DVDs about the life of the prophet, and encounters with more doctrinally strict interpretations of Islamic practice gleaned from others. I also found that these forms were now present in Sierra Leone itself, particularly in Freetown. However, outside the controlled space of the mosque, my experience was that other practices and expectations came into play. Islamic practice formed one arena within a wider set of social obligations and practices by which the Sierra Leoneans I knew built a sense of themselves in London. My friend Alhaji was a case in point. A prominent member of the Sierra Leonean trading community in London, his first name had been given to him, not in fact as a result of completing the Hajj (he had not), but in reverence to one of his Uncles who had been a Temne chief of some renown. One Saturday night, I bumped into Alhaji at Stella's drink spot on Camberwell road. He informed me he had been

invited to a '40-day', a mourning ceremony for one of his friends whose mother had died in Freetown. After seeing my expression of interest, he asked if I would like to come along.

As mentioned earlier, historically Islam spread in Sierra Leone as much as a cultural influence as it was through direct conversion. This led to the emergence of syncretic practices, whereby Islamic traditions of healing, divination and exorcism, as well as life cycle events such as naming ceremonies, funerals and weddings merged with local traditions of ancestor veneration to become grounded in everyday practice (see for example, Shaw, 2002; Ferme, 2001). These syncretic practices become problematic from a strict Islamic perspective, but their continued popularity and the prestige they offered to religious experts able to officiate at them mean that there is a pragmatic acceptance of them in London. While they are labelled as 'cultural', a euphemism for traditional, non-Islamic, for participants they formed an important part of an everyday spirituality in which Islam formed a part, although not necessarily the whole.

40-day ceremonies, or Sara'a, are held to mark the 40th day following the death of a loved one, and mirror the 4- and 7- day naming ceremonies held following a birth. While they are a feature of Muslim observance in West Africa, like the Owujo ceremonies held by the Christian Krios they contain strong elements of ancestor worship found in African systems of belief. 'Sara' is a Yoruba term that can mean either 'almsgiving' or sacrifice (Peel, 2000), and this double meaning was offered to me by my Sierra Leonean informants. The Sara itself is an event where the relatives of the deceased gather together to pray for their departed loved one, to ensure their safe passage into paradise. It also marks the end of the period of mourning, at which point the family is expected to offer a feast to the community in thanks for their prayers and offerings during the 40 days.

Integral to this process is the idea of 'blessings', which are bestowed as a result of a person's good works. Islam holds that no person is guaranteed salvation, that it is granted through the mercy of God as a result of the individuals own accumulated blessings in this life, gathered through adherence to the 5 pillars of Islam – daily prayer, fasting, charity, pilgrimage and faith in the oneness of God.

In the case of Sara'a, I found they were a matter of some controversy amongst the staff at the Sierra Leone mosque. Nevertheless, they sent out staff to officiate at these events, which could range from large affairs to semi-formal gatherings in the front room of the family in question. What the following story illustrates, I believe is the relative value placed in Islamic practice by many Sierra Leoneans who see it as an important aspect, although by no means most important, of their attempts at self-creation in London. The anecdote also illustrates the importance of the home space in constructing the diasporan self in London. Home decoration and the use of technology such as TV and video were both symbols of financial success and contacts to the world. Islam can be seen as a similar form of engagement, allowing a connection with a wider transnational frame (Bowen 2004).

7.4 The 40 day Sara of Titi Sesay

It was early November and raining heavily in Walworth. Still disoriented from my being transplanted in London, I found myself walking with Ibrahim – without an umbrella - through the looming concrete warren of the Aylesbury Housing Estate. One of the largest social housing complexes in Europe, the Aylesbury is home to around 10,000 tenants, with a significant West African population. Alhaji, the market trader, Ibrahim himself, and several of my friends from the Methodist Church lived on the estate, which despite its anonymous brutalist façade contained apartments that were surprisingly warm, well -appointed and spacious. Today, despite the bad weather, we were

heading over to Alhaji's, who had invited us to the 40 day Sara being held by one of his friends to commemorate the death of his mother in Freetown.

Bereavement was a regular occurrence for my informants in London. Every month, it seemed, an announcement would be made at church or overheard at the market that someone's Mami or Pa had died on a trip home to Freetown. A couple of occasions I heard the even sadder news of the death of a child. One man, who visited Nafis shop on a regular basis, arrived one day with tears in his eyes to declare he'd found out his eldest daughter had died of malaria. Her family had spent a large sum of money taking her to a Moriman, or traditional healer, in Waterloo, but to no avail. He spoke of the news with a mix of sadness and detachment, as if the emotions had been refracted across time and distance. The regularity of this occurrence was perhaps no more than a reflection of the difficulty of life in Sierra Leone itself, combined with the fact that many of my informants were themselves advancing in years. Yet it said something about the enduring bonds of community that held Sierra Leoneans together, that events such as funerals and 40 day ceremonies could regularly draw large numbers of people, even far from home. One event I attended filled a local community centre to bursting, people spilling out onto the footway with paper plates stacked with rice and roasted meat. Funerals and memorials were thus opportunities for the community to gather and remember their common ties, to eat and enjoy each other's company, as well as to remember the departed.

On this occasion the event was being held at Alhaji's friend's home up on the second floor of the Aylesbury estate. The big man was going to meet us beforehand, so we squelched along the pavement past the closed doctor's surgery and the concrete pillars supporting a suspended walkway until we arrived at a ground floor flat fringed in front with a plain square lawn. Ibrahim rang the doorbell, and we stamped our feet to fend off the cold until we heard movement inside and Alhaji appeared and invited us into the warm.

Alhaji's flat was typical of the council accommodation provided for those living on Aylesbury estate. A spacious sitting room, with a leather three piece suite, a big TV set and stereo system, and a dining room table looking out on a plain back garden, with a glass case full of certificates stand along one wall. A home computer sat on a stand in the left hand corner, while framed photos of Alhaji and his kids adorned the walls. On one of the shelves beneath the stereo system there was a row of books including an introduction to Islam written in English, and Nelson Mandela's 'Long Walk to Freedom'. In the glass case, amongst more family photos and school portraits, stood Alhaji's certificate of headmanship, written in smart calligraphy and legal language, hereby recognising Alhaji to be the chief of all Temne people in Monrovia, Liberia. Alhaji had been working on the computer when we arrived, apparently filling out an application form for a security guard training course. Market profits had been down so he'd been looking for other options.

We sat on the sofa in our wet clothes and ate satsumas as we waited for Alhaji to get ready. Alhaji's kids scampered and snickered in the hallway, taking peeks at us from around the sitting room door. Finally, Alhaji arrived downstairs in a leather jacket over a hooded gym sweater, and informed us it was time to go. Hauling ourselves up from the sofa, we headed back out and cut along the pavement in front of a ground floor row of flats. The concrete walkways and upper floors of the Aylesbury estate towered over us. The rain having eased a little, Alhaji lead the way as we climbed up the concrete stairwell to a walkway suspended 5 floors up, connecting Alhaji's block to a neighbouring one. We passed over an allotment garden, a basketball court, and a car park fenced off behind wire mesh. Alhaji, in his hooded jersey and tan boots, looked a bit like a boxer, and I mentioned this to him.

'lots of people say that to me – because of my size'

After climbing a second flight of concrete steps we walked along another landing and arrived at a red-painted front door. Alhaji rang the doorbell, which was answered by a short, portly man with long dreadlocks and a t-shirt with a picture of Elvis Presley on it, who invited us in.

Inside the flat was cosy and warm. The dreadlocked man led us up some stairs to a sitting room where we are introduced to the other guests – two middle aged ladies in colourful lapas, an old man in a maroon African-print suit with Chinese collar, and a young couple in smart Western dress.

The sitting room was lovingly furnished, similar in many ways to Alhaji's own flat although slightly smaller. There were big leather armchairs and a capacious sofa, a large, flat-screen TV showing a Nigerian movie, and glass cabinet full of family photos, school certificates and reggae CDs and vinyl. On the floor, next to the TV, stood an enormous, sound-system-style speaker. The two women had been watching the movie while the old man was talking, gossiping about a property dispute back in Freetown.

'If he was a Limba and you said something in Temne, would he understand you? No! Like can a cow understand a goat? All these people fighting for land, in the end they will end up inside it.'

Alhaji, who had parked himself at one end of the sofa, chipped in with a parable about the Earth being angry at God for letting people tread on it all day.

'Don't worry' says God. 'They will come back to you in the end.'

'That was how we were made in the first place' agreed the old man.

Finally, with the words 'Salia Mohamed', the dreadlocked man called the room to order. The two ladies switched off the movie and took their seats, and

another lady arrived from the kitchen with a plate, on which sits a ball of doughy, made of rice flour and sugar, inset with 6 kola nuts. It is put on the centre of the floor. There was something missing - one of the women was sent to the kitchen to bring a glass of water, which she placed near the plate on the floor. The dreadlocked man thanked the guests for coming for the 40 day Sara of his grandmother, Titi Sisay, who died the previous month. Then Ibrahim began with the ceremony.

First he began by making a short speech in Krio describing the importance of prayer to bring us to God. He then began reciting a verse from the Koran, causing everyone in the room to open their hands and lower their gaze, joining in the 'amen'. This went on for several minutes, people whispering along under their breath, their eyes lowered. Finally Ibrahim finished, and people wiped their faces with their hands. Then the old man took over, saying a prayer in Krio, asking for God to help us through our troubles, and help all those who are sick, to remember the Mami who had died. The atmosphere by this point had become distinctly mournful, and a little girl – the daughter of one of the guests - could be heard crying in the hallway.

The old man finished speaking, and handed over to Alhaji, who declared that – it being the beginning of November and close to the national holiday remembering Britain's soldiers who had died for their country - it was important to offer remembrance, and that today all around the world people are offering remembrance to those who have fought in war. He finished with another Qu'ranic recitation, the guests responding to the rippling Arabic syllables with emphatic, 'amens', palms upraised.

There being at least one Christian present, Alhaji then suggested the Lords' Prayer, which the room recited by heart. This brought the ceremony to a close and the rice dish was passed around. The Christian lady commented approvingly on the inclusion of the Lord's Prayer, and Ibrahim looked at me

with amusement. I shared his 'Chris-Mus' joke, to which the young man laughs. The ritual was now over, and the women left the room en masse to sort out the food. The dreadlocked man turned the TV back on, and after a couple of moments a series of slide-show photos, evidently of the funeral itself back in Freetown, started passing in front of the screen, backed by an English-language Muslim singer. Someone handed me a plate of food – jollof rice, chicken, roast fish, beans, plantains and salad, which I tucked into gratefully. The place started to get more lively, as more people began to arrive. On the TV screen, the slideshow gave way to video footage, taken by our host himself of the funeral in Freetown, with long shots of assembled mourners dressed in white robes sitting in the cool of the masjid, the imam offering a sermon and another shot of cauldrons of food being prepared and dished out. In the apartment, the talk grew louder and more convivial, as drinks were passed around, and I sat and ate until it was time for us to leave.

The 40 day Sara was one of 3 I attended when up in London. The main elements of the event were broadly the same – gathering of well-wishers, communal prayers, an 'offering' of rice cake and kola, and a collective feast at the end. The above story is a poignant illustration of the way death and bereavement was often affected by distance and separation between the family members, with the use of modern technology to ameliorate the distance. Yet it also showed how the sphere of the spiritual was also able to transcend such boundaries. The 40 day Sara, as with other events that I attended, sought to affirm and celebrate the relationships between those present, between the family and the deceased grandmother, and between those here in London and their family members back in Sierra Leone. It has its origins in Yoruba ancestor reverence was brought to Sierra Leone by the African recaptives in the 19th century, which saw the ancestors as present in spirit and able to intervene on behalf of those living, and was combined with the traditional expectations placed on bereaved families within Islam. Prayer to God and offerings of food and drink to the deceased emphasised this connection, and the continuing place of the dead in

the lives of the living. The spirit world was invoked through the offering of Kola; Kola is traditionally offered as a token of respect to 'Big' people throughout West Africa. On this occasion it was an act of respect to the deceased. Such ritual action conferred agency to those present, bringing the dead and the absent into spiritual contact with those present, the physical distance overcome by ritual acts of connection. Another element of the Sara was role of exchange – reciprocal offerings both on the part of the bereaved, the guests, and to God.

The difficulty presented by the Sara in terms of a more 'scripturally correct' interpretation of Islam, seemed to centre around the question of whether or not it was possible to pray for someone after they had died in order to facilitate their entry into paradise. This was seen as incompatible with the central belief that it was down to the individual to secure their own salvation through their own lives – and even then, salvation was a gift from God alone. This could be done in variety of ways, as the Chairman of the mosque described to me:

> 'when somebody is in the world there are three things he should try to do, one you, build a hospital, if you get the chance, one, you dig well, so that people will have water to drink, or you make a Mosque, so that people can go pray there, or, if you can bear children, all mean that if you are not there tomorrow money those things, anybody who goes to that mosque that you made, any blessing that comes from those prayers you will get that blessing there. This water, when you've dug a well, anybody who goes there to drink water that you have dug for, God will give you that blessing because you are providing for people who are not able to get it themselves.'

These good works accumulated blessings for the person behind them. 40 day ceremonies, with their blending of different ideals of reciprocity, were

problematic because they challenged this economy. Another friend of mine at the mosque, Abu Hassan, recounted how in Freetown, 40 day ceremonies were often an excuse for conspicuous consumption, with relatives, especially those in the diaspora, using the opportunity for largesse to show the community how successful they had become. The 'globalised' Islamic critique, with its emphasis on scriptural correctness, therefore, focused on one of the central elements of patrimonial culture, whereby one made oneself socially 'big' by giving, as being distinct from the Islamic ideal of charity as being rewarded principally by God through blessings. The importance of scriptural correctness in the diaspora, provoked through encounters with 'global' Islamic authorities, mean that 'cultural' practices that fell afoul of this orthodox gaze became problematic. However, for those whose engagement with Islam was less intensely sustained, such arguments were not a big deal. More important is the simple presence of an Imam or Hafiz to deliver the prayer, so that familial obligations to the deceased can be met. The presence of an Imam, the recitation of the correct prayers, the effort to provide an adequate feast for those present, drew upon a broader notion of 'propriety' that did not rely on a systematic understanding of a particular way of faith. The meeting of one's obligations to the community of large, including, crucially, the community of the dead, particularly in London, reemphasised the value and agency of the living. Alhaji and his friend both recognised the importance of making Sara, and drew upon their repertoires of Islamic knowledge to help make it happen. However Islam per se, was one source (and resource) of obligation among many.

7. 5 'A Church for all nations'

The tension between faith, nationality and culture was also present for Sierra Leonean Christians. However, their position in the UK vis-a-vis the religious authority was different. As mentioned, Christianity's role in the development of the Sierra Leonean state was inextricably bound up with the colonial project. The legacy of Krio culture, especially in Freetown, meant that Christianity, in

particular the mainline Protestant denominations of Methodism and Anglicanism, was the religion of educational and national elites.

Abner Cohen (1981), in his study of the Krio, argues that as their political influence disappeared following the unification of the Sierra Leone protectorate and colony in 1951, the Krio began to assert themselves in 'national', 'Sierra Leonean' terms. The question of 'Unity' over political or ethnic sectarianism was a recurrent concern amongst Sierra Leoneons in London, especially around the era of the 50th anniversary of Independence. Christian churches, being key spaces where Sierra Leoneans could gather in large numbers on a regular basis, were thus sites where broad issues around the fate of the Sierra Leonean national community were debated. Peel (2002) has argued that, more perhaps than Islam, Christianity is implicitly 'national', thanks partly to the powerful story of the Exodus and the idea of the chosen people of Israel. We have seen how the term 'diaspora' makes use of the emotional resonances of its Jewish origins. With the Christian narrative of rebirth and renewal, embodied in the story of Jesus Christ, national development narratives can be framed even more explicitly in terms of radical transformation.

In this section I focus on a Methodist congregation where a large number of Sierra Leoneans were present. Methodism, a protestant denomination that grew out of the Anglican Church in the 17th century, is in some ways comparable to Islam in its emphasis on the authority of scripture i.e. the bible, and its strong evangelical element that sought to override distinctions of race and ethnicity. Methodist spirituality sought to emphasis a more personal spirituality based on faith in Jesus Christ, in a context where the prevailing theological trends in the Church of England were of a rationalistic, philosophical kind. It can thus be firmly placed in the context of the Protestant reformation. While its founders saw themselves as part of the national church, it finally broke away from the established church, although it has maintained theological and ecumenical ties. Its growth was especially strong in working class and lower middle-class

communities, and its structures were influential in the development of the British Labour movement. The structure of Methodism is based on its origins in the itinerant preaching of its founders, John Wesley and George Whitefield, who deliberately sought to spread the gospel to the most impoverished and isolated areas that were neglected by the established church (Davies, 1963). This evangelical bent led to its involvement in missionary activities in the British Empire, with strong churches established in the former Gold Coast as well as Sierra Leone and Nigeria. In Sierra Leone today, the different Methodist churches combined together make it effectively the largest Christian denomination in the country. Much of its influence resides in its enduring education institutions, such as the Methodist High School for Boys in Freetown, and Hartford Girls' school in Moyamba.

Walworth Road Methodist Church describes itself as a 'church for all nations'. Its congregation, some 500 strong, includes members from Ghana, Nigeria, The Gambia, Zimbabwe, as well as Sierra Leone. Its Sunday services are consistently popular, broadcast over the internet for sojourning members to enjoy *in abstentia*. Like most Methodist Churches, it is part of a 'circuit', with a resident minister and a visiting superintendent minister who takes turns to preach at each church under his or her jurisdiction. The congregation is itself divided into 'classes' who engage in bible study, prayer and fellowship, and fellowships for each of the main groups in the church - the women's fellowship, the 'golden oldies' and the young adults, who meet throughout the week. There are also fellowship groups for the main nationalities mentioned above. These held monthly meetings where the order of business is centred on the organisation of outings, ongoing charitable projects as well as prepare for their annual Thanksgiving services and Dinner-Dances. The Sierra Leone Fellowship, of which I eventually became an honorary member, met on the second Sunday of the month. In the main chapel a poster on the wall in the corridor leading away from the main hall displayed a map of Africa, with the words 'please pray for these countries', with the relevant countries coloured in red.

WRMC has a proud history. Established in the early 19th century to minister to the areas working class population, in the 1950s it became famous for its 'Clubland', rooms where local working people could hold meetings, take classes and participate in cultural events – famous attendees included the actor Michael Caine, who appeared in his first public acting role at the venue in the 1950s. However, by the early 1980s numbers attending the church had declined significantly, to about 40, mostly elderly congregants. The arrival of West African immigrants to the church at this time was significant to the reversal of this trend. Many of these were from Ghana, and had begun to organise themselves into fellowship groupings under the facilitation of the then superintendent minister, a British minister by the name of Vic Watson. Fumanti (2007) describes the invigorating effect of West African, particularly Ghanaian membership on urban Methodist churches in the UK in the last 20 years. At the time of my fieldwork, Walworth Road Methodist Church was a busy, thriving church, wealthy enough to have constructed a modern foyer, a security lodge and p.a. system in the main hall, and audio-visual equipment for the recording and broadcasting of services. On Sundays, frequently there would be so many people that latecomers would have to view the service on a live TV link in the cafeteria downstairs.

Within the congregation at WRMC, Sierra Leonean congregants comprised the third largest national grouping, after Ghanaians and Nigerians. Despite their relative minority, Sierra Leoneans maintained a high level of visibility at the church through their occupation of leadership positions – the resident minister, the choirmaster and the musicians of the church band were all Sierra Leonean, as were several members of the church council. Membership of the Sierra Leone fellowship, as judged by attendance at the monthly meetings, was about 40 people, with a wider pool of 'sleeping', ex- and non-members who could not or did not want to be involved. The national fellowships effectively represented each country to the rest of the church, through their annual thanksgiving

service and participation of the annual 'unity and diversity' service held in May. In the early days of the fellowship those original members were those who were living and working in London, often young graduates with previous connections to the Methodist church in Sierra Leone.

During the 1990s, as violence drove many Sierra Leoneans to flee the country, numbers attending the Church and the Sierra Leone fellowship increased. Many of these were older people, as well as people from outside of Freetown, from the provinces who had fled to the capital to avoid the worst of the violence. Thus the profile of the Fellowship changed from a Freetown-based Krio Methodist community to a more mixed group of people. During the conflict the fellowship became something of a hub for information for those who had relatives back home.

> ' we became semi-political, because, um, we had, politicians who would come and talk to us and we had, people who were working for the NGOs come and talk to us, because, there was a kind of drought of information, not a lot was being said, especially people who came from the Provinces, and there was a really, worst point when we lost communication, it was very difficult even to get through to your family members, not knowing what happening, and the forum was very active in that it provided that place where you could meet like-minded people and talk about common issues ('PJ', interviewed 12/4/2012).

During my attendance, these meetings focused on the organisation of the upcoming thanksgiving service, notices about bereavements and sickness amongst group members, and a certain amount of wrangling over financial issues and the group's constitution. Given the fact that the resident minister was from Sierra Leone, this group had a degree of support from the church

leadership yet fears over perceived partiality meant that it was largely left to its own devices. Several of the founding members had past association with each other at school or church in Freetown. One in particular, Buxton Methodist Church, had sent a number of its congregants to London, themselves keen on continuing the churches proud history of choral and instrumental music. This led to the appearance of Walworth's impressive robed choir 'the best voices in British Methodism', in a denomination where such choirs were rare. They performed every Sunday, processing in to their places at the front of the church, and such was the depth of experience that members often took turns as conductor. There were several multi-instrumentalists, including three who had recorded albums of Gospel songs in Krio and English. During the Sunday service, the choir would lead the 'offertory' section in which congregation were encouraged to make a donation of money to the church, with a medley of West African Gospel Worship songs, which included many in Nigerian and Ghanaian languages. This was often a concession to the tastes of the wider congregation. Many of the old Freetowners with their British-style educations had personal preferences towards the traditional hymns, choral anthems and classical pieces provided by the Royal School of Church Music. The Sierra Leoneans at Walworth thus brought with them a musical and devotional heritage that was related to both the pan-African tastes of the broader church congregation as well as the historic traditions of the Methodist Church in the UK. What emerged was a melange of cultural references, derived from different points in the historical experience of the West African congregation; European, Sierra Leonean, West-African, African.

Alongside the cultural references were references to the church's diasporic character. Every Sunday during the service, the minister made a point of welcoming visitors from abroad, relatives or dignitaries from the hometown of one of the congregants. WRMC had established itself as a place where newcomers to the city could connect with old friends from back home. During

the period of my fieldwork there were guest delegations from the Sierra Leonean Methodist Church and the Church in Guyana.

Nationality at Walworth was acknowledged through the fellowship system, and each group had their chance to shine with an annual Thanksgiving service. This engendered a certain amount of competitiveness between groups to see who could put on the best show. This was subsumed to a broader congregational identity, the church itself providing the collective 'home' for those present, where individuals could pursue their individual passions and talents, for music, debate and organising, but also share in and contribute to the love and fellowship of the community as a whole.

7.6 'The Day of Jubilee has come': National and Spiritual transformation
One of the central events of the celebrations for the 50th Anniversary of Sierra Leonean independence, discussed in detail in the previous chapter, was the ecumenical church service held on the Sunday following Independence Day. That Walworth Methodist Church should be the venue at which this event was held was not surprising due the prominence of its Sierra Leonean congregation and Sierra Leonean minister. However there was some irritation expressed on the part of the local members that the official celebrations would undermine their own fellowships' planned anniversary celebrations, due for May that year. Also there were concerns that such a move would associate the church too closely to the Sierra Leone High Commission, which as previously mentioned, was regarded with suspicion by many members of the community.

Unlike at the mosque, people were keener on expressing a Sierra Leonean national identity and had a more direct interest in 'national' concerns. Furthermore, the themes of renewal, of apocalyptic transformation and rebirth present in the Christian story are easily applied to a national narrative, especially when the nation in question had endured such hardship and decline as Sierra Leone. Christianity and development are themselves inextricably

intertwined in the region - it will be remembered that Sierra Leone was founded on this transformative evangelical principle, to 'uplift' the people of Africa, seemingly benighted by warfare, superstition and ignorance, through 'the Bible and the plough' (Peel 2000). In West Africa, Christian revival movements are widespread. Pentacostal Christianity, through its implicitly 'modern' ethos of individual transformation, often accompanied by promises of financial prosperity and success, is popular amongst young, educated men and women who seek a way of escaping the stultifying lack of opportunity present in postcolonial society.

Christianity offers more than a shortcut to modernity, however. Stephen Ellis (1999) has described the common occurrence of ex-rebel fighters claiming to have had religious conversions following the end of the Liberian Civil War, several of whom became popular preachers. The same promise of transformation can be offered to a nation as whole. The Methodist Church was founded through a process of evangelical revival, and prophetic preaching was central to its mission. In the following section, I analyse a sermon delivered by the minister of WRMC on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of Sierra Leone independence, in order to tease out the relationships between Christian faith, and the construction of a Sierra Leonean national identity. I argue that in this context, religion has a transformative effect on other forms of identification; rather than seeking to erase them, religion seeks to redeem and sanctify them. While Islam seeks an order based on a transnational orthodoxy, Methodist Christianity retains the national frame while seeking to ground it in a higher order based on faith in Jesus Christ.

The Independence Anniversary Thanksgiving service was held on the Sunday following Independence Day. The night before, several thousand people from across London had packed out the Lighthouse, a Church hall further down Camberwell road, for the official 50th Anniversary party, and organisers had sensibly moved the time of the Thanksgiving Service to 3 o'clock in the

afternoon to allow people to recuperate. By the time I arrived for the service, the foyer of the church was already full, with dignitaries, including the high commissioner of Sierra Leone, waiting for their cue to process into the hall. As the service was the culmination of the official celebrations it was an ecumenical one – guest preachers from the different denominations serving the diaspora had already taken their seats at the top off the hall, which was a sea of green white and blue hats, scarves and *ashobi*, the commemorative dresses worn on occasions such as this. I hurried up the aisle, to a seat saved for me by some members of the Sierra Leone fellowship - just in time, as a drumroll sounded and a flag bearer and several trumpeters lead the high commissioner, the local MP for Southwark and a representative of the SL government in a procession to their seats at the front of the hall.

The service was a joyous affair. Musical contributions from the church choir and from other singing groups and musicians from the church congregation proved especially popular with those in attendance. The order of service was punctuated some of the more popular hymns from the Methodist songbook, including a rousing version of 'How great thou art', which culminated in a spontaneous a capella repeat of the songs refrain from the congregation. The Walworth Road Choir finished things off with a medley of West African gospel songs which had everyone to their feet dancing. By the time the minister rose to the pulpit for his sermon, the mood was exultant and happy. However, the minister, who was a young man with a Master's degree in development economics, was not about to let the moment pass – with the high commissioner sitting in the front pew of his church - without offering his perspective on the anniversary. His speech, punctuated with cries of 'amen!' from the congregation, was in many ways a classic Methodist sermon, emotional, political and with an emphasis on transformation. He began, however, by invoking the question that had been on many people's lips since the year began:

You know it amazes me for people to start saying 'What have we got to celebrate?' Have you heard about that? I went to so many places, and people kept telling me, 'What have we got to celebrate?' you know what I told them? I told them, 'Look, be quiet and start counting your blessings ('amen') BE QUIET AND START COUNTING YOUR BLESSINGS. Because, Jubilee is a compact from God. Jubilee it is Gods intention that on this day, you shall do this, do this and do that, and that's exactly what we're doing, we have already started counting our blessings, and you know what? We are counting them ('ONE BY ONE') and we should never end. So we use this day to worship God, to give him praises for lives, and for our country, Sierra Leone… together, I want to say to you that today marks a new beginning in Sierra Leone – ('amen!' –followed by lots of applause) – The old days have gone and the new days have come, and so, God is saying, set this day aside and worship him.[7]'

Here, the minister challenged the prevailing view that the 50th anniversary celebration was not worth celebrating, because of mismanagement by the government or collective failure of the people by bringing a third factor into the equation – that of God and the idea that he has a compact with the country of Sierra Leone much in the manner of the old testament covenant between God and the people of Israel. The invocation of the biblical idea of jubilee, essentially a year set aside every 50 years when Gods people were to refrain from economic greed, forgive debts and live according to God's providence, superimposed a new temporality over the old trajectory of the country's failed modernisation since the 1960s, and based on a wider set of significations. The problems of the country, and the failures of the country's leadership, were placed in a broader context, broader than political or social criticism, into a realm of prophetic destiny. As he went on, he continued to shift between the

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[7] The following excerpts of this sermon are taken from my fieldnotes, recorded on 30/4/2011. The 'amens' and other words in brackets/inverted commas are interjections from the congregation.

depressing reality of Sierra Leone as it appeared today, and this wider framework, utilising biblical references as metaphor for the transformation that was going to take place. However, in straddling these different scales, the occasion for direct critique was also often embraced. On one occasion he shifted from scripture to social analysis and back:

> When Jesus opened up the scroll, he said the spirit of God
> is upon me and I have been sent to liberate the captives, to
> give eyes to those who those who cannot see, to open the
> mouths of those who do not speak, and say today, our
> country is being liberated from political bondage ('yes!')
> Our country is being liberated from political bondage there
> are so many TIMES, decisions have been made but not on
> the basis of what is good in our country. The international
> political economy (inaudible) in our country, and when
> decisions are made who suffers? The poor people. ('yes!').
> And yet we continue to say, we have people who care for us
> yes they do, but they also make decisions for us. You know
> sometimes, when you are watching something on TV you don't
> like what do you do? You CHANGE it, it is called Remote
> Control. And that is how people in countries away from Sierra
> Leone over there, and they take hold of their remote control
> and they CHANGE US, 'no that's not what I want, I'll change
> the channel.' But we are not TVs. We are Human Beings made
> in the likeness of God and we should be treated as such.'

At this point, the minister switched from referencing the Old Testament to the New Testament gospel reading from earlier in the service, in which Jesus declares he is the one who God has sent 'liberate the captives'. This is the central element of the Christian narrative, that of Jesus, who comes to overturn the existing order and create a new order under God. The implication is that

faith in Jesus Christ has the power to overturn political hierarchies by creating a new authority for people to place their trust in. However, again there was an ambiguity at play, between this promise of transformation and an evident anger that things had gotten to this point:

> 'But it's not just political bondage, but also economic bondage. It is very pathetic, for us, to hear, with all the resources we have, all the millions of pounds, and dollars of wealth in Sierra Leone, we are still at the bottom of Human Development Index… Doesn't-it-sound…funny, that I have so much in my house, but I am poor. A country that is poor for more than 5 years is in Abject Poverty. And so… the bondage we have been placed under, God says, I will deliver us from it ('amen!') I will deliver you from that spirit of poverty, and we should rise up, and replenish the land. ('amen!'). You know the statistics came out, you know what I did, I shook my head, you know because in the Civil Servants they knew exactly what they were doing, they had not much money, but they had the Privilege ('yes'). It was there, and if you look at the Civil Service that, those days and the civil service these days, there are not much actually to celebrate, but… those civil servants who work tirelessly for their country I'm sure they will be blessed by God.'

Despite his earlier cautioning to 'be quiet and start counting your blessings', there was a tension in the minister's speech: between abjuring the congregation to trust in God, and recounting the manifest problems and disappointments of the country since the 1960s. It is tempting to see this tension as reflecting the true purpose of the sermon – to castigate the political elites – some of whom were present - under whose stewardship the country has faced such a decline. However, I argue that this mixture of indignation and prophetic fatalism is an

accurate reflection of many in Sierra Leone and the diaspora and their spiritual (personal/psychological) response to the country's predicament. The Christian narrative, of transformation and rebirth, offers a solution to those who are willing to place their faith in it, by sanctifying the painful events of political history by placing them within this wider history of salvation. However, this frame is still implicitly national – replacing the authority of government with the authority of God. Those sub-national identities, of religious denomination or ethnicity or politics, in this vision are transcended as people return to faith in God. As he said later on:

'But when, our faith is restored for we Sierra Leoneans, then things will start to happen, then things will start to happen as well, THINK about that. They are already happening. In the UK, for example, we are setting an example (applause), we have set an example for the whole world, both in the Sierra Leone diaspora and internally as well…I am a Methodist - we have Anglicans among us, we have Catholics, we have Pentecostals, and now here they are, sitting in front of you, put your hands together – this is the year of the lord, this is the year of the Lord's favour in Sierra Leone, and it is already happening (applause, cheers, fanfare) with the Ministers.

This is the year I will go to my Brother and say, I am sorry, what has happened between us in this past time, let us lay it to rest for the sake of God. This is the year we will come together and say 'We are brothers we are Sierra Leoneans' ('amen!'). We are brothers we are Sierra Leoneans. You know we have many tribes in Sierra Leone, God didn't make you a Limba, God did not make you a Mende, God didn't make you Kono, God made you as human beings in his own

likeness. We have no factions we are all children of God.

It would be most wonderful for the APC leader, to go call on

the SLPP leader and say, say what you have to say, and

nothing will happen to you, because you are my brother, and

when it is time to say something and you have done good, I

will say it as well, I will commend you.'

The sermon evidently served a mixture of motives and it would be perhaps excessive to read too coherent an interpretation. The event was a celebration, and thus called for something uplifting, that paid due attention to the ideals of unity, of celebration, as well as being grounded in the Christian gospel. The fact that the High Commissioner of Sierra Leone, along with the local MP who was also a member of the British government, were present, meant that the minister would have been unlikely to pass up an opportunity to 'speak truth to power'. The mixture of prophetic encouragement to have faith in God, along with trenchant criticism of political economy, and nostalgic invocation of the past, in many ways reflect the views of many people in the diaspora felt about and coped with their own situation and the situation of the country; hopeful, angry, fatalistic, faithful, celebratory and ultimately ambivalent. Christianity, like Islam, offered a framework for negotiating the problems of life in Sierra Leone and in the diaspora, however, identification did not necessarily put to bed the effects of other forms of ascribed identity. What is interesting is precisely this conflict, suggesting that religious identity does not operate in a neatly functional way but is a space of anxiety, challenge and conflict within which the histories of individuals and communities are played out.

7.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I have examined Sierra Leoneans' engagement with religion in South London. I have argued that they reflect an ongoing pragmatic engagement with different forms of spiritual and temporal power and knowledge that is nonetheless fraught with ambivalence. Religion, as a form of

identification, has an ambiguous effect on other forms of identification – seeking on the one hand transcend ethnic and national forms of difference whilst relying on them to build functional communities. Religious belief and practice, at least in the case of the two world-religions I encountered, cannot be seen as purely functionalistic ways for migrants to better settle in the country of origin, as at the heart of both Islam and Christianity is the aim of radical transformation, an aim that inevitably causes conflict with other forms of identification and cultural practice. What occurs is therefore a sometimes uneasy accommodation where the functional benefits of being part of a religious community - as a source of bonding and bridging social capital (Putnam 1995), a source of emotional support and self-creation – are embraced while at the same time revealing tension and ambiguity over the place of Sierra Leone and its cultural heritage in the wider world. In this sense, the historically rooted nature of 'religions of the book', and their millennial visions of the future in which nationhood is ultimately transcended, inevitably challenges narratives of national development that rely on sometimes crude unilinear models of historical change (Ferguson 2003, Fabian 1983). These sites of religious expression therefore continue to enact the unfinished history of Sierra Leone and its diaspora.

While religious practice can be a way for people to navigate the disruptions and challenges of migrant life, it is not the only way. While God was frequently invoked in daily conversation and in social events marking different stages of the life-cycle, for many people, like Alhaji and Frank, this frame of reference was but one part of a plurality of sources of obligation and meaning, and could even be rejected entirely in favour of a pragmatic cosmopolitanism. Religious diversity, from syncretic practices to orthodoxy to atheism, therefore should not be seen as simply a form of identity but as a set of practices and way of understanding the world that is open to change and challenge.

Chapter 8: Conclusions

The above chapters have sought to explore the basic questions of how a West African migrant community engages with and responds to locality and the diversity it finds around it, and how this affects their relationship with the country of origin. They have engaged in three specific sites of encounter – the arena of trade and business, the temporary spaces created for the 50th anniversary of Sierra Leonean independence, and the public and private realms of lived religious observance – in order to bring highlight the tensions and creative struggles that exist for Sierra Leoneans in London. I now attempt to summarise my findings, relating to the initial questions and explore what this means for future research and for attempts to engage the Sierra Leone diaspora in national development.

8.1 Summary of Empirical Chapters

Chapter 5 explored the relationships and stances created by Sierra Leonean traders at East Street Market. The market, a relatively open space amidst the anonymity of South London, provided a place where entrepreneurially minded individuals could gain a foothold in business. Such a venture demand visibility and a self-conscious presentation of identity in order to gain custom. As a result, Sierra Leonean market stalls and shops have become sites of connection for the community at large, offering identifiable markers through which people can associate and feel at home. Thus, Alhaji, the trader with a long personal history of market trade in the UK, Liberia and Sierra Leone itself, has been able to place himself in a position of authority and respect amongst the overseas community, while not being able to return home himself. His position as 'man of the people', is forged in opposition to the high-handedness and remoteness of the Sierra Leone High Commission, and rooted in his awareness of the daily struggles of individuals living in the UK and derived from his physical presence 'on the street'. By contrast, Nafi, the lady shopkeeper whose store opens onto Alhaji's pitch, has self-consciously utilised her Sierra Leonean

identity as a means of finding a more meaningful lifestyle to the London 'rat race'. Her engagement with Sierra Leone through the culturally esteemed position of the female businesswoman has provided her with status, although ultimately it is a means to creating a more comfortable lifestyle in the UK, which she regards as home.

Given the diverse nature of the market place, it is perhaps not surprising that these traders have sought to build connections with non-Sierra Leoneans and adopt a cosmopolitan attitude in relation to the hundreds of people who shop at the market every day. This vernacular cosmopolitanism is a stance that is based on the mobilisation of cross-cutting aspects of identity, in Nafi's case, a broad West African or pan-African identity that enables her to access the more populous Nigerian, Ivorian and Ghanaian Diasporas that live throughout London. The language and attitudes of cosmopolitanism are balanced with subtle forms of ethnic, national particularism, whereby Nafi's Sierra Leone-ness remains a defined element in the mix as a marker of authenticity. However, the constraints around engaging fully with Sierra Leone mean that Nafi has been drawn more into life in the diaspora itself, balanced between the specifics of her heritage and the pluralistic, diverse world she finds herself in.

East Street Market itself is a contested place, with competing agendas between different traders and competing understandings of the place itself. For long term permanent traders like Ray and Johnny, the market is a place of embattled memorialisation and decline, as the old community moves away or dies and is replaced by a strange, unsettling behaviour of the new migrants. It is interesting to consider the position of these white-British traders, many of whom no longer live in London, but commute to their workplaces from towns and villages outside of the capital, as internal migrants inhabiting their own 'diaspora space' of London and the South East in some ways comparable to the diaspora communities that they encounter, inhabiting similar emotional geographies of belonging, nostalgia, displacement and alienation.

In Chapter 6, I considered the events around the 50th Anniversary of Sierra Leonean independence, which occurred during the year of my fieldwork. The Anniversary was very much a public event, driven and organised by the main public institutions of the Sierra Leonean diaspora in the UK and with the support of the Sierra Leonean government. Its official nature meant that it inevitably became a situation of debate and contestation in which a narrative of Sierra Leonean history – one that sought to justify and naturalise the status quo by connecting it historically to the first post-independence government of Sir Milton Margai, and through the use of a language of renewal, rebirth and rebuilding, in which the violence of the civil war was seen as an aberration, that needed to be moved on from. This perspective inevitably generated contradictory responses from many of those I spoke to, some who contested the legitimacy of the political establishment given their connection with the one-party regime of Siaka Stevens, others who had grown cynical on the basis of continued corruption scandals and the slow progress of development in Sierra Leone. At the same time, the anniversary provided an opportunity for the community at large to come together to express itself, to make itself visible and celebrate its own particularity within London. This was evidenced by the enthusiastic adoption of the green white and blue tricolour on t-shirts, scarves and other commemorative clothing during independence week. While the political narratives were the subject of criticism, the anniversary was nonetheless celebrated enthusiastically. As Mercer et al (2008) have pointed out in regard to African home associations, the primary function of such diasporic groups is in practice to provide mutual assistance and support for those in the diaspora, with development or other transnational activity coming as a secondary or side issue.

A significant element of the anniversary celebrations as they occurred was the discourse around youth and generation. Youth was a recurring subject of concern in debates around the future of the country, reflective of the fact that

youth movements had often been co-opted by political elites to intimidate and suppress their opponents. The use of child soldiers by rebel groups in the civil war, and the importance given to disciplining children and appropriate 'training' reflects the fact that children in Sierra Leone were seen as inherently unstable elements unless appropriated socialised. The transformations of youth culture in London increased the anxiety felt around this issue. Ironically however, it was the language and forms of expression of youth that were central to the celebration of the anniversary itself. Central to the celebrations were a series of parties in which D.J.s and musical acts from both the diaspora and Sierra Leone itself came to perform, highlighting the vibrancy of Sierra Leonean youth culture. What is interesting is how transnationally-oriented these forms were, both in their utilisation of American hip-hop and R&B styles but also in their subject matter, use of technology and links outside the Sierra Leonean scene itself.

The importance of branding both in the official promotion of the anniversary and in the popular expressions of the celebration, through clothing, music and visual media, reflects an interesting aspect of how identity is transformed through migration. Branding can be understood as the utilisation of everyday forms of social interaction in the service of informational capital (Arvidsson 2008). Given the creative and intrinsically innovative nature of these everyday forms, what inevitably happens is that brands are often reclaimed and put to use for different purposes than their initial 'message' would prescribe. The compression of national symbols into t-shirt logos, and the promotional materials utilised by the official organisers of the 50th Anniversary reflect the attempt to create a particular national brand aimed beyond the borders of the community to the world at large – to promote the country as vibrant confident and positively transformed since the end of the war. However, in the event, these materials and symbols were re-appropriated to service the needs of Sierra Leoneans themselves in London. In the event, this transformation of national symbols into branded images reflects the transformation of identity by young

people in the diaspora, more consistent with the expressive practices of the city at large.

Finally, Chapter 7 explored the nature of diasporic and Postcolonial identity through religious forms and practices, focusing on a Methodist Church and Mosque, both of which had large Sierra Leonean populations. It sought to unpack one of the singular features of religious diversity in Sierra Leone and West Africa more broadly, the seeming unproblematic adoption of more than one religious identity, Islam, Christianity and traditional beliefs. In it I point out that this phenomenon, which has resulted in Sierra Leone having a remarkable level of inter-religious toleration compared to other West African countries such as Nigeria, is itself rooted in the chaotic and violent history of the country in which multiple sources of power vied for influence. In order to negotiate this terrain of uncertainty, a pluralistic attitude to spiritual power and knowledge was necessary. In London today, this pluralism is still in evidence, despite trends reported elsewhere of the hardening of particular religious identities through engagement with globalised forms of Islam and evangelical protestant Christianity, through a sphere of popular spirituality/morality that utilises multiple sources of authority and tradition.

Also in this chapter I examined the relationship between religion and national community, as these are regarded as relating to each other in somewhat functionalistic terms in the broader literature. In contrast to this functionalistic approach, I found that, in both the case of the Methodist church and the Mosque, religious practice added a decidedly conflictual element to national identity, and vice versa. The mosque sought to highlight its universalistic ethos through the suppression of national characteristics. However, in practice, it still derived much of its function as providing a distinctively Sierra Leonean space. Furthermore, the representatives Orthodox Islam held specific Sierra Leonean traditional practices, such as 40 day Sara ceremonies for deceased loved ones, as un-Islamic, and they were frowned upon by the masjid authorities, but

ultimately they found themselves officiating at just such events on a regular basis. For Sierra Leonean Methodist Christians, their faith and particular denomination placed them as inheritors of the missionary heritage that undergirded the foundation of Sierra Leone as a colony, and much of the Christian narrative, particularly the old testament story of the nation of Israel, and the millennial, transformative promise of Jesus in the New Testament, can be seen as supportive of narratives of nationalism and modernity. However, these tropes were often re-used to critique and challenge the nation-building agenda of the Sierra Leonean state and the neo-colonial attitudes of Western donors. Christian beliefs reinforce the idea of the nation whilst also seeking to transcend and overcome it. Thus, far from being functionally congruent, religion and national identity were found to be somewhat at odds with each other, creating internal tensions and generating conflict (albeit on an everyday level) for those people involved. Thus, in terms of the multiplexity of identity argued for by Vertovec and others, it needs to be pointed out that, unlike on diversity questionnaire forms, the different factors of identity are not 'tick box' items that together comprise a whole person, but interact with each other in conflictual, unpredictable ways that are fraught with ambiguity.

8.2 Findings

At the beginning of the thesis, I asked two interrelated questions: how does Sierra Leonean engagement with the particularity of London as its host environment shape it as a community and affect its relationship with Sierra Leone. I asked this with specific relation to the burgeoning migrant diversity – or 'super-diversity' existent in the city today, and how do the twin pressures of integration and diasporic attachment manifest themselves in a specific Sierra Leonean diasporic subjectivity. This thesis has argued that, in the case of the particularity of London vis-a-vis Sierra Leone, the frameworks by which individuals use to navigate their relationship with the host country are shaped by the cultural imaginaries of colonialism and its aftermath. London, the site of settlement, occupies a place of power, enlightenment and potential liberation as

well as degeneration, threat and violence, a position that it has held in relation to the colonial entrepot of Freetown since the latters' foundation at the turn of the 19th century.

8.2.1 Diaspora space as its own functional 'homeland'

The result of this history, for those who have inherited it, is a profound ambivalence towards both Sierra Leone and its modernising project, and the promises and values of London itself, an ambivalence that results in many taking refuge in the creative, ambivalent 'third space' of the diaspora itself. Thus, in chapter 5 we see Nafi, Alhaji, and the other Sierra Leonean traders looking to get ahead both in business and community development through mobilising their Sierra Leonean heritage in particular strategic ways, even as their direct relationships with the country are, to varying degrees, attenuated. Sierra Leone as home is an important source of meaning and identity, but this is incorporated in personal trajectories of success that are embedding them deeper into daily life in the UK. Similarly, in Chapter 6, the young creatives involved in the 50th independence anniversary – like Triple C, DJ Little, and Nick, seek to promote and uplift a modern, vibrant Sierra Leonean youth identity, through music, video and fashion, whilst finding direct engagements with the home country frustrating. It is fair to say that a transnational lifestyle is not simply a marker of success but often provides the means to achieve personal goals that are simply not available back home. The ambivalence this generates provides an ongoing subject for the media. Meanwhile the community at large resist official inducements to become 'ambassadors' for Brand Sierra Leone, while at the same time, embrace the material culture of diasporic branding – through the Sierra Leonean flag - as a means of affirming themselves as a community, to 'show people wi culture' making themselves visible for once as participants in the life of the super-diverse city.

8.2.2 Emergence of broader pan-West African – and pan-migrant- identifications (although in tension with national identity)

Related to the above point, one result of engagement in the locality of South-East London has been the development of ties, both of friendship and also association in institution such as churches and schools, with members of other west African minority groups, particularly the Ghanaian, Ivorian and Nigerian populations. This pan-West African grouping reflects the shared historical and cultural roots of these different populations. Much of this was born of necessity. Nafi's business, supplying fresh and preserved Sierra Leone foodstuffs for her customers, could not rely on the unpredictable nature of the export market in Sierra Leone itself, and so took advantage of better organised Gambian and Ghanaian suppliers in order to source the fresh vegetable leaves that were central to Sierra Leonean cuisine. Elsewhere, at the Methodist church, a similar Pan-African association was in evidence, although it existed in tension with the careful definition of national identity groupings.

Religious affiliation and business partnership can both be seen as cross-cutting identifications that enable migrants to transcend the particularisms of where they come from in order to develop themselves as persons. They can be seen as identities based on particular practices in which it is the doing of the thing that gives substance to the identification. In the case of the independence anniversary, while this clearly represents a bounded and exclusive identity, it overlaps with this point in a couple of ways. Firstly, as previously argued, there was much self-consciousness around putting on a good anniversary celebration in order to represent the vitality of Sierra Leone to a wider audience. Consciousness of the success of the Latin American community in Southwark in presenting a marketable ethnic 'brand' to the wider community with the Fiesta del Pueblo, and the efforts made by its regional peers, Nigeria and Ghana, in preceding years to commemorate their own 50th Anniversaries, meant that the Sierra Leone celebrations could be seen as an important community practice whereby people would gain recognition and visibility. Secondly, the utilisation of media technology in promoting and celebrating the anniversary can be seen as a similar practice, the successful performance of which declares Sierra

Leone's membership in the modern club of nations. The frustration around the problems around the anniversary led to some to distance themselves from official nationalism. It could be argued that this is a form of belonging which is crucial for African states to achieve, and which diasporans feel keenly as they rub shoulders with other nationalities and groups in London.

8.2.3 The role of identity in a setting of super-diversity is conflictive and ambiguous, shifting across different scales of generality

Finally, the above points suggest that the development of social relationships and communities in a situation of super-diversity is shifting, conflictive and ambiguous. Amongst Sierra Leoneans in London, different aspects of their identity are utilised in the formation of relationships at increasing degrees of generality. National identity is the most defined of these, although it was interesting to consider that this took time to coalesce – remembering Alhaji's story of the fearful Sierra Leonean refugees pretending to be West Indian in the mid-90s in order to avoid the attention of the authorities. Legal status and national identity thus have a mutually sustaining relationship. On the one hand, legality, through the authorization of residence, offers a path to citizenship, a greater freedom to develop relationships with the immediate locality, while providing the self-confidence to express the particular national identity. Broader scale identifications, to West Africa, or to Islam or Protestant Christianity, allows access to a wider circle of associations, however these can result in conflict with more particular identifications, to culture, or nationality. This is complicated further when a broadening of relationships in the host country through religious affiliation results in a narrowing of options, as in the case of the tradition of religious pluralism in Sierra Leone, which is at odds with the official stances of global Islam and Christianity.

In this sense, membership of the Sierra Leonean diaspora for Sierra Leoneans is to enter into this shifting super-diverse world of multiplex relationships. This is based in no small part on the small size of Sierra Leone and its weakness in

terms of resources and cultural influence. While ethnic particularism and nationalism is a force in the diaspora, it is a nationalism that is based on a desire for a broader acceptance in the modern world. In many ways, this is a similar dynamic to the conditions that forged African nationalism in the 1940s and '50s (Killingray 1994), where military service and studies abroad fostered a sense of anti-colonial patriotism through encounters with other colonial subjects. However, the ongoing problems in Sierra Leone itself, particularly a lack of opportunities, and the negative history and memory associated with its political class despite its best efforts, mean that this diasporic patriotism is often ambivalent towards the actuality of the homeland, and is left to find its focus within the broad diversity of the diaspora itself.

8.3 Implications for further research

In terms of how this thesis can contribute to wider understandings of new immigration and super-diversity, I argue that this thesis offers a more nuanced understanding of how members of a diaspora responds to the conditions in which it finds itself. In particular, I have argued that the relationships between different variables of difference, such as religion, class, age and national identity, often have conflictive and non-functionalistic relationships and that these reflect the real-world geographical and historical context in which these variables are formed. In the case of the Sierra Leonean community, aspects of identity such as religious affiliation or profession have particular forms of significance within the country. The case of individuals who claim multiple religions reflects a particular historical legacy in which overlapping and contesting regimes of power and knowledge – the Islamic influence deriving from the Sahel and the colonial and missionary projects promulgated by Europeans – resulted in a pluralistic attitude to religious authority and arguably to authority in general. While much current work on super-diversity is exploring the quantitative dimension to the interactions between different new migrant groups, careful ethnographic contextualisation remains important in order to fathom the nature of such interactions, and the un-typical and unique

elements of much everyday diversity. The strength of ethnography is its ability to highlight such specificity, as well as to uncover the nature of relationships within a social field.

Similarly this research highlights an appreciation of different ways in which identity per se is framed within the diaspora, and how this reflects processes of social change from one generation to the next. The emergence of a 'branded' Sierra Leonean identity, expressed through clothing and imagery, differs from the relationship between state and subject experienced by many people living within the Sierra Leone, as well as those who have just arrived. Rather than seeing national identity or even ethnicity as a banal aspect of personality that exists uniformly across a population, it can thus be seen as a form of identification that has different meanings according to one's social position. Thus for young diasporans such as Nick or Triple C, Sierra Leonean identity offers a sense of personal distinctiveness that provides a sense of meaning and creative inspiration as they navigate the urban social landscape in which they have spent most of their lives, whereas for others, such as Alhaji, Sierra Leonean identity is reflection of the social life in which they are still actively committed and involved. As a result, understanding how different aspects of identification interact requires an appreciation of such broader social processes and how such aspects are expressed within the life of the person concerned.

The central argument of this thesis is that the ambivalent positioning of many in the Sierra Leonean diaspora in relation to both receiving and sending locality has resulted in many relying on the diaspora itself as a source of belonging and 'home'. Future research drawing on this conclusion could focus on the range of spaces in which this diasporic culture manifests itself, both physically and online. Rather than having a site-specific focus as in the case of my research, focusing on particular people - such as diasporic entrepreneurs - could prove profitable to map the extent of this transnational field. While having a place focus was invaluable in providing the context in which everyday life was lived

while in London, an analysis that shifts to a more network-focused lens could provide an appreciation of the role of broader scale connections in shaping people's attitudes to diversity.

The findings of this thesis have implications for current efforts to involve the Sierra Leonean overseas diaspora in national development. This is a fruitful line of action, as many in the diaspora are concerned with engaging with Sierra Leone, and indeed do so, formally through associations such as Sweissy Union, the Sierra Leone Fellowship and the NBICC, and informally through remittances, the establishment of private businesses and involvement in transnational and diasporic politics. However, two points need to be made clear. Firstly, the 'diaspora' as defined by much of the official rhetoric, refers explicitly to the wealthier, professional class of overseas diasporans, people like Nafi and the congregants at the Methodist church. While arguably these are the people most able to make significant contributions, there is a large proportion of people living in London who do not fit this profile, and are excluded from consideration. Secondly, while there is significant interest and activity within the diaspora, much of it is outside formal channels and this is reflects a general lack of trust towards the state and its intentions. Efforts at 'rebranding' Sierra Leone's image overseas, while they resonate with the personal projects of second-generation diasporans, may be less successful at winning over large numbers of people if it is felt that it is just another scheme to extract money. What might be a more effective approach would be improve the connections that already exist, so that the transnational activities that Sierra Leoneans are already engaging in – whether that be running a grocery business or getting involved in local politics, – can be done more smoothly.

8.4 Reflections on my research and what I would do differently

My research sought to elaborate the intersection between two fields of study and by extension two areas of social life – diasporic relationships and identities, and the interactions between immigrant communities and the locality it which

they are living. As a consequence, the framing of my research was crucial in order for the wide range of experience encompassing these two areas to be effectively incorporated in my data. In practice, this was difficult as my preparation for the fieldwork (5 months language training in Sierra Leone) led me to place a greater emphasis on the diasporic element of the research frame when it came to conducting my fieldwork. While I was able to develop a more comparative approach in Chapter 5 with my analysis of English traders attitudes to and relationships with African immigrants and linking it to the broader social changes affecting the area, much of my fieldwork and therefore much of my research was concerned with the Sierra Leonean community themselves. This raised the problem of a sampling bias described below. In order to provide the balance I required, a more strictly comparative approach in which an analysis of locality and diaspora were researched separately could have been helpful for the final analysis. However, any such parsing of the fieldwork would have potentially resulted in a less rich dataset for each of the elements under study. Furthermore, it might have created a false dichotomy between the two fields. Alternatively, a switch of scale and maintaining a more specific focus on individuals' daily lives as they moved across spaces would have allowed me to better uncover the interactions between transnational activity and integration as defined in chapter 2, although this again could have missed important aspects of social context found in such spaces. During one of the early months of my fieldwork, I asked a Sierra Leonean friend if Sierra Leoneans did in fact spend time and hang out together, and his response was an unambiguous 'yes'. To place too narrow a lens on a person or a few people would have obscured important comparative and contextual information derived from a broader range of sites that fed into my overall analysis. Another problematic element to my research, which I was conscious of during my preparatory stage was methodological nationalism – the uncritical use of national categories within my research project. As I established myself in London and became acquainted with people from the Sierra Leonean community, the label 'Sierra Leonean' became dominant in both my discussions

with people and my relationships. I became known as someone who was interested in Sierra Leone, primarily, and the data that was produced through participating in conversations with people often covered this as a topic. Further to this, I was conscious that the events I was attending and places I was visiting on a regular basis reflected this categorical bias, and that individuals whose primary identification was along another axis, such as profession, or who were not interested in participating in the activities of Sierra Leonean diaspora were passed over. That being said, nationality, with its cultural contents such as language, food, shared memories of particular places and shared perspectives, was a significant basis of identification in peoples social lives, one that accessed a level of intimacy that would not have been possible if I was to have another focus, such as professional occupation or even religion. Furthermore, within the broad milieu of diasporic events, I did come into contact with individuals with more tentative (sometimes deliberately so) connections to Sierra Leone, for whom diasporic gatherings were their one concession to their country of origin, such as Joe, the owner of a sportswear franchise on Walworth road who regarded many of his compatriots with disdain and was so focused on making a success of his business that he needed to remove himself from their company. Ultimately this problem perhaps speaks of how deeply embedded national identity is in migrants' everyday lives, where the act of registration of one's identity upon settlement fixes a person into a particular national category that is more powerful in the diaspora than it perhaps is at home. I hope that exploring the interactions between nationality and other overlapping identities has enabled me to highlight its socially produced nature.

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