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"For a future tomorrow": The figured worlds of schoolgirls in Kono, Sierra Leone

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**“FOR A FUTURE TOMORROW”: THE FIGURED WORLDS OF
SCHOOLGIRLS IN KONO, SIERRA LEONE**

A Dissertation Presented

by

JORDENE HALE

Submitted to the Graduate School of the
University of Massachusetts Amherst in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of

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Language, Literacy, and Culture Concentration
Teacher Education and Curriculum Studies
College of Education

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DEDICATION

To David, Sophia Maxine, Chana Rose

and

Adama

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My Sierra Leone families housed me, fed me, and taught me to live and love-Salone style. With love, I thank my Freetown family: my sister Marie Jalloh and our children, Edna, Little Mama, Fuad, and Alim. In Kono, I thank Patrick, Mariama, Regina, Fatu, Annie, Grace, and PaAbu of the Lamin-Tongu family for taking such good care of me. I am especially grateful to Patrick for his anthropologist's eye, his commitment to social justice, and sharing his passion for his beloved Kono. I thank Komba Boima and Fasali Marrah for their laughter and love. I thank Sunshine for feeding me, Matia for welcoming me, and Emmanuel Tomme for giving me his beautiful home with its very important porch. I thank Jim Higbie for our long discussions over dinners at Aries. I thank Baba for his generosity with vehicles.

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ABSTRACT

“FOR A FUTURE TOMORROW”: THE FIGURED WORLDS OF SCHOOLGIRLS

IN KONO, SIERRA LEONE

MAY 2014

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Current research in Sub-Sahara Africa suggests that young women face challenges in accessing and completing schooling, due among other things to gender related school based violence (Bruce & Hallman, 2008; Dunne, Humphreys, & Leach, 2006; Lloyd, Kaufman, & Hewett, 2000). These studies, while valuable in providing documentation on school enrollment and school leaving, do not explore the motivational framework where young women remain in school.

The purpose of this dissertation is to trace how schoolgirls’ identities or “figured worlds” (Gee, 2011) are co-constructed in particular contexts by the same cohort of schoolgirls, their teachers, households, and communities through an ethnographic case study conducted over a period of three years from 2010 to 2013 in Kono, Sierra Leone. The unit of analysis is the experience of the individual schoolgirls rendered in detailed portraits. The central research question addressed is: What are the ‘figured worlds’ that these schoolgirls inhabit that compels them, in the face of overwhelming odds, to commit to schooling? What is the role of “imagined communities” for these schoolgirls (Anderson, 1991; Kanno & Norton, 2003)?

Further, how do the schoolgirls utilize the liminal space of schooling (Switzer, 2010)? Employing the portraiture methodology (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997) this research focuses on three schoolgirls, their communities, and their relationships with the researcher. This research analyzes how for schoolgirls in sub-Saharan Africa, the figured worlds of schoolgirls, is an identity that despite the physical risk, economic loss, and unlikely career success, becomes compelling. This dissertation contributes to research seeking gender equity in education in sub-Saharan Africa.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	v
ABSTRACT	vii
CHAPTER	
1. INTRODUCTION	1
1.1. Preface.....	1
1.1.1. Vignette.....	1
1.1.2. Introduction.....	3
1.1.3. Focal schoolgirls	5
1.1.4. My role.....	7
1.2. Previous Research on Schoolgirls.....	7
1.3. Theoretical Foundations.....	11
1.3.1. Figured Worlds: Gee.....	12
1.3.2. Imagined Communities: Norton	17
1.3.3. Liminality.....	19
2. RESEARCH SITE	22
2.1. The Civil War	25
2.2. Gender issues in Sierra Leone.....	32
2.3. Education in Sierra Leone.....	35
3. METHODOLOGY	44
3.1. Sierra Leone and my story	44
3.1.1. From researcher to NGO.....	52
3.1.2. Sponsor and researcher	56
3.1.3. Class and Race	60
3.2. Research Design.....	65
3.2.1. Data Collection	66

3.3. Data Analysis Methodology	71
3.3.1. Phase One: Generative coding	72
3.3.2. Phase Two: Writing portraitures	73
3.3.3. Phase Three: Figured Worlds and Imagined Communities	76
3.4. Member checks	77
3.5. Transcription	78
3.6. Limitations	83
4. ISATOU	84
4.1. Portrait of Isatou	84
4.1.1. The War, Courtship and Birth.....	86
4.1.2. Work and Money	88
4.1.3. Suffering	93
4.1.4. Tradition.....	95
4.1.5. An Educated Woman	99
4.1.6. Cooking (An educated woman and a wife).....	101
4.1.7. Ambition	104
4.1.8. Friends.....	105
4.1.9. My Relationship with Isatou	107
4.2. Analysis of Isatou's Portrait.....	109
4.2.1. The Figured Worlds of Schoolgirls:	111
4.3. Conclusion	135
5. FANTU	139
5.1. Portrait of Fantu	139
5.1.1. Family	141
5.1.2. Wealth	143
5.1.3. Getting married	148
5.1.4. Future	151
5.1.5. The village	155
5.1.6. Boldness	158
5.2. Analysis of Fantu's portrait	160
5.2.1. Liminality.....	160
5.2.2. Marriage: Is it the end of the liminal period of schooling?.....	165
5.2.3. Marriage as negotiation.....	171

5.3. Conclusion	179
6. AISATTA	182
6.1. Portrait of Aisatta.....	182
6.1.1. The journey to Sawafe and back.....	182
6.1.2. The war and early years	184
6.1.3. Aisatta's family	186
6.1.4. Living with strangers	191
6.1.5. School	195
6.1.6. Shame.....	200
6.1.7. The future.....	203
6.2. Analysis of Aisatta's Portrait	206
6.2.1. The figured world of schoolgirls.....	207
6.2.2. An Educated woman	213
6.3. Conclusion	219
6.4. Coda	221
7. CONCLUSION & IMPLICATIONS	222
7.1. Preface.....	222
7.2. Discussion of theoretical implications of liminality	225
7.3. Portraiture	230
7.4. Research Findings on the figured worlds of schoolgirls.....	234
7.5. Implications for development in sub-Saharan Africa through education	239
WORKS CITED	242

LIST OF TABLES

Table	Page
1: Human Development Index: Trends 1980-present (2013)	24
2: Sierra Leone's HDI trends	24
3: Education in Sierra Leone.....	37
4: Data Set.....	67
5: Data Analysis	72
6: Transcript Conventions.....	82

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure	Page
1: Map of Sierra Leone with Kono highlighted	22
2: Downtown Kono.....	23
3: Artisanal diamond digging.....	28
4: Downtown Kono in the rainy season.....	29
5: Downtown Kono in the dry season.....	31
6: Lesson from primary school	40

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Preface

1.1.1 Vignette

Fantu¹ hardly ever talks. I have long pauses in my recorded interviews with her. Every once in a while, one of us comments on someone walking by or the birds flying in a circle over the bush, but Fantu doesn't seem to feel a need to speak when I run out of questions. But today sitting among the group of girls gathered on my porch, Fantu is actually commanding her noisy, boisterous friends. She is telling us about her role in the Kono Girls Bus Strike of 2012. She is animated, alive, and louder than I have ever heard her. She tells us how good it felt to pick up a stone and throw it at the bursar, how she picked up another stone and threw it at the "Iron Lady," her headmistress. None of her stones connected with their intended targets but she kept on throwing and chanting "No Bus- No School" to rage against the inequity of the chieftaincy system, to rage against the sexual abuse by her teachers, and to rage against the constant petty fees and special charges levied by the school. The immediate context of the protest is that a bus, promised by the local international diamond mining company, had failed to materialize. This bus is needed to transport children from their old school in the center of town to the new school about five miles out of the town. Over Easter break 2012, Koidu Holdings, the large international

¹ All names are pseudonyms. Fantu chose this pseudonym for herself.

mining company in Kono, moved the old desks and benches to the new school, tore down the old school, and began blasting a diamond vein tunnel under the school ground right through the center of Kono-town. Now, six months later, there is no bus to transport the girls to the new school. Either the headmistress or the politicians or the chief 'ate' the money for the bus but the headmistress still beats the girls for arriving late to school and they still have to wear silly little black heels that blister their feet.

Fantu gets up at 4:30 with the call to prayer. She fetches water from the well about a 15- minute walk away. She washes the dishes, sweeps the compound, dresses her younger brothers and sisters, and, if there is money, buys some bread, and makes tea for her grandpa, the only adult in the house. Then she begins the long walk from her home to the new school. So on that day, when the older girls started throwing stones, Fantu's rage surged within her. She pelted stones 'in honor' of the diamond company, at all authority figures, at politicians, at the chiefs, at all men who hustle her on the walk to and from school, and at all those who made her life just a bit more difficult than it already was.

When I ask her if she had been afraid when the chief's guards started beating girls, sending six of them to the hospital with broken bones, she defiantly answers no. When I ask if she had been afraid of the tear gas that the police fired into the crowd of marching girls, she again answers with a definitive no. When I ask what her parents had said when they found out, she shyly looks down and says that they didn't know anything about it because they'd been in the village farming and they don't ask her about school.

Fantu does not particularly like school. She gets average grades. She struggles with basic math and reads slowly. She sits in the middle of the room because she does not score high enough to sit in the front with the smart girls but is not a 'noise causer' so she doesn't have to sit in the back of the room either. She likes 'lunch' best of all the classes and does not mind if her teachers are absent. But she knows if she leaves school, she'll have to get married and then she won't see her friends, won't have any independence at all, and will have to travel between the village and the city, swapping places with her husband's other wives. So Fantu continues on, neither thriving nor failing, keeping her identity as a schoolgirl for as long as she still sees it as a better alternative.

1.1.2 Introduction

For each rock that was thrown, there is an increased commitment to remaining a schoolgirl. For each rock that was thrown there is a distinctive schoolgirl expressing her desire to be powerful and her desire to stay in school. For as much as each of these girls is committed to being a schoolgirl, in her community there are other girls who have dropped out or who never went to school. For each of the schoolgirls, school is not easy or necessarily pleasant. Nor will school necessarily improve her or her household's economic status; in fact, it may waste the valuable resources she has to offer in her labor within and outside of the household. Nonetheless, these schoolgirls have a commitment to schooling that is by itself worthy of being understood.

To understand better why these girls go to school and stay in school, it is critical that we see the world from the perspective of the schoolgirls themselves.

Drawing upon Gee's (2011) concept of figured worlds, this study examines the figured worlds of three individual schoolgirls. Figured worlds, as used by Gee, are socially constructed stories—often unconscious—about a specific place and the people who make the community of practice. The figured world constructs the normative assumptions that shape beliefs, judgments, and values that affirm or deny an identity. In other words, narratives fold into “theories, stories, and ways of looking at the world” in a description of what is considered the salient aspects of identity (Gee, 2011, p. 90). My study asks how these schoolgirls and their households express the figured worlds of schoolgirls. How does the construction of this identity position them in their households and community? How do the figured worlds of schoolgirls mediate their social relations? What do the figured worlds of schoolgirls currently allow them? Further, what is the role of “imagined communities” for these participants (Anderson, 1991; Kanno & Norton, 2003)? That is, what is the imagined social unit that they see themselves a member of as a consequence of being a schoolgirl? This research analyzes how for a girl like Fantu, in Sierra Leone, the figured worlds of schoolgirls is an identity that, despite the physical risk, economic loss, and unlikely career success, she believes is a compelling life choice. The central research question addressed in this dissertation is: What are the figured worlds that these schoolgirls inhabit that compel them, in the face of overwhelming odds, to commit to schooling?

The figured worlds of being schoolgirls are developed and analyzed through in-depth, semi-structured interviews conducted over a period of three years, from 2010 to 2013, with the same group of schoolgirls, their headmistresses, their households, neighbors, and the larger community in Kono. I have selected three

diverse schoolgirls as focal points for this dissertation. These schoolgirls are individuals, their experiences are unique, yet they share many experiences with a larger population of Sierra Leonean schoolgirls.

1.1.3 Focal schoolgirls

The three focal schoolgirls feature prominently in the introduction, contextual, and methodology chapters before they are formally portrayed. This short section introduces each of the three focal girls and provides some context about each. The three girls use the pseudonyms Isatou, Fantu, and Aisatta. All three girls are Muslim, attend junior secondary schools, and live in Kono, Sierra Leone.

Isatou is very bright, articulate, and ambitious. She lives with her mother, father, and three siblings in a small two-room home on one of the major roads into the city center. Her father works in the diamond mining industry and her mother sells home necessities and freshly-made treats from a small table on their porch by the side of the road. Isatou sells treats at school for her classmates and walks around town at night and on Sundays selling groundnuts (peanuts) or other treats. Isatou attends a prestigious private school and does well, coming in first or second in her class in most areas. Her father is a Kono native. He can read and write well, and is well liked by his neighbors and larger community. Her mother comes from another area, and although her tribe is one of the largest in Sierra Leone, few of her ethnic group lives in Kono. She does not read or write and is shy and timid.

Fantu, who was featured in the opening vignette, lives on the other side of town from Isatou. She lives close to a small stream away from the road, behind other homes. There is no street nearby but a well-worn path runs from her home to the road.

Currently, Fantu runs the household for her grandfather and younger siblings. Her parents live some distance away in the village and farm for their income. They identify as Kono by tribe although her paternal grandfather is Soso from Guinea. Fantu is shy, although she can be bold. She attends one of the above average, inexpensive private schools and ranks within the top ten in her class. She works hard for her school grades although she also admits to copying from others.

Aisatta lives in the center of town in a swampy area. Her home is a small, one-room, mud -walled rental. The family has two, low wooden stools to sit on. If they know I am coming they borrow plastic chairs from their neighbors. They sleep on the dirt floor without a mattress. Her father is in a wheelchair and her stepmother uses a crutch to walk. They beg for their income. They are originally from a smaller city in Kono District, and her father travels between the two places begging. Aisatta attends a low-ranking Islamic school and although she officially does well in school, her reading, and math skills are low. She is the prefect of her class and is well liked by all her teachers. She has few friends and spends most of her after-school time working for others.

Although these three girls share a common geography, age-cohort, and school level, their individual experiences differ greatly. Each of the girls works a full day outside of school. Isatou sells groundnuts and rice cakes to supplement her family income, Aisatta works for others, washing their clothes or taking care of their homes to feed herself and her parents, while Fantu does not work for money or food but manages a household, taking care of her younger siblings and her grandfather. Isatou shares a clean mattress on the floor with her younger siblings in a separate room from her parents while Aisatta sleeps on an old cloth on top of the dirt floor next to her

father and stepmother. These small and large differences lend distinctive aspects to this study and although they are not representative of all girls in Kono, they represent a diverse cross section.

1.1.4. My role

Just as Isatou, Fantu, and Aisatta's stories paint a portrait of schoolgirls in Kono, Sierra Leone, in this dissertation, I, too, am painting a portrait of what I value and who I am, through my particular style, the details I choose to add, and the words I choose to use to describe these details. My relationships with this study, with the girls, and with my role as researcher are all part of the focus of this dissertation. The schoolgirls and I create a liminal space that co-creates figured worlds of schoolgirls, their community, and our futures.

1.2 Previous Research on Schoolgirls

This section reviews the body of existing research on schoolgirls in Sub-Saharan Africa in order to situate this study. I review literature that seeks to understand schoolgirls in the global South within three general topics: a) the reality of the school experience; b) research on the motivation of schoolgirls; and, c) the concept of liminality as applied to the schoolgirl. The following research provides background to contextualize this dissertation.

Literature on girls and their school education paints a dismal picture of the everyday classroom experience for sub-Saharan African girls. In Sierra Leone, one out of three children has a textbook and the reported teacher to student ratio is 1:61 (International Monetary Fund and World Bank, 2008). In 2011, in Kono district only

17 out of 1,503 students passed the national exam that allows students to enter university-level education (Kono District Education Office, July--September 2011).

Furthermore, the chance that a girl will be sexually assaulted on her way to or from school or by her very own classroom teacher is quite high (Sharkey, 2008). Data on the pervasiveness of sexual abuse are difficult to collect and often inaccurate. Estimates of sexual abuse range from 16% in Cameroon (Mbassa Menick, 2001) to 57% in Ethiopia (Worku & Addisie, 2002). Sexual violence against girls is reported to peak during the period of early adolescence and/or within Junior Secondary School education (Nhundu & Shumba, 2001). This may be because older girls are perceived to be 'cooperating' or 'inviting' the rape and thus it is not reported as such. However, Fantu and her classmates consider themselves privileged despite the poor learning environment and the constant threat of sexual violence, because they get to go to school.

In sub-Saharan Africa, school is considered a privilege, especially for girls (Kabeer, 2000). Whether a girl goes to school may depend on factors such as school fees (Inoue & Oketch, 2008), opportunity costs (Behrman & King, 2001; Betancourt, Simmons, Borisova, Brewer, & de la Soudiere, 2008), whether she is fostered (Akresh, 2009), and her father's level of education (Glick & Sahn, 1997). Researchers have explored many factors that inhibit enrollment in school.

Despite such factors, 63% of school-age children in Sierra Leone still go to school (International Monetary Fund and World Bank, 2008). Research has shown that school attendance is associated with better reproductive health (Lloyd & Gage-Brandon, 1994), a decrease in fertility (Lloyd & Hewett, 2009), and a decrease in HIV (Baker, Collins, & Leon, 2008). Schooling also plays an important role in access

to social services for families (Kendall, 2008; Vandermoortele & Delamonica, 2000). Schools allow girls to socialize outside of their families and create empowering non-kin networks (Bruce & Hallman, 2008; Langevang & Gough, 2009; Sharkey, 2008), and the extended networking leads to greater aspirations for girls (Adely, 2004). In sum, research has shown that the act of attending school appears to bring benefits for both girls and their households.

Second, of those researchers who seek to understand schooling from the perspective of the motivation of schoolgirls, some focus on the schoolgirl's perceived future benefits of schooling. Anderson-Fye (2010), from research conducted in Belize, finds that girls' motivation to continue schooling stems from a desire to safeguard against the normalized gender-related violence in their community. Through schooling, these girls get good jobs and earn an income that lessens the chance of domestic violence.

Likewise, Aboh (2006), working in Benin, finds that high school girls who stay in school continue to perceive that education is the way to "be somebody." Those who drop out no longer feel that school would lead to social and economic success. In other words, girls who continue to believe in the neo-liberal development discourse—empowerment through education and individual wealth through hard work—continue in school. In contrast, those who see their senior schoolmates who had graduated struggling for a job or in low wage work begin to doubt that education really does lead to "being somebody." If education does not guarantee that you'll "be somebody" as in Aboh's study, with a good paying job with high status, why do girls like Fantu work so hard to stay in school?

One answer may lie in what it means to be a good, moral citizen. Reimer (2008), working in adult education in Botswana, suggests that education is tied to morality. In his findings, good girls and women go to school to improve themselves. Being moral may be part of the reason why girls work so hard to stay in school and maintain their special status as schoolgirls.

Morality and goodness also figure prominently in the discussion by Aapola, Gonick, and Harris (2005) when they present northern global girlhood as binaries such as good/bad, virgin/slut, and popular/nerd. While concerned with Northern girlhood, their observations apply equally to girls in the global South, as neoliberal constructs are not geopolitically bound. Gendered subjectivities of sexuality and moralist normative binaries of good and bad behavior travel beyond nation states.

Third, and finally, some researchers suggest that being a schoolgirl allows girls to occupy a liminal social category, neither child nor yet adult, which positions them in different, visible, and powerful ways (Gonick, 2006; Switzer, 2010). Switzer (2010), working in Kenya, suggests that being a schoolgirl is an identity state in which “Maasai schoolgirls continually make (and remake) themselves through disruptive approaches to meeting their own needs” (p. 143). The privileges endowed to schoolgirls are unknown to their out-of-school age, gender, and circumcision status cohort. Switzer writes that Maasai schoolgirls “see themselves as having more freedom, autonomy, and agency because they are in school” (p. 148). When they are not in school they have less autonomy, they must marry at an early age to whomever has been chosen for them by their fathers, and they must conform to the traditional gendered notions of womanhood. Switzer’s work suggests that being a schoolgirl allows the space between traditional girlhood and womanhood, a state that usually

lasts a few weeks to a year, to extend until completion of her education thus permitting her to remain outside normative gender constructions.

In sum, research shows various reasons, forces, and ideologies for girls' participation in school. Anderson-Frye shows that the girls actively see education as the positive path away from domestic violence and thus the path to a better life. Aboh shows that while girls believe that education is the key to becoming 'somebody,' they will remain in school until they become disillusioned and then they drop out. Reimer and Aapola *et al* posit that good girls/women in school are seen as morally good. Switzer believes that being in school allows the girl to choose a 'time-out' of traditional cultural expectations of marriage and childrearing. These studies contribute valuable insight into the ways in which being a schoolgirl is constructed by the schoolgirls themselves, their communities, and development discourse. Each of these studies helps to create a picture of why the identity of a schoolgirl is compelling to these girls in Sierra Leone.

This dissertation adds to this body of work by looking closely at the lives of the same cohort of schoolgirls over a period of three years, both from their own accounts as well as from those around them. My semi-structured interviews with the schoolgirls, members of their households, teachers, peers, and administrators, as well as members of the larger community focus on the figured worlds of schoolgirls.

1.3 Theoretical Foundations

This dissertation relies on the concept of figured worlds as theorized by Gee (2011) with the addition of the complementary concept of imagined communities

(Anderson, 1991) as used in education by Kanno and Norton (2003). The concept of liminality is also explored as part of the theoretical foundation of this study.

1.3.1. Figured Worlds: Gee

In his book, “An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method, 3rd ed.,” Gee defines figured worlds as follows:

A figured world is a theory, story, model or image of a simplified world that captures what is taken to be typical or normal about people, practices (activities), things, or interactions. What is taken to be typical or normal, of course, varies by context and by people’s social and cultural group. A particular figured world is a socially and culturally constructed way of recognizing particular characters and actors and actions and assigning them significance and value. Thus, we all have ways to construe what is a typical or ‘appropriate’ bedroom, house, spouse, marriage, way of raising children, educated person, alcoholic, romance, student, and so on through an endless list. . . figured worlds are not just in people’s heads, since they are often reflected in texts and media of various sorts as well. (2011, p. 205)

Understanding the figured world of schoolgirls in Kono, Sierra Leone involves knowing what the girls, their communities, and Sierra Leonean society consider as typical for school-going girls. This figured world is socially and culturally constructed by the girls and their community and it is through them that this figured world is given value and significance. The term figured world can also be used as a form of identity that the schoolgirls strive to maintain.

The meaning of the term “figured world” has an interesting pedigree in Gee’s scholarship. In the first edition of his 2011 book, Gee calls this concept “cultural models.” He then switches to using the term “Discourse Models.” In the most recent edition, he has borrowed the term “figured worlds” from Holland, Lachiocotte, Skinner, and Cain (1998). He writes that figured worlds as a descriptive term has the advantage in that it “construes aspects of the world in their heads” (Gee, 2011, p. 76).

Construing aspects of the world is done through discourse. Discourse is not simply the words that are said or thought but the ways in which action, ethics, attire, mannerisms, and attitudes blend together to create Discourse. Gee (1989) uses a capital D to describe this expanded definition of discourse. He differentiates between our primary Discourse, that which we have been born into and a secondary Discourse that is learned or apprenticed. This secondary Discourse is a figured world. To understand this concept, a clear understanding of Gee's theory of Discourse is useful.

Gee's theory of Discourse sees discourses as "identity kits" in which ways of being in the world are enacted. Gee describes discourse as the "forms of life which integrate words, acts, values, and beliefs, attitudes and social identities as well as gestures, glances, body positions, and clothes" (Gee, 1989, p. 7). These concepts unify in Discourse. Gee uses the term Discourse to cover a broad range of related concepts. As he explains:

The term 'Discourse' (with a big 'D') is meant to cover important aspects of what others have called: discourses (Foucault 1966); communities of practice (Lave & Wenger 1991); cultural communities (Clark 1996); discourse communities (Bizzell 1992); distributed knowledge or distributed systems (Hutchins 1995); thought collectives (Fleck 1979); practices (Bourdieu 1990); cultures (Geertz 1973); activity systems (Engestrom, Miettinen, & Punamaki 1999); actor-actant networks (Latour 2005); collectives (Latour 2004); and (one interpretation of) 'forms of life' (Wittgenstein 1958). (Gee, 2011, p. 40)

In referring to Discourses, Gee signals that there are multiple alternative ways of construing language, discourse, and identity. For Gee, these multiple ways involve:

a) situated identities; b) ways of performing and recognizing characteristic identities and activities; c) ways of coordinating and getting coordinated by other people, things, tools, technologies, symbol systems, places and times; d) characteristic ways of acting-interacting-feeling-emoting-valuing-gesturing-posturing-dressing-thinking-believing-knowing-speaking-listening (and, in some Discourses, reading-and-writing as well). (2011, p. 40)

Gee sees these multiple ways we act, feel, and think as identity. He uses the term identity to constitute the many differing ways we act and perceive our interactions in different places and at different times and with different people.

Gee differentiates between the idea of fixed or core identity and that of a socially situated identity. Gee writes,

I use the term 'identity' (or, to be specific, 'socially situated identity') for the multiple identities we take on in different practices and contexts and would use the term 'core identity' for whatever continuous and relatively (but only relatively) 'fixed' sense of self underlies our contextually shifting multiple identities" (2011, p. 41).

Thus he differentiates between the idea of fixed and core identity as one that holds the essential grounding elements of an individual's being and uses 'identity' to signal various temporal and situational identities.

The temporal identities shift as a consequence of the context of the event. Discourse at home, with our families, trusted old friends and larger kin group, Gee considers as the primary Discourse. It is the primary discourse through which we first learn to make sense of the world. Secondary Discourses or figured worlds are those that are learned later and evolve as we become adept at increasingly wider social interactions. Thus, secondary Discourses are those enacted in school, religious institutions, and other public spaces and constitute figured worlds.

The secondary Discourses which are acquired are the ones that enable a viewpoint from which to view the primary Discourse. The ability to see both primary and secondary Discourses leads to metaknowledge. In other words, metaknowledge is seeing both the Primary and Secondary Discourse and acknowledging them. Gee writes that gaining a secondary discourse leads to:

. . . seeing how the Discourses you have already got relate to those you are attempting to acquire, and how the ones you are trying to acquire relate to self

and society. Metaknowledge is liberation and power, because it leads to the ability to manipulate, to analyze, to resist while advancing. (1989, p. 13)

Although the proficiency of a competing Discourse can be liberating it also entails adapting and enacting values that may not be compatible with one's core beliefs. This can lead to a conflicting imposter feeling. Gee (2001) points out that often school-based Discourses and the figured world of schooling conflict with home-based Discourse. Thus, what a child acculturates, for example, at home, in their primary Discourse may compete with secondary Discourse apprenticed outside the home.

These Discourses will have moments of competition, tension, or conflict. The primary Discourse is not self-referential. In much the same way that a fish cannot describe water, our primary Discourse cannot understand itself except after a secondary Discourse is known. At that point, there is a reference for comparison. The secondary Discourse must be fully mastered in order to gain access to the group for which the secondary Discourse is normative. In other words, for the fish to fully gain access to the secondary Discourse of air they will need to grow wings fully and completely or they will be marked as an outsider by the other birds. Once the fish has gained full access to the world of birds and is flying with her new lot, she will not be actively conscious of flying and except for some moments of discomfort, be confident in both realms. Because identities and Discourses are socially situated, the full mastery of a secondary Discourse requires the group or community of practice that uses the Discourse to allow and encourage the newcomer to acquire the 'correct' ways of being which signal an insider within the Discourse (Gee, 1999).

Just as identities are situated socially, they can signal membership within a group that shares a way of being. Shaffer and Gee describe this as:

. . . a community's distinctive ways of doing, valuing, and knowing. . . the way someone thinks about the world- like putting on a pair of colored glasses. For example, lawyers act like lawyers, identify themselves as lawyers, are interested in legal issues, and know about the law. These skills, affiliations, habits, and understandings are made possible by looking at the world in a particular way. Acting and valuing and talking and reading and writing like a lawyer are made possible by *thinking* like a lawyer. The same is true for doctors, but for a different way of thinking- and for master carpenters, graphic designers, and so on, each with a different epistemic frame. (Shaffer & Gee, 2005, p. 10)

The affinity group or community of lawyers, teachers, or dog-lovers share ways of seeing and being with “an adherence to specific practices and experiences” (Palmer, 2007, p. 292). Communities of practice in this way can be a primary or secondary Discourse as a community of practice is not temporally situated. Communities of practice, Discourse, or identity are all ways of describing:

(A way in which), all members pick up a variety of tacit and taken-for-granted values, norms, cultural models, and narratives as part of their socialization into the practice and their ongoing immersion in the practice. Tacitly accepting these values, norms, cultural models, and narratives (in mind, action and embodied practice) and sharing them with others, is just what it means to be a member of the community of practice. (Gee, 1999, p. 65)

Tacitly accepting ways of being and assimilating values of an identity afford membership in a secondary Discourse.

Depending on members and their communities to assign worth to the figured world means that the parameters will be flexible and porous. Put another way, figured worlds shift and change because of their socially constructed nature. Yet they also form the template for identity development and create a space for greater insight into individuals and the larger community (Worthman, 2008). With membership in the figured world a person acquires the ability to enact this identity vis-à-vis others. We enact our identity in ways that signal a comparison to others either explicitly or

implicitly. To build an identity for ourselves we do not need to actually name and describe the alternative identities (Gee, 1996).

Looking at the boundaries and binary divisions gives definition to the figured world of schoolgirls in Kono, Sierra Leone. This dissertation describes what is considered to be salient to schoolgirls and through this explore the key ways of thinking, believing, acting, and feeling that constitute the figured world of schoolgirls. Gee's concept of figured worlds provides a framework for describing their identities as schoolgirls and the identities ascribed to them by their communities within an overarching theoretical framework. However, this concept as currently defined in the literature does not extend into those figured worlds that the schoolgirls may imagine themselves as part of in the future. The next section adds a small but important conceptual framework for the overarching idea of figured worlds.

1.3.2. Imagined Communities: Norton

Gee's concept of figured worlds describes what is seen as appropriate for a community of practice. These communities of practice exist in physical and/or temporal space. They might include young mothers, academics, or tailors, for example. Figured worlds allow one to be a member of more than one Discourse. Gee's concept of figured world does not extend to imagined membership in a future figured world. I expand the concept of figured worlds to include imagined communities as envisioned by Kanno and Norton, utilizing the work of Anderson (1991) and Wenger (1998). Kanno and Norton explain, "*Imagined communities* refer to groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of imagination" (2003, p. 241). Someone may envision themselves

as a member of the Democratic Party, the Red Sox nation, or the international group of proper French speakers. Imagined communities allow for an expansion of identity that transcends time and space to allow a sense of community with people or groups that we do not actually physically know but with whom we share a sense of identity.

Expanding identity is one of the primary purposes of education. Through education, skills and ways of thinking that signal membership into the imagined community can be learned. Kanno and Norton use imagined communities to address differing motivations for English-as-a-second language learners. They explore how the learners' affiliation with imagined communities influences their educational choices and identity. Kanno and Norton contend that the imagined communities have equally strong weight with those real Discourses that the learner already substantiates; perhaps in some instances, the imagined community may have a "stronger impact on their current activities and investment" (Kanno & Norton, 2003, p. 242). The investment in an imagined community is as real as the investment in temporally and physically bound communities.

The investment in an imagined community "expands our range of possible selves" (Kanno & Norton, 2003, p. 246). By envisioning ourselves as members of this new figured world, we can see ourselves as mothers, doctors, or ministers. Which communities can be imagined is socially constructed so that the least privileged often are socialized into the most impoverished imagined communities (Early & Norton, 2012; Kanno, 2000; 2003; Kanno & Norton, 2003). Although ideally all would have equal access to imagine their membership into any community, real social and political constraints are limiting.

Access into an imagined community requires that one learn how to be a member of this community. Part of the figured world of being a schoolgirl includes preparation to join an imagined community of learned women in the future. The figured world of being a schoolgirl is a temporal place and space in time and the imagined communities that they envision can be seen as the goal of their current figured world. A layer of complexity envelopes this easy interplay of figured worlds and imagined communities when the reality is that not all girls go to school in Sierra Leone. Because of this, the figured world of the schoolgirl might in and of itself be an imagined community for other girls who do not go to school.

Adding to this complexity is the concept of schooling as a liminal time and space. Mentioned earlier in the literature review section of this dissertation, liminality is a useful conceptual framework to describe the ways in which schooling is not the automatic pathway for all children in sub-Saharan Africa. This next section will describe the concept of liminality and how I use it as part of the conceptual framework.

1.3.3. Liminality

The concept of liminality, from the field of anthropology, stems from the work of Van Gennep (1960) and Victor Turner (1984). Van Gennep uses the term liminality to refer to the transitional aspects of rites (1960). He partitions rituals and rites of passage into three distinct phases. First is the preliminary, sometimes referred to as the separation stage that can be seen as the death of the previous self. Next is the liminal stage, a place of neither here nor there, a state of being undeveloped or

emerging. The final phase is the post-liminal phase in which the individual is celebrated as he or she re-enter society inhabiting a different social identity.

Turner (1984) further develops the concept of liminality, principally in his studies of ritual practices, as one in which the individual exists outside customary social categories. His work focuses on the social conditions of being present between two contrasting social expectations. Liminality as a concept has now been applied to such diverse areas of study as changing genders (Booth, 2011), being a student teacher (Cook-Sather, 2006), and the Baddi musicians and dancers in the Himalayas (Fiol, 2010). The place of liminality is disruptive of the previous sense of self and one's place within society. Beech (2010) sums this up as follows: "[L]iminality can be defined as a reconstruction of identity (in which the sense of self is significantly disrupted) in such a way that the new identity is meaningful for the individual and their [*sic*] community" (p. 287).

This liminal figured world or identity can be temporary such as being a student teacher or it can be a space within the larger social constructs (Fiol, 2010). Ybema, Beech, and Ellis (2011) suggest that there are actually two different types of liminal experiences. They refer to the liminal space of being a student teacher or changing genders as "a relatively time-constrained phase in-between two identity positions" (2011, p. 21). They call this "Transitional Betweenness." The second type of liminality is a state of "Perpetual Betweenness" in which "liminality is an on-going state of affairs, balancing on the notational boundaries in-between two or more social categories" (Ybema, Beech, & Ellis, 2011, p. 21). Fiol's (2010) work on the Baddi musicians and dancers would fit into the second category of liminal experiences.

Switzer, working in Kenya, suggests that being a schoolgirl is an identity state in which “Maasai schoolgirls continually make (and remake) themselves through disruptive approaches to meeting their own needs” (2010, p. 143). The privileges endowed to schoolgirls are unknown to their un-schooled age and gender cohort. Switzer writes that Maasai schoolgirls “see themselves as having more freedom, autonomy and agency because they are in school” (2010, p. 148). When they are not in school they have less autonomy, they must marry at an early age whomever their fathers have chosen for them, and they must conform to the traditional gendered notions of womanhood. Being a schoolgirl allows for the space between traditional girlhood and womanhood—a space that usually lasts a few weeks to a year—to be extended until the completion of her education, thus permitting her to remain outside normative gender constructions during this period.

For the schoolgirls, this liminal space outside of traditional girl/womanhood delineation implies that they are neither a girl nor a woman but someone in between: a schoolgirl. Within this liminal space, using the overarching theoretical foundation, individuals develop their own figured worlds. Underlying this exploration, in this section, I have discussed the theoretical foundations of figured worlds as employed by Gee (1989; 1996; 2011) and the collaborating concept of imagined communities as discussed by Kanno and Norton (2003). Adding to these theoretical foundations of the concept of liminality as used in the schoolgirl figured world is that of Switzer (2010).

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH SITE

This chapter provides an overview of the research site and background information on gender issues and the educational system of Sierra Leone. None of these sections is meant to be exhaustive; however, collectively they provide an important backdrop of the site of the study.

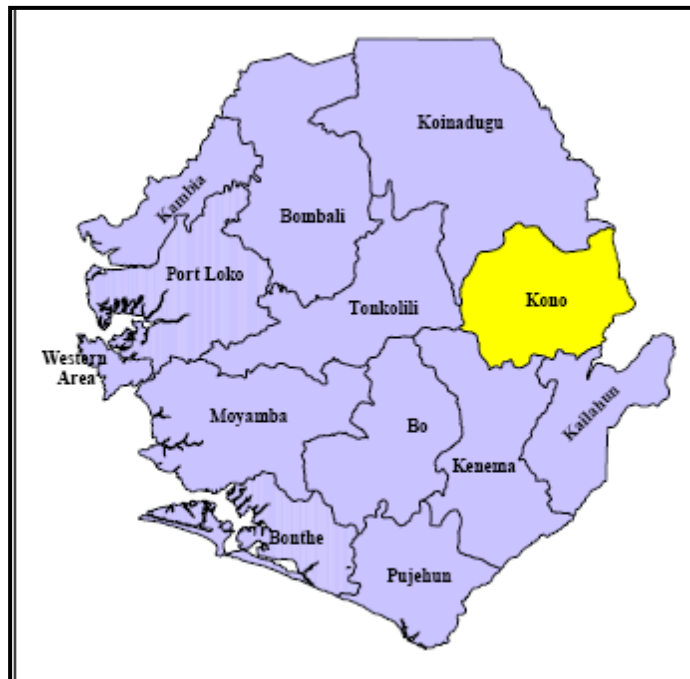


Figure 1: Map of Sierra Leone with Kono highlighted

This study is located in the small city of Koidutown-Sefadu in the province of Kono. Kono, in the far eastern region of Sierra Leone, is part of the Mano River basin area that borders Guinea and Liberia. It usually takes between eight and eleven hours to drive the 200 miles from the capital city of Freetown to Kono province. Koidutown-Sefadu is the capital of the province of Kono and is commonly called by the name of its province, Kono. Thus, this dissertation uses ‘Kono’ to refer to Koidutown-Sefadu.

Sierra Leone has thirteen different ethnic groups, each with its own language. About two-thirds speak Temne or Mende as one of their mother tongues. Krio is the language used in most business transactions and English is the language of parliament, government documents, and newspapers (Government of Sierra Leone: Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, 2007).



Figure 2: Downtown Kono
Note the signs for Diamond offices (1World Map.com, 2013)

In 2004, Kono district had an estimated population of 335,401 people (Kono District Development Association, 2013). The entire country of Sierra Leone is estimated to have six million people (OXFAM, 2008). The 2013 Human Development Index (HDI) ranks Sierra Leone as the 177 poorest out of 187 countries (United Nations Development Program, 2013). Table 1 below, taken from the 2013 HDI illustrates Sierra Leone's scores relative to the world, sub-Saharan Africa, and

the ‘low human development’ category. The chart shows the dip in poverty from the civil war from 1991 to 2002, and the relatively slow but steady post-war growth.

Table 1: Human Development Index: Trends 1980-present (2013)

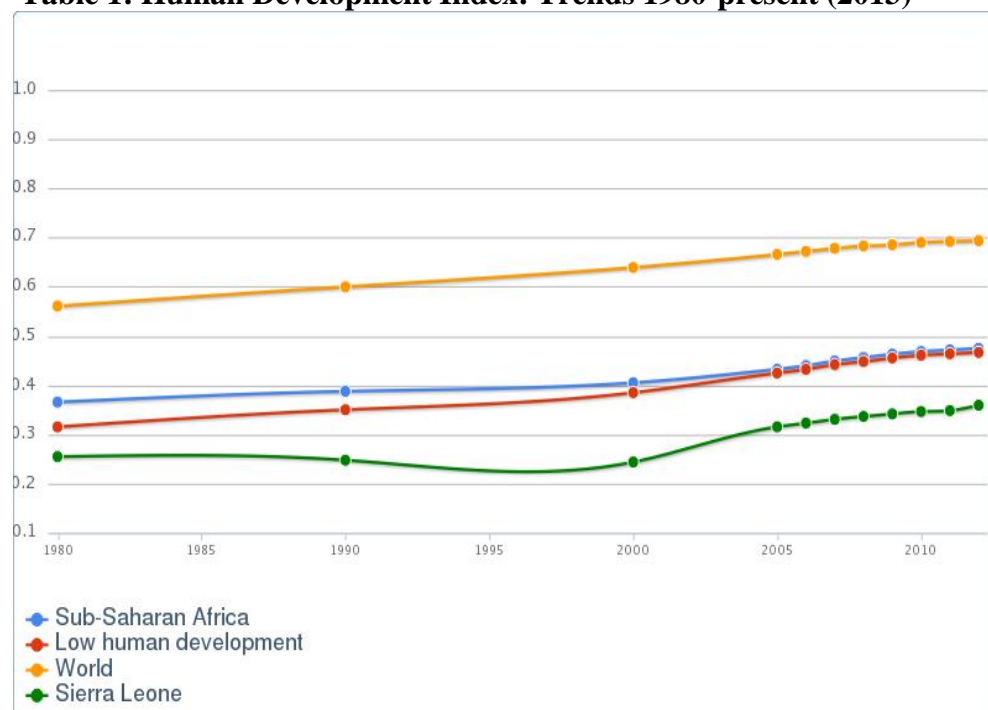


Table 2: Sierra Leone’s HDI trends
(United Nations Development Program, 2013)

Year	Life expectancy at birth	Expected years of schooling	Mean years of schooling	GNI per capita (2005PPP\$)
1980	43.1	5	1	796
1985	42.9	6	1.3	731
1990	38.7	4.9	1.6	623
1995	27.2	4.7	2	516
2000	39.8	4.7	2.4	406
2005	44.3	7.3	2.9	610
2010	47.4	7.3	3.3	739
2011	47.8	7.3	3.3	745
2012	48.1	7.3	3.3	881

Table 2 is also from the 2013 HDI report (United Nations Development Program, 2013). It shows life expectancy at birth increasing over the 32-year period from 43.1 years to 48.1 years. By contrast, however, neighboring Guinea has a life

expectancy of 54.5 years. On average, low HDI countries have a life expectancy at birth of 59 years. Mean years of schooling (average number of years of education received by people ages 25 and older) for Sierra Leone has increased from 1 to 3.3 years from 1980-2012. The mean years of schooling on average across sub-Saharan Africa is 4.7 years of schooling (United Nations Development Programme, 2013). Expected years of schooling indicate the number of years of schooling that a child of school entrance age can expect to receive if prevailing patterns of age-specific enrolment rates persist throughout the child's life. For Sierra Leone, years of schooling shrank during the war years and rose after the war. However, it has remained stagnated at 7.3 indicating that most children will not continue schooling through middle school. For contrast, children in Rwanda can expect to attend school for 10.9 years. These statistics demonstrate that despite growth, Sierra Leoneans are more likely to die young with less schooling than those in neighboring countries. Although part of the weak growth can be linked to the civil war from 1991 to 2002, progress in the ensuing ten years has been slow.

2.1.The Civil War

Because it is close to the border with Liberia, Kono was one of the first areas to be occupied by Charles Taylor's rebel forces coming from Liberia during the recent civil war (1991-2002). Kono was occupied and controlled by rebel forces for most of the war (Hoffman, 2011). The graphically violent movie, "Blood Diamonds," was about this region and many local informants concur that it is largely an accurate depiction of that time.

The civil war began in 1991 when the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) crossed the border from Liberia with the intent of overthrowing the Sierra Leone

government. Almost immediately, the RUF strategically took hold of the eastern and southern diamond mining regions that include Kono. The war continued for the next eleven years with multiple fighting forces forming and reforming and multiple peace accords being signed and then dissolved. It is estimated the more than 70,000 people died and more than 2.6 million were displaced (Kaldor & Vincent, 2006).

During the war civilians moved, on a merry-go-round, as one informant described it, around the mountain in the center of the country running to whatever area was not held by one or another of the rebel armies. It was a war of chaos without clear good guys or clear bad guys. It was a war of “*sobel*s”- government soldiers who fought for the government by day and the rebels by night. It was a war of an estimated 50,000 child soldiers with 25% of the fighting children female. Girls and women who did not directly fight at the front lines served as war bush wives (Coulter, 2009). It was a war of amputees. It was a war without clear objectives, a clear beginning, or a clear end.

The war was a manifest expression of the crisis experienced by Sierra Leone youth. The inequities instilled in the colonial era persisted in access to education, healthcare, and employment. The one party government, corrupt, authoritarian, and oppressive, ignored all the provinces except the capital while profiting from the countries’ natural resources (Kaldor & Vincent, 2006). The chieftaincy system further disenfranchised rural youth through control of land rights and ever-increasing taxation (Network Movement for Justice and Development, 2009). Hoffman (2003) describing the disarmament process writes,

In every respect, this gathering of hundreds of male youth was the quintessence of what the war in Sierra Leone was purported to be about. Overwhelmingly young, heavily armed, angry and idle, they embodied crisis. Whatever conclusions they draw from it and regardless of what they posit as

its original cause, observers of the Sierra Leone war- from academics to journalists to the combatants themselves- are nearly unanimous in discerning within it a crisis of youth precipitated by their marginalization (p. 296).

The marginalization of youth, which precipitated the civil war, was not a result of a changing system but rather a struggle with machine guns to upend the oppressive hegemony.

This war stemming from youths' discontent and fought by youth was a war against the economic and social disparity of the chieftaincy system (Network Movement for Justice and Development, 2009). Describing the chieftaincy system of Sierra Leone, Network Movement for Justice and Development writes,

Many Sierra Leoneans, chiefs included, have acknowledged that the failings of the chieftaincy system were among the root causes of the recent civil war...Many commentators, including the Sierra Leone Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC), argue that the control exerted by the colonial administration over chiefs had a negative impact on their relationship with their people. Chiefs served the central government first and foremost and often used their colonially wrought powers to exploit their people for private gain. (Network Movement for Justice and Development, 2009, p. 1)

This colonial system centralized power in a few individuals and robbed the majority of opportunities for education, health, and well-being. The war was a reaction to the inequitable chieftaincy system that marginalizes youth.

The war was a war of youth and symptom of the chieftaincy system but it was also fueled by diamonds (Campbell, 2004; Francis, 2001). Francis (2001) cites West Africa Magazine, saying that the sale of diamonds from Sierra Leone from 1991-1999 was over seventy million dollars (p.74). In 1999, as part of the Lome Peace Accord, the RUF commander was given control of the diamond mines in exchange for a cessation of fighting. As a result, rebels moved in to stay in the eastern and southern diamond mining areas.



Figure 3: Artisanal diamond digging
(IRIN News Africa, 2012)

Rebels continue to occupy houses in Kono that were seized in the war. One of the focal students- Isatou- family's compound in the center of Koidu is still occupied by rebels. Because they cannot ask the rebels to leave, her family rents a different house. They have no hope of getting their former land back or receiving rent from the current inhabitants.

Isatou's father is an artisanal diamond miner. In the diamond industry, poverty levels are high and dreams for a bright future are based on the unrealistic hope of finding one diamond. The artisanal diamond mining industry attracts single men looking for unskilled labor positions. They work in teams digging in water-filled pits. Working in shifts, they are able to dig twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. When a diamond is found, 70% of the earnings go to the contractor who supplies the equipment and owns the land. Thirty percent is split among the men who are in the digging group. Unless a large diamond is found, there is no daily wage for these men

and diggers can go years without anyone in their group finding a worthwhile diamond.

Perhaps because of the rebels or perhaps because of the violence associated with the diamond mining industry, Kono is still considered dangerous. The Peace Corps refuses to send volunteers to this region. One of the only Americans living in Kono compared the area to the American frontier during the gold rush and indeed the dusty main roads, lack of infrastructure, wooden shacks and burned out houses give the appearance of a Wild West ghost town having been overcrowded by recent settlers (Higbe, Ibis Director, 2010). Sierra Leone, in general, gives the appearance of being peaceful and non-aggressive but Kono is known for episodes of explosive violence. Recently the police turned tear gas on children protesting for a school bus to take them from their homes to their new school that had been relocated to allow Koidu Holding Diamond Mines to exploit the area where the old school was located in the center of the town.



Figure 4: Downtown Kono in the rainy season (Tongu, Downtown Kono in the rainy season)

While other areas of Sierra Leone have allowed women to hold political positions of power, Kono did not allow women to be in office until 2011. Steady (2011) recounts a recent event:

Although SL (Sierra Leone) women from the Mende and Sherbro ethnic groups are renowned for having traditions of female leadership in executive positions as chiefs and paramount chiefs, the same is not true for the whole country. In the Northern Province, women have a harder time holding executive power and are likely to be prevented from seeking positions as paramount chiefs. One such case caused a lot of controversy and received widespread publicity. In 2009, Elizabeth Simbiwi Sorgbo-Torto of Nimiyama chiefdom in Kono district, the first woman in Kono to stand for paramount chief, was denied the chieftaincy, even though, in accordance with the Chieftaincy act, she fulfilled all the candidacy requirements for chieftaincy election. This act indicates that 'where traditions so specifies (*sic*), he or she has direct paternal or maternal lineage to a rightful claimant in a recognized ruling house, whether born outside wedlock or not.' ...The reason given for her disqualification was that, according to tradition, all paramount chiefs should be members of the Poro society, which is the male counterpart of the Sande society for women. (Steady, 2012, p. 168)

Other stories abound in which women are denied access to powerful political positions at the local level. Yet the current mayor of the district is a local woman with a clear Kono lineage. A woman holding such a high position of power may signal that women are welcome in non-traditional (i.e. post-colonial) positions of political power but not in traditional (chieftaincy) positions. Isatou wants to be a Minister in the national government and her father supports her ambition. Yet her father laughs at the idea of her becoming a chief.

Isatou's father was born in Kono. He reports that there has never been much infrastructure in Kono. Campaigning politicians start to build roads to curry favor before elections but stop once they have won. There was electricity in the early 1980s and some homes had running water but nothing has been repaired since the war and there seems little hope that it will. Indeed while other major Sierra Leone cities have

some paved roads, some areas with electricity, and areas with trash removal, Kono has none of these services.



Figure 5: Downtown Kono in the dry season
(Higbie)
(Note the bombed out house at the end of the street)

Adding to the difficulties in Kono, the exodus of youth from rural to urban areas creates a damaging shortage in the rural agricultural market (Sommers, 1997). Urban youth view farming and rural life as inferior to the market economy of the city leaving rural farmers without needed labor. In addition to contributing to food shortages and economic dependence on imports of grain, the rural to urban migration disrupts previous societal patterns of inheritance and land distribution instigating a shift in stability (Bolten, 2009). Many people in Kono have families in nearby villages that send rice for them to sell in the market so that they can sustain their urban life. Many of the girls interviewed spend the weekend and holidays working in

the village on family farms. They walk to the village and return with bags of produce to sell in the city.

Rural poverty and high crime from the diamond industry, combined with a lack of international development support creates a dangerous environment for girls attempting to attend school. Kono's rough and ready character places education in the shadow of the society that values wealth from diamonds, physical strength, witchcraft, and men armed with machine guns.

2.2. Gender issues in Sierra Leone

As with the political system, gender marks many aspects of daily life. In Sierra Leone, girls are considered "girls" until they are married and/or become pregnant, at which point they become women (Burman, 2008). Burman (2008) writes,

...gendered cultural norms that presume women will be mothers – indeed that motherhood confirms a woman's adult-status, such that not being a mother maintains one's child-like position (p179).

Thus for even a married woman, she is not considered fully a woman until she has a child. However, young women who have babies out of wedlock are considered women. The HDI 2013 reports that in 2010 the pregnancy rate for women ages 15-19 per 1,000 was 143.7 in Sierra Leone. For comparison purposes, Ghana had 71.1 pregnancies and the USA had 41.2 pregnancies per 1,000 in 2010 (United Nations Development Program, 2013). Sierra Leone women have a total fertility rate of 5.6 births per woman (Government of Sierra Leone: Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, 2007).

Young women who get pregnant must leave school. While in some areas it is not unheard of for young mothers to continue their schooling, in Sierra Leone it is not allowed by the Department of Education; thus pregnancy, whether one is married or

not, formally ends a girl's education (Government of Sierra Leone: Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, 2007). This should not be taken as a denigration of the role of motherhood in Sierra Leone. Steady (2011) writes, "From an Afro-centric perspective, motherhood empowers and does not subordinate women" (p. 218). Thus having a baby confers adult status on girls but requires that they drop out of school.

Sierra Leonean society has had a strong intermediary cultural marker in which pre-pubescent girls transitioned into women through a ritual initiation variously called *sande*, *bondo*, or *bundu*. Customarily *bondo* is a three to six week training time in which pre-pubescent girls are sheltered outside of the village in a ritual space with their age mates and female *bondo* teachers. In the past and to some extent today, membership in a *bondo* society can be seen as guarantee of patronage and protection. *Bondo* is seen by some as a form of empowerment for Sierra Leone woman as the secret society engages in collective actions, social power, and a social group to share issues.

During *bondo*, the girls learn special dances and songs known only to those who have gone to through this rite of passage. The focus of the training is on how to take care of a home, husband, and children however, most girls have been doing this all their lives. Instead, it is more about "learning new attitudes toward their work" (MacCormack, 1975, p. 156). These initiations center on Female Genital Cutting (MacCormack, 1977). MacCormack writing specifically about *bondo* in Sierra Leone notes,

Shortly after entering the Bundu (*Bondo*) bush, girls experience the surgery distinctive of a Bundu woman in which the clitoris and part of the labia are excised. It is a woman, the *Majo* (Mende), or head of the localized Bundu chapter, who usually performs this surgery. Bundu women told me that

excision helps women to become prolific bearers of children. A *Majo* reputed 'to have a good hand' will attract many initiates to her Bundu bush, increasing her social influence in the process.

Informants also said that surgery made women clean. One might speculate along the lines Douglas has developed that by excising the clitoris, a rudiment of maleness, all sexual ambiguity is removed from the incipient woman. She then fits purely and 'safely' into the social structure, free from impurity and 'danger' of categorical ambiguity. (MacCormack, 1977, p. 98)

At the end of *bondo*, the initiates parade back to the village, are given gifts, and celebrated. This very visible demarcation tells the community that a girl is no longer a girl but a woman ready for marriage.

In the last twenty years, laws and customs have been changing and fewer girls are going to *bondo*. However, this does not necessarily mean that fewer girls are cut. UNICEF (2005) reports that 94% of women in Sierra Leone undergo Female Genital Cutting. Girls are being cut outside of the traditional *bondo* during school vacations or at an early age before attending school. Thus, the traditional marker of *bondo* for becoming eligible for marriage can no longer be considered the normative custom (Easton, Monkman, & Miles, 2003; Adegoke, 2001).

Just as customs around *bondo* are changing, the age of marriage is also changing rapidly. According to Mensch, Grant, and Blanc (2006), recent data suggest that 45% of West African women between the ages of 20-24 were married before their 18th birthday compared to 53% of woman aged 40-44. This suggests that an increasing proportion of girls in West Africa are getting married after the age of 18 years old. However, according to 2005 data, in Sierra Leone, an estimated 62% of girls marry before the age of 18 and 26% before the age of 15 (UNICEF, 2005). In 2013 interviews, Kono residents agree that the age of consent is rising over time. Informants in Kono agree that 16 is the beginning of the age of consent. Many do not feel that it is important to finish high school before marriage but that a girl can

continue in school as long as she does not become pregnant. Many informants do not think 15 years old is too young to get married. Marriage for a girl of 14 years old was considered undesirable. However, when asked about a 13-year-old-girl getting married most respondents uniformly disapproved.

According to the laws of Sierra Leone, marriage under the age of 18 is illegal and parents must obtain consent from their daughter to be cut. These laws were enacted as part of the Childs Rights Act of 2007. However, the Child Rights Act did not settle the question of which form of law superseded the other so that customary law in many cases is considered the normative regulation and the legal national laws are not applied. Booklets published by UNICEF on the Child Rights Act do not mention either early marriage or FGC but instead focus on the rights of a child to go to school and the responsibilities of the child to study. Respondents in Kono knew of the booklet published and the schoolgirls interviewed were well versed in the responsibilities of being a child but none except those working in NGOs were familiar with the child marriage and the FGC provisions in the Child Rights Act.

In the next sub-section, I address education in Sierra Leone, from the macro level of international and national policies, to the micro-level of how the educational system is lived, paying careful attention to the forces that interact to create, enforce and resist.

2.3.Education in Sierra Leone

The table below shows statistics from UNICEF on education in Sierra Leone. Literacy in this table equals the ability to read and write at a basic level. This data, although sometimes contradicted in other sources, give a global perspective of the

education system in Sierra Leone. The remainder of this section explores this data further.

<u>Education</u>	
Youth (15-24 years) literacy rate (%) 2007-2011*, male	69
Youth (15-24 years) literacy rate (%) 2007-2011*, female	50
Number per 100 population 2011, mobile phones	36
Number per 100 population 2011, Internet users	-
Pre-primary school participation, Gross enrolment ratio (%) 2008-2011*, male	7
Pre-primary school participation, Gross enrolment ratio (%) 2008-2011*, female	7
Primary school participation, Gross enrolment ratio (%) 2008-2011*, male	129
Primary school participation, Gross enrolment ratio (%) 2008-2011*, female	120
Primary school participation, Net attendance ratio (%) 2007-2011*, male	73
Primary school participation, Net attendance ratio (%) 2007-2011*, female	76
Primary school participation, Survival rate to last primary grade (%) , 2007-2011*, survey data	93
Secondary school participation, Net attendance ratio (%) 2007-2011*, male	40
Secondary school participation, Net attendance ratio (%) 2007-2011*, female	33
Public expenditure on education (% of GDP)	4.3
Primary school teachers trained to teach (%)	48

Table 3: Education in Sierra Leone

Data in grey shade is from UNICEF (2013). Data not shaded is from UNDP (2013)

The history of the educational system in Sierra Leone can be divided into pre-war and post-war eras. Pre-war, Sierra Leone is often referred to as the Athens of West Africa because of the success of the higher educational institutions (Paracka, 2003). Although this remains a source of pride for Sierra Leoneans, the system worked only for the male elites. The social disruption of the civil war allowed an

acceptance of women in leadership positions to emerge and for women to begin claiming a place in school (Steady, 2011).

Sierra Leone's post war rebuilding coincided with the United Nation's Millennium Development Goal on education to increase enrollment for girls and an emphasis on free education for all of Africa. These policy changes, public campaigns, and a changing awareness of the value of education for all, doubled enrollment from 659,000 in 2001-2002 to 1,280,000 in 2004-05 (Government of Sierra Leone: Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, 2007). *The Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper- Progress Report* published by the Ministry of Education in 2008 noted that the primary Net Enrolment Rate (NER) in Koidu was 75% for females in 2003/04. NER measures the number of enrolled students, regardless of age and level, as a percentage of the population of that age group. However, despite seemingly positive NER numbers, 25% of elementary aged students remain out of school (Government of Sierra Leone: Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, 2007). The dropout rate for primary school for both male and females is around 46% and the national completion rates at the primary level as reported in the 2007 Ministry of Education, Science and Technology report as 81% for 2005. However, for Kono (Koidu Town area) the completion rate is only 70% (Government of Sierra Leone: Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, 2007). The drive to get children into school is working, yet Sierra Leone is far from achieving successful universal primary education, and Kono lags behind the rest of Sierra Leone.

The emphasis on education for all has increased enrollment; however, it has done little to alter the pre-war educational system or increase resources for schools to educate children. Continuing facility challenges include a lack of schools in rural

areas and the lack of adequate infrastructure in existing schools. Schools are without solid walls or ceilings, safe latrines, or access to drinking water. Workforce challenges include untrained or volunteer teachers, high pupil to teacher ratios, and a system reliant on external benefactors. Teachers are considered 'trained' if they have completed a number of years at the apprenticeship level where, in theory, they are supervised by senior teachers. Teachers are considered 'qualified' if they have passed the teachers training courses. However, even once trained and qualified, despite the shortage, teachers may not find a position in a school. This is partially due to the official rosters of teachers on the government payroll, which include "ghost teachers" who left the system, disappeared in the war, or perhaps never existed at all but someone continues to draw a monthly salary in their name. Moreover, schools and teachers lack textbooks and follow a rote teaching methodology, and success is measured in a series of standardized tests largely imported from Britain. These difficulties make education challenging and add to the recurring question of the cost to value ratio of education.

The photo below (figure 8) is from a primary school religious and moral education class lesson. Pupils are expected to copy the lesson into their notebooks and reproduce the text on exams. In this lesson, this trained and qualified teacher had copied the lesson word for word from his textbook. Despite being a trained and qualified teacher, he had failed to correct the spelling and grammar mistakes written into his textbook. He then drilled the children until they could repeat orally the lesson word for word. This was the focus of the forty-five minute lesson. This style of education reproduces systemic inequities in education with only the wealthiest

children able to attend schools with highly educated literate teachers and thus able to pass the international exams.

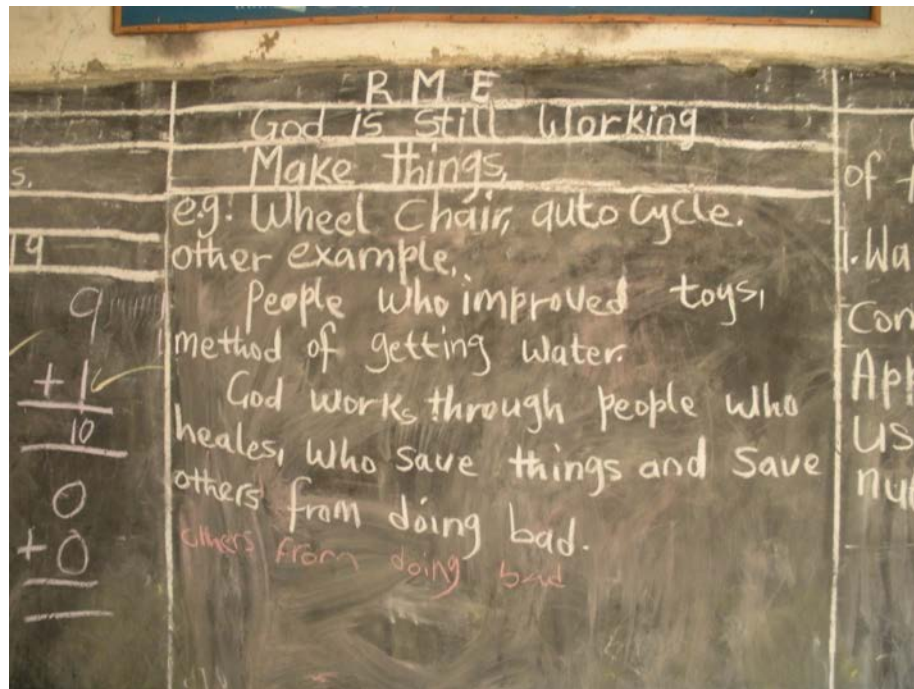


Figure 6: Lesson from primary school

In British colonial times, one son of the chief was taken from the village and forcibly sent to a boarding school to receive a British colonial education. The colonial practice that education is not for all children, although challenged by the dominant discourse at the national and international levels of “Education for All,” is still maintained by many in Sierra Leone particularly in the villages. Today the lack of rural schools and the perception – and reality – that city schools are superior causes school-age children to live with distant relatives in order to attend elementary school in urban areas. These fostered children are often subject to unequal treatment by their surrogate families, who force them to carry the weight of extra chores, make them earn much of their own money, and give them little to eat (Akresh, 2009).

Conversely, those families who do live in the city are often called upon to foster their distant relatives’ children at great financial strain to their own nuclear

family. UNICEF estimates that in 2007, 20% of children in Sierra Leone did not live with their biological parents (UNICEF, 2010). There can be many causes for children to live separately from their biological parents. Many move to the city to be educated in city schools, others are given as 'house help,' others move in with relatives when their parents pass away. In 2010, an aunt of one of the focal schoolgirls passed away and her small family took in the aunt's three children, all under the age of six, as well as their grandmother, who had been previously living with the aunt. This pushed the household total to nine from the original five.

Just as family members are expected to share their limited resources with an unlimited extended family, schools, after the passage of the Free Education Act, were expected to absorb double the number of pupils without increased funding. Schools struggle to find trained teachers to serve this growing population. During the war, teachers, as with almost all Sierra Leoneans, ran from place to place and many never returned to their hometowns. The only teachers' training college in Sierra Leone closed during the war and was slow to reopen post-war.

This shortage of trained teachers along with the lack of school infrastructure, results in an official average ratio of 66:1 pupils per qualified teacher, and an astounding 112:1 ratio of students per unqualified teacher (Government of Sierra Leone: Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, 2007). Considering that 40% of teachers are unqualified, Isatou is lucky to have had a trained teacher for three of her four years and had less than 70 students in her classes.

The school that she attends has a strong female headmistress but none of Isatou's teachers has been female. Research consistently shows that in sub-Saharan Africa female teachers increase enrollment and retention for girls (Haugen, et al.,

2011). However, nationally only 32% of primary school teachers are female (Government of Sierra Leone: Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, 2007) and it is even lower in the Kono area where there are only 25 qualified female teachers and 38 unqualified teachers out of 569 total teachers (Statistician General of Sierra Leone, 2006).

While teaching continues to be a respected professional position, the need to plant crops and rebuild homes often takes priority for trained teachers. Thus, part of a pupil's week, usually Friday, is spent working in her teacher's home garden with her bare hands rather than sitting at a desk in school. Having this free farm labor allows teachers to survive on their small salaries.

Adding to the struggle to train and retain teachers, pre-war and post-war lists of teachers being paid by the government include "ghost teachers." Ghost teachers are counted by the government as real teachers on the official registers. This corrupt practice distorts the official numbers of trained teachers and teacher to student ratios. Furthermore, teachers who have finished their training and are actually teaching in the schools are often denied trained teachers salary rates because the school may have two or three ghost teachers on the roster and the government believes that the school is fully staffed.

To cleanse the payroll of ghost teachers, the government requires teachers personally to travel to the local ministry of education to receive their salary. The result is that teachers miss several days of school each month and incur high travel costs to receive their salaries. Thus, in addition to missing lessons every Friday to work in her teacher's garden, a schoolgirl misses two or three additional days each month for her teacher to travel to the nearest large city.

Despite the rhetoric of the Millennium Development Goals, the increase in donor funding for education, and the post-conflict ruptures in traditional culture that opened new ways of thinking, ensuring adequate education still presents real and present problems. Overcrowded schools, insufficient and untrained teachers, and a lack of textbooks and basic school infrastructure all create a challenging learning environment for students. While these circumstances for education are common across Sierra Leone, Kono provides distinct challenges.

This section provides an overview of the recent history of Kono, the infrastructural obstacles, and the challenges to development and gender equality that are part of a schoolgirl's daily life. The next section delineates the methods used in this case study which are influenced by the setting in which it was conducted.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The findings of this study stem from a qualitative interview-based case study conducted between 2010 and 2013 in Kono, Sierra Leone. The unit of analysis is the experiences of individual schoolgirls rendered in detailed portraits. This section discusses the methods used to collect and analyze data. First, I situate myself in the context. Second, I explain access to the site and data collection methodology. Third, I describe methodologies used to analyze the data. I conclude with a discussion of the limitations inherent in the methodology.

3.1. Sierra Leone and my story

In this section, I present my own portrait, explaining how I came to this topic and to Sierra Leone. Agreeing with Jackson, I see my intersubjectivity as a researcher and the relationships I have made as central to my work.

Herein lies another assumption I make as an anthropologist- the assumption of intersubjectivity. Just as human existence is never simply an unfolding from within but rather an outcome of a situation, of a relationship with others, so human understanding is never born of contemplating the world from afar; it is an emergent and perpetually renegotiated outcome of social interaction, dialogue, and engagement. And though something of one's own experience- of hope or despair, affinity or estrangement, well-being or illness- is always one's point of departure, this experience continually undergoes a sea change in the course of one's encounters and conversations with others. Life transpires in the subjective in-between, in a space that remains indeterminate despite our attempts to fix our position within it- a borderlands, as it were, a third world (Jackson, 2011, p. 2).

In February 2005, I began my experience in West Africa at a meeting in Dakar, Senegal. The meeting, part of my new job, was for all forty-one non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in West Africa working with the Ambassadors' Girls' Scholarship Program (AGSP) sponsored by United States Agency for International Development (USAID). In the room were about thirty men and five

women. I was the only white person there. I was excited, nervous, and uncomfortable. Nevertheless, I really wanted to say something about the topic that would contradict and challenge the previous speakers. Gender, class, race, ethnicity, colonialism, feminism all of it whirled in me but I really needed to disrupt this train of group thought, derail it, and move to a place that was less, less, what? I do not even remember the nature of the conversation, let alone the specifics of my statement; all I remember is the fear of speaking to this esteemed body of new colleagues. I spoke and the room was silent for a minute and then a large woman dressed in a bold red African dress stood up and seconded my opinion. At that moment, Maxine Sow² from Sierra Leone became my colleague and my confidant.

Later that spring, AGSP sent me on a three-week assessment to Sierra Leone. Sierra Leone, just three years out of war, was rough but I knew that Maxine Sow, as the country consultant for the AGSP, would take care of me. Our first night on the road, Maxine checked us into the only hotel in Makeni, and then she left. The hotel had no electricity. My room was dark and hot. The single twin threadbare sheet placed across my double mattress was stained with blood and ripped across the middle. I did not want to sit on the bed. The bucket of water for washing had insects swimming in it, no toilet seat, and the only window had a non-working air-conditioning unit blocking any light. May in Sierra Leone is already 100° in the morning and it was late afternoon. I went out onto the communal veranda to be greeted by men smoking and drinking beer engaged in a vicious debate in a language I could not understand. I went back to my room and tried to call my husband, tried to

² All names are pseudonyms

read my book, tried to listen to music on my laptop until the battery ran out, and I cursed Maxine Sow over and over again.

Hours later Maxine knocked on my door and told me to come to her room. I followed her down the hall and when she opened the door, ten or more women were sitting on the floor, lying on the bed, eating chicken, rice, pineapple and there was a case of cold-ish Heineken. Heaven had come to me! Some of the women spoke English, the others translated for me when they remembered. They told raunchy jokes that needed no translation and engaged in deep political conversations that were well above my situational knowledge. They gossiped, asked me questions about my life, my hair, my children- women sharing. It was a wonderful night and one that was often repeated not only in Sierra Leone but also throughout West Africa as I made many numerous trips to West African countries over the next eight years. I was working but also learning and making deep lifelong friendships with strong, intelligent, dedicated women.

After that night, Maxine and I seldom stayed at hotels. We stayed at her ‘cousin’s’ houses. “Cousins” is the word Sierra Leoneans use for any member of the extended family, old school mates, former neighbors, and pretty much anyone one is at all close to. When we returned to the capital city of Freetown, I stayed in a lovely hotel and sometimes Maxine stayed with me in the hotel. We always ate at her house. I learned a little Krio that trip, learned how to cook some of the local food, and learned a lot about education, girls, family, and the war. Our days were spent interviewing girls who were receiving scholarships, headmasters, and parents, while working with the local NGOs implementing AGSP.

In one of the first schools we visited, I asked the headmaster what he had learned from the AGSP training done the month before. He looked at me with a lovely earnest face and said, “I’ve learned that loving the girls is not good.” Maxine barely shifted in her chair. I asked for clarification, “What do you mean?” “That giving the girls my special love is not good.” With that, I continued down my list of well thought out questions prepared in Amherst. I was clearly a newbie with a lot to learn. After we had driven for a while in silence, I asked Maxine about the headmaster’s comment. She stared straight ahead and simply said, “Yes, we told him that he could no longer have sex with his students.” Then Maxine told me the story of how she got pregnant at the age of sixteen by her teacher. They never married but he paid for her high school fees and now pays for part of the boarding school fees for their daughter. I would later learn that this was not at all uncommon.

That is how I learned about Sierra Leone and West Africa. For the next seven years, I traveled multiple times to twelve West African countries interviewing scholarship recipients, their families, teachers, non-governmental organizations, ministry officials, politicians, and anyone else that would talk to me. In short, I became adept at interviewing girls in school; I learned a lot about how education works or does not work in West Africa, and became comfortable doing so.

When it came time to choose a site for my research, I recognized the value of making the most of my strong relationships with non-governmental organizations in West Africa. Furthermore, it had to be English speaking, safe, and a place that I had not visited as a representative of USAID. As I had visited all of the NGOs in Ghana, Liberia, and the areas that were safe to visit in Nigeria several times, I was left with the one area in Sierra Leone that I had not personally visited.

Additionally one of my friends, Goldy, from Amherst had been a Peace Corps volunteer in Sierra Leone. She had become involved in a small Europe-based NGO, Mountain Top for Sierra Leone Women. Goldy's Sierra Leone friend had started the organization focusing on female genital cutting. I became involved in Mt. Top and we started a United States based NGO of the same name. Goldy encouraged me to travel to Sierra Leone with her and volunteered to translate for me as needed.

Goldy and Maxine pulled me toward Sierra Leone. Additionally, through conferences, emails, and visits to Sierra Leone I had a connection with Mr. Monku, the director of a Kono-based NGO, Kono Development Organization (KDO)³. Kono Development Organization works with those who are affected by the mining operations in town and advocates for the legal rights of women. I contacted Mr. Monku and he graciously agreed to be my host in the area. Having the staff at KDO as my host gave me access to knowledgeable and critical thinkers who understood both the nature of research and the culture of Kono. Being associated with this organization opened doors to schools, government offices, as well as homes of the miners and elites. Three individuals played key roles in situating me within Kono society.

Mr. Monku, in particular, has worked closely with foreign visitors and traveled throughout West Africa. Within Kono, Mr. Monku is considered wealthy, as he owns his own home, sends his children to the best private school, and is well respected as director of a large NGO. His status granted me access to the chiefs, politicians, and other elites within Kono.

³ A pseudonym

Mr. Frankie, the driver for KDO, became my research assistant. As a driver for KDO, he had previously accompanied foreign northern journalists and researchers. Frankie is well known throughout town for his work with KDO and his role within the Muslim community in Kono. He worked as a driver for the army during the war so he knows the roads throughout the country. He spoke freely about this time in the war, unlike most people. It seems that every person knows and greets him warmly and he in turn, knows everything about everyone.

The third key KDO employee was Ms. Annie, fiscal director and assistant to Mr. Monku. Ms. Annie allowed me insight into the world of young professional women in Kono. Ms. Annie had not had the experience of working closely with a white woman nor did she have experience befriending someone outside of her close-knit Kono circle, so this was a first for her. Each of these three people, within Kono, provided me with invaluable introductions, insight into Kono and feedback on my research.

Upon arrival in Sierra Leone, Maxine who had become a member of parliament introduced me to Honorable Edward, the representative for the Kono district. Honorable Edward offered me his compound and help of his 'house-boy' (domestic worker) for the duration of the research. Having a compound and a domestic worker instead of staying in either the Kono Hotel, home for ex-pat Diamond mining executives or the truly named, Uncle Sam Lodge, home to the one or two foreign visitors to Kono who do not have the expense account to stay at Kono Hotel allowed me direct access to the community. It also privileged my position in the community as I was not only white, northern, and an elder in a society that venerates

the elderly, assumed to be wealthy, but also well placed in Sierra Leone society since I was the honored houseguest of a member of parliament.

I greatly admire the miner-advocacy work of the Kono Development Organization (KDO). Their work and the plight of the Kono people affected by the diamond mines resonated with me. My paternal grandfather was a coal miner in southern Illinois and I grew up hearing how he was shot for his union organizing activities. My father was only two years old at the time and he was sent to live with his maternal grandparents, his brother at six was sent to work on farm somewhere else, and my grandmother went into hiding from the anti-union forces for a while. My granduncles all worked in the mines and eventually did get a union started. My father, with the help of GI loans, went to college to get out of the mines. The mines, the exploitation of miners, unions, and the GI loans ran throughout my family stories.

That my father had left the coalmines through education was a constant trope in my household but it was not directed at me. It was solely for my brother. Generationally, my grandmothers on both sides barely finished elementary school. My mother finished high school and went to college for one semester. She dropped out, worked as a switchboard operator, met my father- a college man, and got married. I was expected to follow the same path as my mother and my brother was expected to get an MBA and become a successful businessman.

I was bright, received good grades, and was well liked by my teachers. I could have graduated high school a year early so my parents sent me to live with a colleague of my father's in Sheffield, England. I took my A levels in Art History, Spanish, and Elizabethan Literature and discovered the beginnings of punk music. My father insisted I also take typing and accounting to ensure that I would be a fine

executive secretary. Before he allowed me to go to college, I had to sign a contract with him. In the contract I promised not to get married or get pregnant before I graduated, to get A's or an occasional B, and to leave college with a job that would support myself. I received good financial aid packages and merit scholarships leaving my father to pay for the remainder. In November of my third year, the college bursar's office called me in to tell me that my father had withdrawn me from school. I had no idea. When I finally reached my father, he soberly told me that he had no intention of letting me continue with my education, my brother needed the money to go to school, and really I had enough credits for an "MRS" degree by now, didn't I? My paternal grandmother stepped in and co-signed loans to get me through the remainder of my undergraduate degree.

I didn't know it at the time but I, in my desire to become educated, had joined young women around the world in bargaining for my fees, depending on the good will of my teachers to advocate for me, and relying on my grandmother to see the value in my education. I return to this personal story, remembering that my motivation for college was not an altruistic belief in the inherent value of being a well-read woman. It was a way to have options beyond being a waitress for the rest of my life, a way to displease my father while pleasing my grandmother, and a way that allowed me for just a little while to hold that Mary-Tyler-Moore-hat-throwing-in-the-air feeling about my future. As I do this research, I see myself reflected in the work, and see how my experiences as a daughter, teacher, mother, and international development worker have led me to this topic.

In between college and this research project, I have raised two wonderful daughters, worked in international development, and taught middle school in Japan,

Mexico, and Holyoke. I have learned about teaching, teacher training, and writing curriculum. I also earned a Master's Degree in TESOL and counseling. I have become a specialist on adolescent girls through reading about them, teaching them, reflecting upon them, and raising them.

3.1.1. From researcher to NGO

In telling this very personal narrative of how I came to do this research and more specifically, how I came to do this research in Sierra Leone, I chose to omit the actual research part and go directly to my decision to start a project funding girls' scholarships in Kono. I mentioned earlier that my Amherst based friend-Goldy had started a United States based NGO called Mt. Top for Sierra Leone Women. Goldy and I raised money and donated it to an organization in Sierra Leone working to end female genital cutting. Additionally, my friend, Maxine Sow, now a member of the Sierra Leone Parliament, had come to meet the women involved in the NGO and a decision was taken to begin supporting her in creating a leadership institute for women in Sierra Leone.

The idea of helping others, *tzedakah* in Hebrew, is a fundamental tenant of all religions. As an observant Jew, *tzedakah* is part of my daily life. The website Judaism 101, explains,

. . . giving to charity is an almost instinctive Jewish response to express thanks to G-d, to ask forgiveness from G-d, or to request a favor from G-d. According to Jewish tradition, the spiritual benefit of giving to the poor is so great that a beggar actually does the giver a favor by giving a person the opportunity to perform *tzedakah*. (Rich, 5772)

Tzedakah was a value instilled in me by my family. My family was a foster family to many children as I grew up. My husband and I have unofficially fostered children in

our home, paid for college for others, and sponsored two children in Gambia through a local Gambian NGO. In our charitable acts, we try to remember the eight levels of *tzedakah* in Judaism. The least meritorious is to give begrudgingly. The most meritorious is to assist the recipient to become self-reliant.

With this background, I listened to the harsh words that Mr. Monku and the KDO staff had for foreign researchers who came to Kono, used up their host's resources, such as petrol, time, and space, and gave little back. They complained bitterly about the researchers who came to their office, often unannounced, expecting interviews, tours of the diamond mining area, introductions to local leaders and affected communities, then left without 'giving back to the community' in any way. They complained most about the researchers who came and never sent their final work back to them. It was not only the lack of triangulation, in that the researchers had often portrayed Kono in ways that KDO did not agree, but also the lack of respect in not sharing the research findings of work that KDO had significantly contributed. Indeed, as I used their offices, I saw a constant stream of researchers, reporters, and international development workers coming in, demanding time and knowledge then leaving without sending their findings, reports, or dissertations back to KDO.

I also saw the ways in which the poorest of the girls I was interviewing were marginalized in schooling. For example, to attend the sixth grade graduation ceremony, the girls were required to purchase a coat and scarf very much like the commencement gowns and hoods worn for high school and university graduations in the states. Additionally the families were required to purchase a specific cloth from the school and have a tailor make a dress or shirt for all of the family members to wear to the graduation. It is common for churches, clubs, family groups, weddings,

and political ceremonies to require all in attendance to have a dress or shirt made from a particular cloth. I have had special cloth-dresses for Maxine's brother's wedding and for her political celebrations that identify me as part of the inner circle. However, for the families of some of the girls I was interviewing to find the money for special ceremonial gowns and clothes put an undue burden on their resources. One school, in particular, would not permit any girl or her family to attend graduation if they did not have both the commencement gown and the family dressed in the special cloth. It was perhaps a spontaneous reaction. However after listening to the headmistress admonish the pupils at the school assembly that if they did not buy the special cloth from her by Friday, they would not be allowed to attend the graduation ceremony. Additionally they would not be permitted to attend school the following week. I then, privately gave the headmistress 100,000 Le or about \$25. I asked her to buy the cloth for the five girls in that school that I was interviewing and to give cloth to other needy girls so that all could attend the graduation. I asked her not to tell the children or their families where the money had come from. While this was decidedly helpful for those few girls and their families, it is clear that one small contribution did not begin to change the underlying issues.

That graduation was at the end of my first year and/second round of interviews, and although my modest gift was a spontaneous gesture and hopefully a somewhat anonymous one, it led me to some deep reflection and discussion with Mr. Monku of KDO, Maxine, Goldy and all those who had supported my research. I knew that I needed to give back to the community in a meaningful, more sustainable way, not as a one-off gesture, but that doing so should not interfere with my research. We decided that through Mt. Top for Sierra Leone Women and KDO, we could start a

small scholarship program for girls. The idea was to fund education for needy girls after they had made the leap from primary school to junior secondary school. At first, it was only to provide cash for the third semester's tuition because it is the most difficult time for agricultural families to provide.

The third term of junior secondary school for many of the girls fell after my third and what I thought at the time was my final data gathering interviews in Kono. I asked, Frankie, my research assistant, to assist me in providing scholarships. I discussed with Frankie how to do this through Mt. Top and how to keep my role confidential. Frankie, Mr. Monku, and I assessed the thirty girls that I had been interviewing and chose five of them that were currently selling groundnuts, charcoal, or vegetables after school and on weekends to receive the third trimester tuition fees. We agreed that after the third round of interviews, when I had left Kono, Frankie would distribute five scholarships using Mt. Top's name but using the KDO vehicle. Man plans and God laughs.

The next morning one of the girls, Mariama arrived with a chicken under her arm, thanking me for the tuition for the third trimester. Throughout the day, the other four arrived thanking me for their scholarships. Other girls came, as they often did, to play, sit on the porch and see what weird and wild thing I might be eating -- hummus and pita bread for example. So those that had received money privately learned that not all of them had received scholarships and I learned that when my driver, after our last interview celebration, went to drop Frankie off they had driven to the five girl's homes, given the money and announced that I was the benefactor. I was angry and disturbed but none of the Sierra Leoneans had a problem with the girls knowing who had given the scholarships. When I called to complain, both Frankie and Mr. Monku

laughed at my white-lady behavior and informed me that there were no secrets in Kono.

The following year, 2012, I returned to Kono with enough money to pay for school fees, shoes, books, and uniforms for ten girls. I gathered the five girls that had received scholarships the previous year and told them that Mt. Top would pay for their school fees, shoes, books, and uniforms again this year. Moreover, that they had a choice to make: Mt. Top could pay for their lesson fees, sports day fee, Thanksgiving Day fee, and all the other little fees that schools charge throughout the year for only those five girls or Mt. Top could sponsor five additional girls. I left them alone to decide what they wanted to do and within minutes, they called me back onto the porch and said that they wanted Mt. Top to sponsor five additional girls. They also wanted final approval of the five additional girls because they said that they knew far better than Frankie and Mr. Monku which girls were really, really poor.

Elsie, Maxine's 22-year-old daughter, and her best friend, Little Mama, came to Kono from Freetown to coordinate the scholarships. Elsie and Little Mama bought the books, arranged for the uniforms, and took care of other logistics. I continued to interview the girls and tried to separate myself from the scholarships.

3.1.2. Sponsor and researcher

If I had known that I was going to interview the girls for an additional two years, I would not have begun sponsoring them when I did. The primary problem with my association with the scholarships is my inability to determine how it affected my research. Before I began sponsoring the girls, I had wonderful relationships with them and spent hours on my porch and in their homes with them. For a 'woman of

substance’ as Maxine says, there is an expectation that she will support others.

Michael Jackson, (2011) anthropologist whose work focuses on Sierra Leone put it this way,

. . . human beings everywhere acknowledge a minima moralia grounded in a sense of sharing a common humanity. . . but a tension between particularistic and universalistic ethics remains. . . with the assumption that the powerful owe it to the powerless to improve their lot. (p. 35)

Everyone I know who is not poor is sponsoring two, three, or ten children to go to school. Maxine and Mr. Monku do it. The only white NGO worker in Kono not only sponsors about ten children to go to school, he also has bribed the diamond mines human resource officer to get ‘his kids’ jobs, and paid for his staff and their family to receive medical care, sometimes at substantial cost to him. In Sierra Leone, those with means are expected to give directly and openly. I have seen both Maxine and the politician whose home I stay in when in Kono, have a long line of supplicants waiting to tell their tale of woe and then receive the equivalent of ten dollars. I once asked Maxine why she does not just give them the ten dollars when they come to the door instead of spending so much time with each person. She said that sometimes I was “really white” and that for her listening, and for them, being heard was as important as the money. I eventually learned that from the moment I walked into the schools asking to interview girls, I was expected to become their benefactor.

One of the common expectations in the United States is the idea that we are beholden to our benefactors. I have always felt obligated to my grandmother for paying my school fees. I am not convinced that there is the same sense of obligation in Sierra Leone. I do not see the children that Mr. Edward sponsors coming to his house when he is in town. Mr. Monku although the recipient of politicians’ graft does not feel obligated to vote for that politician. Maxine does not expect to know how the

children she sponsors are doing in school and it seems that she does not necessarily support the same children every year but gives to whomever asks until the money runs out. There does not seem to be the same idea of obligation for the benefited to be beholden to the benefactor in Sierra Leone. It is an obligation from the benefactor to the one who needs to benefit.

One of the difficulties USAID, as a benefactor, had with AGSP was the ways in which the local community did not distinguish between the local NGO and USAID. USAID wanted it to be known that the scholarships were ‘from the American people.’ Yet, when we went to the field, the scholarship recipients were said to be “FAWE girls (Federation of African Women Educationalist)” or “Caritas kids” not recipients of the American people’s scholarship. Often it was not even the local NGO that was given credit but the individual director of the organization itself so instead of “XYZ NGO girls”, the scholarship recipients were “Mr. Sam’s girls”. Although it frustrated the USAID officials, it also pointed out how close to the recipients the NGOs had become and how inherent in the tribal system was the idea of one individual giving rather than an international donor network. In my case, I tried to refer constantly to the scholarships as coming from Mt. Top for Sierra Leone Women and as I explained how we raise the money, I showed the girls and their families photos of the women involved in Mt. Top. However, I am not sure it made a difference in the end. I am the face that they know.

In what ways might the financial support have influenced my research? Before the scholarships began, I had already established connections with the girls and their families. Some of the headmasters nagged me to support the schools or the girls themselves and this disappeared when they heard that I was sponsoring the girls. Of

course, they wanted more girls to be sponsored, preferably their own daughters or granddaughters. After Mt. Top began to sponsor the girls, the parents were grateful but it seemed that they had expected it all along. I did not perceive any difference in my relationship with the parents. In other words, the conversations were not longer; access was neither more difficult nor easier; from the moment I had come to their homes expressing interest in their daughters' education, it must have been assumed that I would, at some point, take responsibility for their fees.

With the girls, I perceived no difference in our relationship. By the time the third round of interviews were finished most of the girls were comfortable in my home, had shared very intimate stories of their lives, and seemed to be happy around me. I am not sure it meant much to them that I was supporting them. They were grateful but I do not think they felt obligated to me. With the scholarships, I now had Elsie and Little Mama sleeping in my room and they added to the general vibe of an afterschool girls' clubhouse that my porch had become. Elsie, the daughter of a Member of Parliament and Little Mama are both college educated young women. At 23 and 21, they were closer to the girls' age yet we all had a wonderful time playing cards, cooking, singing, and just watching -- as my grandmother would say, just watching the cars drive by, except there are not any cars in Kono, only motorcycles and trucks.

For some of the scholarship recipients, it changed their obligations within their household. Some of the girls, who had previously had to sell charcoal, garden vegetables, or groundnuts, walking through town with a platter balanced on their head, after school and on weekends, the scholarships meant that they no longer had to work. However, for others, they continued to work in order to support their younger

brothers or sisters in school. They were used to selling and it was their responsibility to provide for their siblings. It is often said that all children work in Africa and indeed UNICEF (2013) estimates that 27% of urban children and 57% of rural children between the ages of 5-14 work more than eight hours a day. The schoolgirls worked but they did not work in exploitative situations nor did they work an untoward amount of hours per day. Selling groundnuts was their equivalent of an after school activity. Interestingly, now that many of them are in their third year of junior secondary school, an important exam year, they are no longer selling after school but attending test prep classes. It is not that their families no longer need the money but the investment in this year's tests supersedes the extra income in importance.

Although I can never know the effect that bringing money to pay for their education had upon my relationship with some of the girls in my study, I can say that for those girls that I have not sponsored, I remain a welcome guest in their homes, and a sought out companion, and they continue to visit my porch.

3.1.3. Class and Race

According to the Fasewoia elders, the first people in the world were *bimba* Adama and mama Hawa- ancestor Adam and ancestress Eve. They had three sons. The eldest was the ancestor of the whites, the second the ancestor of the Arabs, and the third the ancestor of the blacks. The first two sons inherited book learning, but the last-born son- the ancestor of the black- inherited nothing.

It surprised me that the old men should imply that Africans were natively inferior to Europeans, and I asked them to explain why the last-born son was doomed to illiteracy.

"If you uproot a groundnut, "I was told, and inspect the root, isn't it always the case that some of the nuts are bad and some good?"

"I have heard that," Hassan said. "There were three calabashes. Allah put the book of inventions under one, the Qur'an under another, and groundnuts under the third one. The ancestors of the blacks would have taken the Qur'an or the book of inventions, but the ancestor of the whites tricked him into taking the groundnuts." (Jackson, 2011, p. 31)

Three men, a white man, an Arab, and an African appeared before Allah. Allah said that he would give them anything they wanted. The white man said he wanted money. So America became very rich. The Arab man said he wanted wisdom. So Muslims became very wise. Then Allah turned to the African man and asked what he wanted. The African man said, “Don’t mind me. I’m just here to carry their bags.” (Mr. Monku’s favorite joke.)

There are three kinds of people in the world: Men, Women, and American Women! (Joke told in Japan)

Racially marked as an outsider, I am at a distance from the community and the girls I seek to know. Being white, having a United States passport, cash to spend, and the idea that I carry both a knapsack and a purse, all signal my relative affluence vis-a-vis the women of Sierra Leone. Despite these differences, I found myself welcomed warmly and invited into intimate conversations from the very first day in Kono. For example during my first data-gathering trip, the woman who cooked for me eagerly confided tales of her lover and their relationship. I felt that she wanted an outside ear, an American woman’s take on his behavior and their affair, and a sympathetic listener so that she could talk without the repercussions attendant to speaking to those within her community. Griffins (2011) writing about her research in Francophone West Africa, expresses this advantage in the following way:

However, the fact of being externally perceived as an outsider in the culture can offer the researcher a privileged vantage point on the margins of society. Occupying an unfamiliar location in the environment, being non-African, non-Muslim, non-male, and not ostensibly representing any established power center, can be as productive as it is challenging, protecting the researcher from prejudice, while providing a shield behind which she can take shelter from her own and the community’s preconceptions of the process and outcomes of developmental research. (p. 27)

I think, particularly with the girls themselves, that my status as a white woman, my skills as former teacher and elder paved the way, over time for the girls to become familiar with and trust me. As an outsider, I do not expect the girls to fetch water, cook rice, or sweep my compound- all chores that any other neighbor woman could

freely ask of the girls and which they would be socially obligated to do without hesitation or complaint. I make few demands on them. I want to sit and talk with them, play games, to hear their views and to have them explain their culture to me. I allow them to make tea with lots of sugar. I share my biscuits and they know that if there is any food leftover from breakfast, they can ask and receive it. I expect that the girls view me as a curious 'other', interested in their stories and willing to share my resources. Naturally, the inequality implicit in this situation presents a danger that they might say what they think I wanted to hear. This possibility was mitigated through 'member checks' of the data.

As mentioned previously, Honorable Edward allowed me to stay in his home and his porch became a central meeting spot for KDO staff, the girls, my neighbors, and other friends. Although the initial interviews were done within the school setting, many of the girls learned where I was staying and began to visit in the hours after their chores had been done but before dark. When they visit, they examine my belongings, comment on my dresses, try on my hat, shoes, sunglasses, or play with my hair. In my field notes, there is mention of a time when Isatou asks me why I had bought new sandals. She demands to know what happened to the previous year's red pair and why I bought black sandals this year. They bring me foods that I might not know so they could teach me and they bring their friends and little sisters to meet me. In 2011, Isatou pulls down the neckline of my *bubu* (big West African dress) and peers into it so she can see if my breasts are white. The girls love to teach me Krio and delight in hearing me read Krio primers. They correct my pronunciation, smilingly threaten to flog me for being dull witted, and demand to teach the next lesson.

However, as comfortable as I am with the girls and they seem to be with me, the minute we leave my compound and walk a little ways up my street, the children who do not know me start shouting, 'Waitman' (Whiteman) or 'Waitwoman' or '*Orporto*' (Whiteman in Temne) or even 'Le-ba-nese.' This happens when I ride in a car, walk on the streets, or sit on my porch. Sometimes it is shouted to get my attention; sometimes it is observation that is shouted out to others to come look at the spectacle that is I. In Freetown or Makeni, the larger cities, I usually go unannounced through the streets but in Kono, there are so few white people that I garner attention. Even I take note when I see a white non-Lebanese person passing and I know those other white people who stay longer than a night or so.

As comfortable as I am with being a marked outsider, I often think about what it means to the girls and their families, even their teachers to have me, and all that I represent, around them. Being with white people and my being white was often brought up in my conversations with the girls. I do not intend in this dissertation to do a full analysis of the data around whiteness that I gathered, as it is too important a topic to be treated lightly and it is not the primary focus of my research. However, it is important to discuss two ideas that arose from my examination of the data. The data directly from the girls falls into two broad categories; a) white people are benefactors and b) people who have white friends have prestige.

An example of the first category- White people as benefactors occurred in January 2010 in my first conversation with Fantu when I asked her about the difference between girls going to school and girls not going to school:

1. Jordene: What is the difference between a girl going to school and girl who is not going to school?
2. Fantu: Hmm?
3. Jordene: Some girls are going to school- some are not going to school?

- What is the difference?
4. Fantu: The one that go to school? The one in school white people de get money for school.

Fantu never directly asks me for money but the expectation is certainly in the air, unspoken but visible. Indeed, later her wish does come true and white people do pay for her education.

Another time I was visiting Mr. Monku's family home and his elder sister asked me directly for money; I told her that I did not have any. She replied that I must have money because I am white. Then a little neighbor kid added, (in translation) "You're white and you've got a passport and you've been on a plane, so you do have money!" This brief moment has stayed with me as a constant reminder of my place in Sierra Leone.

In my first interview with Kadidja, she described a woman that she admires. When I asked for details about the woman and why she admired her, one of the reasons she gave is that this woman is seen with many white people.

5. Jordene: Do you have any women that you think are wonderful women?
6. Kadidja: What?
7. Goldy: Mentor?
8. Jordene: Who are the women that you admire? That you are looking to be a role model?
9. Kadidja: There is one woman around our area there. She is very educate. Every day, every day you see her. She hang her bag (imitates hanging a pocketbook over her shoulder) and in the morning when she works she wants to walk. When she off, she come back and there are a lot of white people that they come to her to come to visit her.
10. Goldy: What kind of work does she do?
11. Kadidja: Na office work, but actual, na office actual thing that she does I don't know. (She works in an office. I do not know the actual thing that she does in an office but I know she works in an office.)
12. Goldy: Mining? NGO? Education? Do you know her name?
13. Kadidja: Ny name is Mrs. Kadiatou/
14. Jordene: And so every day she goes to her office and a lot of people come to visit her. What kind of people come to her here?
15. Kadidja: Those people that come to her visit her. There a lot of whites but not black people. If black people come unless her parents or family

Thus the act of being with white people and having them come visit her home allows this woman to have increased social capital. Along with her pocketbook and working in an office, this makes her a role model to Kadidja.

Knowing that my race trumps all other aspects of how I am perceived makes it difficult to know what role my whiteness plays in the research process. Certainly, my race opens doors and allows me great privileges. Being a white person, I am allowed to enter situations, interview people, and ask questions that other Sierra Leonean researchers may not be able to access as easily.

This easy access comes with the assumption that I will be a gatekeeper to resources and power outside of Kono. Being white and foreign, the assumption is made that I will be a benefactor to the community in some way. As discussed in the previous sections, over the course of my time in Kono, I do share my knowledge by working with local NGOs and I do provide resources to support the girls and their families.

3.2. Research Design

This dissertation is an ethnographic case study (Dyson & Genishi, 2005; Heath, 1983). It is concerned with the social and cultural context of a group of people's everyday social interactions and activities. It examines how, in that context, they make meaning of their experiences (Carspecken, 1996; Egan-Roberson & Willet, 1998; Heath, 1983). In general, ethnographic methodologies strive for a holistic, reflective process of collecting data, analyzing data, and writing through "thick description" (Geertz, 1973). The descriptions include the specific larger historical, economic, and cultural forces that shape and give meaning to experience (Gupta & Ferguson, 1997). Ethnographic case studies are concerned with "what some

phenomenon means as it is socially enacted within a particular case” (Dyson & Genishi, 2005, p. 10). This dissertation uses three particular case studies written as portraits of schoolgirls as the unit of analysis.

To actualize the ethnographic case study methodology I deploy several other tools of inquiry. I use Siedman’s work on interviewing, particularly his suggestions for techniques and developing relationships between interviewer and interviewee (2006). I draw heavily on Geertz (1973) and Emerson, Fretz, and Shaw (1995) in creating deep, detailed, ‘thick’ descriptions in my field notes. I process data through writing (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Richardson & St.Pierre, 2005) and use portraiture as a means of interacting with the writing (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997). All of these methods are “thinking devices” (Gee, 2011, p. 12) that guide my inquiry into making sense of the data.

This section discusses the methods used in several parts. First, I lay out the data collected. Second, I explain site selection. Third, I explain how I selected the focal schoolgirls. Finally, I discuss my interview protocol.

3.2.1. Data Collection

Data for this dissertation consists of:

- 85 interviews with schoolgirls in Kono
- 26 letters from schoolgirls in Kono
- 20 essays written by schoolgirls in Kono
- 15 interviews with family members
- 12 interviews with community members
- 15 interviews with education related community members
- Field notes from five field visits lasting 3-6 weeks (Jan 2010, March 2010, January-February 2011, January-February 2012, January-February 2013)
- Classroom observations

From this large data set, I focus on data from three schoolgirls. For the three schoolgirls, the data set is as follows:

Participant	Interviews with participants	Interviews with Family	Interviews with teachers headmistress	Letters	Essays
Aisatta	11	0	2	1	0
Isatou	6	4	2	6	1
Fantu	5	2	2	2	1

Table 4: Data Set

3.2.1.1. Site Selection

In the previous section, I explained how I came to settle on Koidu city as a research site. Three different schools were selected as initial interview sites on the basis of three criteria: a) walking distance from my lodging; b) gender segregated schools (i.e. all three schools are girls-only schools); and, c) one secular school and two religious schools (i.e. one Muslim and one Christian).

3.2.1.2. Focal Schoolgirl Selection

Participants were initially selected by their headmistresses or class prefect based on the following criteria: (a) identified as ‘self-funding’ her education; (b) had attended the school more than one year; and (c) was in 5th or 6th grade; and, (d) was between the ages of 11 and -13. Many children in Sierra Leone receive scholarships from international aid organizations, families abroad who send remittances, or other benefactors who which pay for their fees. I was interested in interviewing schoolgirls without scholarships.

In 2010, I interviewed thirty participants. In 2013, I was able to find fourteen of the initial interviewees. Of those fourteen, I focused on eleven that I had clear and easy access to, including their teachers, and their households. For this dissertation, I focus on three individual participants. I selected focal schoolgirls based on these

criteria: a) the amount and quality of interview data and b) a diverse and evocative selection of school achievement, family situations, and personalities.

3.2.1.3. Interview Protocol

I conducted multiple formal interviews with eleven schoolgirls and their households during six separate site visits to Kono. I initially interviewed all focal participants at their schools and the households at their homes. As the years passed, many of the formal interviews took place on my porch or other local quiet settings. Other informal discussions occurred while cooking, playing cards, or sitting under the mango trees. As the years of research have increased so has the comfort and depth of these interviews. Initially, the interviews were rather formal following a common question/answer format. In the household interviews, I directed questions at specific people and others were respectful and did not interrupt. The most recent household interviews in 2012 and 2013 have interruptions, jokes, and casually drift among topics. I usually interviewed teachers on the veranda of the classrooms or in empty classrooms. I interviewed headmistresses in their offices and occasionally in local eateries or my porch.

The setting- whether it be a private interview on my porch or in their office- made a difference. Topics appropriate to my porch were not necessarily appropriate for the office. I tried, as much as possible, to allow the interviewee to choose the location of the interview and to have the power to set the boundaries of the interview topics. Acknowledging that the interview relationship is never equal, I consciously chose to allow the interviewees to lead, as much as possible, the interviews. When I interviewed people in positions of power within their office, I did so without others in the room. In some cases, they turned on and off the recorder so that they had total

control of what was being recorded. Of course, the girls and others interviewed also held the recorder but did not exercise their power to turn it off.

Aside from the various location in which I conducted interviews, the interviews themselves varied in style. Differences in class and race were discussed earlier in this dissertation but additional factors entered into the different interviews. With the girls, my age made a difference and the contents of our interviews needed to be age-appropriate for them. When interviewing NGO workers, teachers, or other professional people sometimes my age made a difference and sometimes it did not. My age made a difference most clearly when interviewing older men and women in positions of power as they gained status as elders and knowledgeable insiders.

Along with setting, age, class and race differences, the range of suitable topics differed and the extent to which I felt I could express my own opinions differed as well. With Frankie, Mr. Monku, and other close friends, I could express my acceptance of homosexuality and abortion, for example, and they openly voiced their opinions on such controversial topics. Bringing these topics to the girls would have pushed the boundaries of my relationship with them and perhaps the extent to which their families welcomed me. An incident that occurred one evening on my porch reminded me of the differences in cultural boundaries and the careful line I had to draw between outsider/insider. That evening, Mr. Monku came over to pick me up on his motorbike. I told the girls on the porch that I had to leave because we were going into the bush to drink palm wine and watch the sunset. The girls were horrified that I was going into the bush to drink. First, going into the bush is considered dangerous. Secondly, 'good women' do not drink at all, especially crude palm wine. Then Mr. Monku reprimanded me for letting the girls know that he drank, and more seriously

for being a bad role model for the girls. Those moments when I crossed cultural boundaries without grace, stumbling ineptly through local expectations, norms, and assumptions serve as markers for me of cultural differences that, if respected, allowed me into their worlds. My very presence in their lives was transformative, but my interviews, manners, and actions needed to be respectful of their moral and cultural boundaries, which necessitated understanding those boundaries.

I was already pushing cultural normative behaviors. I was frequently asked where my husband was, who was taking care of my children, and what my parents thought of my being so far from them. These questions served to reinforce the oddity it was for them to see a married elder woman traveling alone so far from home. In an effort to ask questions from an emic perspective, I asked questions that might seem strange in another situation. For example, I asked the girls about wearing pants—if they could wear pants, when and where they felt comfortable wearing pants, and if their mothers would ever wear pants. Asking their age mates in the USA those questions would evoke surprise, as the answers would be obvious—to me at least—and considered irrelevant. Conversely, I could not ask the Sierra Leone girls questions that might seem appropriate to their American age mates.

When it came to asking questions about expectations, I made the cultural assumption that they would marry a man and that they would have children. I ask the girls if they want to get married and they all say yes. There is no hesitation. When I ask what kind of man they want to marry, the girls seem puzzled. It appears to be the first time they have thought about marriage as a choice for them. The girls look confused until I prompt with “A tall man or a fat man?” From there we begin a

discussion of what attributes they consider important and how the decision is going to be made.

These interviewing challenges are not unique to my work. The interviewing relationship is a fragile one that requires a balance between power, comfort, and reciprocity. It is also a relationship in the best sense of co-constructing the form, space, and the respect that comes.

3.3. Data Analysis Methodology

I have used several methods of data analysis. I see these phases of analysis as overlapping, thick, and ultimately richly complementary. Each of these phases intertwines with, and derives directly from, Gee's notion of figured worlds (Gee, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method*, 2011). They also reflect my personal and professional experiences (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). The chart below illustrates this process:

Data Analysis Chart				
Research Question	Constructs	Unit of Analysis	Data Sources	Data Analysis
<p>How do these schoolgirls and their households express the figured worlds of schoolgirls?</p> <p>What does the figured worlds of schoolgirls currently allow them?</p> <p>What is the role of imagined communities for these girls?</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Figured Worlds (Gee, 2011)- Imagined Communities (Kanno & Norton, 2003) Liminality (Turner, 1984; Switzer, 2010) 	<p>Case studies of schoolgirls (Dyson & Genishi, 2005)</p> <p>My portraits of the schoolgirls</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Field notes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995; Geertz, 1973) Interviews with participants, their households, their teachers, and the local community (Seidman, 2006) Letters from participants Report cards 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Figured worlds (Gee, 2011) Portraiture (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997)

Table 5: Data Analysis

3.3.1. Phase One: Generative coding

While in the field, I coded data generatively (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 1995). In other words, as I was writing my field notes and listening to the interviews I noticed themes. As I was doing this, I did daily ‘member checks’ with participants. I discuss more about ‘member checks’ later in this section. In subsequent interviews, I was able to notice whether this trend repeated. This continued for all interview periods. Generative coding continued as I worked with Sierra Leonean transcriptionists and informants to clarify word usage, interpret comments, and provide relevant background details. I discuss in more detail the process I have used with transcriptionists in section four of this chapter.

3.3.2. Phase Two: Writing portraitures

I wrote several portraits of schoolgirls (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997). I consider the methodology of portraiture particularly useful as a tool of data analysis because it allows a focus on context and, the researcher's perspective, and a commitment to framing research to ask what is enlightening in the situation rather than searching for problems. Through providing thick description (Geertz, 1973) and writing through the process, portraiture is particularly focused on the context. Context is vital even when the researcher's site is well known and familiar to the audience but is especially informative when the intended readers have little if any experience with the research context.

Just as important as a strong and thorough description of the research site is the researcher's perspective. Portraiture forefronts the identity, ideals, and personal story of the researcher as being vital to the ways in which the research is composed and presented. Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis explain,

With portraiture, the person of the researcher — even when vigorously controlled — is more evident and more visible than in any other research form. She is seen not only in defining the focus and field of the inquiry, but also in navigating the relationships with the subjects, in witnessing and interpreting the action, in tracing the emergent themes, and in creating the narrative. (1997, p. 13)

This is particularly vital when the history of the researcher varies greatly from the history of the research participants. The researcher gains transparency in making the 'person of the researcher' more visible to the reader and a dynamic part of the process. The emphasis on describing relationships and weaving the researcher as well as the subject into the narrative allows me, as a researcher, to expose aspects of my own figured world that may influence the research.

In the process of creating portraits, we enter people's lives, build relationships, engage in discourse, make and imprint . . . and leave. We engage in acts (implicit and explicit) of social transformation, we create opportunities for dialogue, we pursue the silences, and in the process, we face ethical dilemmas and a great moral responsibility. This is provocative work that can disturb the natural rhythms of social reality and encounter. This is exciting work that can instigate positive and productive change. (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997, p. 11)

The pact between researcher and subject can be a profound relationship that can lead to transformation for all involved; for many, particularly children, the effects of being involved, as a participant in a research project, may not be immediately apparent. Thus, the need for transparency and accountability toward the relationship and an agreement to open dialogue are paramount for the research process and product.

English claims that portraiture is not transparent in that the method fails “. . . to interrogate what it conceals” as it only presents one stable essentialized truth (2000, p. 21). Although I do not dispute the warning implicit in English's criticism, I am not seeking to create truth through portraiture.

I did find that as I struggled to write deep, rich portraits, I wanted to add events, places, and feelings. At times, my field notes were not deep enough, did not have enough detail to relay the richness of the event. In the novel, *Miss Peregrine's Home for Peculiar Children*, (Riggs, 2011) one of the characters spends twenty-seven years observing the same day over and over again.

“He spent three years on pigs alone!” Hugh said. “That's all day every day for three years taking notes on pigs! Can you imagine? “This one dropped a load of arse biscuits!” “That one said oink-oink and then went to sleep in its own filth!”

“Notes are absolutely essential to the process,” Millard explained patiently. “But I can understand your jealousy, Hugh. It promises to be a work unprecedented in the history of academic scholarship.” (p. 197)

Like Millard, I took volumes of notes, but unlike Millard, I could not repeat the same day over and over adding more details and differing perspectives each time. Unlike

the author of this fictional time-travel novel for young adults, I could not make up details to add to the stories. Censoring myself so that I would not embellish tales to make the portraits livelier was one of the challenges of portraiture methodology for me. To check myself, I had Frankie, Mr. Monku, Goldy, Daniel, and others involved in the stories, read the portraits and give me feedback.

Sometimes this process of getting feedback involves negotiating meaning between several Sierra Leoneans. For example, I read Daniel, my houseboy, the passage about how one of the headmistresses cuts her pupils school uniforms if she does like the length of the bodice. He responded by telling me that his headmaster did the same thing if the boys sleeves were not long enough. Furthermore, he said that the new shoes I had brought him must be polished before he went back to school or he would be sent home. He did not seem to think anything was strange about the headmistress slicing the uniforms. However, when I sent Mr. Monku this chapter to read, he texted me: “I don't appreciate the portion that talks about slicing the uniform. It is seemingly normal to ask the (girl), to go back to get the correct shoe or so but slicing is extreme.” I wrote back, “That is what the Iron Lady at X school does. She is horrible.” To which he responded, “She is horrible to say the least. She is not normal. She does not have her 5 senses complete.” After Mr. Monku wrote this, I went back and changed the passage from—“One headmistress in the area slices the girls’ dresses if the bodice is too long. She carries a pair of scissors with her at all times and will shred the dress if she is unhappy with the way it was sewn or the way the girl is wearing it. Then she drives the crying girl away from the school. The girl cannot patch her uniform but must find the money to have a new uniform sewn. Children lose schooling over their uniforms. *From an American perspective, this headmistress’*

action seems extreme but none of my Sierra Leone colleagues thinks that there is anything unreasonable about her slicing children's school uniforms. They argue that without supervision, schoolchildren would wear inappropriate uniforms" to "Although this headmistress' actions are extreme even to some of my Sierra Leone colleagues, they argue that without supervision, schoolchildren would wear inappropriate uniforms." Clearly, Mr. Monku and Daniel have different perspectives. One is still a schoolboy and the other a father of school age children. I expect that their responses to the headmistress will be different and I must engage in a process—of ascertaining different perspectives and relaying them from my viewpoint which states my views while ensuring that any generalized statement are to the best of my ability truthful.

In the conclusion chapter, I discuss more about the process of portraitures and the implications for my methodology. For this initial description, it suffices to note that although portraitures bring depth and richness to the process of discerning and recounting meaning, it is a methodology that requires the researcher to make explicit the thin line between data and memory. In this next section, I explain the ways in which I utilized the work of Gee, and Kanno and Norton in my analysis.

3.3.3. Phase Three: Figured Worlds and Imagined Communities

In Phase 3, I explore the data using the frameworks of Gee's (2011) work on figured worlds and Kanno and Norton's (2003) imagined communities (Gee, 2011; Kanno & Norton, 2003). As I discuss these frameworks in detail in the theoretical foundations section, I will focus here on how they are tools for data analysis. Gee

(2011) provides six questions to center figured worlds as a tool of inquiry. His

questions are:

- a. What figured worlds are relevant here? What must I, as an analyst, assume people feel, value, and believe, consciously or not, in order to talk (write), act, and/or interact this way?
- b. Are there differences here between the figured worlds that are affecting espoused beliefs and those that are affecting actual actions and practices? What sorts of figured worlds, if any, are being used here to make value judgments about oneself or others?
- c. How consistent are the relevant figured worlds here? Are there competing or conflicting figured worlds at play? Whose interests are the figured worlds representing?
- d. What other figured worlds are related to the ones most active here? Are there “master figured worlds” at work?
- e. What sorts of texts, media, experiences, interactions, and/or institutions could have given rise to these figured worlds?
- f. How are the relevant figured worlds here helping to reproduce, transform, or create social, cultural, institutional, and/or political relationships? What Discourses and Conversations are these figured worlds helping to reproduce, transform, or create? (Gee, 2011, p. 95)

In addition to Gee’s guiding questions about figured worlds, I ask additional questions of the data using Kanno and Norton’s construct of imagined communities (2003). I paraphrase their research question as:

- g. What are the imagined communities (groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of imagination) that add to the figured world of a schoolgirl?

In combining these two lines of inquiry, I aim to present a fuller picture of the figured worlds of schoolgirls in Kono, Sierra Leone.

3.4. Member checks

As illustrated in the section above, I was able to discuss my preliminary findings with adult participants, older children, the participants themselves, and their households while in Kono. More formally, I was also able to present my findings to local NGO Sierra Leonean national workers, members of parliament, women’s organizations, and close colleagues. Since leaving Sierra Leone in February 2013, I

have been sending my portraitures to several native Sierra Leoneans both men and women of varying ages to get their feedback and comments. By checking my interpretation with Sierra Leone nationals, native Krio speakers, and people familiar with the girls and their lives in Kono, I have been able to confirm that my findings are in accord with their interpretations. In discussing the data and my findings with knowledgeable Kono people, I have been able to deepen and expand my initial understandings.

3.5. Transcription

In this section, I will explain how I understand the theoretical difficulties of transcription, the process I used to transcribe data, and finally I will illustrate the transcript conventions used throughout this dissertation. Davidson (2009) describes transcription as a “. . . process that is theoretical, selective, interpretive, and representational” (p. 37). In this dissertation, I am sometimes transcribing from recorded utterances in English to written English. At other times, I am transcribing a mix of spoken Krio and English into written English. As transcripts are constructed and not an exact representation of the conversation, I attempt to reproduce the fullness of the discursive process, the location and that activities that we were engaged in, other non-audible participants, the mood of the speakers, time of day, and all of the details that might influence the reading of a selected piece of discourse.

Research took place from 2010-2013 during five different field visits. When the research began, the schoolgirls were in class five or class six and approximately eleven to thirteen years old. As the years of research progressed, the schoolgirls English improved and my Krio improved. By 2013, our conversations were primarily

in English with both the schoolgirls and me using Krio to clarify, emphasize, or more accurately reflect the meaning.

Initially, I hired my colleague, Mr. Monku to translate the interviews with the schoolgirls. Mr. Monku is fluent in the orthography of Krio, having taken formal courses while at Fourah Bay College. However, Mr. Monku was not familiar with the process of transcribing and translated everything into Krio even if the utterance was spoken in English. For example:

1. Isatou: *A want mek wi go tork bort Sa Lone tumara. I want for mek wi go tap arle mareg.*
2. Jordene: *Yu go ebul tel wi mor abawt erle mared?*

We actually said:

3. Isatou: I want us to talk of Sierra Leone for tomorrow. I want us to stop this early marriage.
4. Jordene: Really? Can you tell me more about this early marriage?

In the first couplet (lines 1 and 2), Mr. Monku transcribed and translated every syllable into Krio even when we were speaking English. In line 3, although Isatou is speaking in English, she is using Krio construction (using “of Sierra Leone” instead of “about Sierra Leone” for example) so he might have provided a translation but the section did not merit a transcription in Krio. Mr. Monku had difficulty transcribing rather than translating. I eventually asked two other college-educated native Sierra Leoneans to assist in the task of transcribing. Unfortunately, Little Mama and Elsa worked very slowly and after two solid weeks of working had transcribed only one interview. I continued to let them transcribe at their pace but began to transcribe the data myself.

When I had sections of the data that were difficult to either transcribe or translate, I sent the data sections to Mr. Monku, Little Mama, or Elsa to help me transcribe. I also saved sections that I was not confident in the transcriptions to play for Frankie and the houseboy, Daniel when I returned for my next field visit.

By 2013, it became much easier to transcribe as the interviews were mostly in English, my listening abilities in Krio had become much better, and I understood the background of the place of the utterance:

5. Aisatta: /If you want you to laugh me, ahh, I don't worry. Ahh I like. If I don't have lunch, I will go to school. I will *pilot* (makes motion of driving a motor bike). I pass by the government hospital, and I will go. I will go and talk. (Continues talking about going to school) I will *gladdy*, I will run. Run to the place and go and eat. Ahh *lafide* (a treat sold in schoolyards), I eat *lafide*, I will be *gladdy* to eat *lafide*, I will *scoff* (eat quickly).

In this example, my knowledge of Krio and my background knowledge of the place help to construct meaning of Aisatta's utterance. When she says she will 'pilot' – I know that 'pilot' is used for the English words- 'drive or ride.' It is also helpful that I know that her school is on the road past the government hospital so she will pilot by the government hospital on her way to school. I know that *lafide* is a treat sold in schoolyards for the children to buy as lunch. Adults consider the word "scoff" as very rude but used as slang by teenagers. If this conversation had happened in 2010, I would have had to ask Aisatta for clarification or brought it to one of my many translators for help, but by 2013, I could keep up.

As I am not doing a critical discourse analysis of the text, in representing the data, I have eliminated repeated false starts, repeated words, and some of the pauses. Ochs (1979) advises that the researcher must simplify the conversation while also being conscious of the filtering process. I have chosen to seek clarity of meaning over

exact representation of the utterance. Many times, I have cut the selection so that repetitions and clarification questions are absent from the dialogue. For example, in the selection below from an interview with Isatou, Goldy, and me in 2010, Goldy misinterprets Isatou's ambition that leads to repeated questioning:

6. Jordene: What do you like about school?
7. Isatou: I love school because . . . I want to be a minister for a future tomorrow.
8. Jordene: You want to be a minister? Hmm.
9. Isatou: Yes.
10. Jordene: What kind of minister?
11. Isatou: For the whole world.
12. Jordene: For the whole world?
13. Isatou: For, for Sierra Leone. I want to build a better Sierra Leone.
14. Jordene: For Sierra Leone.
15. Isatou: Yes I want to build a better Sierra Leone.
16. Goldy: *Sabi* a women minister? (Translation: Do you know a female Minister?)
17. Isatou: No.
18. Goldy: *Ben de around or you can git ah?* (Translation: Are there any around here or can you see one?)
19. Isatou: No. No but I can want for love to.
20. Goldy: Which church? Umm Methodist or?
21. Isatou: Not um church na mosque.
22. Goldy: Na mosque?
23. Isatou: Na mosque na Imam nat minister na chief
24. Goldy: Then they call um Chief in the mosque? They can get women chief na de mosque? But you self you go do um? Fine. Really!

Isatou is actually expressing that she wants to be a government minister not a religious minister but she is confused when Goldy asks about the church because she is a Muslim and goes to mosque. Including all of the repeated false starts and stops into the transcript would lose the point of Isatou's political ambition.

I have used the following transcript conventions in this dissertation:

Convention	Meaning	Example
<i>Italics</i>	Krio word	“ <i>Sabi</i> a women minister?”
/	Overlapping phrasing	“Aisatta: Everywhere, every program they have in school, they can said let us pick Aisatta/ Jordene: /Good. Good/ Aisatta: /Let’s pick Aisatta.”
...	Pause	“I love school because . . . I want to be a minister for a future tomorrow.”
[]	Word needed to make sense of utterance	“This time we also have a concert [play] in school.”
(Unclear)	When the word or phrase is unclear	“The one in school white people de get money for school (unclear). The one de no go school no get nothing for pay for them. They no de leave the house. Nothing for no de support them. They just down in the house (unclear). For do those vegetable things na house. Maybe they garden sell and eat.”
()	Word requiring translation to English	“ <i>Sabi</i> (Know) a women minister?”
()	Describe repetitive or non-relative part of the selection	“I pass by the government hospital, and I will go. I will go and talk. (Continues talking about going to school) I will <i>gladdy</i> , I will run.”
()	Describe non-verbal part of the dialogue such as laughter or loud car engine passing.	(laugh)
<u>Underlined</u>	Emphasis- When the speaker emphasizes a word or phrase louder than the others.	“Isatou de learn for cook, go to school, get married. She go learn. <u>I go learn her for cook</u> . The days Saturday and Sunday na time.”

Table 6: Transcript Conventions

3.6. Limitations

As stated earlier, in this study, I want to highlight that I am speaking across lines of race, class, and privilege. I do not propose to speak for the participants but instead am striving to co-construct a narrative with them that is true to their understandings and relevant to the ongoing debate over girls and education in the global South. As Geertz (1973) says, I am not speaking for these schoolgirls but describing our conversation. What I am actually analyzing is the portraits I have constructed of our co-construction of the figured world of schoolgirls.

Conducting multiple interviews over several years has improved my interviewing practices within this particular setting. Additionally, the diachronic nature of this research project has allowed me to gain familiarity with local issues that adds depth to my interviews and analysis. This expanded timeline has also allowed the participants to gain trust in me and offer their perspectives freely. However, despite the time spent in field and my efforts to remain informed while out of the area, I am not a long-term resident of Kono and as such lack the full lived history of this particular context.

Language was another limitation in that I did not speak Krio during my first two visits. Many of the participants spoke English but were not always fluent. Having fully bi-lingual native Sierra Leoneans translate and transcribe all of the interviews has been very helpful as it minimizes the dangers of misinterpretation in the findings.

CHAPTER 4

ISATOU

Chapters 4, 5, and 6, the data analysis chapters, have two distinct parts. The first part of each data analysis chapter is a portrait of an individual schoolgirl. This style is based on the work of Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman Davis (1997) discussed in the methodology section of this dissertation. The second part of these data analysis chapters analyzes the portrait presented. Thus, the first part of the chapter tells a story, paints a picture, and describes my ways of seeing an individual schoolgirl. It is told in my words in a straightforward register. The second part of the chapter analyzes my portrait of the individual schoolgirl, bringing in the work of other researchers and the words of other schoolgirls as they concur or disagree with the primary portrait presented.

I begin the analysis with Isatou. I see Isatou's portrait as laying the foundation of what it means to be a schoolgirl in Kono, Sierra Leone. She does not represent all schoolgirls but her story has a centrality about it that marks a median. The fifth chapter is about Fantu. Fantu's story delves deeper into some aspects of the figured worlds of schoolgirls. The final data sketches Aisatta. Aisatta's story adds to Isatou and Fantu but adds a layer of divergence and complexity to the previous painting of the figured worlds of schoolgirls in Kono, Sierra Leone.

4.1. Portrait of Isatou

In 2011, Isatou's mother, father, and I gathered on the porch of their home. I sat on the concrete half-wall with my back to the dirt road and Isatou's mother and father sat on the bench against the house facing me. A sheep was tethered to the porch and chickens ran under our feet. Isatou's mother offered me a freshly picked banana

and a glass of water while Isatou went inside to change out of her school uniform. When Isatou came onto the porch, she snuggled in between her mother and father, working her skinny bottom right down onto the bench touching each of her parent's thighs. She looked up at me and glowed. She was sitting on a royal throne. At times, she jumped off the bench-- to either push the sheep off the porch or pick up her younger brother—but when she returned, she snuggled right in-between her parents. They made room for her, letting her feel their warmth and love.

I feel their warmth too. I know I am welcome in their home. Before I went to see them for that third interview, I had asked Isatou if I could come see her family.

She responded:

1. Isatou: I told them yesterday. They said if you have come. Yesterday when I went with that picture (a picture of Isatou I had taken in 2010), my mother laughs. She laughs. And then she said, "Has she come?" And then I say, "Yes".. Then she said, "Ok".. She said if you are coming, they are at home.

When Isatou's mother smiles at her oldest daughter there is warmth and love, and the joy in the house is made visible. This family shares love, goals, and even their suffering—and as they graciously welcome me into their family circle, I know that I am being welcomed to share in all that with them as well.

Maybe my being so welcomed is part of the family desire to be, in their words, 'modern.' Although they go to the mosque and consider themselves religious, Isatou's father has promised Isatou's mother that he will have only one wife. They have only one relative—a young woman—living with them and say that they will not add more rooms onto the home for fear that other relatives will move in with their tight nuclear family. They have consciously spaced the children four years apart so that they have time and money for each child. They say that they will not have any more children,

content with two girls and two boys. Isatou's mother is free to travel to villages, to town, and to sell her wares without a male escort. Still, Isatou's mother wears t-shirts and lappers (sarongs) or traditional dress but never trousers. Isatou and her mother both occasionally wear a hajab but as an optional accessory rather than a religious necessity.

Part of what they see as being modern is allowing children to talk, and within Isatou's family, she is empowered to contribute to the conversation. Her family talks together and they speak openly of their affection for each other. Because Isatou's family is so present in her life, this portrait encompasses both Isatou and her family more so than other portraits of schoolgirls in this dissertation.

This portrait begins with the story of how the parents met and continues with themes that I have found repeated in my three years of sitting on their porch. After the portrait, I discuss themes that have emerged from the portrait and strengthen these themes with interview data from the other schoolgirls, their families, and community members.

4.1.1. The War, Courtship and Birth

Isatou's father ran from the rebels out of his home in the city of Kono into the bush. He continued running further into the bush finally stopping in Kabala. There he stayed, worked a bit, and met his wife. He says that he was attracted to her because she is Muslim, beautiful, obedient, and strong. Plus, he said, the Fulani women are known for their faithfulness and the women of his tribe, the Kono, are not faithful to their men. The newly married honeymoon period in Kabala lasted a short six months.

When the rebels came to Kabala, they killed Isatou's mother's brother and sisters. The newlyweds escaped across the border. In Guinea, they met good fortune and found a relative already in a camp. This allowed them to get a voucher to live inside the official refugee camp instead of the makeshift camps set up all along the roads. Still, the official camp had little food, not even enough bulgur. There were few tarps to keep off the rain and the heat. There was no clean water but they stayed—almost starving, but alive.

Isatou was born in the camp. She was the second birth for the mother, the first daughter to be born alive. When Isatou came into the world, she was sick all the time and her father did everything he could to provide for his small family. He attended a training school close to the camp until the rebels attacked the school, burning it down. Then he did some volunteer work for an NGO operating inside the camp. The NGO promised to pay the volunteers but only gave a small amount of money, a token of appreciation, before they left the camp.

With this small token of appreciation, he sent his wife to Freetown to see if she could find her surviving brother and beg him for help. Isatou's mother took Isatou on her back, and they waited for several days in the market for a ride to Freetown. When they got to Freetown, Isatou's mother was unprepared for the size of the city. She had no address or contacts for her brother so she asked every person on the street if they knew her brother. After several days, a kind man told her where her brother was and gave her transport money. When they reached her brother, they sent word back to the camp to Isatou's father that they were safe.

Isatou's father had found another job as a field worker. He taught sanitation to his fellow refugees. Because of this work, for a while, he was able to send small

amounts of money to his wife, but the rebel attacks on the camp became unbearable. He felt that he would be just as safe back in his home town of Kono. He returned to Kono to see his father and tried to reclaim the family land. He was able to reclaim some of the family land from the rebels but not all. He was also able to do some small artisanal mining but always under the radar of the rebels coming and going. He saved enough money to travel to Freetown and brought his wife and daughter back to Kono. As he arrived in Freetown so did the rebels. Freetown was under attack. The small trio fled back to Kono and has been there ever since.

4.1.2. Work and Money

Like most Kono men, Isatou's father has worked in mining for most of his life. He can read and write so he is eligible for security duties and other higher status jobs. When I first met him in 2010, he was part of an artisanal mining crew of seven men. Men who work in the artisanal mining crew stand shoulder to shoulder, waist high in muddy water, bent over, as they scoop a basket of earth—shifting, shifting, shifting, tossing it high to let the pebbles separate, all the while looking for the elusive diamond. A work crew is always observed by one or two overseers who work directly for the land and equipment owner. Their job is to watch the miners carefully so that they do not sneak a diamond into their mouths, in their pants, or into their ear canals and steal the profit away from the owner. In 2010, diamonds were scarce, and Isatou's father was not able to provide anything for the family.

That year Isatou's mother provided all for the family. She bought cubes of Maggi (MSG), peppers, and other small things, and then she sold them for a bit of a profit. The petty trading allowed her to buy staples for the house and contribute to the

soso, or saving circle. The fifty women members of the *soso* put in 1,000 Leones a day and if they have faithfully kept their promise to do this, received 50,000 Leones when it is her day. That year, big items, like Isatou's school fees and the family's rent, were paid for through her mother's *soso*. She says she would rather go hungry than forget her *soso* obligation.

Isatou is also a petty trader. She sells groundnuts (peanuts) on a tray balanced on her head. She walks through town after school and on weekends, selling groundnuts to pay for her school fees, uniform, shoes, and other necessities. Her mother boils the groundnuts when Isatou is at school and has them ready for her to sell when she gets home. Sometimes Isatou has to sell some groundnuts before the family can afford to eat sauce with their rice that same afternoon. Other days the profit goes to her schooling. So they get by with '*small-small*.'

In 2011, the family fortunes changed a little. Isatou continued to sell groundnuts and her mother continued to sell small staples to her neighbors but Isatou's father's artisanal mining work group had found a big diamond. This allowed them to pay off their debts and move out of the rental unit into a family-owned compound just about a mile further out of town. Isatou's father was expecting to start a new job with Koidu Holdings, the Kimberlitic diamond company, in town. The big news was that Isatou's mother was expecting their fourth child. The baby was due any day, and Isatou's mother and father were feeling good.

However, Isatou was a bit apprehensive. Isatou's mother had plans for Isatou to come home at lunchtime to pick up rice bread to sell to her friends at the school compound. Because Isatou's mother would not return to petty trading for three or more months, the burden of providing for her school fees would be Isatou's alone.

She would be expected to help with the baby, sell food to her friends at lunch, and continue walking the streets with groundnuts and rice bread for sale in the evenings.

In March 2011, I had the following conversation with Isatou about selling groundnuts:

2. Jordene: Is there anything about selling groundnut that you like?
3. Isatou: I don't like anything there, only that I love is after selling them, only like that is when my mother gave me the groundnut, if I go on selling it, if it is finish earlier, that what me, what makes me happy, but if it is not, I would not be happy because I should be wonder, wondering that I'm going to study. I'm going to do things because after selling the groundnut, when I came home took my books and study, after study I'm going to sleep.

Isatou is usually cheerful and talkative but that day, she was negative and grumpy. I interviewed her before going to visit the family. Her displeasure at selling groundnuts may have been a bit of a cover for her displeasure about having to take on the additional burden of a new baby and a postpartum mother.

When I returned in February 2012, Isatou was thirteen years old, and she had a new baby brother. Her new brother had been born by caesarean section. Isatou's mother and the baby were fine—healthy and robust—but the weariness of the family was visible. They had used all of their savings and borrowed great sums to get the operation. More money had been needed to help the mother recover in the hospital and now, still more expenses were accruing as Isatou's mother was unable to go back to her small but sustaining work as a petty trader. Furthermore, Isatou's father had 'resigned' from his job at Koidu Holdings Diamond Corporation to attend to his wife during her birth. He was not hired back after her recovery.

During her mother's hospitalization, Isatou prepared two meals a day and carried them to the hospital for her mother. She described this period in the February 2012 interview:

4. Isatou: At that time I was selling groundnuts so if I boiled the groundnuts if I can say I had boiled it at nine o'clock then if it is finished at twelve o'clock I will boil another one then I will go. I will prepare some food for my mother. Carry it to the hospital and when I come if the groundnut is finished then I will boil another one and cook for my...the younger ones. After eating then I prepare another food for dinner for my mother.

Isatou's mother was on bed rest for three months and had to refrain from riding in a car or motor bike taxi, doing any hard work including laundry (done by hand with a washboard), and toting water on her head. During this period, Isatou had malaria, and her mother and her mother's sister had helped with the laundry and toting the water but now that she had recovered, Isatou had resumed these chores.

Isatou also continued to sell groundnuts. Her mother had the baby during a school holiday so Isatou did not miss school to take care of her mother. However, she could not return to school because the family did not have the fees for the second term. She was 'driven from school' for not paying her fees and spent a week selling groundnuts to earn her fees. She said:

5. Isatou: So I'm still selling my groundnuts because the term. I have not paid for all the term. It is left 50,000 (Leones) so I'm still selling [groundnuts] not only to pay for me but for my younger ones also. Me and my younger sister—I will give her a little [groundnuts to sell] and me I will take the balance. (We discuss where and when to sell groundnuts.)
6. Jordene: Ummm. . . but through this you are still going to school?
7. Isatou: Yes.
8. Jordene: Why? It is too . . . *e tronga*. It is too difficult.
9. Isatou: (giggles) No. But I can I can try my level best. I can try my own.
But if I see that I am still going to school, I will boil it in the morning and leave it at home and after school, then if I met the groundnut is finished then I boil another one and then I come to sell
10. Jordene: Why. . . why . . . if I were you I would stop school and selling groundnuts all the time.
11. Isatou: No, I don't think that is good for me.
12. Jordene: Why not?
13. Isatou: Because my parents have disturbed to be educated. So if I'm

now at this stage, I must have maybe both my parents said they don't have enough money to pay for three of us. I will, must help because I can say now, I'm a big girl so I must help. . . the home.

Isatou's considers it her duty to help her family send all three children to school. Her parents also expect it of her.

When I interviewed Isatou's father, he was excited about a new job prospect. He had gone back to artisanal diamond mining as a temporary means support the family but now he had a prospect of a salaried position. When you work as an artisanal digger, you do not earn anything daily, but instead you "borrow" the owners' land and equipment. If your work group finds a diamond, the workers get 30 percent of the owners' sale price for the diamond. The workers pay back the company out of this 30 percent. Whatever remains is divided among the men in your work group. However, a salaried job as a security man has a weekly salary and some prestige. Isatou's family was eager for the Nigerian firm to get to town and begin digging.

The job did come through and the family experienced a period of economic growth from February 2012 until January 2013. When I returned in January 2013, Isatou's father had been given notice by the Nigerian company. They were closing due to corruption and mismanagement. He thought he had a few weeks left, maybe until April but he was not sure. Isatou's mother had recovered enough to have a small table in front of the house with Maggi (MSG), plastic bags of cooking oil, small peppers, and other small, daily, cooking items that she sold to her neighbors for a small profit. In 2013, Isatou was in ninth grade, an exam year in the Sierra Leone system; as such, she was exempt from selling groundnuts Tuesday through Friday, so she could study.

This daily work—washing the dishes in the morning, getting her younger sister and brother ready for school, sweeping the compound, and selling groundnuts and rice cakes—has always been part of Isatou’s life. As the oldest girl in the family, she is expected to do this work. Now that she has a benefactor, I had naively thought that she would have less work to do, more time to study. But there is something in the idea of working for what your family wants that sets Isatou apart from the other girls. Isatou is much more motivated to earn money than the other girls in this study. Her family seems more united, more set on a specific path together than the other families I have come to know. Isatou’s work ethic in her eagerness to support her family is a major part of what defines her for me.

4.1.3. Suffering

All of the families I have come to know speak of suffering. It is a common refrain in Sierra Leone. Particularly that the mothers are suffering to send the girlchild to school and Isatou has internalized this message. For example, in a 2012 interview she says:

14. Isatou: I don’t want to be a dropout. God forbid whilst my parents are suffering then at the end they should for me again. They have started to suffer for me again. I don’t want that to be. They have started to suffer again.
15. Jordene: Do you think your parents will. . . ummm . . . benefit from you becoming educated?
16. Isatou: Yes I think that.
17. Jordene: How?
18. Isatou: Right now they are suffering for me to be educated. Then if I’ve been educated, I finish my college then I start to work. Who do you think I will remember? My parents, because they suffer for me. If they were not suffering for me I won’t be at that office. I will just encourage my parents to encourage me also then and when I’m educated now, I will be sponsoring them for what they have done. The tears should be out of their eyes.

19. Jordene: The tears should be out of their eyes.
 20. Isatou: Yes.

The conversation above was in 2012; the year before, in 2011, I had the following discussion with Isatou's father:

21. Jordene: I'm trying to understand . . . for the two of you parents to be so much, to put Isatou in school, when she could be a market girl, right now and make a lot of money. 'Cause she is smart and she knows her math. And she is strong. So she could go to work every day and really help the family. So that L (younger brother) could get a fine education. Do you see get me?
22. Isatou's Father: Yeah, I get you.
23. Jordene: And there are many, many parents in Sierra Leone and in Liberia. I talk to many, many parents and they say, "Well the girl should work. She should contribute so that the other children can go to school later."/
24. Isatou's Father: / Yes.
25. Jordene: /But you are different.
26. Isatou's Father: Yes. I have reason to that. My reason is . . . presently at least see. Is started encouraging her. Maybe the education is settled. She will focus on the looking out on that. And when she start earning some amount for herself—buying expensive cloth and shoes—aha! And thinking she is very beautiful. She is getting some connections and attractions. So the focus on the education side. So my dream will not conclude. I prefer, I prefer to strive in any way out for her to be educated in the end.
27. Jordene: But you can't eat education?
28. Isatou's Father: Yes that one is true but when she gets educated, I can eat from that.
(laughter)
29. Jordene: Okay, I see your long range plan/
30. Isatou's Father: /exactly
31. Jordene: / it's not a short range plan.
32. Isatou's Father: Exactly cause for now I can jump dance (but) at my old age, I'll be expecting Isatou and the others to assist me getting get my food. By then . . . I'll by then I'll just walk by having a stick, while walking, maybe so I won't be active in finding food for myself so I'll be expecting them to do that for me. So you see, for now, I'm looking at something ahead.
33. Jordene: So this idea of suffering today for a better tomorrow/
34. Isatou's Father: /exactly better future.
35. Jordene: Is that a Kono idea is that a Kono place or ethnic group

- idea? I'm not seeing that as a Kono idea I'm thinking/
 36. Frankie: /most anyway that I know (Kono people)
 37. Jordene: I don't know. I mean, some people I know just think for
 today because tomorrow might not come.
 38. Isatou's Father: Hmm. Oh well, it is their own philosophy but for me, I
 prefer tomorrow. For now I can jump. I can do anything
 I want to. At my old age, the jobs I'm doing presently I
 can't do tomorrow.

Isatou's father sees his future resting in the education of his children. He knows that the backbreaking- work of digging diamonds is a tenuous job and as he ages, it will be harder and harder for him. His work literally makes him suffer. The heat of standing in the exposed sun, waist-high in muddy water, bending over shaking and shifting, always under the eye of one or two overseers is suffering. But the suffering that Isatou's father is referring to goes beyond the daily digging, into the times when he or his wife go without food or medicine so that they can pay the school fees.

Isatou has joined her parents in 'going without' so that her younger siblings can be educated. My NGO began paying for Isatou's school fees, uniforms, books, shoes, and other school essentials in 2012 after the interview quoted above. Yet Isatou continues to sell groundnuts and rice cake at lunch at her school, after school on Saturday, and all day Sunday. She is making her contribution to the family and taking on her share of the suffering.

4.1.4. Tradition

Isatou's family suffers for education and they suffer for tradition. When I first visited the family in January 2010, there were six additional children living in the house. Isatou's aunt had been murdered by her husband a few days before my arrival. I had seen photos of the deceased woman passed around and offered for sale in the local food shop. Although I could not really tell, the man selling the photos said that

they showed that the victim's organs had been removed for use in witchcraft. When I was sitting on their porch asking about all the additional children they were taking care of, I did not realize that the dead woman in the photos was Isatou's aunt. Later when I asked Frankie, my translator, about it, he just shook his head and would not discuss it. When I returned in March 2010 and asked about the additional children, Isatou's father simply said that they had gone to the village to live with other relatives.

I have tried to ask about what happened to the children, to the deceased aunt, and to the former uncle, as there are so many aspects I do not understand. As far as I know, Isatou's mother has only one sister in Kono, and she is still alive. As far as I know, the murdered aunt was not Isatou's father's second wife. I know that Isatou's father was not the man charged with the murder by the police. I was told that the deceased woman was a Fulani, the same tribe as Isatou's mother. So perhaps they were distantly related and as tradition dictates, the children went to live with the closest relative or a member of the same tribe from the same region after the murder.

Traditions are important to Isatou's mother. She takes great pride in her Fulani cooking and ways of doing household work. She makes it clear that Isatou is still learning how to be a Fulani woman and would need several years of apprenticeship before she is a good cook. It was also important to Isatou's mother that Isatou be circumcised. Isatou was clear that it was her mother who had requested it.

Isatou shared this story with her best friend, Kadidja and me in 2011, when she was in seventh grade. I had been interviewing Isatou's best friend in a small, dark, and empty classroom that provided some respite from the heat. I remember fanning myself during the interview just to get a little breeze. Isatou burst into the classroom,

plucked the fan from my hand, and sat down next to her friend. I let her know that the tape recorder was on. Kadidja and I had been talking about when she would become a woman and Isatou joined the topic. They explained that being a woman would happen after they grew breasts, then menstruated, got married and only then would they be women. I asked if they thought they would go to “*this bondo business?*”

39. Kadidja: Since I was in class two. I went there.
 40. Jordene: Oh since you were in class two. What about you, Isatou, did you go?
 41. Isatou: I was in class two.
 42. Jordene: Did you go together?
 43. Kadidja: No.
 44. Isatou: No. (They explain that they weren't in class two together because Kadidja skipped a grade).
 45. Jordene: Because in some places in the world, they say that after you the *bondo* business you are automatically a woman. How you see um?
 46. Kadidja: Fine. Our own country people say that. Not here. In our own village if someone has gone to the *bondo* and you are not yet, you will be suffered and you will go to the *bondo*. But for us but I don't like it. They do that culture. That's why I do not go there.

Then Kadidja told Isatou and me the story of how her grandmother hired *digbas* (traditional cutters) to do her circumcision and how they cut her while she lay on the washroom floor.

Isatou sat quietly listening, which is very unusual for Isatou. I asked Isatou what she was thinking.

47. Jordene: What are you thinking, my Isa friend?
 48. Isatou: Just listening to her.
 49. Jordene: You don't listen. You talk.
 50. All: (laugh)
 51. Isatou: Me at the time that I went. But the time that my mother told my father that she wanted me to go there. My father was wanted to go and tell the chief but some people told him that what KADIDJA has said. That you should go with palm oil, two bags of rice, three bottle and go with it, white salt and a sheep . . . (more details). So my father was not having all those things. So he did not go to the chief again.

So one night, we are sitting then he said, “Isatou you and your sister are going to go and sleep to that woman. I said, “But father, I don’t know her. How should I go and sleep to her?” He said, “Just go there. She won’t do anything”. So I said ok. We went there that night. So I went and sleep there. We are just sleeping. The woman woke me up and said Isatou, “Come here”.. I said, “No auntie, I want to sleep.” She said, “Come here. This is your own room.” I went there and she closed the door. I want to lie down but she said, “Come here.” She tied my eyes. I don’t know what passed.

Then after the morning, my mother makes some she cooked *sati* and bring it for me. But I didn’t eat that day. Because it was very painful to me that my father did not tell me and also my mother did not tell me. The woman ate the food. And gave back to my mother. The next day she forced me to eat. But I ate just a little. It took me, I don’t know four or six days and I went back home.

Some people asked me but my mother warned me not to say anything. I just say I am not feeling my head and cold. So after that . . . after the things have passed and I don’t feel bright. I start to go to school. Cause it was in holiday time.

- 52. Jordene: (unclear) And did you tell your friends? Or was it a big secret?
- 53. Isatou: No my mother warned me that I should not tell anyone.
- 54. Jordene: So when did you start to tell your friends?
- 55. Isatou: No not yet.

I have listened to many circumcision stories and Isatou’s account is not unusual.

What I find unusual is that Isatou equated the physical suffering with the emotional betrayal by her parents (line 51). For Isatou, her parents’ not telling her what was going to happen was just as painful as the actual physical pain. At seven years of age, she would not have been able to comprehend what was going to happen anymore than she was able to process what had happened.

Isatou is a girl who wants to know what will happen, and she considers herself part of the decision-making structure of her family. Yet, she is a child and does not have power. Nevertheless, for Isatou it is important to feel informed and empowered. Later in that conversation, I asked the two girls if they knew the current laws on female genital cutting in Sierra Leone. They told me about the traditional *bondo*

society and some of the *bondo* laws, although they confused secular laws with traditional rules.

56. Jordene: And how do you see it for your own daughters?
57. Kadidja: (snort) Very hard. But they said you must go under. That if you fail to do It, it is a crime. So.
58. Jordene: Do you know what the law is in Sierra Leone?
59. Kadidja: No. I knew some. If you child does not go to the *bondo* bush, she should not abuse someone that has gone there. And if he or she has not gone there, they should not sing their song. If you sing it is a crime. If you sing it cannot have it.

I told the girls that the current law requires girls to be eighteen and give their written consent. Both girls snorted with indignation. Isatou crossed her arms in front of her chest and shook her head. We sat in silence for a minute then Isatou changed the subject by saying, “Papaya, Papaya” which is a common way to break the tension or change a subject in Sierra Leone. This made us all laugh. Even when faced with the betrayal of her parents, the memories of a physically painful experience, and the general injustice of her culture, Isatou’s response was to take control of the situation.

4.1.5. An Educated Woman

Taking control of a situation, being in control, and controlling herself are frequent themes for Isatou. Being out of control is something that she wants to avoid. She believes she will gain control through education. Isatou likes to talk and she relishes the topic of an educated woman vs. an uneducated woman. She will happily pontificate on this theme repeatedly. In the second interview in May 2010 in her primary school headmistress’ office, she explained her views as such:

60. Jordene: So let me ask you, what is the difference between a girl in school and a girl not in school?
61. Isatou: A girl in school is more important than the girl outside because the girl outside she won’t learn anything unless to cook in the kitchen, to do some works at home. She won’t know what is

this (pointing to a book). She won't know how to . . . won't know how to pretend, umh, to present herself, how to secure herself from sickness. She won't know anything like what we children are saying. Because I won't *put* myself out there although I didn't dream of do that. Many of them are saying, "Bad water no de clean"; that is what we are saying.

In this brief monologue, Isatou claims her place as an educated young girl who knows about books, how to present herself, and how to keep herself healthy. She affirms that she will stay in school because once you are out of school you will be tarnished forever.

Later, Isatou affirms that it is better to be a girl:

62. Isatou: I think it better to be a girl.
 63. Jordene: How come?
 64. Goldy: *What'n do?*
 65. Isatou: Because if I'm a girl, like right now, they said girls are important more than boys. Because they have seen our strengths. Now they say, if a girlchild is educate, they may help you. But if, like if I'm a boy, if I'm a girl, de another one is a boy, if I sat my exam, my WASSCE examination (West Africa Senior School Certificate Exam), if I am I the boy pass me or I pass the boy, if we carry our results any place, they may take me first before the boy.
 66. Goldy: Hmm, so if they have the same results they make take the girl first. Everyone say. *Who na de say* say if the girlchild is more important?
 67. Isatou: They de *talcum*. *Talcum*. (Translation: They say)

Later in the same field visit, Isatou's father gives the exact same example. He says:

68. Isatou's Father: More especially for women them today. Yeah for woman little education what's she gets in her head, the man no matter how big or how far he done go in education. The woman *wey gets small in her head, and na man na get big in his head*, na go for a job. The woman na the first person na they take today. We know that. (Translation: Even if the woman has only a little knowledge and the man has a lot of knowledge, the woman will be given the job.)
 69. Jordene: Yeah?
 70. Isatou's Father: Yeah! It de happen.
 71. Jordene: Why?
 72. Isatou's Father: For encourage the woman. Let her learn. Yes. They

- make na do that today. We see *um boku* signs in the offices today. (*boku*= many)
73. Jordene: But that is not fair to the men
74. Isatou's Father: Not fair but if in order to for the girlchild for to emphasize see the example they not go bother to learn but if they de see that the motivate them for let them learn.

I wonder if Isatou and her father have discussed this or if they both listened to the same speaker over the radio. Isatou's father adds to her content by sharing his view that the purpose of hiring women before men is to encourage women to learn. He agrees that it is not fair to men but is willing to see his fellow men be passed over in order to 'motivate them [women] for let them learn.' I have discussed this idea with many men and women in Kono and although there are certainly men who agree with Isatou's father, there are many more men who believe that men should be the primary breadwinners for their families and given preference for jobs.

4.1.6. Cooking (An educated woman and a wife)

Isatou's ambition is not only that she be a breadwinner but also that she will be better than anyone in her family. She wants to better herself more than anyone else and is quite competitive with her friends and classmates. Yet she knows that she must perform traditional womanly duties, particularly cooking. I am frequently asked if I can cook, what I cook, and if I cook every day, as some sort of measure of the woman I am. Cooking in Sierra Leone seems to be a marker of womanhood and worthiness:

75. Isatou: My mother sometimes flog me that I don't love work. Only when they said, "Come and do this," I go and take my book this. "Come and do this," I go and take my book. That is what I know; she said if I think that if I am educated, I won't be in the kitchen to cook. This is what she asks me.
76. Goldy: You will be *what'tin*?
77. Jordene: In the kitchen to cook.
78. Goldy: Oh yeah, yeah, yeah.

79. Isatou: But I always tell her that, “Mommy, I can practice how to cook. Also I want to know education than how to cook. Cause If I know education, I won’t be suffer to cook. Because if I have only me and my husband, I may buy some things, outside, but not things that they are selling on the street, that dust area just packing on them. I will buy some things that is very secure. That the person is very clean that making it. That is what I will buy for us to eat.
80. Isatou: Then my mother says, “One day I must put my hand in the pot to cook.”
81. Isatou: I tell my mother that sometime I will cook but I want to educate. “You are the one that send me to school. You say I should learn. Don’t flog me to cook then. Don’t flog me to cook. Don’t flog me to cook. Flog me, to let me learn. That I will be the better in our family than anybody because my father’s sisters, they don’t have any control.” (May 2010 interview) [Flogging is when the authority figure whips the child with a kind of stiff rope called rattan. Usually the flogging is done around the buttocks, hips, or back of the legs. Sometimes the child must stand in a circle drawn in the dirt or with chalk so that they cannot move away from the flogger.]

In 2011, Isatou’s mother confirmed that no matter what, her daughter would learn to cook:

82. Isatou’s mother: *Isatou de learn for cook, go to school, get married. She go learn. I go learn her for cook. The days Saturday and Sunday na time. Saturday she can be with me if she no go for class. Sunday she de go to class. But the days she no go to class, Saturday and Sunday, she can be with me. Sunday she can be with me. Isatou sit down and for watch. Some time go she de reach. When they say holiday, big holiday with me in the house. She boku, boku small-small thing. But schooldays if I say, lef me do her u all things, one thing she go learn if she does all things she no de go learn for now I say that she suffer for education. Until God he does help right now I left for live. (Translation: “Isatou will learn to cook, go to school, and get married. I will teach her to cook. There is time on Saturdays and Sundays when she doesn’t go to school; she can sit by me and watch how to cook. She definitely will learn to cook. She does many small things now. If I were to ask her to do all of the housework now, she wouldn’t learn her school education. So for now she has to do small things and suffer in order to get an education. God has helped because he left me to live.)*

Isatou's mother is hard working, and she takes care of her family by petty trading, cooking, and supporting her daughters in their selling. She is proud of her domestic skills and Isatou frequently talks about learning these skills from her mother. It is important to Isatou's mother that her daughter knows how to cook and perform the other duties customarily given to women.

Although Isatou agrees with her mother that cooking is very important, she is also trying to plan for a professional life. One of my joys in interviewing Isatou is watching her grapple with these modern women questions and seeing how she tries to solve these conflicts as she grows from a young girl to a young woman. We had this conversation about cooking in 2011:

83. Jordene: What is the most important knowledge to have in your head?
84. Isatou: Me like educating and how to cook.
85. Jordene: Okay, and when you have your own house and you are a big woman, what are you going to do?
86. Isatou: That time if I would be having my, if would be having somebody that is helping me.
87. Jordene: Hmm.
88. Isatou: If I cook today and tomorrow if I feel tired I would just say you are going to assist me today because I have not, I have feel tired so I would not able to cook.
89. Jordene: Hmm.
90. Isatou: I think that, that person will not say no or say anything; the person would help me.
91. Jordene: Do you think it's possible for a woman to work for example, in, at bank all day long and then come home and cook. What do those ladies do that work in the bank? What do they do?
92. Isatou: Sometime they have house girls or when they went to the bank and they have girls will. . . they will leave the house girls at home and she will cook and after the bank when the person comes she will just eat and relax.
93. Jordene: Hmm.
94. Isatou: Cause if you are working ... whole, at the whole of the day, the time that you will wanted to relax and you saw other work, you will be very weak, you won't do anything.
95. Jordene: Hmm. So what about buying food on the street? Do people do that?
96. Isatou: Some people do that but me; I don't like that because I don't

know how you are making your food or whatever. If I buy that and I don't eat and I eat anyone in my mouth, then I pull it. I don't love that. So I prefer that somebody left a home and cook for me.

Other times, Isatou has told me that she will buy food on the street for her husband and herself.

She has also told me that she will cook for her husband on Sundays because it is important for a wife to cook for her husband. Sometimes I wonder what Isatou would think of the countless women's magazine articles devoted to the topic of how to prepare good food for the family and still be successful at a professional job.

4.1.7. Ambition

The first day I met Isatou, she walked into her headmistress' office erect and composed. She sat down and answered the introductory questions, about her family and school, with ease. I then asked her what she liked about school. She responded:

97. Isatou: I love school because I want to be a minister for a future tomorrow.
98. Jordene: You want to be a minister?
99. Isatou : Yes.
100. Goldy: What kind of minister?
101. Isatou: For the whole world. For Sierra Leone. I want to build a better Sierra Leone/
102. Goldy: /For the whole world?
103. Isatou: For Sierra Leone. I want to build a better Sierra Leone.

When I asked her if she knew any ministers she said that she knew of some and that she had read about them in her social studies books.

For Isatou, school will make her a leader. She knows that ministers are leaders so that seems like a good thing to say. When I interviewed her four months later she was a bit vaguer:

104. Jordene: What do you think will happen if you stay in school?
 105. Isatou: I will be very glad because I want to be a future leader for tomorrow. I want to, I want to be, I want my mother to be very happy with me. They tell me that to send girls to school is important not only boys are important to go to school but girls also are important.

At different times, Isatou has wanted to be a bank manager, lawyer, and President of Sierra Leone.

I spur on these bold proclamations and frequently tease her about becoming president. In 2011, we had a serious conversation about the reality of her chance at actually becoming president:

106. Jordene: So why do you want to be educated? In the end, you might not Be president. (Pause) I'm sorry/
 107. Isatou: /Yes/
 108. Jordene: /But reality is—maybe you won't be president?
 109. Isatou: Yes.
 110. Jordene: So why work so hard?
 111. Isatou: I just want to be educated that is why I'm working hard. I don't want to be like that girl (Fatumatu). She's not now going to school. (Continue discussion of Fatumatu).

Isatou is clear about wanting to be a professional but she is also clear that the real goal of education is to be 'educated' by whatever standards are set in your community.

In her family, Isatou has already achieved more than anyone else has. Isatou's mother never went to school and she cannot read or write. Isatou's father went through grade four or five but then dropped out because his father could not afford the school fees. He is ambitious and speaks of his regrets, including not being able to do more in life because of his lack of education.

4.1.8. Friends

Like her father, Isatou is ambitious, and she makes sure her friends are ambitious. When I met Isatou in 2010, her best friend competed with her for the

position as top student in the class. On the WASSCE exam, Isatou scored 299 and her best friend got 300. When Isatou transferred to a different school, it took her a semester to become the second girl in the class and she was determined to be the top student by the next semester. Isatou and her friends frequently discuss how they are going to be president and vice-president or bank manager and lawyers working together. When they are hanging out on my porch, they tease each other by saying things like- “Ms. Bank Manager, go get Jordene a glass of water” or they claim the seat in the front of the truck saying that they will be president of the world so they need to see what is happening on the road. That they want to be important women is one of the criteria Isatou uses for choosing her friends.

Isatou also relies on the opinion of her mother when choosing her friends. We have had gossip sessions about the girls in the neighborhood with whom Isatou’s mother does not want her associating. Isatou, her mother, Isatou’s aunt, and I sit and watch the women parade by on the street and although Isatou’s mother is very quiet, she will snort or shake her head when Isatou delivers the gossip on each person passing by. In 2102, Isatou and I had the following conversation:

112. Jordene: Okay. Last year you told me about one girl who jumped in the street.
(Translation: jumped in the street = exchanged sex for money or items)
113. Isatou: Yes, sometime I think about her because she was my friend.
114. Jordene: Hmm.
115. Isatou: But my mother warned me to stay away from her.
116. Jordene: Hmm.
117. Isatou: She said that girl is not a better girl. So I should stay with, away from her. Then after, I don’t know one month, then her mother said she is pregnant.
118. Jordene: Oh. How do you think that happened?
119. Isatou: I don’t. That day, that day that they told I said “HO! It thanks to God. I said because if my mother had told me stay away from that girl and I didn’t she should have pushed me in bad things then a cont den I go on doing it. Stop my mother’s work.

What my mother will tell me I won't do it again, I will just be doing bad things, and her, will be bad company.

Isatou's close relationship with her mother is not unusual. Many of the schoolgirls who live with their mothers enjoy a close relationship. Girls are expected to help their mothers with the cooking, cleaning, and tending to the younger children. Most of the time, young girls are expected to be sitting with their mother, ready to run for more water or stir the cooking pot. While girls may spend a great deal of time with their mothers, they do not always respect their mother's views of the world; yet Isatou listens to her mother and bases many decisions on how her mother would react. Isatou's mother has none of the assets that Isatou values in her friends ---she cannot read or write, she does not know English, and she is not ambitious—but she values education and wants her daughter to succeed at both school and cooking.

4.1.9. My Relationship with Isatou

Maybe because Isatou knows that she can always snuggle in between her parents and that she is free to express her own opinions, she was the first schoolgirl to come sit on my porch. A day or two after our first interview, she led four of her friends through the metal gate and across the compound to knock on my door. Isatou and her pals were in their street clothes and filled with giggles. They took off their sandals at the door and flopped onto the couch. Within seconds, Isatou had bounced up again to take my hat off the table. Putting on my hat and swaying her non-existent hips, holding her head erect, she said in nasally Krio, "This town is nothing but dirt. In Freetown, we have electricity and running water. We Krios⁴ are better than you country people!" Then she grabbed my sunglasses and purse, slipped on my heels

⁴ Krio is the name of a tribe as well as the name of the lingua franca of Sierra Leone.

and stopped swaying. Walking with her back erect, bottom tucked in, she walked around the room, stiff-legged, laughing as she said, “Now I’m a white lady. I speak English. I am from America.”

Over the years, she has become even more familiar with me, my things, and my ways of doing things. She will walk into the house unannounced and flop down on my bed, telling me to move over so she can have more room. She has inspected my clothes, proclaiming this or that to be good quality or bad quality. She demanded to know where my red sandals had gone when they were finally beyond repair and abandoned. I have brought her Harry Potter books, and we have discussed whether she is Harry or Hermione. She has scolded me for drinking palm wine, claiming that women did not drink and good Muslims did not drink either. And I think her boldness is delightful.

One day she pulled the neckline of my big housedress open and looking at my breasts exclaimed, “Your boobies are white too!” Boobies, as Isatou calls them, have been a source of discussion from the first time we met when she explained that the girls with big breasts were not allowed to stay in her primary school. In 2013, her ninth grade year, she proudly showed me her little beginnings of breasts. She has asked me about menstruation and to explain ‘mommy and daddy business.’ She has said that she cannot talk about ‘body things’ with her mother or teachers.

Isatou has never asked me for anything, not money for school fees or a piece of bread on my table, but I have freely given. At first, it was a bit of bread and tea after school and other small things that were available in my house. However, I refrained from jumping in with larger treats. Her shoes finally broke my determination to be an unbiased researcher. I thought that money would taint the

researcher-subject relationship. Nevertheless, after our fourth formal interview in 2011, when we sat quietly swinging our feet under the bench, just looking out over the school courtyard, I noticed that the soles of her black school shoes had completely separated from the tops. I remember her telling me about trying to sew the top onto the sole but the needle would not go through the plastic. So now, she shuffled to and from school, almost five miles each way, until she could get home to her only other shoes, a pair of plastic flip-flops. I had planned to interview her family after school that day so we left school and I bought her a new pair of shoes on the way to her home. I interviewed her family and then when I went to get in the car to return to my home, Isatou asked to come with me. I was surprised at myself for immediately saying yes and I realized that I had come to care very deeply for this strong young woman and knew that I could not pretend to be an unbiased researcher any more.

4.2. Analysis of Isatou's Portrait

In the interviews with Isatou, we construct her figured world by contrasting her as a schoolgirl with other girls who are not in school. We compare her to the boys with whom she will compete for employment in the future. Isatou believes that her figured world of being a schoolgirl will lead to the figured world of being an educated woman. Right now, the community of educated women in her future is largely imagined as she does not actually know many educated women. There are few women in her community that are educated, fewer who have jobs, and very few who have jobs equal to a man. Isatou's principal is a man, all of the medical people are men, and all of the community leaders are men. Her elementary school headmistress was a woman and she knows four who have professional jobs- two NGO workers plus two bank tellers. She knows the woman who owns a tavern and the woman who owns

her own restaurant. Other women she knows sell small things by the road or braid hair for small coins.

Isatou and her cohort will describe one girl as a ‘schoolgirl’ whereas another girl has ‘jumped in the street.’ It is a casual, descriptive comment, like whether they are tall or short. Indeed, in Kono, where 40% of the girls do not go to school (Gassimu, 2012) and several of Isatou’s classmates have stopped going to school, it is a normalized way for the community to place labels on children. Most of the girls in the initial interviews used this labeling and as such, it became a question that I would ask during the interviews – “What is the difference between a girl in school and a girl out of school?” In answering this question, the schoolgirls use language that reproduces the distinction and contributes to a gendered performance. To understand Isatou’s binary construction of schoolgirls and out-of-school girls, I use Gee’s analytic tool when he asks:

What figured worlds are relevant here? What must I, as an analyst, assume people feel, value, and believe, consciously or not, in order to talk (write), act, and/or interact this way? (2011, p. 95)

The analysis of Isatou’s portrait seeks to answer this question. First, I discuss the binary construction of schoolgirls vs. out-of-school girls. This binary defines the boundaries of the figured world of schoolgirls. Secondly, I review the idea of role models and its meaning to the figured world of schoolgirls. Third, I look at the ways in which the figured world of schoolgirls leads to entrance in an imaginary community of educated women. Finally, I explore the assumption that education will lead to equality with men in work and in marriage.

4.2.1. The Figured Worlds of Schoolgirls:

4.2.1.1. What schoolgirls know

Isatou believes that her education will give her an advantage over girls who have not gone to school. Isatou's mother cannot read, most of her neighbors' mothers cannot read, and many of her friends cannot read as well as she can. Forty-two percent of all adults (over 24 years old) have a basic level of literacy. In the group just older than Isatou, 50% of females and 69% of males can read and write (UNICEF, 2013). Isatou already belongs to the 50% of females who can read and write and has surpassed the basic reading level. We had this conversation in March 2011 when Isatou had entered JSS:

120. Jordene: Can you give an example? What does the schoolgirl know that the not-going-to-school-girl doesn't know?
121. Isatou: Like I can give example like myself.
122. Jordene: Hmm.
123. Isatou: I'm now in secondary school, I, I can try how to speak or do something. But somebody that is not going to school if you ask, how to speak or do or write a letter or anything, she would be telling you that you are just joking with her. Because she is not going to school and she would not know if she said if somebody that is not going to school, then you write a letter then you please come and read it for me, they have just giving me this letter she would just look it like a picture and give it to you back.
124. Jordene: Hmm.
125. Isatou: She will just laugh and give it to you because she don't know ever, anything in the pic, in the letter.

For Isatou, school-going girls learn how to read, how to prevent illness, and will be the future leaders of tomorrow.

Other girls list additional attributes to the figured world of schoolgirls. In 2010, Hannah, a girl who has since dropped out, said:

126. Hannah: The girls in school have knowledge but the girls in house don't have any knowledge. Because they don't know what is education. That is why they don't come to school.

127. Jordene: What is knowledge?
 128. Hannah: Knowledge is when someone have a sense that anything you ask, to decide for their will. (long pause)
 129. Jordene: What if you don't have knowledge?
 130. Hannah: They will take you for a fool.

For Hannah, being a schoolgirl was being able to have sense and to decide for herself. Unfortunately for Hannah, she dropped out of school her first year in JSS because she could not come up with the school fees. Indeed nationwide, while 76% of all girls attend primary school, only 33% go on to attend secondary school (UNICEF, 2013). However, in Kono, only 60% of girls even begin to attend primary school (Gassimu, 2012) so the percentage of those who make the leap to secondary school may be even lower. I hope that Hannah learned enough to at least, in Isatou's words prevent sickness, if not enough to be a future leader.

In Isatou's list of attributes of a schoolgirl, she repeats the tie between an education and improved health. This is an often-repeated correlation throughout the literature (Lloyd & Mensch, 2008; Vandermoortele & Delamonica, 2000) and in international development discourse (Population Reference Bureau, 2011). In sensitization campaigns run by NGOs or the government, health is a frequently cited reason for allowing girls, in particular, to go to school (Bruce & Hallman, 2008; Kendall, 2008). The slogans and explanations of campaigns that promote that a woman should be educated so that she will know how to read the label was on her children's medicines were repeated by my neighbors, the NGO workers at ISIS, and several of the other girls. This kind of direct cause and effect example is often used by NGO workers to inspire girls, and for their families to allow them to attend school.

4.2.1.2. Being out of school

4.2.1.2.1. Never went to school

Equally compelling is the idea that a schoolgirl is somehow ‘better’ than the child who is out of school. In Isatou’s portrait, I quote her as saying: “bad water no de clean.” I repeat the full quote here to explore further its meanings:

131. Isatou: A girl in school is more important than the girl outside because the girl outside she won’t learn anything unless to cook in the kitchen, to do some works at home. She won’t know what is this (*pointing to a book*). She won’t know how to . . . won’t know how to pretend, umh, to present herself, how to secure herself from sickness. She won’t know anything like what we children are saying. Because I won’t put myself out there although I didn’t dream of do that. Many of them are saying, “Bad water no de clean”; that is what we are saying.

Isatou repeats the idea of good girls going to school and learning about health and bad girls are those who do not know how to take care of themselves. She uses the Krio expression “Bad water no de clean” (Translation: bad water can never be cleaned). This usually refers to a person or a situation in whom or which you cannot see the evil but know that it does not mean it is not there. It is used as a caution to stay away from people who may have done ‘bad’ or whose families may be known to be ‘bad’. For example I heard it used about a rebel soldier who was trying to start a business. The speakers did not believe that he had reformed from his previous ways enough to be trusted to do business. When Isatou uses this expression, she is condemning girls who do not go to school as being ‘bad water’ and thus without hope for the future.

Isatou affirms the out-of-school-girls’ image as one of failure by saying that girls who are not in school will only learn how to cook and work at home. She claims that girls in school are more important than girls who never went to school. Isatou is repeating what she has heard from her family, her compound, and her school community when she adds, “like what we children are saying.” The “children” are the schoolgirls but they are also the voice of the larger community.

Interestingly, Isatou and her cohort do not fault the girls for not having gone to school. They place the blame for not sending the girls to school either on the girls' parents or on God's will. Isatou's best friend put it this way:

132. Jordene: What is the difference between school girls and not in school?
133. Kadidja: Well, the girls who is in school there is a lot of pain. But you have to patient. But the ones who are in the street, some of them, they do not have parents. And when you do not have parents, the ones that do not have parents, they go outside and go and find what they find to eat.

In Kadidja's words, the girls who have never gone to school do not have parents and as such are beggars in the street looking for food.

Fantu, who is the subject of the next chapter, said in her first interview that girls who do not go to school do not have people to support them and therefore do not have the money to go to school. She says that girls that go to school have white people to pay their school fees:

134. Jordene: What is the difference between a girl going to school and girl who is not going to school?
135. Fantu: Hmm?
136. Jordene: Some girls are going to school; some are not going to school? What is the difference?
137. Fantu: The one that go to school? The one in school white people de get money for school (unclear). The one de no go school no get nothing for pay for them. They no de leave the house. Nothing for no de support them. They just down in the house (unclear). For do those vegetable things na house. Maybe they garden sell and eat.

The girls who have never gone to school lack the resources to go to school but are not necessarily failures for their lack of education. If only 60% of girls attend primary school that means there is 40% of girls who have never entered school (Gassimu, 2012). These 40% are the girls that elicit pity even from those who have to sell groundnuts on the street to pay their school fees.

4.2.1.2.2. Drop Outs

If Isatou and her cohort of schoolgirls find girls who have never gone to school as being worthy of their pity, they find girls who have dropped out worthy of their scorn. Ophelia, another of the research participants, called girls who have dropped out “not a useful person.” In a place where everyone, from the smallest three-year-old to the granny lying on her mat, has a job and a use in the family, being seen as useless is a serious offence.

138. Ophelia: *Behteh bikors galpikin if I ehduket I fayn for luk bort if yu nor ehduket ehni say yu pas dehn de put mort pan yu dehn se dis bin de skul bort naw I nor de go skul i nor ehduket nor to behteh porsin, bort we yu ehduket dehn de rorn bi yehn yu. Dehn de fala yu ehni say yu go bikors yu na ehduketehd porsin.* (Translation: Better to be a girlchild. If I am educated I am good to see/look at but if she is not educated, anywhere she goes she will be gossiped and people will say she went to school but she is not going to school; she is not educated and is not a useful person).

The girls on the porch frequently discuss their peers who have dropped out. One of the girls that they frequently gossip about dropped out before sixth grade. The girl, Fatumatu, was a rival of Isatou’s for the attention of Isatou’s best friend at one time, but then Isatou and Kadidja turned on her. They retell the story of Fatumatu’s demise frequently and provide me with updates when I return each time. In 2011, Isatou recounted to Kadidja and me the last time she saw Fatumatu:

139. Isatou:

I just want to be educated; that is why I’m working hard. I don’t want to be like that girl (Fatumatu). She’s not now going to school. She’s just. The last time I met her –I don’t know where. That time I was selling groundnuts. I met her. She saw – she was the first person that saw me. When she saw me, she wanted to run. Then I said, “Ho Fatumatu! I saw you”.. Then she stand and look at me. She bow her head until I passed. Then I said, “It’s for you. Because the time I was advising you that you should go to school.” At that time, at that time, you that time, you just, she just, that time I was advising her, she was wanted to flog me –only that time my friends were there so I said,

“OK, if I am telling you bad things, you will see it in the future.” Then I leave her. I went to Kadidja and I advise her. So that time when I saw her she was she was very much ashamed. I passed and then I said, “It is good for you to be educated but you have spoiled your future.” I said, “If you were the person that should have take my advice. You should be like us. We are now in JSS”. And she also should be in JSS but, “You did not wait for, you did not take your mother’s advice and you did not take my advice. That is why you are now suffering.”

Fatumatu is a suffering person who has gone against the advice of her friends and her mother. She is seen as ashamed of her life and having spoiled her future.

This shame and sense of waste is put upon those who drop out of school by those who are able to maintain themselves in school. It is seen as the personal fault of the child, not the fault of her parents or of society for allowing primary education for one child to cost almost as much as the Gross National Income⁵ of \$340.00. Isatou illustrated this as she continued her diatribe against Fatumatu:

140. Isatou: I asked her for the baby. She said she don’t have any baby. Then I said, “It is your business if you are hiding it from me.” So I leave her there and I come. Then I said for me to be like this girl, I don’t mind. Every day that afterschool, I don’t mind if every day after school I sell my groundnuts. I be like this girl. That is why I’m selling my groundnuts to be educated; I don’t want to be like this girl.

Isatou’s hard work ethic and determination to be educated are clear motivators for her. However, the way in which she returns to the theme of Fatumatu year after year and her feelings of superiority over Fatumatu for having won Kadidja and remained in school suggest that Isatou’s vow to stay in school is a daily triumph of her will.

For girls who never went to school and girls who have dropped out, the discussion focuses on how the individual girls and their families have failed. This

⁵ **GNI per capita** - Gross national income (GNI) is the sum of value added by all resident producers plus any product taxes (less subsidies) not included in the valuation of output plus net receipts of primary income (compensation of employees and property income) from abroad. GNI per capita is gross national income divided by mid-year population. GNI per capita in US dollars is converted using the World Bank Atlas method (UNICEF, 2013, p. Definitions of the Indicators).

figured world puts the responsibility for achieving an education on the girl and her family. In his list of tools of inquiry, Gee asks:

How are the relevant figured worlds here helping to reproduce, transform, or create social, cultural, institutional, and/or political relationships? What Discourses and Conversations are these figured worlds helping to reproduce, transform, or create? (2011, p. 96)

The figured world of being a schoolgirl puts the onus on the girls and their families to pay for their education. Seldom does anyone mention the inequity of school fees, required uniforms, textbook fees, fees to get your report card, fees to take an exam, sports-day fee, teachers play futbol and you must watch fees. In this way, the figured world of being a schoolgirl does not challenge or transform the social striation. Even those who refer to the civil war as a war for more power to poor people do not acknowledge that although more children go to school, few succeed enough to enter a professional life and those that do come from the wealthier families. In this way, the figured world of a schoolgirl, which casts dispersions on those who are not able to pay for schooling, reproduces the inequities of the larger society.

4.2.1.3. Educated women

4.2.1.3.1. Real role models

Because Isatou and the other schoolgirls interviewed live in Kono, far from the capital city, they know few women in the professional world. There are a few headmistresses in the Christian and secular schools. Two women work for local NGOs and two women work in the two local banks. Three women own their own small restaurants. However, there are no female shopkeepers that have a permanent building; instead, they have tables outside of the permanent structures or set up their wares on the ground during market days. Many women sell their homemade cooked

goods on the street or walk with trays on their heads, as Isatou does. There is no television so there is no Mary Tyler Moore or Clair Huxtable to inspire the girls to be a ‘working girl.’

During the first interview period, I asked all the schoolgirls if they had a role model. I have continued asking the question in every interview. In 2010, Satu answered:

141. Goldy: *How yu can call ah pon krio like mentor, yu get uman like Hannah Bangura, or like uh, uman who de parliament, or like yu sabi uman who get...like big uman u sabi dem?* (Translation: How would you say it in Krio, like a mentor? Do you know a woman like Hannah Bangura, or like a woman who is in parliament? Or like you know women who get...like an important/big woman. Do you know any of them?)
142. Satu: No...no.
143. Goldy: We can call, ah in English, we call ah mentor, or...how else what else are they called?
144. Jordene: Role model
145. Goldy: Role model?
146. Satu: No.
147. Goldy: *Bort yu no get ah?* But you don’t have one?
148. Satu: No.
149. Goldy: *Yu no sabi boku uman, we eh de get, we de go Freetown, we de go university?* (Translation: You don’t know any women who have gone to Freetown to go to university/college?)
150. Satu: No
151. Goldy: *Hmm, so wutin make yu think yu gon go?* (Translation: Hmm, so what makes you want to go (or think you can go)?).
152. Satu: *Well, it lef to god no mo.* (Translation: Well, it is up to God, nothing more).

What I enjoy about this conversation is Goldy’s insistence that there must be someone, some woman, which Satu admires as a role model. There must be some woman that she knows that has gone to the big city or to the university. Throughout all the questions, Satu answers “No.” She does not expand or explain. It is a fact. She does not know anyone who could be her role model. Yet when Goldy asks, “So what makes you think you can go to university in Freetown?” Satu answers that it is up to

God. Satu sees no contradiction in not knowing anyone who has blazed the trail before and her ability to achieve it, but for Goldy, it is unthinkable that she would have no one to emulate.

Other girls have specific role models although they may never have spoken to them and may not have any idea what they do for work. These women dress well, carry themselves well, and have white friends. During the first interviews in 2010, Isatou's best friend answered:

153. Jordene: Do you have any women that you think are wonderful women?
154. Kadidja: What?
155. Goldy: Mentor?
156. Jordene: Who are the women that you admire? That you are looking to be a role model?
157. Kadidja: There is one woman around our area there. She is very educate. Every day, every day you see her. She hang her bag and in the morning when she works, she wants to walk. When she off she come back and there are a lot of white people that they come to her to come to visit her.
158. Goldy: What kind of work does she do?
159. Kadidja: *Na* office work, but actual, *na* office actual thing that she does I don't know.
160. Goldy: Mining? NGO? Education? Do you know her name?
161. Kadidja: *Ny* name is Mrs. Karima Kende.
162. Jordene: And so every day she goes to her office and a lot of people come to Visit her. What kind of people come to her here?
163. Kadidja: Those people that come to her visit her – they're a lot of whites. But not black people. If black people come unless her parents or family.

Kadidja tells us that educated women, the members of the imagined community she wishes to belong to, carry purses, and choose to walk to school. Educated women work in an office, and it does not matter what kind of work they do. The important thing is that it is in an office. Furthermore educated working women associate with white people. The only black people that come to visit them are relatives.

In a later interview, Kadidja has decided that she will be a bank manager. She said:

164. Kadidja: Well, for me I'm thinking for tomorrow – because now I want to Educate and so that tomorrow will be . . . good for me. So I educate now. Tomorrow when my future will be shining I will enjoy tomorrow so that's why I said, I will say, I will talk about tomorrow because today but I don't know what will be tomorrow. But my own heart and feeling tomorrow will meet me. And I will enjoy my life when I'm doing my education. When I'm working now and when I . . I just say when I'm working in the banking, in the morning when I dress and I'm going there, I will look so beautiful. So that what I am thinking for tomorrow.

When I asked her what she wanted to be when she grew up, she replied a bank

worker:

165. Jordene: Know what you want to be when you grow up?
 166. Kadidja: I want to be a bank worker.
 167. Jordene: A bank worker?
 168. Kadidja: (Laughs)
 169. Jordene: And wear a nice uniform? Look good? Do you know a bank worker?
 170. Kadidja: Yes.
 171. Jordene: Who is that?
 172. Kadidja: She'sMiss Conteh. I know her. She is working at the bank. At C. bank.
 173. Jordene: And why do you like her?
 174. Kadidja: Because when she dress the bank, when she is going in the morning, going the bank, the way she dress, she looks so beautiful, that is why I love her.

When the girls grab my purse, put on my shoes, and sway across the porch, they are playing at being educated women. They know these role models. They have only seen what the women look like to and from work. They have not actually seen a woman at work, making decisions, talking to a man like an equal, or even supervising a man.

A few years later, Satu has found two role models, and she knows what they do for work:

175. Jordene: So I was asking you about role models (Interruption). Who are your role models?
 176. Satu: I know one. Her name is Sia Issa (unclear) Bawe.
 177. Jordene: OK! Tell me about her.
 178. Satu: She is living at Boch Road.

179. Jordene: Okay and what does she do that you like?
 180. Satu: She is a big woman that normally teach those parents about child abuse.
 181. Jordene: Ahhh/
 182. Satu: /That is the work that she is doing.
 183. Jordene: And who does she works for?
 184. Satu: I don't know.
 185. Jordene: Okay, and she is a good woman?
 186. Satu: Yes.
 187. Jordene: Okay. Would you like to be like her?
 188. Satu: Yeah.
 189. Jordene: I think you'd be a great community development worker because you have such a sweet way. Who else do you admire?
 190. Satu: I admire you.
 191. Jordene: Ahhhh, no.
 192. Satu: Yeah.
 193. Jordene: That is because I go to school till I have grey hair.
 194. Satu: Yeah.
 (Both laugh)

In watching Satu grow, I have seen a young child who had no real role models or clear ambition grow into someone who is actively seeking out role models and envisioning herself as a professional. She, like all of the schoolgirls I have been interviewing, lists me as one of her role models. I may be the only non-school administrator 'big woman' that they know well. As such, I bring not only my purse and fancy shoes but also a laptop, a watch, and the promise of America.

Gee's tool of inquiry asks:

How are the relevant figured worlds here helping to reproduce, transform, or create social, cultural, institutional, and/or political relationships? What Discourses and Conversations are these figured worlds helping to reproduce, transform, or create? (2011, p. 96)

By asking the schoolgirls about role models year after year, I have created a discourse that encourages them to look for working women or "big women." I am acknowledging that they may someday be educated women and someday may become these role model's equals and then become role models for others. I am reproducing the discourse of my generation, which through television, Scholastic

readers (“Meet a woman scientist”), and the urging of my teachers, transformed my self-perception from a good cook and good seamstress to the idea that I might have a career. My continued presence and the individual attention each girl receives from me, adds to their figured world of a schoolgirl. For these study participants, being a schoolgirl gives them access to my attention and me.

4.2.1.3.2. The imagined community of educated women

When Isatou talks about her education, she puts it into the present and the future. The present includes her working on her studies, learning how to cook, and selling groundnuts to pay for her school fees. However when she talks about the future, she adds to the figured world of being a schoolgirl by imaging all of the things that her status as a schoolgirl will bring her when she joins the community of educated women. Isatou sees that when she joins this imaginary community of educated women she will be able to do what educated women are allowed to do, and she will be the equal of all educated people, men, and women.

The larger community has a list of what an educated woman can and cannot do as well. Moving from the claims of what a schoolgirl can do that an out-of-school girl cannot moves the period into the future when these schoolgirls will enter the largely imaginary community of educated women. Kanno and Norton (2003) define an imagined community as a way to “expand(s) our range of possible selves” (p. 246). By envisioning herself as a member of the figured world of schoolgirls, she can see herself becoming, in the future, a part of a community of educated women. Drawing upon Kanno and Norton’s construction of imagined communities, I ask:

What are the imaged communities (groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of imagination) that add to the figured world of a schoolgirl?

Throughout my three years of interviewing her, Isatou has listed the privileges that she will have once she is a member of this community of educated women. As an educated woman she will be able to have preferential treatment in the job market, she will be able to have someone cook for her, and she will know how to present herself when she speaks in public.

Isatou's claim that educated women know how to "present themselves" has been restated by several adult women interviewed. It is interesting that they speak of how education gives you the right to speak in public forums. Indeed, in the public forums I have attended, at schools, in community meetings about the diamond mining industry, and political forums, women rarely speak but those who do can claim a university education that speak out.

Isatou and the other schoolgirls emphasize that an educated woman is 'useful':

195. Ophelia: *Gal pikin if yu lan yu go bi behteh porsin tumoro.* (Translation: If a girl child is not educated you will not be of any good use in future).

The schoolgirls also emphasize that an educated woman can go anywhere. Perhaps they are putting the emphasis on this point to me so that I will get the hint and take them to America. However, it does require more literacy than day-to-day life in Kono to get a passport, visa, plane ticket, and all of the other things required to travel. In the first interview in 2010, Kadidja said:

196. Jordene: Describe shining future?
197. Kadidja: Yes. A shining future. Like me if I learn my education for example, maybe somebody will take me from here. Hmmm- – I can go to America. Because I educate but those who are not educated they will not go there, they do not know what they can say and what they can do. So if you ask me that question that is what I have to say.

Other claims that are made about this imagined community of educated women are that they will be independent as one schoolgirl's father said:

198. Portia's Father: But if you are not educated who is going to fight for you. No way. Education is the key to success. Try with your education. If you have been educated you are an independent woman. That was my advice to her every day to her.

Being independent is not easy in a community in which much is intertwined. Satu, one of the schoolgirls in this study, is currently very dependent on her mother. Satu's two older sisters and her mother are all petty traders, selling cassava leaf and potato leaf from trays that they carry through town to sell. Satu's sisters both have young children and so it is often only Satu's mother who brings home any income.

199. Satu: *We tin nor mor a go tehl mi kornpin dehm leh wi lan buk we wi lan buk we wi mama go day wi nor go pornish.* (Translation: What I have to tell my friends is that we need to be educated. When we are educated, when your mum dies, you will not suffer.)

The educated woman does not suffer because she has the skills and independence to make her own way in the world. Ophelia adds:

200. Ophelia: *We yu lan yu de go ehni say we yu fil we yu bi behteh porsin tumara.*
(Translation: If you learn you are a better person tomorrow).

The imagined community of educated women to which these schoolgirls envision themselves entering is made up of better people, who are useful, independent, have skills, do not suffer, and can travel to America.

4.2.1.4. The equal of men- in work

The list of what educated women in this imagined community can do often includes being the equal of men. This is seen in simple ways, such as not needing to trade sex for material goods. Talking to Portia one day, Frankie, my translator, said:

201. Frankie: Man can't fool you with mobile phone. After getting an education all these things are common.

An educated woman is not fooled by something as common as cell phones because she will be able to earn them herself.

Isatou is already comparing herself to the boys in her class, competing with them for first place in every exam. She is not shy about setting her future in comparison to those of her male classmates. The quote below is repeated from the portrait section of this chapter:

202. Isatou: Because if I'm a girl, like right now, they said girls are important more than boys. Because they have seen our strengths. Now they say, if a girlchild is educate, they may help you. But if, like if I'm a boy, if I'm a girl, de another one is a boy, if I sat my exam, my WASSCE examination, (WASSCE=West Africa Senior School Certificate Exam), if I am I the boy pass me or I pass the boy, if we carry our results any place, they may take me first before the boy.

Isatou has much confidence that she can carry her results any place and indeed, there is much talk about 50/50 for men and women in Sierra Leone now. Some of it is funded through the United Nations women initiatives such as the All Political Parties Association of Women (APAWA), which strives to have women constitute 30% of the legislature. Additional momentum comes from inter-Sierra Leone discussion, which faults men for the violence in the civil war and exerts that it is time for female leadership. Isatou seems to have integrated this talk with her future.

Isatou continues by saying that the actual results of the education as measured by the WASSCE exam are not as important as the fact that she has been to high school. Isatou's belief is well founded in that simply going to senior secondary school in Sierra Leone is an accomplishment, as less than 10% of all women have received a high school education (United Nations Development Programme, 2011). Additionally

the score of the WASSCE exam is very important and does determine the level of higher education one can enter, but for Isatou, at her age, it is unlikely that she would know this level of detail. In 2011 in Kono District, 1,503 students sat for the WASSCE. Of these only 17 students met the requirement to attend a four-year college. One hundred and fifty students met the requirements for a tertiary institution (technical school). The remainder failed (Kono District Education Office, July--September 2011).

For Isatou, going to school and being educated is the factor that will allow girls to be better than boys. In Krio ‘pass’, as in the line, “if the boy pass me or I pass the boy” is used in the English sense of ‘better’. For example if I say, “Chocolate pass vanilla” it means that I like chocolate better than vanilla. In this way, Isatou is saying that it does not matter which child scores higher but the fact that she has any results at all will allow them to take the girl child first.

While Isatou may appear naïve to assert that simply having taken the WASSCE is enough to allow a girl to ‘pass’ a boy, the achievement of having taken the WASSCE signals that the girl has remained in school and completed all of her grades. Getting an education, no matter what the results, in Isatou’s worldview allows a girl to compete with boys for jobs and thus status. Getting an education in Isatou’s view allows women to compete on an uneven field for jobs and status against males, a field in which the scales may even be tipped in favor of females.

Unfortunately, Sierra Leone female informants with substantial employment such as members of parliament, government employees, and NGO workers, adamantly deny that they have received any preferential treatment and insist that the culture is far from achieving 50/50. The second wife of the local parliamentarian told

me, “Kinship between men and women is not today, not tomorrow, but maybe the next day. They want to push us behind and don’t want us side by side.” Yet she sends all of her female children to school. Despite the reality that woman are not currently receiving equal opportunities, the belief is that education will be the key to achieving equality with men.

4.2.1.4.1. The equal of men – in marriage

The girls and their families believe that education will be the key to achieving a good marriage. Isatou’s best friend believes that when she enters the community of educated women she will be the same as an educated man, particularly her husband:

203. Jordene: You think, you think, women going to be same as men?
204. Kadidja: Yes.
205. Jordene: How can women be the same as men? (Question is repeated several times)
206. Kadidja: Oh, I don’t understand what that means.
207. Jordene: How can women be the same as men?
208. Kadidja: The same as men? By in life, for example, if you educate and your husband educate, it is the same. Because the knowledge that you have and your husband have this same knowledge, so you will be as the same as man.

For Kadidja, having an education will make her the equal of her husband. This equality will let her ‘be the same as man.’ In another interview, Kadidja put it this way:

209. Kadidja: When I am married and I have children then my husband will be working and I am working. I will say these are our children. Our children are going to school and we are ok and we are working so let us concentrate on our children. They will be our future leaders for tomorrow and maybe he will understand what I’m talking about.

Just as educated women are seen to be superior to uneducated women; educated men are seen as being kinder to their wives, investing in education for their children, and having more money.

Many of the parents have argued that educating their daughters is a way to ensure that their future son-in-law will treat her kindly, will not flog her, and will be able to provide for the family. Satu, one of the other schoolgirls interviewed, emphasized that an educated husband will not act superior to his wife:

210. Satu: *Ehduketehd man, bikors we yu ehduket i nor go mek blorf pan yu.*
(Translation: [I want an] educated man because when you are educated your husband will not act as if he is superior to you).

I have asked the schoolgirls what kind of husband they want. Sometimes they say that they want a handsome husband, a tall husband, or a good Muslim man. The more common answer, however, is that they want an educated man. They believe that an educated man will not flog them, will allow them to work away from the house, and will treat them as an equal.

Isatou takes it a step further saying that an educated woman will actually be able to control her husband. In a conversation in 2010, Isatou narrated the story of her neighbor who has the audacity to control her husband even though she is not educated:

211. Isatou: Some-- -- look at my life! The example is given to me. Like my mother, she doesn't know what is education. But she loves those children that wanted to learn. But our neighbor! That woman, she always controls her husband although she don't have education. But her husband is very (unclear). When he works, if they pay him, when he comes home with the money, he give his wife.

Isatou tells us that her mother, although uneducated, loves children who want to learn. Implicitly we are to understand that her mother loves learning and would have

joined the category of educated women but was not fortunate to be allowed an education.

Isatou also narrates the story of her uneducated neighbor. Stories of this neighbor reappear in subsequent interviews with Isatou and seem to present a convenient contrast by which Isatou can measure her own life. Her tone changes when she talks of the neighbor, and she will shake her head in a gesture of disgust. Isatou's condescension for the neighbor woman is seen in her remark, "But our neighbor! That woman, she always controls her husband although she don't have education." Controlling her husband 'although she is not educated' is a bit of a contradiction. It is difficult to tell whether educated women are supposed to/allowed to/expected to control their husbands but uneducated ones are certainly not supposed to control her husband. When Isatou refers to her neighbor as controlling her husband it is not necessarily stated as a negative thing to do. Isatou says, "That woman, she always controls her husband although she don't have education." It is not the idea that a woman would control her husband that has Isatou's attention but the idea that an uneducated woman would control her husband. In other words, for an educated woman, it may be expected or acceptable that she controls her husband.

Pulling the lens back to look at the ways in which education and success in the future are discussed, education is posited as the way toward equality with men and superiority over uneducated women. Watching Isatou grapple with what it will mean for her to be educated and observing how over the years she adds more and more tangible attributes of an educated woman leads to contemplating what are the "social, cultural, institutional, and/or political relationships" being reproduced or transformed (Gee, 2011). Isatou, her cohort, and their parents believe that education will lift them

up to a better social class and provide a more pleasant life. However, a recent UNICEF (2013) report states that 63% of female adolescents in Sierra Leone believe that wife beating is justified. In contrast, 73% of women over the age of 19 believe this is justified. This indicates that the younger generation is less approving of wife beating. In the general population, 82% of all people support violent discipline of children and 72% of women support genital mutilation/cutting. These statistics point to a reproduction of patriarchal power structures. Isatou and her cohort may be among the few dissenting voices or they may not, since they seek equality for themselves, but not necessarily for their uneducated age-mates, when they voice their belief that at least for the ones who start school and stop, they get what their actions deserve. Using Gee's Tools of Inquiry, I ask:

How are the relevant figured worlds here helping to reproduce, transform, or create social, cultural, institutional, and/or political relationships? What Discourses and Conversations are these figured worlds helping to reproduce, transform, or create? (2011, p. 96)

In the figured world of being a schoolgirl and the anticipated imaginary community of educated women, there is investment in creating a better, safer life for the individual girl and by extension her family but there is not an investment in transforming the larger culture to make men and women more equal. These schoolgirls believe that education will prevent them from being flogged by their husband but may still support the inequity for others.

4.2.1.5. The cooking pot: Contradictions in expectations

Although flogging, beating a girl around the buttocks, back, or arms with a rope called rattan is common in Sierra Leone, Isatou is not flogged at school very often and she is not flogged much at home. However, her mother has been known to flog her when she hesitates to do her chores. Isatou can be rather stubborn—I have

seen it when it is her turn to do the dishes after a meal with the girls at my house and I have seen it with her mother, when she turns to her little sister and tells her sister to do the errand that her mother has given to her. Of course, Isatou will say that she is an important part of the conversation and must not do the chore because it will interrupt her ‘education’ even when that education is really a card game.

In the portrait of Isatou, I discuss her relationship with chores and her mother. Isatou’s mother insists that Isatou must learn to be a good cook and to clean the house well. When Isatou’s mother was in the hospital, and during her recovery from her c-section, Isatou and her mother’s sister did all of the cooking and household chores. Yet, Isatou’s mother still feels that Isatou needs more tutoring in how to do chores. However, she is willing to let Isatou slip a little because she needs to study for the exams.

These debates are not unique to Isatou and her mother. The importance of being a good cook and a good housekeeper are frequently mentioned by the girls and their mothers. In a 2011 interview with Satu, she reiterated the social importance of a clean house:

212. Jordene: What’s more important: cooking or sweeping?
213. Satu: Sweeping is very much important!
214. Jordene: Why?
215. Satu: Because when you are living in your compound, people who don’t sweep there—people—they call them ‘dirty girl’ or ‘dirty woman.’ You can’t go there to joke, play with you. You alone will be there.

So a dirty, un-swept compound will cause you to be disparaged by your neighbors and in a place where all entertainment comes from sitting around with your neighbors, being alone is thought to be very difficult.

In my experience, families do not share meals but because cooking is done outside in view of all, people will gossip about their neighbors' cooking. Particularly scrutinized are women who work away from the home, and the tension over cooking vs. educated women is a frequent topic between Isatou and her mother. As mentioned in the portrait section, Isatou's mother is adamant that her daughter will learn to cook and do the housework required of a woman. So Isatou is allowed to succeed at school; however she must maintain good grades, be a good cook, clean the compound, and do the laundry all at the same time, even during exam years. In this way the 'master figured world' of schoolgirl becoming a member of the imaginary community of educated women competes with the gendered normative assumptions of a woman as the primary cook and keeper of the compound. Gee asks several relevant questions:

What other figured worlds are related to the ones most active here? Are there "master figured worlds" at work?

And—

How consistent are the relevant figured worlds here? Are there competing or conflicting figured worlds at play? Whose interests are the figured worlds representing? (2011, p. 96)

During the portrait section of this chapter, I represent several conversations in which the chore of cooking was contrasted with the goal of achieving in school. Here, I expand and repeat one of the conversations from page x in order to provide further analysis. The interview took place in 2011. Isatou's family and I were joking about Isatou becoming president of Sierra Leone when the following exchange took place:

- | | | |
|------|------------------|--|
| 216. | Jordene: | If Salimatu becomes a big lady and becomes president of Sierra Leone, which is my plan for her, President Isatou president, vice-president Kadidja, but Isatou never learns to cook well, how do you see that? |
| 217. | Isatou's father: | That one is up to her and her mother. |
| 218. | Jordene: | Ahha, so let's ask the mama that question. Can you translate for me? So Isatou is going to become president of Sierra Leone someday <i>Ensha-Allah</i> they are ready for Isatou president. |

219. Isatou's father: / by God's grace
220. Jordene: But she never learns to cook, she never gets married, she never has *pikin* (children). How do you see that?
(Isatou's mother looks away and appears to be angry.)
221. Frankie (translator and assistant): *U de heare?* (Said somewhat aggressively)
222. Isatou's mother: Well/
223. Frankie: */u de heare?* (Said more aggressively)
224. Isatou's mother: *I de heare.* (Translation: Yes, I hear you.)
225. Frankie: Hmm?
226. Isatou's mother: *Isatou de learn for cook, go to school, get married. She go learn. I go learn her for cook. The days Saturday and Sunday na time. Saturday she can be with me if she no go for class. Sunday she de go to class. But the days she no go to class, Saturday and Sunday, she can be with me. Sunday she can be with me. Isatou sit down and for watch. Some time go she de reach. When they say holiday, big holiday with me in the house. She boku, boku small-small thing. But schooldays if I say, lef me do her u all things, one thing she go learn if she does all things she no de go learn for now I say that she suffer for education. Until God he does help right now I left for live.* (Translation: Isatou's mother says, "Isatou will learn to cook, go to school, and get married. I will teach her to cook. There is time on Saturdays and Sundays when she doesn't go to school; she can sit by me and watch how to cook. She definitely will learn to cook. She does many small things now. If I were to ask her to do all of the housework now, she wouldn't learn her school education. So for now she has to do small things and suffer in order to get an education. God has helped because he left me to live. (Note- Ma Isatou had a c-section in 2011 and almost died. At that time Isatou and her 20 year old auntie did all the housework by themselves.)

Isatou's mother was clearly unsettled by my idea that Isatou might not learn to cook and that she did not need to cook if she was the president. I do not think she enjoys thinking of her daughter's ambition as she clearly states that Isatou will learn to cook, finish her education, and then get married. Isatou can already cook most Sierra Leonean dishes well and demonstrated her ability to care for the family for almost two months while her mother was in the hospital in 2011.

However, her mother insists that Isatou's education as a cook and housekeeper is not completed. The phrase "sit down and watch" is the traditional way that tasks are taught to children and it is not unusual for a child to be doing the work while women sit and watch, correcting them all the while from their chair. This is seen as teaching the child to do the work.

Isatou's mother also states that she does not have Isatou do all of the work that she could ask of her:

227. Isatou's mother: *She boku, boku small small thing But schooldays if I say, lef me do her u all things, one thing she go learn if she does all things she no de go learn for now I say that she suffer for education* (Translation: "If I were to ask her to do all of the housework now, she wouldn't learn her school education. So for now she has to do small things and suffer in order to get an education.")

Isatou's mother is asserting her own role in providing an education for Isatou by not having her do all the chores that a mother has the right to demand of her girlchild. In this way, she is acknowledging what the opportunity for Isatou's education costs to her as the primary caretaker of the family as regards Isatou's potential but unrealized labor.

Isatou's mother is also perhaps keeping Isatou a bit grounded. I come alone once or twice a year and encourage Isatou to dream big—to maybe become president of Sierra Leone or a bank manager. I come from an American perspective that thinks that with hard work and a little bit of a helping hand with the tuition that maybe, just maybe, Isatou might actually have a chance at a professional life. However, the reality is that Isatou comes from a lowly background and that perhaps her only achievement will be finishing high school. Then she will get married, have children, and need to know how to cook and perform all the other duties of a good housewife. Indeed,

Isatou's father acknowledges that she will need 'connections and attractions' if her education is to become a solid investment in their joint futures:

228. Isatou's father: Yes. I have reason to that. My reason is . . . presently at least see. Is started encouraging her. Maybe the education is settled. She will focus on the looking out on that. And when she start earning some amount for herself—buying expensive cloth and shoes—aha! And thinking she is very beautiful. She is **getting some connections and attractions**. So the focus on the education side. So my dream will not conclude. I prefer, I prefer to strive in any way out for her to be educated in the end.

After earning some money for herself, Isatou is expected to use that money to buy 'expensive cloth and shoes'. She will then feel beautiful and attract 'connections and attractions'. It is not only her education but her womanly attributes that will ensure their economic success.

Is it her womanly attributes that enhance her education or her education that enhances her womanly attributes? I see 'girlchild education is good' as the master figured world right now with the 'connections and attractions' along with cooking and house chores as competing figured worlds. Yet the master figured world is tenuous at best. If there is a serious injury to her father or mother, if my little NGO stops paying for her school fees, if Isatou become pregnant, her education up to the ninth grade will not enable her to enter the professional world.

4.3 Conclusion

Isatou's portrait and subsequent analysis illustrate the figured world of schoolgirls by exploring the ways schoolgirls "feel, value, and believe, consciously or not, in order to talk (write), act, and/or interact" in this figured world (Gee, 2011, p. 95). Isatou creates an image of a schoolgirl as one who is able to take care of herself

and her family, is hard working, and is not a fool. Schoolgirls have families that suffer for them.

Isatou and her cohort see girls who are not in school as not having families that will suffer for them. They pity girls who are too poor to go to school. They disparage those who have dropped out. This demarcation speaks to the “value judgments about oneself or others” (Gee, 2011, p. 96) that delineates the schoolgirl from other girls and reinforces the dominant discourse that those who do not attend school do so from lack of effort on their part and their parents’ part rather than as a societal failure to create equal opportunity for all.

The emphasis on the failure to become a schoolgirl as an indicator of individual success rather than a societal effort speaks to Gee’s tool of inquiry that asks:

How consistent are the relevant figured worlds here? Are there competing or conflicting figured worlds at play? Whose interests are the figured worlds representing?

And

How are the relevant figured worlds here helping to reproduce, transform, or create social, cultural, institutional, and/or political relationships? What Discourses and Conversations are these figured worlds helping to reproduce, transform, or create? (2011, p. 96)

The delineation of schoolgirls as good, hard working girls with families that love and support them versus out-of-school girls as morally bad, likely to get pregnant, and with families that have failed to raise them correctly reproduces the ‘social, cultural, institutional, and political relationships’ that has led to large economic and social injustice in Sierra Leone.

Isatou and the other schoolgirls in this study believe that they will have economic and social equality with men in the workplace and in their homes. Gee asks:

What sorts of texts, media, experiences, interactions, and/or institutions could have given rise to these figured worlds? (2011, p. 96)

The media in Sierra Leone, particularly radio, frequently discusses the ways in which women will have the advantage over men in employment and equality in politics.

When Isatou and her father believe this, they are investing in the media as representing the truth and giving merit to the figured world of schoolgirls that the media helps to construct.

The media representation is not totally fiction as there are independent, educated women in Sierra Leone and some of the schoolgirls can identify Sierra Leonean female role models. However, research establishes that these schoolgirls will have a difficult time achieving independence. In countries such as Sierra Leone, in which fathers and other male members of the family have the majority of power and institutional practices subvert women's decision-making, the link between schooling and behavior change is less evident (Caldwell & Caldwell, 1993; Jejeebhoy, 1996; Moulton, 1997). Succinctly stated:

The norms of patriarchy play an important role in conditioning the impact of education on changes in women's autonomy. In settings that are highly stratified by gender, women may have little autonomy until they have attained relatively high levels of education, whereas in more egalitarian settings, the thresholds are lower. (Jejeebhoy, 1996, p. 36)

Each family in this study has personal ways of enacting the patriarchy. Isatou may be the most likely to be able to have a relatively autonomous future in that her father espouses egalitarian values and her voice is already allowed in family discussions.

Isatou can see herself, because she has a voice in family discussion now, as a future member of the imaginary community of educated women. As an imaginary community "refers to groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of imagination" (Kanno & Norton, 2003, p.

241) Isatou, out of all of the girls interviewed, may be the closest to accessing a tangible membership into the community of educated women.

Isatou may have a chance to become part of a real community of educated women as her family seeks to be ‘in their words, ‘modern’ and hopes to see Isatou a successful professional woman. However, she must maintain the cultural gendered values of having children and being a good cook. Isatou’s family sees being ‘modern’ in many ways; the father has said that he will have only one wife, they use family planning – spacing their four children four-years apart, they live in a nuclear family group in their own home away from the larger family compound, and they encourage their children to participate in discussion. These ideas contrast with the ways the parents were raised and are indicative of a larger societal shift. The mother and father married for love- they did not have an arranged marriage and they do not expect to arrange one for Isatou. The father has done ‘modern’ work in an NGO and as a security guard for diamond mining companies. These jobs required an education and commitment to having a watch and a cell phone. Yet, there is a strong expectation that Isatou will take care of her husband, she alone will be responsible for cooking and household chores. Her parents put her through the pain of *bondo* and believe in witchcraft as much as they believe in Islam.

These in-between space between an acceptance of fixed gender roles in the home, for example, and the belief that Isatou will be the equal of men in the work place represents a liminal space for society that is exemplified by Isatou’s family. At the risk of over simplifying, Isatou’s families, in some ways, characterize a liminal transition for Sierra Leone society away from the chieftaincy system with its corresponding supernatural affiliations toward a meritocracy built upon education.

CHAPTER 5

FANTU

5.1. Portrait of Fantu

Fantu⁶ is sweet and shy. She has a huge smile. She laughs easily and stands very close to her friends—, holding hands, putting her arm around them, and tussling with them as they walk. She does not talk much, to me or to her pals. Sometimes when I ask her a question, she just smiles her sweet, shy grin and laughs. The other girls all like Fantu but she does not have a particular alliance. She walks to school with anyone going her way, usually her pal and fellow research participant, Satu. She is not particularly clever at school. She is not a good reader but not a bad reader either. She will win at cards now and then but more because of luck than skill. When she wins, everyone celebrates with her because no one can refuse her smile, her little victory dance, and her laugh.

Fantu does not come to my house every day but often stops by with her friend, Satu, in the morning on their way to school. I give them some tea and bread and send them on their way. The other girl, Satu will often comment on my choice of outfit, suggesting a different shirt or order me to sit down so she can fix my hair. Fantu will smile and nod but very rarely make a suggestion. If she comes over on her way home from school, she does not come in the front door but will go to the back of the house where the cooking stones and laundry bucket are to see if any of the other girls are hanging out. If the others are not there, she will leave without seeking me out. Most of the other girls knock on the front door or lie on the couch until I come in, and are eager to have a moment alone with me, but Fantu would rather not be the focus of my

⁶ Fantu is the pseudonym chosen by the girl.

attention. During our formal interviews, when the red light of the recorder is steady, she holds the recorder, looks down, and avoids eye contact and while slowly and thoughtfully answering my questions.

In 2013, after three years of interviewing Fantu, with six formal interviews, many letters, shared meals, walks, trips to the market and multiple hours spent hanging out with all of the girls on my porch, I asked her if she were comfortable with me. It was a strange question and one that I did not ask any of the other girls I had been interviewing. When I asked the question, Fantu and I were sitting in the lounge of the teacher's house at her school. Outside on the porch a woman was selling deep fried fish balls to the schoolchildren, so although it was a private space it was a bit noisy. We started the interview talking about her infected foot. She had stopped by my house that morning on her way to school and I had noticed that her foot was bandaged. We agreed that after school we would go into town and buy soap for her foot and for my house because we both needed soap. Then I turned the conversation into a formal interview:

1. Jordene: Fantu, I've been interviewing you now six, seven times?
2. Fantu: Six
3. Jordene: Six yes. (Big sigh) That is a long time to know somebody, right?
4. Fantu: (nods yes)
5. Jordene: I've been thinking about (lots of noise around us) I've been thinking about.... (Indicating the woman selling outside) – That woman sells here every day?
6. Fantu: Yes.
7. Jordene: So I've been thinking about how your life has changed. What are you thinking about?
8. Fantu: About my school?
9. Jordene: About anything? You are still so quiet with me.
10. Fantu: Me?
11. Jordene: Yeah.
12. Fantu: Not really so.
13. Jordene: Not really so?
14. Fantu: Yes.

15. Jordene: You are comfortable with me?
16. Fantu: Yes.

From this, I understand that for Fantu, our conversations are normal. This is her rhythm and I adapt to her pace. If to me it is slow, it is not slow to her. If to me, she seems shy and reticent, to her this is being close. I think that she likes the interviews and that she is comfortable with me so I expect her to be more talkative but she is not.

Our conversations follow a common format. I ask a question, Fantu answers with one or two words. I repeat her answer. She confirms that I have it right. I do not really think that she is shy in the classic sense of an introvert. I have grown to think of her manner as respectfully distant with others. I have never seen her act in any way familiar with any other adults except for her granny and auntie. With her auntie and granny, she hangs on them, wraps her arms around them, holds their hands, but still does not talk much.

5.1.1. Family

Granny is Fantu's paternal grandmother and the auntie is her father's second wife. Her relationship with her biological mother and father is physically distant and seems a bit emotionally distant too. But her ties to her auntie and granny are wonderful to watch. Her father and biological mother and the younger children live in the village and until recently, her father's second wife lived in Kono-town with the school-going children. Fantu's mother seldom comes to the city and her father only visits once or maybe twice a month.

An incident in 2013 reminded me of how distant Fantu's daily life is from her parents. When I arrived in Kono in 2013, Fantu eagerly told me all about her role in a strike action at her school. I use this story as the beginning vignette of this

dissertation. A few weeks later, when I mentioned the strike to her father, he had not even heard of it. He certainly did not know about the active role his daughter had played, throwing rocks at the chief's compound and the police and stung with teargas. Fantu's teachers have not met the father or the mother. The principal of her school says that she does not know the family. Even her adult neighbors a few houses down do not know Fantu although they have seen her walk through the neighborhood with Satu, whom they all know. It seems that Fantu puts most adults at a distance, keeps her siblings, granny, and auntie close, and shares only what is necessary with her parents.

In 2010, about ten minutes into the initial interview with Fantu, she responded to an opening statement with her fear that strangers would interfere with her education.

17. Jordene: I'm interested in girls' education.
18. Fantu: I like going to school. ...
19. Jordene: Ahhh
20. Fantu: because I want to educate. When I educate, when I, when enjoy. No one should be by me unless my *fambous* (family)...
21. Jordene: What do you mean "no one should be by you except [your] *fambous*?" Can you explain that to me better? (pause) What do you mean no one should be by you?
22. Fantu: Wants to humbug my life.
23. Goldy (translator, seemingly puzzled by this): To humbug her life?/
24. Jordene: /To humbug your life?
25. Fantu: Mmm. Yes.

Fantu has been told to keep her distance from others except those in her immediate family. Because most of her extended family is in the village and their house in Kono is not part of a larger compound of village/family connections, Fantu is somewhat distanced from the larger, interwoven community that many of the long-time Kono dwellers experience.

5.1.2. Wealth

Fantu's father built the Kono place to house his children while they went to school in Kono. It is nothing fancy— the mud blocks have not been covered with plaster and painted. Yet it is larger than many of the other homes. The house in Kono has a parlor, storage room, and bedrooms. There is land leading down to a small stream and several fruit trees. I have never been inside the home but have spent plenty of time sitting on a bench in the backyard looking over the stream. It is cool, quiet, and peaceful there. One year there was a monkey with a chain around its neck tied to a tree. The children taunted it but they also fed it bananas. Fantu's father is not rich but he does earn enough through farming to pay the school fees for at least six children and until recently had two wives, and he has land and a big seven room house in the village. However, it is a tentative prosperity. In 2011, he failed to plant rice early enough and the family went hungry until they had the next harvest. Even in a good year, the family often eats rice without sauce.

In my first interview, when Fantu was in class six of elementary school, she asked me for support to go to school, explaining to me that her father is a farmer. It is expected that children ask adults for support and that adults ask 'big women' or 'big men' i.e. those of a higher status— like politicians, NGO directors, or shop owners— for support. It is also expected that white people are going to be working for NGOs or represent government projects and therefore be in Kono to disburse funds. So I was not surprised by Fantu's request. However, Fantu was not like some of the other girls begging for school fees from the moment they entered the interview. She did not ask me for money or support, she just casually mentioned it, and it seemed perfectly normal, reasonable, and right that seeing Goldy and me would inspire hope that white

ladies would pay for her schooling. Indeed two years later, I did pay for her school fees.

26. Jordene: What is the difference between a girl going to school and girl who is not going to school?
27. Fantu: Hmmm?
28. Jordene: Some girls are going to school; some are not going to school? What is the difference?
29. Goldy: How *you see 'um*?
30. Fantu: The one that go to school? The one in school white people de get money for school (unclear). The one de no go school no get nothing for pay for them.
(The ones that go to school have white people to pay for them. Those who do not go to school do not have anyone to pay for them.)

Later in the conversation, Fantu asked directly for support. Most of the girls in the first interview asked me for money, and I did not find it unusual or off-putting. Fantu was perhaps the least insistent of those girls who did ask:

31. Goldy: Anything else where you want to talk?
32. Fantu: Help me for make education. For pay for me school charges and buy school materials for me until I go to secondary school.

For Fantu, having money is not about buying things but rather about having enough money that you won't have to suffer and just as importantly to prevent having to beg family members for support. In a 2011, English composition entitled, "A Composition about myself," Fantu wrote:

33. I am going to school to build up my future tomorrow.
34. Like for example when I am through with my education, I want to become a bank manager.
35. When person go to school and pay attention to your learning you will make the suffered that your parent suffered for you will make them forget about the time they were buying you, books, bag, shoes, sock, pen and other.
36. But if you don't pay attention, you are going to suffered more than everybody in your family. Every day you may be standing at your younger brothers and sisters door, and you began to say, my husband did not give me chop (food) money today. I come to you people for you to give me money, I want to go and buy some food for me and my children to come and eat today. And that time you your younger sisters and brothers will not give you respect and abusing you, every day they may said you come to us for we to give you money, get out in front of our

compound we don't have money today to give it to you. But if you learned that all will not happen to you.
37. That is why I am going to school.

In this composition, Fantu paints a picture of what that embarrassment will look like—standing on her brother's and sister's door, being pushed out of the compound, the loss of respect, and the abuse from her siblings. It is interesting that she says that her husband did not give her chop money for today rather than she was unable to earn the chop money for the day.

Fantu already has many people depending on her for support right now. Fantu is the oldest daughter in a polygamous family. When I first met her in 2010 there was an older 'sister' living in the house and taking care of her but this older sister has not been around in the last three years so I am not sure where she fits into the household. As far as I can decipher, Fantu is the oldest of all the children of her father. I know that Fantu is the oldest girl of her mother and I think her mother is the first wife. Like many Sierra Leonean households, Fantu's family constellation seems to shift every time I visit.

It took me a while to understand Fantu's family shifting structure, not because I was not accustomed to polygamous families and the coming and going from village to town but because Fantu has never been forthcoming when speaking of her family. Several of the girls live in polygamous families and speak freely of their mother's mates and which sibling has the same mother/same father and which siblings are from the same father/mother's mates. These topics are a constant discussion on my porch, but Fantu seldom mentions her family at all.

There are a few things that have remained constant in Fantu's household structure— Fantu and her younger sisters are consistently in the Kono house while

their father stays in the village. The school age children stay in Kono and the younger ones stay in the village. Fantu's grandmother does not like the city so she usually stays in the village but she will come in from the village if I come to town or other events. Prior to this year, Fantu's mother and Fantu's auntie took turns coming to Kono-town or staying in the village. This year, Fantu's auntie has left the family compound to go to live with her first husband in Kono town. Since Fantu's auntie left, her biological children have moved across Kono town to live with her. Because he is not in good health, this year Fantu's grandfather is in the Kono house. So Fantu at 16 years old of age is now in charge of the daily operations of the household that today includes her grandfather and her three full siblings.

Fantu grew up with her auntie. She has lived with her mother's mate for more time than she has lived with her biological mother because her mother has stayed mostly in the village while the auntie lived with the school-going children in town. So now that her mother's auntie has left the family, Fantu feels the loss acutely. She talks about how strange it is to go and visit her auntie across town and how she misses her younger half-siblings. Fantu narrated the story of her father and her auntie one day in the car as we drove toward her house. She said that her auntie had been married before marrying her father. Auntie had left her first husband because of her love for her father. Then Fantu's Auntie and Fantu's father had a quarrel and Fantu's auntie went back to her first husband. Then when Fantu's auntie had a quarrel with the first husband, she begged Fantu's father to take her back. He did but when she had a quarrel with Fantu's father, she went back to her first husband. Now Fantu's father says that he does not love her anymore and he will not take Fantu's auntie back again. Fantu was sad that they said that they do not love each other anymore.

When she lived with them, Fantu's auntie did the cooking and ran the household. Now that she is gone, Fantu is the oldest woman in the house and thus responsible for the food and the other children. The grandfather, although in the house, is not expected to contribute labor or engage with the younger children. Although Fantu is ultimately responsible, she does not have to do all of the chores. Her younger siblings do their gender and age specific chores. Fantu's younger brothers gather firewood or go out to buy some if there is not any in the house. Her fourteen- year- old sister goes to the market every day to buy the ingredients for the sauce and then cooks the one meal for the day. Normally, Fantu would do the cooking but she is in an exam year in school and is thus, like most children in an exam year, exempt from the time-consuming chore of cooking. About twice a week, they only cook rice. They do not have enough money for sauce so they make 'dry rice'— rice without sauce. It fills the belly but does not offer much nutrition.

I have had to stop myself from asking Fantu questions about how she manages the household. Questions that would sound ridiculous to her—, like asking if she has trouble putting the younger children to sleep or why does not the grandfather go to the school meetings. But I did ask Fantu what would happen if there were an emergency, like if one of the younger children were ill. Fantu looked at me strangely and patiently explained that their neighbor had a cell phone that she could use to call her father's village. Fantu's father would then call the cell phone back and tell Fantu what to do. For Fantu, it seems to be a normal thing to have a sixteen year- old level of responsible for her fourteen- year- old sister, her twelve- year- old brother, and her nine nine-year- old sister. Next year, her seven- year- old brother will join them from the village to go to school in the city and Fantu will have another child to take care of.

Aside from not being sure who would be in the house from year to year, I also get confused about their religious affiliations. Fantu has always said that she is a Muslim. When I asked her if she was a Christian or a Muslim, Fantu replied, “My father tells me to go to mosque.” Her grandparents are Muslim. Her grandfather had five wives although he has remained with only Fantu’s granny. From this, I can surmise that the family has been Muslim for a long time. Yet when I spoke with Fantu’s father in 2013, he kept repeating, “In Jesus’ name.” I am not sure if this was a sign of conversion or if he expected me to be a Christian so he called upon Jesus as a rhetorical device to please me. The neighbor woman who was sitting with us is a Christian so maybe he was responding to her. All of the children go to Christian schools but that does not mean anything special usually. The auntie became a Christian when she returned to her previous husband. I am not sure if she was a Christian before she entered into the polygamous marriage and then went back to it. It is not unusual for people to celebrate all the holidays, and I do have several friends who have switched from Islam to Christianity.

5.1.3. Getting married

On the porch, the girls tease each other about having to marry an old Imam or being the third wife of a fat, ugly man. They all adamantly insist that they will marry for love and must be the only wife. Although Fantu offers a timid rebuttal when the girls tease her that she will be the first to marry an old man and be his third wife, in private she tells me it will probably be true. One afternoon, when Fantu was 14, a group of girls were sitting on my porch with a neighborhood woman discussing this woman’s desire to have a husband. We were laughing and joking but the discussion

was clearly serious. Out of this conversation, Fantu wanted to know if a 14- year- old getting married was “child marriage.” The neighbor woman said it was not and I said it was. Fantu has said several times in the past that if she leaves school she will have to get married, but now in 2013, at 16 years of age, Fantu knows that she is undoubtedly of marriage-able age. We had the following conversation in 2013:

38. Jordene: And when your mama got married, how old was she?
39. Fantu: My mother? I don't know.
40. Jordene: young girl or old lady?
41. Fantu: Not old.
42. Jordene: Young.
43. Fantu: Yes.
44. Jordene: Ok and what about your aunties?
45. Fantu: (sighs) She is not old. She is also young.

Fantu knows that her mother and auntie were likely her age or younger when they got married. Neither of them went to school at all so for them schooling was not a reason not to get married. Fantu's time to get married is approaching.

In her culture, Fantu is technically a woman ready for marriage. She has been through the initiation and had her clitoris cut. I do not know if she went to the bush for the full *bondo* initiation. I am guessing that she might have because of her family's continued residence in the village. One day in 2012, again on the porch of my house, the girls who were gathered asked me about “mommy-daddy business” (sex). I talked about mating habits of dogs and other animals, which they all knew about and had witnessed many times. When I asked if they had learned anything about human reproduction in school or at home, they said that they would learn about it in senior high school. I asked if they had learned anything about mommy-daddy business in the *Bondo* ceremony and they all shook their heads no. Fantu said that she was too young to know for sure but that she remembered that there was a lot of pain and she got to eat special foods. She must have been very young. I now regret not

pushing the girls for more details but they had their own agenda and the conversation moved to whether or not it was better to raise goats or chickens.

For Fantu, school is what keeps her out of marriage and a life raising goats and chickens. In 2013, I asked Fantu about leaving school:

46. Jordene: What will happen if you leave school?
47. Fantu: I will be suffered more.
48. Jordene: Yeah? (pause) How? How will you suffer? (long pause)
49. Fantu: Because my father will not have enough money to give it to all of us. And I will be suffering more.
50. Jordene: So your father will not support you if you do not go to school?
51. Fantu: Yes.
52. Jordene: Wow, ohhhh, ok. Will he make you get married?
53. Fantu: Huh?
54. Jordene: If you don't go to school will your father make you get married?
55. Fantu: Yes (firmly).
(We discuss who will choose the future husband, then I return to the school-marriage connection.)
56. Jordene: So to stay in school, no husband. That's a good reason to stay in school?
57. Fantu: Yes! (We both laugh)
58. Jordene: Unless maybe you want to get married? Maybe you want to get married?
59. Fantu: No!

In this conversation, I can see that I am balancing being a confidant and an interviewer. Clearly, I support her staying in school; I am paying her school fees. Yet I want to allow her the opportunity to contradict me and let me know that she might prefer to getting married than over staying in school. To me, Fantu does not appear ready for marriage. She is not one of the girls who notices boys as we walk through town, or grooms self-consciously to look good. Although she is fully developed and has the appearance of a woman, she still carries herself like a girl, unaware of her beauty, and with a childish gait rather than a womanly sway.

As far as I know, none of Fantu's close friends or schoolmates has a boyfriend but at sixteen years of age, everything can change in a few days. My own principle is

to consider relationships that originate between the young man and young woman are somehow more authentic than arranged marriages. I try not to influence the girls with my beliefs. Indeed, they are influenced by much more than my conversations alone. ‘Love matches’ as they are called are seen by the girls as more modern and educated than arranged marriages. Fantu is on the edge in her family. Her classmates and society encourage love matches but her family may not allow this as a viable option. I am not sure that Fantu feels it is her choice to make. In the middle of the conversation presented above, we discussed who would choose her husband:

60. Jordene: Ok so, Ok so, ok if you stop going to school -you get yourself husband?
 61. Fantu: Yes.
 62. Jordene: So ok, who is going to pick your husband?
 63. Fantu: Mme?
 64. Jordene: Yeah? Who is going to decide this man is for Fantu?
 65. Fantu: No one.
 66. Jordene: No one?
 67. Fantu: Yes.
 68. Jordene: Will your father say, eh “This is a good man, Fantu. I want you to marry him.”
 69. Fantu: (pause) I will!
 70. Jordene: Huh?
 71. Fantu: Yes.
 72. Jordene: Yea? What will you say?
 73. Fantu: I too will accept.
 74. Jordene: Because you are the daughter?
 75. Fantu: Yes.
 76. Jordene: Ahmmm

In this small segment of conversation, I see Fantu rocking back and forth between her desire to pick her own husband and the reality that it will probably be her father who decides when and to whom she will be married.

5.1.4. Future

Perhaps because her future is not hers to decide, Fantu does not spend a lot of time thinking about it. Some of the girls have elaborate scenarios that they imagine for their future—, who they will marry, what kind of house they will have, or what food they will cook. But Fantu does not talk about much about her future. The one thing that she is clear about is that she wants to go to America. In 2010, she wanted to be a nurse and then later she wanted to be a bank manager. Now she wants to be a lawyer. She does not know why she wants to be a lawyer but she imagines that it will take her far from Sierra Leone to America.

77. Jordene: Thinking about your future? What are you thinking— this is your past, *na so*? What are you thinking about your future? (*na so*?=*means* isn't it?)
78. Fantu: If I through with my education, I want to be a lawyer
79. Jordene: Do you know what kind of lawyer? Why do you get this idea to be a lawyer? Where did the idea come from? Did you meet a lawyer?
80. Fantu: No.
81. Jordene: No?
82. Fantu: No.
83. Jordene: You don't know any lawyer? (We discuss the hand cream we are putting on)
84. Jordene: So you want to be a lawyer (pause) and sit in an office/
85. Fantu: /Yes.
86. Jordene: /and carry a pocketbook. (Jordene laughs) Do you want to stay in Kono or go to Freetown, Makeni, or Kabala? What are you thinking?
87. Fantu: I want to go far away from, far away from Freetown.
88. Jordene: Far away from Freetown?
89. Fantu: Yes.
90. Jordene: You, don't like Freetown?
91. Fantu: No. (No that isn't the reason)
92. Jordene: Have you been to Freetown?
93. Fantu: No.
94. Jordene: but you don't know Freetown, but you don't want to go there? Why?
95. Fantu: I want to go there but I want to go far.
96. Jordene: OK.
97. Fantu: Want to go more than Freetown.
98. Jordene: OK.

Later in the conversation, she confirms that her dream for the future is to go to America:

99. Jordene: When you finish your education, you become a lawyer. What will your (pause) what are your dreams?
100. Fantu: Huh?
101. Jordene: What are your dreams? What are the things you imagine for your future?
102. Fantu: (pause) Like something you imagine in your dreams?
103. Jordene: Hmhm.
104. Fantu: (7 second pause) I do not dream that one yet.
105. Jordene: Hmm. You don't sit in class and think to yourself oh, when I'm a big woman I'm going to (pause) I don't know— have a big house or have two husbands or/
106. Fantu: (laugh)
107. Jordene: (laugh)
108. Jordene: You don't think about that?
109. Fantu: I only think- ... if I say- ... if I am learning, I want to go to America.
110. Jordene: Ahh that is a good dream. (I change the subject to the day we met)

When Fantu speaks of her dream as coming to America, I am a bit surprised. She is so shy that I cannot imagine her standing in front of the visa council but she does not really know what it would mean to come to America. She has no idea of the visa, the money, and the reality of the situation but I had asked her for her dream, not what she expected to happen. I do not know if this would have been her dream if she had not become close to me and if her friends did not talk about the idea of coming to America.

Fantu would probably not tell her family that she wants to come to America because she does not know their reaction but she does know that her family wants her to get an education. If she continues to go to school, she will be the first person in her family to complete high school. She has an uncle on her mother's side that who went to junior secondary school class II (eighth grade) and an estranged uncle on her father's side who went to senior secondary school and may or may not have finished. Fantu is the first female in her family to graduate from primary school and enter

junior secondary school and with the exception of one uncle; she may be the first person to graduate from senior secondary school. Despite this, her family is not actively invested in her learning. Her parents do not go to school meetings, do not spend the money to get her report card, and do not play any part in her achievement. But they do provide a house, allow her to go to school rather than work, and make it clear to her that they want her in school.

111. Jordene: Does your father say to leave school and sell the vegetables in the market? It would be nice for/...
112. Fantu: But he says the time for holiday if I tell him, because he do come with market if I ask him for some to sell he says no. When I ask him why. , he says nothing.
113. Jordene: What do you think he's afraid of?
114. Fantu: I don't know.
115. Jordene: What would your father say if you told him you don't want to go to school anymore?
116. Fantu: He would be very unhappy.
117. Jordene: What will he say? What will your father say? If you say I'm done with school, papa. I just don't want to go to school anymore. It is too difficult. I have to walk far. I don't want to go.
118. Fantu: He have to send you to the village. Go and stay in the village because if you say you don't want to go to school, go and stay in the village. And if I tell him to find work for me to do- , He will say no— only school.

In this way, by denying her the opportunity to make money and help the family, her father is confirming his investment in her education. He is making it very clear that her education comes before helping the family earn money. When I have asked Fantu's father about his commitment to education, he recites the radio jingles about the importance of girls' education. Yet, Fantu's father is also confirming that the minute she leaves school, she will be sent to the village to stay. Going to the village is something that Fantu wants to avoid.

5.1.5. The village

In Fantu's life, the village and school are binaries. If she stays in school, she can live in Kono. If she stays in school, she is not obligated to get married and move to the village. If she moved to the village, she would have a lot of rice and would be well fed, but she would not have a future outside of the village. In a different conversation than the one above, Fantu repeated the trope about the village equaling marriage and not school:

119. Jordene: Mmm. Will you have to get married if you go to the village?
120. Fantu: Yes, if I leave school and go to the village.
121. Jordene: You told me once when you were little, when you were in class six, that if you don't stay in school you'll have to get married.
122. Fantu: Yes, if I say I don't want to go school, he will say let me go and get married in the village.
123. Jordene: Does he mean that or is it only to scare you?
124. Fantu: He wants me to learn; let me say that one.

The village is a difficult place for Fantu. She has not lived with her mother since she was much younger and she does not go there often now. She was taken from the village and put in school after something happened to her. She does not know exactly what happened but it sounds to me like she was sexually assaulted in some way. One day when we were talking about scars on her body she showed me a serious burn on her chest and said that it happened before she left the village. Then she described a time she had a dream:

125. Jordene: /...So you were five. Right, ok. And did you go to school in the village?
126. Fantu: No. When I come here I started going to school.
127. Jordene: And why did you go to school here and not in the village?
128. Fantu: Is my father removed me there. Because When I was in the village I dream in in night
129. Fantu: An old man come and squeeze my stomach. From that time my

- stomach start aching me one month later when this. When this stomach pain goes down, my father take me to the town here and started going to school.
130. Jordene: What did he do to your stomach? He squeeze . . . ?
131. Fantu: I don't know. When I was sleeping in a dream a person squeeze my stomach. When I wake (unclear) in the morning my stomach started aching. One month my stomach was aching. When that go down. , my father take me here to the town. (4 second pause)
132. Jordene: Have you seen that old man again in your dreams? (3 second pause)
133. Fantu: (shakes her head no) I didn't see him clear. (9 second pause)
134. Jordene: And what part of your stomach? The top part, the bottom part, the bottom . . . bottom part?
135. Fantu: Here. (points to the pelvic area)
136. Jordene: What do you think that was? Now you are older you can think about it. What do you think it was?
137. Fantu: It was a witches.
138. Jordene: Is the witch business strong here?
139. Fantu: Yes.
140. Jordene: Tell me about it. (pause) Are there men witches and women witches both?

I am not sure if this was a sexual assault. Fantu was only about five years old. I am not close enough to the family to ask about it and even if I were close, I doubt that they would tell me or perhaps they do not know what happened. So often, negative things are attributed to witchcraft. Witchcraft allows for a level of ambiguity that does not require retribution by the family or a public condemnation but can be forgotten. Blurred events, unknown illnesses, and bad luck are witchcraft. Good fortune is luck. It is all attributed to God. When I have asked other Sierra Leoneans to interpret this part of the interview they do not think there is any way of knowing the truth or that there would be a truth. What I can surmise is that something happened, either externally or internally to Fantu and then she was taken to the city to go to school. And since then she does not want to return to the village.

Witchcraft both in and out of the village is a frequent topic for Fantu. All of the girls talk about witchcraft but Fantu and her pal, Satu bring it up the most often.

141. Jordene: So what do you know about witches? I don't know anything about witches in West Africa.
142. Fantu: (pause) The witches they destroy many things.
143. Jordene: Ahha. Like what?
144. Fantu: (pause) Like for example if a person has a gift for you and your friend there. If that friend hate you and she was a witch or she or he is a witch when she hate you she will plan bad things for you. She will plan a bad mind for you. If you are going to school and you have a chance and you tell that of all of her friends. She will tell all of her witch companions to let that of your gift go away from you. The witches do that. They try many things. If you have a gift they try many things. That of your gift they mess it up.
145. Jordene: How do you know? I'm trying to understand. Is it from one family or how does someone become a witch?
146. Fantu: (long pause) I don't know. Maybe some have witch for their friend. Like for example, you and your friend are going to school if that of your friend is a witch. She put that of her witch in it if you eat that food you too will become a witch.
147. Jordene: I have to be careful of what I'm eating.
148. Fantu: Yes.
149. Jordene: So if you have good luck, if you are good in school, you meet a good person, fall in love, the witches can cut it off.
150. Fantu: Yes!

Getting poisoned through witchcraft, being shot by a witch gun, having a witch give you a headache on an exam day are all common enough topics. Fantu frequently talks about the man who lives behind her house that sends big, black snakes under the house at night. The kids pray before they go to sleep and the snake has never attacked them. So the witchcraft is also alive under their house in the city not just the village.

When Fantu talks about the snake or witches gathering in a tree at night, she becomes animated and excited. We have joked about writing a book about schools for witches. The school would be very much like her current school but it would be where the witches go to learn. She has brought this idea back to me a few times, suggesting that we should make a movie or suggesting that the witch school would have magic flogging sticks. She has never read Harry Potter or seen the movies. I

would like to see what she thought of global northern witches compared to her Sierra Leone-style witches.

5.1.6. Boldness

Sometimes when I am having trouble reaching Fantu, I will bring up the topic of witches to get her animated and involved or we will do little mini-manicures together. Sometimes it is hard to engage her but not always. The picture of Fantu that I have painted is one of a shy girl, desperately trying to stay in school although not particularly motivated to achieve, afraid of a loss of funding from me, afraid of being told to get married, and of an adult child responsible for her siblings. There is a side of Fantu that is not shy, not quiet but very bold and noisy. I see her growing into her power, her sense of self and her self- confidence.

151. Jordene . . . And before you met me you were a small girl, in class six. Do you remember the day that you met me?
152. Fantu: in class six, the day, the day I met you? I forgot the date but it was in 2009 or 8.
153. Jordene: What do you remember about that day? Who told you to come see me? (We discuss how she was chosen to be interviewed)
154. Jordene: What did you think when you walked into the room and saw two white ladies?
155. Fantu: At that time, I was very ashamed and I was scared. The time you were talking.
156. Jordene: I was surprised to see you so bold yesterday with Isatou and Kadidja fighting for the cards/.
157. Fantu: (laughs)/
158. Jordene: It was really fun. I don't usually see you so bold. Are you like that sometimes? Are you so bold sometimes?
159. Fantu: Huh?
160. Jordene: So bold sometimes?
161. Fantu: Yes sometimes.
162. Jordene: What makes you bold?
163. Fantu: At first I did not know how to speak English but now I can try it.
164. Jordene: Hmm...
165. Fantu: /That is why I'm bold. I'm so proud of myself.
166. Jordene: Your English is really quite good. You have no reason to be at

all to be afraid. Your English is fine. Don't let that Kadidja
bluff you too much/... (*bluff*= show you up; brag or boast)
167. Fantu: (Laughs)

I have noticed that over the years, in our formal interviews, Fantu is more and more confident. She laughs louder and will occasionally suggest a topic. In 2013, she asked if I was going to take her to America. I cannot imagine her having the confidence to do that when she was younger. Despite her quiet, shy manner she gets what she wants; she asks me for funds in the first interview and now asks if she can come to America.

Fantu was also bold and assertive when it came to telling her story of throwing rocks, chanting, and marching in the Kono Girls Bus Strike. When telling her story, she grabbed the microphone and commanded her pals on the porch. She was proud and boastful of throwing stones at the headmistress. She was in the pack of girls that marched to the police station. She was one of the girls who tricked the police by pretending that their classmate was wounded so they could approach the station and get close enough to stone the police. She bought potato leaf to cover her eyes so that the tear gas would sting less and she could keep throwing stones. Her rage and her joy at her own power are palpable in her retelling of the event.

That day on the porch, retelling her story of bravery into a microphone in front of me and her age- mates, I saw a side of Fantu that I had not seen before. The quiet, obedient, soft spoken, sweet girl was animated, bouncing around in her white plastic chair, interrupting her pals, shouting just a little louder to be heard, and for once demanding that her side of the story be heard clearly.

I wonder if this Fantu— the assertive, rock throwing for her rights girl— will transform the quiet, obedient young woman or if this was a onetime burst of power shouting out about all that she wants to become.

5.2. Analysis of Fantu's portrait

5.2.1. Liminality

Drawing on the concept of liminality as discussed in the theoretical frameworks chapter (Turner, 1984; Van Gennep, 1960), I see Fantu simultaneously inhabiting two liminal spaces. First, there is a transitional, liminal figured world of being a schoolgirl moving between being a girl and being a woman (Switzer, 2010; Ybema, Beech, & Ellis, 2011). Secondly, she is of a generation or a perpetual between-ness that spans her uneducated war-generation parents and her future children who presumably will be educated and will have grown up in peace (Steven, 2002; Ybema, Beech, & Ellis, 2011). To explore these liminal spaces and times, I begin with the transitional, liminal figured world of being a schoolgirl.

5.2.1.1. Liminal space of being a schoolgirl

Fantu's figured world as a schoolgirl is a temporary space between being a small girl in the village and the unknown future. Ybema, Beech, and & Ellis (2011) define this temporal space in this way: "Liminality ...[pertains] to a relatively time-constrained phase in-between two identity positions" (p. 21). For Fantu, this temporal figured world of being a schoolgirl is a liminal one in which her identity is solid but fleeting.

This liminality of being a schoolgirl in areas where schooling is not nor has been the norm is not unique to Fantu or to Sierra Leone. In a Kenyan study, Switzer

(2010) interviewed ninety-eight Maasai schoolgirls. She interviewed each Maasai girl once, providing a snapshot of what each girl considered her identity at that moment.

Switzer's snapshots reveal the schoolgirl identity as an "emergent social category" that is "contradictory resistance to traditional gender norms and social forms" (2010, p. 137). Switzer sees the international development discourse promoting "Education for All" (UNICEF, 2013) as pushing all girls into school, thus creating new gendered categories for the Maasai.

The social categories— girl, initiate, woman, wife, and mother— are all gendered. The schooling imperative thus alters the conventional Maasai progression across the life course and the meanings ascribed to various stages of this progression (p. 143). Switzer's research shows that the Maasai schoolgirls describe themselves in much the same way that Fantu and her cohort do.

However, Switzer finds that the Maasai girls describe themselves as schoolgirls using a specific word appropriated from other circumstances. This allows her to illustrate positively the ways in which the schoolgirls themselves are distinguishing this period of their lives from other stages. Fantu, her school-going cohort, and the community in general do not use a particular term to describe their school-going status as the Maasai girls do, however they clearly see this time in school as a limited period that differs from other girls' time periods and other periods in their own lives.

Fantu asserts that her time as a schoolgirl is a limited period that will end when someone else decides it should end. Her father will end it if the money is not there to pay for her or by giving her in marriage. Other girls, like Isatou, have also expressed schooling as a liminal period that may be terminated by someone else. In sixth grade, Isatou acknowledged that being in school was not in her control or even

totally under her parent's control. Instead, if she matured sexually faster than her classmates did, she would be asked to leave school by the headmistress. In the following data sample, Isatou says that her headmistress will not allow girls who have gone through puberty to be enrolled in primary school.

168. Isatou: But Auntie Katie, I love this teacher, this head teacher. If she said, no, if that is why she won't allow any girl that have, that have breasts very big to attend our school.
169. Goldy: *ahh Wetin du?*
170. Isatou: Because if . . . if we attending school. If she because of *na morni, na morni, if'n yu na say na morni na morni want. e no go get better school pikin, they will go learn, super na behleh xxxx can say, no want person whose booby done big, e de mature enough. E na say no want that.*
(Translation: *If she (headmistress, Auntie Katie) says she will allow girls with big breasts in the school because of the fees, she will end up having so many girls that are pregnant.*)

In this exchange, Isatou is accepting the idea that primary school girls should not be sexually matured because their sexual maturity will lead to pregnancy. In other words, the girls' biology in some way determines her ability to study in primary school.

Taking the time of being a schoolgirl as a temporal state which that will end when the girl is married or becomes pregnant, further refines the parameters of a primary schoolgirl as a girl who is not married and not pregnant and who has not sexually matured. Isatou's headmistress confirmed that she does not allow physically mature girls to enroll in sixth grade; however if a girl matures during sixth grade, she allows her to stay in that school (Katie, 2010). Members of ISIS, a local education focused non-governmental organization, confirm that sexually mature girls are seen as risky as they may become sexually active and thus will not remain in primary school.

Therefore, this liminal period of being a schoolgirl is a nebulous time to be that may be ended by others in spite of the girls' desires.

These findings concur with Switzer (2010) in her work with the Maasai in Kenya. In many ways, the category of schoolgirls in Kono echos Switzer's findings. In other ways, Sierra Leone schoolgirls present a somewhat different perspective. For Switzer the Maasai schoolgirls must leave one path and walk onto another. Switzer writes, "For some Maasai girls, becoming a student means becoming a different person, one who will walk away from her current life in an effort to create a new one" (p. 146). In the interviews with Fantu, she does not indicate that her identity as a schoolgirl creates a fissure with her overall self- image. Perhaps the different cultural patterns of the two cultures may explain the difference in findings. As presented by Switzer, the Maasai girls have a more defined path from girlhood to womanhood, with precise time markers and transitional events. In contrast, much of Sierra Leone's post-war culture post-war allows for a variety of paths toward womanhood and has less well- defined liminal markers.

5.2.1.2.Perpetual Between-ness

The post-war culture of Sierra Leone is a transitional liminal time. Fantu and her age- mates were young children during the war and as child survivors of the war represent the liminal generation between war and peace (Steven, 2002; Ybema, Beech, & Ellis, 2011). Fantu inhabits a figured world that is significantly different from the possibilities of the one afforded to her mother's generation of women. These possibilities include greater mobility, radio and other media influences, and education. Fantu as a student in a junior secondary school, level 3 (ninth grade in the United States), has already completed more schooling than any of her ancestors or even her cousins. Although still an emerging reader, Fantu is the most educated person in her entire extended family.

Fantu's family's belief in education comes out of the causes of the civil war and the war itself. After the war, education was heralded both as the way out of poverty for individuals and the nation but also as the way toward equality for Sierra Leone women. For many families, the refugee camps became the first place that schooling was seen as a normal childhood activity. Then immediately post-war, girls were enrolled in school in record numbers. For Fantu's mother, going to school was not an option, but she did not perceive this to be a hardship. For Fantu, schooling became the goal.

Some of this shift from unknown to goal can be attributed to changes within Sierra Leonean society. However, it is visible in the discourse of international development. International development discourse posits the schoolgirl category as a liminal space that will positively disrupt traditional life cycle sequencing of the following scenario: first, the child is a girl, then the girl goes to *bondo*, and then she becomes a wife and mother. The discourse of development normalizes the global north's childhood and lengthy adolescence sequence.

In addressing shifting cultural markers for adolescents, Adegoke (2001) illustrates the contrast between the expectations that women must start having children by a certain age yet and the expectation that they should also stay in school. He writes:

This [These contrasting expectations] results in mixed messages to adolescents: that women must start having children at a young age and are expected to do so within marriage, but that they should stay in school, which requires postponing marriage and childbearing. As the years in school [increases], the period between menarche and marriage is lengthened, extending the period of premarital exposure to the risk of conception. (p. 22)

Adegoke is speaking of sub-Saharan Africa in general when he speaks of mixed messages of childbirth and womanhood, but the issue is part of the daily discourse in

Sierra Leone. Steady Bongo, a popular musician in Sierra Leone, challenges the marker of womanhood as having a child, when he sings of a woman not needing her own child to be considered a woman on his 2010 album, *Mama Sayla*.

The appearance of a lengthening of the period of adolescence is further demonstrated when the schoolgirls themselves proclaim that they want to get married but only after they have completed their education. Their mothers, in contrast, were expected to get married and have children immediately after the *Bondo* ceremony. The discourse of education for all, perfectly timed with the Sierra Leone civil war, has transformed Fantu's generation into one that expects to be educated and that challenges previous markers of womanhood. Fantu's generation of child war survivors occupies a liminal generational space. This space is defined in part by the fact that they know the ways the culture has operated and are actively questioning its hegemony.

Some of the questions that Gee asks of the data are: "How consistent are the relevant figured worlds here? Are there competing or conflicting figured worlds at play? Whose interests are the figured worlds representing?" (2011, p. 95) When I think of the contradictions in Fantu's interview— one minute she is shy, then bold or that at first she claims that she will pick her husband but in the next moment she is allowing that it will be her father who chooses her mate—, it seems that she is contradicting herself over and over again. However when viewed from the perspective of conflicting or competing figured worlds, Fantu is eloquently expressing the liminal dilemmas of her generation.

5.2.2. Marriage: Is it the end of the liminal period of schooling?

Aporia in my data set of interviews is not uncommon. It is expected that Fantu at the age of twelve will not answer the question about her future occupation the same way that Fantu at the age of sixteen will answer. Fantu has at times wanted to be a banker, a lawyer, and a nurse. She has always been clear that she does not want to go to the village and that staying in school is the way to avoid going to the village and getting married. What remains unclear are the timing and the manner by which Fantu will leave school and get married.

5.2.2.1. Who chooses the husband?

Fantu is confident that her father will allow her to stay in school as long as he has the funds to pay for her schooling. In lines 61--68, she reaffirms that her father's priority is her and her siblings' schooling. What she is not clear about is who will choose her husband. In lines 11-27 (repeated here for convenience) Fantu initially says that she will choose her own husband— Line 16 –“No one” in answer to my question, “Who is going to pick your husband?” Then when I role-play and use her father's voice to say, “This is a good man, Fantu. I want you to marry him,” Fantu confuses me with her enthusiastic “I will.” From her answer of “no one,” At first I thought she meant that she would choose her husband but then it seemed that she was saying she would marry the man her father suggests. This conversation confused me. I played it for several Sierra Leoneans to make sure I understood it the way they did.

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| 11. Jordene: | Ok so, Ok so, ok if you stop going to school— -you get yourself a husband? |
| 12. Fantu: | Yes |
| 13. Jordene: | So ok, who is going to pick your husband? |
| 14. Fantu: | Me? |
| 15. Jordene: | Yeah? Who is going to decide this man is for Fantu? |
| 16. Fantu: | No one. |
| 17. Jordene: | No one? |
| 18. Fantu: | Yes. |
| 19. Jordene: | Will your father say, eh “This is a good man, Fantu. I want you |

- to marry him”?
20. Fantu: (pause) I will!
21. Jordene: Huh?
22. Fantu: Yes,
23. Jordene: Yea? What will you say?
24. Fantu: I too will accept.
25. Jordene: Because you are the daughter?
26. Fantu: Yes.
27. Jordene: ahmmm

The informants agreed that Fantu is saying that she will accept whomever her father has chosen for her to be her husband. This example illustrates the competing discourse of respect and obedience to her father with the discourse of being a schoolgirl. Fantu is eager to stay in school in order to delay marriage but she acknowledges that this may contradict her father’s wishes.

Fantu is not alone in telling me that she will accept whomever her father wishes for her to marry. However, the majority of schoolgirls believe that they will have an active role in making this decision. Agreeing with Fantu and adding a layer of nuance to the discussion is another of the schoolgirls interviewed extensively, Portia. Portia is particularly interesting in that she told me that her father would choose her mate, although he will not like doing it. Later, her father, in her presence, tells me that he will not choose for Portia but that she will choose her own mate. The following conversation is the first of this set with Portia:

171. Jordene: Do you have friends who are married? Do you have friends that are married?
172. Portia: Yes, I have a lot of friends that are married.
173. Jordene: Tell me?
174. Portia: Because women get married before boys.
175. Jordene: Why does that happen?
176. Portia: Because some women are not loves school.
177. Jordene: Why do they not love?
178. Portia: Because if they don’t get responsibility they get married.
179. Portia: They will get married.
180. Jordene: Who decides?
181. Portia: The pa and the woman. The father who decide.

182. Jordene: What does he think when he decides.
 183. Portia: When he decides?
 184. Goldy: That pa how *he de seeum*?
 185. Portia: He don't feel happy.
 186. Jordene: So do you think the girl decides or pa decide? The pa decides?
 187. Portia: Yes.
 188. Jordene: The pa says, "He tomorrow you get married," and the girls says
 "Yes?" The girls say, "No problem"?
 189. Portia: Yes.

While Portia says that the father will decide whom she will marry, she adds that the father will not be happy when he decides to marry off his daughter. Portia is a very religious, sentimental girl and has a close loving relationship with her father.

Portia comes from a religious family, attends an Islamic girls-only school, frequently goes to mosque, and always wears a headscarf and long pants/skirts and long sleeved shirts. The girls I interviewed from her primary school had classmates who had left school to get married. This differed from the girls from Christian or secular schools, in that while most of those girls were also religiously Muslim, none had friends that had left school to get married. This trend has continued with the girls from the strict Islamic school who leave school to get married before having children. The girls from the Christian or secular schools may have left school and may have children but they are not necessarily leaving school for the purpose of getting married.

The data sample above was my first conversation with Portia and shows how she saw her future in 2010. In my second interview with the family during my 2012 visit, her father suggests that Portia should finish junior secondary school. Present at the interview is Frankie, who acted as an interpreter when needed. He is also a close friend of the father. Also present was Portia's brother. He is two years younger than she is but attends the same grade as Portia in the segregated boys' section of the same Islamic school that Portia attends. During this second interview, we tell the family

that my non-governmental organization will pay her school fees and provide uniforms, shoes, and books, and as a result, her father has agreed that she can continue in school. Of course, the fact that her brother Mohammed also shares the textbooks sweetens the deal. However, the father is clear when I asked him how long he would like to see Portia continue in school:

190. Jordene: When are you thinking of Portia, what are you thinking?
191. Portia's father: Woohhh. I'm thinking of prosperity to her. I hope to her. Because for myself I have been dropped. So I don't want her to be dropped like me again. So I am the hope to her.
192. Jordene: How long do you think she should go to education? How many more years?
193. Portia's father: Wellllll, if she continue with the efforts. Only for now, only for four years now.
194. Jordene: So finish JSS?
195. Portia's father: Yea because. Finish JSS for now, she is in form 2, next academic form 3. Just in about three or four years' time.

For Portia's father, Portia finishing junior high school would be enough schooling.

That may have been because I was sitting there and he knows that I am a white lady researching girls' education and I have agreed to pay her school fees. Interestingly, in front of her father, with my support, Portia challenged him:

196. Jordene to Portia: What do you think of that?
197. Portia: (softly) I think (unclear) should educate me.
198. Jordene: *Yea tey when, to wus time*
199. Portia: Finish college.
200. Jordene: (assuming she meant local, post-high school training school) What part, what kind of college?
201. Portia: Fourah Bay College! (the best college in Sierra Leone)
202. Jordene: Fourah Bay College! Woohoo!"
203. All: (Laugh)

Having Portia challenge her father boldly and openly surprised me. She is sweet, obedient, and always cheerful but here she was defying her father openly. This led me and Frankie, my research assistant /translator, to discuss the comment later. Frankie

thought that it was symbolic of her lack of respect for her father because he does not work and therefore is not ‘the man’ of the house but I think it has more to do with her own sense of self as a potentially independent woman. I think the comment was more about her confidence and less about her father.

In 2013, the conversations with Portia, her father, and her brother and with Frankie are very different. In the three years that have passed since my first interview with Portia, I have visited her home several times and although the relationship with her father is more formal than with other families, he seems to be comfortable with me and often invites me to come sit with him as I am driving or walking by his house. I noticed when reviewing all of the interviews with Portia’s family that there was a more informal atmosphere and informality in 2013, as if, they were getting more comfortable with me and my strange questions. In this conversation, we are sitting in the back of their home, under some trees, near the family’s garden.

- | | | |
|------|------------------|--|
| 204. | Jordene: | Will you chose a husband for her? |
| 205. | Portia’s father: | Let her choice for herself. Her choice is my choice. |
| 206. | Jordene: | OK. Did you choose for yourself? |
| 207. | Portia’s father: | Of course, my, I chose my wife although some of my parents, at that time, some of them, are not interesting. Yes! They say the woman, you know the way they see, let me just forget about her, but at that time, I say, “No, she is my choice,” so I got married her. I married her, so by that time, some of them, they admire us because they see the way that we live with the woman. So all of them come nearer to us and support. So if she also choice her husband, I will not object because I do the same. |

In 2010 in class six, Portia made the statement that her father would chose her husband but he would not be happy to have to do it. In 2013, Portia’s father says that he and his wife chose each other and therefore he would allow his daughter to do the same. These two statements are in direct conflict with each other. In 2010, Portia may or may not have known that her parents went against their own parent’s wishes and

married for 'love'. She may also have been reproducing the discourse of her school that says that girls marry when and whomever their father chooses for them.

What is clear for all of the girls is that the process of getting married is a negotiation with their fathers. For most of them, getting married will end their education and for many of them it will mean a return to the village, farming, and having children immediately.

5.2.3 Marriage as negotiation

Although Portia and Fantu's families are poor, they are not as poor as Aisatta's family. Aisatta's father is in a wheelchair and her step-mom uses a crutch to get around. They beg for their living. For Aisatta, schooling is a very fragile liminal time, dependent on many more variables than it is for the other girls. For Aisatta, getting a husband might mean the end of some of the family's poverty. In my first interview with Aisatta in 2010, we had the following conversation:

208. Jordene: Do you want a husband?
209. Aisatta: A husband? Yes. We are praying for a husband.
210. Jordene: OK, what kind of husband do you want?
211. Aisatta: What kind of husband do I want? The only thing for pay my school fees, *uside no de poil, and come to pay my pa nah huse. My pa na* handicap no got money for pay mi school fees. So let him pay for my book learning. That is what the husband be for. (*I want a husband to pay for my school fees (I don't want to be spoiled) because my father is handicapped and cannot pay for my school fees. I don't want to be spoiled. Let my husband pay for my book learning. That is all I ask.*)

In 2011, the conversation was repeated:

212. Jordene: What if a rich, handsome man comes to your father and says I want Aisatta?
213. Aisatta: Rich man?
214. Jordene: (role- playing) "Father, I want Aisatta as my girl."
215. Aisatta: My father, he has agree, but I don't have that man there yet. (pause) Yes.
216. Jordene: So your father will agree?

217. Aisatta: Yes, if I have good luck, because he says he wants. “Ok marry her and start to go school back. You pay for my daughter.”
218. Jordene: An how you see it? (*What do you think?*)
219. Aisatta: I see it, she have cool, the other (unintelligible) not cool, because have money not there. If money is there, you will not do not marry first, unless you do your school, but if, if, your father cannot do not have money, he will say, ok go marry to that boy. Yes. My father will talk that. Ok this boy go marry this girl but you will pay school fees for this girl until you see her go in college.

For Aisatta, getting married will involve having her father negotiate her educational expenses through senior secondary school and this will be ‘good luck’.

Having a husband pay your school fees is common in Sierra Leone. Frankie is paying the school fees for his eighteen- year- old wife. In 2013, she will be finishing her final year of secondary school, and she is pregnant with their first child. They have been married for two years now. Frankie negotiated the marriage with his father-in-law on the condition that the girl finishes high school before having a child. Maxine, my friend who is now a high ranking government official, negotiated to have her first husband pay her school fees through high school into teacher’s college.

The theme of negotiation continues to appear as each of these schoolgirls discusses her imagined route toward marriage. One of the girls that I have not been able to keep track of since 2011 made her role in the negotiation quite clear:

220. Jordene: What if your father picks for example, the headmaster?
221. Hannah: I will not accept, I *will used* to the person. I will tell him to find another person.
222. Jordene: What if your father picks an old, old man?
223. Hannah: I will marry to him because he don’t have a long life again.
224. Hannah and Jordene: (laugh)
225. Jordene: So you marry the old man and he’ll die and you have all the money!
226. Hannah & Jordene: (laugh)
227. Hannah: YES!

Although Hannah and I laugh throughout this section of the interview, Hannah attended an Islamic school where several of her sixth and seventh grade classmates had already married. Some of those girls who had married continued in school but most stayed home with their mates and had babies. This was a very real possibility for Hannah.

I wish I had asked Hannah why she would marry an old man and wish him to die quickly. Was it that she wanted the old man husband to have a short life so that she could be free not to marry again or that she wanted the money? What is seen from this exchange and the other conversations with the girls is that for some school will end if they get married while for others marriage may be a way to continue their schooling. However, for most of the schoolgirls, like Hannah, Portia, and Aisatta, who and when they marry is expected to be a negotiation. For these schoolgirls, unlike Fantu, their fate is to be negotiated actively with their parents.

However, Fantu, in her devotion and obedience to her father, allows that he will be the one to ultimately make the decision. I did not ask Fantu's father if he would ask Fantu to marry someone she does not choose for herself so I cannot speculate on what the future will actually bring. By the end of the conversation, Fantu is reproducing the dominant figured world of being a good girl in her culture but through her discourse, the competing figured worlds are apparent. She first insists that she will choose but later says that her father will choose her husband. These competing figured worlds play out through many of the conversations with Fantu.

Like Fantu, Portia thought that her father would decide whom she marries. Perhaps she thinks this because of the same dominate discourse in her Islamic school that has the father choosing the husband for the daughter. The figured world of being

a girl includes obeying the father in his wishes but Portia's father, while seeking obedience, does not extend this obligation to marriage. Portia's father contradicts this dominant figured world espoused by the school, the mosque, and the elders of the community and allows that he had disrupted the dominant figured world when he chose his own wife. He expects that his children will follow in his footsteps and reproduce his transformed figured world.

Neither Aisatta in her desire to marry a man who will pay for her schooling or Hannah in her willingness to marry an old man only if he quickly dies are transforming the existing figured world for schoolgirls in regards to marriage. These two riffs are well-established ways for girls to succeed within the existing figured world. The mastered figured world is that schoolgirls leave school to get married but the actual action and beliefs acknowledge that there are ways to get married and stay in school.

5.2.3.1 The village for farming and the city for opportunity

Although Kono is a small city with a population of about 110,000, it is the biggest metropolis in the district of Kono and in the Eastern Province. People in Kono consider everywhere that is not in Kono's center to be "village." People come to Kono to access modern services such as the hospital, secondary schools, civil society organizations, and government services. In contrast, villages are portrayed as places filled with supernatural powers, uneducated people, and 'old ways.' In the village, the chieftaincy holds more power because there are fewer civil society organizations or civil government offices. In the village, beliefs in witchcraft and supernatural powers are stronger than more modern religions, like Christianity or Islam. For health care,

the village may have a government paid nurse or midwife but it will also offer traditional herbal cures and the removal of bullets shot from a witch gun. Villages may have a primary school and sometimes a junior secondary school but usually children have to walk many miles for a substandard primary education and then are sent to the city for junior secondary school. Fantu's family has invested in a home in the city so that the children can receive the best available education starting in primary school. Before the children are old enough for school, which in Fantu's family is around seven or eight, the children stay on the farm in the village. In Sierra Leone in general, when labor is needed on the farm, children, but particularly girls, are pulled from school to help (Bolten, 2009).

Fantu knows the village and she knows the city and like her schoolgirl friends, she prefers the city. This is not uncommon in Sub-Saharan Africa, which is becoming increasingly more urban. Currently 33% of the Sub-Saharan African population lives in urban areas but by 2050 it is anticipated that 68% of the population will have left their villages and migrated to the cities (Lynch, Maconachie, Binns, Tengbe, & Bangura, 2013). In Sierra Leone, this migration was accelerated by the civil war. The lack of opportunity in the village for all, but particularly for young men, is also one of the often-cited main causes for the civil war. The Revolutionary United Front (RUF) anthem "Footpaths to Democracy" states:

We pointed out to them (*the government soldiers*) that for the first time they were out of the security of Freetown and the barracks into the insecurity and poverty of the countryside. They were now getting to know their country and they could see for themselves what all the diamonds and gold taken from the countryside have done to the environment and the people. The land has been despoiled and the irresponsible and corrupt mining magnates leave the villagers only with the gift of pits and craters that breed mosquitoes, malaria and cholera. Farmlands are destroyed in the insatiable quest for diamonds and gold. The only way out of their cringing poverty is for the youth and able to yield to the false attraction of urban and cosmopolitan life. (RUF, 1995, p. 9)

However much the ideology of the RUF promoted the village life, once the war was over, few fighters returned to their home villages—instead they choose the “false attraction of urban and cosmopolitan life.”

The urge to live the cosmopolitan life was actually accelerated because of the war. Prior to the war, 70% of the young men worked in farming, but when given a choice of reintegration packages, 50% of the ex-combatants chose to receive vocational training (Peters & Richards, 2011). Only about 15% of the fighters chose to receive agricultural tool kits, based on seeds and farming tools. Many of those are speculated to be older fighters who had farmed prior to the war (Peters & Richards, 2011). In Kono, many of the ex-combatants did not know how to farm, as they had been child soldiers and knew little beyond war and diamond mining (Tongu, 2013). Those who did not choose farming were funneled into vocational training packages focused on learning the skills of a carpenter, builder, auto mechanic, or other trade deemed appropriate for male ex-combatants. Female ex-combatants were led into dying cloth, making soap, or seamstress vocational training. These training programs lasted at most a few months and really were simply a means to “separate fighters from their guns” (Peters & Richards, 2011). Many of the vocational training graduates sold their tool kits and returned to farming or the unskilled work of diamond mining.

Against this background of rural to urban migration and the failure of the civil war to resolve underlying inequities of the chieftaincy rule, the schoolgirls in this study have grown up knowing the reality of life in the city and the reality of life in the village. In 2012, after reading Bolton’s article entitled “The Agricultural Impasse: Creating ‘normal’ post-war development in Sierra Leone” (2009). I was interested in the dichotomy between the city and the village and included several questions about

city vs. village in my interviews. The responses of the schoolgirls promoted the city as the place where educated, modern people live. Uniformly, they espoused that people in the city have access to the wider world. Fantu's neighbor and classmate, Satu expressed this clearly:

228. Jordene: When you are a woman do you want to live in the village or city?
229. Satu: City!
230. Jordene: Even though the city is so difficult?
231. Satu: I like it here.
232. Jordene: But there is so much dust. Look at the dust here and all the strange men. And it is not like the village where it is sweet and simple. So why, how come you like the city?
233. Satu: I like the city because when you are there, you have a lot of friends that can help you with (unclear) and other activities.
234. Jordene: Ok, what kind of activities?
235. Satu: Like when you are city in the city you can have a good friend who can tell you I will take you to America or other ways but when you are in the village you cannot have those friends.

Satu is obviously referencing me as the good friend who can take her to America, and she is correct in that very few whites come to the region where she lives and even fewer make it close to the village. We would not have met if she were not in the city. I think that for her, I represent the benefits of city life.

Aisatta, another focal schoolgirl, expressed the connection between city and education and job. The schoolgirls refer to nurses, lawyers, bankers, and office workers. Their mothers who have small tables set up in front of their house or may make handicrafts to sell are not considered to have a job. Similarly, many of the girls expressed that farming was not a job. Here is a data from a conversation with Aisatta

236. Jordene: Why do you come to school every day?
237. Aisatta: When I educated, sometime I may be lawyer, nurse, president. I may be many thing to do. I will have job to do.
238. Jordene: What about being a farmer? Would you like to be a farmer?
239. Aisatta: NO.
240. Jordene: Why not? Farming is good; they have rice to eat, (pause) You don't like rice to eat?

241. Aisatta: I like it. Rice is the staple food of Sierra Leone.
 242. Jordene: Ahh so but you don't want to be a rice farmer? Why not?
 243. Aisatta: Is that why I want to educate? To do job!
 244. Jordene: What do you like about a job vs. farming?
 245. Aisatta: When I educate I will be a nurse.

The schoolgirls routinely complained of being hungry, of not having enough to eat, and having had only 'dry rice.' In Sierra Leone, it is not unusual to have only one meal a day but that meal should be plentiful and have both rice and a sauce with some sort of protein. If the food provided is insufficient or does not have enough protein, day laborer farmers will walk off the field and refuse to work. Hunger is real for these girls, and they have been taught to value rice above all other grains. Those in the village generally eat better than their relatives in the city, yet despite their hunger, the girls did not consider farming to be a job.

Finda, another schoolgirl intensively interviewed, expressed the idea that farming was not an actual job but something suitable in retirement, despite the fact that like Fantu, Finda's father is a farmer. When I interviewed Finda, we were sitting on a bench under a shade tree outside of her school. I asked her about a man sitting on another bench just outside of her classroom. She explains:

246. Finda: He taught me integrated and agriculture.
 247. Jordene: So you can be a farmer?
 248. Finda: No. (puzzled)
 249. Jordene: (laugh) Why? You don't want to be a farmer?
 250. Finda: Cause the educated person cannot be a farmer. Only if he or she is a retired person.

The idea that educated people cannot be farmers was often repeated. When the schoolgirls used this binary, I routinely objected saying that farmers know how to plant rice, harvest rice, and they must know a lot about the land. The girls assented that I was somewhat correct but that farmers do not know how to read and write so

they were not really educated. It was reading and writing that the schoolgirls held as being educated and anything other than book learning was dismissed as not educated.

Finda further divides farmers into two categories. One is the idea of the ‘gentleman farmer’ as opposed to the poor farmer. Many of the successfully educated professional people I know have small vegetable farms that they tend on the weekend. Some have larger farms for which they hire others to do the hardest labor for them in the tradition of the overseer. Some of the farms are for cash crops such as walnut; others are simply for their own fresh cassava leaf.

Most of the schoolgirls in this study grow cassava leaf, potato leaf, and green-green with their mothers. Many of them sell this produce on the weekend or after school, walking through the town with a tray on their head, to pay for school fees and other household expenses. As much as they rely on agriculture for food and cash, they would not consider themselves to be farmers because farmers live in the village and are uneducated. The figured world of being a schoolgirl is in contrast to the reality of their dependence on agriculture both in the village and in their city garden plots. Gee asks:

Are there differences here between the figured worlds that are affecting espoused beliefs and those that are affecting actual actions and practices? What sorts of figured worlds, if any, are being used here to make value judgments about oneself and others? (2011, p. 95)

The view that farming is less valuable than education is widely stated by the schoolgirls, yet their subsistence depends on farming. Even those girls whose fathers dig for diamonds rely on their relatives in the village to send rice, and they rely on the family garden plot to provide cassava leaf to eat and to sell to pay for their school fees. This value judgment elevates the status of the educated above the farmers.

5.3. Conclusion

Fantu's portrait offers three discussions that illuminate her figured worlds as a schoolgirl in Kono, Sierra Leone. First, Fantu sees her time as a schoolgirl as liminal space and time that will end when her father can no longer support her education. Then she will go to the village and get married. The liminality of her time as a schoolgirl is a defining attribute of Fantu's figured world.

Concurrent with the liminality of her time as a schoolgirl is the liminal space that she plays in the generational history of her family. She is the first to go to school through junior secondary school. She is the first generation to have school as the normative path and the first generation to have a long period between entering the *bondo* society and getting married. Her generation is thus in a liminal state of "perpetual between-ness": neither following the old customs nor completely rejecting them but holding a new unknown space between her parents and her own children.

That Fantu will have children is an unquestioned part of her figured world—whether she is a schoolgirl or not. What is different, as discussed in the second finding, is the ways in which the schoolgirls perceive that they will be able to negotiate the choice of their husbands. Fantu accepts that her father will choose her spouse and she will accept because she is a 'good daughter.' Others believe that they will be able to influence their father's choice, and indeed Portia's father says that he will allow his daughter to choose for herself. Hannah and Aisatta plan on leveraging the marriage for schooling or as an investment in their future.

The final discussion brought forth by Fantu's portrait is the monetary and psychological investment in her future as an educated woman in the city in contrast to the equally possible future as a farmer's wife in the village. Although either future is a

real possibility, Fantu's figured worlds of a schoolgirl do not incorporate any alternative but focus solely on her future with a job in the city.

CHAPTER 6

AISATTA

6.1. Portrait of Aisatta

6.1.1. The journey to Sawafe and back

Aisatta⁷ is abused, reused, and tossed away but she would not say this about herself. In Kono town, she pushes her father in his wheelchair, shoving away the blind and the crippled, to get to the car window, begging for her dinner, her school fees, and the rent money. Her father smells in my nostrils like urine and bad breath and years of decay. His skin is clean, scrubbed by Aisatta's daily attentions, but his clothes are torn and the smell no longer washes out. To Aisatta, he is a man with dignity, an intelligent man, a man of morals. He has always been disabled but he was not always a beggar. His wheelchair was donated sometime after the war—the seat strong and the wheels replaced many times. Aisatta's stepmother uses a stick to help her walk. She is a frail, small little bird, bent over her stick, only able to carry things with one hand. Aisatta's stepmother cannot push Aisatta's father so it is Aisatta's job, her fate, and her daily existence.

But not today. Today we are loading Aisatta's parents' meager belongings into my truck for the 90-minute journey to Sawafe, a smaller town, just northwest of Kono. They are from this place; they speak the local dialect, know diamonds, and have relatives from whom they can demand food. Aisatta's father is sick. His blood pressure is high, his throat rattles with a cough, he complains of a constant headache.

⁷ Aisatta is a pseudonym I chose for the girl. This girl told me to pick a name for her. When I suggested Aisha, she modified it to Aisatta, which she considered a 'nicer' name.

They need the family support and can no longer live alone. They have been waiting for this Sunday, for my truck to take the bench, two rolls of corrugated tin roofing, an old suitcase full of brown, torn shreds of clothes, a wooden pestle and mortar, two small wooden stools, a cooking pot, an old broken yellow jerry can to haul water in, and his wheelchair to Sawafe. The truck is crowded. Mr. Monku, my colleague, wants to visit his mother in Sawafe. Daniel, my houseboy, wants a journey out of the city. Aisatta wants to come with her father. Therefore, Mr. Monku sits in the front; Aisatta and Daniel ride in the open truck bed atop the furniture and other belongings, and Aisatta's father and stepmother, the goods that would not fit in the back of the truck, sit next to me in the back seat.

When we reach Sawafe, Aisatta's father directs us to the area where the auntie lives. There is no road, but the driver follows the footpath and we arrive in the courtyard of a collection of small mud houses. The truck is unloaded quickly and we say our goodbyes. As we are turning to leave, Aisatta's stepmother announces that they are ready to go back to Kono-town. "Back? I thought you are staying here in Sawafe with your relatives. That is why we moved you." Mr. Monku, Daniel, and Aisatta walk away down the path. The driver turns the car around, and I stand in the middle of courtyard, puzzled. I have completely missed this. I never saw it coming. I follow Mr. Monku, Daniel, and Aisatta down the path through the grass.

When I catch up, they are laughing. No one had expected Aisatta's stepmother and father to want to return with us—not Aisatta, Daniel or Mr. Monku. I had not missed anything. It was a surprise to all. But now what? What would they do? How would they cope? There were still things in Kono yet to move. Against Mr. Monku's advice, I had given them about \$15 to help them settle. Daniel and Mr. Monku

laughed at my concern and Aisatta swung my hand as we walked across a schoolyard where the secondary school boys were playing futbol. Aisatta and I talk about how she would like to play futbol if she was a boy. Aisatta does not look back; she never kissed her father goodbye, or exchanged a word about when they would see each other again.

After we visited Mr. Monku's mother, Mr. Monku, Daniel, Aisatta, and I returned to Kono without Aisatta's father and stepmother. I kept bringing it up—asking if we should go back for them, asking if someone could call someone to talk to them, asking if we should go get the rest of their items in Kono and bring them to them in Sawafe. The others laughed at my concern and said they would do what they would do and we could not decide for them. Still I wondered. Then about a week later, I saw Aisatta's father begging in Kono center. When I went to say hello, he did not mention being abandoned by me in Sawafe. He only asked for some small money to buy rice. Later that week, when I went to visit them in their house, they had gone to Sawafe again. They will continue to travel between Sawafe and Kono, begging on the streets of Kono when they are healthy, and returning to his sister's home in Sawafe when they are too ill to beg.

6.1.2. The war and early years

Aisatta is very attached to her father. Aisatta's father was a diamond dealer before the war but he, like so many others in Kono, never regained his pre-war status. Perhaps because he has always been disabled, in a place that does not make any allowances for the handicapped, it is not his current beggar state that is the surprise, but that he was a successful man before the war that astonishes.

Aisatta has relied on her father, despite his beggar status, to protect her. She confides in him, trusts him, and feels his love. He took her to the hospital after she was raped. He removed her from harmful family members and went to the school principal to beg for his daughter to remain in school. He talks to her, tells her family stories, encourages her to follow Islam, and unusual for a Sierra Leonean man, demonstrates his love with a gentle hand on her arm. Despite, or perhaps because of his disability, he has tried to give Aisatta the kindness the harsh city of Kono does not easily share.

In 2013, Aisatta and I were sitting at the table drinking tea when Aisatta started telling me stories her father has shared about the war. Aisatta was small—maybe a toddler, she knows she could walk—she does not know her age even now—when they heard the shots announcing that the rebels were back. Her strong, educated uncle was shot in the back while running and pushing her father in a wheelbarrow. When I asked whether her uncle’s family blames her father for his death, Aisatta looked puzzled and said, “*na God* (God’s will/fate).”

In the same rebel attack, Aisatta’s mother was captured, mutilated, and killed. She does not go into specifics but it seems that someone has told her details that I am not sure a child should know about her mother’s death. The word ‘mutilated’ haunts me as she continues telling the story. Aisatta does not know what happened next. She only knows that her uncle, one brother, one sister, and her mother were killed that day and somehow her father, she, and two siblings survived. After that, she is not sure where she went or whom she lived with or for how long.

Although Aisatta does not know where she lived during the war or how she survived, being too young to remember, she does know that her father lived in

Freetown during and for some time after the war. An aid organization gave her father a wheelchair and, when she was barely old enough, Aisatta was brought from a village into Freetown to push her father and beg. Aisatta's brother and older sister sometimes took the job of pushing their father but according to Aisatta, they resisted, so she lived with him on the streets and pushed. She remembers the first time she saw her father in Freetown. She said that she cried and tried to run away. She did not recognize him. He gave her biscuits until she accepted him again.

6.1.3. Aisatta's family

Aisatta loves it when I visit her father. She wants me to visit their house, to sit next to her father and hold her little brother. It worries me when I come to their home. There is no proper bench for me to sit on—only a small stool—and the area in front of the house is dirty. The house is a simple mud hut with no finishing on top of the mud. There is no furniture in the house—no mattress, no chairs. There is a three-stone fire cooking area but no shed. I cannot see any food items—not even a leftover hot pepper. Yet, this is her home and she is proud to take me there. She wants her father to know me and for me to know him. Aisatta spends much of her free time taking care of her father, worrying about him and trying to ease his pain.

She has had to do many things for her father that may be unthinkable for other families. She told me this story in 2013:

1. Aisatta: The other time, my father want to go to the urine. There is nobody. My stepmom also travel to her sisters' child. Yes. Nobody was not around to help him to be, to be go and help him go and toilet. I also go there. "Forgive me, my God!" I will do this because there is nobody. And I also do it for him. And he also bless me. Yes.

The last part of this quote is poignant. He blesses her. A father blessing his child for doing the unthinkable. They knew they were breaking a taboo, yet there was no other option. He needed to relieve himself. “Forgive me, my God,” Aisatta says and then her father blesses her.

Aisatta frequently mentions that her father prays with her and blesses her. I, too, blessed Aisatta later in this same conversation—something I had never done before. I come from a culture that does not bless our children except in ritual prayers on the Sabbath but something about Aisatta engages my heart to protect her. In our conversation, Aisatta was talking about her father:

2. Aisatta: Sometime I be sorry for my father. “Hey, my father, if I am a big child like my big sister,” I said. “I will make you be *glady* for me. Lets you pray for me and I will be some future tomorrow. . my child. May God bless you.”
3. Jordene: I agree. May God bless you, Aisatta.
4. Aisatta: Amen.

When Aisatta said, “Amen,” she said it in a serious tone, a reverent way of speaking. She had heard, received, and accepted my benediction.

Aisatta’s father listens to her and looks out for her in the ways that he can. He frequently councils her to stay in school and not get pregnant. In 2012, we were talking about her getting *belly* (pregnant) and married:

5. Aisatta: *Belly?* Oh! My father will drive me from the house.
6. Jordene: Really?
7. Aisatta: Yes, he says, “Oh I don’t like that. If you want to pregnant you will go and fetch a man and come with it and show me. But if you go and take a *belly* in the street, that is not good.
8. Jordene: Your father tells you those kind of thing?
9. Aisatta: Yes.
10. Jordene: Does he encourage you to stay in school?
11. Aisatta: Yes, my father, if I come in the school and [then] go home, he will *drive* (force) me back. I run and go in the school.

Even though her father cannot pay for her school fees or provide her with a uniform, he still sends her to school and encourages her to learn. Many disabled parents do not allow their children to go to school so that they can guide them along the streets to beg.

Aisatta's father used to travel frequently to Freetown where the begging is more profitable. Aisatta often expresses the desire to go see Freetown again now that she is older. She left Freetown when she was very young but now she wants to go back because she has heard the stories about the music, the car horns, and all of the excitement.

12. Aisatta: When I tell my father I want to go to Freetown with you he says, "No you don't able to push me." Because if any. When I hear that I want to go to Freetown. He said, "Let's go" [I say], "I will push you." He said, "Freetown is so bad. It is not like here. The town is so plenty because when you are passing, the car also will be missing you." I say, "Ok, it's true." [He says], "Stay here, my daughter, live near your auntie." I say, "Ok."

Despite the extra income it would generate to have Aisatta pushing him faster in his wheelchair, he chooses to have his daughter stay back in Kono, go to school, and be safe. He is not relying on Aisatta to provide for him or help him earn his living begging.

Aisatta has a large extended family that she could rely on. Aisatta could move to Sawafe. Her auntie would feed her. She is the only child out of ten still close to her father. Her biological mother and father had six children together. When I first met Aisatta in 2010, her elder brother was living in the house but he has thankfully moved out. Her elder sister lives close by in Kono. A younger sister is in a big town near Freetown. She has not seen her for many years. A younger brother died and another younger brother is in a village with distant relatives.

I am not sure how many other wives Aisatta's father has had. He has had four children with the current woman, who I call Aisatta's stepmother. I have not met three of the four children. They sent these children to relatives' homes in distant villages. I did meet the baby. He was born in 2012 and he was sent away during my field visit in 2013. They took him to live in a distant village with a distant relative before he started to crawl. Because Aisatta's father could not take care of the baby from his wheelchair and Aisatta's stepmother has limited mobility and walks with a stick, they feared that when the baby started to crawl, they could not chase after him.

Aisatta thinks that she is the only one of these ten children who is going to school. Aisatta knows there are more half-siblings but she does not count them because she does not know them. However, even the siblings she does know are no comfort to Aisatta. Her older brother is about nineteen years old and goes by the name of "Twenty." Whether it is from the nickname of a popular rapper or the expression 20/20 or from some other association, Aisatta does not know. What she does know is that her older brother is to be avoided. Even her teachers at school advise me not to let him see me with Aisatta. I have never met him but people in Kono frequently imitate his voice. It sounds evil—deep, husky, and menacing. When I ask Aisatta what her brother does all day, she shrugs and says, "Nothing." I ask if he is a bike rider taxi-man, a frequent job for young uneducated men. She responds with a laugh that he does not know how to ride a bike. She says that if he sees her, he asks her for money and harasses her.

In 2013, sitting on my porch late into the evening, we had a long, rambling conversation about her brother. Here is an excerpt of that conversation:

13. Aisatta: When he was small, he was so wicked. That of

brother. He was so wicked. He has a (unclear) arm—If he take a stone. If you are like a place, like a far place. And he was here. He can leave the stone and go and meet you there. When he and she were playing football. They can afraid of him; no I don't want M here. His name was M, and he go and change it 20 cents.

14. Jordene: Was he in the war? Did he fight in the war?
15. Aisatta: No. He also small. By that time, he cannot be even in the war. When he is big now. The name is left there. Anywhere he goes in Koidu [Kono] town, if you know him . . . (continues discussion of his name and his voice)
16. Jordene: When you meet him on the street, does he say, oh my sister or does he pretend he doesn't know you?
17. Aisatta: No! He can also come. "Oh my sister, give me money." When I go to the *loma* (market) at the park, when I saw him there, he says that "Oh my sister, my sister will come and give me money." I say, "I too, I cannot have any money." [He says] "You don't have money? I will come there. I will come there at home." I say, "Come!"
18. Aisatta: He go and take my father's phone and sim and go with the phone.
19. Jordene: NO!
20. Aisatta: When I go there and ask her. I said, "M, where is our father's phone?" He says, "Go! Go! I will meet my father there." I said, "Oh, ok I am going."
21. Jordene: It sounds like your brother is trouble. Is he trouble for you?
22. Aisatta: He is trouble for me. I can afraid that one. When I see her coming I will *cool* (be afraid). If I was do anything, I will *cool*. Because when he ready to beat me. He can kick me anywhere. Box me. He also curse me a bad curse.
23. Jordene: Really? What did he say?
24. Aisatta: If I talk, he will slap me. Then I run and go. Then I run and I come to our father. He also go there and draw me there. He can't respect our father.
25. Jordene: Really? Because he is sitting in a chair?
26. Aisatta: Yes, because she is sitting in the chair, he cannot respect our father. When my father is talking, he will also be talk. My father also cannot talk. My father will sometimes will sit and cry. I say, "Father, don't cry for that." When I was seeing that my father is straining, sometimes I will sit and cry for my father.

Aisatta and all those that know her brother speak about him as an extremely unstable, violent man who will steal from his handicapped father and beat his sister without

provocation. Aisatta is often positioned between her father and the rough world, even negotiating for her own brother to give her father back his cell phone.

If Aisatta avoids her brother because he will beat her, Aisatta avoids her older sister because she is trouble. Aisatta's twenty-one-year-old sister has a three-year-old daughter and six-year-old son and a new man. They live in the area somewhere but Aisatta would never purposely visit her, and she does not want to know this new man. I wanted to meet them but Aisatta said that she would not introduce me even if we ran into them on the street. She would just nod and pull me along a bit faster. She says that she only wants me to know her father. She does not want to have anything to do with the others.

6.1.4. Living with strangers

Aisatta has lived with other family members before. After some years in Freetown—during the war and for a while after the war—Aisatta, her father, stepmother, and siblings moved back to Kono. At that time, it was easy to access services in Kono because there were many NGOs assisting with the post-war recovery. However as the crisis slowed down, NGOs pulled out and stopped distributing food and supplies. Without the assistance of the NGOs, her family could not feed all of the children.

When I asked her why her father does not receive assistance from any of the aid agencies I see around town, Aisatta was clear that corruption was the cause. She said:

27. Jordene: Did your father go for training or help for handicapped people?
28. Aisatta: First time he also have people to help them. But as for now, when the help come, they cannot give them. They also give the people who have two foots, two hands. They cannot give them.

Sometimes they can snap (hurt) my father, also the handicapped people; they cannot give them anything. The big one [person in power] can hold the money and sit on top the money and eat the money. They cannot do anything. Even when he is sick he don't have money to go to the hospital. Yes.

Without assistance from the government or an agency, the family does not have any way to feed the children, so her father sent the children to live with other family members.

At the age of seven, her father sent Aisatta to live with a 'sister' in a village.

This sister was actually a cousin. In a 2013 interview, Aisatta told me this story:

29. Aisatta: She (cousin) started to mistreat me. She will flog me, he take an axe. She want to drop it on my head. She's from there a man kick him. Yes and the man said that, "What do you want to do to this children? You want to kill this child?" She said that, "Yes, I also miss to kill her." Yes, sometimes when I do anything she will beat me. She also beat me. She said that I am not be—if I learn education, let hair be wilt in her hand, in her palm. If I learn education, the hair will be in her palm. I too say that it is not you that will make me. I also be educated. Yes. I also be educated. It is not you who make me. And then she also flog me. When I go and get water, she cannot not give me any food. I sit and cry. She also send stone at me. She also want to damage me. There is nobody. I started to cry. In the morning, I dress for school, but they drove me for school fees. I take my uniform and put it in my bag and take cloths, and I ran away from the village and come to my father in Kono town. I explain all things to my father. (Translation: My cousin abused me. She whipped me. One day as she was holding an axe over my head, a man came by and asked her if she wanted to kill me. My cousin said, "Yes, I want to kill her." My cousin said that before she allows me to go to school, hair will grow on my palm. But I said that I would be educate and do it by myself. Then she whipped me again. She would send me to go and fetch water and then I could eat, so that when I return the food would be gone. I sat and cried. One day, she threw stones at me, trying to hit me hard. So in the morning, when they sent me away from school, I ran away. I had put clothes in my school bag, so I changed from my school uniform and ran away from the village to Kono city to tell my father).

When I asked Aisatta for the reasons why her cousin might have treated her so poorly, she suggested that perhaps it was because they did not share the same paternal relations. I do not think she has thought much about the ‘why things happen’ question and seems to accept this as another ‘*na* God’ time—a time when God determines your fate. The idea of someone taking an axe to a child’s head is horrible but the routine violence and abuse that Aisatta described is horrific. Aisatta described being stoned, starved, and having all of her clothing taken away so that she had to do her work naked.

For Aisatta, it is not the abuse that still haunts her but the insult of not being educated. The cousin cursed her, saying that before she was educated, hair should grow out of the palm of her hand. Aisatta has repeated that curse several times to me as a reminder of where she has come from and how she has changed her life.

When I arrived in 2013, Aisatta was living with an unrelated woman and three children in a rented room crafted from the skeleton of a once fine house. “Rebels’ had burned the house—maybe not rebels but perhaps soldiers burned it. Maybe the Guinean soldiers who came with their own trucks to loot what remained burned it as they left. Someone could rebuild the house but it will probably stay abandoned. Someone collects rent for the 10’x10’ space. In exchange for a spot on the mattress and one meal a day, Aisatta carried the water, washed all the clothes in a basin with a washboard and hard local soap, cooked rice, and prepared the sauce over the wood three-stone cooking spot. Then she swept the small dirt courtyard and cement floor of the small room. She bathed and dressed the little one; she stayed home to take care of the 10- and 9-year-old children when they were ill, and ran errands for the woman. When they ate, the woman ate what she wanted first, then the children and Aisatta

shoveled food into their unhinged mouths as quickly as they could, stabbing at the protein parts first. There was never enough food, in this one meal a day, so those who ate faster, had a full belly.

One day while I was still in Kono, Aisatta moved home to take care of her father. He was sick, and as told in the story that began this portrait, starting to move to the house of his sister in Sawafe. It was not clear whether Aisatta had left of her own will or was driven out of the home but I know that the excuse of going to live with her father was a lie. At some point, the stepmother and father decided to have the stepmother and Aisatta live full time in Kono and the father to move to Sawafe until he recovered his health.

Aisatta is healthy and a hard worker. She has learned to please others as a way of survival. Aisatta is the one that the driver calls on to help him hold his tools while he pesters the underbelly of the truck. Aisatta is the one who is called to fetch more water to finish washing the clothes. Aisatta is the one that will help slaughter the chicken. Aisatta is strong, lean, and curvy. She has punched men to protect herself. She no longer suffers fools or trusts men. She is obedient to all but has moments when her eyes grow smaller and she stands with both feet firmly on the ground and walks away. When I questioned why she was washing the driver's clothes she explained that she did not mind doing it—he was older, and besides, he was not feeling well. She had to do it to help her 'uncle.' This willingness to work hard, to be humble, to assist all, endears her to her elders, leaves her open to scorn from her peers, and because she stays, creates for her a loneliness that comes from being the only competent one in a house full of dependents.

Assisting her elders has not been easy for her. Earlier, as a young child, she pushed her father in his wheelchair; then she lived with the abusive cousin; and finally, as a girl, she sells potato leaf and cassava leaf to feed her family. Being a girl alone on the streets of Kono is not safe. Aisatta was raped when she was in class two. I estimate she was about nine years old at the time. She had been in the truck-stop area of town selling cassava leaf when one of the ‘big men’ who her father knew asked her to go and get him some cigarettes. When she returned with the cigarettes, he told her to come into the house and at first she protested but then he said that she must come in. He raped her. Her father took her to the hospital, and they kept her for observation overnight. The ‘big man’ left town, and they have never seen him again. It is remarkable that her father is the one who took her to the hospital. It is a testimony to their bond that she trusted him.

6.1.5. School

If Aisatta moved to Sawafe with her father, when he is there, she could go to school. Her father’s cousin is the headmaster of the local junior high school, and he would let her enter in the middle of the school year. She would have to repeat the grade she is in now but the school in Sawafe is highly regarded and the fees are low. Yet, Aisatta demands to stay at her school in the small city of Kono. She has many reasons: she likes the school, the teachers are good, she has friends, and perhaps most importantly, she does not want to have to repeat the grade she is in now.

She has been to many schools, repeated grades, and failed others. She started school in Freetown then repeated the same grade in Kono. She attended second grade

in a village and then repeated again in Kono. She explains that during this time, if she did not have the money to pay her school fees, she would go to the bush, gather palm nuts to crack, and sell the oil. She was able to stay in the same school for three years (grades 3–5) because of the headmistress's charity. Nevertheless, the following year, for grade six, she transferred to a different school. When I ask her about the transfer in sixth grade, she says that the school had evil witches around it but I suspect that the headmistress did not want Aisatta's poor exam scores to reflect poorly on the school. Her scores did not earn her a place in a prestigious junior high school (JSS) so she is attending a low-ranking, government-supported Islamic school.

Aisatta does not have many friends her own age. She has a few girlfriends in school but she does not spend time with them outside of school. In her neighborhood, there is an older woman who likes Aisatta. Aisatta works for her sometimes, and the neighbor often shares her food with Aisatta. Outside of school, Aisatta stays to herself. Even among the girls who gather on my porch, Aisatta has only one close friendship. The other girls treat her poorly at times—asking her to fetch them water or do their dishes. She is of a lower status than even the poor girls who sell groundnuts to eat because her parents beg instead of engaging in petty trading or farming for their living. So Aisatta stays to herself outside of school and has a few friends in school.

The woman Aisatta lived with and worked for is the sister of Mr. Bangura, one of Aisatta's teachers. Mr. Bangura's sister saw Aisatta on the street selling groundnuts and liked her courage, attitude, and easy smile. Mr. Bangura's sister is not the only one who admires her courage and boldness. Aisatta is an average student but she is bold and that boldness earns her a place in every activity. Her teachers like her and care for her. They know her situation, although it does not stop them from

extorting money from her to correct her assignments, give her extra lessons, and purchase their self-published pamphlets, just as they do with their other students.

In 2013, Mr. Bangura and I discussed Aisatta's academic skills. He has about fifty students in the class and is supposed to teach five classes a day. He really does not know her strengths and weaknesses but says that she is in the middle and because she is a leader, self-confident, and cheerful, teachers think that she is brighter than her skills show. Her report card places her as second in class rank, behind a boy. She may deserve this rank and really be the second best student in the class. Or, the head teacher may have boosted her rank or she may be perceived as a good student because of her eagerness. At any rate, Mr. Bangura does not think she will do well on next year's compulsory Junior Secondary School exam unless I pay for a private tutor for her. I know that her reading is very weak. I have read with her and can see how she stumbles for basic words. Her math skills are low too but she catches on quickly—when asked what $12 \times 6,000$ was, she waited for someone else to come up with the correct answer, but when I asked again what $6,000 \times 12$ was, she smiled and blurted out the number before the rest of the girls.

Although Aisatta's skills are low, it is not because she skips school or does not pay attention. In a 2013 conversation, Aisatta was complaining about a boil that was forming on her forehead. I asked her if she went to school that day, and she said that she always went to school:

30. Jordene: Do you feel better when you go to school?
31. Aisatta: Yes, I don't like when, I like. I like school. If I sick I will make sure I will be to school. If my bag *spoil*, hmm, I will take my book and put it here and I will hold it like so. I will go to school. If my shoes spoil, I will make sure that I will find another shoes to *patch-patch* it. And I go to school, ahhh, I don't busy/
32. Jordene: /Laughing/.

33. Aisatta: /If you want you to laugh me, ahh, I don't worry. Ahh I like. If I don't have lunch, I will go to school. I will *pilot* (makes motion of driving a motor bike). I pass by the government hospital, and I will go. I will go and talk. Let me go. God will give me money at school. Sometimes I will see person who know me and give me money. I don't have to say that. When I go to school, sometime, I will sit. When the teacher come, "Ah my friend, you don't have money today." I say "No." The teachers know me if I have money, because I can buy food for them. They say, Ok, hey, look at 1,000. I will *gladdy*, I will run. Run to the place and go and eat. Ahh *lafide* (a treat sold in schoolyards), I eat *lafide*, I will be *gladdy* to eat *lafide*, I will *scoff* (eat quickly).

Aisatta feels better when she goes to school. School makes her happy. The teachers like her. They know her and despite their low salary, share what they have with her. Mr. Bangura, as one of her current teachers, speaks highly of her as a girl with a future and wants to help her. I have followed Aisatta through three schools, and each headmistress/headmaster who knew her and pitied her is glad that she has now found a benefactor.

On the eve of my departure in 2013, Aisatta and I sat on my porch talking. Her school's sports day was to be later in the week, and I was going to miss it. We had been sitting in silence for some time when she said:

34. Aisatta: Eh, I wish that if you are in here now, you go and watch me in field (Sports day). They can say oh—everywhere I pass in school—they can say, "Where is your, your mother?" I say, "My mother is not here." [The teachers are asking her if I am present in town or if I am coming to visit the school that day.]
35. Jordene: Uhuh.
36. Aisatta: Yes, when you see me, I was cool in school. You can say, "Where is your, your mother?" I say, "My mother is not here." If anyone want to beat me. Go and sit down. You are not a troublesome girl so go and sit down. We also be free. (Translation: If any other student or teacher wants to bully or flog her, the teachers tell her to go and sit down. The teachers know that she is not troublesome so they allow her to go freely through the school.)

The teachers did not beat Aisatta before I came because they know that she is eager to please, trying very hard, and has so little. Now that I am in her life, they will not beat her for fear that I will intervene. School is a safe place for Aisatta. She is not beaten, her teachers will give her a small amount of money to buy *lafite*, and her spirit is encouraged.

Even in school, when she speaks, she is sometimes hesitant and scrambled. She often shakes her head and leans a bit to the left, with a shy smile, silently turning around and starting to do what she thinks has been asked of her. In school, when she stands to answer questions, the answers are jumbled. The answers are in her, rambling around somewhere. However, the words do not come out quite right. It is only when telling personal stories—in storytelling mode—that her words come out clear and in order, even profound. She knows what she has experienced and speaks eloquently.

The teachers often choose her for special things. She is the class prefect in her eighth grade class. She is the one chosen to go get the chalk from the principal and speak at the assembly. She explained to me one day in 2013:

37. Aisatta: When I was speaking that why I cannot *shame-o* in school. Everywhere, every program they have in school, they can said let us pick Aisatta/.
38. Jordene: /Good. Good/
39. Aisatta: /Let's pick Aisatta. "Aisatta is so bold." I cannot be *fear* (be afraid). If thousands of people are there, I can talk. I can be talk. I cannot be make like this "I shameo. I shameo." When I was doing my action, I will laugh first. Yes, I do. I will laugh. My friends also say, "Oh Aisatta, you like to laugh." I said, "Yes. I also like laugh." But sometimes when I was in stage I don't like playing. I also concentrate to my action on stage.
40. Jordene: What do you mean stage?
41. Aisatta: Like when (discussion of what a stage is)
42. Aisatta: Last time we also have a concert [play] in school. I am with child
- so [in the play she is playing a pregnant teenager]. At [In] that concert [play], the man give me. I also pregnant. At that time, I go to nurse and the nurse destroyed the child. I also died. . . .

my friends also be laugh at me anywhere I pass. Oh, Ms. I have the name they give to me. Isha, oh Isha you are pregnant, you are dead. Hey, Isha. Anywhere I pass they can laugh at me. I don't worry.

(discussion of drama). . .

43. Jordene: That's fun! Must have been very fun.

44. Aisatta: Yes. I said that you have laughed at me but you people, you cannot

able to come and stand here. Because when they say, "You girl, come and stand here." You can see one can be making like so. He will tremble. I don't want there. I don't want to go there. I cannot go there. I also want to use that one.

Sometime, I go to another country. They say let me talk. I started to say, "oh no." I started to shame. I don't want that one. That's why I will make a bold. I will pull the shameness in my eyes. I cannot be shamed. (Translation: Aisatta is addressing her classmates, "You people who have laughed at me, come here and stand!" If my classmates are asked to perform they are nervous and cannot do it. They will say, "I don't want to go there. I cannot go there [to perform].")

Someday, I will go to another country. If I go to that other country, people will ask me to talk. I will start to say, "Oh no" and I will feel ashamed. So that is why I am learning to be bold. I am not allowing myself to be ashamed.)

45. Jordene: You are very brave

46. Aisatta: If it is school time, I cannot be laughed at.

School is a place that Aisatta feels safe and is not ashamed to be. On the street, people make fun of her clothes. They know that her father is a beggar and the other children will taunt her. I have seen the other girls who hang out on my porch tease her about her clothes, her hair, and her poor manners. She is not as worldly as the other girls are but she is brave.

6.1.6. Shame

Aisatta does not have much experience with things. She spills water from the thermos, not used to pouring hot water from it as the other girls are. She put my glasses in her pockets when she was cleaning off my bed so that she could lie down. Only after I had asked her twice if she had seen my glasses did the lump in her pocket

and my words connect. She dives into the communal rice bowl with her fingers while the others wait for a spoon. Her books are all soiled, even the new ones, because although she honors her books she does not think to keep them from being wet or covered with charcoal ash. So, she knows that she has less than the other girls do; yet she is proud of what she has and who she is.

Aisatta can no longer be shamed easily. Once when we were sitting in a circle on my porch discussing the Green School Girls Bus strike, one of the Green School girls passed the tape recorder over Aisatta's head to the next girl. Aisatta was sitting on a bag of cassava leaf stems that made her sit lower than those who had taken the plastic chairs, but she bounced up, grabbed the tape recorder, and said to the other girls that even if she was not a Green School student, she still knew about the strike. The other girls protested but she persevered. I fear that they will shame her because of all the girls I have interviewed, Aisatta is the poorest. And the other girls know it.

Aisatta has faced the rejection of her peers before. Kono is a relatively small town and there are less than twenty-five beggars. I recognize many of the beggars by the spots they habitually beg from, and I am sure they all know each other. Because Aisatta has spent so much of her life pushing her father in his chair, begging or selling cassava leaf around the town, she is well known. She is also unusually cheerful and eager and that makes her stand out among the other sellers. She wears mismatched and tattered clothes and does not appear to mind it—although when I take the time to sew her rips and give her proper fitting shirts, she is very appreciative.

Aisatta is also appreciative of the monetary support that the little NGO I started gives her. One day when we were discussing her school, she thanked me for all the things that I was doing to support her. Many of the girls offer their thanks but

there was something different in the way that Aisatta did it. Most of the girls talk about how the financial support has eased the suffering of their parents and how they are not driven out of school for lack of school fees anymore. But Aisatta discussed how she was proud to wear a new uniform and how the other children did not taunt her about being dirty anymore:

47. Jordene: Before I came to your life, did the other children tease you, did they say, “Hey, you’re dirty and things like that?”
48. Aisatta: They also cannot talk to me. If I hear them, they will *grap* (grumble) and go another side. I will bow down my head. I started to cry. If I follow them to go and buy food. They buy their food and they cannot give me. And I will also – I cannot talk. I will just follow them and go back to form (class) and sit.

Having lived a life of hard work and poverty, having the money for school fees, a small monthly food allowance, and books of her own was life-changing for Aisatta. She grew from a child frequently shamed to a young woman able to achieve some small measure of success.

Her success in school is paramount to her. When we discuss the possibility of her going to boarding school, she is adamant that she will wait to go until senior high school because the idea of repeating JSS 2 (grade 7) is unbearable. She explains that she is a girl now, but she will be too old to finish school if she repeats again. She wants to continue at her school, with her teachers, even if it means living with a stranger and sleeping on cement. She does not want to risk being embarrassed about her age in a lower class.

Aisatta is claiming her power. She will no longer allow her classmates to taunt her and has found a school where she feels safe. She will now demand the recorder so that she can tell her story even if the others are disgruntled. As part of her new independence, Aisatta wanted a bank account. I agree to help her open it, but I was

out of town, so she asked Frankie, my research assistant, to help her. They called me to say that because she is not 18, she must have a guardian to sign for her. What should they do? I could be the guardian or Frankie the guardian—it is not about protecting the child but about protecting the bank. When I return to town, we go to the bank. The bank manager knows that she is not 18, so she cannot open it herself, but if we open an account together, I will be the only one that can take the money out of the account. So later, when I am doing something else, Aisatta goes to another bank and with 32,000 Leones (about \$9.00) bribes the manager into believing that she is 18 and gets her own bank account. Now she can be free of the worry of hiding her money all the time, and she is an adult with a bank account.

6.1.7. The future

Aisatta is in charge of her own life. No one will tell her to go to school, to get dressed, or give her food without her having to work for it. Even when Aisatta is ‘not feeling bright’—the Sierra Leone phrase for any illness—she goes to school. Her report card shows near perfect attendance. For her, showing up at school gives her focus, strength, and self-esteem. She is not in the street; she is not a street-girl but a schoolgirl. Despite her repetition of grades and a slow start, she is with her age-mates, she is liked by her teachers and principal, and she has something to do with purpose. She is proud to be the prefect of her class and as such, she knows the schedule by heart, which teachers need two pieces of chalk instead of one, and which students are most likely to forget to bring the bucket of water to school. She does not like school holidays because there is no order to the day—anyone can send you to do anything at any time—but at school, there is a schedule. Even if the teacher does not come to

teach during their period, at least the students know that math is what you are supposed to be studying.

For Aisatta, school is a place of independence and a place of refuge where she does not have to push her father in his chair begging for money, but it is also a place where she imagines a different life. She thinks she wants to be a nurse, partially because that is what she knows and partially because she thinks she can get a good job, with a salary that will take care of her father and stepmother.

In February 2013, we were putting together a puzzle when Aisatta started talking more about the cousin who had humiliated her, threatened to kill her, and made her feel shame when she was seven years old. Aisatta said that she could never return to that village. She would call the family from the village to come to her when she was educated and had money. She would give them rice and other things but she could never go to the village. In the beginning of this conversation, Frankie, my research assistant, was sleeping on the couch next to us.

49. Aisatta: The people who said I not be educate, I do something for them. And also their child, I do something for them.
50. Jordene: So you de go back to village, you de say, hey look at me, I de educate!/
51. Aisatta: /Hey I cannot be talk that way, to let them not be kill me/
52. Both: (Laugh)
53. Jordene: How you de talk?
54. Aisatta: (Earnestly) I cannot be go there. I also will call them and tell them
come take this one. I cannot be go there. If anyone saw that I'm an educate woman I also have some money (unclear) their eyes, their eyes also be with me/
55. Jordene: They de be *bigeye* (jealous)?/
56. Frankie and Aisatta: /Yes
57. Aisatta: They can also take a witch gun and stone me. I cannot be enjoy myself again.
58. Jordene: So if you are educated, if you de educate, you need to live far from
the village? You have to *lef* your family?
59. Aisatta: If I have a chance I will move far away!

Aisatta wants to share with her family but she will not share directly. She fears going into the village to face the cousin who cursed her. Her cousin cursed her saying that hair would grow on her palm before she allowed Aisatta to be educated. In Aisatta's fantasy future, she sends for the village relatives to come to her in the city and receive a small benevolence.

While Aisatta wants to share with her family, for Aisatta, the ties to Kono are tenuous. She has asked me to take her to America and I have explained that I cannot and she accepts this. She says she does not like Freetown because it is noisy and crowded but she knows that she will never go back to the small village. Even Sawafe, a large town/small city, is deemed too small for her.

Aisatta knows that of all her siblings, cousins, and extended family, she is one of the few to make it to junior high school (JSS). She made the difficult leap from primary to JSS on her own. The small non-governmental organization I founded began helping her with school fees for the third term in JSS class 1 (7th grade), and in JSS class 2 (8th grade) we paid all of her school fees, uniforms, shoes, books, and lesson fees. She is grateful for this assistance but careful not to expect more. While the other girls have pulled me aside and asked for sports day fees or teacher-produced pamphlet fees, Aisatta has never asked for anything. However, Aisatta does show her dependency and attachment to me. One day as we were walking through town, she said that someday when I am walking through town, she will be sitting in her office, wearing a nice suit, and she will see me through the window. She will run out the door, hug me, and say thank you, thank you, thank you. Then she will bring me into the office and show me to her colleagues saying this is the woman who paid for my education. While the village and her cousin occupy places of shame within her,

walking through town with me, her benefactor gives her a sense of pride of place and represents hope for the future.

Aisatta, while attached to her father, is not attached to the rest of her family. The only child taking care of her father and mother, the abuse by her cousin when she was seven, and the failure of the older children to perform their duties as oldest have left Aisatta alone and on her own. She dreams of making it as a 'big woman' so that she can take care of her father and please me, but surprisingly, she does not speak of revenge upon her siblings, cousins, or those who have shamed her throughout her life.

Aisatta dreams of a life where she carries a purse and works in an office, as many girls her age do, but those distant goals are not the prime motivator for her to go to school. Her goals are to please me, take care of her father, and get a job so she can eat. But she gets up every day to put on the uniform of a schoolgirl, be proud of herself, and have somewhere structured to go—a place where the work is not physically demanding, and a place that is consistent day after day, a place where people are kind to her, and a place where she belongs.

6.2. Analysis of Aisatta's Portrait

For Aisatta, school is a happy place where she is respected. She is given responsibility, such as getting the chalk for the teacher at the beginning of every lesson and cleaning out the water bucket. The teachers choose her for school-sponsored events like dramas and speeches. School gives her access to social services and to people like me who might help her. Aisatta feels good when she goes to school. It gives her life purpose and belonging. She is proud of being a schoolgirl and feels morally right that she is a schoolgirl and not a "dirty girl" as she calls girls on the street. It does not matter to her that she is not the top student in the class. It does

not matter to her that she does not go to the best school; what matters is that she is a schoolgirl now. Aisatta does not dream of becoming a big woman, a minister, or even a lawyer. She just wants to work. When she succeeds in finishing high school and gets that job, she is going to *bluff* (show-off) those that had tried to harm her and those that had cursed her desire for an education.

The analysis of Aisatta's portrait begins by exploring the figured worlds of schoolgirls as expressed through Aisatta's portrait. This adds to the description of "What must I, as an analyst, assume people feel, value, and believe, consciously or not, in order to talk (write), act, and/or interact this way?" (Gee, 2011, p. 95). The second part of the analysis will discuss the imagined community that Aisatta aspired to and the limitations of her dreams (Kanno & Norton, 2003).

6.2.1. The figured world of schoolgirls

6.2.1.1. The uniform

For Aisatta, school—going to school, being in school, and wearing a schoolgirl uniform—confers a legitimate place within society. Aisatta is bright and tries hard in school; however, it is not the actual book learning that holds her. It is her engagement with the structure and institution of school that empowers her. Getting to school on time, having lunch money, and raising her hand, the rituals of belonging, of knowing the way to do things in the classroom—those are the reasons that Aisatta goes to school. The knowledge gained from a day in school comes as a distant second.

The portrait section relays several conversations in which Aisatta tells me of her determination to go to school. I have repeated a section of a conversation from the *1.5 Schooling* section here:

60. Jordene: Do you feel better when you go to school?

61. Aisatta: Yes, I don't like when, I like. I like school. If I sick I will make sure I will be to school. If my bag *spoil*, hmm, I will take my book and put it here and I will hold it like so. I will go to school. If my shoes spoil, I will make sure that I will find another shoes to *patch-patch* it. And I go to school . . .

In this section, Aisatta affirms that she will go to school even if she is ill or not properly dressed. Part of being a schoolgirl to her is having all of the proper items required of schooling.

School uniforms are part of the colonial tradition in Africa. Missionary education required uniforms. An 1889 report from a missionary in Botswana states the following:

When they [the students] are promoted from the spelling book to the next reading book, they are expected to come dressed in frock or trousers if they have not been doing so before. (Wookey, 1898, quoted in Reimer, 2008, p. 455).

All schools in Sierra Leone require a uniform. Some are simple shifts with no adornment. Others have complicated pleated skirts and regulation shoes. Each school and each section (primary, JSS, Sr. High) is easily identifiable by its unique uniform.

Sierra Leone schools send children home if their shirt is torn or their skirt is dirty. One headmistress in the area slices the girls' dresses if the bodice is too long. She carries a pair of scissors with her at all times and will shred the dress if she is unhappy with the way it was sewn or the way the girl is wearing it. Then she drives the crying girl away from the school. The girl cannot patch her uniform but must find the money to have a new uniform sewn. Children lose schooling over their uniforms.

Although this headmistress' actions are extreme even to some of my Sierra Leone colleagues, they argue that without supervision, schoolchildren would wear inappropriate uniforms. They speak fondly of taking care of their school uniforms and the ways in which it reinforced their school pride. They say that without the

headmistress' sanctions, standards of dress would quickly disintegrate, and there would be no school pride.

Aisatta takes great pride in her school uniform. When I first met her in 2010, she had begged one old uniform from the headmistress and washed it on the weekends. In 2012, when the small NGO began to pay for several girls to go to school, the girls voted on their priorities. Most girls wanted the textbooks first, before the uniforms. However, Aisatta wanted a new uniform right away.

Aisatta's delight in wearing a uniform can be viewed in two parts. First, the uniform signals that she belongs to something, to a school. Being allowed to wear the uniform means that she has met the requirements for that school at that level. Secondly, it means that her life has structure and meaning. Joseph and Alex (1972) explain:

The very existence of a uniform implies a group structure—at least a two-step hierarchy, the wearer and a superior individual(s)—which has granted the right to wear its uniform, which supervises conformity to group regulations and standard definitions of behavior, and to which one can resort with complaints. The uniform acts as a guarantee that an upper level in the group will control the members and, in turn, that members will conform. By permitting the use of its uniform, a group certifies an individual as its representative and assumes responsibilities for his activities. The uniform is a symbolic statement that an individual will adhere to group norms and standardized roles and has mastered the essential group skills and values. Gross derelictions of duty will result, at an extreme, in discharge from the group and deprivation of the uniform. (p. 722)

Wearing a uniform means belonging to a group in an extended community. Aisatta's home life has little structure; she lived with several different people during the three years I have known her and even when living with her father and stepmother there is little routine to her days. However, going to school, wearing a uniform, and having lunch at school are consistent, steadfast, and unfailing activities that give structure to her day.

Going to school also means being recognized as an individual. At school, she is someone. Outside of school, she is merely a beggar's daughter, literally and figuratively the appendage of someone else. In school, the teachers and her fellow students take care of her.

62. Aisatta: /If you want you to laugh me, ahh, I don't worry. . . I will go and talk. Let me go. God will give me money at school. Sometimes I will see person who know me and give me money. I don't have to say that. When I go to school, sometime, I will sit. When the teacher come, "Ah my friend, you don't have money today." I say "No." The teachers know me if I have money, because I can buy food for them. They say, Ok hey look at 1,000. I will *gladdy*, I will run. Run to the place and go and eat. Ahh *lafide* (a treat sold in schoolyards), I eat *lafide*, I will be *gladdy* to eat *lafide*, I will *scoff* (eat rudely and quickly).

Indeed when I speak to her teachers, headmasters, and others involved in the school, they all take care of her to some extent and acknowledge the difficulty of her experience. Their help and her joy at being part of a school—performing in the dramas, speaking at assemblies—transforms the ways in which she is viewed and in which she views herself.

Gee encourages the analyst to ask:

How are the relevant figured worlds here helping to reproduce, transform, or create social, cultural, institutional, and/or political relationships? What Discourses and Conversations are these figured worlds helping to reproduce, transform, or create? (2011, p. 95)

In a postwar society with no national safety net, collapsing chieftaincy system, and disintegrating family networks, having a place outside of these previously stable institutions to belong to is important. School is that place. Aisatta does not belong to an extended family that cares for her. She does not belong to a close chieftaincy community. Instead, she is one of the many children whose sole purpose could have

been to push their disabled parents through the streets, begging. Yet, Aisatta rejects that world and instead embodies the figured worlds of schoolgirls.

6.2.1.2.Morality

In Aisatta's unpredictable world, she is often on her own. Her father goes to Freetown to beg, and stays away for months at a time. Her stepmother cannot be counted on and the homes that she lives in as a 'house-girl' are sometimes violent and always exploitative. Getting up and going to school is the consistent melody of her days. Girls who go to school have a reason to go somewhere. Out-of-school girls do not have a reason to leave the house.

As with the other schoolgirls, Aisatta contrasts herself with those girls who are out-of-school. Because she is so close to being out-of-school herself and has suffered many of their indignities, she is never derogatory about those who are not in school. Instead, Aisatta accepts that what comes her way is 'God's will,' and her good fortune is a blessing. It is part of her duty to be morally righteous and part of being morally righteous is going to school.

Aisatta's morals are not apparent through external means. In other words, Aisatta does not explain or lecture about her belief system, but through small ways, it is apparent. For example, in *1.3 Aisatta's family*, I quoted Aisatta's father and her prayer after she had helped him urinate. Later in *1.4 Living with strangers*, the abuse that Aisatta suffered at her cousin's house is discussed, and in *1.7 The future*, she talks about how she wants to give something to her cousin.

63. Aisatta: The people who said I not be educate, I do something for them.
 And also their child, I do something for them.

Her desire to give to her cousin is both an act of showing off and a sincere desire to help others. Aisatta believes that she is a useful person and through that, she is doing

right. Aisatta asked me for a headscarf to attend the mosque and expressed a desire to learn the Koran, but her beliefs are not strongly tied to formal Islamic teaching but instead have been gleaned through her father's faith, education, and compassion.

Aisatta's figured worlds of being a schoolgirl included the faith that going to school was a morally correct way to be. Getting up, putting on a clean uniform, no matter what the day might lead to, was a way for her to assert that she was a 'good' person. One of her primary school classmates put this idea quite succinctly:

64. Hannah: Good children always like to go to school because he obey and respects elders.

Hannah is conflating going to school with obeying and respecting elders and how it makes one a good child. It is a common conflation. Writing about adult learners in Botswana, Riemer (2008) says:

It is their attempt to make sense of themselves in a world in which they remained on the margins, in which they felt kept "in the dark." Literacy offered a way into the light, a way of accessing road signs, letters from husbands, wives or children working in distant places, and price tags on consumer goods. But perhaps more importantly, literacy afforded a way of being a person among persons, of being "humane, courteous, and highly disciplined" (Mogae, 2003), and of upholding one's part of the social contract. (p. 495)

Aisatta thinks that going to school is the right thing to do and believes that school makes her righteous. Although the circumstances are different, Riemer's words describe Aisatta's desires to be well thought of and morally righteous.

Turning again to Gee's tools of inquiry, I ask:

Are there differences here between the figured worlds that are affecting espoused beliefs and those that are affecting actual actions and practices? What sorts of figured worlds, if any, are being used here to make value judgments of oneself or others?

For Aisatta, the beggar's daughter, school is a safe place and her figured world of being a schoolgirl is powerful. The espoused belief is one of equality for all children.

All girls have an equal chance to go to school, and through their own effort, morally superior schoolgirls will succeed. Aisatta believes that those who go to school are morally better than those that do not go to school but she, at the same time, believes that a lack of attendance at school is not an individual failure of the child or a failure of the social structure but rather an assertion of God's will.

6.2.2. An Educated woman

As with Isatou and Fantu, Aisatta believes that she will join the imaginary community of educated women. These schoolgirls believed that their current figured world of being a schoolgirl would bring them into a community of educated women. Kanno and Norton (2003) call an imagined community a way to "expand(s) our range of possible selves" By envisioning herself as member of the figured world of schoolgirls, Aisatta sees herself becoming, in the future, a part of a community of educated women.

Drawing upon Kanno and Norton's (2003) construction of imagined communities, I ask, "What are the imaged communities (groups of people, not immediately tangible and accessible, with whom we connect through the power of imagination) that add to the figured world of a schoolgirl?" For Aisatta, the imagined community of educated women means that she will be able to support herself and her parents.

6.2.2.1. Sends remittances to her father

In 2010, in the first interview, Aisatta is clear that school will bring her food and care in the future:

65. Goldy: So what n'thing make you want for go school?
66. Aisatta: I want for go school because I want learn me book. I want for

- get good book.
67. Goldy: For what thing?
68. Aisatta: Because I for learn me book just now, I go get food, care. And care. When I de na school. When I *commote* (come to) school, I *glady* because I no de sorry for me pa. When I learn me book, me pa no de sufferness.

School meant that she would not go hungry and she would receive care. It also meant that after she finished school her father would not suffer. She says, “*When I learn me book, me pa no de sufferness.*” (When I am educated, my father will no longer suffer.)

Most of the girls talk about how they do not want their parents to suffer.

Fantu, presented in Chapter 5, spoke about suffering:

69. Fantu: When person go to school and pay attention to your learning you will make the suffered that your parent suffered for you will make them forget about the time they were buying you, books, bag, shoes, sock, pen and other.

Isatou’s best friend, Kadidja states that all parents suffer for their children:

70. Kadidja: Our parents, they are suffering for us, for us to come to school.

The schoolgirls, their parents, and the community in Kono frequently mention how parents suffer for their children. As discussed in Chapter 4 about Isatou, parents expect that their suffering will reward them in the future when the children take care of them in their old age. However, Aisatta’s father is in a state of perpetual suffering, regardless of whether his daughter goes to school or not. There is no farm to feed him as Fantu’s family has, there is no business of petty trading or mining as Isatou’s family has, there is only begging on the street and the kindness of one aunt. Her father’s two older children do not support him in any way. If anything, they cause him more suffering—stealing his cell phone and sleeping at the house without paying rent. Aisatta’s father and stepmother live off charity in one of the poorest places on earth. Aisatta takes care of her father as she can and she wants him to receive more aid.

Aisatta also takes care of herself. I was never clear about who paid for her school fees before my NGO started. I know she received charity from a neighbor who sometimes hired her to wash her clothes or sweep her compound. I know that the teachers and headmistresses sometimes allowed her to attend school without paying school fees and sometimes gave her old, torn uniforms to wear. Sometimes, Aisatta gathered greens from other people's gardens, but her family did not have a plot of their own. It was hard for me to see how she got feed and got to school. In a 2011 interview, Aisatta said:

71. Aisatta: I want you let you to help me. I want you to help my father in the sufferness. I want to help my father.
72. Jordene: Hmm, yeah. How do you want to help your father?
73. Aisatta: When I go anywhere, if I stay there, I will go and find the Money. When I go in the school, I will find money too. I begin send it to my father. Yes.
74. Jordene: And how will you get the money?
75. Aisatta: Unless I work, for people. When I work for people, they will give me money and I go and send to my father.
76. Jordene: What kind of work would you like to do?
77. Aisatta: I like to do nurse-work. Or I will brook (launder) for people. Yes.
78. Jordene: So, do you do that work here?
79. Aisatta: Yes, Saturday I will go and take people's clothes and brook it. They will give me 1,000 and go and buy chop (prepared food).
80. Jordene: You buy chop for the family or for you?
81. Aisatta: For me. Cause sometimes I can't have shoes, clothes. My father does not buy for me because he says they don't have money. Unless people give me cloths and wear.

In the beginning, Aisatta asks me to help her father (line 73). Then Aisatta says that she will find money. At first, she says she will go to school with the money (line 75). Then she quickly says that she will send money to her father. She repeats that she will send the money to her father in line 75. However, by line 83 she says that she will buy food for herself. Having food in your own belly, when you know that all is not shared

equally in your family, is more important than taking care of the others or buying shoes for school.

However, in her imaginary future, Aisatta will have enough money to send some to her father. Her figured world of being a schoolgirl leads to being part of the imaginary community of people who send money back for their families (line 75). Part of the imaginary community that she will join by virtue of being educated includes the community of those who are able to send back to their hometowns to support their families.

Being able to send back to support her father is more important to Aisatta than the kind of work she will do. She is just as content to dream of being a laundress as she is of being a nurse. The occupation or the work does not matter to Aisatta, unlike Isatou, she does not dream of being a minister for the whole world to help Sierra Leone. Aisatta is focused on feeding herself and her father. In 2011, we discuss possible occupations for her:

82. Jordene: Do you ever think about being a teacher?
83. Aisatta: My teacher?
84. Jordene: Do you ever think about you becoming a teacher?
85. Aisatta: Becoming a teacher? Hmmm, I don't know yet.
86. Jordene: What do you think would be a good job for you?
87. Aisatta: I, I want to be – I want to be a doctor.
88. Jordene: A doctor! You like blood?
89. Aisatta: Blood? – Ahhh, No, I don't like doctor. I want to be – a lawyer.
90. Jordene: A lawyer!
91. Aisatta: Yes! To sit in an office and make like that – *bluff*!
92. Jordene: (laugh) To sit in the office and be all *bluff*?
93. Aisatta: Yes!
94. Jordene: And wear big high heel shoes and lipstick?
95. Aisatta: Yes! When I see you, I will run and go greet you like that!
96. Jordene: That would be wonderful. I'm looking forward to that day.

Primary importance was given to the idea of sitting in an office and looking good rather than the particulars of the job.

As Aisatta grows older, and we continue to discuss occupations, she does not get any more specific about an actual occupation but instead sets her ambition to moving to the United States. She thinks that she could earn more money if she went to the United States and then could send more money back to her father. The fact that I keep appearing over and over again in her life fuels that dream. Despite my forceful statements that chances of getting to the United States are very small, she continues to dream of travel.

6.2.2.2.Might be married young

Aisatta's dreams of going to the United States and becoming an educated woman rest on her ability to continue going to school. Going to school means finding funding every semester. Before the NGO started funding her in 2012, it was a daily worry, and one of the solutions to getting her education, was to find a husband willing to pay school fees. As discussed in the chapter on Fantu, marriage is often a strategic decision, and Aisatta represents the girls for whom marriage means funding for school. The following data is reproduced from the section "2.2. Marriage" Chapter 5 on Fantu:

- | | | |
|------|----------|--|
| 97. | Jordene: | Do you want a husband? |
| 98. | Aisatta: | A husband? Yes. We are praying for a husband. |
| 99. | Jordene: | OK, what kind of husband do you want? |
| 100. | Aisatta: | What kind of husband do I want? The only thing for pay my school fees, <i>uside no de poil, and come to pay my pa nah huse. My pa na handicap no got money for pay mi school fees. So let him pay for my book learning. That is what the husband be for. (I want a husband to pay for my school fees (I don't want to be spoiled) because my father is handicapped and cannot pay for my school fees. I don't want to be spoiled. Let my husband pay for my book learning. That is all I ask.)</i> |

In 2011, the conversation was repeated:

- | | | |
|------|----------|---|
| 101. | Jordene: | What if a rich, handsome man comes to your father and |
|------|----------|---|

- says I want Aisatta?
102. Aisatta: Rich man?
103. Jordene: (role- playing) “Father, I want Aisatta as my girl.”
104. Aisatta: My father he has agree but I don’t have that man there yet. (pause)
Yes.
105. Jordene: So your father will agree?
106. Aisatta: Yes, if I have good luck, because he says he wants. “Ok marry her and start to go school back. You pay for my daughter.”
107. Jordene: An how you see it? (*What do you think?*)
108. Aisatta: I see it, she have cool, the other (unintelligible) not cool, because have money not there. If money is there, you will not do not marry first, unless you do your school, but if, if, your father cannot do not have money, he will say, ok go marry to that boy. Yes. My father will talk that. Ok this boy go marry this girl but you will pay school fees for this girl until you see her go in college.

Aisatta wants a husband to pay her school fees. She does not want to be spoiled (line 102); she only asks that he pay her school fees. She is clear that her father will want her to marry if the man pays the fees. She says that they have been praying for such an opportunity (line 100). It would be good luck to find such a man (line 108). She says that the marriage will only be a necessity because if the money is there to pay school fees there will be no need to get married (line 110). In Sierra Leone, 18% of the general population is married by the time they are fifteen years old. Forty-four percent are married by the time they are eighteen years old (UNICEF, 2013). If Aisatta marries strategically, to stay in school, her parents and her community will approve.

Aisatta’s strategic goal is to stay in school and somehow get to the United States. In some ways, her lack of specific goals and her continuous dreams of the impossible seem to be in contradiction, yet in other ways they make sense. Aisatta knows that her chance of becoming a lawyer or a doctor or sitting in an office is slim. That is the reality that she knows and accepts. She accepts that in a way that the other

girls do not. Most of the other girls assumed that with an education, they will succeed.

For Aisatta, she wants to eat, learn, and get by. Sen's (2008) emphasizes that

"happiness can be deeply unfair to those who are persistently deprived" (p. 4). The

entire paragraph reads:

The utilitarian calculus based on, say, happiness can be deeply unfair to those who are persistently deprived, such as the traditional underdogs in stratified societies, oppressed minorities in intolerant communities, precarious sharecroppers living in a world of uncertainty, sweated workers in exploitative industrial arrangements, subdued housewives in deeply sexist cultures. The hopelessly deprived people may lack the courage to desire any radical change and often *tend to adjust their desires and expectations to what little they see as feasible*. They train themselves to take pleasure in small mercies. The practical merit of such adjustments for people in chronically adverse positions is easy to understand: this is one way of making deprived lives bearable. But the adjustments also have the incidental effect of distorting the scale of utilities. (Sen, 2008, p. 4) (Italics are Sen's.)

Aisatta adjusts her desires to what little she sees as feasible. She sees that being a lawyer is probably not a reality; but sitting in an office might be. She is also prepared to launder other people's clothes all the time, if she can eat and send money back to support her father. Her expectations are much lower than the other schoolgirls.

Even when Aisatta is dreaming about coming to the United States, she knows it will not happen. My presence in her life inspires her dreams but she speaks, just as often, of how I will come back to Sierra Leone and greet her in her office. Aisatta's imagined community of educated women includes my validation of her success.

Her imagined community of educated women also includes a reproduction of the current social stratification. In other words, the discrimination and shame that she faced as the child of a beggar will be overcome in the future as well. For Aisatta, the figured worlds of being a schoolgirl in Kono includes a continuation of the social stratification rather than an opportunity for transformation.

6.3.Conclusion

The portrait of Aisatta and the analysis that followed answers Gee's question:

What figured worlds are relevant here? What must I, as an analyst, assume people feel, value, and believe, consciously or not, in order to talk (write), act, and/or interact this way? (Gee, *An Introduction to Discourse Analysis: Theory and Method*, 2011, p. 95)

To the figured worlds of a schoolgirl as one who is able to take care of herself and her family, is hard working, and can read and write, Aisatta brings a level of complexity. Aisatta's figured world of being a schoolgirl is a tenuous position—a position that may be lost at any moment because of the dire poverty that brings uncertainty to every aspect of her life. While the other schoolgirls portrayed in this dissertation can be certain of home and food, Aisatta has secured neither of those basic necessities. For Aisatta, the figured world of being a schoolgirl is a world to which she just barely belongs.

Aisatta's place of belonging in the figured world of schoolgirls does not contain the stark demarcations of in or out of school as it does for the other schoolgirls. Aisatta has been out-of-school and she has been in school. While she sees those that managed to stay in school by any means as morally better than those out of school, she knows that she is in no place to judge those who did not "find money", have a white benefactor, or were lucky enough to have a husband to pay for them.

Aisatta does not dream of having a husband that will be her equal or a professional job that will make her the equal of men. She dreams of sending money to her father and bluffing in front of her abusive cousin. When she allows herself to fantasize beyond the scope of reality, her castle in the sky is to come to America and earn more money to send to her father. She does not dream of speaking in public, leading the nation toward greater equality, or any of the things that Isatou can imagine. She plainly wants to lift her family out of poverty through her education.

However, if education does not work, she is ready to launder in someone else's home to earn the money to do it.

Aisatta and her family occupy a liminal space in society. They are beggars. They live on the edge of a swamp, literally and figuratively. Aisatta, despite her cheerfulness and bravery does not have friends; she has benefactors among her teachers, neighbors, and me. Just as her parents move from one place looking for the place that offers them kindness at the moment, Aisatta moves from home to home looking for a way to get her rice for the day. School is the only place that Aisatta belongs. School is the liminal space that holds Aisatta's sense of self and gives her days a rhythm.

6.4.Coda

Aisatta died in May 2013. I received a phone call from Mr. Monku saying that Aisatta's stepmother had come to his office; she had told him that Aisatta had gone to her stepsister's home outside of Freetown to take care of her brother-in-law while her sister was in the hospital. While she was there, Aisatta had an abscess tooth pulled. That was on a Tuesday. Mr. Monku, Elsa, and Frankie all tried to locate Aisatta but the stepmother did not have a phone number for anyone with Aisatta. They finally spoke to the brother-in-law on Thursday; he had taken her to a local healer. But on Friday, Aisatta died and, following Muslim tradition, was buried shortly thereafter.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUSION & IMPLICATIONS

7.1. Preface

The coda of the previous chapter announced the death of Aisatta, one of the focal schoolgirls. She died in 2013, three months after I left Kono. I have had Aisatta's photo over my desk since I started this research project in 2010. Her image on my wall helped me to sustain focus as I wrote this dissertation. As I gaze back at Aisatta's serious expression and at the tattered but much cherished school uniform, she wore, I was constantly reminded of the power of positive deviance. Why had she, out of the thirty girls I started the research with, been able to stay in school? She was not the top scholar in school, but she stayed in school, nonetheless. A new study by Bjorkman-Nyqvist (2013) suggests a correlation between drought and reduced school attendance for girls. However, the researcher finds no correlative effect on boy's attendance at school. So how is it that girls, like Aisatta--the daughter of beggars, manage to stay in school?

Though this research has shown that each girl finds her own way to access and maintain their status as a schoolgirl, they share common beliefs about the value of inhabiting the figured world of schoolgirls. The schoolgirls interviewed spoke of the immediate benefits of being schoolgirls, for example, belonging to a group and having some place positive to go every day. They also spoke of more long term, less concrete benefits, like marrying a man who would not flog them as much, or being able to stay in the city. The schoolgirl identity is empowered through a shared community commitment to the imagined future that is accessible only through

education. The schoolgirls and their communities believe in a future where educated women lead the government and grandchildren have better health because of better education. Although I am not convinced that schooling as it is practiced in Kono empowers critical learning, education may be a path toward greater stability, more food, and less inequity in Sierra Leone.

After sharing with the reader so much about me and the schoolgirls, and the relationships we built, I am certain that the worth of this research lies in what is to be gained in the intersubjectivity or the 'subject in-between.' I repeat Jackson's quote from chapter three,

Herein lies another assumption I make as an anthropologist- the assumption of intersubjectivity. Just as human existence is never simply an unfolding from within but rather an outcome of a situation, of a relationship with others, so human understanding is never born of contemplating the world from afar; it is an emergent and perpetually renegotiated outcome of social interaction, dialogue, and engagement. And though something of one's own experience- of hope or despair, affinity or estrangement, well-being or illness- is always one's point of departure, this experience continually undergoes a sea change in the course of one's encounters and conversations with others. Life transpires in the subjective in-between, in a space that remains indeterminate despite our attempts to fix our position within it- a borderlands, as it were, a third world (Jackson, 2011, p. 2).

Like Jackson, who also writes about Sierra Leone, I have come to realize that although I entered this research on my own, for me and those who journey with me, there was a 'sea-change' over the course of my research. Over these three years, I have become entangled with the dust and the people of Kono, the politics of the diamond mining industry, and with the schoolgirls and their families. A conclusion requires an ending point from which to view the experience and thus I view this work from the intersubjectivity in-between.

The porch that is both the physical location and metaphor for this work is a place both inside and outside, a place of in-between. It is the place I see the

schoolgirls inhabiting. While writing the portraits, I listened over and over to their voices and pictured Aisatta jumping up from her lowly spot on a burlap sack to grab the microphone as another girl started to pass it over her head. I see Fanta just sitting, smiling when I ask her if she has something she wants to talk about. She says, ‘No’, so we sit on the porch in peaceful silence. I remember Isatou, the very first visitor to the porch, her feet swinging from the chair, a foot above the tiles. The porch is a safe place, an island, for the schoolgirls and for the relationships we formed.

These schoolgirls are real. Their struggles are real and their aspirations are real. They believe in the figured worlds of schoolgirls as they live them and as they imagine them to be. They also believe that their plodding journey will be rewarded.

The figured worlds of schoolgirls as discussed in this work posit a coherent construct of common attributes and affordances. To some extent, a circle is drawn around these commonalities in section 7.3 of this chapter. I can envision an article that explores the ways that schoolgirls in Kono look at marriage or an article on the ways ‘the village’ is used as a metaphor for ‘not modern’ by schoolgirls in Kono. However, the deeper finding is that despite the overwhelming poverty, violence, and difficulty of getting up and getting to school, these girls truly believe that they will have a better life by going to school.

This chapter is divided into three major sections. The first section traces how liminality is conceptualized in the research literature. Next, I examine what this study contributes to the understanding of liminality. In the second section, I consider the use of portraiture as a methodology, and more particularly the role of the researcher in mediating discourses and shaping the co-construction of portraits. The last section reviews the analysis presented in previous chapters (three, four, and five) in light of

existing research. Finally, I consider the implications of the research findings for understanding and supporting schoolgirls.

7.2. Discussion of theoretical implications of liminality

Liminality – that place of being outside of or between conventional social categories -- is central to the analysis in previous sections, and thus an expanded discussion of this concept and its implications for this study is warranted. This section looks at several ways that liminality occurs in this work. First, since not all children go to school in sub-Saharan Africa, the very act of going to school creates a liminal space for schoolchildren. Second, I explain how in contrast to other liminal spaces, schoolgirls move in and out of the liminal space. Next, I look at how, in this study, my visits to Kono create an additional liminal space and time for the schoolgirls featured. Finally, these girls, the first generation after a war, and the first generation to see more than half of the children enrolled in school, may be part of shift in which the act of going to school will no longer be considered a liminal space and time for girls in Sierra Leone, but may assume the status of a valued social category

The figured world of being a schoolgirl in Kono is a liminal space. It corresponds in many ways with Van Gennep's (1960) three phases—first the girl is a child who works besides her mother; next she enters the liminal stage when she is neither a child nor a woman but rather a schoolgirl; and finally, with a ritual, she is celebrated and re-enters society as a woman. However, the outcome—a celebration and completeness of her transformation—in not assumed in this case. The figured world of schoolgirls in Sierra Leone as a liminal period is not a stable matter of passing through the requisite stages. Instead, multiple actors may abruptly shift the liminal period. Teachers or headmistress may destroy a uniform, dismiss a student for

premature puberty, or simply drive the student off the school grounds. Parents can refuse to continue to contribute to school fees or demand that the schoolgirl stay home to take care of her siblings. The schoolgirl herself can choose to leave school. In this way, the figured world of being a schoolgirl rests on the continuation of a liminal time and a liminal space of being no longer a child not yet an adult.

While the girl is a schoolgirl, she is also a girl who is expected to work. Her afternoons are not spent in sports teams, school clubs, or artistic productions but rather she spends her afterschool time selling groundnuts, cooking, and taking care of younger siblings. The figured world of schoolgirls is added to the existing figured world of being a girl in Sierra Leone. This construct of a liminal period differs with Van Gennep (1960) and Turner's (1984) visions. In their construct, a liminal period is a time and space separated from other time and space. In Kono, the schoolgirls move in and out of being a schoolgirl.

In Turner's world, the rest of life stopped when people entered liminal spaces; in this world, life goes on and people move in and out of the liminal spaces... Thus, the transformations the liminal period aims to [a]ffect must take place during as well as in between moments of continued life in the present. (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 115)

The schoolgirls are adding the figured world of a schoolgirl to their figured world of being a girl and in doing so they move in and out of both spaces.

In addition to moving in and out of the liminal space of being a schoolgirl, the girls move in and out of the temporal periods of my visits. My visits to Kono followed a regular pattern. I stayed at the same home, visited schools in the morning, spent the afternoons at an office typing up field notes or working for the NGOs in the area, and in the evenings, I sat on the porch while neighbors, friends, and schoolgirls came by. My visits to the area created a liminal space in which the schoolgirls did not spend

their afterschool time selling groundnuts but came to spend time with me and the other girls. The actual physical liminal space of my porch -- neither fully inside the house, nor yet fully outside it -- represents both the space and the liminal temporal time spent together.

Outside of my visits, the girls did not gather as a group of friends. Thus, my arrival not only brought magazines, cookies, and time with me, but also brought the girls together so that they could play, read, and talk. This physical space of shared dreams, talking into a microphone, telling and teaching me about their lives was a liminal space and time in which the girls could explore their shared figured world as schoolgirls who knew Jordene. My visits offered the girls a safe space, a community of fellow schoolgirls, and a role model. The schoolgirls gathered on my porch attended different schools, lived in different parts of the city, and knew me in individual ways, yet when they came together on my porch they crafted “individual experiences of transition as part of their larger group rite of passage” (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 114). In forming a group on my porch the schoolgirls became part of a larger group undergoing the same process.

The schoolgirls knew that they were schoolgirls. They understood that their figured world of being a schoolgirl was different from the figured world of those who were not in school. They knew the difference between when they had their schoolgirl uniform on and when they were wearing *lappa* and t-shirts. However, when they were on my porch in their *lappa* and t-shirts they were schoolgirls who were special schoolgirls because they were with each other as scholarship recipients and interviewees of an educated white woman who came to Kono to see them. Shoshana (2012) describes the meta-consciousness of being an ‘other’ as:

The experience of liminality encourages a consciousness of two types of self and constant movement between them. Moreover, the experience of liminality encourages a consciousness of being unusual and being an exceptional subject, which in turn heightens the sense of visibility. (p. 204)

The schoolgirls' experience of themselves as being in a liminal space and time as schoolgirls was intensified when I came to Kono, because my presence reminded them of their unique place.

They also occupied a unique liminal place in society as *nachgeborenen* or the first generation after a war (Jaron, 2002). War itself is a liminal period and the generation born after a war occupies a liminal space that allows for great change and shifting of social groups (Malksoo, 2012). This, in turn, permits new normative spaces to be created (Fiol, 2010). Smet (2009) observes that in Sierra Leone, the aftermath of the armed conflict offered a space to create new gender relations. During the war, women took on lead roles in the household economy as primary producers and became leaders within their communities. After the war, supported by international organizations that stressed the importance of the participation of women in rebuilding Sierra Leone, these new identities continued.

This constant state of post-war liminality and the liminality of the *nachgeborenen* is visible in the rising numbers of girls going to school. Post-war enrollment in Sierra Leone schools doubled (Government of Sierra Leone: Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, 2007) and net enrollment rose to 75% of all girls in Kono (International Monetary Fund and World Bank, 2008). These percentages indicate that the idea of 'schoolgirls' as being different from 'girls' is shifting. As more girls enroll and more girls complete schooling, being a schoolgirl will no longer be a figured world apart from being a girl. Through increased

enrollment and completion of schooling, the figured world of schoolgirls in Sierra Leone is become less liminal and more normative.

My part in creating the figured world, of normalizing the educated girlchild, combined with societal shifts in the view of education led to a refiguring of the liminal space of being a schoolgirl in Kono. The rite of passage through schooling as something outside of the normal space for girls is transforming the figured world of schoolgirls. Rites of passage allow initiates to try-on, to assume the new ways of being—new figured worlds.

...rites of passage that do not simply reproduce traditional power dynamics, social practices, modes of participation, and fixed senses of self, but rather create spaces within which to question these, have the potential to transform not only individuals but also educational institutions and, perhaps, society. (Cook-Sather, 2006, p. 122)

The questioning of power dynamics and the space created to question them features prominently in this study.

The dissertation began with Fantu and her classmates pelting stones at their headmistress and the tribal chief. It continued with data showing schoolgirls challenging their parents' expectations for girls. For example, when Portia said that she would go to Fourah Bay College or when Isatou expected to be exempted from cooking because her books were more important, they were exploring the limits of the power of their liminal space. There were also stories of schoolgirls creating spaces that allowed bigger dreams, like becoming the minister for the whole world or sending back money to the village. These individual, yet, collective assertions of transformation are available in a liminal space.

The multiple layers of liminal spaces move from my intimate porch and the rich relationships fostered there to the larger societal shifts of the *nachgeborenen*

period. These are concentric rings of liminality as the schoolgirls move in and out of their figured worlds and grow.

7.3. Portraiture

The process of writing portraits required careful consideration of details and intentionality of purpose. Setting the scene so that those who have never been to Kono could envision it meant including details that might seem odd to a resident who lives it daily. For example, I began Isatou's portrait on her porch. In Kono, a porch is often a concrete slab floor, which shares one full wall with the home and a half-wall on the street side. There is an entrance to the porch usually a step up, sometimes two steps but usually not more than that. The porch has a wooden bench for guests to sit on or in wealthier homes guest are provided a plastic chair. The residents or close friends usually sit on the half-wall with their back to the street to face their guests. If there are no guests, residents sit on the half-wall toward the street to greet people walking by. In some ways, a porch is a porch all around the world; in other ways, a Kono porch is unique. Trying to paint a rich portrait with enough, but not too many details, required equal attention to the subjects (the schoolgirls), the author (me), and the reader (you).

Portraiture obligates the author to address her role as researcher, storyteller, writer, and co-constructer of the story. The author is fore-fronted in portraiture. There is no place to hide. Dixon, Chapman, and Hill (2005) describe the relationship between researcher and portraiture as intended by Lawrence-Lightfoot and Hoffman-Davis (1997) as such:

In concert with critical race theorists...Lawrence-Lightfoot and Davis (1997) argued that the researcher must acknowledge the extent to which the researcher's perspective, experiences, and identity informs her or his construction of the portrait. The experiences and ideology of the researcher must

be shared with the readers to acknowledge biases, lenses of analysis, chosen imagery, and the presentation of selective voice—both the researcher’s and the participants’ words and actions. The ideology of the research is further reflected in the stories the researcher chooses to tell and the ways in which the researcher tells them. Much like the stories and counterstories that are presented by critical race theorists ..., Lawrence-Lightfoot (1983) made the political commitment to relate the stories of strength and complexity that she built using the data. (p. 19)

Highlighting the role of the researcher/author exposes the biases and assumptions of the research.

In the study, “Through Thick and Thin: How Views of Identity Affect Listening for a Story in Portraiture”, two different researchers, Matthias & Petchauer (2012), explain that although they both used portraiture as a methodology, the results of their studies were very different. They found that the product of their portraiture studies were “very different from one another and connected to some of our personality traits, demeanors, and temperaments” (p. 400). This is not surprising as portraiture is influenced by the author, the way she enters the research, the way she frames the story, and her unique style of writing. What is surprising is that there would be the assumption that all researchers using the portraiture methodology would be expected to produce similar pieces. Each writer will have her own style and each researcher will have her own vantage point.

Portraiture allows qualitative researchers to share their vantage point and to acknowledge the co-construction of data. The interviewing process for me, as an educated, relatively wealthy, white female, outsider in Sierra Leone, was by its nature a co-construction. The interviews were co-constructed (Gee, 2000), my role as a researcher was co-constructed, and the stories I chose to tell were co-constructed (Dyson & Genishi, 2005). Because research is co-constructed with research subjects, I strove through reflection, to make clear the position I played in all aspects of the

research (Richardson & St.Pierre, 2005). My rendering of the schoolgirls was and can only be partial. Dixon, Chapman, & Hill (2005) write,

However, this partiality is not in and of itself a negative aspect of the research. Rather, this partiality provides the portraitist the space to acknowledge her or his presence—physically, psychologically, spiritually, and emotionally—in the research, thereby dismantling the notion that the researcher is the only knower and expert on the lives and experiences of the participants. (p. 17)

Exposing the space of the portraitist de-privileges the role of the author/researcher. It reveals the author as much as it reveals the subject (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Hoffman Davis, 1997). Because of the co-construction of all aspects of the research and the exposure of myself, I had to be conscious of not overpowering the portraits with my presence and my story. I tried to balance acknowledging my influence on the data collected and the ways I chose to write and analyze, while allowing the individual characters of each schoolgirl to maintain an equally vital role. I strove to ensure the focal point of the portrait remained the schoolgirl.

My goal in ensuring that the focus remained on the schoolgirl was to invite the reader to engage with the girls alongside the author. Bloom and Erlandson (2003) had six people read their portraiture and then write a letter to someone about the subject of the portrait. They found that the letters written resonated with the author of the portraits and were each a “sound interpretation” (p. 890). Some of the letters picked up and highlighted points that the author had not chosen to highlight. However, the author felt that the alternative interpretations were applicable and solidly based on the portraits. Reflecting on this experience, they write,

Clearly in regard to the common objective interpretation of the portrait, the portraitist is the person primarily in control. It is he or she who selects the facts to be included; it is he or she who emphasizes, deemphasizes, or ignores other features of the subject being portrayed. But in the powerful, subjective interpretations that make a portrait more than a vita or a reference letter, the balance of power between portraitist and reader is more evenly distributed. In

one sense, the portraitist is drawing in the reader to dance with him or her—matching the portraitist's steps, feeling his or her rhythm, enlisting the reader's own active involvement. As the reader picks up the step and the rhythm, he or she too may initiate movement and create new meaning. (p. 891)

The role of the reader as meaning maker is essential in the portraiture methodology and disturbs the construct of study as report. Portraits do not report, they invite the reader into the text and ask for an equal investment of attention.

Acknowledging the equal investment of attention by the author, subject, and reader dispels the notion that there is a singular interpretation or truth of the work.

English (2000) critically assesses the portraiture methodology stating,

Though not directly stated as such, the resulting *portrait* is a literal, encompassing, and stable *truth*. And that truth is singular, unequivocal, and transcendent. By *transcendent* what is meant is that the summative portrait is beyond reproach (p. 22).

However, English's argument is limited to positivist approaches to research.

Qualitative research, in general, is controlled by the researcher. The researcher frames the study and the results by controlling what is included as data, what is not included, and how much emphasis is placed on competing narratives. In contrast to English, Richardson and St. Pierre (2005) frame poststructuralist research by highlighting the lack of a singular truth,

Specifically, poststructuralism suggests two important ideas to qualitative writers. First, it directs us to understand ourselves reflexively as persons writing from particular positions at specific times. Second, it frees us from trying to write a single text in *which* everything is said at once to everyone. Nurturing our own voices releases the censorious hold of "science writing" on our consciousness as well as the arrogance it fosters in our psyche; writing is validated as a method of knowing. (p. 962)

In my work, the deep probing portraits of the schoolgirls, as well as the inclusion of my own self-reflection into the narrative, provide the reader with deeper, richer detail than a different methodology might have allowed. In other words, the use of

portraiture gives the reader multi-layered insight into the lives of the subjects.

Portraiture allowed me to forefront my relationship with the schoolgirls and to tell a complex story in an engaging manner. With these rings of concentric circles forming a whole, there can be no one single interpretation.

The beauty of multiple interpretations is that it allows the reader to become engaged in the multiple layers of the work. Writing that is compelling, aesthetically pleasing, yet deeply grounded in the research, engages the reader. The use of portraiture makes it possible for the reader “to experience a deeper level of understanding and empathy that would be exceedingly difficult to achieve if [the author] were writing as a dispassionate, detached observer” (Hackmann, 2002, p. 53). I am not a dispassionate, detached observer. I wanted to place a theoretical question onto the personal. I wanted to share the counter-narrative of girls who do stay in school and why. I wanted to discuss my relationship with these extra-ordinary and yet ordinary schoolgirls, contribute to the research, and to move people to action.

When the conversation about social justice is contained in high-level abstractions, it is often easy to achieve a wide consensus with little commitment to drive it to meaningful implementation. Portraiture, by focusing on the poignant personal features of the person or group portrayed, forces a personal stance on the part of the audience. Silent, easy consent is no longer tolerated. (Bloom & Erlandson, 2003, p. 893)

In using portraiture as a methodology, I engaged my readers by providing rich detailed intimate data that painted a picture of a whole being- a schoolgirl and the figured world of being a schoolgirl that she, her community, and I contributed in co-constructing.

7.4 Research Findings on the figured worlds of schoolgirls

This study examines the salient aspects of identity evoked by schoolgirls and their households to describe the figured worlds of schoolgirls. How did the

construction of this identity position them in their households and community? How did the figured worlds of schoolgirls mediate their social relations? What did the figured worlds of schoolgirls allow them? Further, what was the role of “imagined communities” for these participants (Anderson, 1991; Kanno & Norton, 2003)? That is, what was the imagined social unit they saw themselves as a member of as a consequence of being a schoolgirl? This research analyzed how girls like Isatou, Fantu, and Aisatta believe that the figured worlds of schoolgirls is an identity, which in spite of the very likely outcomes of physical risk, economic loss, and unlikely career success, becomes a compelling life choice. The central research question addressed in this dissertation was: What are the figured worlds that these schoolgirls inhabit that compels them, in the face of overwhelming odds, to commit to schooling?

The figured world of schoolgirls in Kono, Sierra Leone as co-constructed by me, the schoolgirls, their schools, families, and larger community was a liminal space that was seen to lead to a brighter future as members of an imagined community of educated women. The liminal space of schoolgirls had common expectations among all of the girls interviewed: schoolgirls wear clean uniforms, are identified with their school, and have steady, consistent lives with friends among the community of schoolgirls. Additionally, schoolgirls are allowed privileges such as walking independently through town and can prevent sickness and take care of themselves and their families.

From the perspective of the figured worlds of schoolgirls, the Kono schoolgirls are seen as having knowledge that was more valuable for themselves and their families. They are morally superior to girls who are not in school. Girls who do not go to school were portrayed as being bored and sitting at home all day with

nothing interesting to do. Girls who by choice do not go to school are to be scorned. These girls are portrayed as lazy, interested in material goods, and unworthy of friendship. However, girls who do not go to school because they do not have benefactors to pay for their school or parents willing to suffer to allow them to be educated are instead to be pitied.

The girls and their communities presented schoolgirls who succeed in staying in school as automatically becoming adult women who would be members of the imagined community of educated women, which automatically implied a woman of substance. As such, they would be able to send remittances to their families or otherwise support their siblings and parents. They would live in cities and never be farmers. Educated women would speak openly at public meeting, be equal to men in public settings, and be given preferential treatment over men in the workplace. Educated women would marry men who were their equal in education; therefore, their husbands would not flog them. Additionally, even when they were both educated and married, they would be expected to fulfill normative gender roles. They would have children and do the cooking and housekeeping while keeping a job.

Imbedded within this long list of expected achievements and values was the belief that schoolgirls had parents who suffered for them in order to gain security later. Education was an investment in a child whose labor could have been going toward gaining more food or opportunity for the family. This finding is consistent with researchers such as Behrman & King (2001), Betancourt, Simon, Borisova, Brewer, & de la Sodiére (2008), and Wils, Carrol, & Barrow (2005). Kabeer (2000) adds to the discussion that it is not only a contract on the part of the family to suffer

for the child to attend school but that there must be a plausible payout for the family in the future:

Indeed, to characterize the parental decision to commit scarce resources to their children as an act of investment only makes sense if certain conditions are in place, chief amongst which is the existence, however implicitly, of inter-generational contracts which provide parents with some kind of guarantee that the resources that they sacrifice for their children will bear returns in the long run. (p. 466)

Additionally, the sacrifices of parents to educate children motivates the entire community to assign value to the achievement of an education. Thus, only by having the entire community place this value on education does the payoff for the sacrifice now have value.

The value placed on being educated and being a member of the imagined community of educated women articulates a hierarchy between those with an education and those without. Education now becomes a class marker, with the assumptions that the society will become a meritocracy, and that all one has to do to raise oneself to a higher status within it is to have an education. As the chieftaincy system and old tribal alliances are eroding, education is seen as a way toward achievement. Because none of the schoolgirls featured came from the traditionally powerful tribes, a comparative assessment from tribe to tribe was not possible.

Within Kono, the schoolgirls all knew who their local chief was and where he lived. They were well versed in gossip and corruption stories about their chiefs. Although still feared for their magical powers, the chiefs were seen as less mysterious, more human as they went openly about town with their girlfriends, attended common social events, and were explicitly accused of corruption. This relatively recent change to a more commonplace status for the chiefs led to a general lack of respect for their societal position on the part of many, including the girls in

this study, as is well illustrated in the story that began this dissertation in which the schoolgirls pelted stones at the chief's compound. As Kono society has lost respect for traditional forms of power, the power vacuum created has allowed education, and thus educated women, to seep slowly into place as a new form of social stratification.

The prominence of education as a means of social mobility as was indicated in this study did not necessarily ensure a challenge to patriarchy. Schoolgirls who completed schooling were still expected to continue to be fully responsible for the household including cooking and sweeping, while maintaining a full time office job. Some of the schoolgirls expected to be able to select their own husband, have equal say in how the finances would be used, hire house-help, and attend the college of their choice away from home. These expectations were in sharp contrast to their mother's lived experiences and indeed to the experiences of many of their age-mates. The schoolgirls featured in this dissertation succeeded in maintaining their status as schoolgirls while others who were in the initial interview cohort were married and had children of their own.

Along with articulating choices available to them that were not available to their mothers, the schoolgirls, even while they lived in liminality, also spoke of education as a normative path, accepting that girls like themselves should be in school. Researchers challenge the need for advanced literacy in many communities in sub-Saharan Africa (Kabeer, 2000; Kendall, 2007; 2008; Riemer, 2008) and from my experience in Kono, there were few if any employment opportunities that required anything beyond basic literacy or numeracy skills. Yet, the trope of education as a panacea was commonplace and compelling to these girls and their communities. This is not, however, the concept of education that is normative in the global North; the

Kono schoolgirls continued to work for their tuition. Despite my NGO's assistance to them and their families, all of the girls receiving scholarships continued to make charcoal to sell, walked the streets selling groundnuts or rice cakes, or braided hair to earn money.

This dissertation asked why schoolgirls in Kono continued to go to school. Through my engagement with the schoolgirls and their families, I contributed to the normalization of the act of going to school. My presence as a researcher studying girls' education and as an educated woman role model for the schoolgirls and their families privileged going to school as the better choice. I did not challenge the global North's normative notion of going to school as the better path for these girls but instead sought to ease the financial burden on the families so that their daughters might continue in their studies. I fueled their dreams by offering to pay for their university and despite my effort to dissuade them, my existence in their lives held out the promise of the United States and all that accompanies the myths of the USA in the Sierra Leonean imagination.

7.5 Implications for development in sub-Saharan Africa through education

Although I deeply value education, I think that international development needs to work in concert with local communities to challenge the applicability of the global North's concept of schooling as normal for children in the global South. Challenging schooling and universal rights of a child to be educated would inherently involve examining the usefulness of applying northern notions of childhood, family, and community to the current realities of children living in Kono. Kendall (2008), writing about the experience of HIV/AIDS infected children in Malawi, states:

On the other hand, such conceptualizations of which spaces are acceptable and unacceptable for children to inhabit fundamentally de-center the life experiences

of many children and families around the world... [They:] reify certain roles for children (for example, student[s]) while demonizing others (for example, being sexually active, choosing to work, trying to make “adult” claims on political or legal systems); deny children direct agency in the name of adult protection; center the individual child as the primary unit of interest and analysis, reinforcing developmentalist conceptual models that separate the individual from the community and broader social, economic, and political systems in which they live; and do little to engage in the necessary conversations with young people in heavily AIDS-affected areas about how to improve their life experiences (371).

Examining the choices and the realities behind the choices made by sub-Saharan African children and their families allows a shift in which the value of education is questioned.

This study examined the figured worlds of schoolgirls asking why they went to school. Part of the answer was my intercession in their lives. Part of the answer was contained in the findings presented earlier in this chapter. The schoolgirls did believe that education does, in Kendall’s words, “reify certain roles for children . . . while demonizing others,” yet it also allowed them access to ways to challenge the existing power structure. The Kono girls’ strike was a powerful example of collective action by schoolgirls who were flouting their combined power as schoolgirls and stakeholders in the process. The northern view of schoolgirls and the models used by development agencies do not explore the power of these schoolgirls to speak for themselves and to challenge their future.

Schoolgirls and their communities are deeply invested in the power of an education yet the reality for most of these girls is that their schools are not invested in educating them. The Education for All Initiative (UNICEF, 2013) invested in getting children in school but did not invest in the infrastructure of schooling such as books, teachers, or facilities. Although the parents, the schoolgirls, and their communities are indeed suffering for their education, the education they are receiving is not worthy of

the suffering. The antiquated educational system relies on a testing system that is a vestige of colonial rule and few children pass the national exam for admission into college. Strict gate keeping practices, such as the exam system, coupled with corruption and unequal infrastructure privilege the few who can claim legacy. International development agencies hold out the promise of the imagined community of educated women, in which the families, the schoolgirls, and their communities invest. Regrettably, however, the reality for the Kono schoolgirls is that few of them will enter college and even fewer will achieve a job with an office, a purse, or the luxury of high heels.

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