

Love and Violence in Sierra Leone

In the decades following the civil war that took place in Sierra Leone between 1991 and 2002, new laws were passed to rebuild the state and to prevent rape, teenage pregnancy, and domestic violence. In this ethnography, Luisa T. Schneider explores the intricate semantic, empirical, and socio-legal dynamics of love and violence in contemporary Sierra Leone, challenging the oversimplification of these phenomena. Schneider underscores the limitations of imposing singular interpretations on love and violence, advocating for a nuanced, phenomenological approach that reveals how state and institutional attempts to regulate violence and loving relationships without considering local lived experience and meaning-making can yield negative consequences. By analysing how love and violence are historically constituted, experienced, and (re)produced across personal, social, legal, and political levels, this book critiques the construction of violence within gendered sexual relationships by development agencies, lawmakers, and politicians, urging them to engage with local knowledge and experience.

Luisa T. Schneider is a sociocultural anthropologist specialising in intimacy, violence, and law. Schneider is Assistant Professor at VU Amsterdam, a published academic and public author, and advisor to policy-makers and practitioners. She has conducted ethnographic research that emphasises the importance of local knowledge for over ten years.

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Love and Violence in Sierra Leone

Mediating Intimacy after Conflict

Luisa T. Schneider

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam



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Glossary

<i>ansa bele</i>	a practice regulating pregnancies out of wedlock by which a man accepts full social and financial responsibility for a pregnancy
<i>ataya bes</i>	a coffee place for men serving <i>ataya</i> tea, which is believed to provide energy; mostly young people gather there to drink and discuss politics and daily events
<i>bambrus</i> or <i>bambrusing</i>	treating someone or something roughly; can also be used to describe rough sex limited to penetration; can also indicate rape
<i>bod ose</i>	a wooden house
<i>bossing</i>	consensual sex where the man is dominant
<i>cher am</i>	to tear, to rip apart; here it is describing men's sexual conquest of attractive women
<i>cober lappas</i>	minors, 'girl lovers'
<i>contract relationships</i>	cohabiting partners who are not exclusive but may not bring other lovers home
<i>cut</i>	male orgasm
<i>cut and play</i>	sex that considers male and female pleasure
<i>fala-fala</i>	someone who loves to escort another person; here a love potion that leads a person to follow another person wherever they go; <i>fala</i> can also mean to have sex
<i>faray</i>	an addicted smoker; also used to describe a woman who is embedded in street life and who smokes but who does not engage in sex work

Glossary

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<i>financiers or providers</i>	middle-aged men/elders who enjoy the (sexual) company of women and girls in exchange for financial support, often in the form of school/university fees or rent
<i>fine boy</i>	pretty boy; a physically attractive or sexually skilled person without the financial resources desired of a main partner
<i>gbagba</i>	black magic that prevents someone from urinating or going to the toilet; this spell is said to be often used against ‘passers-by’ (q.v.)
<i>get beɛ</i>	to be pregnant
<i>get-to gɛda</i> or <i>chillin</i>	outing organised by social clubs in Freetown for club members and friends
<i>ifohn</i> or <i>swear medicines</i>	traditional medicines used in oath ceremonies as truth-determining devices in theft cases
<i>keɗi masta</i>	someone who runs a brothel or gambling place and who takes a commission for services provided in exchange for a place, security, or introduction to customers; brothels are often run by women
<i>ketch</i>	to catch; also the name a female sex worker may use for a customer or a man to describe a new sexual partner
<i>kongosa</i>	gossip, backbiting
<i>lek-lek</i>	love potion mixed in substances, food, or ointments; used against a partner to prevent them from loving someone else; used against a stranger to make them fall hopelessly in love and surrender all control; the charmed person’s free will is taken away
<i>mami kɔs</i>	calling someone’s children bastards, thereby cursing someone’s mother
<i>mami kwin</i> or <i>mammie queen</i>	female leader
<i>mas am</i>	to step on someone; also used to describe men or boys sexually penetrating women or girls, yet not necessarily in a violent way
<i>na mi bɔs am</i>	I am the one responsible for taking her virginity

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nak am

means to hit someone, but is also a slang term for having sex; for example, *Ar wan nak am* means I want to have sex with her

nɔr lɛf mi so

do not leave me like that

pan bɔdi

corrugated-iron house; zinc house

passer-by

a man who makes empty promises to a woman or who only takes when having sex and does not give the woman pleasure

pikin biznes

child's play; also used to indicate a physical relationship that involves kissing and touching but does not lead to sex
 palaver, to quarrel or fight
 female orgasm

plaba

play

playing in her garden

a man sexually pleasuring a woman; a man giving oral sex to a woman
 to have an abortion; to perform an abortion

pul na do

put mɔt pan di fet or putting

mouth into the fight

the naming ceremony for Muslim babies involving oneself in someone else's argument; talking to people while they are fighting

rare gal

female sex worker deeply involved in street life and sometimes in gangs
 to deny having caused a pregnancy
 ointments that are believed to be magical and that people rub on their bodies either for protection from magic that could be used against them or as a charm to use against others for personal desires
 consensual sexual act

I nɔr ansa di bele

rɔb- rɔb

the father of a baby introduces himself to the family of the woman he impregnated, to confirm that the baby has a father without taking social or economic responsibility for the child or the mother
 a woman who is very attractive or sexually skilled but who is believed not to possess the qualities of a main partner and is therefore an intimate partner among others

sexing

show face

side-chick

snatching

stealing someone's partner

Glossary

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<i>sugar daddies</i>	middle-aged men/elders, who enjoy the (sexual) company of girls and young women in exchange for money, mobile phone credit, clothes, or hair
<i>swallow</i>	apologise ritually at the end of informal community and household mediations and acknowledge that all issues have now been attended to
<i>sweat</i> (n.)	an oath
<i>tabulay</i> (n.) or <i>tabule</i> (v.)	a drum or to drum; can also be a nickname for male or female sexual organs
<i>tap to mi</i>	cohabiting without being engaged or married
<i>tay-tay</i>	(mostly ropes) that are believed to be magical that people tie on their bodies, for example on the waist, ankle, wrist, or neck; this is done either for protection from magic used against them, or as a charm to use against others for personal desires
<i>tedi bɔi</i>	a gang member or young man engaged in the illicit economy who asks his girlfriend to make money for him (often through sex work and associated trickery)
<i>tɪt ɛn tɔŋ mɔs jam</i> or <i>teeth and tongue jammed together</i>	the quarrels that necessarily occur between people who are close (e.g. kin, lovers, or friends); it is used to describe the relationship between men and women
<i>toma</i>	namesake (i.e. someone with whom you share the same first name); a term especially used by the Mende people
<i>wahala</i>	conflict, trouble, or problem