It is fruitful to think about bike riding as an ethical practice, as it sheds light on the particular ways okada-men positioned themselves (shaping their own selves and norms) in reference to normative discourses and more implicit nondiscoursed normative configurations existing in Makeni (being shaped).
Riding the Narrow Tracks of Moral Life: Commercial Motorbike Riders in Makeni, Sierra Leone
Michael Bürge

Contrary to the postwar paradigm of demobilization and reintegration of ex-combatants and ideals of coming-of-age under elders’ guidance, some Sierra Leonean ex-combatants and other young men took another way: by remobilizing and providing transportation on motorbikes, they nowadays enhance the physical and social mobility of others and themselves. Depicted nevertheless as transgressing local morals, they try to find ways to conjoin the expectations of others with their own aspirations. Oscillating between avoidance and compliance with claimed norms, negotiating and extending them, they fill ruptures and gaps within society while they broaden and open fissures further. This article is about those men’s ethical mobility and the obstacles to it: congestion, denied mobility, and difficulties of avoiding potholes and not losing the right track while navigating a constantly transforming social landscape.

In the early morning hours of Monday, 18 June 2007, life in Makeni came to a halt. The okadamen were on strike. Market women could not take their goods from the outskirts and surrounding villages to town, and people could not purchase heavier items in the town center, as no one would convey them to their destination. Likewise, the staff of local nongovernment organizations, government bodies, and others, accustomed to the comfort of a transport to go to work or go from office to office in different parts of town, had to walk or suspend their tasks. An anthropologist, scheduled for a visit to a hospital to get a new dressing and antibiotics for his wounded knee and therefore unable to walk, experienced the loss of mobility with no small measure of pain.

Commercial motorbikes have become an indispensable means of transport on the streets of Makeni and other towns in Sierra Leone—among villages, mining fields, and towns, and to cross the border. Okadamen, commercial motorbike riders, have changed the landscape of the country,
geographically and socially: they have highly enhanced the mobility of people who can afford to hire a bike; almost all narrow tracks and bush paths—and therefore most remote areas—are traversable on them. By speeding up a great portion of economic activities, transporting people and goods, and increasing the number of consumers, bike riders contribute to the economy and society at large, and therefore they indirectly benefit people who do not ride bikes themselves [Juana 2008:32].

I suggest in this article that bike riding goes beyond responding to the most immediate need to survive in economically difficult times. It is about some people’s particular way—or better, various particular ways—of participating in Sierra Leone’s recovery from war and trying to become responsible and respected members of the community and society at large, contributing to its development and future prosperity in congruity with their own aspirations. Bike riding metonymically stands for and mirrors more general developments or tendencies in society: in the practices of and around it—unsurprisingly thoroughly linked to questions of mobility—and the public discussions of its dangers and potentials for the individual and the community, different ideas of adequacy and social meaningfulness of particular ways of engaging in the highly dynamic and thus often unsettling local social landscape are tried, challenged, and negotiated. Issues of mobility, migration, economic enterprises, education, relations between generations, aspirations, and ideas for the future that come haunting society at large are discussed in a condensed form around bike riding.

I argue that bike riding is about building up one’s personhood as a responsible and full member of society, an adult, in continuous check and balance with the environment—by and through riding a bike, but not only. Becoming an adult, a full person, in Sierra Leone implies becoming the master of one’s own, and possibly even of others’, destiny—through control over resources or capital, instead of being dependent on others; being a caring and nurturing father or patron and husband, instead of a consuming son or client to be cared for (Shaw 2000; Shepler 2005; van Gog 2008; Vigh 2006). As it is argued in this article, pursuing upward or forward social mobility, becoming an elder (in terms of social age, thus a timely advanced status), requires not merely economic success: one’s activities and success have to be recognized and accepted by fellow community members, often discoursed in a language of moral responsibility and adequacy—that is, “being a good person” or “living a good life.”

As I shall show, however, being a moral person cannot be reduced to slavishly following a lawlike and culturally defined moral code as binding custom, which ensures social cohesion (Caduff forthcoming; Foucault 1985:25–32; Laidlaw 2002, 2010). In accordance with contemporary anthropological investigations into the ethical field [e.g., Faubion 2001a, 2001b; Hellweg 2009; Hirschkind 2006; Humphrey 1997; Laidlaw 2002, 2010; Rees 2010], which are heavily indebted to Michel Foucault’s work on ethical practices [e.g., 1985, 1997, 2005], that is, practices of self-constitution and self-transformation, in my understanding, the “domain of ethics is wider
than the following of socially sanctioned moral rules, in Durkheimian terms. It includes our response to invitations or injunctions to make oneself into a certain kind of person” (Laidlaw 2002:321–322, emphasis added). Ethics, in other words, refers to practices in which a given or claimed set of norms—in Makeni highly heterogeneous—are negotiated through specific [self-) positioning of individuals. Norms thereby delineate and constrain the space in which the subject can invent its life, without absolutely determining it.

Understanding bike riding in Makeni as an ethical practice thus implies a focus on practices of self-constitution and self-conduct within a field of constraints to take on a distinct stance toward the world. It means focusing on individuals’ practices or ways of moving and positioning in relation to norms, cultural models, or claimed traditions and expectations of others, so as to become or make themselves a subject and live a life they deem worthy of themselves. This article is an attempt to grasp a variety of practices in which people engage and err in a specific context to fulfill their—as well as of some of their—fellow citizens’ manifold aspirations for the future in negotiating relations with people, norms, and ideals, which overlap, intersect, contradict, and collide.

For this purpose, I first introduce the specific context or social landscape in which bike riders in Makeni had to move and find their position. Painting a picture of the conflicting norms and the accusations of moral indecency they were confronted with, I shall lead over to the second part, delineating my already stated understanding of bike riding as an ethical practice, through which okadamen negotiated their position within society, mediating among normative claims and ideological stances but accentuating and creating fissures. Before I portray today’s activities of okadamen around bike riding, which contribute to their position as in-betweens, I shall show in the third part how bike riding from its very beginning—even in how its origins were traced—was an ambiguous and liminal practice between more settled practices and structures. Okadamen’s liminal position today, it is argued, has to be understood in broader historical continuity.

The Crisis of Bike Riding in Makeni

Already before my arrival in Makeni I knew from NGO reports, newspapers, and a few academic articles that okadamen faced many hostile sentiments within the community and discrimination from state institutions (Peters 2007; Sesay 2006; SFCG 2005), which hindered their social mobility. Once I was in the field, this picture immediately became confirmed. I witnessed daily discussions at the junctions and squares where riders waiting for passengers were accused of immoral behavior. Okadamen were depicted as being rude, law-breaking, and criminal—an attitude mainly traced to their past or history as fighters during the war. Their activities and their income from riding were considered unfavorable to the development of the country, as they were not sustainable. Not going to school, not working properly,
not attending mosque or church, spending money on useless things, causing accidents, consuming drugs and alcohol, and impregnating girls, they did not live a good life as responsible citizens of the country. In short, they did more bad than good. Most of them challenged these accusations and underlined their sacrifices for the community, as the following statement, made by a member of the Makeni Bike Riders Association’s (MBRA) Task Force, shows:

We, the bike riders, make this place safe. People say we are rude, but it’s not true. We just stand for our rights. Without us, Makeni is nothing; we are the economy of this place. You see the women at the market? Without bikes, they have to walk from their villages, walk under the hot sun. Have you seen the strike? People were crying because they had to walk; they are not used to walk anymore. Without bikes, this place is backward, more dark. So why [do] people say we are dangerous? We give young people a possibility to earn good money, otherwise they would idle around; they would steal, because they are disgruntled, you know the history. But a bike rider is a serious person: he has responsibility—for his bike, for the community. But the government and the police, they don’t take us serious, they harass us every day. . . . You see, some of these schoolboys, they don’t abide to [sic] the rules; we know this, but we try to control them. The [MBRA is an important stakeholder, we are a political force. . . . We went on strike because we want our license, so police cannot harass us anymore. (Sembu)

Bike riding is thus an inherently paradoxical activity, potentially enabling riders to escape economically from the status of being dependent youth, while carrying the potential of remaining stuck in this liminal status because of its socially and morally questionable quality (Menzel 2011), in the long run endangering economic success.

Sierra Leone’s violent conflict was often portrayed as a crisis of youth (see Fanthorpe and Maconachie 2010 for a comment). Today, the crisis is going on, I argue, but as a crisis of potentially everybody: the omnipresent pending danger to remain or become youth, that is to say, not a full member of society because of limited capital, leads people to challenge each other’s coming-of-age to improve their own relative status. As already stated, becoming an adult, a relational person, having people depending on oneself rather than depending on others, thus having “wealth-in-people” (Bledsoe 1980; Shaw 2000, 2002), is determined not only by economic factors, but by fellow citizens’ social and moral recognition of one’s doing—and denied morality means denied adulthood. Bolten (2008) has shown how people in postwar Makeni struggle to fulfill the expectations and obligations posed by different actors within the wider community, to deal with a continuously
transforming social context, and to reconcile their inherent contradictions, leading to an inability to figure out the right way for their own and the community’s improvement.

Discussions about adequate activities in Makeni and criticism of others’ doing can stem from honest caring for others and deep-seated existential insecurity and fear about the community’s future. But questioning and even denying other people’s economically successful activities to be moral might be a discourse targeted at hampering and slowing down their success. Okadamen were particularly scrupulously observed and scrutinized in Makeni because of their public presence and the inherent high visibility of their doings and misdeeds. More important, though, was the fact that their origins were traced among so-called ex-combatants of the conflict in the 1990s, with whom they shared a demographical profile and a main characteristic: highly mobile young men rushing through the streets, entering and leaving the town at any time, disappearing and reappearing, and thus seeming highly uncontrollable. Opening up the community for, and bringing in, potentially dangerous powers from the outside—modern—world (Bürge 2011a, 2011b) added further reasons for people’s critical opinions about them and the need to observe and discipline them. Therefore, whatever okadamen did, they could not be sure whether it would be appreciated or recognized by the people in the community and whether it would lead to a better future, for themselves and those they wanted to include in that future. Nevertheless, they did not give up, and they challenged insecurity with their daily activities and tried to gain some security through mobility within social turmoil.

It is some of these daily engagements, tied to bike riding and being mobile in an unstable and challenging social landscape and with likewise demanding actors, that I explore in this article. Before doing so, in the next section, I want to say some general words about the navigation of the social landscape as an ethical practice and why it is fruitful to study ethnographically and think through people’s conduct as such.

Navigating the (Social) Landscape as an Ethical Practice

In an ethnography of young men soldiering in Guinea-Bissau, Henrik Vigh (2006) develops the concept of “social navigation” to analyze their daily struggle to make sense of and gain orientation within a social context in continuous transformation. Departing from Bourdieu’s (1992) concepts of “habitus” and “social field,” which conjoin individual agency and social structures and their interdependent relationships, Vigh crafts a more flexible approach to grasp the fluidity and continuous and mutually interlinked transformation of the social landscape, and of the actor itself, using the metaphor of navigating continuously changing waters (Christiansen, Utas, and Vigh 2006, Vigh 2006). Navigating these murky waters, destinations are beyond the horizon, trajectories have to be changed as circumstances cross and obstruct one’s course, and whirlpools and storms have to be avoided,
despite their invisibility, as they carry along the danger for the individual of losing a sense of the right direction, and even of up and down, left and right.

Like their counterparts in Guinea-Bissau, young men in Makeni “navigate an unstable political landscape where the shifts, tows[,] and underlying dangers require strategy and tactics to be constantly tuned to the movement of the immediate socio-political environment[,] as well as to its future unfolding” (Vigh 2006:10). People’s primary concern in Makeni was not the hardship of climbing up the social ladder within Bourdieu’s defined and determined social space (1992), but even finding out where the top and the bottom actually might be. Okadamen tried to gauge the social space and explore and extend its limits, and not everybody steered his destiny in the same direction, as this article shows.

Bike riders were often openly criticized for their immoral behavior and offending “local traditions” or an “African culture” of being social and caring for others. Presumably not fulfilling their duties within society, running around instead of settling down, they were positioned as irresponsible subjects, not deserving full rights as members of the communities, unless they changed their lives following the ideas proposed by their critics. Different ideas of the right way into a better future were projected onto, but also by, the okadamen, young men embodying the country’s future, making them the victims of these ideological battles. This multiplicity of discourses and practices, of norms and rules, and of the different ideas people had about the proper or good life, which even changed situationally and contradicted themselves, made it extremely difficult for the riders not to lose their orientation between good and bad, and between desirable and despicable ways of living, and which potential passenger’s request they had to satisfy first: concerning more strictly professional issues of the motorcycle-taxi business, clients requested fast, but at the same time safe, transport and neatly dressed riders, despite the latter’s day-long patrols under the hot sun on dirty roads. Traffic laws demanded the licensing of bikes and riders and the purchase of number plates, which were either too expensive or impossible to acquire in a reasonable time. Laws required riders and passengers to wear helmets, by the latter even more vehemently refused than by okadamen. Thus, because of their own responsibility, their passengers’ stubbornness, or contradictions between the law and the local workings of state bodies, riders became targets to be fined, or even to have their bikes confiscated. To ensure the circulation of their bikes to earn money, they had to bribe police officers and make arrangements with other state actors, who were in their turn breaking laws—actions necessary for “greasing the business.” The choice was between different manners of breaking the law, either way resulting in accusations in the community of being criminals (Bürge 2009). Beyond these requests, whose incommensurability led almost automatically to offenses against the norms, okadamen faced a welter of demands concerning community life in general, which were likewise difficult to conciliate: Muslim tablīgs reminded them to fulfill their religious duties, girlfriends wanted them to “show their love” (that is, to give financial help for going to school, or for buying clothes or
mobile phones), friends and kin wanted a share of their income, while others wanted them to attend school, not considering, however, the difficulties of paying school fees. These people claimed that only a completed education could lead to the development of the town and country, but others saw its future in enhanced trading activities connected to world markets, starting in Conakry, and still others demanded hard work in the fields for agricultural development. International donors and the government propagated youth empowerment, individual freedom, and participation by introducing new policies while refraining from making any considerable efforts and consequentially lacking results in substantiating these policies. Satellite TV transmitted views of a world that for some people seemed desirable and at least partly reachable in Freetown or Conakry, and partly purchasable in Makeni through goods some of the okadamen brought there. Others considered this wealth in other persons’ hands as the exemplar of Africa’s eternal exclusion or abjection, the unattainable “promises of modernity” (Bürge 2011a, 2011b; Ferguson 1999:236). For some, it was possible to catch up with the Western world, either by reproducing its successful development through adopting its educational system, or by tapping into the powers of Western inventions and (consumer) goods; others proclaimed an “African way” without being all too clear about its particulars and its degree of detachment from the rest of the world. These uncertainties about how best to steer one’s everyday life and destiny were true for the whole society, but particularly for okadamen.

One of the dominant arguments brought up by people who criticized and stigmatized okadamen’s engagements was their presumed past as ex-combatants, a past that was claimed to be still inside those men: “They are still rebels. They have their inner habits. They don’t respect others’ rights and lives. How can somebody ask that others respect his rights and his life, if he doesn’t care?” (Collin, a journalist in Makeni). Though advocating for riders’ issues within the community, this speaker emphasized their unlawfulness and rudeness, leading to road accidents and therefore to their need for being disciplined—an opinion often mentioned by the executive members of the MBRA, who, for this disciplinary endeavor, saw themselves as adequate persons, able to negotiate between riders and the community at large (Menzel 2011). Thus, even among people close to and positive about okadamen—and even among okadamen about other riders—negatively connoted views about others were evoked, sometimes purposefully, to promote their own interests (that is, to improve their status relative to that of others), sometimes as the result of more existential anxieties, caused by deep-seated concerns about bike riders’ high mobility and speed, endangering themselves and the community as a whole (Bürge 2009, 2011b).

To be highly mobile and to move physically and imaginatively between different points, shifting places and identities, were bike riders’ core qualities and activities, a reason for their ambiguous assessment, as this characteristic was intimately linked to their presumed past as ex-combatants (Bürge 2011a). Generally, to be mobile or active, leaving the community temporarily to tap and irrigate outside powers and make them productive for the
home community, is positively assessed in Sierra Leone, yet always linked to insecurity and potential danger (Bürge 2011b; Ferme 2001; Jackson 1989, 2004; Shaw 2002). Although okadamen increased other people’s mobility and accelerated the economy, for some people in Makeni their mobility seemed exaggerated, aimed at leaving the community and threatening to become uncontrollable, thus potentially harming, instead of benefiting, the community. They therefore tried to slow down okadamen and regain control, to root them in the community and participate in their mobility. Okadamen’s physical mobility was thoroughly intertwined with social and imaginative mobility, their perceived and perceptive flexibility to adapt to the transforming landscape: riding a bike, young men had found a way to overcome at least partially the social inertia of not becoming adults, caused by the lack of resources (Vigh 2006) that characterized the lives of a majority of Sierra Leoneans. Those who could not overcome this social inertia were unsettled, and they feared to become dependent on those who should be dependent “by tradition,” and thus indebted to them, and to become relational social inferior youth to biologically younger people (see Piot 1999 on the logic of debt and personhood; Shepler 2005); biologically older people, in turn, feared to be neglected by those surpassing them, as the latter had no obligations to care for them when they would become old. In their view, children are supposed to care for their old parents and kin because of an idea of reciprocity, paying back the debts of care and assistance received in growing up and becoming an adult—an obligation, or indebtedness, okadamen supposedly did not have, as they had become economically adults and moved away without the assistance and guidance of elders. It was not movement or moving away in general that was feared, but an uncontrolled one, without one’s participation. Denial of the social and moral recognition of economic success implied the need of further guidance in moral issues and thus subordination.

Okadamen tried to reconcile contradicting ideals about responsible adulthood and citizenship and norms posed by others with ambitions they had themselves about their life and their ideals of participation in the community. Resisting to surrendering to a passive position, they showed and proposed a great variety of possible ways to navigate the social landscape in and around Makeni. This navigation between different and changing structural constraints and constraints imposed by other actors within society and combined with one’s individual ambitions and ideas, I call moral navigation, or navigation of the social landscape as an ethical practice. As already stated, moral navigation as an ethical practice does not just refer to people’s limited movements within a clearly delineated space of culturally defined norms aimed at the reproduction of social cohesion (Laidlaw 2002). Of course, ethical projects always take shape in concrete contexts defined by power relations and are “not something invented by the individual himself. They are models that he finds in his culture and are proposed, suggested, imposed upon him by his culture, his society, and his social group” (Foucault 1997:291). Judith Butler cogently states: “The norm does not produce the
subject as its necessary effect, nor is the subject fully free to disregard the norm that inaugurates its reflexivity; one invariably struggles with conditions on one’s own life that one could not have chosen” (Butler 2005:18, in Caduff forthcoming). Ethical practices, thus, are reflexive engagements with cultural models, individual actualizations and negotiations of norms and their limits, which can always lead to shifts, extensions, and breaks with norms proposed in the name of tradition: as an exercise of and on the self, “by which one attempts to develop and transform oneself, and to attain to a certain mode of being,” it is not adherence to “a morality of renunciation” (Foucault 1997:282), but a productive undertaking of becoming.

It is fruitful to think about bike riding as an ethical practice, as it sheds light on the particular ways okadamen positioned themselves (shaping their own selves and norms) in reference to normative discourses and more implicit nondiscoursed normative configurations existing in Makeni (being shaped). It has to be said that only by people’s actualizations and negotiations of cultural models in everyday life are they put into existence, and these actualizations, as also must be said, take place in fields of power that are restricted by other actors and their ethical practices, different from one’s own and challenging them. Thinking of everyday practices as an ethical project offers a lens honing our focus on the important issues concerning people’s lives and how differently they envision their future and the future of the community and remember the past. In discussions of claimed duties, discoursed in a language of morality—proven-to-be-good customs or ancient traditions, due to their proponents a homogeneous set of beneficiary rules leading to a better future—and their counterdiscourses and everyday actualizations by individuals, issues such as relations between old and young, and relations among development, education, business, mobility, settling down, ways of linking to the world, and how all this should be tackled in the present and future, were constantly negotiated.

In what follows, it has to be seen how differently the individual okadamen moved within the fields of power (Foucault 2005:252) and how they rode the narrow tracks of moral life, avoiding the potholes and obstacles made up by the constraints of cultural models and their proponents. It is about how they productively made use of the multiplicity of normative registers to “transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality” (Foucault 1997:225) and how they were strained by the contradicting possibilities, duties, and expectations. I focus on certain individual practices, the way riders actually move, oscillating between the ability to invent their lives and the conditions one has not chosen (Butler 2005), challenging the loss of control over their lives, yet remaining enmeshed in contingencies.

Okadamen’s strength, their core quality, was their mobility and flexibility—physical, imaginative, ethical. They could not be reduced and fixed to certain positions, but moved in-between, rode between places, mediated between youth and adulthood, war and peace, outside and inside, Makeni
and the world. Their place was in the flexible navigation of a transforming landscape, through which they bound themselves to the world, shifting places as much as themselves (Bürge 2011a)—yet, as already said, this erring led to other people's attempts to contain their mobility and fix them. To understand bike riders' in-betweenness and the problems other people had with it, we have to know their history, as bike riders and beyond. Thus, in the next section, I try historically to contextualize bike riding and its inherent in-betweenness.

A Short History of Bike Riding in Makeni

Commercial bike riding is not a postwar phenomenon, nor is it a business introduced by ex-combatants. To be sure, authors writing on the topic are right in claiming that it became a booming business just after the completion of the DDR programs (Bürge and Peters 2010; Menzel 2011; Peters 2007; van Gog 2008). Information I received during my research in Makeni shows, however, that there was already commercial bike riding before and during the war. Ibrahim, the most senior okadaman I met in Makeni, stated in 1995:

"I started to use a Yamaha 100 for transport when vehicles didn’t go anymore to Magburaka. I made transports to Magburaka, and up to Mile 91 and Yele. It was very dangerous because you had to cross kamajor checkpoints, and they thought you are a rebel, and when you reached RUF checkpoints, they thought you were a kamajor, so you had to pay 2000 leones to pass, and 2000 leones were much money in these times. Sometimes you could take a bypass, a bush path to avoid the fighters, but if they found you in the bush, they treated you badly, so it was sometimes better to use the road and pay.

In those early years, commercial bike riding remained a marginal enterprise, involving just a handful of bikes, mainly in extraurban transport. Intraurban motorbike transport started to grow after 1998 with the arrival of people unwilling to walk within town: fighters of different national factions, ECOMOG, and later on, UN soldiers. People who already owned a bike adapted quickly to this new demand and offered their services to those requesting them. Higher ranks among the Nigerian soldiers, where motorbike transport was well established, purchased their own bikes and hired local men to ride them personally or to ride commercially on their behalf within Makeni town. This practice was copied by locals with entrepreneurial spirit: "We had experience in renting bicycles, but we saw that with motorbikes you could earn much more money, and why should our brothers ride for the Ogas [Nigerians]? So we started to buy our own bikes and ride for our own money" (Charles, first chairman of the MBRA).
The second boom of the business was the transitional period from wartime through the DDR phase to official peace, when a second wave of people with a more urban lifestyle working in the “industry of reconstruction” [NGOs, international donors] came to Makeni. Krijn Peters and others have argued that DDR programs and other transitional attempts to ensure long-lasting peace failed and left behind a big number of young people affected by the war²⁸ and unable to create a livelihood in the new context [Bürge and Peters 2010, Peters 2006, 2007, Keen 2005, Richards, Bah, and Vincent 2004]. This led into a fertile situation for bike riding to prosper: on the one hand, an increased demand for transportation combined with fewer four-wheel vehicles available and poor road conditions due to war damages; on the other hand, a large number of unemployed young men, easy to recruit for any activity. Peters [2007] argues that bike riding was an adequate employment for ex-combatants, as many of the qualities they had developed during the war—and which DDR programs aimed to destroy—were useful for this kind of work [see also Bürge and Peters 2010]: they knew the paths surrounding Makeni, they were resilient and fearless enough to ride even at night, and they could rely on solidarities and trust built up in the small units in which they had been living and fighting during the conflict, making them independent from others. However, I emphasized earlier that bike riding is neither only a postwar nor an ex-combatant phenomenon. Menzel for Bo-Town [2011] and Voldby [personal communication], based on a survey on the composition of the MBRA, state correctly that former fighters among riders today are increasingly outnumbered by other young men, though the MBRA executive sometimes claimed ex-combatants still make up the majority of its members.

My findings sustain the thesis that the enterprise from its very beginning, or better from its emergence, was developed by a variety of actors with different histories throughout so-called wartime. The fault lines between ex-combatants or former fighters and civilians, hence, have never been as straightforward as often claimed, even less in the process of transition from war to peace. A more nuanced and historically informed analysis of the war and its aftermath, the formation of solidarities, and the foundational continuities and ruptures throughout time, as it has been done elsewhere [Bolten 2008, Bürge 2009, Peters 2006, Shaw 2007a, 2000b],²⁹ has shown that identities and belongings were never fixed, but fluid and adaptable to the circumstances.

The social networks and organizational structures in which okadamen were enmeshed have partly been shaped today by experiences and ideas made during the war, based not only on solidarities of former comrades-in-arms, as often stated. Bonds of trust, important for sharing a bike [Bürge and Peters 2010, Peters 2007], had developed not only among fighters, but also among those who had had to live in the bush hiding from them.³⁰ Even more importantly for my argument, “civilians” who remained in Makeni during the conflict made their arrangements with fighting units and were already
living alongside them before any reconciliation program had been undertaken. Bike riding was one of the activities where combatants and civilians mingled in-between, where supposedly clear-cut boundaries were blurred as combatants became ex-combatants and okadamen, where okadamen worked for and with combatants, where civilians became okadamen and combatants, really fighting or only being called ex-combatants later on. Thus, the impact of bike riding on lasting peace in Makeni was considerable in those times, merging people with different histories and trajectories (actually only slightly different, as my argument goes, and not absolutely opposing, as is often claimed in the literature on war, but constantly changing), and thereby contributing to what is often called reintegration.\textsuperscript{21} Reintegration, though, implies settling people into a context or a community to which they were previously exterior [Menzel 2011; Peters 2007:3].

Evidence for Makeni shows that community people and “those-to-be-integrated” should be thought of not as living in essentially distinct realms, but as interdependently shaping the community in transformation. The process of reconciliation and accepting the past has its origins within wartime, not afterward: “We knew, some of [the young men in the streets] had done bad things, but we also knew it was time to forgive and forget. We had to integrate them [working as bike riders], because all of us were tired of war. . . . Today, they take their share and participate productively in the community” [Charles, first chairman of MBRA\textsuperscript{22}; see Michael Jackson 2005:368–370]. It is noteworthy that this speaker states that “we had to integrate them,” indicating that egalitarian self-organization and more hierarchical associational forms and visions of bike riding competed and coexisted even in those years—or perhaps better, there were shifting and fluid positions between these extremes—correcting the picture of a germiane egalitarian movement later on captured by patronage [Fanthorpe and Maconachie 2010; Menzel 2011; Peters 2007]. Even some of the people within the bike-riding community envisioned bike riding as giving young men in the streets a working opportunity and a place in the community under their guidance and control. Others, instead, tried participation under their own guidance—different positions, which today still inform okadamen’s struggles of navigating the landscape and finding their place. Bike riding in its emergence is in-betweeness, impossible to fix.

Despite statements of today’s meaningfulness of the category of “ex-combatants” due to a nondiscriminatory ideology and a will or urge for peace [Michael Jackson 2005:368–370, Menzel 2011], during my fieldwork in 2007 it was still often evoked in everyday circumstances. Okadamen had had a positive impact on social cohesion during the transition from war to peace, and on current security issues\textsuperscript{23} and economic development in Makeni (admitted by most of the people), but in the present they were nevertheless accused of being problematic to social reproduction. Despite the fact that all kinds of [young] men—ex-combatants, schoolboys, former farmers, and so on—rode bikes together, bike riders’ history and identity was in certain situations essentialized and fixed to the negatively connoted one they presumably
shared with former fighters. In-betweenness, having neither one bounded identity nor another, became essentially bound to a typical rebel identity or habit, characterized by in-betweenness, mobility, and speed, and thus turned into a fixed and negative identity. Hence, ironically, the seamless continuity between young men effected by the war and riding bikes nowadays—their in-betweenness, a quality facilitating peaceful coexistence in Makeni during and after the war—became their burden today: they were indiscriminately called ex-combatants or rebels, unsettled, uncommitted, and thus potentially harmful young men—categories, I have argued above, which earlier on had not been exclusively negatively connoted, as they became now. Okadamen were thereby discursively formed as a separate, clear-cut, antisocial entity outside society, or at least at its margins.24

This discursive dimension has to be emphasized: okadamen’s claimed isomorphism with ex-combatants was evoked when suitable—concomitantly also “forgetting” about one’s fertile coexistence with combatants in other times. The issue at stake was not primarily the question of a particular person’s real past as a combatant, but simply the denial or questioning of his qualities as a good citizen. Identifying the okadamen’s behavior in continuity with a historically proven antisocial, thus immoral, youth (Shepler 2005:107–111) ensured one’s own moral superiority. In Sierra Leone, as elsewhere in Africa, youth is itself a highly ambiguous category, in-between or liminal: between childhood and adulthood, making and breaking society, becoming and destroying, hope and decay (Abbink and van Kessel 2005; Comaroff and Comaroff 2000; Honwana and de Boeck 2005; Shepler 2005). People state that guidance is needed to realize the positive potential and suppress the problematic one. As mentioned above, evoking a negative genealogy of okadamen, emphasizing only the negative part, granted the right and responsibility for socializing and disciplining them to become responsible adults.

In line with Krijn Peters’s delineations of the purposeful failing of DDR programs (2006:129), I have elsewhere argued that, despite contrary official commitment, there are indicators for a continuity of deliberate exclusion or marginalization of young people from formal development programs (Bürge 2009:80–82)—an opinion voiced by many okadamen, especially about the Tejan Kabbah government then in power, but also about elders and the elite in general.25 In everyday confrontations of riders and community people, top-down orchestrated discrimination was less the case, as both were existentially struggling for their social position and lacked the power for strategic moves, in de Certeau’s sense (1984). Evocations of unruly, inadequate, or immoral behavior were part of existential social navigation in a context of restricted access to resources, as people bothered about the general situation of society, but also about their own survival, existentially fearing decay due to the supposedly dangerous behavior of okadamen (Bolten 2008; Cole 2007:84; Durham 2007).

If I attribute common people’s lack of resources to discrimination orchestrated by others, it does not mean that these grassroots tensions might
not have been fomented by more strategic incitements of those disposing of the necessary power to deflect common people’s energies and attentions from the causes of problems which are with more distant “chief enemies” (Foucault 1982)—they might have been themselves (Bürge 2009). Though many people in Makeni were clear about the fact that the roots of their problems were not to be found within town and their relations with their closer neighbors, in their daily struggles they were limited to restricted spaces against their most immediate competitors; but also in Makeni, some people acted out of a position that allowed more purposeful manipulations and discourses: “big men,” owners of many bikes, for example, or landowners, had an intimate interest in controlling individual okadamen and disposing of them as socially marginal young men and therefore a cheap labor force (Bürge 2009, 2011b, Peters 2006), either as vilified okadamen, or even pulling them out of the business and making them jobless. For these people, evoking a genealogy of harming moving people—silencing other facets—and appealing to the fears of the more existentially threatened were a tactic to harm okadamen’s general moral reputation and marginalize them (Bürge 2011b). We should not think of a dichotomy of a strategically acting elite outside Makeni and the tactically acting people inside Makeni, but in a continuum of relational positions, or as Nathaniel King puts it: “The ‘haves’ strive for resources for prestige maintenance; the ‘have-nots’ strive for resources for survival” (2007:12).

Claiming a historical link between okadamen and ex-combatants, fearing their flexibility and capacity to move in between, and warning from their possible harms to the community are not an invention without any foundation. Throughout history, Sierra Leone experienced mobile people (slave raiders, warriors, soldiers) harming the country, but it experienced benefits from this mobility (hunters, strangers settling down, emigrants) (Bürge 2009, 2011b, Shaw 2002), and they could always transform from the good to the bad and vice versa, shifting shapes, making certainty impossible (Bürge 2011a, 2011b, Ferme 2001). In 2007, insecurity about their individual and collective future merged with memories and imaginations of historical violence and their present continuities (Bürge 2009:135–141, 2011a, 2011b, Ferme 2001; Shaw 2000, 2002), producing an amalgam of existential fears about social meaningfulness and an adequate reaction to the daily putative dangers to personal and communal well-being, and while in-betweenness and liminality, the capacity to be multiple instead of only one, to change one’s position and mediate between different positions, at times had been positively assessed, many people now required more security and stability and young men’s commitment to a fixed position within the tormented community. To be mobile for many people meant now to be unstable, irresponsible, upsetting the social landscape even more; negative aspects of being mobile were emphasized and identities essentialized, allocating and fixing mobile people to the negative side of society.

In what follows, I want to describe some of the trajectories okadamen envisioned for navigating the variety of discursive, practical, and imaginative
possibilities and obstructions present and posed in Makeni. It is my aim to show how okadamen related and were related to different positions, ideas, and places, through practices and ideas of mobility and in-betweenness. I shall show how they thereby affirmed their various modes of belonging, but also transcended them (or at least tried to do so), and how the practices of committing to and taking distance from certain positions and norms, but also people, were questioned and countered within the community.

Most of the okadamen understood their activities of mobility, linking different places in and beyond Makeni, and navigating various normative sets, as engagements committed to the community (though in terms they wanted to codetermine), and not for its destruction (Asad 2000:48), yet they lacked acknowledgment for these efforts.

**Riding the Narrow Tracks of Ethical Life: Practices of In-Betweenness and Secrecy**

The previous pages might have painted a picture of a social landscape in which two opposed parties were engaging, okadamen against the rest; yet ideas and practices for the best possible future in Makeni did not diverge along such a clear fault line. Different opinions and navigations of the social landscape existed possibly between any members of the community, and likewise between young men. Even okadamen did not share the same imaginaries of a better future and the way they wanted to participate in it. There were no congruent schools of ethical practices for certain particular groups within the community, but there were individual navigations and positions, making orientation even more difficult, and while one individual might have had divergent positions with somebody in a certain domain, they might have had similar positions in another one. Alliances and oppositions were as fluid, dynamic, and confusing as the social landscape in general. Issues about bike riding and related questions of ways of participating in and contributing to the community were not merely between biological generations (that is, old against young), as I have written before, about the tensions between okadamen and the elders. Discussions about the proper way of living and becoming a responsible adult took place among people of the same age and among okadamen who were but a homogeneous group. Generations did not exist. As relative social positions within the community, they were produced and discussed in and about ways of navigating the social landscape, but for the reasons outlined in the pages above, okadamen often were thrown into one “drawer” and globally criticized. One of the most heard discussions, with different opinions cutting across the entire community, concerned the relationships among bike riding, education, and being a good citizen and contributing to society’s well-being, as I show below.27
Mamadu sometimes deplored the fact that “wa tem i dan pwel mi edyukeshan,” that war had destroyed his education, but he was clear about the fact that he was too old now to go to school again with boys much younger than he was. He was even clearer in his opinion about the uselessness of formal education for his economic success, shared by many, but by far not all okadamen (Bürge 2009:123–126). Bangura, another okadamen, had left school quite some time ago, voluntarily, unforced by war. For this, he received considerable criticism, as the following episode shows, in which Kamara, a man of about the same age, addresses him:

K: Yes, Sir, I tell you, you spoiled your life. Your father paid you everything, but you were troublesome. If I had had your opportunities, I would already have a lot of degrees. But you? Look at you. You had so many possibilities, and now look at you. You preferred to go to Freetown to be juman.\(^{28}\)
B: Yes, Sah, I earned money, and now I’m a businessman, and I can go to school whenever I want.
K: Are you serious? Look at you. How old are you? You want to go to school with these boys?
[Kamara regularly turns away from Bangura and speaks to the people at the junction who gathered around them, his audience. Kamara wants to become an actor, not working for the government or an NGO, but to “privatize my live [sic],” he will tell me later. His monologues are in English, not Krio, as he wants me to follow the discussion, but it is the language he has learned in school, the language Bangura is struggling with. In this way, Kamara tries to show Bangura the errors the latter had made.]
K: I can conversate [sic] in English. I can go everywhere in this world and find a job. I can work with all the people coming to this country. And you! You just speak broken English.\(^{29}\)
[Bangura tries to defend himself, but the audience is on Kamara’s side. None of his riding friends is around; no bike is to be seen. The people following the discussion are schoolchildren, students, and two elder women, one a teacher. Bangura now addresses me.]
B: I sat my BECE\(^{30}\) exams; well, I managed to pass them, somehow, let’s say.
[He had paid the teacher to pass.]
B: I learned enough. Why should I pay again and again for my exams? Look at you, Kamara! Who are you? You have your WASSCE,\(^{31}\) and now you sit and wait for money! You know me, Michael. I lived in Freetown; I know to live there. I know all the markets and how to make money. . . . I go to Conakry
and drink cool drinks, *eglasse*. I’m European. I go to the clubs and know how to cajole women, but this man here, he’s African; he’s still a *youth man*, his life is PRSP. . . . They call us dropouts because we don’t go to school, but what about them? They waste their money for a degree and become afterwards dropouts, but we earn our own money now.

Mamadu, who taught me to ride and lent me his bike for my first attempts as an okadaman, was often criticized by various people, despite his success as an entrepreneur: he was not only a rider, but also the owner of his bike. Victor, a young man Mamadu had grown up with, now studying at his kin’s expense in Freetown, but for holidays in Makeni, doing nothing for the whole day, was one of the critics. Victor mainly criticized Mamadu’s way of handling his finances, asserting that the reason for Mamadu’s low level of literacy was his reluctance to go to school. Criticizing him, he wove together all sorts of strands of explanations, causes, and results of his activities: not going to school had resulted in bad financial management because of lack of knowledge; furthermore, bike riding had impeded school attendance and had made him prone to the typical lifestyle of okadamen, which is drinking, smoking marijuana, gambling, and idling around in the ghettos of Makeni. (In other words, he spent money for useless purposes instead of contributing to the community.) Moreover, he was not going to school anymore, and he was losing a lot of money by gambling, on which he spent every day at least 8000 leones for *poyo* (palm wine) and *jamba* (marijuana).

But this was just part of the story! Here is the other part, not told by critics, as they could not or did not want to see it. Mamadu would buy the *poyo* in a village he often went to for meeting people and relaxing; however, he did not drink every day the gallon he would buy by paying about 6000 leones to a befriended palm-wine tapper. In those days, he did not collect his wine, he was just the tapper’s beneficiary; the uncollected wine might be given to other people going to the village, many of them Mamadu’s friends. Thereby, he was not only not senselessly wasting money: paying for *poyo*, he was diversifying and strengthening his social networks and sharing his income with people he wanted to.

Gambling was another matter again, but whose social value one has likewise to consider. People criticizing it often did not have an idea of the sums won and lost during the nights of gambling, amounting to the gains of riding for several weeks. Mamadu once told me the morning after a gambling session that he had lost 190,000 leones, more than US $60, but gambling was not just a senseless waste of money for him (Bürge 2009:149–155). While the MBRA executive ideologically upheld the idea of general solidarity among all okadamen, the individual riders only occasionally “solidarized” as “okadamen united.” They were loyal within much smaller groups, though. Gambling groups were one possible way of knitting or strengthening and sustaining social networks they relied on in everyday life, possibly congruent with groups of riders collectively using, and sometime even owning, a
bikes, making a business, or sharing a room for sleep, but also cutting across the wider community. Gambling groups were quite stable regarding their members; money got lost and won, and lost again, but it remained mainly within a group of friends. The winner of the day usually left the place with a considerable amount of money he could use for bigger acquisitions, similar to the receiver of bulk money in rotational saving schemes, of which I write below. Receiving money from gambling was perhaps not as foreseeable as from esusu, where the day of payment was fixed, in theory. In praxis, esusu-payment often was delayed for social hiccups—contributors not paying or incompetent organizers. Written rules and actual workings were seldom the same in Makeni. Gambling mirrored, thus, life in Sierra Leone perfectly, where the insecurity of paybacks from investment of labor is common and has a tradition—a tradition that bike riding, by the way, somehow put an end to, as transports had to be paid immediately.

The okadamen with whom I spent most of my time called their nightly gambling sessions skul [school], their local way of learning. To a certain extent, this was just an ironical comment, ridiculing constant criticism about not having a proper education; but they stated seriously that their skul was about real life in Sierra Leone: unforeseeable, marked by a sense of loss of control and of economic difficulties, but never ceasing to promise the one big deal that would solve all their problems. Nobody knew when and how this would happen, as the dice used for gambling decided in the end about winners and losers—bai Gd in pawa, if God wants, as for every undertaking in Sierra Leone. Their world was less a limited checkerboard, on which one tries restricted strategical moves, than a game of dice without a clearly delineated playing field; yet be it in a game of dice or real life, through achieved knowledge and sensitivities, relying on their wits, okadamen claimed to be able to a certain extent to single out the right time to take a risk and try their fortune, and even to manipulate the fortune on their turn. Success in the game depended not only on the moment of throwing the dice, but in its preparation, in hidden tricks, and gambling was thus, not only about the game itself, but about the skills needed in everyday life, to be streetwise, as Bangura told me once:

I never go to skul with money. That’s why we had this trouble yesterday, because Puff don’t want me to participate without money. He also knows about business, he’s a Fullah. . . . I go there with useless things, broken assets, like the phone yesterday. It had no worth, but in the end I got 40,000 leones for it to play with. . . . You have to know how to do your things. They think they gave me a lesson, but it’s me who knows much more. I learned my lessons. . . . Yesterday was a bad day: I lost some money, but not real money, I never had this money. So very often, when I win, I earn a lot of money out of nothing.
Money won with gambling was usually invested not in “sustainable” acquisitions, but in fashionable things, like sound systems or DVD players, which led likewise to criticism by many people within the community; other people, however, notably friends who could enjoy themselves participating in listening to music or by watching films, considered the same items and control over commodities as signs of success. Bolten argues that money made without physical hardship was seen as immoral in Makeni: baseless in its generation, it had to be spent on baseless items, such as consumer goods [2008:128]. Yet I argue that money earned without hardship is losing its stigma. Buying consumer goods may be part of ethical practices, a way by which one can participate in desirable modes of living and social networks beyond Makeni. It helped divert the money from claims made by the elders, people who claimed rights in participating in young men’s productivity on account of custom, as they had a lesser interest in this kind of goods.37

One single activity or item could have had many different meanings and effects on different people within the community. Through gambling, one could lose or win economic capital, just as one could lose or win social capital; yet while losing or winning money was unpredictable, the spoiling of social relationships with critics because of immoral behavior was predictable, but even to a certain extent acceptable: gambling harmed personally less important relations, but it allowed relations considered more valuable and attainable to build up. Those gambling were not giving priority to one normative mode in a binary competition between two existing normative modes, as critics claimed. Gamblers were not opting for modernity and useless consumerism brought from elsewhere against local traditional ideals of acquiring adult status through learning and hard work on behalf of the community (Cole 2007:92). As much as normative modes overlapped, though proponents of one or another moral set always claim exclusiveness and distinctness, in Makeni as elsewhere, the practices of actualizing to suit these continuities oscillated. Gambling was a practice that eclectically and creatively joined joyful consumerism with solidarity in chosen networks of mutual dependence and adequate education in this particular social landscape. For sure, gambling had no visible direct outcomes, as working in the field would, but it made life more beautiful for those riding the whole-day bike, endowing them with strengthened and diversified social bonds to rely on in facing daily challenges, and it even accelerated the economy.

**The Secrets of Drinking**

I stated before that Mamadu was criticized for wasting his money on poyo and smoking, instead of buying something useful, like a second bike, but he had no interest in buying a second bike, though he had enough money. He feared other people would be attracted by his wealth and claim a stake in it: “I have enough money to buy another bike, but when my brothers see it, they eat my money, so I use it in secret ways. I don’t want them to know. They can see my bike and some of my money, but not all.” Using money in a
secret way—in dark places and on activities invisible to most—in gambling, spending it elsewhere, was a tactic many okadamen deployed. Actually, Mamadu’s patrols were just partly secret. Everybody knew that he was going to drink and smoke, but the content of these sessions—the performative act, the increase in social ties and solidarities—remained somehow hidden (Berliner 2005). Instead of investing in a new bike, which would entice unwanted people’s demand for participation, Mamadu chose to invest into social bonds, letting chosen ones participate. In the village, he wove networks of friendship, meeting with people crucial to the kind of everyday life he deemed the most appealing:

My bike makes me feel free. I can earn my money, and in the evening I can go to my places and enjoy myself. I have to be at the junction because they are my brothers, but it’s not good to stay too much with them. Pa Ahmad, my Fullah brother, and also Jalloh and Abu, they are my friends; we smoke and drink to make kulat (‘cool heart’).

He could drink poyo and share ideas with people working for NGOs—people with better reputations than what his critics might have suspected or claimed. I knew his village already in 2005, going there with my housemates, Sierra Leoneans working for international NGOs who had chosen the place because it was distant from Makeni, ensuring high-quality poyo and the good company of like-minded people. In the village, Mamadu got closer to influential people within the bike riders’ community, like Jalloh, a member of the MBRA executive, and Saidu. Both of them imported bikes from Conakry, and Saidu had helped him with a leasing scheme to get his first bike, when Mamadu had not had enough money to buy it on his own: “I saved some money, together with my brother Bah, and we bought a MATE 50. That’s how I learned to ride bike, but it’s not all kukri moni. I just managed to pay the bike because of osusu, because other people trusted me, because Saidu trusted me.”

In another way, too, Saidu and Jalloh played an important role in Mamadu’s navigation of Makeni’s social landscape. Within the MBRA executive, a conflict between two factions about the presidency and power was going on, also concerning the import of bikes and spare parts. The factions represented different bike parks within town trying to mobilize their okadamen for internal politics. Contrary to the peacefulness observed during the national presidential election, executive meetings of the MBRA were full of tension. While the few executive members were meeting inside the tiny MBRA office, there was a gathering of a huge crowd of riders outside supporting their respective factions, and Mamadu was in the midst of this conflict. Like many other okadamen, he was not overly enthusiastic about MBRA issues, and he questioned the executive’s honesty about really representing okadamen’s interest, and not just reproducing nepotistic agendas (Bürge 2009:103–109; Fanthorpe and Maconachie 2010). He knew how to insinuate
himself into these structures, as did many other okadamen, blurring the fault lines and displaying partisanship only when certain advantages were at stake. He was often at the center of ongoing provocations. He acted as a security staff for the chairman, his “brother,” because the junction where he waited for passengers and lived near was under the chairman’s control. His biological brother Bah, with whom he had tense relations, was park chairman and therefore a follower of the MBRA chairman. Saidu, who had helped Mamadu get his bike, was one of the chairman’s closest friends. This made him to a certain extent a brother of the chairman—yet the latter’s most open, fervent, and even violent critic was Jalloh, Mamadu’s “real brother,” a friend he had chosen and would support in upcoming executive elections. With Jalloh he carried on a business that invested in the importation of bikes and spare parts. Mamadu navigated thus within and across the most important networks within the bike business and beyond, “insinuat[ing himself] into the lives of others, to become some part of their ‘stories,’ networks[,] and activities, without becoming too obligated, too dependent[,] or [too] tied down” (Simone 2005:519).43

Hiding Money as an Ethical Practice

Beyond the already depicted ways of navigating different networks and moving in between instead of fixing and reducing oneself to a certain place, group, and practice, esusu44 added another facet to many riders’ everyday lives. Its working was quite simple: participants contributed regularly, usually daily, one hand. As one osusu often lasted one month [thirty-one days], there were thirty participants, or better, enough people willing to hold thirty hands needed, as one participant could hold many hands, and the lump sum on the thirty-first day was the organizer’s “salary.” Each day, the lump sum was disbursed to one holder of a hand. If a single contribution was 3000 leones and there were thirty hands, each day one holder got the lump sum of 90,000 leones.

Bockarie rode his bike to pay school fees to finish secondary school and then study accounting, as he was one of the okadamen who still—or again, as he had lived many years in the streets without caring about education—believed in education as a way for betterment.45 He explained to me his daily incomes and duties. First, he had to earn 20,000 leones for masta moni, rent paid to the owner of the bike,46 and then at least 15,000 leones for a gallon of fuel. Further, he told me, “I have to earn 6000 for two hands in two esusu, and when I have earned 3000 for food, I can park my bike, but sometimes I don’t get enough money for food.” That means that Bockarie had at least to earn between 40,000 and 50,000 leones a day. His calculations can stand for an average full-time okadaman—possible, but not certain to be fulfilled. Going to bed hungry was always a risk, as one had to pay for unforeseen things—fines, medicines, accidents, damages, and so on. If one had a family to care for, to pay for a room, one needed more money. Sembu, a member of the MBRA Task Force and owner of his bike, paid the first 20,000 leones
he earned into an osusu with sixty hands, entitling him to a lump sum of 1,200,000, which he would use to buy a new bike. Beside this, he paid three hands in a smaller osusu with a hand for 5000 leones and 2000 in a third osusu. The lump sum of each osusu had its particular purpose.

Bockarie sometimes went to sleep without having eaten, just to be able to comply with the osusu’s exigencies, and Sembu had to save 37,000—equal to thirty-seven transports within town—before he could think of anything else, more daily expenses. But why these sacrifices? What was the use of such schemes, where the contributions were equal to, or even bigger than, the outcomes, as no interest was paid?

Osusu were a particular way for navigating the social landscape that many people in Makeni made use of. As money-saving schemes, they concern in a first instance economic issues. Further they are essentially another way of making money secret, removing it from the most visible realm and certain cycles; they therefore have social consequences. It is a practice to free oneself from certain constraints and dangers while engaging realms more desirable, thus forming one’s life in a certain way [Shaw 2000:38], but again, in the case of okadamen, other people emphasized often only the “freeing part,” or the part involving a break with others, not the one of engagement, as they lumped them together with other critically assessed practices of secrecy and presumed avoidance and negligence of the community and the people.

Hiding money makes it safe from unwanted seizing, not least from oneself: “If I have some money and I see something nice but useless, I’m tempted to buy it; but if I put it into osusu, I don’t see this money, and in the end of the month I can buy something big [with the lump sum]” (Abdul, okadaman). Money thus became invisible to those who should not see it—often kin claiming moral rights in somebody’s wealth, as they were considered detrimental to one’s well-being:

If my family sees my money, they want it. They would eat and eat my money, and pull me down. So I put it into osusu. Like this, they cannot see it. . . . But if I save my money, I can improve my life. I can buy a second bike and pay my children’s school fee, so they don’t need to ride bike or do agriculture but become educated. This is development. (Sembu)

Osusu offered the possibility of removing money from unproductive cycles and investing it in endeavors that one might deem to be productive for one’s development. While keeping certain people from participating in one’s wealth, money bound in an osusu entitled others to make use of it, and as people diversified their savings in different osusu, they diversified their social networks. Osusu were thus about mutually taking part in other people’s lives, as creditors and debtors, yet leaving excluded ones behind. Hence, osusu helped comply with the requests and logics of a monetized commodity market, yet it rooted and balanced these necessities within cooperative
associations based on solidarities beyond mere market logics, which *esusu* even helped extend and increase.50 Okadamen participated in *esusu* among themselves but also with “ordinary” people, therefore building up multifaceted social bonds. These people were chosen to share money with, and those who claimed benefits on account of what they considered natural or moral rights were not.51 Thus, while *esusu* were part of knitting ties within certain networks, other networks were untied or loosened because of the logic of removing and hiding economic capital. For certain people, this meant being cut out of participating in others’ income, being hit perhaps in their very existence—and this made them critical of the individual okadaman neglecting them.

Okadamen’s shifts in sharing their income and life were not generally aimed at excluding the closest and neediest; contrary to generalizing claims often made by critics of bike riding, okadamen’s disappearing money did not leave the greater community more often than other people’s money.52 It therefore potentially contributed to the community’s development, yet, as I have said before, people often did not want to or could not see this. Their views were obfuscated by existential fears—sometimes purposefully manipulated—about the community’s and their future in this unstable social landscape, populated by rushing people and transforming powers that they struggled to make sense of. Activities too flexible and mobile, recurring also to practices of secrecy, further destabilized their world and fomented fears (Bürge 2011b, 2011b). That is why people often did not see, or forgot in their criticism, that okadamen shared many things with them, such as saving money in *esusu* as a particular mode of participating in society. Instead, people in this instance often saw only the practices in which okadamen presumably did not participate. For such critics, all the seemingly invisible money ended in gambling, drinking, and senseless consuming, and thus helped develop communities elsewhere, outside Makeni, in the world even of spirits and witches. And with their criticism, they almost urged okadamen to exclude them from their networks, as they saw them increasingly becoming obstacles, oppressive to their aspirations.

**Toward a Conclusion**

One day, as I was discussing with Mamadu issues of income and savings of the different actors in the bike business and his own calculations,53 I realized that, as the owner, he could much likely earn more (regular) money by lending his bike instead of riding it, having more time for enjoyment and saving his health.54 “I know,” he said, “but I cannot just sit around: people are watching me, and if you are idle, you get problems.” Other people around agreed: “You have to move; otherwise you are exposed to gossip and other African practices. You don’t have this in Europe, but here people poison you with their mouth: they destroy you if you don’t move” [Bockarie]. Clearly referring to witchcraft, more interesting for the argument of this article is
Mamadu’s and Bokarie’s awareness about the urge to move, to be active, to
work, instead of sitting around doing nothing.

With their bikes, okadamen complied with this urge and earned money
by taking people and goods from one point to another. Roaring about Make-
ni’s streets and beyond, they heard the newest information and gossip,
searched for opportunities to make favorable deals, and met the people
they deemed suitable for their scopes, participating in their lives. I have
shown in my article how bike riders thereby enlarged the loops of social
networks, diversified their ways, and made the right contacts for a better
future [Simone 2005:520]—unmaking certain ties, but knitting others, not
completely breaking with their community.

To be in between, flexible, liminal was their strength, but it became
their burden, too. While flexibility and unboundedness made their busi-
ness a success, today it increasingly threatens it. People in general fear the
ephemeral quality of (hyper)mobility, and they long for security and stability
in a confusing and all-too-unstable landscape. Whereas okadamen find this
security and stability on the move—in being mobile and in between, but
always linking and fixing themselves and others to certain places and people
[Bürge 2011a]—many people in Makeni envision security in more settled
activities, not appreciating okadamen’s actions beyond the mere comfort of
being transported from one place to another.

Mamadu, who told me that he rode a bike to show that he was doing
something and not idling, stated on another occasion that it was not his goal
to ride for the rest of his life, as it “destroys my image.” For him, as for many
others, riding a bike was thoroughly an activity in between—only a transi-
tional phase, to build up their personalities and social reputations, yet with
a concomitant danger of harming them considerably. In 2007, the pendulum
of public opinion about their actions was swinging toward the negative side.
Okadamen tried to adjust this to a certain extent, as their lives were not only
about a better future [not riding] to come [if it ever came], but to live as well
in the present an enjoyable life—which implied temporary coexistence with,
and avoidance of, certain people in the community.

Bike riding was thoroughly linked to activities beyond the mere steer-
ing of a bike, comprising the general steering of one’s life. Therefore, I have
opted to understand it as a comprehensive way of navigating the social
landscape, as an ethical practice to form one’s life, “to give it the most
beautiful possible form” [Foucault 1988:259] under certain circumstances,
through multifaceted interrelated mobility—physical, social, and imagina-
tive. Okadamen not only connected places, I have argued: they also moved
between—but not inherently beyond—ideas, aspirations, and loyalties; past,
present, and future; war and peace; Makeni and the world outside; village
and bush; and youth and adulthood.

Surrounding people often could not really appreciate okadamen’s
engagement, as it was many times accompanied by actual and presumable
antisocial behavior, which evoked memories of negative experiences with
similar figures. The unstable social landscape made orientation difficult, I
have argued, and it obfuscated one’s vision. Many people in Makeni felt less capable than others, for example, the okadamen. They feared being overtaken by them in their social position, becoming dependent on those who should be dependent. They feared being left behind by them, excluded from every network. They feared lifelong relative youthfulness—that is, never becoming a full person because of the impossibility of disposing of dependents (or enough dependents to become a “big man”)—because of a lack of economic resources and the actions of others, who might boldly subtract from the “right way.” In other words, they failed at least to a certain extent in their particular views of forming their lives in the most desirable way. I have argued that some people in Makeni applied moral discourses purposefully to contain okadamen, claim their inferiority, and deny their success to dispose of them; for others instead, they really erred in their actions and had to be brought back into the right way for everybody’s prosperity. The former felt responsible for upholding the proper way of life and coming-of-age to ensure the community’s future; and as I have shown, it was not about the goal, but about the best way to ensure it, that people’s ideas differed.

Unfortunately, because of constant accusation and lack of appreciation, okadamen became disgruntled, as they often stated, angry with society; they increasingly questioned the purpose of engaging in a community so inimical and complying at all with its expectations. As they were constantly positioned at the social margins, they increasingly and more radically engaged in marginal or hidden activities, refraining from participating in society. Many even left Makeni and headed for Freetown to continue their endeavors under less control; some returned, as it was more difficult to establish networks there. Thus, local critics were often right about their views of bike riding as leading to rupture with the community and neglect of those remaining at home; yet, I argue, this is not an inherent danger of bike riding, but an outcome of misunderstanding, this practice of engaging in the world and in the community, and these discrepancies in envisioning the right way to do so.

It will have to be seen whether bike riding will lose its stigmatization when people increasingly realize that bike riders are not aiming at social destabilization, but trying to comply with the exigencies posed by social transformation and to take part in it. Okadamen had to deal with this reality and tried different ways of navigating the landscape, not knowing whether they led into a cul-de-sac, as any activity could always be turned against them, though flexible adjusting of individual aspirations to new developments did not mean refraining from more localized forms of social bonding. It was not autonomy from any social bond, but, rather, the freedom to take part in chosen people’s lives, to ensure personal and communal development, that okadamen were looking for (Shaw 2000). Bike riding as an ethical practice, with all the portrayed—and more—facets, aimed at the transformation of the self and the community in individual ways, which could certainly take their toll in neglecting some people at the expense of others, though, whereas common people might have been benefiting directly and indirectly from bike-riding activities, skepticism toward, and criticism of, okadamen
increasingly endangered this potentiality. That is to say that, as common people—including okadamen—are engaged in internal conflicts, they mutually hinder their own navigation, making upward and forward social mobility even less likely, and perpetuate a constant struggle at each other’s expense to live a good life.

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NOTES

1. Okadaman dem (pl.; sing. okadaman) or hondaman dem (pl.; sing. hondaman) is the name for commercial bike riders in Sierra Leone’s lingua franca, Krio, as okada means ‘Honda’ in Nigerian. Actually, okada “is the common name for the commercial motor-cyclists in the south [of Nigeria, . . . ] derived from a private airline in Nigeria (now defunct), which was established by a successful businessman and named after his hometown, Okada, in Edo State” (Beekers 2008:65; for commercial bike riding in other African countries, see Beekers 2008; Lopes 2005; Simone 2005). Despite the name hondamen, commercial bike riders did not use Honda XL 125s and other trail bikes as NGO workers did, but the more comfortable—for the passengers—Indian brands, such as Bajaj and TVS, or Chinese brands, because honda is the general term for ‘motorbike’ in Sierra Leone. I use the term okadaman and its English plural, okadamen, for commercial motorbike riders.

2. See IRIN (2007) for a brief overview of the strike.

3. In Freetown poda pods (minibuses) and taxis still dominate the streets, but the number of bikes is rapidly increasing because of their higher flexibility, able to follow the narrowest tracks and to avoid the notorious traffic jams in the capital.
4. In 2007, one single transport within Makeni cost 1000 leones, about US $0.30, equal to the price of one plate of rice with sauce and some fish or meat; therefore, not everybody in Makeni could afford to take a bike.

5. The people I call okadamen (or bike riders, as they were called in Makeni) engaged in not only steering a bike (bike riding in a narrow sense), but in many other activities linked to, complementing, and benefiting from bike riding. Therefore, many of them did not identify themselves as okadamen. Steering the bike for transport purposes was just one practice, so they were schoolboys, rasta, businessmen, students, going out, having fun, meeting people, working on the field, studying and caring for their loved ones. Others often reduced them to the single identity of okadamen so as to criticize them; they themselves used the term when it defended their interests (Bürge 2011b).

6. Elsewhere, I argue that this particular practice of accusing young men of having had sexual intercourse demanding “compensation” for this “damage” bears striking similarities to the strategic accusations of “woman damage” in rural Sierra Leone, pressing young men into slavery-like dependencies by elder polygynists (Bürge 2009:96, 2011). Richards and others describe them as an important factor in igniting the war (Archibald and Richards 2002; Bürge 2009; Mokuwa et al. 2011; Richards 1996, 2004).

7. The Task Force was the MBRA’s internal attempt to discipline the commercial bike riders for securing safety on the road and to protect its members from arbitrary punishment by the police (Baker 2005; Bürge 2009).

8. All names are changed throughout the article. Conversations I had in Makeni were in Krio, English, and Temne, and mixtures of these languages. Citations from these conversations are my translations, trying to do as little harm to as possible to the people’s statements. This particular statement, which reflected to a certain extent the official position of the MBRA, was given more informally during a ride on Sembu’s motorbike after a meeting of local “stakeholders” that Sembu and I had attended.

9. In July 2007, about 300 bikes and more than 400 riders were registered with the MBRA (I thank the executive for sharing with me the official documents of the MBRA). Men actually riding might at least double those being registered. Every day new men tried to get access to a bike and ride for some hours to earn some money. Besides the limited availability of motorbikes (which were exported on a daily base), no barriers limited participation or were easily overcome. The abundance of potential riders had further detrimental consequences for the group. Individual okadamen had fewer passengers and tours and thus less income. Younger riders were less experienced, less committed to a long-term engagement, and thus less respectful. Competition between riders led to rude behavior (e.g., speeding, causing accidents, cursing) among okadamen, damaging their reputation within the community and weakening their solidarities. Younger riders, aiming at gaining quick money, left the business quickly; owners of bikes mistrusted them, as they didn’t care for the bikes and cheated on the owners, until they looked for another rider for their bike, who was easily found (Bürge 2009:120–123 and passim).

10. People in Makeni could come to terms with fighting forces during stabler occupation by the latter, yet “war” broke out, with chaos and all the events painfully remembered, when factions began to move; and whenever the town was bombed, fighting factions had to withdraw, often retaliating upon civilians while moving on, causing chaos and acts of revenge, where neighbors turned into enemies, and protectors into killers, and nobody could anticipate the other’s aims (Bürge 2009).
11. See Christensen (2007) and Utas and Jörgel (2008) for adaptations of Vigh’s social navigation to Sierra Leonean reality. Contrary to their focus, the present text not only focuses on social navigation (maneuvering) by former combatants, but argues for its general usefulness as a lens on everyday life. As a matter of fact, everybody is socially navigating. Therefore, it has to be asked how people navigate.

12. Meghan Ference has recently shown how the inherent urge of paying off police officers in Nairobi’s matatu sector concomitantly promoted the criminal image of people riding those minibuses and their disrespect for the rule of law, as everything can be settled with bribes. As they experience state authorities as nothing but money-requiring entities, inventing even offenses against the law, “crewmembers wonder why they would ever need to listen to a police officer or any authority figure” and therefore increasingly break the laws (Ference 2011).

13. Note that rebel itself has a very ambiguous meaning in Sierra Leone and did not exclusively refer to former RUF fighters (Burge 2009). A child who was troublesome would be attributed with rebel habits and even called a rebel. The term often referred to a continuum of being undisciplined (or not “full”), youthful, too immature to live a bush life, marginal, potentially controlled by negative forces. Elsewhere I have shown how people in Makeni differentiated between rebels and the real rebels who had come to Makeni during the war. (Burge 2009:68, 2011b). Rebels were local boys, joining whatsoever force when entering the town and taking revenge on people they had a conflict with or they wanted to loot. Real rebels were fighters in the RUF who fought for a long time, ideologically driven and in Makeni highly estimated, as they treated people relatively fairly. Many people stated that they had done so, unlike their “brothers,” though they were Mende and therefore strangers: “Real rebel [sic] came out of the bush; they were rebels with their hearts. . . . Michael, you can ask everybody here, in those days we could discuss with those real rebels. Real rebels sometimes forced people to help with food or with work, but they also called the people and gave them food. . . . Their commanders, especially Issa, he wanted law and order. If a rebel treated you bad, you could go to Issa and he would flog this rebel thoroughly, but our brothers, those who joined the rebels when they entered Makeni, they were very wicked” (Bockarie).

14. This fear is very common in Makeni, as Bolten has shown for people in surrounding villages who fear negligence by their children sent to Makeni for education, yet only partly with the parents’ investment (2009).

15. When people told me about bike riding before the war, they did not mean before 1991, the official outburst of the conflict, as I initially thought, but before war hit Makeni, which was only in the late 1990s. Elsewhere I have written about the specificity of the remembering of history and the alternative periodization of notions of wartime in Makeni, in general compared to national history writing, but also by different people within Makeni (Bolten 2008; Burge 2009:49–82; Shaw 2002; Shepler 2005:30). It is noteworthy that many people in Makeni, and particularly okadamen, told me that life in 2007 was a war, more difficult than in the 1990s. Consequently, the following representations of bike riding’s history in Makeni are the outcome of individuals’ storytelling and their inherent subjectivity in attempts at mastering their past and present.

16. Other sources state as well that bike riders started in 1995 to import bikes for commercial purpose from Conakry to Makeni (personal communication Laurent Cartier). Like Anne Menzel (2011) in Bo-Town, I was told in Makeni that Kabala was the first place in Sierra Leone where commercial bike riding had started. Unfortunately, in 2007, I didn’t travel to Kabala for further investigation.
17. In 2001, when today's Makeni Bike Renters/Riders Association (MBRA) was founded, its name was Central Bicycles and Honda Renter's Association. It is noteworthy that in 2007, in most of the formal documents (registrations and alike) that I read, the R in the acronym MBRA stood for Renters. The executive emphasized this point, as the ideology was still to defend in the first line the rights of those who just rent but do not own a bike, though okadamen called themselves more often bike riders, without reference to their legal status, but to the activity.

18. I use the rather neutral term affected by the war, because the kind of involvement of those young men highly differed. Some of them had been fighting for one or many of the factions, others had been conscripted for carrying goods or doing minor works, while others again had had to leave their villages on account of the conflict. Many young men I got to know had started their first businesses (selling food or drugs, offering services) during the conflict and therefore profited from this period.

19. Rosalind Shaw (2007a, 2007b) and Krijn Peters (2005, 2006; Bürge and Peters 2010) have shown how formally orchestrated reconciliation and reconstruction programs (as TRC and DDR programs) have had limited success, or have even led to high rates of failure, because of ignorance of specific historical and cultural continuities. Peters criticizes the fact that postwar reconstruction was based on a clear and total rupture with the war, emphasizing continuity with the conditions of prewar Sierra Leone (those who in the end led to the conflict), and thereby bracketing out and forgetting about developments throughout the war (Bolten 2008; Bürge and Peters 2010; Michael Jackson 2005; Peters 2006, 2005; Richards et al. 2004). Social capital that had been built up during the war years and could have been used in the aftermath was lost (Bürge and Peters 2010).

20. Younger riders, who did not themselves develop bonds of trust during the war, nowadays copy and participate in the organizational forms and solidarities of the pioneering riders.

21. Though this mingling of people occupying clearly distinguishable (war/peace, combatant/civilian, inside/outside) in-between states had cohesive effects on life in Makeni in the late 1990s and early 2000s, Bolten (2008) and others have shown how the same blurring of clear distinctions was politically used by the wartime and postwar SLPP government to marginalize Makeni within Sierra Leone during postwar reconstruction because of its population's collaboration with the RUF (Bürge 2009)—a practice, I argue in this article, ironically reproduced to a certain extent by people in Makeni to marginalize okadamen within their community.

22. I had many talks with Charles, who had retired from the chairmanship because of tensions within the association, which his successor still experienced in 2007. In these talks with senior functionaries and senior riders, like Ibrahim, the picture of bike riding's much more nuanced history got shaped, as thereby did also my ideas about the conflict and its overcoming in general: "We had no problems with the rebels. Sometimes they refused to pay, but they never seized a bike like the police today! Otherwise they would have been flogged thoroughly. This was Issa's thing. General Issa really cared for order in Makeni town. He introduced Temne into RUF to control the Mende. We had great respect for him; we also respected the rebels, but we didn't fear them" (Charles). Charles refers to Issa Hassan Sesay, the last battlefield commander of the RUF. Admiration for him was quite common in Makeni (see also Richman Cohen 2010) during the special court trial against him and other commanders of the RUF. In general, my informants considered the role of "real rebels" in Makeni often to have been (much) less negative than that of kamajors (and other Civil Defense Forces), and especially ECOMOGs and "our brothers," local youth who had joined the fighting factions just to take revenge on other community members (Bürge 2009:68–69). People who had committed the most severe atrocities
did not remain in Makeni; they had already left by the time the war had ended. Therefore, the exact histories of violence of the remaining ex-combatants was often not known to the community, making peaceful coexistence generally easier, but leading, however, to baseless suspicions and claims.

23. To the two ways of contributing to peace and security identified by Menzel (avoidance of easy recruitment by “big men” and offering an alternative livelihood strategy), I would add a further factor, often mentioned by riders: patrolling the streets even during the night, they made them less dark and thereby less risky for robbery and burglary, as they might even alert the police in case of criminal acts (statement of a police officer) (see Bürge 2011b on okadamen’s securing Makeni as an ethical practice and counterintuition by other people).

24. The labeling of okadamen as rebels was not only done by community members. I witnessed occasions when an okadaman would yell at somebody who had insulted him due to his profession: “Yu sabi wetin a bin don du?” (“You know what I have done??”) These events of intimidation were mentioned to me by Collin, the journalist, and a police officer in Makeni; yet, contrary to van Gog’s findings, or more accurately, to the situation she encountered in 2003, when okadamen introduced themselves as former rebels to her (2008:44), in 2007 nobody did so to me. While in 2003 to claim to be an ex-combatant promised attention and possible participation in a reintegration project, a similar self-identification in 2007 would mainly lead to stigmatization.

25. A thorough analysis of the role of “big men” in interdependent governmental and developmental bodies goes beyond the scope of this article, though it is worth noting that bike riding was (and is) paradoxically cut out from any substantial—financial, infrastructural, or capacity-building—support, despite its apparent compliance with international institution’s neoliberal ideology of self-empowerment, self-responsibility, and market-driven entrepreneurship (Peeters et al. 2009; World Bank 2006:225; World Bank and ENCISS 2007). It is likewise noteworthy that some of the biggest bike owners in Makeni were working for NGOs and parastatal bodies involved in development projects.

26. See also Fanthorpe on the effects of postwar politics of decentralization and “liberal peace” on the struggles for power and accountability between a closer and more distant elite and the poor, “force[d] . . . to make use of whatever social and moral leverage they can muster in order to stay in contention for resources” (2005:45), and the tactics to avoid capture, but also making part of patrimonial capture (Fanthorpe and Maconachie 2010; Paul Jackson 2005; Richards 2005).

27. For other practices okadamen engaged in to participate in the community (which were likewise critically assessed on account of different visions of the future) and insecurities due to the past and accentuated in the present, see Bürge (2009, 2011a).

28. For Kamara, a juman was a beggar or a thief, selling stolen goods on the street. As a matter of fact, Bangura had earned his money stealing goods in the center of Freetown and selling it in the suburbs. In his eyes, this made him a successful entrepreneur, somebody who knows how to “drag,” to survive making use of his wits.

29. Broken English usually meant Krio, but it could connote bad English, as Kamara implied here.

30. Basic education certificate exams after three years of junior secondary school.

31. West Africa senior school certificate examination, after three years of senior secondary school (see Government of Sierra Leone 2007 for more information about the educational sector in Sierra Leone).

32. Eau glacée ‘cool water’ in Guinea. Whereas kul wato in Makeni was only lukewarm because of the lack of electricity, the water in Conakry was really frozen. As Bangura never tired of stating
when we went to Conakry, for him this was the symbol of cosmopolitan, modern life, and of the backwardness of Sierra Leone in general, and Makeni in particular.

33. *Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper,* as the name says, was a strategic paper for the government of Sierra Leone, determining much of its politics. In Makeni, PRSP was used by younger people to remark on the low quality of goods and people.

34. People in Makeni often claimed that starting “to ride bike” meant for young men to stop definitively with their education (which actually happened), but some young men “riding bike” had received money for education from abroad and had decided to invest first in a bike, ride for a time, and then rent the bike to someone else to earn money and enter school a year later, becoming a bike owner without riding anymore. Bike riding was thus not inherently the cause for leaving school; but on the contrary, it served as just a transitional endeavor. Those definitively breaking with education often had other reasons, out of conviction or the mere impossibility of entering again.

35. Once I had discovered this nightly activity of gambling, the morning after a session I was able to figure out who had won and who had lost money. The winner usually had a rich breakfast, with abundant meat or fish, and did not ride his bike that day, while the loser was working even harder to make up for the lost money.

36. See, for example, Peters (2006:41–42) and Levin (2005:72) on the lottery of diamond mining.

37. See Cole 2007 on consumerism and shifts in its moral assessment in Madagascar.

38. A bike, often considered to be the reason for social decay, in these circumstances became a thing perceived to be useful. As stated, opinions and discourses of morality changed quickly, thereby puzzling the people criticized.

39. Elsewhere I have shown how these hidden activities additionally increased people’s suspicions about the morality of okadamen’s actions, as if they made contracts with witches, the underworld, and other antisocial forces (Bürge 2011a, 2011b; Shaw 2002). Okadamen often claimed to know how to disappear and hide from others’ eyes when needed, while seeing everything. They claimed that the war had “opened their eyes” (Peters 2007:5)—the junction where I did most of my research was called Opin Ay—and that they could now control their destinies instead of being coopted and manipulated by others. Okadamen considered this to be a positive capacity, allowing them to be masters of their destinies and even to control and secure the community; for other people in the community, however, this hiding and controlling of others confirmed the okadamen’s supposed links to ex-combatants and evil forces.

40. *Cool heart* means ‘calm and relaxed’—not just spending a comfortable evening with a cup of *poyo,* but reducing aggressions and transforming them into positive energy, essential for peaceful life in a community. Ahmad, Mamadu’s cousin, often told me he needed drugs to get along with everyday hardships and to forget about them, not to go astray because of all the injustice in Sierra Leone; he needed to cool down to be able to pray in the mosque. Making *kulat* was seen as the essential transformation of subjectivities after the war to enable peace (Shaw 2007a, 2007b).

41. Many riders I knew built up such relations. Maberr, another okadaman often criticized for staying away from school and wasting his money on palm wine, specialized in supplying teachers at the Northern Polytechnic with first-class *poyo* and bush meat from surrounding villages, consuming it with them and other people he could learn from through “sharing ideas.”

42. Mamadu did his first business during the RUF occupation, carrying out services for some of the rebels by getting food from them. Later, he made his first money during the transitional phase selling food on the street.
Mamadu relied heavily on different relations to people within the MBRA, especially in regard to police issues. Contrary to okadamen who had made their arrangements with relatives within the police (Bürge 2009:85–113), Mamadu had hardly any support through kin in Makeni. To be close to the chairman substituted for this needed support, as Mamadu was prone to getting fined for lacking a rider’s license and a number plate—which after a while he received through a special connection within the MBRA, a person who “lubricated” its acquisition.

Esusu, (pl.; sing. osusu), most likely stemming from the Yoruba term esusu, are so-called rotational saving-and-credit schemes. For more details, see below and in general Anderson and Baland (2002), Ardener (1964), Bascom (1952), Cornwall (2007), Geertz (1962), and Verstralen and Isebor (1997).

Bockarie was not the owner of the bike, and he suffered from unfavorable working and payment conditions with the owner (see next note). Thus, he heavily struggled to earn enough money to reenter school. Actually, through bike riding for exploitative family members, he tried to show them his willingness and capacity to engage and be a responsible man, which should have led them to pay for some of his school fees—a strategy he further diversified in organizing an osusu. As a matter of fact, he succeeded only in 2010 in finishing senior secondary school, thanks to further bike riding and help from people convinced about his commitment.

Usually riders had to pay the 20,000 leones six days a week. Sunday was “riders’ day,” the day they earned for themselves. Bockarie, however, had no riders’ day: he worked seven days a week for the owner, actually an uncle and a cousin.

The 150,000 leones he got from the 5000 osusu covered emergencies, like not earning enough money on a single day, unforeseen services for the bike, and medical treatment.

Bockarie organized his first osusu during my stay. After investing a lot of time for collecting money and the like, he had had negative experiences with people not paying anymore after having received their share, yet organizing an osusu and convincing thirty people to participate showed that he, a former member of the RUF and later a street child, had gained people’s trust; it was, however, also due to the facts that the saving group wasn’t well established and Bockarie’s social status was weak that people participating could try to exploit it. For Bockarie successful organization, making the osusu, the practice of hiding money, visible, should have been proof of his ability and responsibility for a potential sponsor of his studies (see Ferme 2001 on the logic of concealing and making visible), and therefore failing was detrimental to these aspirations.

Organized by football teams for mutual benefits, the organizer’s hand was used to buy new equipment. The MBRA organized one where the organizer’s share would have been used to buy a bike.

See Piot 1999 about cross-fertilizing exchanges of goods, commodities, and social relations.

Esusu diverged greatly in size and especially in the cost of one hand, and thus they were heterogeneous regarding the people they brought together. Though in an osusu of a football team or of a bike park, people knew each other, and mutual participation in others’ lives was more direct, people in bigger osusu did not all know each other. Decisions about taking part in other networks were more impersonal and abstract, based on confidence in the organizer.

Money not remaining in Makeni is a big problem, as I have shown elsewhere (Cartier and Bürge 2011; Bürge 2009). Even rice, the local staple food, and many other basic commodities are imported; little is produced locally. Okadamen are importing consumer goods and other stuff from outside Makeni—a process that drains money out of the community, but brings goods
that are consumed and used by everybody who can afford them. Okadamen, however, were not more guilty of this drain than other people. On the contrary, bike riding was a productive and money-binding activity, and okadamen even exported goods (Bürge 2009).

53. Juana singled out three main types of riders (2008:21–22): those who owned the bike, like Mamadu; those who rented the bike on a stable basis (stagnant bike) from a masta (somebody who owned a bike but did not ride it); and those who act as second riders, second to an owning rider or one who rented from a masta. While agreements between a masta and a renter had been almost institutionalized, agreements between riders themselves differed extremely and therefore became part of their navigational ability (Bürge 2009:120–122). Riders who rented their bike on a daily basis and had to pay the masta moni of 20,000 leones were eager to ride as much as possible, and they got second and third riders to run the bike so it would be in service all twenty-four hours of the day; yet owners, realizing that a bike that was run continuously would necessarily be consumed prematurely from lack of maintenance, urged the renters to park the bike at least for some hours. Finding a consensus about adequate resting time was a factor that led to conflicts between riders and owners (Sesay 2006).

54. As the owner, he had to pay everything to maintain the bike and calculated for the day at least 18,000 to 25,000 leones for petrol, 8000 for oil, and 26,000 for two esusu. (This money was meant for a new bike later on and for repairing the bike.) That means he needed at least fifty-two transports before starting to earn money for food, drinks, and so on. Lending the bike, as he sometimes did, ensured him 20,000 leones (the osusu money) and even more, as he lent the bike out only part-time (rent cost 5000 leones per hour, or 20,000 per day, which was for about twelve hours, permitting Mamadu to earn extra money in the remaining time, if needed), on the condition that the rider would pay for petrol, oil, and small repairs.

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