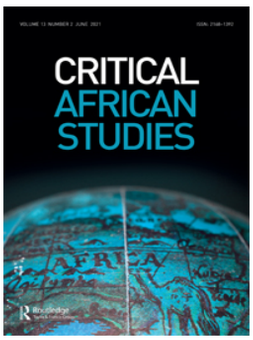
Bringing inside out

Martin, Laura S.; Bradbury-Jones, Caroline; Koroma, Simeon; Forcer, Stephen

DOI:
10.1080/21681392.2021.2005378

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Citation for published version (Harvard):
Martin, LS, Bradbury-Jones, C, Koroma, S & Forcer, S 2021, 'Bringing inside out: humor, outreach, and sexual and gender-based violence in Sierra Leone', *Critical African Studies*, vol. 13, no. 3, pp. 356-373. https://doi.org/10.1080/21681392.2021.2005378



Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Critical African Studies

ISSN: (Print) (Online) Journal homepage: https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rcaf20

Bringing inside out: humour, outreach, and sexual and gender-based violence in Sierra Leone

Laura S. Martin, Caroline Bradbury-Jones, Simeon Koroma & Stephen Forcer

To cite this article: Laura S. Martin, Caroline Bradbury-Jones, Simeon Koroma & Stephen Forcer (2021): Bringing inside out: humour, outreach, and sexual and gender-based violence in Sierra Leone, Critical African Studies, DOI: 10.1080/21681392.2021.2005378

To link to this article: https://doi.org/10.1080/21681392.2021.2005378

Published online: 08 Dec 2021.

Critical African Studies, 2021
https://doi.org/10.1080/21681392.2021.2005378

Bringing inside out: humour, outreach, and sexual and gender-based violence in Sierra Leone

Faire ressortir l'intérieur: Humour, sensibilisation, et violence sexuelle et sexiste en Sierra Leone

Laura S. Martin[a]†, Caroline Bradbury-Jones[b], Simeon Koroma[cd] and Stephen Forcer[e]*

[a]*School of History and Cultures, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK;* [b]*School of Nursing, Institute of Clinical Sciences, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK;* [c]*School of Social and Political Sciences, University of Edinburgh, Edinburgh, UK;* [d]*Timap for Justice, Freetown, Sierra Leone;* [e]*Department of Modern Languages, University of Birmingham, Birmingham, UK*

This article explores the theoretical and practical role(s) of humour in facilitating outreach about sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in Sierra Leone. While humour might be considered an insensitive way of approaching difficult issues, this project shows that incongruity can in fact be productive. Recognizing that humour itself can be a form of symbolic or physical violence in some contexts, we argue that humour is a means of opening up conversations about violence (in this case SGBV) in order to address the social and legal challenges associated with it. Our pilot project – devised by an interdisciplinary team and conducted in partnership with a Sierra Leonean access-to-justice NGO, Timap for Justice – used comedy and performance to meet two key challenges: to disseminate awareness about social and legal issues related to commonplace practices of SGBV, and to open up a broader discussion about experiences of SGBV. Using empirical evidence from focus groups and interviews, this article shows how a humorous approach proved to be a productive mode of engagement and examines key concepts including 'the vicinity of laughter' (involving the spatial and interpersonal aspects of humour), the connections between laughter and memory, and the paradoxical relationship between lived experience, humour and violence.

Keywords: Sierra Leone; humor; violence; gender; outreach; development

Cet article explore le(s) rôle(s) théorique(s) et pratique(s) de l'humour pour faciliter la sensibilisation sur la violence sexuelle et sexiste (SGBV) en Sierra Leone. Alors que l'humour peut être considéré comme une manière insensible d'aborder des problèmes difficiles, ce projet montre que l'incongruité peut en fait être productive. Tout en reconnaissant que l'humour lui-même peut être une forme de violence symbolique ou physique dans certains contextes, nous soutenons que l'humour est un moyen d'engager des conversations sur la violence (dans ce cas SGBV) afin de relever les défis sociaux et juridiques qui y sont associés. Notre projet pilote – conçu par une équipe interdisciplinaire et mené en partenariat avec une ONG sierra-léonaise d'accès à la justice, Timap for Justice

†Now affiliated with the School of Politics and International Relations, University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK.
*Corresponding author. Now affiliated with the School of Modern Languages and Cultures, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, UK. Email: stephen.forcer@glasgow.ac.uk

– a utilisé la comédie et la performance pour relever deux défis clés: faire connaître les problèmes sociaux et juridiques liés aux pratiques courantes de la violence sexuelle et sexiste, et d'ouvrir une discussion plus large sur les expériences de violence sexuelle et sexiste. À l'aide de preuves empiriques provenant de groupes de discussion et d'entretiens, cet article montre comment une approche humoristique s'est avérée être un mode d'engagement productif et examine des concepts clés tels que « le voisinage du rire » (impliquant les aspects spatiaux et interpersonnels de l'humour), les liens entre le rire et la mémoire, et la relation paradoxale entre expérience vécue, humour et violence.

Mots clés: Sierra Leone; Humour; Violence; Sexe; Sensibilisation; Développement

Introduction

Over 2012–2017 the award-winning Radi-Aid group celebrated the best – and the worst – campaigns for international development.[1] Headed by its CEO Trevor Sithole [*sic*], Radi-Aid used a variety of satirical activities – including its viral campaign for Africans to donate radiators to Norway – to promote the need for nuanced, creative and sensitive development work. Raid-Aid saw parody, comedy and humour not only as ways of identifying problematic practice but also at the centre of opportunities for new and effective types of development work.

As highlighted by Radi-Aid, designing effective, engaging and politically sound outreach activities has long been a difficult and potentially problematic task. Among Non-Governmental Organizations, the most common approach to outreach has been what is often referred to as top-down 'talking exercises' whereby a group of people (whose numbers can be counted and included in donor reports) sit in front of local aid workers for a few hours and are provided with information about a wide range of topics. Satirized by Radi-Aid's 'Educate Africa Challenge' and 'Who Wants To Be A Volunteer?', this 'technology of talk' (Watkins, Swidler, and Hannan 2012) is a cheap and transferrable method for local NGOs to conduct activities and meet donor requirements in a timely fashion but is not necessarily the most effective. Theatre for Development (TfD) is an alternative means of outreach engagement. TfD has been used in African contexts since the 1950s as a tool for development outreach, pedagogy and, increasingly, community participation and problem-solving (Flynn and Tinius 2015). Humour and comedy, however, have usually been secondary elements in TfD and other creative modes of outreach, if they feature at all. Similarly, the benefits and limitations of humour itself have not been widely analysed in relation to conveying information on sensitive topics. And yet the modes of comedy and satire are co-commensurate with theatre and performance, to say nothing of the huge potential for positive physiological, cognitive and social responses produced by humour. Humour and comedy are both antonymic and eminently suited to the problem-driven, socially engaged potential of TfD emphasized by Afolabi (2017, 77).

Outreach activities, and conceptualizing development more generally, have long been the subject of critiques not only among satirists such as Radi-Aid but also in academic research. A principal criticism is that development creates particular agendas about certain groups of people that are seen to need fixing (Li 2007; Enria 2019). A further limitation is that development work can claim to 'sensitize' communities to particular issues, but it does not necessarily tackle the deeper fractures within social relations (Bolten 2012). While we do not deny the validity of these critiques, we also recognize that such programmes and activities will continue to operate, and so we seek to engage with development, and by extension outreach activities, as a 'category of practice' (Mosse 2013). By this, we mean that, as opposed to engaging with foundational questions of development subjectivities, we seek to understand and analyse how individuals and groups engage with development-related activities, such as outreach, and more specifically through particular modes of *performative* developmental engagement, such as humour.

This article, therefore, presents a case study exploring the role of comedy and humour in NGO outreach about sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in Sierra Leone. Although SGBV can affect both men and women, we focus here on women because of the disproportionate burden on girls and women. SGBV largely refers to acts of violence directed at a woman *because* she is a woman. A raft of statistics indicates that SGBV remains a critical and pervasive phenomenon.[2] In Sierra Leone, data collated from multiple sources indicate that the lifetime prevalence of physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence stands at 45%, compounded by a relatively high tendency for men and women to justify violence (UN Women 2019).

At the same time, statistics and development indicators are proxies for the incalculable human consequences of SGBV which include broader physical and psychological issues, such as trauma and physical injury, as well as everyday communal and familial disruption that results in both short- and long-term impacts. One woman, for example, recounted the difficulties faced by her daughter in getting to a school located in the larger regional capital city of Makeni (approximately five miles from their village). An okada man (motorcycle taxi driver) offered to take her to school free of charge and the daughter, who was under 18, subsequently became pregnant by the man. The mother reported this to the chief and the matter was mediated between families. Ultimately, though, the daughter was still required to drop out of school. Such incidents demonstrate the long-term impacts of gender-related crimes and the need for individuals, and women, in particular, to know the various legal avenues available to them.

While humour might be considered an insensitive way of approaching sensitive and traumatic issues, such as SGBV, this project shows that this incongruity can in fact be productive. Using comedy and performance as a mechanism meets two key challenges: disseminating awareness about social and legal issues related to commonplace practices of SGBV, and opening up broader discussions about experiences of SGBV. The research team (all authors here) partnered with Timap for Justice, an access-to-justice organization founded in 2003 that has pioneered a method for delivering justice services that respond to the particularities of Sierra Leone's socio-legal context. Using an innovative community-based paralegal system, the organization addresses a wide range of justice problems through mediation, advocacy, education, and organizing, and at the same time seeking to cultivate the agency of the communities where they work.[3] Through Timap, a trio of local comedians were commissioned to produce a 20-minute performance about SGBV, which included humorous scenes with the realistic enactment of everyday forms of violence. These skits were designed collaboratively between the comedians and two female members of the Timap staff. In May 2019, the performance took place in a small community just outside Makeni, capital of Bombali district in northern Sierra Leone. Forty community members attended. Prior to the performance, the paralegals, who have all been trained in counselling due to the sensitive nature of their paralegal work, had a discussion with the audience about the sensitivity of the subject matter. Audience members were encouraged to inform Timap staff if they felt uncomfortable, so that appropriate assistance could be provided. The performance was followed up with four focus groups (one with women, one with men, and two mixed-gender groups). All focus groups and interviews were supported by a paralegal from Timap For Justice (Makeni office). Where necessary, paralegals interpreted from Krio and Temne for UK-based members of the research team. The day after the performance, two members of the research team (Forcer and Martin) returned to conduct follow-up interviews, again supported by Timap paralegals. Questions in focus groups and interviews related to a range of interrelated issues including: the comedians' performance; personal and community issues related to SGBV; the use of humour to discuss SGBV and community matters, including any topics felt to be 'off limits' to humour; whether audience members obtained new information from the workshop; what audience members laugh and joke about in daily life; what community members would like to see in any future events. Methodologically, in an effort to emphasize our interdisciplinary

approach, we have also engaged with neurological research into humour and laughter in order to corroborate and cross-reference our findings from Sierra Leone.

The relationship between humour and violence is well established in cultural studies of the grotesque, where the duplicitous 'Janus face' of laughter turns in one moment to catharsis, regeneration and inclusion, and in the next moment to ridicule, oppression and tyranny (Edwards and Graulund 2013). Recognizing the indeterminacy between the causality of humour and its ethical and moral effects, this project has deployed the interconnected relationship between humour and violence in order to harness it for practical purposes. We ultimately argue that humour is a means of opening up conversations about violence (in this case sexual and gender-based violence) *in order to* address the social and legal challenges associated with it. In this sense, then, humour and violence combine to form what we refer to as 'productive incongruity'. While we do not necessarily claim that this one activity has drastically changed the perspectives of the Sierra Leoneans with whom we engaged, our engagement with humour contributes to the enhancing of TfD approaches by opening up discussions about taboo issues and generating the potential for longer-term change.

Over the course of this article, we will summarize the theoretical and practical aspects of conducting performative outreach, the paradoxical relationship between humour and violence and the social and legal framework for SGBV in Sierra Leone, in order to contextualize how and why humour can be an effective tool for addressing such pertinent societal issues. Our empirical findings will demonstrate how a humorous approach to addressing SGBV is productive due to the fact that the comedians' performances were perceived to be both 'funny' and 'real.' The visualization of the performance, as well as the act of laughter, helped participants remember their engagement with the programme, also proving to be a productive means of helping participants become more aware of laws related to gender-based violence. We will then reflect on the implications of humorous engagement in relation to TfD, transformative change, and the theory and practice of humour and violence.

Performative outreach

The most common form of performative outreach is TfD, which was pioneered by a group of radical African scholars and artists in the 1970s and 1980s 'with the intention of enabling marginalized people to discuss issues of importance to them, either among themselves, or with "experts", to resolve community differences and/or to critique power: familial, local, or national' (Plastow 2015, 107). The goals of TfD performances are often pedagogical in nature – seeking to convey information and initiate change in relation to health, education, gender relations or other social issues – particularly in Africa (Chinyowa 2009; Ewu 2007; Moyo and Sibanda 2020; Nwadigwe 2012). Over the last twenty years, as part of the participatory turn in development discourse, stated goals have started to include empowering communities and listening to their concerns, with the objective of communities voicing and solving their own local issues. Participants are encouraged to envisage change within themselves and collectively, thereby enhancing and re-conceptualizing political subjectivity (Afolabi 2017; Flynn and Tinius 2015; Makhumula 2013/2014). In the most applied form of TfD – which some would say is its most effective form – audience members are involved in performing and devising performances, either immediately or after a longer process of acclimatization and support (Plastow 2015). As emphasized by Makhumula, treating TfD as an iterative 'devising process' combining research, play development, and rehearsals offers the potential for 'transformation' in TfD. Makhumula also reasserts the importance of the theatre form itself as central to this transformation (121).

Nonetheless, while Flynn and Tinius emphasize that performance has great potential, they also recognize the limitations of TfD and its capacity for substantive transformation. Indeed, TfD in Africa has largely been appropriated by NGOs, funders and state organs to promote

pre-determined messages about particular topics. In Plastow's estimation, '80–90 per cent of TfD work today across the continent does not prioritize a truly dialogic mode in either process of performance, although paying lip-service in the form of a post-show discussion, a radio phone-in, or even a forum theatre-style presentation is common' (2015, 107). Consequently, although some programmes purport to be doing creative work, certain forms of performative outreach are themselves performed, with the creative component as an afterthought. Conversely, in this project the collaboration between the comedians and the local NGO served to 'vernacularize' the outreach, such that legal discourses and practices were translated not only through a specific language and frame of reference, but through a particular, context-specific humorous medium (Merry 2006). In combination with NGO support, comedic performance is ideally suited to the diverse range of material requiring vernacularization (language, images, concepts and laws). The importance of dialogic spaces in creating the opportunity to engage with contested, sensitive issues is well recognized in existing influential work on performance, education and pedagogy by figures such as Paul Freire and Gert Biesta. We hold that comedy performance opens up a significant variation in the typology of dialogic spaces that can be deployed within outreach activities. Especially, humorous performance can offer a literal and figurative language for the discussion of sensitive subject matter that is difficult to address.

There are select instances of humorous legal and social engagement. For example, in 1995 the Mayor of Bogotá sought to address chronic rates of road traffic accidents by replacing traffic police with over 400 mime artists. By increasing civic agency and responsibility among citizens through humour, satire and performance, the incongruous but serious campaign saw the number of road deaths fall by nearly 50% during the Mayor's first year in office (Sommer 2019). In the area of international aid and outreach, certain humanitarian organizations such as Clowns Without Borders use ludic modes of performance to engage people (in their case mainly children) affected by violence, as well as natural disasters. This relationship between humour, trauma and performative outreach does have precedents in TfD. For example, Diang'a et al. identify the strong potential relationship between humour and traumatic subject matter through community theatre in Kenya: 'Despite the grim topics […], performances were regularly enlivened by eager audience comments and roaring laughter during and/or at the end of each performance' (2015, 113). However, while these are individual examples of humorous engagement, the relationship between humour and trauma has not been treated centrally by the theory or practice of theatre-based outreach and engagement.

Mitigating imperfection: reflections on limitations, ethics, and risk in humour outreach

> It's starting to sound like it's more about us than about the Norwegians.
>
> ('Radi-Aid' promotional video, SAIH)

It is necessary to critically reflect on approaches to outreach activities and development research, especially those involving very sensitive subject matter, in order to mitigate risk. When designing and coordinating the project, we worked closely with Timap to identify and mitigate risk. The team commissioned local professional comedians with a track record of dealing with sensitive health issues, and ensured that the event was led by paralegals and overseen by the Executive Director of the NGO. Prior to fieldwork, the project underwent and was approved through an extensive institutional ethical review.[4]

Similarly, we recognize that as academics based in the global north, conducting research in the global south will inevitably present questions related to material and structural imbalances. Although local expertise was fundamental to the preparation and delivery of the activities, the project originates in a team of predominantly white researchers, alongside Timap's founder.

To the best of our ability, our approach attempted to mitigate perpetuating structural inequalities and reproducing global hierarchies of expertise. We did this by maximizing local involvement in the project design and implementation while accepting that full, total knowledge of audience responses is impossible. For example, while no members of the team discerned any signs of discomfort or distress during the workshop, focus groups or interviews, it is important to acknowledge that we could not know for certain whether everyone was comfortable at all times. Therefore, while we did employ local knowledge and expertise to mitigate risk, we acknowledge the limitations of the project and recognize that we are working within the fundamental inequalities of global academic research.

We have, however, made an ethical judgment in which mitigated imperfection and uncertainty were weighed against the potential of humorous engagement. We concluded that it was better to attempt a rigorously prepared collaborative project, acknowledging risk, than not act at all. Reflecting upon the question of comfort, it is important to consider the distinction between potentially productive discomfort caused by the performance (for actual or potential perpetrators of SGBV) and potential upset and distress (for those who have experienced or witnessed SGBV). These reflections will be taken forward in future activities and research discussions, the question of which we address in the conclusion.

Humour and violence

Conceptually, this project is based on the fact that humour and violence are simultaneously universal and context specific. As noted by Nancy Scheper-Hughes and Philippe Bourgois, 'The social and cultural dimensions of violence are what give violence its power and meaning' (2004, 1). The same can be said for humour, the manifestations and meanings of which are rooted in specific socio-cultural contexts. At the same time, violence and humour – and the capacity for violence and humour – are universal (Berger 2014).

Crucially, the relationship between humour and violence is not only universal-specific but also teleologically indeterminate. In other words, to pick up the question of duplicity, the effects of humour and violence depend on where the Janus face of laughter is looking. On the one hand, humour can heal, liberate, and open up otherwise difficult or 'closed' conversations. There are numerous occasions where humour has helped humans to cope with and overcome violent or otherwise unsurvivable experiences (or the threat thereof) (Frankl 1984; Goldstein 2003; Zelizer 2010). On the other hand, humour is often complicit in extreme acts of obscenity, oppression, and physical and structural violence (Oring 2008). Equally, while jokes can signal political resistance and subversion, such humour can also signal the perpetuation and acceptance of violence (Mbembe 2001).

This undecidedness of humour – its teleological indeterminacy – is in part a function of the physiological and social effects of laughter. Laughter makes us feel good by stimulating 'endogenous opioid release' (Manninen et al. 2017) and can reinforce empathy, habit, confidence and social cohesion (Neves et al. 2018). However, while such stimulus may seem inherently positive, the effects and behaviour stimulated by humour and laughter are extremely diverse. Ostensibly, there is little that connects the core cognitive development of babies (Addyman 2020), interpersonal relations between schizophrenics (Lavelle et al. 2018), the sharing of Alt-right memes (Greene 2019), and group mocking behaviour in military atrocities and war crimes (Bourke 2000). However, these research areas all intersect in the physiological, cognitive, behavioural and social effects of humour and laughter. In other words, humour and laughter are by no means an intrinsic 'good'.

The relationship between humour and violence, then, is intimate, paradoxical and indeterminate, rather than mutually exclusive and pre-determined. This raises important questions about

how humour can instigate and promote violent behaviour, as well as deter it. Violence by its very nature destroys, alters, and creates worlds anew. It signifies pain and hardship, be it physical, psychological or symbolic. Humour, too, can re-frame narratives and invert hierarchies, sometimes overtly but also in very subtle ways (Mbembe 2001). While violence itself is not necessarily to be laughed at, the ambiguous space in which humour is enacted presents the possibility of productivity.

In academic research, humour has frequently been a useful lens to explore and understand a wide range of social issues, including experiences of violence (Downe 1999; Scott 1985; Trnka 2011). humorous discourses – be they positive or negative – can offer valuable insights into how people understand and negotiate their surroundings and circumstances in all societies. However, the use of humour *itself* can also be understood as productive, even if seemingly antithetical to violence. Humour can be used as an alternative, or more subtle means of exchanging information and ideas about taboo, sensitive subject matter. Humour, then, is significant not only as a response to the phenomena treated *by* outreach but as a potential vehicle *for* outreach.

SGBV in Sierra Leone: social and legal challenges

The acuteness of SGBV issues in Sierra Leone was highlighted in February 2019 when the President declared a state of emergency in relation to SGBV, with a specific focus on sexual offences (BBC News 2019).[5] This was in response to an alarming number of sexual offences from 2018. The declaration was theoretically meant to result in harsher punishments for offenders, such as life in prison. The pervasive nature of SGBV in Sierra Leone is further reflected in justification and resignation both in our other research and our own. In a large survey, a high proportion of Sierra Leonean women and men accepted domestic violence (62.79% for women and 33.54% for men), relative to most groups in 31 other Sub-Saharan countries (Sardinha and Nájera Catalán 2018). While acceptance is not the same as condoning, elevated rates of 'acceptance' indicate something of the complex socio-cultural specificity of challenging SGBV in Sierra Leone (pointing to the need for local expertise and delivery, a key feature of the partnerships used in this pilot). In the focus groups run for this project, male and female research participants candidly discussed their own experiences, as both perpetrators and victims of violence, demonstrating that these acts are not 'extra-ordinary' occurrences but rather that violence is embedded well and truly within the ordinary.

A combination of international commitments and domestic legislation provides the basis for the country's legal framework for SGBV.[6] Between 2007 and 2012, five key pieces of domestic legislation were passed: the Domestic Violence Act, the Devolution of Estates Act, the Child Rights Act (all in 2007), the Registration of Customary Marriages and Divorces Act (2009), and the Sexual Offences Act (2012). Together with the colonial-era statutes,[7] there is a strong legal framework to address SGBV and biases against women in Sierra Leone. These laws have also provided a useful basis for advocacy and have been incorporated into extensive outreach activities related to gender throughout the country.

However, the complexity of the legal system (as well as access to it) is crucial for understanding the ongoing challenges of addressing SGBV. Sierra Leone has a dualist legal system whereby on the one hand, customary law, based on unwritten codes and practices, is used to arbitrate cases. This operates alongside a formal justice system based on English common law. Customary courts, which take various forms, are arbitrated by different traditional leaders and chairpersons,[8] and are far more accessible to the vast majority of Sierra Leoneans.

Yet, institutional failings and deeply embedded social norms and ideas about women remain difficult to challenge, despite growing efforts by government, international agencies, and civil society. Institutionally, to determine a sexual offence or physical act of violence, a medical

report by a qualified doctor is required as part of the official complaint. However, only 0.024 physicians per 1000 people are available in Sierra Leone (WHO Key Indicators: Sierra Leone) and, with a notoriously slow and complicated judicial process, it is no surprise that only a small percentage of cases investigated end with a final court decision. In terms of reporting SGBV, there are also problems of access to judicial processes, trust with the police, and the ability to pay legal fees (as well as logistical costs, such as transport).

Further, ideas about women's roles and community remain obstacles. For example, women are often discouraged from reporting violent incidents because of the notion that it could be divisive between families or friends in communities all of whom work and depend on each other daily. Finally, while there is a dualist legal system, issues related to sexual and gender violence are not supposed to be addressed in customary courts. Although this does occur, the outcomes for women vary substantially. Thus, the legal avenues to addressing SBGV in Sierra Leone are fraught with a wide range of complex issues. As a result, organizations like Timap look for new modes of facilitating discussions about sexual and gender-based violence.

Summary of the performance and research approach

The performance took place on 1 May 2019 in the Pate Bana Marenk School, a few miles outside the city of Makeni. The three performers (one woman and two men) were already known to the local community as members of the Makeni Professional Comedians. Formed in high school, the group performs in towns, villages and on the radio, and they often deal with issues affecting local communities (during the 2014–2016 Ebola outbreak, for instance, the group incorporated health issues into their performances). The performance was attended by 40 people and the audience was mixed in age and gender, with roughly equal numbers of women and men. The initial approach to the community was made by Timap staff and consent was acquired from all participants for all parts of the activity (workshop, focus groups, and interviews).

The performance got off to a lively start, with the comedians bursting into the room to perform a short absurdist dance accompanied by fast-paced music played through a sound system that had been transported to the venue. Wearing a skirt and t-shirt (the female comedian) and shorts and t-shirt (the two male comedians), the performers danced freely and frenetically. Some bizarre aspects of costume on the male performers – cravats tied around the waist, suspenders (braces), hats, and padding to produce an exaggerated groin area – generated humour not only as amusement (the dance and costumes produced some laughter) but in the sense of a mood and atmosphere. The costumes visually introduced the idea of the male performers playing 'fool' characters with absurdly exaggerated masculinities. Visibly and audibly, the audience were clearly amused and engaged by the ebullient prologue offered by the comedians.

Following the satirizing of masculinity in the opening scene, the issue of gender power dynamics was picked up in the main performance, which consisted of two skits delivered in Temne, the primary language of the community. Using visual humour and metaphor in the first skit, the male character scolds his friend for treating his wife like an object. Initially, the friend resists the rebuking, claiming that he is entitled to expect his wife to meet his needs. Faced with the combined arguments voiced by his wife and his friend, the husband character becomes subdued and awkward, before conceding that he should in fact be more considerate. In the second skit, a neighbour stumbles upon an argument between a married couple. Adopting a more serious tone than the first half of the performance, this section conveyed directly the legal punishments for rape and other crimes. The vocal delivery was firm throughout and quite intense during scenes depicting argument and abuse. Strong use of body language supported the performance, and both male and female audiences responded by laughing at the performative inflections made by the comedians.

As part of the outreach component, during the break between comedic skits, paralegals from Timap invited comments and responses from the audience about the play and SGBV. Initial comments came from only one or two audience members. Over time, and encouraged by the 'Socratic' approach of the paralegals (addressing the audience using questions rather than only statements), the discussions opened up and audience stories built upon each other. As community members spoke about their own experiences of violence, paralegals used a blackboard to highlight emerging themes and engage in discussions with the audience on these topics. A range of themes and anecdotes were noted, reflecting the extent of audience engagement with a wide range of topics related to women, specifically rape, early marriage, teenage pregnancy, education, physical and economic violence, sexual harassment and exploitation, and illiteracy. These plenary discussions were used by paralegals to reinforce points about laws related to gender and the channels for reporting.

Productive incongruity: bringing inside out through humour

It is well established that humour and performance can explore differences, question everyday life, and say the unsayable (Diang'a, Kebaya, and Mwai 2015). However, while the human potential for laughter is universal (Berger 2014), performative outreach can really unlock this potential if it is culturally specific and sensitive. For most societies around the world, SGBV is a difficult subject to discuss, and is often relegated to private spheres along with other gender issues. Equally, though, understanding the particular socio-cultural dimensions of violence in Sierra Leone is part and parcel of addressing it.

SGBV in Sierra Leone is, unsurprisingly, a private issue. While this is not necessarily specific to Sierra Leone, what is contextually notable is the cultural (and gendered) preponderance for secrecy (Ibrahim 2019). As noted by a number of anthropologists, Sierra Leonean society is dictated by a set of multi-layered beliefs wherein 'the visible world … is activated by forces concealed beneath the surface of discourse, objects and social relations' (Ferme 2001, 2). This is best exemplified by the central role of secret societies, which pervade all aspects of life, particularly in rural areas, and are important in determining how social order can and cannot be challenged in public. Such societies are taboo to discuss with those who have not been initiated, but, along with other sets of occult and religious beliefs, dictate social interactions and political decision-making across the country.

While secrecy plays a key role in structuring social relations, men and women spoke candidly about their violent experiences (both as perpetrators and victims) after the workshop, discussing SGBV not only in and of itself but within the context of community relations, education, and the other factors noted by Timap facilitators. At the same time, SGBV is still considered a private matter, largely to be dealt with amongst families. In fact, a few women stated that they were discouraged from reporting matters to the police because this would create unnecessary community divisions. Humour, however, seemingly provided a means through which participants felt taboo subjects could be brought out in the open. As one man stated, 'What we saw in the play is a joke but not a joke. Violence impacts people's lives, especially of women … but the play has brought things into the open. These are now things that people can talk about'.[9] A female participant agreed: 'People say this happens but we can't say it out. It's easier to discuss when it's funny'.[10] Several participants made similar statements, thereby suggesting that approaching taboo subjects in this way has the capacity to lead to broader, more 'serious' conversations that could ultimately address these issues.

Confronting difficult, intimate subject matter is a clear and conscious aim for the comedians in their work, who stated in an interview with the research team that, 'We provoke issues so that people will understand'.[11] Provocation through humour, as distinct from a more sober

'technology of talk', was seen to be a more engaging way to present a topic that is acutely private. Reflecting on the event afterwards, an audience member commented that the performance format was effective because 'what is normally secret is brought outside'.[12] In other words, SGBV, while widely experienced and known about in the community, is not necessarily discussed openly. Crucial is the fact that humorous performance functions not only as a medium but as a space (literally and figuratively) and as an act. Therefore, the humorous performance creates a threshold that the audience is invited to cross, beyond which humour provides a space for what is otherwise difficult to discuss.

Comedy, then, was able to access what is simultaneously 'real' but 'inside' (secret, invisible). During the discussions and interviews following the comedic skit, some participants (particularly women) pointed to the relationship between laughter and their ability to relate to the performances. As one woman stated, 'The last skit, I liked it because the message was real and I also laughed because it was real'.[13] Another woman similarly stated: 'I liked the way it was acted out … but it was reality'.[14] This reality-comedy paradox illustrates how participants reported that the comedic aspects of the performance were funny because they were real, and that the recognizability of the scenes made it acceptable to laugh at them. This raises questions about the relationship between familiarity and humour. Much more than a 'coping mechanism', humour is a way of reframing narratives and (re)acquiring agency over experience and memory in times of crisis. Indeed, humour can play a powerful cognitive role in shaping how particular experiences are processed, negotiated, discussed and remembered. Given that humour can exert a radical influence on experience and memory, a further philosophical implication of humour is that there may be no fixed 'essence' to an experience. Such laughter can actually help an individual re-frame how particular events and experiences are thought about through the simultaneous act of laughing (a positive physiological act) and recognition of one's own experiences. The shared experience of laughter also acts as a symbol of empathy and understanding, which can in turn connect individuals with common experiences and enable the possibility of actually opening up about sensitive issues in order to ultimately address them.

In preparing performance outreach, close collaboration with specialist organizations helps to assess and reduce the potential for causing trauma in audience members. In this case, that meant engaging with an organization founded and run by Sierra Leoneans and Sierra Leonean comedians who live and work in a particular area, and who have distinct insight and knowledge into the nuances of these issues. As one of the comedians stated: 'We know the issues because we live them'.[15] Therefore, they performed stories they knew to be 'on the inside' and 'brought them out.' Crucially, the audience tacitly allowed the comedians to do this because of their persona as local comedians and because the audience was engaged by the performance itself. This connection allows for both the issues and the humour to be appropriately contextualized and delivered in the performance.

Thus, a humorous approach to discussing and addressing SGBV, and violence more broadly, seeks to turn the Janus face of laughter, thereby inverting the pernicious potential of the relationship between violence and humour. Distinct from violence as a force that alters, destroys, and creates new worlds, this project sought to harness the inverting quality of humour to bring the inside of the existing world (violence) out into the open, in order to begin addressing the attitudes and structures associated with it. No part of the performance involved laughing at SGBV or at those who have suffered from it. Rather, the comedians generated laughter about scenes based on paradoxes – a joke but not joke, acted out but real – that allowed the unsayable to be said, experience to be reframed, and the inside brought out. Methodologically, the overarching paradox is the productive potential of incongruity as a way of conceptualizing a response to sensitive issues, in which elements that may seem inherently antithetical in one context (comedy and

traumatic experience) are put in series with each other on the basis of co-presence in other contexts revealed by research.

The vicinity of laughter: authenticity, performance space, and memory

Key to the effectiveness of the performance was establishing a 'vicinity of laughter',[16] defined here as a dedicated space constituted by and for humour, in which it is safe to laugh in relation to issues that may be otherwise difficult or distressing. Signalling and creating 'the vicinity of laughter' is essential to building audience trust and engagement when seeking to conduct NGO outreach through humorous performance.

The comedians quickly established a vicinity of laughter through the absurdist dance at the beginning of their performance, which immediately preceded the acted scenes. The incongruous elements of costume added to the idea that the comedians were presenting themselves as safe and not to be taken too seriously. In satirizing themselves from the start of the performance, the comedians indicated that the vicinity of laughter extended to laughing at themselves, thus permitting the audience to also find them funny. As the comedians noted, 'If you don't put a costume on, [they] don't see you as a comedian.'[17] As noted several times in focus groups and interviews, the elements of costume were playful additions, as distinct from the more overtly comedic outfits and props used by popular Sierra Leonean comedy troupes The Professionals and Wan Pot in the 1980s and 1990s (featuring fake beards, colossal water pistols and jumbo-sized heart-shaped sunglasses, the Professionals' comedy film *Return to Sender* deals with the 'Dos and Don'ts' of Ebola). This dress signalled the transformation of a person into a comedian, and the dance was an overt physical statement announcing the arrival of comedians as comedians and performers, which in turn provides the basis for a connection between performers and the audience.

The skit also created a space in which community members could connect over a common experience and through laughter. Neurological research into laughter indicates a range of physiological and social responses that are of considerable benefit to humour-based outreach. Authentic laughter has been shown to be associated with 'emotional contagion' and empathy (Neves et al. 2018). That is to say that laughter increases empathy and the sharing of emotion with the group, as part of the work done by the brain to process and understand laughter. A further benefit of authentic laughter is to provide short-term relief from stress and cortisol, a stress hormone (Bains et al. 2014). The need for a clear and authentic 'vicinity of laughter' (McGettigan et al. 2015) is underlined by the fact that the processing of inauthentic, non-volitional laughter involves a shift away from auditory, communicative activity towards visualized decoding ('mentalizing') as individuals attempt to determine the mental states of others in the group. In humour-based outreach, then, we posit that the 'vicinity of laughter' must be synonymous with the authenticity of laughter. Neurology emphasizes the importance of creating an authentic vicinity of laughter in which the audience are physiologically comfortable, receptive, and able to laugh together.

Like many performers, the Makeni comedians were already aware of the palliative and cohesive potential of authentic comedy, which they offer not only as cultural entertainment but as a form of social healing based on shared experiences with their audience: 'Comedy is important; it gives relief. The traumatized don't get relief, so we give them relief. When we make [people] laugh, it's like medicine to the soul.'[18] Triggering the physiological and social benefits of laughter creates space and energy for conversations, and brings people together. In the words of Danish artist Victor Borges, 'laughter is the shortest distance between two people' (Merton 2015). The comedic performance brought people together and opened up a space for conversation during the workshop and afterwards. The laughter prepared the ground for conversations between members

of the local community, NGO workers and researchers about a range of topics including sex, child abuse, economic hardship, and violence in the community.

Participants noted that the visual aspect of the play helped them to better understand the information conveyed in the plenary discussions. As one male interviewee commented, 'What you are told can be forgotten. But the play is effective. You carry the images in your head'.[19] While the link between vision and memory is axiomatic, scientific research has also emphasized the importance of visual elements in learning and memory (Super 2003). The visual aspects of performance and humour contributed to the vernacularization of information relating to SGBV. Significantly, comments about laws and reporting mechanisms were repeatedly accompanied by statements about the performative aspects of the event, potentially increasing the chances of internalizing legal norms. The visualization thus linked the material to the act of laughter.

Furthermore, it is notable that, as stated by one participant 'laughter makes us remember',[20] thereby aiding recall of information about the social and legal avenues open to the community. Laughing, as shown elsewhere, helps significantly with the learning and recall of information (Super 2003). The act of laughing can be a physical signifier of a particular, or even remarkable, observation or interaction that is then remembered, in part because of the physical reaction to it. Such experiences are then often recounted and repeated, in large part because they are 'fun' (and have given the body physiological pleasure) and people desire sharing these experiences with others.

Such repetition of funny experiences or events further reinforces the memory of them. This was exemplified by workshop participants, as there was evidence that the messages from the performance extended beyond the workshop to other community members. Some participants had smartphones and so the outreach was 'delivered' beyond the participants present. The day after the workshop, one male participant reported that he had shown the film to his wife, who had not been able to attend, and that this had initiated a confessional conversation about the topic. In another instance, a woman reported acting out the skits herself to neighbours, imitating the comedians both for 'fun' and as a means of conveying what she had learned. Other participants reported that they had discussed what they had learned with their family members. Therefore, while this workshop was a starting point for these sensitive issues, the vicinity of laughter extended beyond the audience that originally attended and the event served as a productive catalyst for participants to have subsequent and ongoing conversations about SGBV-related issues in the community through humour.

Noting that applied theatre practice foregrounds and idealizes participation, Afolabi argues for a holistic people-centered conceptualization of participation that has the potential to rethink how applied theatre practice can be sustained in a given community (68). In this project, the audience were engaged about a sensitive subject in a new way through humour and comedy, but participation was limited to audience spectatorship, questions and answers during the performance, and interviews. Developing opportunities for more active and creative audience participation is active part of an ongoing AHRC scoping grant involving members of this research team, where fieldwork in Sierra Leone has produced some provisional but suggestive results involving improvisation derived from songs that form part of the existing cultural and social life of the community (Fitzmaurice et al. 2021). This aligns with other recent initiatives such as *Rachel 19*, which infuses aspects of African performance aesthetics with Boalian participatory theatre (Moyo and Sibanda, 331), and MSF's Stories of Change which draws on stories told by local people to facilitate health promotion in northwest Nigeria (Hughes 2018). In addition to the importance of local cultural practice in applied theatre and NGO outreach, Chinyowa (2014) underlines that effective and inclusive participation relies on the diversification of practice (quoted in Moyo and Sibanda, 336). Moyo and Sibanda emphasize Chinyowa's point that applied theatre is well suited to offering diverse forms of practice and that this diversity

must be maintained if social change is to be realistically achieved (336). Moreover, Moyo and Sibanda make clear that the diversification of forms is effective in reaching women and girls, and in articulating the experiences they face (336–339).

Revisiting humour and violence: implications and reflections from Sierra Leone

This project combined existing practical approaches alongside theoretical insights on humour in an effort to explore new ways of addressing violence that go beyond simple awareness and sensitizing. Bolten (2012) discusses the notion of community sensitization in relation to civilian acceptance of ex-combatants in Sierra Leone, questioning whether the notion of 'sensitization' can really penetrate the surface of social relations and address more fundamental problems. We agree with this evaluation and recognize the limitations of one-off acts of outreach, or sensitization, in any context. We do not necessarily mean to suggest that simply adding humour to TfD approaches will fundamentally change social relations and perspectives. Rather, centralizing humour in outreach builds upon existing TfD approaches through a blended format in which comedy, performance, socio-legal expertise, and audience participation are mutually supporting. Localized co-design and sustainability are key challenges for TfD and other forms of outreach. The format used in our project indicates the potential to tackle these problems: brokering a relationship between an NGO and local comedians ensured local leadership of co-design and implementation, which generated strong audience responses about the possibility of future events that could facilitate the transition from 'sensitization' to deeper social change.

The project was informed theoretically by the productive social role of humour. Although seemingly antithetical to violence, it has been demonstrated that humour is used across societies and experiences not only as a coping mechanism (Obadare 2016) but also as a means of social commentary that helps re-frame violent events (Hernann 2016). These studies, however, have examined the relationship between humour and violence retrospectively as a discursive medium, either by looking at a violent event through the lens of ongoing humour about it (such as political cartoons) or at how people use humour as violence unfolds.

Our project, on the other hand, actually employs theoretical frameworks of humour and violence *in order to* address violence. By operationalizing humour within live outreach activities based on TfD approaches, we have sought to move beyond more passive modes of analysis and actively harness humour in the present in order to have productive discussions about the future. In other words, employing humour in the present aims to help reduce future acts of violence. In this sense, the relationship between the theory and practice of humour intersect. Theories about the social role of humour have informed our practice: noting that humour and violence are both symbiotic and antithetical, we sought to mobilize humour in an effort to prevent violence. Concurrently, practice refines theory: using humour in outreach emphasizes that humour can be proleptic, having considerable forward-looking potential, and raising the theoretical idea that humour can act against violence by preventing it. A key theoretical proposition of our project, then, is that humour functions not only as driver or symptom of past and current violence, but as an agent of possible future change. Paradoxically, humour for change involves aspirations for what does *not* happen (acts of SGBV) as well as what does (deeper social healing).

Our research on humour as a central part of outreach is a starting point, not a finished model. Ultimately, profound social change takes time. Equally, however, placing comedy and performance at the centre of outreach has catalysed new conversations about an urgent, sensitive social topic and excited the audience to continue discussing the workshop with peers. The project points to new ways forward in TfD practices and can be modified further, with a focus on greater

audience involvement, the potential for adaptation according to location and context, co-creation, and sustained engagement in order to really address deep social fracture.

Conclusion

The nature, scale and diversity of development challenges mean that it is necessary to reflect on the practices and approaches used to address particular issues. Various iterations of TfD have been used to engage different African communities, but not necessarily with a direct focus on what humour itself can offer to performative engagement. N.J. Long (2013) argues that theatre, as a means of education, rests upon its capacity to create actual (if temporary) and affectively charged relations between audience members and performers. Humour, we contend, also has a powerful but untapped potential in this regard, and can potentially invigorate the ways in which development organizations 'perform to transform', presenting alternative mediums for discussing the sensitive subject matter. The Malawi TfD described by Makhumula involves participants as 'spect-actors', a term created by Augusto Boal to describe 'the dual role of those involved in the process as both spectator and actor, as they both observe and create dramatic meaning and action in performance' (Makhumula, 116). Our project has not utilized participants as actors in the theatrical sense, but during discursive elements of the event spectators did engage as social actors, actively responding to the performance and drawing on their own life experiences and values to create a new type of conversation about a sensitive issue of social justice. Combined with the 'devising process' advocated by Makhumula, comedy can be used to dialogically expand the 'spect-actor' dynamic regarding topics that are otherwise difficult and sensitive to broach, and involving participants as spect-actor responders.

Combining humour and SGBV in a research project might well seem incongruous, even distastefully so. Conceptually, however, this link is founded on the potential of 'insolent', 'unexpected' relationships between things that are kept apart by right-minded common sense but which can be put together to 'illuminate a world of unexpectedly fertile connections' (Breton 1968). Further, elements of this incongruous but productive combination – humour, local comedians, trauma, performance, outreach – facilitated a form of vernacularization whereby particular subjects and information were 'translated' through a culturally specific humorous medium, which then allowed for the discussion of highly sensitive and taboo issues, thereby 'bringing inside out'. This is not to say that humour can be put in combination with absolutely anything. On the contrary, care must be taken to ensure that humour-based outreach remains culturally sensitive and specific. However, humour can provide a framework for the discussion of issues that are ordinarily taboo. We contend then that the potential of humour itself is universal, as it allows individuals to say the unsayable, while the content and delivery required to do this are culturally specific.

The creation of a literal vicinity of laughter – using a physical place where comedians and participants were present and close to each other – was critical for establishing the space in which sensitive subject matter could be discussed. The format was also positively received by the regional Timap staff, and was compatible with the format and information they wanted to communicate to the community. Noting not only the responses from participants, but also the cognitive, physiological and social benefits of laughter, 'applied humor' outreach could be expanded to activities where people are attempting to convey serious information about interpersonal conflict. Indeed, as noted to the research team by the Makeni comedians, 'the long-term effect [of laughing] changes attitudes'.[21] A sustained 'applied humor' approach to SGBV – or other areas involving sensitive subject matter – could therefore be central in making the difficult transition from disseminating information and raising consciousness to producing positive changes in behaviour.

This is of course not to say that humour is the catch-all solution to resolving challenges. While there is potential for opening up discussions about social transformation, we also recognize humour has limits, both in its capacity to 'speak' and open up conversations, and in the extent to which it can address broader societal structure and attitudes. Rather, we want to emphasize that humour is a starting point for opening up discussions *about* these broader legal and structural changes, as well as the attitudes and perspectives about women. Furthermore, we also acknowledge there are issues that simply are not humorous. In Sierra Leone, for example, participants made clear that secret societies were not 'funny' or to be discussed in a humorous manner. Thus, while the use and content of humour is culturally specific, so too are its limits.

To a certain extent, there is also an element of intended incongruity in the fields brought together in this interdisciplinary research team (anthropology, law, modern languages, and nursing). On one level, the team results from an attempt to think creatively about new ways to address SGBV as an urgent international issue that does not derive from a single phenomenon that can be treated in isolation by any single discipline. And yet a broad 'interdisciplinary' approach to human problems is a centuries-old feature of humanism, which welcomes apparent incongruity between culture and science, and recognizes 'the value of art in producing uncommon effects' not available to a mono-disciplinary approach (Sommer 2008). Thus, the use of humour and cultural performance is a return to an interdisciplinary way of approaching health and interpersonal care rather than an invention of it.

Indeed, to return to the idea of humour as 'Janus-faced': rather than rejecting violence as entirely antithetical to health and social justice, we suggest a productive way of acknowledging that humour and violence are intimately and indeterminately interconnected. If Janus represents the two-faced duplicity of humour, the logical response to that duplicity is to point humour in the direction of progressive aims, in this case outreach, reflection, and social cohesion. Thus, applied academic research can position humour to look away from violence, even while continuing to acknowledge and investigate the intimate, complex relationship that exists between the two forces.

Acknowledgements

The authors are extremely grateful to Stella, Juliet, Dominic and Samson at the Makeni Timap for Justice office for their support and commitment to the success of the project, which were vital to its preparation and implementation. We warmly thank the three members of the Makeni Professional Comedians for their engagement with the project, and for the energy and humour they brought to their performance. Thanks are also due to those who provided technical assistance and catering at the workshop. We especially wish to acknowledge and thank the people who attended the workshop and who spoke afterwards in focus groups and interviews. For candid and constructive suggestions on draft versions of this article, thank you to Lisa Downing and other members of the Modern Languages Reading Group at the University of Birmingham. We are also grateful to the two anonymous reviewers who provided very helpful comments at the submission stage.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

Funding

This project was funded by a Global Challenges Research Fund grant from the Institute of Global Innovation at the University of Birmingham.

Notes

1. These and other projects were developed by the Norwegian Students' and Academics' International Assistance Fund (SAIH) (2014). The aim of Radi-Aid is 'to challenge the perceptions around issues of poverty and development, to change the way fundraising campaigns communicate, and to break down dominating stereotypical representations'.
2. Thirty-five per cent of women worldwide have experienced either physical and/or sexual intimate partner violence or sexual violence by a non-partner (not including sexual harassment) at some point in their lives […] Some national studies show that up to 70% of women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence from an intimate partner in their lifetime (UN Women 2019).
3. Timap addresses intra-community breaches of rights (e.g. domestic violence, land disputes) as well as justice issues between people and their authorities (e.g. abuse of authority, failures in service delivery, corruption). The paralegals are supported and supervised by lawyers. In severe and intractable cases, the lawyers employ litigation and high-level advocacy to address injustices which the paralegals cannot handle on their own. The program strives to solve clients' justice problems through the most appropriate means, whether it be community mediation or the magistrate court. The program adopts a synthetic orientation towards Sierra Leone's dualist legal structure, engaging and seeking to improve both formal and customary institutions.
4. For more information, please see: University of Birmingham Humanities and Social Sciences Ethical Review Committee, application ERN_19-0042.
5. This was revoked in June 2019, with a bill addressing the 2012 sexual offences act.
6. In 1995, Sierra Leone adopted the Beijing Platform for Action, and the country submits an annual report to the UN General Assembly on progress made on women and children's rights. Sierra Leone has also ratified several gender-specific international instruments including the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Violence Against Women (CEDAW), the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and Peoples' Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol), and the Child Rights Convention. These documents, along with strong advocacy from civil society organizations (such as Timap for Justice), have paved the way for domestic legislation that addresses SGBV in Sierra Leone.
7. For example, the Ordinances for the Protection of Women and Girls (1927) and the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (1926).
8. The Local Courts Act (2011) incorporates local courts into the Judiciary of Sierra Leone, with appointment responsibilities.
9. Focus group, Pate Bana Marenk, 1 May 2019.
10. Interview, Pate Bana Marenk, 2 May 2019.
11. Interview, Makeni, 30 April 2019.
12. Focus group, Pate Bana Marenk, 2 May 2019.
13. Interview, Pate Bana Marenk, 2 May 2019.
14. Interview, Pate Bana Marenk, 2 May 2019.
15. Interview, Makeni, 30 April.
16. Sam Holdsworth, Clowns Without Borders UK.
17. Interview, Makeni, 30 April 2019.
18. Interview, Makeni, 30 April 2019.
19. Focus group, Pate Bana Marenk, 2 May 2019.
20. Interview, Pate Bana Marenk, 2 May 2019.
21. Interview, Makeni, 30 April 2019.

References

Addyman, C. 2020. *The Laughing Baby*. Unbound.

Afolabi, T. 2017. "Theatre and Participation: Towards a Holistic Notion of Participation." *Applied Theatre Research* 5 (2): 67–82.

Bains, G., L. Berks, N. Daher, E. Lohman, E. Schwab, J. Petrofsky, and P. Deshpande. 2014. "The Effect of Humour on Short-Term Memory in Older Adults: A New Component for Whole Person Wellness." *Advanced Mind Body Medicine* 28 (2): 16–24.

BBC News. 2019. "Sierra Leone Declares Emergency over Rape and Sexual Assault." February 8. https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-47169729.

Berger, P. 2014. *Redeeming Laugher: The Comic Dimension of Human Experience*. 2nd ed. Berlin: De Gruyter.
Bolten, C. 2012. "'We Have Been Sensitized': Ex-Combatants, Marginalization, and Youth in Postwar Sierra Leone." *American Anthropologist* 114 (3): 496–508.
Bourke, J. 2000. *An Intimate History of Killing: Face-to-Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare*. London: Granta Books.
Breton, A. 1968. *Signe Ascendant [1948; Ascendant Sign]*. Paris: Flammarion.
Chinyowa, K. 2009. "Theatrical Performance as Technology: Drama in Aids Education (DramAidE) in South Africa." *NJ Drama Australia Journal* 32 (1): 67–81.
Chinyowa, K. 2014. "Re-imagining Boal Through the Theatre of the Oppressor." In *Applied Drama/ Theatre as Social Intervention in Conflict and Post-conflict Contexts*, edited by H. Barnes and M-H. Coetzee, 2–18. Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
Diang'a, R., C. Kebaya, and W. Mwai. 2015. "Community Theatre and Development Practices in the Nyanza Region of Kenya." *Journal of Pan African Studies* 8 (6): 107–121.
Downe, P. J. 1999. "Laughing When it Hurts: Humor and Violence in the Lives of Costa Rican Prostitutes." *Women's Studies International Forum* 22 (1): 63–78.
Edwards, J., and R. Graulund. 2013. *Grotesque*. New York: Routledge.
Enria, L. 2019. "The Ebola Crisis in Sierra Leone: Mediating Containment and Engagement in Humanitarian Emergencies." *Development and Change* 50 (6): 1602–1623.
Ewu, J. 2007. "Crossing the *Zaure*: Theatre for Development and Women's Empowerment in Northern Nigeria." *African Performance Review* 1 (2–3): 75–97.
Ferme, M. 2001. *The Underneath of Things: Violence, History and the Everyday in Sierra Leone*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Fitzmaurice, S., M.-H. Coetzee, S. Forcer, A. Forna, S. Koroma, L. Martin in Conjunction with NGOs Timap for Justice (Sierra Leone), and Clowns Without Borders South Africa. 2021. *AHRC Scoping Grant (£148,565). Performing Arts and Social Violence: Innovating Research Approaches to Sexual and Gender-Based Violence in the Global South*.
Flynn, A., and J. Tinius. 2015. "Reflecting on Political Performance: Introducing Critical Perspectives." In *Anthropology, Theatre and Development: The Transformative Potential of Performance*, edited by A. Flynn and J. Tinius, 1–32. London: Palgrave MacMillan.
Frankl, V. 1984. *Man's Search for Meaning: An Introduction to Logotherapy*. New York: Simon & Schuster.
Goldstein, D. 2003. *Laughter out of Place: Race, Class. Violence, and Sexuality in a Rio Shantytown*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
Greene, V. 2019. "'Deplorable' Satire: Alt-Right Memes, White Genocide Tweets, and Redpilling Normies." *Studies in American Humour* 5 (1): 31–69.
Hernann, A. 2016. "Joking Through Hardship: Humor and Truth-Telling among Displaced Timbuktians." *African Studies Review* 59 (1): 57–76.
Hughes, K. 2018. "Innovation. Can Stories Help to Save Lives?" Blogs from Doctors Without Borders (MSF). https://blogs.msf.org/bloggers/kate/innovation-can-stories-help-save-lives-0.
Ibrahim, A. 2019. "The Bondo Society as a Political Tool: Examining Cultural Expertise in Sierra Leone from 1961 to 2018." *Laws* 8 (3): 1–12.
Lavelle, M., C. Howes, P. Healey, and R. McCabe. 2018. "Are We Having a Laugh? Conversational Laughter in Schizophrenia." *Proceedings of the Workshop on Dialogue and Perception*, Gothenburg, June 14–15. http://www.christinehowes.com/papers/Lavelle.etal_DaP_2018.pdf.
Li, T. 2007. *The Will to Improve: Governmentality, Development and the Practice of Politics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press.
Long, N. 2013. *Being Malay in Indonesia: Histories, Hopes and Citizenship in the Riau Archipelago*. Copenhagen: Nordic Institute of Asian Studies Press.
Makhumula, C. 2013/2014. "Participatory Dramaturgy in Theatre for Development." *Journal of Humanities (Zomba)* 23: 109–123.
Manninen, S., L. Tuominen, R. Dunbar, T. Karjalainen, J. Hirvonen, E. Arponen, R. Hari, I. Jaaskelainen, M. Sams, and L. Nummenmaa. 2017. "Social Laughter Triggers Endogenous Opioid Release in Humans." *Journal of Neuroscience* 37 (25): 6125–6131.
Mbembe, A. 2001. *On the Postcolony*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
McGettigan, C., E. Walsh, R. Jessop, Z. Agnew, D. Sauter, E. Warren, and S. Scott. 2015. "Individual Differences in Laughter Perception Reveal Roles for Mentalizing and Sensorimotor Systems in the Evaluation of Emotional Authenticity." *Cerebral Cortex* 25 (1): 246–257.

Merry, S. 2006. "Transnational Human Rights and Local Activism: Mapping the Middle." *American Anthropologist* 108 (1): 38–51.
Merton, P. 2015. *Only When I Laugh: A Memoir*. London: Random House.
Mosse, D. 2013. "The Anthropology of International Development." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42: 227–246.
Moyo, C., and N. Sibanda. 2020. "Applied Performance as a Space to Address Issues Affecting Girls and Women in Zimbabwe: A Case Study of Rachel 19." In *The Routledge Companion to Applied Performance*, edited by T. Prentki and A. Breed, 331–340. Abingdon: Routledge.
Neves, L., C. Cordeiro, S. Scott, S. Castro, and C. Lima. 2018. "High Emotional Contagion and Empathy are Associated with Enhanced Detection of Emotional Authenticity in Laughter." *Quarterly Journal of Experimental Psychology* 71 (11): 2355–2363.
Norwegian Students' and Academics' International Assistance Fund (SAIH). 2014. "Africa for Norway: Radi-Aid." https://www.radiaid.com/about.
Nwadigwe, C. 2012. "Theatre for Development: An Alternative Programme for Reproductive Health Communication in Urban Nigeria." *African Sociological Review* 16 (2): 102–118.
Obadare, E. 2016. *Humor, Silence and Civil Society in Nigeria*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press.
Oring, E. 2008. *Engaging Humour*. Champaign: University of Illinois Press.
Plastow, J. 2015. "Embodiment, Intellect and Emotion: Thinking About Possible Impacts of Theatre for Development in Three Projects in Africa." In *Anthropology, Theatre and Development: The Transformative Potential of Performance*, edited by A. Flynn and J. Tinius, 107–126. London: Palgrave MacMillan.
Sardinha, L., and Nájera Catalán, H. E. 2018. "Attitudes Towards Domestic Violence in 49 Low- and Middle-income Countries: A Gendered Analysis of Prevalence and Country-level Correlates." *PLoS ONE* 13 (10): e0206101. doi:10.1371/journal.pone.0206101.
Scheper-Hughes, N., and P. Bourgois. 2004. "Introduction: Making Sense of Violence." In *Violence in War and Peace: An Anthology*, edited by N. Scheper-Hughes and P. Bourgois, 1–30. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
Scott, J. 1985. *Weapons of the Weak: Everyday Forms of Peasant Resistance*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
Sommer, D. 2008. "Crisis Means Turning Point: A Manifesto for Art and Accountability." In *A Time for the Humanities: Futurity and the Limits of Autonomy*, edited by J. Bono, T. Dean, and E. Ziarek, 210–226. Fordham: Fordham University Press.
Sommer, D. 2019. "A Case for Culture." *MLA Profession* [Internet]. https://profession.mla.org/a-case-for-culture/#content.
Super, H. 2003. "Working Memory in the Primary Visual Cortex." *Archives of Neurology* 60 (6): 809–812.
Trnka, S. 2011. "Specters of Uncertainty: Violence, Humour, and the Uncanny in Indo-Fijian Communities Following the May 2000 Fiji Coup." *Ethos* 39 (3): 331–348.
UN Women. 2019. *Global Database on Violence against Women*. http://evaw-global-database.unwomen.org/en/countries/africa/sierra-leoneLifetime.
Watkins, S., A. Swidler, and T. Hannan. 2012. "Outsourcing Social Transformation: Development NGOs as Organizations." *Annual Review of Sociology* 38: 285–315.
Zelizer, C. 2010. "Laughing Our Way to Peace or War: Humour and Peacebuilding." *Journal of Conflictology* 1 (2): 10–18.