



A DISARMAMENT PROGRAM FOR WITCHES: The Prospective Politics of Antiwitchcraft, Postwarcraft, and Rebrandcraft in Sierra Leone

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A decade after its invasion by rebel forces amid 1999's infamous Operation No Living Thing in the final months of Sierra Leone's devastating civil war, Freetown was once again the site of a shocking series of battles. Mobilized squadrons descended on public sites in regimental formation. Armed figures engaged and struck their enemy with advanced technologies deployed across specialized units. Emergency medical teams tended to their wounded. Dozens of culprits were apprehended and imprisoned. Yet while these battalions claimed to serve the defense of the nation, they were neither police nor army nor international peacekeepers. Through extravagant public operations, the Sierra Leone Indigenous Traditional Healers Union (SLITHU) took upon itself the task of ridding the country of witchcraft—unearthing countless so-called witch guns, apprehending numerous reputed witches, and retraining offenders as benevolent healers.

The Union dubbed such actions a “disarmament program” for witches, consciously conjuring both Sierra Leone's recent strife and the technocratic responses imposed by the United Nations (UN) through Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration (DDR) models. As SLITHU's inimitable leader, President Alhaji Dr. Sulaiman Kabba, Field Marshal and Professor General, told me:

[In] this organization, disarmament is a separate unit. . . . The health sector, that's their own [area]. They must treat people and integrate those people. To pull them from evil. To bring them to good. The traditional healers' disarmament frees us, because we have come to help the people. If we don't begin to hold bad people here, in order to change them, we will not be able to succeed.¹

Yet Kabba did not limit his vocabulary of transformation to the buzzwords of international intervention; he also espoused the jargon of global marketing strategies. In a newspaper interview, Kabba declared the disarmament programs “our *rebranding* effort to shift the paradigm complex attitude of some malcontent persons opting to always display wicked knowledge on the innocent” (Tarawally 2012; emphasis added). Kabba further interspersed such appeals to rebranding throughout calls on his constituents to shift their public image by labeling medicines, halting sidewalk sales, or suspending bloody society initiations. With a handful of rhetorical gestures, Kabba brought into conversation the seemingly disparate spheres of esoteric tradition, peacekeeping bureaucracy, and commercial promotion.



Figure 1. A disarmament for witches led by Alhaji Dr. Sulaiman Kabba, Campbell Town, 2011. Stills from *Eye Opener*, videographer unknown, courtesy of the SLITHU archives.

In contemporary Africa, conversations about violence and recuperation cross multiple discourses, and putatively traditional healing practices—fluid products of ongoing postcolonial negotiations among diverse knowledge regimes—inherently synthesize numerous lexicons. Stacey Langwick (2015) observes that contemporary traditional medical professionals attempt to speak to multiple, changing, and often contradictory partial publics, even as their expertise is progressively margin-

alized. The SLITHU disarmament programs constituted one group's efforts to reclaim political power by mobilizing longstanding witch-finding conventions within novel idioms that addressed its publics simultaneously as patients, war survivors, citizens, patrons, and consumers.

The organization's disarmaments exhibited many qualities common to pan-African, charisma-based antiwitchcraft efforts: "a transregional and outwardly modern character" (Smith 2008, 217); the appropriation of bureaucratic and scientific language; dramatic, affective impact through haste, induced chaos, and the invasion of private spaces. Such efforts aim to remap moral geographies in contexts of unpredictable economic and social transformation (Douglas 1970; Auslander 1993). Widespread uncertainty promotes what Peter Geschiere (1997, 205) dubs "the search for new public arenas . . . to balance witchcraft's secrecy" and what Jean and John Comaroff (1999, 293) call "instruments of social divination, dramatic discourses of discovery in the public sphere." Such spectacular events serve to make visible otherwise imperceptible forms of violence—spiritual, structural, economic, environmental—while often resorting to violent tactics of their own.

The Union reframed older models of witch-finding spectacles, formerly designed to cleanse villages and sponsored by chiefs, as events targeting the whole nation and performed in the name of the government's development efforts. James Smith (2008) has shown that development discourse, perhaps counterintuitively, can promote witchcraft discourse, while Harry West (2005) has described how citizens in postwar Mozambique mobilized interpretations of sorcery and traditional medicine in their demands for better governance. Erica Caple James (2012, 52) correlates the diagnostics used by Haitians to suss out occult insecurity and those used by internationalized development projects to assess governance failures, labeling the latter "bureaucraft." We might consider *postwarcraft* a subset of *bureaucraft* designed for conflict settings and *rebrandcraft* a parallel process undertaken within global marketization. The Union's operations show that antiwitchcraft, postwarcraft, and rebrandcraft—despite their divergent ontologies and aims—share common logics of diagnosis, exposure, and transfiguration.

The play of secrecy and exposure perhaps constitutes the predominant political dynamic in the broader upper Guinea Coast region and beyond. As Mariane Ferme (2001b, 7) has observed, spaces marked by uncertainty and violence such as Sierra Leone call for a "hermeneutic of suspicion" and practices of concealment to protect oneself and one's agency. Thus those who forcibly expose such protected power both defuse it and empower themselves, as was the aim of the socialist government's Demystification Program in neighboring Guinea (McGovern 2013).

On the other hand, possessors of even the most covert power must expose it strategically to be recognized. [Sasha Newell \(2012, 1\)](#) describes how Ivorian youths reveal illusory wealth through fashion in a “dance of brands”; much like SLITHU’s occult power, the economic capital these youths flaunt is inherently dubious, but that suspicion proves immaterial to their “display of potential.” The Union drew on all these regional logics at once by revealing hidden, suspect power in order to demonstrate potential contributions to the nation-state.

Such procedures redistribute power between authorities, constituents, and experts, echoing [Geschiere’s \(1997, 9\)](#) observation that witch-finders resemble “public relations experts” in Western democracies, whose “intervention . . . loaded with esoteric knowledge, seems to remove power from the people.” The Union’s claim to state authority represented an outgrowth of African governments’ neo-liberal transformation into “para-states” (see [Geissler 2015](#)) that outsource governance to NGOs, businesses, and other agencies, often at the expense of popular welfare. Although its relations with the Sierra Leone government were tentative at best, SLITHU reproduced officials’ and experts’ efforts to consolidate power while dispersing responsibility. As the direct authority of nation-states continues to wane in the face of a variety of neoliberal forces, governments, political aspirants, and



Figure 2. Kabba (center) launches the Kenema District branch of SLITHU, Kenema, 2012.
Photo by Samuel Mark Anderson.

related organizations increasingly manufacture revelatory spectacles that diagnose hidden ills and proscribe proprietary cures in order to hail various forms of financial and emotional investment.

Kabba's synthesis of witch-hunting, DDR procedures, and brand management potentially reveals further congruities. One might argue that Kabba was simply throwing concepts together and seeing which ones stuck. Indeed, in interviews and speeches, his verbose and seemingly extemporaneous pronouncements skimmed across discursive fields from biomedicine to development to commerce to religion—all ultimately steered toward justifying Union activities or, more often, his own supremacy. Yet to dismiss such sweeping conjunctions as mere bombast would be to discount Kabba's skill for integrating local and foreign languages of power, a vital art in contemporary Sierra Leone. Moreover, Kabba's hybridizations, however quixotic, are in themselves revealing ethnographic projects, attempts to explain disparate cultural regimes to each other. Beyond representing another case of witchcraft's modernity, his provocation articulates a profound correlation between the strategies of seemingly opposed models of social transformation. Yet I also aim to push his analogy further to expose the shared fragility undermining those same models.

As a foreign researcher with presumptive access to external resources, I too was hailed by SLITHU. I first heard of the organization on a 2010 pilot study when I chanced on an herbalist posted below a banner promoting the Union's upcoming official launch that had been strategically hung near Freetown's downtown banks and government offices. During my fieldwork from 2011 to 2013, I followed the organization's exploits when I could amid more methodical study of provincial performances. By then, SLITHU had largely discontinued the disarmament spectacles, but Kabba introduced many projects with similar objectives, including launch events in the provinces, literacy programs for members, and the inauguration of a curiously named "allopathic" clinic that purportedly synthesized traditional and Western medicine. I also attended a number of Union assemblies, the first of which hosted numerous speeches and demonstrations of occult power clearly orchestrated to cultivate me as a potential patron. Such appeals continued as I interviewed Union executives, along with former members and other healers. Yet I fear I ultimately disappointed their hopes for investment due to my modest finances and my skepticism, indicating to some extent the contingency of their aspirations.

I am more concerned here with SLITHU's logic than with the reception of its acts, although controversies indicate the tenuousness of its approach. The ter-

rains of witchcraft battles, by their nature invisible and contested, invite suspicion, and detractors accused SLITHU of inventing the very problems it claimed to cure. Critics, many of them defectors from the Union, contended that Kabba accomplished nothing but his own enrichment from dues and donations. The disarmaments, they argued, presented no more than staged inventions using wrapped umbrella handles for props, as true witch guns are invisible. The hypervisual operations thus simultaneously substantiated *and* undermined SLITHU's competence. The question of whether or not the heterogenous Sierra Leonean public believed Kabba's claims seemed as inconclusive as questions of witchcraft belief more broadly. Contemporary Sierra Leonean understandings of witchcraft appear more often defined by doubt and contingency than belief (cf. [Bubandt 2014](#)): anything is possible, little is certain. In my admittedly unsystematic experience, the Union did little to shift common conceptions of witchcraft or traditional medicine. Outside of Union events, most Sierra Leoneans I questioned had only vague ideas about the institution and continued to select healers based on reputation rather than affiliation. While the Union's dramatic actions did win the attention of a number of local elites from television personalities to journalists to the president of Sierra Leone himself, such recognition never resulted in substantial support. Its calls for confidence unheeded by either the power brokers they courted for resources or the broader public they courted for advocacy, SLITHU began to slip into irrelevance even before the 2014–2015 Ebola epidemic disrupted the organization's activities and any authority it had accrued.

The Union's maneuvers nonetheless marshaled new possibilities and new publics, however briefly. Following Kabba's example, this article employs the successive lenses of witch-hunting, DDR implementation, and brand management to explicate a logic of *politics by prospection*—a logic that may well inform other spectacular promises of radical social transformation, from Pentecostal crusades to protest movements to populist rallies. Where power and suffering are increasingly diffused within and beyond the boundaries of community, individuals and institutions stage events that probe invisible terrains, dramatically expose sources of affliction, and ostensibly enact personal and social change. These spectacles represent a kind of aspirational governance that seeks out resources and labor in other social strata and hopes to generate new forms of intimacy between them. Such projects beget novel effects yet also prove inherently precarious, dependent on the efforts of those they claim to serve and predicated on an unstable foundation of trust—all too often code for a lack of real choice, whether over the persons, processes, or products in one's life.

ANTIWITCHCRAFT

The Union marshaled dozens of members, each of whose legitimacy as an agent of transformation was rooted in a different configuration of inherited skills, inspired visions, and ad hoc inventions. Given the variety and hyperindividualism of local healing practices, President Kabba's most impressive ability was perhaps his capacity to unite disparate actors and their often conflicting knowledge systems around a single project. Though largely rooted in combinations of herbs ("leaf medicine") and Islamic scripture ("book medicine"), available antiwitchcraft remedies are as diverse as the many forms of invisible violence they combat and the varied geographic, temporal, and linguistic (Krio, Temne, Mende, Limba, and other) milieus in which they are deployed. Thus a multiplicity of strategies became available to the Union once it framed its work as neither chiefdom-level nor ethnic tradition, but as national project. It would be futile to catalog all the practices from which SLITHU draws inspiration, due both to their breadth and to their continuous innovation. Yet some dynamics are notable.

Beyond its inherent antisociality, witchcraft is as mysterious in Sierra Leone as anywhere, reflecting the difficulty of classifying invisible evil, as well as incrimination risked from knowing too much about it (Geschiere 1997, 57–60). In Krio, *wich* might refer either to one who deploys invisible evil or a substance or spirit within such a person possessing its own powers, agency, and desires.² As an adjective, it might further reference any extraordinary power granted by such a spirit; most frequently evoked is the *wich yai* (witch eye) allowing the perception of hidden realms, comparable to the Temne *ε-for t-ayle* (four eyes; Shaw 2002, 92). Kabba embraced and exacerbated the semantic slipperiness of the Krio term *wich* so as to encompass a wide variety of invisible forces.³

Histories of exploitative violence have inspired violent responses from antiwitchcraft practices, directed both externally and internally. Witchcraft accusations multiplied amid the transatlantic slave trade, as social ties unraveled and accused witches and their families were sold into bondage (Shaw 2002, 211–18). In apparent contrast to such extroverted violence are more private practices of individual introspection. Michael Jackson (1975) noted a relative absence of witchcraft accusations but a prevalence of confessions amid Kuranko communities before the war. It was left to villagers, largely women, to do the introspective labor of discovering witch spirits inside themselves and confessing so as to invoke broader social healing.

Witch-finding spectacles merge accusation and confession. In one sensational example, the missionary Anthony Gittins (1987), working in Mende communities

in the 1970s, described dramatic witch-finding spectacles conducted by a flamboyant *kemamɔi* (witch-finder; literally, “one who shows or demonstrates”). Invited by a paramount chief at the request of villagers plagued by inordinate child deaths, the *kemamɔi* engaged in three nights of revelatory exposure of power objects that were then ritually destroyed, exploding in blood and apparent baby parts. Yet at the moment the villagers were most agitated, the *kemamɔi* enjoined them to feed and clothe penitent offenders and tend to broken relationships. From Gittins’s (1987, 183–202) perspective, these events promoted conscientious reciprocity, and even discounting such functionalism, his fervid text attests to the *kemamɔi*’s effective use of spectacle to captivate a culturally diverse audience, including Gittins himself. Such disruptive dramas remain in use by contemporary rural witch-finders and clearly underpinned SLITHU’s disarmament programs.

Of special concern in Sierra Leone’s national imaginary are witch guns, weapons causing inexplicable illness and misfortune while reflecting particular violences of modernity (Shaw 2002, 208). While every practitioner I interviewed recognized witch guns, their descriptions varied. Dancers and drummers use herbal injections to defend against witch guns fired during their acts by jealous colleagues with an audible pop and an acrid smell like gunpowder. One herbalist argued that witch guns are only used by initiatory societies to censure insubordinate members. Another distinguished three types, with effects ranging from sickness to instant death. Yet all conceptions of witch guns focused on the unknown identity of the assailant, participating in broader unease about potential violence arising from urban anonymity and dangerous technologies (cf. Bonhomme 2012).⁴ If, as Rosalind Shaw (2002, 265) suggests, the witch gun arose in tandem with the violences of the slave trade and colonialism, such fearsome power was echoed by an explosion of terrifying analogues in more recent warfare. Such revitalized witch technologies served as a logical focus of SLITHU’s disarming movements.

These key elements—the unstable meaning of *witch*, its historical implication with other forms of violence, its potential to inspire both spectacle and introspection, and the category of witch gun technology—served as the foundation for Kabba’s amalgamation of local witch-finding practices. Kabba’s synthesis was by no means free of controversy, but it was ambitious and elastic enough to attract the imaginations of a wide swath of healers and herbalists.

SLITHU

Sierra Leone has undertaken some nominal efforts to manage local medicine, but such attempts have remained limited in comparison to other African

states (cf. [Last and Chavunduka 1988](#); [Langwick 2015](#)). When Sierra Leone emerged from civil war in 2002, its medical conditions ranked among the worst in the world, and progress since has proven disappointing. Postwar reconstruction strained the state's ability to provide health solutions for its citizens, so it has farmed out responsibility for medical services to NGOs and other associations. So-called traditional medicine could serve as a preexisting and cost-effective source for health solutions, but the government has made only symbolic gestures toward oversight and promotion. Thus, SLITHU aimed to fill the void.

In 2003, under the aegis of the [World Health Organization's \(2002\)](#) Traditional Medicine Strategy, Fourah Bay College professor Babara M. S. Turay founded the Sierra Leone Traditional Healers Association (SLENTHA) within the Ministry of Health and Sanitation, expressly to recognize the affordable, available, and holistic ministrations of traditional practitioners and local herbs. Yet following the All People's Congress (APC) party's election in 2007, SLENTHA, a project sponsored by the previous administration, lost government support. At the same time, SLENTHA members, frustrated that resources did not match earlier promises, blamed Turay for the alleged misappropriation of funds. In 2008, many broke



Figure 3. SLITHU launching ceremony overseen by President Ernest Bai Koroma (lower row), National Stadium, Freetown, 2010. Videographer unknown, courtesy of the SLITHU archives.

away to form a new organization, the Sierra Leone Indigenous Traditional Healers Union.

The Union began to make dramatic new claims for its mission and mandate as a new leader consolidated power. President Kabba was born in Foredugu, Port Loko District, where his father, also a scholar and healer, spurred his Qur'anic studies. Kabba traveled to his grandfather's Mandinka homeland in Kankan, Guinea, for additional education, and he has claimed further training in Ghana, Nigeria, India, Syria, China, and France. Before returning to Sierra Leone, he worked for President Yahah Jammeh of The Gambia, to whom he credits his respect for traditional African culture.⁵ Courted for his resources and energy, Kabba was duly elected by the SLITHU membership, although this represented a minuscule fraction of the constituents over whom the Union claimed jurisdiction. In 2010, he orchestrated a spectacular launching ceremony during which Sierra Leone President Ernest Bai Koroma presented him with a staff of authority akin to that of a paramount chief, enabling Kabba to claim that the post was his for life. His titles—President, Field Marshal, Professor, Doctor—bestowed by his followers rather than achieved through institutions, further tie him to medical, military, and governmental power (cf. [Luedke 2006](#)). Perhaps inclined toward his own expertise, Kabba refocused Union activities from the scholarly documentation of herbal medications to the sensational expulsion of witchcraft ills.

Operations

The Union began disarmament programs in early 2009, performing regularly for the next two years and more sporadically afterward. Dressed in charm-laden cotton shirts rendered bullet- and witchcraft-proof and popularly known by the Limba name *ronko* ([Richards 2009](#)), healers assembled at chosen sites with instruments of ritual cleansing: amulets, brooms, horns, and mirrors with which to see the invisible. Disarmaments began with a “charity” or sacrifice, determined through prayer, which might consist of groundnuts, eggs, coconut, leaves, or other comestibles distributed within the community before disarmament troops could enter a site. Fanning out through fields, forests, and markets, healers moved in formation under the direction of a handful of commanders, as discerned by Yankain Marrah, SLITHU's welfare chairlady:

We have five types of ceremonial [healers]. Some people can see [witch weapons], but they can't remove them. Some people are there who can remove, but they can't see. Some people remove and see. Some people don't remove,

but only spoil [the bad medicine]. Once you see them spoil [witch weapons], you can hold them and try to use them, but they won't do anything anymore. Some people call out bad things, they call and they command them to fall.

When healers in the disarmament division found invisible powers, they would “pull” them, risking seizures and coma in the process. Another team of herbalists stood by with medicines to wake and heal their fallen comrades. Leaves held in bottles were capable of keeping an herbalist standing even while holding an armed witch gun. Other teams stood on watch, using witch eyes to spot attacks before they happened.



Figure 4. SLITHU members search for witch weapons, Campbell Town, 2011.
Stills from *Eye Opener*, videographer unknown, courtesy of the SLITHU archives.

Sometimes a witch would bolt, forcing the squad to pursue. The witch might have taken on a disguise or changed gender, becoming a woman and unable to change back to a man until assisted by SLITHU members. Witches were then detained; at the time I asked, one SLITHU member claimed the Union was currently holding forty witches. Without access to offenders, I could not assess their demographics, but witches highlighted in the media tended to be young men, suggesting several overlapping factors: the continued marginalization of youth, the reproduction of male-centered templates of ex-combatant disarmament, and retribution for the wartime potential of youths to “jump ahead” of elders’ traditional authority through visions and esoteric defenses in what [Mike McGovern \(2013, 174\)](#) calls the “entrepreneurial capture” of authority. The accused were fed and lodged until cured of their witch and rehabilitated back into the community. Welfare Chairlady Marrah argued: “Some of their people don’t take care of them, so we also have to

feed them, because you're not going to host someone and not feed them." Small children apprehended as witches might be taken to school. Many Union members claimed privileged positions as redeemed witches, specialists who now used their witch eye to serve the country's good rather than selfish profit.



Figure 5. Kabba (upper left) and SLITHU members display and explain a variety of divination tools and witch weapons, including a “witch plane” (center), Campbell Town and Marampa, 2011. Stills from *Eye Opener*, videographer unknown, courtesy of the SLITHU archives.

Perhaps most vital to the event's impact was the revelation of material objects. From tree trunks or thickets or the mud underneath cooking fires, various items were unearthed, from witch guns to witch planes, the latter appearing as small agglomerations of pipe, string, and stones with crude helicopter rotors (cf. [Geschiere 1997](#), 3; [Shaw 2002](#), 202, 209). The materialization of what had been largely considered invisible weapons proved highly controversial among the broader community of Sierra Leonean healers. But these tangible objects appeared essential for binding SLITHU's programs to the civil war and its unresolved consequences.

POSTWARCRAFT

From 1991 to 2002, Sierra Leone was devastated by a protracted rebellion whose particular forms of brutality often erupted into international headlines in the form of child soldiers, blood diamonds, and amputations, as well as “juju jour-

nalism" (Shaw 2003) that disparaged and exoticized local forms of ammunition and defense. That said, wartime, as a period of social stress and hyperintensive movements of military and refugees, did cultivate occult beliefs. Esoteric technologies inspired by local hunters were appropriated by both rebels and the progovernment militias of the Civil Defense Forces (CDF)—amulets, elixirs, and vestments bestowing powers of bullet-proofing, teleportation, and transfiguration (Ferme 2001a; Hoffman 2011). Alongside such neutral defenses circulated more indisputably nefarious forces. Witchcraft and cannibalism were weapons ascribed to many international fighters: Burkinabés who fought alongside the first wave of rebels, Liberians who replaced them, and Nigerian Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) troops who restored the government to power (Hoffman 2011, 249). At the end of the war, many felt that unruly and imported occult violence persisted. Kabba collapsed residual, unchecked tradition with what he termed "wicked people":

In that time [war], we had many societies working in Sierra Leone. We had Kamajor, Gbethi, Ronsho, Kapra, Tamaboro [various ethnic hunters' associations mobilized under the CDF] etc. etc., all under *tradition*. But that's no good. We believe that we should form one umbrella for tradition, rather than everybody forming many different things under the name of tradition. If you do that, you will invite wicked people.

The Union's dramatic exercises aimed to contain invisible powers that remained unregulated.

Visible weapons of war were deactivated through internationalist peacekeeping models. Disarmament, Demobilization, and Reintegration programs originated in Central America in 1989, and they quickly became the prevalent three-step recipe to pacify irregular armed forces. Facilitated by the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, DDR ran from 1999 to 2004. In total, 42,330 weapons and 1.2 million pieces of ammunition were said to have been collected from 75,490 fighters (United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone 2005). While statistically successful in disarmament, the process largely passed the responsibility for demobilization and reintegration to local communities. As in other DDR implementations, administrators emphasized certain postwar transitions at the expense of others, and risked remarginalizing ex-combatants by providing insufficient or untenable skills training (Knight and Özerdem 2004; Theidon 2007).

On the cumulative national level, DDR potentially bore more significant ramifications. [Danny Hoffman \(2005\)](#) argues that DDR events provided stages for renarrating combatants' agency. They were also highly visible manifestations of the restored state and its international backers ([Knight and Özerdem 2004](#), 506), especially through widely publicized ceremonial bonfires of arms. The process not only reestablished the state's monopoly on violence ([Munive and Jakobsen 2012](#), 361) but also presumed a rewriting of the ex-combatants' social contract with national and international authorities ([Knight and Özerdem 2004](#), 506). Whatever its effects on individual lives, DDR itself constituted a highly visible promise made between the international community, the national government, and a newly re-configured citizenry.

Just as the United Nations and the Sierra Leonean state regained a monopoly on physical violence by negotiating the surrender of combatants through DDR processes, SLITHU sought a monopoly on invisible violence by negotiating the surrender of witches through discursively identical programs. Yet the reproduction of DDR also reproduced its shortcomings. The Union mirrored DDR's deferral of responsibility for long-term social transformation as former witches and freelance healers were pressured to surrender independence for a promise of future benefits that ultimately failed to fully materialize.

State

Discursive affiliations were not the only markers of SLITHU's connections with the state. Its performed regimentation evoked the state's most clearly formidable aspect: the military. Moreover, it situated its operations in arenas of state power, thus casting the state as its primary client and beneficiary. Witch-finding took place at state headquarters—army barracks, police posts, and even the State House—or sites of heavy state infrastructure, most notably the national airport. The Union also marched into crucial nodes of the informal circulation of goods and individuals, such as the market at Upgun Turntable, the target of their first operation in 2009.⁶ By bringing their national operation to such sites of unregulated exchange, they carried the state into sectors previously considered beyond its reach.

The Union also invited the state to participate in its operations, most frequently via the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Police and military served as bodyguards and, crucially, as crowd control, their presence both escalating and containing the presence of spectators. Ostensibly, these agents could do what the healers could not, resort to physical violence, while the healers could do what the state

agents could not, identify sources of invisible danger. Once witches were apprehended, SLITHU turned to state models for censure and punishment, as Kabba conceded:

I only arrest you, I send you to the chief . . . or I send you to the police if you killed someone. I make a statement, you make a statement. They send you to Pademba Road [Prison]. We go to court. I testify that this is a thing that kills, this doesn't kill, this is such-and-such. You accept it, and it's left to the government. Nothing's left to me. It's not my business. Me, I've done my work. But law doesn't permit me. I don't have a jail, I don't have a cell, I don't—the law doesn't permit me to do anything. Because we have human rights. . . . The power invested in me, and His Excellency the President Dr. Ernest Bai Koroma, and the government of the people of Sierra Leone, now that's what we work with. I don't have any different power.⁷

According to Kabba, cooperation with the prison system reifies the ties between SLITHU and the state and bolsters each agent's claims to righteousness.

Stage

Union activities offered a ready source of news that tied together cultural, political, and public health issues. The local media regularly reiterated the numbers captured in raids, though without necessarily verifying them independently. Each executive meeting I attended was covered by a different reporter for a different newspaper, all having apparent long-term and cordial relations with the executive council. Both the publicity of spectacle and the intimacy of individual relationships substantiated SLITHU's authority.

Among the figures most eager to promote SLITHU was Sarankay Bayoh of the Sierra Leone Broadcasting Corporation. Bayoh shadowed SLITHU through televised correspondent reports. She interviewed participants, bystanders, and even those confessing to witchcraft, while eschewing debate by rarely introducing critical or skeptical views. The title of her program, *Eye Opener*, attests to visual and revelatory epistemes uniting witch-finding and investigative journalism.

Bayoh was an iconic example of the modern cosmopolitan woman reporter. She often sported pantsuits, the quasi-masculine formal wear of the international elite that women rarely wear on Freetown's streets. Her charisma met her fashion with aggressive professionalism conforming to global models of television journalism. Both Bayoh and SLITHU exploited the juxtaposition with each other's

embodiment of the modern/traditional divide. By sharing the same screen, they reconfirmed boundaries of difference, but also amply demonstrated their powerful abilities to cross those boundaries. Bayoh's journalistic skill was rendered incisive enough to allow her to access the secret and rarified practices of African tradition; SLITHU's esoteric power was rendered influential enough to be recognized and honored by the most modern of actors.



Figure 6. Sarankay Bayoh, Grafton, Campbell Town, and Marampa, 2011.
Stills from *Eye Opener*, videographer unknown, courtesy of the SLITHU archives.

Another incident involving the media and the state suggests how SLITHU's practices could be interpreted and accepted by Freetown's evangelical Christians. In early 2014, the controversial newspaper publisher Sylvia Blyden, then serving as special executive assistant to President Koroma, detailed with photographic evidence Kabba's expert dissection of a "witchcraft arsenal" that had "dropped out of thin air" at her residence, exposed by her own powerful faith:

Christianity causing [sic] the metaphysical to be forced into the physical. My house is deeply consecrated with Holy Ghost fire of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. . . . Dr. Kabba can be contacted to elaborate on the type of WITCH, EVIL, BLACK MAGIC arsenal that was launched on my house that night. We called him to be the one to dismantle the witch weapon because they (traditionalists) know best about how these things are built and what purposes they serve. Us Christians do not know and since the world needs to know what was built, launched and for what purpose it was sent on my house, it was important to call him in. (Blyden 2014)

Shared logics of revelation and expertise thus potentially transcended religious differences within the nation-state.

Performing the State

By enacting its disarmament programs in public spaces and the broader public sphere, SLITHU performed the state.⁸ Postcolonial governments often call on expressive cultural traditions to perform the nation and thereby promote allegiance. They are less often explicitly engaged in performing the state, that is, in bringing the state into existence by enacting strategies of governance. Intriguingly, SLITHU did so not by mimicking state performance (although the presence of security personnel evoked such practices), but rather by reenacting longstanding forms of witch-finding divination *within the discourse* of the state apparatus, using terms like *disarmament*, *transparency*, and *accountability* to signal alternative explanatory paradigms. By reframing the act, SLITHU transformed its interpretation.

Yet the role SLITHU took on was more than a simple citation of government; it was a surrogation, a mirror government projected onto an invisible world, one where the processes of peace-building accomplished in the visible domain had not yet succeeded and whose lack of resolution explained the persistence of suffering on both planes of existence. Kabba and his team presented themselves as the only public servants capable of action in both realms.

Ironically, the Sierra Leonean state was also merely performing itself, using rituals, procedures, and self-professed expertise to produce conditions to host other administrations and labor pools, agencies that would supposedly enact governance in turn. This embrace of nested sovereignty (Hansen and Stepputat 2006, 307) unfortunately promotes a kind of fractal mimicry; the fact that SLITHU structured itself isomorphically to the state while the state structures itself to be enacted by organizations like SLITHU suggests the disturbing image of an infinite series of empty nesting dolls of governance, each successive tier awaiting fulfillment by international funders from one direction, and by local laborers from the other. Indeed, a certain stratum of the national economy appears consigned to civil society organizations who deploy forms of expert knowledge and continuously shifting partnerships to cover for limited means and impact. The leverage and legitimacy of such para-states and their proselytes depend on public image: in effect, their brands.

REBRANDCRAFT

As part of the Agenda for Change that brought him to office in 2007, President Ernest Bai Koroma inaugurated the Secretariat for Attitudinal and Behavioral Change (ABC). The program was meant to overcome Sierra Leone's "state of backwardness" ([Government of Sierra Leone 2008](#), 110) by changing inhabitants' mind-sets into those of productive optimists and responsible citizens.⁹ The ABC Secretariat's purview remained vague beyond media sensitization and public talks, but its repeated invocation in the public sphere proved enough to inspire discourse on the nature and necessity of personal transformation.

The Union frequently aligned itself with ABC, even though many Sierra Leoneans might have accused SLITHU members of participating in exactly the "backwardness" ABC was meant to stamp out. Medicinal and ritual practices have been vilified in Sierra Leone for more than two centuries—by missionaries aiding the foundation of Freetown, by waves of proselytizers of Christianity and Islam, and, more recently, by horror movies imported from Nigeria and Ghana. By rehabilitating witches as productive herbalists, SLITHU has reinvented traditional medicine in the image of contemporary neoliberalism, as when Kabba trumpeted SLITHU's successes:

The traditional healers have done something in this country. The traditional healers saved thousands of lives in this country. Traditional healers brought transparency and accountability in this country. . . . Traditional healers made those who feared to come to this country before, today they come to invest. We have our sisters and brothers in the diaspora, who feared to come here. Today they come. The white people feared to come here. Today they come. All the [scam artists], we arrested them because they've resolved to cheat the people who come invest in this country, and we won't allow that. All that was under tradition. And we aren't playing. Traditional healers have shown reality in this country. . . . We've shown that traditional healers, we've changed, we've arrived, we've mobilized. We've shown we are patriotic citizens.

In Kabba's telling, SLITHU's key contribution has been to recuperate Sierra Leone's modern public image and, thus, international investment.

Market principles have long found purchase in witchcraft discourse through "occult economies" ([Comaroff and Comaroff 1999](#), 284) organized either to enrich via perversions of the norms of exchange or to combat such supernatural preda-

tion. Witches often lurk in markets, they trade in human body parts, and throughout Sierra Leone, they are said to meet in rotating credit associations that travesty longstanding village-level cooperatives (Shaw 2002, 208). Kabba's embrace of the idioms of rebranding thus aligns with historical conceptions of exchange and value.

Brand as Performance

Sierra Leoneans are hungry for languages of transformation, especially those associated with global power, and many deploy the word *brand* metaphorically for any form of promotion (cf. Pier 2011, 416). The term *development* is an obvious precursor that still maintains cachet in Sierra Leone's aid-based economy. Yet the language of branding may prove even more potent, as it is tied to the iconography of the global marketplace, "an ever more powerful sovereign force" (Hansen and Stepputat 2006, 309).

Brands—and their qualities such as reputation and consumer loyalty—have increasingly been interpreted as a predominant source of value, eclipsing that of the commodities they purportedly represent (Manning 2010). The detachment of brands from products exacerbates "entanglements of branding" (Banet-Weiser 2012, 7) and their multiple confusions: of material products with immaterial affects; of authenticity with fabrication; of individuality with mass production; and crucially, of the labor of production with the labor of consumption (Manning 2010, 36). Brands serve as the organizing principle mediating and consolidating forms of consumer labor, from loyalty to promotion (Foster 2007, 717). Brands achieve this displacement of labor through performativity, in the Austinian sense of action through utterance, often by constructing the very desire the brand claims to satisfy (Nakassis 2012, 635). A brand's various utterances can further instill a sense of responsibility to act in a manner properly representing an identity, from Nike's call to "just do it" to Save the Children's "kick polio out of Sierra Leone." Recent Heineken ads promoting their clear green bottles near Freetown government buildings playfully enjoined the reader: "It's good to be transparent." Such calls of duty represent a contract between the user and the brand owner to mutually support a set of aspirational qualities, from fashionability to healthfulness.

Marketing strategies of so-called cultural branding have appropriated anthropological and sociological theory to argue that successful branding derives from "performing a myth that addresses acute contradiction in society," where the consumers' task is "ritual activity to experience the myth when using the product" (Holt 2004, 14). An acknowledged goal of such models is to enter into zones once naively considered beyond market influence, including culture and tradition. In



Figure 7. SLITHU promotional billboard, on which Kabba appears with various national and international figures, including Ernest Bai Koroma (center) and the author (far lower left), Kenema, 2012. Photo by Samuel Mark Anderson.



Figure 8. Herbal medicines displayed at a SLITHU event in support of the government's Free Health Care Initiative, Calaba Town, 2011. Photo by Samuel Mark Anderson.

Africa, both marketers and practitioners of local traditions initiate such interpenetration through the sponsorship of festivals (see [Pier 2011](#)) and the establishment of intellectual property rights for cultural products, markers of identity, and ethnicity itself ([Comaroff and Comaroff 2009](#)).

Kabba welcomed paradigms that shifted consumer loyalty from tradition to branding, and thus demonstrated some ways in which Sierra Leonean rebranding discourses played out in practice. He obliged healers to purchase ID cards featuring the Union logo that are still brandished throughout the country. He promoted the Union through giant billboards strategically placed in Freetown and regional centers. He advocated ingredient lists on medicines and researched pill-manufacturing technology—less to ensure customer safety, as there were no means to authenticate the medicines' composition, than to mimic the public image of marketable pharmaceuticals. He attempted to regulate seemingly chaotic practices like public initiations and informal markets that undermined the Union's reputation for transparency and order. All these efforts called on herbalists and their clients to conform to new image standards, explicitly so as to win support from potential national and international sponsors. Yet it was in the public spectacles of disarming witches that SLITHU most clearly embraced the “entanglements of branding” by generating a space in which materiality and immateriality, authenticity and fabrication, desire and responsibility became productively confused.

Brand as Governance

Kabba's use of the term *rebranding* echoes President Koroma's own frequent invocation of the “rebranding of Sierra Leone.” Beyond being one of many ways the former insurance company CEO deployed the language of business, this bid formed part of a globally accelerating effort to apply neoliberal marketing logics to statecraft. Brand states are said to operate on image and reputation, a politics of “style over substance” ([van Ham 2001](#), 3). In nations classified as developing, branding's task is to expose “bad” culture as the gap between local and foreign understanding, thus initiating a “transitional process during which local participants gain increasing clarity as to what foreign interests want from them, and adapt their customs and output accordingly” ([Aronczyk 2013](#), 162). The purpose of national representation is no longer political at all, in the sense of serving a public, but economic, attracting foreign capital and increasing marketability ([Jansen 2008](#)).

Postwar reconstruction offers an especially potent arena for national rebranding. The most visible brands across Sierra Leone—excepting perhaps bottled beverages and telecommunication networks—remain those of postwar interna-

tionalist agencies and NGOs. In recent work, [Alex Fattal \(2018\)](#) profiles Colombia's experimental DDR process that employed international marketing experts to orchestrate spectacular publicity stunts meant both to encourage rebels to disarm before the initiation of a joint peace process and to preemptively declare the war's end to the international community; [Fattal \(2018, 16–22\)](#) argues that such “brand warfare” failed rebels who defected only to be abandoned to a perpetual limbo between ostracism and reintegration. Participants in Sierra Leone's less media-savvy DDR process have likewise found themselves exposed and struggling to live up to imported, individualized rights-based values embedded in postwar rebranding.

Rebranding as governance thus entangles different publics in different ways, and the spectacular launch of a new brand unfolds variably as it hails ever more participants. The existing brand's bad reputation is *explicitly* exposed to proscribed, insider publics—shareholders in the case of corporations, stakeholders in the case of governments and NGOs. In Sierra Leone, this took the form of extensive discussions about “backwardness” and the need for “attitudinal and behavioral change.” Meanwhile, the reinvented brand is broadcast outward to broader publics, *implicitly* inverting the former brand that nonetheless still haunts it. Descriptions of Sierra Leone's “adventurous” investment opportunities and “peaceful” beaches purposefully echo and upend preconceptions of wartime. The APC's call to rebrand Sierra Leone simultaneously invited outsiders to invest and transform the country and demanded that the public transform its behavior. Both publics were thus tasked with the actual commitment of transformation.

The Union's synthesis of governance and rebranding reflected a global rapprochement between the two fields, particularly in attempts to transcend violence. Yet its integration of these spheres within antiwitchcraft discourse revealed not just shared transformative ambitions but also shared procedures and fault lines.

CONCLUSION

Antiwitchcraft, postwarcraft, and rebrandcraft share a politics oriented around spectacles of prospection. Prospecting—to use an apt metaphor tied to Sierra Leone's mineral resources and the extractive economies they inspire—evokes a quest for hidden resources across promising strata (see [Hayden 2003](#)). Authorities and experts collaborate to program spectacles of prospection designed to bring to the surface otherwise hidden resources of local labor, international capital, and further sources of value. Such spectacles serve as the engines for governance by anticipatory transfiguration.

Demands for transformation arise from experiences of affliction that do not match observed phenomena of exchange: the suffering of innocents, continued threats of physical violence, a lack of commercial traction. Explanations are found within the terrain of the invisible, “a space of imagination once dominated by the dead [and other spirits] but now shared with the technological apparatus of modernity and the mysterious value form of commodities” (Newell 2012, 162). Summoned experts initiate spectacles of prospection with acts of divination, designed to suss out sources of negative value production (see Munn 1986), whether witch, rebel, or brand liability.

Once the source of negative value production has been determined, it can be exposed and reconfigured in spectacular form. The exposure itself serves as the primary transformation. The witch is rooted out, the implements destroyed, and a confession extracted. The rebel is pulled from the bush, the firearms confiscated, and an apology and reintegration ceremonialized. The brand’s new, fashionable iteration—an implicit inversion of its former failings—is rolled out through an advertising blitz. Each of these processes claims to be capable of rendering invisible malefactors visible and of refiguring them, once visible, into positive principles.

Yet running beneath are implicit demands on the concerted labor of their constituents. Witch-finders enjoin their communities to accept former witches and change behaviors to rein in jealousy. DDR officials acknowledge that “locals are the real heroes” (Williamson 2006, 189) for overcoming prejudice and finding ways to reintegrate combatants. Brands depend on buyers for promotion, and “consumers pay again and again to recover the outcomes and means of their own productivity and subjectivity” (Foster 2007, 719). The central tokens of these processes—accused witches, ex-combatants, and brands—are less sources of change and more visible beacons around which constituents are invited to orient and coordinate their own labors of transformation.¹⁰

Such aspirational spectacles perform a kind of promise, demonstrating capacity for change rather than any significant change in and of itself. The witch’s confession disavows future invisible violence alongside an implicit promise from the community not to encourage jealousy. The DDR process rewrites the social contract between ex-combatants, governments, and communities (Knight and Özerdem 2004, 506). The brand promises personal transformation, just as the consumer promises to act in accordance with the brand’s identity (Banet-Weiser 2012, 4). The promise simultaneously offers hope and demands allegiance. It also requires trust.

Each of the aforementioned processes are quite explicitly designed to restore trust, whether between kin in prototypical witch hunts (Geschiere 2013), between combatants and civilians in DDR programs (Humphreys and Weinstein 2007), or between corporations/nations and consumers/citizens in brand management (Aronczyk 2013, 163). Geschiere (2013, 23) triangulates (anti)witchcraft practice as a response to the ever more urgent quest for trust amid the ever-expanding dangers of intimacy. Yet neither what he calls the “necessity” (Geschiere 2013, 29) of trust nor the “elasticity” (Geschiere 2013, 208) of intimacy should be taken as a priori. In politics by prospection, trust and intimacy are manufactured. Revelatory events draw people together not only physically through the attractions of spectacle but also psychologically through the divulging of privileged information—they thus invite intimacy by pushing people and knowledge in and out of visibility. Such intimacy immediately calls for trust. Alberto Corsín Jiménez (2011, 190) sees these movements as recursive, “an appearance of trust in the disappearance of other forms, and vice versa. Trust thus emerges as the forever self-eclipsing relationship through which people re-place themselves into new relationships.” Matthew Carey (2017, 22) argues that trusting “always implies . . . a redistribution of control,” referring largely to the allocation of responsibilities among the entrusted. But trust also redistributes control by allowing social actors to extend predictability into unseeable and ungovernable realms: the future, the mind of the other, not to mention the invisible domain of witches. None of these arenas are at all controllable, but trust offers the necessary yet always unstable illusion that they are. The sleight of hand shared among witch hunting, DDR processes, and nation rebranding is to offer trust as a panacea for precisely those crises during which choice appears most remote.

Built on trust and often hollow spectacles of aspirational transfiguration that largely serve to call for change rather than providing the actual instruments necessary for change, such programs are subject to dramatic reversals of fortune. Witch-finders and those who use them are ultimately open to accusations of witchcraft themselves. Postwar DDR implementers are blamed for collusion with military leaders (Munive and Jakobsen 2012, 369–70; Theidon 2007, 82, 88). Corporate brands are continuously at risk of accusations of inauthenticity (Banet-Weiser 2012).

Thus SLITHU itself succumbed to the fickleness of its own model. The rank and file soon began to suspect corruption in the disconnect between Kabba’s pronouncements of government support and the realities of continued deprivation. During the time I knew the Union executive, they hemorrhaged active mem-

bers, to which they could only respond with their own accusations of witchcraft and malfeasance. When I began research in earnest, the disarmament operations were already part of SLITHU's past, serving primarily to legitimate more recent projects, all of which struggled to meet the disarmaments' success mustering the country's diverse healing professionals and raising the Union's national profile.

CODA

On April 8, 2014, a healer died in Sierra Leone's far east, and by the end of May when she was identified as the country's index case for Ebola Virus Disease, an epidemic had slipped through the fingers of authorities that ultimately propelled the nation and the international community into a state of emergency (Sack et al. 2014). Soon, traditional healing practices were outlawed alongside other activities presumed to exacerbate transmission. As the public face of the healer community, Kabba attempted to consolidate his influence with his typical press releases and conferences (e.g., Kargbo 2014). Yet denied the central platform of his authority—spectacle—by the bylaws against healing and public assembly, his influence was largely limited to posing as the representative traditional healer for a series of government-sponsored posters in which community members declared *le we tap Ebola* (Anglicized Krio for “let's stop Ebola”).

If the Ebola epidemic exposed a void behind SLITHU's model of spectacular governance, it laid bare the parallel hollowness of the Sierra Leone government's Free Health Care Initiative. To combat the deplorable state and untenable cost of medical infrastructure, the government had in 2010 initiated a program designed to provide free services to mothers and children up to five years old. Rolled out with great ceremony and repeatedly touted on the APC campaign trail throughout the 2012 election cycle, people on the ground knew that the program was plagued by graft and an overburdened and undereducated workforce (Nossiter 2013). The lack of proper equipment and training for infection control proved devastating as dozens of hospital staff and patients succumbed to the virus.

In retrospect, SLITHU's dramatic witch-finding spectacles now appear part of another era, one in which lack of oversight invited an upsurge in creative experimentation with the available languages and structures of power. It is not yet clear if such grassroots trial-and-error will be possible under potential new regimes of medical regulation.

More resilient was the language of neoliberalism. In 2015, I was told the Ministry of Tourism and Cultural Affairs was preparing a project that would tout culture as the key to “post-Ebola rebranding.” Further such calls rolled in from



Figure 9. Leftover sensitization poster, Kenema, 2016. Photo by Samuel Mark Anderson.

newspaper commentators ([Hanciles 2015](#)), the Liberian military ([Cooper 2014](#)), and the Sierra Leonean president himself, who told the African Union (AU):

We would like the AU to champion the rebranding of our countries . . . and the entire continent as brimming with profitable investment and other opportunities for recovery and growth. Without this rebranding the fortunes of our countries would be constrained by travel, investment and other restrictions that could hamper our recovery and resilience to prevent future outbreak. ([Koroma 2015](#))

In the absence of agency, rebranding remains the ultimate panacea.

ABSTRACT

Descending on the capital city of Freetown a decade after Sierra Leone's civil war, members of the Sierra Leone Indigenous Traditional Healers Union (SLITHU) unearthed countless "witch guns," apprehended dozens of malevolent witches, and endeavored to rehabilitate culprits as productive citizen herbalists. The organization's leader, President Field Marshal Alhaji Dr. Sulaiman Kabba, described these operations as a "disarmament program" for witches, discursively echoing postwar disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration programs previously imposed by the United Nations. Moreover, he dubbed SLITHU's interventions "a rebranding effort," appropriating pervasive marketing rhetorics. This article follows Kabba's example by successively examining the disarmament campaign through the discourses of anti-witchcraft, postwarcraft, and rebrandcraft. A common logic underlying all three discourses hinges on a spectacular politics by prospection, exposing aspirations for social transformation but displacing the labor of change from leaders to their putative clients. The illusory effects of witch-finding, postwar reintegration, and rebranding epitomize models of contemporary neoliberal governance built on an unstable foundation of trust rather than material investment, leaving them vulnerable to devastating collapse. [traditional medicine; witchcraft; disarmament; brands; violence; spectacle; trust; Sierra Leone]

ABSTRAKT

We den bin de enta di kapital siti Fritɔŋ tɛn ia afta di Salon sivil wa, memba dem na di Sierra Leone Indigenous Traditional Healers Union (SLITHU) pul wich gon dem, siz dozin pan den wiked man wich dem en tray fɔ cheng dem fɔ bi bete sitizin en abalist dem. Di ɔganayzeshɔn in lida, President Fil Mashal Alhaji Dɔkta Sulaiman Kabba, diskrayb di ɔpreshɔn dem as "disamament program" fɔ wich dem. Dis in spich fala poswa disamament dimobilayzeshɔn en rintigreshɔn program dem we di Yunayted Neshɔn bin ɔblaj bifo. Fɔ ad pan dis, i bin kɔl SLITHU in intavenshɔn wan "ribrandin ɛfɔt" we i dɔn tek langwej frɔm global makitin. Dis atikul get fɔ fala Kabba in kampen bay we ɔf pwel wich bisnes en poswa biznes en ribrand biznes wan-wan. Wan kɔmɔn lɔgic fɔseka ɔl tri diskɔshɔn eng pan spektakyula politiks fɔ fɛn prɔspekts en so ekpos pipul den aspireshɔn fɔ soshial transfɔmeshɔn yet displɛs di lebo fɔ cheng frɔm lida dem to den wan dem we dipend pan dem. Di fɔls ɛfɛkt dem fɔ fɛn wich, postwa rintigreshɔn en ribrandin kin pruv model dem fɔ kontemporari nioliberal gɔvment bisnes we bil pan fawndeshɔn ɔf trɔst rada dan matirial investment en we de lef dem vɔnɔrebɔl to kolaps. [tradishɔnal mɛresin; wikhkraft; disamament; brand; vayolens; spektakul; trɔst; Salon]

NOTES

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1. All interviews were conducted in Krio and translated by the author. Krio largely employs English cognates, including such overloaded terms as *wich* and *tradishun*.
2. Certain regional languages make distinctions similar to E. E. Evans-Pritchard's (1937) classic division between involuntary witch and voluntary sorcerer: for example, the distinction between *hɔna* and *bɔni* in Mende (Gittins 1987, 130; Grijspaarde et al. 2013, 29–30). Yet such nuances are absent in Krio and frequently lost in everyday discourse.
3. Kabba thus reproduces rather than alleviates the wider problem of witchcraft's "loose terminology" (Geschiere 2013, 9).
4. As a comparatively wealthy foreign researcher of cultural and political affairs, I was consistently warned to take seriously the threats of witch gun owners who might be jealous of my success or seeking to defend secrets. In fact, it was to allay the fears of a friend that I first visited Yainkain Marrah and learned more of the Union.
5. Only later did I learn Jammeh led his own spectacular and brutal national witch-finding operation in 2009 (see Amnesty International 2009), possibly to unearth the killer of his aunt. I was never able to ask Kabba if this inspired him—or vice versa.
6. Upgun represents the historical frontier of the colony, and it still serves as the intersection of roads from the city, the mountains, and the dockyards, as well as hosting the petrol station terminus for private taxis from the provinces and the large Kissy Road Cemetery. It thus stands as a barely regulated borderland between city and province, land and sea, and life and death.
7. In January 2016, I was told Kabba was running "trials" against accused witches, apparently largely Union defectors, and may have been overseeing similar trials during my fieldwork from 2011 to 2013. This would have directly contradicted Kabba's claims during our interviews and might indicate something of his narrative and moral flexibility.
8. Many thanks to Kevin O'Neill for pointing out this important distinction.
9. Ironically, the first ABC executive director, Philip Conteh, and its national coordinator, Aliou Kamara (also known as "Territorial Integrity" and a former spokesperson for the AFRC junta), were convicted in 2011 by the Anti-Corruption Commission for the misappropriation and mismanagement of funds, abuse of office, abuse of position, and obstruction of justice (Awoko 2011).
10. While emphasizing antiwitchcraft's coherence with psychoanalysis rather than governance or marketing, Jeanne Favret-Saada's (2015) argument that French antiwitchcraft rites encourage victims to transform their self-image so as to accept their own perpetuation of patriarchal violence resonates here.

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