

SECURITY-ARMAMENT-DEVELOPMENT Nexus Paper 2022

When the 'War Attitude' persists

How Pro-Government Militias affect Society in the Long Run

Fiona Wilshusen \ BICC

Yet Another Nexus?

Introduction to the SAD-Nexus Papers

Since 2002, BICC has provided information on German arms exports, the state of security and development of (potential) recipient countries to the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). BICC's project, titled 'Security, armament and development in recipient countries of German arms exports', assumes that there are legitimate reasons for states to invest in the military and its armament to guarantee the security of its population. Nevertheless, such financial and human resource allocations are always a trade-off, as they have complex and sometimes unknown effects on a country's development. Although there are long debates on the linkages between a state's investment in armament and its positive and negative effects on development (the so-called guns and butter debate) and the linkages between armament and security, there is little systematic research on the question of how armament affects both, security and development. In other words, the nexus between security (S), armament (A) and development (D)—the SAD-Nexus—is critically understudied. The *SAD-Nexus Papers* will address current challenges within that nexus. To do so, the individual papers in the series will discuss issues that cover the entire nexus or focus only on specific segments, for instance, the relationship between armament and security. This might result in a 'series within the series' where different papers address the same topic from different thematic angles.

The *SAD-Nexus Papers* complement the existing formats of the **country reports** and the **Global Militarisation Index (GMI)**. The country reports assess the situation in potential recipient countries of German arms exports with regard to the eight criteria of the EU Common Position and thus represent an important knowledge base for political decision-makers. The GMI measures worldwide militarisation by putting the resources allocated to the military and its armament in relation with resources allocated to development (such as health and education).

The *SAD-Nexus Papers* are published once a year and are mainly based on original (field) research.

CONTENTS \ INHALT

Yet Another Nexus? Introduction to the SAD-Nexus Papers.	2
Executive Summary	4
Zusammenfassung	5
Introduction	7
Remnants of Conflict	8
Methodology	10
PART I: Sierra Leone	12
Civil War, the Role of Pro-Government Militias and Post-War Stabilisation Measures	12
Pro-Government Militias in Sierra Leone: Still Affecting the Country's Fate?	13
Persistent Networks	13
Interlinkages between Networks and the Political Elite.	15
Interplay with Society	17
PART II: Liberia	20
Civil War, the Role of Pro-Government Militias and Post-War Stabilisation Measures	20
Pro-Government Militias in Liberia: Still Affecting the Country's Fate?	21
Persistent Networks	21
Interlinkages between Networks and the Political Elite.	22
Interplay with Society	24
Conclusion: Lessons on the Long-Term Effects of Pro-Government Militias	27
Bibliography	29
Annex	32

Executive Summary

Resorting to so-called pro-government militias (PGMs) in the face of severely challenged state forces is a timeless phenomenon in government politics across the globe. However, providing military training and distributing weapons to civilians can represent a security risk—in the short and the long term. Sierra Leone and Liberia share a history of protracted civil wars with the involvement of numerous pro- and anti-government militias. Previous research also demonstrated that networks of former combatants continued to exist in both countries after the end of the civil wars. However, most of these studies were conducted in the early 2000s, the first decade following the civil wars and thus lack a long-term perspective.

In this Paper, I address the question of how PGMs affect societies politically and socially in the long run. Building on qualitative interviews conducted 20 years after the end of the civil wars, my study indicates that in Sierra Leone and Liberia

- \ networks of former combatants continue to exist;
- \ the membership in pro-government militias creates persistent identities;
- \ networks of former combatants can become an instrument of political violence;
- \ networks of former combatants affect social development.

From these findings, it can be concluded that former (pro-government) combatants represent a potential instrument for exercising political violence—even decades after the official end of a conflict. Furthermore, the analysis suggests that if the ruling party, as in the case of Sierra Leone, or the current government, as in the case of Liberia, is willing to use violence to enforce its interests, ex-militias seem to be the resource to use. The political will thus has a decisive effect on the question of which form of (political) violence is exercised by ex-combatants.

With a view to the upcoming elections, political violence may increase. Incidents in recent years show that political elites in Sierra Leone and Liberia are willing to use violence to maintain power. As the cooperation between former combatants' networks and the ruling elite continues in both cases, it also seems possible that the ruling parties will use former (pro-government) combatants around elections to intimidate political opponents.

Zusammenfassung

Regierungen, die angesichts überforderter staatlicher Kräfte auf sogenannte Pro-Regierungs-Milizen (Engl. pro-government militias, kurz PGMs) zurückgreifen, sind ein zeitloses Phänomen auf der ganzen Welt. Die militärische Ausbildung und die Verteilung von Waffen an Zivilist:innen kann jedoch ein Sicherheitsrisiko darstellen – sowohl kurz- als auch langfristig. Sierra Leone und Liberia haben eine Geschichte von langwierigen Bürgerkriegen, an denen zahlreiche Pro- und Anti-Regierungs-Milizen beteiligt waren. Bereits existierende Forschung hat gezeigt, dass Netzwerke ehemaliger Kämpfer:innen in beiden Ländern auch nach dem Ende der Bürgerkriege weiter bestanden. Die meisten dieser Studien wurden jedoch in den frühen 2000er Jahren, also dem ersten Jahrzehnt nach den Bürgerkriegen, durchgeführt, sodass ihnen eine langfristige Perspektive fehlt.

In diesem Paper gehe ich daher der Frage nach, wie sich PGMs langfristig auf politischer und sozialer Ebene auf Gesellschaften auswirken. Basierend auf qualitativen Interviews, die 20 Jahre nach dem Ende der Bürgerkriege geführt wurden, zeigt meine Studie, dass in Sierra Leone und Liberia

- \ Netzwerke von ehemaligen Kämpfer:innen noch immer bestehen;
- \ die Mitgliedschaft in Pro-Regierungs-Milizen persistente Identitäten schafft;
- \ Netzwerke ehemaliger Kämpfer:innen zu einem Instrument politischer Gewalt werden können;
- \ Netzwerke ehemaliger Kombattant:innen die soziale Entwicklung beeinflussen.

Aus diesen Erkenntnissen lässt sich schließen, dass ehemalige (Pro-Regierungs-)Kämpfer:innen ein potenzielles Instrument zur Ausübung politischer Gewalt darstellen – auch Jahrzehnte nach dem offiziellen Ende eines Konflikts. Darüber hinaus deutet die Analyse darauf hin, dass ehemalige Mitglieder von Milizen ein passendes Instrument zu sein scheinen, wenn, wie im Fall von Sierra Leone, die herrschende Partei oder, wie im Fall von Liberia, die derzeitige Regierung bereit ist, Gewalt zur Durchsetzung ihrer Interessen einzusetzen. Der politische Wille hat also einen entscheidenden Einfluss auf die Frage, welche Form der (politischen) Gewalt von Ex-Kombattant:innen ausgeübt wird.

Im Hinblick auf die bevorstehenden Wahlen könnte die politische Gewalt zunehmen. Vorfälle der letzten Jahre zeigen, dass die politischen Eliten in Sierra Leone und Liberia bereit sind, Gewalt anzuwenden, um ihre Macht zu erhalten. Da die Zusammenarbeit zwischen den Netzwerken ehemaliger Kämpfer:innen und der herrschenden Elite in beiden Fällen anhält, scheint es auch möglich, dass die Regierungsparteien ehemalige (Pro-Regierungs-)Kämpfer:innen im Umfeld der Wahlen einsetzen, um politische Gegner:innen einzuschüchtern.

Acknowledgements

Without the support of others, this Paper would never have been possible. I am most thankful to all the interviewees who were willing to share their perspectives and stories with me. It is their accounts that form the basis for this Paper. Most respondents have been granted anonymity, though their names are known to the author. For this, their stories are no less valuable and my thanks no less.

For Sierra Leone, a huge thank you goes to Dr Ibrahim Bangura, who supported my research significantly. I would also like to thank Dr Alex Mbayo, whose thoughts and perspectives were most helpful. Finally, I would like to thank my research assistant who made not only the journey to Bo possible but also opened doors to valuable interview partners.

For Liberia, I am indebted to Professor T. Debey Sayndee and Dr Raphaela Kormoll for valuable insights and lively exchange. Furthermore, many thanks go to Titus A. Padmore and Kollie B. Dogba for their patience and support as research assistants—their knowledge and contacts contributed significantly to the research. I would also like to thank the Kofi Annan Institute for Conflict Transformation (KAIPT) and its entire staff for their warm welcome and valuable support. The Institute is not only a very welcoming place but also gathers a wealth of knowledge and experience under its roof.

I would also like to thank all my colleagues at BICC who helped me to develop the *Paper* further through discussions and exchanges. Special thanks go to Dr Markus Bayer, who accompanied me on this (literal and metaphorical) journey and provided valuable advice and support at all times. I would also like to thank Dr Marc von Boemcken for his valuable comments that contributed to improving the quality of this Paper. Last but not least, my thanks go to Heike Webb for copyediting and the final layout.

Introduction

On 10 August 2022, Sierra Leone experienced the worst unrest since the end of the civil war 20 years ago. Protests against increased costs of living turned into protests against the government, and within a very short time, the situation escalated violently. At least 30 people were killed, including civilians and six police officers, and numerous protesters were arrested. The government shut down the Internet and imposed a curfew for several days. In the course of the following few days, opposition politicians repeatedly accused the government of extrajudicial killings by 'death squads [...] controlled by few powerful men' (Thomas, 2022a). A few days later, a prominent member of the opposition party was killed by state security forces. The police report said armed ex-combatants had opened fire, which necessitated the massive use of force. Already before this outbreak of violence, the government had banned protests citing potential violence by ex-combatants.¹ But what role do ex-combatants still play in the country's politics and society? And what kind of picture emerges when we look at a specific group of former combatants, namely the groups that were aligned with or fought on the side of the government? Do they maintain their close relations with the government, ready to exert violence against political opponents?

Resorting to pro-government militias (PGMs) in the face of severely challenged state forces and/or to exert political violence while being able to deny accountability is a phenomenon in government politics across the globe. Current examples of this practice include governments in the Sahel region that heavily rely on PGMs in the fight against Islamist groups. However, providing military training and distributing weapons to civilians represents a risk with an uncertain outcome. The previous SAD-Nexus Paper (Wilshusen, 2022) examined the acute impact

of this cooperation on civil security. It is striking that this seems to continue in the long run: The events described above suggest that forming PGMs and arming civilians can also have long-term consequences for a country's democratic processes.

I thus want to take a closer look at cases where the past involvement of PGMs casts a shadow on current political and social developments. Sierra Leone and Liberia share a history of protracted civil wars with the involvement of numerous pro- and anti-government militias. Previous research has also demonstrated that networks of former combatants continue to exist in both countries years after the end of the conflict and that these were involved in political violence (Hoffman, 2007; Christensen & Utas, 2008; Włodarczyk, 2009; Persson, 2012; Bøås & Utas, 2014; Utas & Christensen, 2016). However, the studies predominantly discuss former combatants in general—and do not focus explicitly on former PGM members. It is extremely relevant to look specifically at these groups because not only are they less likely to demobilise, but the fact that they have already fought alongside government forces can increase the chances that they will do so again. Moreover, the existing studies so far were more interested in understanding the inner dynamics of the networks, thereby somewhat neglecting their interactions with other actors. Finally, these studies were conducted in the first decade after the end of the civil war and are thus somewhat outdated—and lack a truly long-term perspective. My study contributes to addressing this gap.

Against the background of current events, it seems likely that former combatants continue to affect the countries' political stability. At the time of writing, the level of political violence in Sierra Leone is higher than ever since the civil war (De Bruijne, 2020). A similar picture emerges in Liberia: Over the last few years, there have been repeated accusations that the government and its supporters silenced critical and opposition voices by (the threat of)

1 \ Among experts, the term (ex-)combatant covers members of both regular and irregular military organisations (see UN, 2006). In everyday language in Sierra Leone and Liberia, however, the term is usually used to refer to (former) members of PGMs and rebel groups. Since the Paper focuses on former members of non-state armed groups, I will also use the term primarily for them.

violence. Moreover, both Sierra Leone and Liberia are due to hold elections this year. In the past, this used to be a situation in which former combatants were remobilised for political violence (Christensen & Utas, 2008; Themnér, 2019). In view of the upcoming elections in both countries, the question of whether former fighters are reintegrated into society is pressing and highly relevant. Which role do their networks play in the relationship with the broader society? Further, what does the existence of these networks mean for the social and political development of the countries?

Building on the findings of the SAD-Nexus Paper 2021, this Paper aims to deepen our knowledge about PGMs. This is highly relevant since the German federal government has hitherto only regarded (former) armed groups opposed to the government as a threat to security and development—thereby neglecting such groups that fought alongside the government (Bundesregierung, 2017). The Paper at hand contributes to our knowledge in two ways: On the one hand, it expands our insights on long-term effects of PGMs and can thus inform German development policy and its specific programmes (e.g., transition assistance, civil peace service). On the other, these insights offer a better understanding of the current situation in the respective countries and may contribute to a country's security assessment—particularly relevant regarding the upcoming elections.

The second SAD-Nexus Paper builds on original research and previous studies to analyse the long-term effects of PGMs on political and social developments and thereby provides lessons learned on how the cooperation between PGMs and the government affects society in the long run.

Remnants of Conflict: How Former PGM Fighters (still) shape Post-Conflict Societies

Civil wars, such as those in Sierra Leone and Liberia, usually involve a variety of actors—including irregular militias supporting the government, among them PGMs. Their allegiance to the government and their aim to preserve the (political) status quo distinguishes PGMs from other non-state armed actors (Schneckener, 2015; Ferguson, 2015). The government typically reciprocates the loyalty of these groups through various kinds of support (e.g. payment, weapons, training, etc.). Additionally, a shared identity, like a common religion, ethnicity or regional origin, may further strengthen the allegiances. Thus, in short, PGMs are pro-government, receive local or national government support, are armed, have some level of organisation and are not part of the regular state security forces (Carey et al., 2013). Militias formed to protect local communities and thus have a more localised and defensive character than PGMs (Clayton & Thomson, 2014; Jentzsch et al., 2015; Carey & Mitchell, 2017) are termed 'civilian defence forces' (CDFs) in the literature. In cases where CDFs are co-opted and share common goals with the government, they are de facto PGMs. Yet, state-militia alignments are often fluid and prone to frequent alliance-switching and changing loyalties (Jentzsch et al., 2015). Empirically, one-quarter of all non-state armed groups, pro- and anti-government alike, switch sides during a conflict at least once (Otto, 2018).

Typically, a state's practice of distributing weapons to parts of the civilian population and cooperating with PGMs affects the relationship between the civilian population and the combatants as well as the relationship between the government and the people organised in these auxiliary forces: On the one hand, reciprocal relations evolve between the militias and the government. Especially in protracted civil wars, support for the government from the local population can vary greatly from region to region and over time, which also affects the relationship between PGMs and civilians. Thus, despite—or in certain cases because of—their affiliation with the government and their partly localised character, PGMs may also use

excessive violence against civilians if deployed outside their home region or community (Jones, 2012; Aliyev & Souleimanov, 2019; Wilshusen, 2022). On the other hand, close social ties develop among the fighters, which, against the backdrop of a common veteran feeling, can also go beyond direct comradeship. In essence, networks of former combatants and the form of violence they exerted during the conflict determine how the broader society perceives members of PGMs and to what degree their reintegration is successful or not. This consequently affects the development of post-war society and politics.

Nowadays, transitions from war to peace are often accompanied by disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR) programmes, transitional justice (TJ) and security sector reform (SSR) that ultimately aim at the remaking of post-war relationships and preventing renewed violent conflict. If, on the one hand, DDR is to enable former combatants to return to society and regain civilian status, then, on the other, TJ must create the conditions that former (potential) perpetrators are also accepted as part of society (see Duthie & Specht, 2010). Disrupting networks and links between former fighters has been identified as one of the keys to enabling a (re)approchement between ex-combatants and their civilian counterparts (Kilroy & Basini, 2018). Yet, previous research has demonstrated that networks of former fighters in Liberia and Sierra Leone have 'survived' these measures (Hoffman, 2007; Jennings, 2007; Reno, 2010; Themnér, 2011; Persson, 2012; Christensen, 2012; McMullin, 2013a; Söderström, 2015; Themnér, 2019). Based on the assumption that persistent networks play a crucial role in post-war relationships between former combatants and the communities (Kilroy & Basini, 2018), we can thus assume that the networks of former members of PGMs affect their ties to the wider society.

Since this Paper focuses more on the interaction of former PGM networks with the political elite and society and less on the networks' inner structures, my definition is rather basic: A network is understood as a relationship between two or more former members of a PGM, that is characterised by contact (both regular and irregular) and some degree of material or immaterial support. In this case, a network can mean direct contact between two former comrades and/or greater solidarity and support networks among former combatants. Furthermore, a network can include vertical and horizontal connections between former members of PGMs, i.e. connections between combatants of the same rank but also between former combatants and their commanders. As a result, a network can span different levels and extend into different spheres of society.

Methodology

I will examine two historical cases to assess the long-term effects of PGMs on society. From a conceptual perspective, Sierra Leone is an ideal case of PGM-government cooperation. During the civil war, the alliance was not only consistent but also official, with strong support structures. One example of this is Hingah Norman, one of the most prominent figures of the Kamajors², serving as Deputy Minister of Defence. In contrast, the Liberian case offers a glimpse into the often grim reality: Switching sides and changing alliances was common during the civil war. Although the country thus does not represent an ideal case, it does represent the non-negligible group of empirical cases in which PGMs have been involved in conflicts, changing sides at least once during the conflict. This group is estimated to account for about 25 per cent of all cases (Otto, 2018). As intensive post-conflict stabilisation measures like DDR, TJ and SSR have been implemented in both countries, they should be representative cases of where a presence of networks is least likely.

The analysis draws on existing literature and original research through qualitative interviews. I conducted semi-structured interviews in Monrovia, Freetown and Bo in July and August 2022. Local research assistants supported me in establishing first contacts with interview partners and coordinating contacts and appointments. In Sierra Leone, I conducted interviews in Freetown and Bo. While Freetown is the heart of political and civil society life, Bo was ‘the stronghold of the pro-government kamajor militia’ (Hoffmann, 2007, p. 408), and many fighters returned to the area. To get a bigger picture, I conducted interviews in both towns: Twelve in Freetown and three in Bo. However, as one of the interviews in Bo and one in Freetown was a group interview, the total number of interviewees in Sierra Leone is twenty-one. In Liberia, I conducted 13 interviews in Monrovia, the capital being the centre of political and civil society life, and many combatants of the civil war had settled there (Hoffman, 2007). Since one of the interviews was with a group, the number of interviewees is sixteen. I used MaxQDA and qualitative content analysis to analyse the interviews.

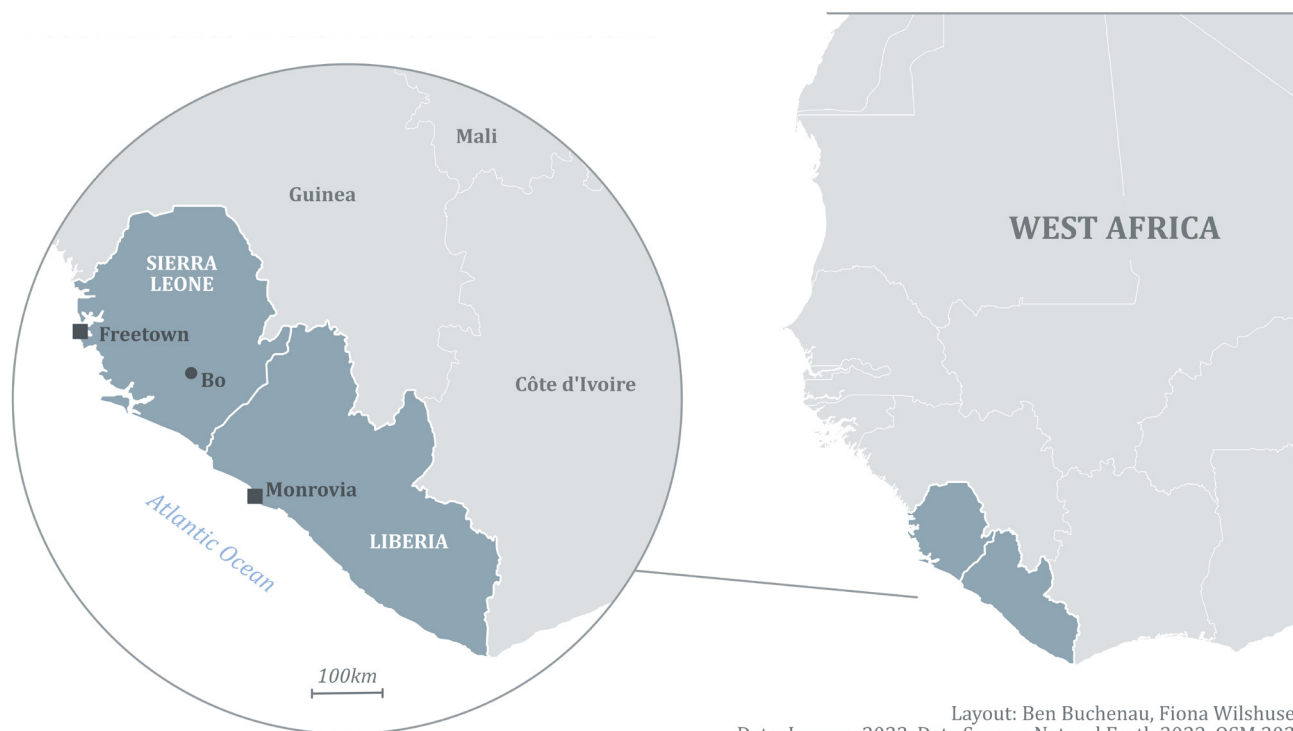
The selection of interviewees was similar in both cases—my research aimed at capturing different perspectives to understand the bigger picture. Therefore, I selected former combatants and representatives of the political elite and civil society organisations as interview partners. The non-governmental organisations’ (NGOs) representatives took on a dual role: For one thing, I selected NGOs that are active in peacebuilding and have thus also worked actively with communities and former combatants. Representatives of these NGOs thus represent experts in these fields. For the other, they represent knowledgeable members of civil society who can provide deeper insights into how most members of society perceive or interact with former combatants. Since—in urban areas—many former combatants work within the security or transport sector, members of private security companies and the motorbike business were included as interview partners to grasp their perspective, too.

All of the interviews were conducted under the principle of informed consent. In cases where the interview partners preferred to take part anonymously, they gave their consent verbally, and the accounts were anonymised. Others wanted to be named and gave their consent in written form. However, due to the tense political situation in Sierra Leone and subsequent attacks on oppositional voices, I anonymised all interviews conducted in Sierra Leone to protect the informants.

Limitations of this research arise from different aspects. Access to interview partners proved to be a challenge. In Sierra Leone, due to the tense situation, it was not possible to interview a representative of the police. In Liberia, in particular, people were quite reluctant to be interviewed. Only one former combatant consented to an interview; all others declined from the outset or dropped out at the last moment—the fear of possible prosecution by a special court is still deep 20 years after the end of the conflict. First-hand accounts from the immediate environment of former combatants can somewhat mitigate this weakness in the research design. Despite numer-

2\ The Kamajors were the most dominant group of PGMs during the civil war (see the following chapter).

Research sites in Sierra Leone and Liberia



Layout: Ben Buchenau, Fiona Wilshusen
Date: January 2023, Data Source: Natural Earth 2023, OSM 2023

ous attempts, access to the political elite was also impossible here. This is certainly a shortcoming of the study. Moreover, the accounts and—in consequence—the findings represent a male perspective. Except for one interviewee in Liberia, all accounts, from members of NGOs and the fighting forces alike, are from men and are thus limited to specific experiences and realities. This is symptomatic of highly patriarchal societies and the stigmatisation from which female combatants still suffer.

In the end, the relatively small amount of interviews provides a good snapshot of the current situation of former combatants in the countries. Especially in combination with previous research, we can thus map tendencies and formulate plausible hypotheses. However, this is only an excerpt from reality—this study does not claim statistical representativeness.

I will proceed as follows. For each country, I will first give a brief overview of the role PGMs played during the civil war, outline the measures taken to reintegrate former fighters and then—based on my research—take a closer look at the current situation of interlinkages between former PGM networks and the political elite as well as former PGM–society relations. The concluding chapter offers a comparison between the two cases and identifies lessons that can be learned from the analysed cases.

PART I:

Sierra Leone

To assess whether and how PGM networks still exist in Sierra Leone and how they influence the broader society, this case study will first give a brief overview of their involvement during the civil war and how they were affected by post-war stabilisation measures. Subsequently, I will take a closer look at the current situation and discuss how these networks in Sierra Leone interact with the political elite and the wider society. Main take-away points can be found at the end of the study.

Civil War, the Role of Pro-Government Militias and Post-War Stabilisation Measures

On March 23 1991, the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) headed by Foday Sankoh, in an attempt to topple the Sierra Leone government, pushed into the country from neighbouring Liberia. This marked the beginning of a civil war that lasted for 11 years. The fighting not only broke out between the Revolutionary United Front and Sierra Leone's armed forces but among various factions: Renegade soldiers collaborated with the RUF and the government was supported by the multilateral, armed Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group, the private military company Executive Outcome and pro-government militias like the Civil Defence Forces (CDF). The CDF were an umbrella for various local militias local populations had established to defend themselves against the RUF. The Kamajors³ dominated the various different groups in the CDF in numbers and power (Okano, 2019). The Kamajors and some other groups are based on traditional hunter groups and secret societies and established a common identity by performing initiation rites and other rituals (e.g., to become invulnerable during a fight). Initially, the Kamajors were only fighting within their localities.

However, they were also deployed around the country the longer the conflict lasted. The Kamajors thus regarded themselves as defenders of the legitimate government, which is also reflected in the CDF motto, 'We defend democracy'. Their erstwhile leader, Sam Hingah Norman, even became Deputy Minister of Defence during the conflict. We can thus observe a formal and close tie between the Kamajors/CDF and the government throughout the conflict. The Abuja Agreement finally ended the fighting in November 2000. On 18 January 2002, then-President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah declared the end of the civil war. Overall, two million people were displaced, 50,000 to 100,000 people were killed, and thousands more suffered mutilations and other injuries in the conflict (Solomon & Ginifer, 2008; Sesay & Suma, 2009). Most of the country's physical, health and educational infrastructure was destroyed.

Different United Nations (UN) and British government entities accompanied the subsequent transition from war to peace, implementing a DDR programme, SSR and measures of TJ to rebuild social trust and social ties. Even though the measures were intended to impact all parts of society, some aspects hit the Kamajors particularly hard. Within the DDR programme, the traditional weapons many Kamajors had used were not recognised as firearms, and their bearers, therefore, were not considered eligible for DDR and consequently excluded from the support programme (Solomon & Ginifer, 2008). It was widely believed that former CDF members were less in need of DDR programmes than members of the rebels because of their close social embedding (Włodarczyk, 2009, p. 209). And still, reintegration measures were too short, lacked community engagement, and their activities did not consider the realities on the ground. Thus many training courses did not meet the actual needs, which resulted in continued unemployment (Sesay & Suma, 2009; Bangura, 2013). Furthermore, while some former Kamajors have joined the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (Nilsson and Kovacs 2013), many felt betrayed and neglected by the government due to the lack of recognition and compensation

3\ The Kamajors were the most prominent group among the CDF, and they dominate the perception of the CDF up until today—most interview partners referred to the Kamajors rather than CDF or used the terms synonymously. This Paper will do the same. Some accounts or previous studies, however, may use the term CDF. In this Paper, both terms are used interchangeably.

for their services to democracy and government during the civil war (Francis 2017[2005]; Solomon and Ginifer 2008; Włodarczyk 2009). Moreover, while the establishment of the Special Court for Sierra Leone to hold "persons who bear the greatest responsibility" (Government of Sierra Leone, 2012) accountable was welcomed by many, the indictment of the Kamajor leader Sam Hingah Norman, high priest Aliu Kundorwai and former Director of War Moinina Fofana has led to the Kamajors not seeing the court as a tool for reconciliation, but as a sign of further rejection and betrayal of their role during the civil war (Francis 2017[2005]; McMullin 2013a).

In essence, while one of the main goals of the post-war stabilisation measures had been the remaking of social relations and one would have therefore expected to find a resettled society, this was not the case. The measures had an unintended effect on the Kamajors, their relation to politics and their position within the wider society. In the next sections, I will take a closer look at the current situation of the former combatants' political and social relations.

Pro-Government Militias in Sierra Leone: Still Affecting the Country's Fate?

In how far the transition programmes have been successful in demobilising structures and reintegrating former fighters is in doubt since '[...] ex-militia members in Sierra Leone have been mobilized for various purposes, e.g., by political parties for violence, in the aftermath of the civil war', often through 'networks shaped and maintained by former commanders' (Utas & Christensen, 2016, p. 24). This observation is widely shared. Several studies conducted in the first decade after the civil war describe how networks of former combatants continue to exist (Christensen, 2012; McMullin, 2013a; Utas & Christensen, 2016). Building on these studies and analysing the situation 20 years after the end of the conflict, I want to assess these networks' long-term impact. To do so, I will first demonstrate how these networks are still persistent and, second, analyse how they interact with the political elite and the broader society.

Persistent Networks

To this day, it not only matters whether someone fought during the civil war but also on which side. Even though there is a shared veteran feeling and former Kamajors claim that they have no resentments towards former members of the Revolutionary United Front and live with and alongside them, it is nevertheless clear that their identity as (former) Kamajors has continued relevance (INT7_FGD_SL). During interviews, former Kamajors preferred identifying themselves as 'ex-Kamajor' than 'ex-combatant'. This can be attributed to the clear separation between the warring factions and the self-image of the Kamajors. Rallying around the motto, 'We defend democracy', they felt a shared commitment and carried themselves as 'liberators' during the civil war (Ginifer & Solomon, 2009). They hence not only enjoyed wider support than other groups but represented 'the embodiment of the collective will and determination of the people to resist [...] all other forces opposed to democratic order' (Francis, 2017[2005], p. 66). The Kamajors still pride themselves on this image as defenders of the legitimate government and democracy. Additionally, initiation rites performed by the Kamajors that build on their origin as a traditional hunter group and manifest their status as a secret society (Włodarczyk, 2009) also led to a strong group identity that continues to this day.

However, this seems to vary from region to region. In Bo, the interviewees carry this identity with pride (FGD with former Kamajor, INT7_SL; interview with former Kamajor, INT8_SL), and other interviewees still cultivate this identity when they return to their home villages in areas where the Kamajors enjoyed great support (interview with former Kamajor, INT10_SL; interview with former Kamajor, INT11_SL). This appears to be different in Freetown, which is not located in the heartland of the Kamajors. Here, interviewed former fighters either stated that their past as a Kamajor plays a subordinate role (interview with former Kamajor, INT11_SL) or that they deliberately keep it secret (interview with former Kamajor, INT10_SL). Although this may be a mere coincidence, this, together with other accounts (see the chapter on interplay with society), points toward a spatial divide regarding identity, perception and social embedding of former Kamajors.

Yet, while former Kamajors in Freetown keep this part of their identity secret while in the capital, ties come to life as soon as they are in their hometown and are surrounded by other former Kamajors. A former Kamajor commander in Freetown explained that his unit members are now scattered across the country. However, in line with the above, he emphasised that their past as Kamajors is still part of their identity and that whenever he returns to his hometown, he not only reconnects with other Kamajors but is approached by former Kamajors due to his position as a former commander (INT11_SL).

A former Kamajor notes that the communication structures are not limited to those Kamajors he knows personally but that former Kamajors can identify themselves because they [...] have a common language, common tongues. [...] So we can understand and know each other' (INT8_SL; see also INT7_FGD_B1). Overall, a special bond and a common language as strong features of identification and solidarity have remained until today:

We all have a special bond because, you know, what we went through was to protect our country. So anybody who was part of that society means good for this nation. So we, you know, we are all one. We have that bond. And even today, it exists among us (interview with former Kamajor, INT8_SL).

From this follows that networks building on this shared identity still exist today. Even though the official structures of the Kamajors were shattered by the indictment of three of their leaders before the Special Court for Sierra Leone (focus group discussion (FGD) with former Kamajors, INT7_SL; see also Francis, 2017[2005]), this seems to have strengthened the informal bond among the Kamajors. This special bond can translate into mutual support, which can be observed with groups of motorcyclists, in which we find former Kamajors in numbers (interview with a representative from the Motorcycle Union, INT12; see also Bürge, 2012). Another interviewee emphasises that there is strong union-wide solidarity: [...] when you touch one, when you have a problem with one rider, you have a problem with all. When you have a conflict with one rider, you will have a conflict with the entire membership. And that makes us so power-

ful' (INT9_SL). This solidarity is expressed in 'human support' at weddings or funerals and mutual support in cases of confrontation with the police (INT9_SL). However, besides this union-wide solidarity, the representative also identified a special bond between former Kamajors. In line with this, an NGO representative stressed that Kamajor structures informally still exist 'at committee level, at town level and at village level' (INT5_SL).

Beyond the sense of a shared identity and strong solidarity, which we can understand as a socio-emotional network, ties between former Kamajors can also translate into forms of economic support. In rural areas around Bo, where many former Kamajors have returned to, they often live from subsistence agriculture. Here, mutual support, e.g., during harvest season, plays an important role (INT7_FGD_SL). The interviews suggest that economic networks are even more evident in urban areas. Especially in the motorbike sector, which is a place of refuge for many former Kamajors, we can observe these networks. These ties are evident in (economic) support systems among former comrades:

It has been happening and it is still happening. If I have the financial capacity and you don't, and you are my brother, we all fought together. I will buy one [motorbike, F.W.] or two. Or if I have access to only one, you and I will ride together (INT9_SL).

This observation is echoed by the representative of an NGO who describes a very similar form of support among former members of the CDF⁴ :

Yes, I know somebody who is a driver, a former CDF. He drives for another person who thinks that he was loyal to him. [...] I know drivers like that who are ex-CDF who are driving, and I'm sure most of these people who provide these vehicles were people in the same society [the Kamajor, F.W.] [...] (INT1_SL).

These accounts highlight how ties continue as an identity-building aspect and have a concrete effect on people's economic situation. This suggests that the networks have continued relevance—at the social and the economic level.

4\ Following the common practice, the terms CDF and Kamajor are used synonymously in this study (see above).

Finally, interviews with former Kamajors in Bo suggest that many former Kamajors now operate in the informal security sector in the country: All former Kamajors interviewed in Bo are members of a local vigilante group. The groups meet regularly to patrol the neighbourhood or are called when someone suspects a crime (FGD with former Kamajor, INT7_SL; interview with former Kamajor, INT8_SL). As many members of the groups are former Kamajors, they maintain contact with and support each other, sustaining the networks as a result. This observation is further supported by the account of a former member of the Kamajor who, although not maintaining close contact with former comrades, would fall back on the networks for security-related issues at any time if needed:

[...] [W]hen it comes to defence, we are one. [...] [W]e are not praying for a war because we know what we went through. But [...] we are always prepared. So if such [situation, F.W.] arises, we all be on board, and we consider ourselves to be one in as much as you uphold to the rules and regulations (interview with former Kamajor, INT8_SL).

In essence, against the backdrop of indicators such as special ties and communication as well as (im)material support, networks between former Kamajors still seem to exist. While socio-emotional and economic support demonstrates how networks can be used for peaceful purposes, this kind of support dynamic perpetuates (inter)dependencies among former Kamajors and thereby maintains these ties.

Interlinkages between Networks and the Political Elite

While social networks of former Kamajors today mostly exist as somewhat low-key structures, this does not apply to the political sphere. Here, former Kamajors and their networks are openly active. Even though the Special Court prosecuted, charged and, in some cases, convicted 'persons who bear the greatest responsibility' (Government of Sierra Leone, 2012) and subsequently prevented them from playing an active role in national politics, there are links between the

political elite and former combatants. Such affiliations usually go along the country's political division, with the geographical and ethnic basis of the two major parties, the All People's Congress and the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party, playing a decisive role in this. The Sierra Leone People's Party and the Kamajors have their support base in the southeast of the country and among the Mende ethnic group—and historically have a close connection both geographically and ethnically. The fact that the Kamajors fought as a PGM on the side of the Sierra Leone People's Party—led government during the civil war reinforces this.

The linkages between political big men⁵, electoral politics and former combatants persist. According to various interviewees, both ruling parties use ex-combatants for security and as party marshals. They recruit them from among ex-combatants they know themselves or through their contacts with former commanders who usually organise the party militias (interview with the director of a national peacebuilding NGO, INT5_SL; interview with representatives from a regional peacebuilding NGO, INT2_SL; interview with the director of a global development NGO, INT12_SL; see also De Bruijne, 2020). This has also been observed in the past: After the civil war, the mobilisation of former members of militias has often been linked to members of the political system and particularly to electoral politics (Christensen & Utas, 2008; Utas, 2012).

More than a decade later, these ties between political parties and former combatants, or in our case, between the Sierra Leone People's Party and former Kamajors, seems to have hardly changed. One interviewee—himself a former Kamajor—describes how he still recognises former Kamajors he knows from the time of the civil war at the Sierra Leone People's Party office in Freetown (INT11_SL). He further states:

the current president, when he was campaigning, most of them were with him moving around. But now that he has won, you mostly see them at the party office (INT11_SL).

5\ The term 'big man' usually refers to (political) strongmen who accumulate and maintain (in)formal power through neopatrimonial patronage systems, see also Bayart, 1993 and Utas, 2012.

Other interview partners confirm this connection between former Kamajors, the Sierra Leone People's Party and President Julius Maada Bio (INT1_SL, INT5_SL; see also Christensen, 2012). In line with these accounts, a former Kamajor explains that most of his former fighters will be tempted by these politicians (INT7_FGD_B2), which indicates that, in principle, the Sierra Leone People's Party can recruit former Kamajors. He identifies the disappointment over broken promises during the DDR measures and the lack of jobs and prospects as reasons why. While this generally holds true for all former combatants, this weighs doubly in the case of Kamajors, who felt entitled to a reward for fighting for the former government, but then had to deal with prosecution (as in the case of the leaders) or were not recognised at all (as in the case of most rank-and-file). The alignment with the Sierra Leone People's Party is thus closely linked to socio-economic factors:

Well, from our discussions with a handful of them, they [former Kamajors, F.W.] clearly told to us that, yes, they have a link because their means of survival is through those who are leading them. And those are the people now who are in some major government positions. So they are still communicating directly or indirectly. They still rely on them (interview with the director of a national peacebuilding NGO, INT5_SL).

Former fighters usually anticipate social and economic ascension from their proximity to the political elite, which in their eyes is a reward for their commitment during and after the civil war (Christensen, 2012; Utas & Christensen, 2016).

The following accounts strengthen the hypothesis that there is not only a socio-economic or ideological link between the Sierra Leone People's Party and former Kamajors but that this link can have concrete effects on the country's political stability. The representative of a local NGO emphasised that the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party would use the Kamajors to 'back up security when it comes to riots and other things related to the party. So they bring them in [...]' (INT6_SL). Similarly, the representative of another NGO states:

We have experienced situations where we have seen members of the Kamajors [...] in certain political parties being integrated as personal security to high profile politicians in the country. [...] [W]hen there is violence or there is a conflict, even at the national level, the active players are still the Kamajors [...] (INT5_SL).

The representative of a regional NGO working on governance and justice further describes that the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party maintains ties to former Kamajors:

We still see them around. [...] [A]nd sometimes because of politics, you hear them threatening that [...] they have Kamajors, they will train them, they will come back. Some of them still have this idea that they are still relevant and can bring whatever, bring some threat to society or stand with the government. Especially [with, F.W.] the current government because of the region where they come from [...] (interview with a representative of a regional NGO, INT1_SL).

This correlates with another study that found that 'semi-institutionalized militias' can be observed around the party offices, usually 'headed by some notorious leaders who are directly deployable when needed' (De Bruijne, 2020). Representatives of other NGOs confirmed this observation, highlighting the role politicians and their affiliated former Kamajors play in current cases of political violence: In principle, the structures of these party marshals can be used for political violence such as 'intimidation and [...] confrontation' (INT12_SL) that is mainly directed against political opponents and used during election campaigning (INT5_SL, Pos. 52). One interview partner established a link between current cases of political violence during by-elections in the Tonkolili district (Thomas, 2022b), and the use of former Kamajors 'as instruments of violence for the fulfilment of political objective' (INT5_SL). A look at the past bolsters this assessment and also illustrates the continuity of political violence in the country: During the 2007 election campaign, political parties remobilised large numbers of former militia members to provide 'security', which primarily meant keeping them around out of fear they may otherwise be called upon by someone else and having them around to be able to threaten political opponents (Christensen & Utas, 2008).

In general, the political climate in Sierra Leone is tense: Both political parties regularly attack each other verbally, and clashing party followers and party militias are not unusual. In line with this, a 2020 survey found that 80 per cent of Sierra Leoneans believe that politics 'often' or 'always' lead to violence (Sanny, 2020). A current study (De Bruijne, 2020) further detected that the level of political violence in Sierra Leone has been increasing steadily since 2014. While this violence is not intended to take control of the state, it is used by individuals or groups to formulate political views and demands or expand certain groups' political influence (De Bruijne, 2020, p. 8). Although we cannot causally link these observations to the ties between the Sierra Leone People's Party and the Kamajor, the accounts from my interview partners suggest that the use of the former Kamajors by the Sierra Leone People's Party is (partly) contributing to this increase in violence.⁶ In view of the upcoming elections in June 2023, this connection will likely become even more important.

In essence, we can thus state that close ties between former Kamajors and the Sierra Leone People's Party seem to be persistent up to today. Moreover, the utilisation of former Kamajors by the Sierra Leone People's Party reinforces the use of political violence, which in turn contributes to a continuity of physical aggression in national politics.

Interplay with Society

In Sierra Leone, social relations—especially between former combatants and civilians—are still marked by the civil war. Today, their networks and connections to the political elite play a role in this relationship. Additionally, the relations between former Kamajors and their communities differ spatially.

The measures that supported the war-to-peace transition left many Kamajors with a bad aftertaste. Although the interviewee from a local NGO working on peacebuilding considers Kamajors to be better integrated than former Revolutionary United Front fighters (INT5_SL), the self-perception of the former Kamajors I interviewed remains different from that of 'normal citizens'. Former Kamajors in Bo describe how their life today is like that of other community members making a living from farming. However, this does not lead to greater identification with the civilian population but has the opposite effect—having fought in the war, they still feel entitled to more (INT7_FGD_SL). Similarly, Włodarczyk (2009) states: 'this disappointment has grown into resentment as the years of peace have failed to offer sustainable opportunities for the former fighters who feel entitled to "a better deal"' (p. 210).

In Bo, the interview partners associate their Kamajor past with a certain pride and refer to their role as defenders of the civilian population. In the communities, people know who fought as Kamajor, and former Kamajors describe how their communities pay their respect to them (INT7_FGD_SL; INT8_SL). In line with this, Kamajor/CDF fighters argued that they aimed to defend their communities from the violence brought by the war. Moreover, CDF fighters had tight networks within their family, friends and communities, and close to 75 per cent returned to the communities where they had lived before the war (Humphreys & Weinstein, 2004). This still plays out today. The links between former Kamajors are thus not necessarily perceived as a threat. On the contrary, former Kamajors interviewed in Bo are now members of local vigilante groups and, again, act as security providers in their communities. According to one interviewee, the police even encouraged them to set up these groups (INT7_FGD_SL). This way, from the perspective of the ex-Kamajors in Bo, they actively and positively influence the sense of security in their communities—a close link to their identity as former Kamajors.

In fact, most times, when we have these thieves, these armed robbers or a stuff of issues around, so whenever there is something around like that, they call me. They trust me. They know I can protect them. [...] They know I have that ability (INT8_SL).

6 \ Just like the Sierra Leone People's Party, the oppositional All People's Congress has been repeatedly accused of using ex-combatants to perpetrate political violence, so both parties bear responsibility for the level of political violence in the country. For the purpose of this analysis, however, I have focused on the link between the SLPP and Kamajor.

Another interview partner in Bo is not only a member of a vigilante group, but also acts as a mediator in his community (INT7_FGD_B3). Previous research found that the status of a CDF commander translated into a retained authority, also in peacetime—in parts based on the ability to command men in battle (Włodarczyk, 2009). A former Kamajor further elaborates that some people trust those who were Kamajors more and that the perception of someone who had already protected and defended the community in the past and thus can be trusted can even be the decisive factor for obtaining a political position (INT8_SL). A representative of an NGO confirms this, stating that people in Sierra Leone perceive military experience as a sign of strength and assertiveness because the person has already proven that they can protect (INT1_SL). Therefore, people in the heartland of the Kamajors not only respect and trust them — but also support them in political positions (INT7_FGD_SL; INT1_SL).

Societal perceptions, however, seem to contrast the self-image of the former Kamajors described above. As outlined, they tend to see themselves as protectors of their communities and guardians of democracy. Representatives from NGOs in Freetown, however, expressed their view that former Kamajors are a potential threat to peace and security. According to one interviewee, the relationship between ex-combatants and society is still negatively affected by the atrocities that the Kamajors committed during the civil war (interview with a representative of a regional NGO, INT1_SL). This appears plausible considering that the Kamajors in the course of the war operated beyond their communities and were thus more likely to exert violence, and that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the Special Court provided the space for a critical examination of the deeds of the Kamajors.

As a consequence, as one interviewee describes it, there is still a sense of a ‘disconnect’ between former Kamajors and communities which is ‘affecting the existence, the welfare, the well-being’ of the former (interview with the director of a national peacebuilding NGO, INT5_SL). In line with this, and fearing stigmatisation, the former Kamajors I interviewed in

Freetown usually do not identify themselves as one but rather live in communities where they are not known (also highlighted by a representative of a peacebuilding NGO, INT2_SL_B3). A former Kamajor living in Freetown keeps his past a secret not only from his wife but also from his community, because ‘up till now, there is that fear amongst people. [...] So that’s why you don’t discuss it, because of the past’ (INT10_SL). Another interviewee from a local NGO working on peacebuilding at the community level shares this perception and stresses:

[...] If there is anything that they are not happy with, we will know that there are the warning signs. [...] Cause in the future, they will come out. When they come out, it will be disastrous for us (INT6_SL).

Taken together, we can thus see significant regional differences in the perception of the former Kamajors. Besides the geographical factor, according to the National General Secretary of an NGO, the proximity to the political elite significantly influences the relationship between former Kamajors and society (INT12_SL). In line with this, the representative of an NGO describes that it is ‘disturbing’ for ‘a lot of people at committee level’ to see Kamajors who were ‘involved in the war, [...] killed, [...] raped [...] behind a high profile personality [in politics, F.W.]’ He continues that in consequence, the society does ‘not trust the process we had, the disarmament, people don’t trust it, the reintegration, we don’t trust it [...]’ because when ‘there is a conflict [...] the active players are still the Kamajors [...]’ (INT5_SL). While this statement already establishes a direct link between former Kamajors and violence in the country and thus may be indicative of the division between broader society and former Kamajors, the allegations remain vague. They have become more concrete following the violent riots on 10 August 2022.⁷ In this context, the National General Secretary of a global NGO working on societal and developmental issues refers to ex-combatants’ involvement in the violence because if ‘things like this happen’ this is because they ‘always look for an opportunity’ to ‘just jump in because the issues with them is that [...] they have the skills in terms of [...] rifles or guns’ (INT12_SL).

7) On 10 August 2022, anti-government protests took place, that were accompanied by violent riots in the course of which more than 30 civilians and police officers were killed (see also Introduction).

In essence, it can be said that the relationship between the former Kamajors and society is very much characterised by regional differences, due to the civil war and current political divisions. On a broader level, the former Kamajors are still perceived as a potential threat to national security. This is reinforced by the links between the ruling Sierra Leone People's Party and former Kamajors.

Take-away points

My study on the persistence of networks in Sierra Leone indicates that

- \ against the background of a shared identity, language, and mutual (economic) support, it seems that networks of former Kamajors still exist.
- \ the identity as former Kamajors may either increase or decrease the former combatants' social status up to today. This is based on a set of geographic, ethnic and political factors that determine how home communities and society in general perceive former Kamajors today: While they are well respected in Bo, the erstwhile heartland of the Kamajors, in Freetown, people may still perceive them as a threat.
- \ the Kamajors' past as pro-government militias leads to a sense of entitlement to some form of reward, which seems to make them vulnerable towards being used by the political elite because they hope for being finally rewarded through these linkages. Moreover, due to their past and based on their sense of entitlement, former Kamajors still form a special group within the wider society—thereby undermining the principle of an equal society.
- \ networks of former Kamajors seem to be most persistent around the political elite, namely the Sierra Leone People's Party. Moreover, there is evidence that the Sierra Leone People's Party still uses Kamajors and their networks to threaten political opponents. The reliance on these networks therefore reinforces political violence. This has a negative effect on the political stability.
- \ linkages between the current Sierra Leone People's Party government and former combatants and the utilisation of the latter to exert political violence feed stigmatisation and fear of former Kamajors in the broader society. This therefore undermines social cohesion in the country.

PART II: Liberia

In this case study, I will give a brief overview of the civil war in Liberia and post-war stabilisation measures to assess the degree to which former members of PGMs still affect society in the country. I will then take a closer look at the current situation and discuss whether, where and how networks in Liberia still exist, and, in a second step, how they interact with the political elite and the wider society. Main take-away points can be found at the end of the Paper.

Civil War, the Role of Pro-Government Militias and Post-War Stabilisation Measures

The Liberian civil war began in December 1989 when Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) invaded the country from Ivory Coast to topple the government of Samuel Doe. Over the next seven years, the NPFL and the armed forces of Liberia were involved in heavy fighting, both supported by various armed militias. Some of them, like the Liberia Peace Council, fought as PGM on the side of the government. After an intervention by the Economic Community of West African States Military Observer Group (ECOMOG) and the election of Charles Taylor as president, the first phase of the civil war ended in 1997. However, clashes between Taylor's troops and the rebel group Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy erupted in 1999. While Taylor had drafted many members of the NPFL into the armed forces of Liberia, he also formed the pro-government Anti-Terrorist Unit and Special Security Service, which, together with the armed forces of Liberia, were then known as government forces (Ansorge & Antwi-Ansorge, 2012). However, given the frequent changes of alliances and a rebel becoming president, the Liberian case does not show clear front lines and stable alliances. Thus, even though we find PGMs in the civil war, they cannot consistently be labelled as such. With the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement on 18 August 2003, the civil war ended but left deep scars: Around one million Liberians were

displaced, and an estimated 300,000 to 500,000 people were killed (McMullin, 2013a, p. 201). Much of the country's social, health and educational infrastructure was destroyed.

Different UN entities and the US government accompanied the transition from war to peace, implementing a DDR programme, SSR and measures of TJ to rebuild trust and social ties. The measures targeted society as a whole, yet some aspects affected former combatants more than other parts of society. The DDR process has generally been criticised by both researchers and practitioners as establishing the group of ex-combatants in the societal perception while at the same time contributing to their stigmatisation by labelling them as a security threat (Bøås & Bjørkhaug, 2010, p. 15). Further, having to hand in a weapon to be included in the DDR process prevented many combatants from participating, either because they had no access to a weapon or they had sold it for quick money. Consequently, non-combatants participated in the programme, while several combatants did not (Ansorge & Antwi-Ansorge, 2012; McMullin, 2013a). Only in very few cases did the reintegration training programmes have a positive impact on the socio-economic situation of ex-combatants (Ansorge & Antwi-Ansorge, 2012). Socio-economic opportunities were further limited by the fact that, unlike in Sierra Leone, SSR also intended to hinder former combatants—government, pro- and anti-government alike—from joining the new armed forces of Liberia through high recruitment standards and extensive background checks. This caused deep frustration among ex-combatants (Crisis Group, 2009).

To reach 'genuine healing and reconciliation' in the population, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission provided a forum to share experiences, tell the truth and 'address issues of impunity' to understand and overcome the conflict (TRC Report, 2009). Yet, in contrast to Sierra Leone, no special court to investigate and prosecute war crimes has been established, which results in large-scale impunity for all (major) actors of the civil war and thus affects social relations.

Since one of the main goals of the post-war stabilisation measures was the remaking of social relations, and all programmes were implemented in Liberia, one could expect to find a resettled society. However, these measures also influenced the former combatants' relation to politics and their societal position. In the next sections, I will take a closer look at the current situation of the former combatants' political and social relations.

Pro-Government Militias in Liberia: Still Affecting the Country's Fate?

Despite all the efforts of reintegrating former combatants, studies in the past indicated that the ex-combatant community has continued relevance (e.g., Söderström, 2015). Moreover, earlier research also indicated that post-war stabilisation measures had not disrupted networks of former combatants but that they continued to exist during the first decade after the end of the civil war (Jennings, 2007; McMullin, 2013b; Söderström, 2015). Building on these studies and analysing the situation 20 years after the end of the conflict, I assess these networks' long-term impact. To this end, I will first demonstrate how these networks are still persistent and then analyse how they interact with the political elite and the broader society.

Persistent Networks

Even today, having fought during the civil war plays a fundamental role and seems to co-determine people's social position and contacts. However, representatives from the Veterans Bureau who actively participated in the civil war highlighted that it is usually less the affiliation to the various warring factions or the pro-/anti-government alignment that determines the identity of an ex-combatant today. Instead, there is a sense of one, all-embracing ex-combatant veteran community (interview with representatives of the Veteran Bureau, INT12_LR; see also Bøås & Hatloy 2008; Söderström, 2015). In addition to this general sense of belonging to one community, personal allegiances still play a role among former combatants. An interviewee points out that the local population may consider a wartime leader who today is in a powerful position a 'godfather' and former combatants acclaim him a 'political hero', still

pledging 'loyalty to that person'. Consequently, 'there is still command, there is still control over them' (INT2_LR).

These connections are not only lingering in the background as a common identity. Loyalty to former comrades and commanders still exists today and plays out in communication lines and various ways of (mutual) support, as the account of a former fighter of Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia indicates: In the past, his former general had helped the fighter find a job, and until today, the former fighter and his family have been living in a room in the general's house. As described by the fighter, this support goes back to their shared wartime experience (interview with former NPFL fighter, INT11_LR). We can thus state that they not only maintain contact, but their relationship is still shaped by (interdependent) support. In line with this, other interview partners highlight that a security officer might not issue a fine to a bike rider who had violated the law because of their shared background as former fighters/veterans (interview with the president of the National Federation of Motorcycle and Tricycle Association of Liberia (NAFOMTAL), INT10_LR). Others continue to support former comrades with small amounts of money (interview with a representative of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), INT3_LR). Moreover, according to another interviewee, in situations where former combatants need someone to trust for (economic) cooperation, e.g., in gold mining, they rely on those who have already proven themselves trustworthy in matters of life and death—former comrades (interview with a representative of WANEP, INT3_LR). These individual accounts indicate that there is not only a special bond between those who participated in the civil war but that it also translates into social and economic support. This becomes evident in larger groups, too.

Against the backdrop of hardly any opportunities to work the fields—work that ex-combatants were trained to do during the DDR programme—many living in Monrovia today can be found in certain areas of employment: Riding a motorcycle taxi, for example, has become a viable option because it does not require any school qualifications or training. At the same time, it is quite resilient to crises and thus offers a steady form of income. Alternatively, former combatants are regarded as experienced in security, e.g., due to their (potential)

training in weapon skills and fighting during the civil war and, therefore, now work in the private security sector. Within these groups, we can detect the influence of the structures created during the fighting and how they are maintained today.

Within the group of motorcyclists, there is a strong feeling of solidarity. This becomes evident on social occasions, such as a wedding or graduation, but also manifests itself in strong expressions of solidarity in cases of conflicts with people outside the group, for instance (interview with the president of NAFO-MTAL, INT10_LR; see also Shilue, 2010, as cited in Small Arms Survey, 2011). Today, this solidarity is predominantly based on a shared identity as motorcyclists. However, in groups that include many ex-combatants, they seem to play an important role for the organisation, maintenance and recruitment of these groups (interview with a representative of YMCA, INT6_LR; see also Persson, 2012). Moreover, embedded in and parallel to the larger group solidarity amongst motorcyclists, special bonds and solidarity apparently still exist between former combatants, as the following accounts indicate. Both Samuel G. Deapah, President of NAFOMTAL, and the Human Resources manager of a private security company describe how these networks are maintained: Ex-fighters get together before meetings, chatting and exchanging war stories or sharing other social activities (INT10_LR, INT13_LR), thereby maintaining their identity as former combatants, but also the ties between them. We can thus assume that there is still a shared veteran feeling and maintained communications among former combatants.

In sum, then, considering indicators such as special ties and communication as well as (im)material support, networks between former combatants still seem to exist. These are based on a shared ex-combatant identity that includes all former fighters, regardless of their previous pro- or anti-government affiliations. While this form of socio-economic support demonstrates how networks can be used for peaceful purposes, it simultaneously maintains (inter)dependencies and contributes to creating in-groups and out-groups.

Interlinkages between Networks and the Political Elite

Against the background of the above, it is plausible to assume that networks of former fighters might be even more pronounced around the political elite. Similar to the Sierra Leonean case, former combatants and their networks are used by the political elite for personal security and as irregular forces. However, due to the fact that, in contrast to Sierra Leone, (prominent) civil war actors were not prosecuted, former warring faction leaders like Prince Johnson⁸ or George Boley⁹ are part of the current government of Liberia. As a consequence, former combatants not only interact with the political elite, as seen in Sierra Leone, but are actively involved in politics through their former leaders.

According to several interviewees, it is common practice in the current government to use former combatants as private security. Their (arms) training and reputation of being fear- and reckless increases their eligibility for this kind of position (interview with representative of WANEP, INT3_LR). Even President George Weah follows this approach (interviews with representatives from peacebuilding NGOs WANEP, P4DP, CEMESP). Accounts from the security and human resources managers from private security companies explaining that politicians often do not refer to companies for personal security but rather acquire former fighters based on private recommendations support these observations. Here, trust among and communication along ex-combatant networks play a crucial role (INT7_LR and INT13_LR). This dynamic becomes stronger around former warring faction leaders now involved in politics. Several interview partners highlight that they only consider those who have fought with them as loyal and thus trustworthy:

Prince Johnson has his private security from his fighting forces because these are the people he trusts. He is not going to choose anybody else (interview with representative of WANEP, INT3_LR; see also interview

8\ Former leader of the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL), one of the most notorious warring factions during civil war, now senator of Nimba county and member of the Senate.

9\ Former leader of the Liberia Peace Council (LPC), one of the pro-government warring factions during civil war, now member of the House of Representatives for Grand Gedeh county.

with National General Secretary of YMCA, INT6_LR, and interview with HR manager PSC, INT13_LR).

Moreover, a former fighter of Charles Taylor's National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) states: 'If someone touches George Boley somewhere, he will get all the old people and put them together [...]' (INT11_LR).

However, links between ex-combatants and the government go beyond their use as security forces; there is also anecdotal evidence that state forces and former generals of the warring factions cooperate to hinder protests against and criticism of the government. During opposition-initiated protests in January 2020, reports by the Independent National Human Rights Commission and the civil society Human Rights Platform allege that several former generals from various warring factions¹⁰ were identified alongside state forces during the protests (News Public Trust, 2020). There are further reports not only on intimidation of the opposition by former rebel generals during protests (BTI 2022) but also that Coalition for Democratic Change supporters and former PGM generals allied with the ruling party had threatened political opponents of the ruling Coalition for Democratic Change (US Department of State, 2020; 2021; African Star, 2020). This becomes particularly evident in the case of a former general of the United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy, Augustine Nagbe, also known as 'General Power'. He was among the private security to President George Weah before he, allegedly together with state forces, closed down the radio station 'Roots FM', which had been famous for being one of the most critical voices towards the government, in October 2019 (interview with representative of WANEP, INT3_LR; see also African Star, 2019). At the end of 2019, he publicly announced his willingness to set up a defence unit for President George Weah to defend him against criticism (Dodoo, 2019). His statement reveals the interdependence of the relationship and links pledging

loyalty to the president with the hope for socio-economic ascension, underlining his willingness to defend the president and expressing his assumption: 'He'll bring me to government' (Dodoo, 2019).

In line with the linkages described above, James Shilue, Executive Director of the Platform for Development and Peace (P4DP), states, 'the fact that generals who have not been held accountable for their deeds in the war', act 'on behalf of the state' clearly demonstrates that 'these structures, they are not dead'. Quite on the contrary. He draws attention to attempts by the incumbent to 'resuscitate and support and strengthen the structures' to address situations that may challenge their hold on power (INT8_LR). Based on a US Department of the Treasury report that states: '[Prince, F.W.] Johnson receives an undeserved salary from the GOL [Government of Liberia, F.W.] as a salaried intelligence "source" yet he does not provide any form of intelligence reporting to the GOL; Johnson is reportedly being paid in order to maintain domestic stability' (US Department of the Treasury, 2021), this assumption may well prove to be true. And yet, these relations are reciprocal. The Executive Director of the Center for Media Studies and Peacebuilding (CEMESP) explains that as long as former combatants

are around the powerful people, [...] nobody can touch them. [...] There's no accountability there because they are connected. They know they are connected with the power. [...] They walk scot free [...] as long as they are connected with the power (INT9_LR).

The International Justice Group seconds this and highlights in a petition to implement the recommendations of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission: 'President Weah made a pact with President Johnson Sirleaf and Senator Prince Johnson to shield them and their family from justice', which leads to a situation in which 'ex-combatants are resurrecting and resurfacing in Liberia' (Liberian Listener, 2019).

These reciprocal relations are likely to affect national politics. While we cannot track causal connections, but in view of the interdependencies described above, President George Weah's reluctance

10 \ Ex-General Ofori Diah (Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy, LURD), ex-General Siafa Norman (National Patriotic Front of Liberia, NPFL) and ex-General Augustine Nagbe (United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy, ULIMO-J).

to implement his election campaign promise and install a Special Court to investigate and prosecute war crimes has been linked to his close ties to and political dependence on high-ranking members of the warring factions (interview with James Shilue, INT8_LR; see also Bondo, 2021). Given Prince Johnson's decisive number of votes and great political weight due to his influence in Nimba county (Weah, 2012), he was already called a 'kingmaker' in the past (Bondo, 2021; see also Bøås & Utas, 2014). Considering Johnson's statement that he would not support a party that is in favour of the establishment of the war crimes court (Bondo, 2021) and President Weah's subsequent reluctance to do so, an effect on national politics cannot be dismissed out of hand.

In sum, the findings suggest that there are close ties between former combatants and the current government. Further, there is evidence that the government utilises former combatants to put pressure on and exert violence against political opponents. The fact that former warring faction leaders are members of the current government not only reinforces these ex-combatants–government linkages but also leads them to use their political power to maintain networks and prevent the prosecution of war crimes.

Interplay with Society

Even though the civil war in Liberia ended almost two decades ago, it is not a closed chapter. The traces are not only visible on Monrovia's buildings; social relations are also still marked by wartime experiences. This is especially true for the relationship between former combatants and those who did not fight. Linkages between former combatants and the government put further strain on this rather tense relationship.

The (lacking) implementation of the post-war stabilisation measures still affects social relations today: Many people believe that most members of the different warring factions who had committed crimes during the wars were not prosecuted and got

away with their crimes. This still affects their personal lives and the wider communities. Thus, according to interviewees who work in the communities, people experience re-traumatisation by meeting perpetrators on the street or by witnessing the prominent position of former warlords, e.g., Prince Johnson in politics (interview with National General Secretary of YMCA, INT6_LR; interview with Executive Director CEMESP, INT9_LR). According to E. Timotheus Kamaboakai, National General Secretary of the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), 'underlying command structures' and the fact that 'their commanders are still around, their leaders, influential people' (INT6_LR) affect social relations in the communities. He further stresses that relations seem to be reconciled at the surface, but former combatants 'are not in a relationship with the community' and thus 'it just takes a spark' to realise that there has been 'serious tension all along' (INT6_LR). In line with this, Malcolm Wleemogar Joseph, Executive Director of the Center for Media Studies and Peacebuilding (CEMESP) stresses: 'There's always this issue of, oh, this person fought the war'. So, he continues, the 'resentment is there', the 'finger pointing is still around' (INT9_LR). In addition to this stigmatisation, *people still have that fear that these guys still have that kind of mindset. They are afraid of what they are able to do based on their past, so community members are very careful how to deal with them, how to live with them, how to approach them* (interview with member of the Liberia National Police, INT2_LR).

According to Söderström, this results in a vicious cycle, since the former combatants' 'hostility and questioning of society was reinforced by their understanding of their own position in society as subordinate' (2015, p. 159). Accordingly, '[t]rust is in short supply in Liberia. [...] Trust is largely restricted to private settings [...] and rare in the public sphere' (BTI 2022). Thus, while former combatants live in communities, the above accounts suggest that these communities do not necessarily regard them as full and/or respected community members.

While the interviewees generally view the group of former combatants as disconnected from the broader society, individual cases may differ. Some former

combatants are considered as reintegrated and contributing to society, having 'transformed' and living 'a better life today', having started a family, and 'moved on with life' (interview with WANEP, INT3_LR). Yet, to some degree, this still relates to the combatant's wartime behaviour, as the account of a former NPFL fighter underlines:

And if you ask them what was one of the things he did during the war when he was here as a commander, they will tell you. [...] I still live in that community and people know me there. Because I saved them, I saved their life, I saved their property (INT11_LR).

This recognition may even result in local communities turning to former fighters for protection asking them to form a neighbourhood militia (Bøås & Bjørkhaug, 2010).

We can thus note that a perception of strained ex-combatants-community relations dominates. Nevertheless, there seem to be cases where former combatants live as respected members in their communities. The above account suggests a link between the current situation and wartime behaviour. Moreover, earlier research identified a gap between the individual—who wants to live peacefully—and the 'forced action of the collective', where behavioural expectations make former combatants behave like troublemakers (Jennings, 2007, p. 212)—resulting in a persistent division.

Former fighters' networks deepen this division (INT1_LR; see also Reno, 2012). Members of large groups with a high proportion of former combatants often perceive former combatants as setting the tone through their powerful networks (interview with a member of the Liberia National Police, INT2_LR). This exacerbates the schism between former combatants and non-combatants as it strengthens ties between former combatants while, at the same time, undermining relations with people outside the group of former combatants. Samuel Deapah, former President of the Liberia Motorcycle Transport Union's description of a situation during his presidency when his deputy repeatedly became hostile against him in favour of a former comrade from Charles Taylor's Anti-Terror Unit, supports the above accounts:

He [Samuel Deapah's deputy, F.W.] saw that this man [his former comrade, F.W.] is his interest. Whether he's right or wrong, he supported him. So that's the kind of relationship when people who were faction members yesterday see each other today. Yes, there is a close bond between them. And when it comes to standing by one another, yes, they stand by one another based on their past relationship, I experienced that (INT10_LR).

This case depicts how loyalty between former combatants undermines their social relations outside the network. A form of solidarity that not only turns into hostility towards a superior but might also result in losing the job becomes even more significant in a setting where hierarchies persist and job opportunities are rare.

Furthermore, whenever violence comes from motorcyclists, it can usually be traced back to the structures of former combatants within their groups. Consequently, the broader society perceives the motorbike sector as a threat to national security (interview with the President of NAFOMTAL, INT10_LR). In this context, resorting to violence in case of a conflict has been described as 'ex-combatant behaviour' (McMullin, 2013b, p. 396). Thus, even though motorcyclists make an essential contribution to social and economic life in Liberia by enabling mobility, the accounts indicate how the presence of former combatants leads to the perception of motorcyclists as violent and unreliable. This, in turn affects the relationship between them and wider communities.

Finally, the presence of former warring factions leaders in the current government and the linkages between the government and former combatants negatively affect social cohesion and political stability in Liberia. Interview accounts suggest that impunity for wartime atrocities is a concern (see previous chapter), and this is reinforced by wartime leaders now being part of the government, expanding their power and profiting from it. In addition, the utilisation of former combatants by the political elite for political violence (see previous chapter) amplifies the stereotype of violent ex-combatants and thus undermines their reconciliation with communities.

Taken together, relations between former combatants and the broader society are still fragmented. Often, there seems to be a division between former combatants and society that goes back to wartime experiences and leads to former combatants associated with violence. The presence of former warring faction leaders as well as links between former combatants and the government however reinforces stigmatisation and fear of them.

Take-away points

My study on the persistence of networks in Liberia indicates that

- \ against the background of a shared identity and mutual (economic) support, it can be assumed that networks of former combatants still exist.
- \ former pro-/anti-government allegiances or affiliation to a certain warring faction play no role in today's social navigation of former combatants. Rather, a shared veteran feeling has emerged among those, who participated in the war. This is most likely due to shifting alliances during the civil war and the following DDR process that created the group identity as 'ex-combatants'.
- \ networks of former combatants seem to be most persistent around the political elite, namely the (current) government. This is based on (1) the active role of former warlords in the current government and (2) the current government's use of former combatants as personal security and irregular forces. Moreover, there is evidence that former combatants are told to threaten political opponents and critical voices. Relying on these networks thus reinforces political violence
- \ the presence of former warring faction leaders in government and linkages between the current government and former combatants and the use of the latter to exert political violence feed stigmatisation and fear of former combatants in the broader society. This therefore undermines social cohesion in the country.

Conclusion: Lessons on the Long-Term Effects of Pro-Government Militias

The analysis of the two cases of Sierra Leone and Liberia has shown that arming civilians by building pro-government militias has short-term and long-term effects on peace and security in a state. Against persisting communication structures and forms of (mutual) support in Sierra Leone and Liberia, it is reasonable to assume that networks of former (pro-government) fighters continue to exist. This is remarkable, given that the wars took place 20 years ago and that a whole range of measures were implemented in both countries to support society in transitioning from war to peace. It further suggests that the ties of solidarity forged during armed struggle are long-lasting. This persistence has consequences for a country in different areas:

\ *Networks of former combatants continue to affect the countries' security*

The case studies have shown that the persistence of networks of former (PGM) combatants can have considerable but regionally very different effects on security. On the one hand—as in the case of the former Kamajors in Sierra Leone—they can continue to serve as security providers that support the local police and protect their communities. This can positively contribute to the security situation—particularly in areas at the margin of the national government's influence. However, this positive impact is regionally very limited and centrally dependent on the role of the respective militias during the war.

On the other hand, the results suggest that time and even interventions, like the establishment of special courts, cannot cure what has already proven to be a problem in the short term when using PGMs: political actors who are willing to use violence as a means of politics are likely to resort to PGMs (Wilshusen, 2022). For a political elite that is willing to use

violence to enforce its interests, ex-combatants seem to be the necessary resource to do so. The maintenance of irregular groups plays a crucial role in this to avoid accountability. It is striking that in both cases—and thus regardless of whether or not the Special Court has indicted the faction leaders or former warlords actively engaged in national politics—the networks of former fighters persist the closest they are to the political elite, the political parties and the government. Political actors not only fall back on existing networks but are also actively involved in their maintenance through the exchange of resources. The growing time gap between the civil wars apparently has no influence this relationship at all; the connections are still intensive, as current evidence of cooperation demonstrates. In the case of Sierra Leone, the strong link between the former Kamajors and the Sierra Leone People's Party, which is based on regional and ethnic identity and goes back to the time of the civil war, seems to continue. It is important to note that because of the Kamajors' strong ties to the party, we can assume that the group would act as an anti-government force if the party were to be in the opposition. Their loyalty lies not so much with the government but with the party. Following this, the former Kamajors may be mobilised for political violence during party rallies and election campaigning. This leads (civil) society to perceive that the Sierra Leone People's Party can thus fall back on large-scale structures of the former Kamajors. In the case of Liberia, prominent leaders of warring factions actively shape national politics by using their strong support bases in their home counties as well as combatants' networks as leverage to impose their political will. Consequently, it is likely that their political involvement contributes to preventing the reappraisal and prosecution of the civil war's atrocities. Furthermore, the current government maintains close ties to former combatants and uses their networks to intimidate political opponents.

From these findings, it can be concluded that former (pro-government) combatants, regardless of their previous affiliation, represent a potential instrument for exercising political violence—even in the long term. The utilisation of former combatants in both cases thus contributes to continuing violence

as a (political) means in national politics, thereby undermining democratic processes and the countries' stability. With a view to the upcoming elections, political violence may increase. Incidents in recent years have shown that political elites in Sierra Leone and Liberia are willing to use violence to maintain power. As the cooperation between former combatants' networks and the ruling elite continues in both cases, it also seems possible that former combatants will be used around elections to intimidate political opponents.

\ *Networks of former combatants still mark the countries' social relations*

Despite DDR, SSR and TJ programmes, ultimately aimed at remaking post-war relationships by disrupting the links between former fighters to enable a (re)approchement between former fighters and their civilian counterparts, the networks persist, which has two effects on social relations:

- *(Pro-government) militias create protracted identities and feelings of entitlement*

Both case studies have revealed that the identity as (former) combatant proves to be persistent—and still seems to exist today. However, we see differences between Sierra Leone and Liberia: The Sierra Leonean Kamajor's identity is linked to wartime group affiliation, while accounts and previous studies in Liberia point toward a shared veteran feeling of one ex-combatant community. This is a likely outcome of the different dynamics of the civil wars. In the Sierra Leonean civil war, the fronts between pro- and anti-government forces were more or less consistent, and the Kamajors, as part of the pro-government forces, regarded themselves as protectors of their communities and the legitimate government throughout the war. This strong loyalty feeds into the feeling of being entitled to a reward of some description. While this feeling of entitlement makes the former combatants seek proximity with political elites and maintain relationships with their former commanders, it undermines the idea of equal citizenship and the reintegration process.

In the Liberian civil war, the warring factions were much more fragmented. These blurred front lines contributed to the fact that identification as a rebel or pro-government militia was less important than the distinction of whether someone had been a fighter at all.

- *Networks of former combatants affect the level of trust*

In both cases, the level of trust within society is still affected by the aftermath of the civil wars. On a broader societal level, both cases suggest that those wanting to re-establish social relations between the civilian population and former combatants need a lot of staying power. Ex-combatants are still perceived as having a war attitude and willing to resort to violence at any time. Here, the distinction between members of PGMs and former anti-government militias plays a subordinate role. However, the case of Sierra Leone, where the Kamajor acted primarily as defenders of their communities of origin, highlights that the picture is not as clear-cut as perceptions and relations may differ within the wider society. In their stronghold Bo, former Kamajor are now not only respected community members but also perceived as security providers. These findings imply that the social embedding and the subsequent control of a combatant's behaviour during fighting may also determine post-war social relations.

Bibliography

- African Star (2019, 10 October). Liberian government shuts down critical voice ROOTS FM radio. <https://www.africanstar.org/liberian-government-shuts-down-critical-voice-roots-fm-radio/>
- African Star (2020, 5 December). Liberia: Election-Related Violence Hits Convoy of An Opposition Member. <https://www.africanstar.org/liberia-election-related-violence-hits-convoy-of-an-opposition-member/>
- Aliyev, H. & Souleimanov, E. A. (2019). Ethnicity and conflict severity: accounting for the effect of co-ethnic and non-ethnic militias on battlefield lethality. *Third World Quarterly*, 40(3), 471-487. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2018.1545568>
- Ansorge, J. T. & Antwi-Ansorge, N.A. (2011). Monopoly, Legitimacy, Force: DDR-SSR Liberia. In M. A. Civic & M. Miklaucic (Eds.). *Monopoly of Force: The Nexus of DDR and SSR*, (pp. 265-84). Washington, DC: National Defense University Press.
- Bangura, I. (2013). A Critical Assessment of the Socio-Economic Reintegration Process of Ex-Combatants Ten Years After the War in Sierra Leone [Doctoral dissertation, HHL Leipzig Graduate School of Management].
- Bayart J.-F. (1993). *The State in Africa: The Politics of the Belly*. New York: Longman.
- Bertelsmann Foundation (2022): Bertelsmann Transformation Index: Liberia. <https://bti-project.org/en/reports/country-dashboard/LBR>
- Bøås, M., & Bjørkhaug, I. (2010). DDRED in Liberia: Youth Remarginalisation or Reintegration? (MICROCON Research Working Paper No. 28). <https://doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.1650589>
- Bøås, M., & Hatløy, A. (2008). 'Getting in, getting out': militia membership and prospects for reintegration in post-war Liberia. *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 46(1), 33-55. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X07003060>
- Bøås, M., & Utas, M. (2014). The Political Landscape of Postwar Liberia: Reflections on National Reconciliation and Elections. *Africa Today*, 60(4), 47. <https://doi.org/10.2979/africatoday.60.4.47>
- Bondo, D. (2021, 20 July). Liberia: Prince Johnson and George Boley, former warlords who remain powerful in politics, *The Africa Report*. <https://www.theafricareport.com/107181/liberia-prince-johnson-and-george-boley-former-warlords-who-remain-powerful-in-politics/>
- Bruijne, K. de. (2020). *When emerging democracies breed violence: Sierra Leone 20 years after the end of the civil war*. Madison, Wisconsin: ACLED. https://acleddata.com/acleddatanew/wp-content/uploads/2020/12/Report_SierraLeone_ACLED_Clingendael_WANEP-SL_2020webpub.pdf
- Bundesregierung (2017). *Krisen verhindern, Konflikte bewältigen, Frieden fördern. Leitlinien der Bundesregierung*. <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/blob/283636/d98437ca3ba49c0ec6a461570f56211f/leitlinien-krisen-praevention-konfliktbewaeltigung-friedensfoerderung-dl-data.pdf>
- Bürge, M. (2012). Riding the Narrow Tracks of Moral Life: commercial motorbike riders in Makeni, Sierra Leone. *Africa Today*, 58(2), 58-95.
- Carey, S. C., & Mitchell, N. J. (2017). Progovernment Militias. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 20, 127-147. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-polisci-051915-045433>
- Carey, S. C., Mitchell, N. J., & Lowe, W. (2013). States, the security sector, and the monopoly of violence: A new database on pro-government militias. *Journal of Peace Research*, 50(2), 249-258. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343312464881>
- Christensen, M. M. & Utas, M. (2008). Mercenaries of democracy: The 'Politricks' of remobilized combatants in the 2007 general elections, Sierra Leone. *African Affairs*, 107(429), 515-539. <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adn057>
- Christensen, M. M. (2012). Big Man business in the borderland of Sierra Leone. In M. Utas (Ed.). *African conflicts and informal power: Big men and networks* (pp. 60-77). London: Zed Books.
- Clayton, G., & Thomson, A. (2014). The Enemy of My Enemy is My Friend ... The Dynamics of Self-Defense Forces in Irregular War: The Case of the Sons of Iraq. *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism*, 37(11), 920-935. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2014.952262>
- Crisis Group. (2009). *Liberia: Uneven Progress in Security Sector Reform* (Africa Report N°148). <https://icg-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/148-liberia-uneven-progress-in-security-sector-reform.pdf>
- Dodoo, L. (2019). Liberia: Ex-combatant, General Power, to Form Kru Defense Force for the Protection of Pres. Weah, The Kru People. *Frontpage Africa*. <https://frontpageafricaonline.com/liberia-war-crimes-trial/liberia-ex-combatant-general-power-to-form-kru-defense-force-for-the-protection-of-pres-weah-the-kru-people/>
- Duthie, R. & Specht, I. (2010). *DDR, Transitional Justice, and the Reintegration of Former Child Combatants* (Research Brief). International Center for Transitional Justice. <https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-DDR-Child-Combatants-ResearchBrief-2010-English.pdf>
- Ferguson, N. T. N. (2015). Just the Two of Us? Civil Conflicts, Pro-State Militants, and the Violence Premium, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 29(2), 296-322. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546553.2015.1035368>
- Francis, D. J. (2017[2005]). *Civil Militia: Africa's Intractable Security Menace?* London: Routledge. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315260167>

- Hoffman, D. (2007). The city as barracks: Freetown, Monrovia, and the Organization of Violence in Postcolonial African Cities. *Cultural Anthropology*, 22(3), 400-428. <https://doi.org/10.1525/can.2007.22.3.400>
- Humphreys, M., & Weinstein, J. (2004). *What the Fighters Say: A survey of ex-combatants in Sierra Leone*. Columbia University. http://www.columbia.edu/~mh2245/Report1_BW.pdf
- Jaye, T. (2008). *Liberia's security sector legislation*. Geneva: DCAF. https://issat.dcaf.ch/download/7786/71468/DCAF_Liberia_Legislation.pdf
- Jennings, K. M. (2007). The Struggle to Satisfy: DDR Through the Eyes of Ex-combatants in Liberia. *International Peacekeeping*, 14(2), 204-218. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533310601150800>
- Jentzsch, C., Kalyvas, S. N., & Schubiger, L. I. (2015). Militias in Civil Wars. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 59(5), 755-769. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002715576753>
- Jones, S. G. (2012). *The strategic logic of militia* (RAND Working Paper Series, WR-913-SOCOM). Santa Monica: RAND National Defence Research Institute. https://www.rand.org/pubs/working_papers/WR913.html
- Kilroy, W., & S. A. Basini, H. (2018). Social Capital Made Explicit: The Role of Norms, Networks, and Trust in Reintegrating Ex-combatants and Peacebuilding in Liberia. *International Peacekeeping*, 25(3), 349-372. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2018.1461564>
- Liberian Listener (2019, 27 October). Liberia: Justice Group Accuses Weah-Led Govt of Recruiting Ex-Combatants, Putting Them on Payroll. <http://www.liberianlistener.com/2019/10/27/liberia-justice-group-accuses-weah-led-govt-of-recruiting-ex-combatants-putting-them-on-payroll/>
- McMullin, J. (2013a). *Ex-Combatants and the Post-Conflict State: Challenges of Reintegration. Rethinking Political Violence*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137312938>
- McMullin, J. R. (2013b). Integration or separation? The stigmatisation of ex-combatants after war. *Review of International Studies*, 39(2), 385-414. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0260210512000228>
- News Public Trust (2020, 9 January). Human Rights community criticizes government over ex-rebel generals role in January 6 protest. <https://newspublic-trust.com/human-rights-community-criticizes-govt-over-ex-rebel-generals-role-in-jan-6-protest/>
- Nilsson, D., & Kovacs, M. S. (2013). Different Paths of Reconstruction: Military Reform in Post-War Sierra Leone and Liberia. *International Peacekeeping*, 20(1), 2-16. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13533312.2013.761825>
- Okano, H. (2019). *Politics of Human Network in African Conflicts: Kamajor/the CDF in Sierra Leone*. Langaa RPCIG.
- Otto, S. (2018). The Grass Is Always Greener? Armed Group Side Switching in Civil Wars. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 62(7), 1459-1488. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002717693047>
- Persson, M. (2012). Demobilized or remobilized? Lingering rebel structures in post-war Liberia. In M. Utas (Ed.), *African conflicts and informal power: Big men and networks* (pp. 101-118). London: Zed Books.
- Reno, W. (2010). Transforming West African militia networks for postwar recovery. In K. B. Harpviken (Ed.), *Comparative Social Research. Troubled Regions and Failing States: The Clustering and Contagion of Armed Conflicts* (Vol. 27, pp. 127-149). Emerald Group Publishing Limited. [https://doi.org/10.1108/S0195-6310\(2010\)0000027009](https://doi.org/10.1108/S0195-6310(2010)0000027009)
- Sanny, J. (2020). Fear of Political Violence Soars in Sierra Leone, AD345, *Afrobarometer*. <https://afrobarometer.org/publications/ad345-fear-political-violence-soars-sierra-leone/>
- Schneckener, U. (2015). Status-quo-orientierte Gewalt? Zur Charakterisierung von Milizen. *Sicherheit und Frieden*, 33(4), 173-179. <http://dx.doi.org/10.5771/0175-274X-2015-4-1>
- Sesay, M. G., & Suma, M. (2009). *Transitional Justice and DDR: the case of Sierra Leone*. International Center for Transitional Justice. <https://www.ictj.org/sites/default/files/ICTJ-DDR-Sierra-Leone-CaseStudy-2009-English.pdf>
- Small Arms Survey (2011). *Reading between the Lines: Crime and Victimization in Liberia* (Liberia Armed Violence Assessment Issue Brief 2). Geneva: Small Arms Survey.
- Söderström, J. (2015). *Peacebuilding and ex-combatants: Political reintegration in Liberia. Studies in conflict, development and peacebuilding*. London: Routledge.
- Solomon, C., & Ginifer, J. (2008). *Disarmament, Demobilisation and Reintegration in Sierra Leone* (Case Study). Centre for International Cooperation and Security. https://au.int/sites/default/files/documents/39119-doc-85._disarmament_demobilisation_and_reintegration_in_sierra_leone.pdf
- Government of Sierra Leone (2012). *Special Court for Sierra Leone Agreement (Ratification) Act*. <http://www.rscsl.org/Documents/RSCSL-Act.pdf>
- Themnér, A. (2011). *Violence in post-conflict societies: remarginalization, remobilizers, and relationships*. Abingdon, Oxfordshire: Routledge.
- Themnér, A. (2019). Wealth in Ex-Combatants: Examining the Resilience of Ex-Command Structures in Postwar Liberia. *Journal of Global Security Studies*, 4(4), 526-544. <https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogy029>
- Thomas, A. R. (2022a, 15 August). Opposition APC media strongman assassinated as fears grow over return of extrajudicial killings in Sierra Leone. *Sierra Leone Telegraph*. <https://www.thesierraleonetelegraph.com/opposition-apc-media-strongman-assassinated-as-fears-grow-over-return-of-extra-judicial-killings-in-sierra-leone/>

- Thomas, A. R. (2022b, 12 June). Reign of terror in Sierra Leone's Bendugu bye-election: Worrying development for the country's 2023 elections. *Sierra Leone Telegraph*. <https://www.thesierraleonetelegraph.com/reign-of-terror-in-sierra-leones-bendugu-bye-election-worrying-development-for-the-countrys-2023-elections/>
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Liberia (2009). *Final report*. <https://www.trcofliberia.org/reports/final-report.html>
- United Nations (2006). *General IDDRS. Glossary: Terms and Definitions*. <https://www.unddr.org/modules/IDDRS-1.20-Glossary.pdf>
- US Department of State (2020). *Human Rights Report: Liberia*. <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/LIBERIA-2020-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf>
- US Department of State (2021). *Human Rights Report: Liberia*. https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/313615_LIBERIA-2021-HUMAN-RIGHTS-REPORT.pdf
- US Department of the Treasury (2021). Treasury Issues Sanctions on International Anti-Corruption Day. Press release, <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/jy0523>
- Utas, M. (Ed.) (2012). *African conflicts and informal power. Big men and networks*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Utas, M. & Christensen, M. M. (2016). The Gift of Violence: Ex-Militias and Ambiguous Debt Relations during Post-War Elections in Sierra Leone. *African Conflict and Peacebuilding Review*, 6(2), 23. <https://doi.org/10.2979/africonfpeacrevi.6.2.02>
- Weah, A. (2012). Hopes and Uncertainties: Liberia's Journey to End Impunity. *International Journal of Transitional Justice*, 6(2), 331-343. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ijtj/ijj007>
- Wilshusen, F. (2022). *Today's solution, tomorrow's problem? An analysis of West African practices in the use of pro-government militias* (BICC Security-Armament-Development Nexus Paper). Bonn: BICC. https://www.bicc.de/uploads/tx_bicctools/SAD-Nexus-Paper_2021_BICC.pdf
- Wlodarczyk, N. (2009). Politically Enfranchising the Non-political: Safeguarding Peace through Civic Education and Inclusion? The Civil Defence Forces in Sierra Leone. *Civil Wars*, 11(2), 200-214. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13698240802631095>
- Zack-Williams, A. B. (1997). Kamajors, 'sober' & the military: civil society & the return of the military in Sierra Leonean politics. *Review of African Political Economy*, 24(73), 373-380. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03056249708704269>

Annex

Interviews in Liberia

Abbreviation	Place	Person
INT1_LR	Monrovia	Journalist; Anonymised upon request
INT2_LR	Monrovia	Member of the Liberia National Police (LNP); Anonymised upon request
INT3_LR	Monrovia	Phillip Kollie; National Coordinator of West African Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP)
INT4_LR	Monrovia	DDR expert; Anonymised upon request
INT5_LR	Monrovia	SSR expert; Anonymised upon request
INT6_LR	Monrovia	E. Timotheus Kamaboakai; National General Secretary of Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA)
INT7_LR	Monrovia	Security manager of a private security company; Anonymised upon request
INT8_LR	Monrovia	James Suah Shilue; Executive Director of Platform for Development and Peace (P4DP)
INT9_LR	Monrovia	Malcolm Wleemogar Joseph; Executive Director of the Center for Media Studies and Peacebuilding (CEMESP)
INT10_LR	Monrovia	Samuel G. Deapah; National President of the National Federation of Motorcycle and Tricycle Association of Liberia (NAFOMTAL)
INT11_LR	Monrovia	Former NPFL fighter; Anonymised upon request
INT12_LR	Monrovia	Rtd. Maj. Alexander S. Geor, Rtd. Lt. Andrew J. Wleh; Rtd. Cpt. Klee G. Kerper, representatives of the Veterans Bureau
INT13_LR	Monrovia	Human resources manager of a private security company; Anonymised upon request

Interviews in Sierra Leone

Abbreviation	Place	Person
INT1_SL	Freetown	Representative of an NGO
INT2_SL	Freetown	Representative of an NGO
INT3_SL	Freetown	Former member of the RSLAF
INT4_SL	Freetown	Former member of the RSLAF
INT5_SL	Freetown	Representative of an NGO
INT6_SL	Bo	Representative of an NGO
INT7_SL	Bo	Former Kamajor Former Kamajor Former Kamajor Former Kamajor Former Kamajor
INT8_SL	Bo	Former Kamajor
INT9_SL	Freetown	Representative of the motorcycle union
INT10_SL	Freetown	Former Kamajor
INT11_SL	Freetown	Former Kamajor
INT12_SL	Freetown	Representative of an NGO
INT13_SL	Freetown	Representative of the government
INT14_SL	Freetown	Representative of a private security company
INT15_SL	Freetown	Representative of an NGO

NOTE: Due to the security situation that significantly worsened after August 10 2022 and subsequent attacks against people that are critical of the government, the author decided to anonymise all interviews that were conducted in Sierra Leone.

**bicc **

Bonn International Centre for Conflict Studies gGmbH

Pfarrer-Byns-Straße 1, 53121 Bonn, Germany
+49 (0)228 911 96-0, Fax -22, bicc@bicc.de

www.bicc.de
www.facebook.com/bicc.de
twitter.com/BICC_Bonn

bicc Bonn
International Centre
for Conflict Studies

DIRECTOR

Professor Dr Conrad Schetter

AUTHOR

Fiona Wilshusen

Researcher at BICC

EDITOR

Dr Marc von Boemcken

COPYEDITING

Heike Webb

LAYOUT

Heike Webb



Supported by the



Federal Ministry
for Economic Cooperation
and Development



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 3.0 Unported License;
[cf.creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/](http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/)