The Mano River Basin Area:
Formal and Informal Security Providers in Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone

MAGNUS JÖRGEL, FHS, MATS UTAS, FOI

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FOI
Swedish Defence Research Agency
Defence Analysis
SE-164 90 Stockholm

Phone: +46 8 55 50 30 00
Fax: +46 8 55 50 31 00

www.foi.se

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FOI, Swedish Defence Research Agency
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Sammanfattning

Mano River-staterna – Liberia, Sierra Leone och Guinea – har under de senaste 20 åren varit ett oroligt hörn av Västafrika, med inbördeskrig och kraftig politisk instabilitet. Även om det idag formellt råder fred i området, så ter sig livet för stora delar av befolkningen som en våldsam kamp för överlevnad i extrem fattigdom. Liberia och Sierra Leone befinner sig i återhämtning, men trots resursbidrag i form av återuppbyggnads- och reformstöd från organisationer och länder i västvärlden har förvånansvärt lite skett vad gäller reell utveckling och möjligheter för en stor del av befolkningen. Detta kan få allvarliga konsekvenser för regional säkerhet och stabilitet. I Guinea finns tecken som tyder på att befolkningen börjar tappa tålamodet med sin sjuke och ålderstigne totalitäre ledare.

Mängden strategidokument, utvecklingsplaner, planer för fattigdomsbekämpning, multidimensionella *Security Sector Reforms* (SSR) och andra av bidragsgivare iscensatta och samordnade utvecklingsstrategier visar det stora intresse som västvärldens givarländer har i Mano River-staterna. Trots detta har reella utvecklingsresultat uteblivit och ansträngningarna har därmed inte bidragit till den stabilitet och säkerhet som eftersträvats. Denna studie beskriver formella, säkerhetsrelaterade strukturer i Mano River-staterna samt regionala och subregionala strukturer såsom MRU, ECOWAS och AU. Detta kompletteras med en beskrivning av de informella strukturer som finns i och runt de formella strukturerna. Genom denna jämförelse framträder bilden av att det är de informella strukturerna som till stor del bestämmer det formella och driver eventuell samhällsutveckling framåt. Studien visar att utan en djupare förståelse av s k *Big Men* (patroner) och *informella nätverk* är det svårt för externa aktörer att åstadkomma social och politisk förändring i området. Endast genom att förstå och använda de informella aktörer som har tillgång till, eller kontrollerar, de sociala, ekonomiska och politiska sfärerna, kan säkerhetssituationen i regionen förbättras.

Nyckelord: Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Mano River Unionen, ECOWAS, Afrikanska Unionen, säkerhetsaktörer, säkerhetsstrukturer, informella aktörer, nätverk, Big Men

Summary

For the past 20 years the Mano River Basin (MRB) has been an area of violent upheavals and political instability. Although the area today enjoys peace in formal terms, life for many citizens of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea is one of immense struggle in poverty for a decent livelihood. Both Sierra Leone and Liberia are currently recovering from a decade of devastating civil strife that tore countries apart and caused massive death as well as destruction of private property and state structures. Despite ample emergency and development funds from Western donors being dispensed into the region, surprisingly little real development can be observed. This can have a real effect on long-term security and stability. Guinea awaits the death of its President, and with him a totalitarian ruling system.

The abundance of different strategy papers, development blueprints, comprehensive approaches, multidimensional Security Sector Reform (SSR) attempts and other donor-orchestrated development efforts indicate a great deal of international interest in dealing with the post-conflict situation in the MRB region. Unfortunately, direct outcomes remain uncertain and results from donor investment have not led to the social stability and security that have been wished for. This study describes the functions of the formal structures of the MRB states, the MRU, ECOWAS and the AU. It also looks into the informal networks that enmesh this formality. The study shows that it is the informal that pursues and carries the formal forward. It argues that without a thorough understanding of the concept of Big Men and informal networks external actors will never be able to make any real contribution to how political and social matters unfold in the MRB area. If we do not support this knowledge with comprehensive capacity-enhancing assets, and if we do not continue doing this for a substantial length of time, there will be no real change in the security situation in the region.

Keywords: Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea, Mano River Union, ECOWAS, African Union, security actors, security structures, informal actors, networks, Big Men

Contents

1 Executive Summary

This study was conducted with funding from the Swedish Armed Forces through the Swedish National Defence College (FHS) and the Swedish Defence Research Agency (FOI). Fieldwork and research took place during the autumn of 2007.[1] The study was initiated in the context of emerging strategic concepts dealing with multidimensional or multifunctional responses to contemporary conflicts and crises, such as the Comprehensive or Whole-of-Government Approach. In national and international development of such concepts, there is a general need for more knowledge of the environment in which they are to be applied. The result of the study is intended to be used as an input to national development of the comprehensive approach, and to the Multinational Experimentation Series (MNE), where a central aim is to enhance processes for planning, execution and evaluation of multinational, comprehensive responses.

For the past 20 years the Mano River Basin (MRB) has been an area of violent upheavals and political instability. Although the area today enjoys peace in formal terms, life for many citizens of Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea is one of immense and at times violent struggle in poverty for a decent livelihood. Despite ample emergency and development funds from Western donors, organizations and nations being dispensed into the region, surprisingly little real development for its citizens can be observed. This can have a real effect on long-term security and regional stability. Both Sierra Leone and Liberia are currently recovering from a decade of devastating civil strife that tore countries apart and caused massive death as well as destruction of private property and state structures, whilst Guinea awaits the death of its President, and with him the totalitarian ruling system.

The complexity and abundance of different strategy papers, development blue-prints, comprehensive approaches, multidimensional Security Sector Reform (SSR) attempts and other donor-orchestrated and coordinated development efforts indicate a great deal of international interest in dealing with the post-conflict situation in the MRB region. Unfortunately, direct outcomes remain uncertain and results from donor investment and interest have not led to the social stability and security that have been wished for.

[1] Fieldtrips to Addis Abeba (29 September – 5 October), Abuja (16-19 October), US, New York, New Haven and Chicago (20-31 October). Background papers written by: Mikael Wiking (Liberia), Jesper Bjarnesen (Guinea), Judy Smith-Höhn (comparison of Liberia and Sierra Leone), Côte d'Ivoire (Morten Bøås) and Guinea Bissau (Henrik Vigh).

Underlying the study was a series of questions of explorative nature, revolving around the regional and local West African aspects that influence the approach to multifunctional implementation planning, and the key factors that promote or hamper West African implementation planning processes and the status of accepted implementation plans. The core response to these questions deals with the formal informalities of the MRB region. This study describes the functions of the formal structures of the MRB states, the MRU, ECOWAS and the AU – both their paperwork and structures. It also looks into the informal networks that surround and enmesh this formality. The study discusses the tools and mechanisms for the implementation of different blueprints, and the informal reality in which these blueprints are to be put into action. The study discusses some of the mechanisms for preventing conflict and building peace and security that exist in the MRB area today.

The theoretical framework for discussing informality in this study is the fusing of the concepts of *Big Man* (patron) and *networks*. We argue that central to politics in the MRB region is the controlling of people rather than territory. The mutual relationship between the Big Man and his network is not only seen as a social group action but is rather at the heart of how the state functions. The way to manifest power is to "invest in people" – the more, the mightier. To achieve and maintain power is to control an extensive network, or networks, as broad as possible. This brings politics, economics and hard security such as the military together into one system. All socio-economic and social-political action is carried out within the realm of informal networks. The planning and implementation of decisions are thus far from transparent, and accountability is skewed and rather hard to see.

The formal organizations the AU, ECOWAS and the MRU share a desire to be important security providers. Unfortunately, they all, in different aspects, lack this capacity and economic resources. They deploy well-trained and hardworking individuals and are important starting points for improved regional security, yet with their limited capacity the ability to work through and develop services is minuscule. Thus, the organizations must be complemented in the peace enforcement work being performed on the African continent. Despite these facts, partial accomplishments of AU forces in Darfur and Somalia and long, albeit problematic, ECOMOG missions in Liberia, Sierra Leone, Guinea Bissau and Côte d'Ivoire have shown that these organizations can put boots on the ground in difficult conflict situations and with a boosted capacity might be able to bring about some real change in the future.

The MRB countries are going through Security Sector Reform (SSR) programs, have documented Poverty Reduction Strategies (PRSP) and have created other

blueprints to facilitate change and socioeconomic improvement on a countrywide basis. Unfortunately, actions attending to root causes for national and regional conflicts are few. Far-ranging social problems of youth unemployment, state corruption, over-hierarchical leadership and the inability to provide a secure environment for the individual are seldom addressed seriously. Hence the strategy papers largely pay only lip service to the World Bank, the UN and the donor community rather than reflecting real action.

The informal networks that play such an important role in all activities in West Africa, not only in a post-war context, consist of a multitude of actors: politicians and political parties, military, finance, NGOs, national and international actors, secret societies, police, businessmen, international organizations, religious leaders, warlords and trade unions. The informality and inaccessibility of those networks is what makes them on the one hand difficult to see and address, and on the other hand so effective. In this study we argue that none of the formal, transparent mechanisms would function without the support of some form of informal network authorization. Experience has shown that it is difficult to locate platforms for joint action. In this text we have tried to highlight the complexity of society in the MRB region. A comprehensive approach to security in the region would be to open a dialog with a whole range of partners and include their various capacities to form a joint taskforce. Partly, this would imply finding venues and the various Big Men who hold office (albeit unofficially). Yet alternative platforms, such as the Mano River Union Peace Forum, might function as a temporary staging area. What must be emphasized is the importance to include all actors, including traditional leadership, civil servants and politicians.

Our study and the case studies presented show that a rigid focus on the official structure and its documentation will inevitably not lead very far. It is of utmost importance to both understand the informal society, with its networks and Big Men, and interact with it. If this is not done, many well-meaning efforts will continue to yield limited and at times non-intended results.

2 Introduction

This study is set in the geographic area of the Mano River Basin, but more importantly in the context of three countries emerging from violent social, if not armed, conflict. Underlying the study is a series of questions of explorative nature, revolving around the regional and local West African aspects that influence the approach to multifunctional implementation planning, and the key factors that promote or hamper West African implementation planning processes and the status of accepted implementation plans. The study will look into some of the strategies and blueprints used to plan, coordinate and implement the activities usually gathered under the term *Conflict Prevention and Peace Building*; broadly, this includes all activities such as Security Sector Reform (SSR), socio-economic foundations of long-term peace, political frameworks for long-term peace, reconciliation and other poverty reduction models together with a number of more practical restructuring activities for post-conflict states. This study will discuss the different strategies from a practical implementation point of departure, in an attempt to determine what works and what does not. The study will assume a strong local (national and sub-regional) perspective, looking into local capacity and local realities. Moreover, the study will not only discuss the mechanisms *per se*, but will also look into what truly makes formal structures in the region work (or not); thus it will look into the informal, or "shadow", networks of the region.

For the past 20 years the Mano River Basin[2] has been an area of violent upheavals and political instability. The civil wars in Liberia (1989-1996, 1999-2003) and Sierra Leone (1991-2002) not only devastated the two countries but to a certain extent also destabilized an entire region (involving more specifically Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea). The wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone are now over, and both countries are struggling to rebuild physically and socially. The two countries are furthermore steering towards a democratic political system, which was manifested in the successful elections in Sierra Leone earlier this year. In the media we hear time and again that Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf is the first elected female president of an African country. Her gender, Harvard economist back-ground and experience working for the United Nations are expected to work wonders for Liberia, the state she heads. Neighbouring Sierra Leone has recently

[2] The Mano River Basin area designates the states Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea. The term Mano River Region is sometimes used with the same denotation. A joint structure, the Mano River Union, was established in 1973, between Liberia and Sierra Leone (Guinea joined in 1980) to constitute a customs and economic union between the member states in order to improve living standards and work for regional integration.

voted out the donor-friendly Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) government and President Tejan Kabbah, also a former UN employee. Despite his garnering of large sums of emergency and development funds from Western donors, little indicates that Kabbah's UN background made him less corrupt or more efficient in running the country. His government's passivity and shortcomings made it unpopular to the extent that it, as the first government in Sierra Leone's post-colonial history, was democratically removed from power (in all other instances, breeches in the ruling continuity have been brought about by military coups). The new Sierra Leone President is former businessman and insurance broker Ernest Bai Koroma of the All People's Congress (APC).

In Guinea, the aging and totalitarian Lansana Conté is still clinging to power in a centralized political system. Opposition leaders have long been awaiting his natural death, and political observers in the West have been stating for the past ten years that it is just a matter of time before the country will experience violent upheavals like what we have seen in Liberia and Sierra Leone. So far this has not happened, although armed groups in the southern Guinea have at times created states of emergency and, most recently, the general strikes organized early this year by the unions created both temporary commotion and unrest in larger towns and cities and, more importantly, have set an agenda of change.

The pre-colonial history of the three states shows many similarities consisting of small, often interlinked forest chiefdoms[3] that have at times been attacked and incorporated or traded with the larger state-like kingdoms of the West African interior.[4] Colonial and post-colonial history has realigned the states to a significant extent, however. Liberia was never formally colonized, although British and French interests continuously contested the state's sovereignty by providing government troops, rearranging borders, etc. Instead, a tiny elite of returning slaves and so-called recaptives came to dominate the country both politically and economically. In Sierra Leone, the British Sierra Leone Company handed over power to the British and Guinea came under French rule. After gaining independence, Sierra Leone soon came under the autocratic, yet British-endorsed, rule of Siaka Stevens, while Guinea broke with the French and became a Marxist state under Sékou Touré. Already independent Liberia continued its plutocratic rule under US supervision. This wide variety of political setups certainly created deeper structural differences that were cultivated and

[3] Warren d'Azevedo, "Tribe and Chiefdom on the Winward Coast," *Liberian Studies Journal* xiv (1989), Robin Horton, "Stateless societies in the history of West Africa," in *History of West Africa vol. 1*, ed. J.F. Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowder (1992).

[4] J. F. Ade Ajayi and Michael Crowder, *History of West Africa* (New York, 1972), John Iliffe, *Africans: the History of a Continent*, African studies series, 85 (Cambridge, 1995).

maintained throughout the Cold War. Western business interests remained strong in the region, particularly in minerals and large-scale plantations. It is correct to say that the MRB states were, because of politics and economic interests, being globalized rather than marginalized as part of the Cold War battlefield. This changed with the downfall of the USSR. The invasion of Liberia on Christmas Eve 1989 was part of a new world order that meant an increased reluctance to maintain order in the periphery of the West. West Africa was marginalized and its countries' politics were placed in a macro-political void. New actors became crucial for Liberia and Sierra Leone, states such as Côte d'Ivoire, Burkina Faso, Nigeria and Libya.

Despite far-ranging differences, there are similarities that the state system and its policies were not able, or did not wish, to wash away: the importance of the *Big Man* and *networks*. In this report we intend both to show the formal setup of the MRB states and the supernational organizations and to give some idea of the powers hidden behind them.

2.1 Journey without maps

How are we to understand African states? They were formally set up within the tradition of the Westphalian state, moreover during a long period of Western dominance.[5] Today, especially since the end of the Cold War, we see how they fail to deliver, or how they crumble. The MRB states are commonplace examples in the literature of failed and collapsed states, and UN agencies, Western governments, international aid agencies and others time and again express their frustration over how they do not work. The UN, G8, the World Bank and other loan institutions rightly demand structures they can work with. Blueprints like Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSP) have become a prerequisite for obtaining loans and larger development funds. The MRB countries, as we shall see, all have documents of this character. Likewise, supernational organizations on the African continent such as the African Union (AU) and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) all produce steering papers on how their organizations are, or rather ought to be, structured. Yet our research clearly shows that these blueprints of the various organizations show to a very limited extent how things work and give external actors a map of the particular organization to navigate from. The reasons for this are many, ranging from out-right resistance to the Western state, alternative power structures that contest the

[5] Daniel Biró, "The (Un)bearable Lightness of Violence: Warlordism as an Alternative Form of Governance in the 'Westphalian Periphery'?" in *INEF Report 89*, ed. Tobias Debiel and Daniel Lambach (Duisburg/Essen, 2007).

state, to the fact that most African states, and even more so supernational structures, have never had the formal capacity to govern their citizens and territory.[6]

Whatever the reasons behind the deficits of the formal state, it is central to see that in the eyes of informal actors the formal structures are vehicles for consolidating power and resources in the informal sector. If we estimate that 80% of the structures in the MRB area are of informal character, we must acknowledge that the informal structure decides both the importance and real use of the formal one. We argue that actors in the informal structure use the formal structure as a vehicle for their own political and economic ends. In such a case, in real political terms, the formal structure becomes the shadow image of the informal reality and thus blueprints cannot become more than blueprints. This is true to the extent that one could argue that the armed forces of the three countries are used to defend the political elite, or factions thereof, rather than the nation itself.

The intention of this report is to unravel some of the informal structure that lies behind the formal blueprints of the MRB states. This is a meticulous and difficult undertaking, as most actors do not wish to be viewed from this perspective – mainly because they know the importance of the official picture in relation to the Western donor world. Furthermore, it is difficult because there is no simple structure to be unravelled but a very complex web of networks that are difficult to follow and understand. Fluctuating nodes and the changing nature of the networks themselves make them difficult to map. Our intention is thus to show some of the structures at work, especially regarding security matters. In this effort we mainly use two theoretical tools to organize the material, namely the Big Man and the network. From everyday political life in the MRB states, we see how actors keep changing. Thus the way to view a report like this is not to direct too much attention at individual Big Men but rather try to understand how Big Men use networks and are used by others within these networks. The duality of giving and taking favours makes this a fluid and intangible system. Finally, it is important to point out that this system is not always used to maximize personal gain but can equally be used as a means of solidarity – being a Big Man and a node in a network certainly encompasses a moral code.

[6] See, e.g., the works of Jean Comaroff, John L. Comaroff, and Jean Comaroff, *Law and Disorder in the Postcolony* (Chicago, 2006), Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat, eds., *Sovereign Bodies: Citizens, Migrants, and States in the Postcolonial World* (Princeton, 2005), Thomas Blom Hansen and Finn Stepputat, eds., *States of Imagination: Ethnographic Explorations of the Postcolonial State* (Durham and London, 2001).

2.2 Theoretical framework: Big Man and network

Politics in the MRB area concern controlling people rather than territory.[7] In an influential article, Bledsoe has called this a "wealth in people" system in which all individuals "are for someone", and where networks of political patronage are crucial to the success of the individual.[8] In this text we acknowledge the importance of the concept of patron-client relations but prefer to use the emic terms *Big Man* and *network* because they take us beyond the Western usage. Both Big Man and network are open relational concepts facilitating fluid descriptions of social settings. They allow us to describe a reality in which not only the clients are many, but also in which clients have a number of Big Men they are using, or avoiding, in different ways depending on social field and time. Furthermore, the Big Man also has his/her Big Men, who are equally shifting. We thus find intricate networks of both vertical and horizontal characters by which we ought to view Big Men as nodes in the networks.[9] If we return to Bledsoe's work, she proposes that Western patron-client categories fall short of the local notions as Big Men relations are more in-depth:

> *Closely tied to the notion of clientage is the notion of 'being for' someone else or other people. As a young man explained, 'being for' someone implies that 'you have made yourself subject to the person. You work for him, fight for him, etc. And he is in turn responsible for you in all ways [such as court fines, clothes, food, school fees, or bridewealth]'. A patron figure ('big person') whom one is 'for' can be a chief, landlord, teacher parent, senior wife or older sibling. Whether such individuals are kin is less important than the capacity to perform meditative and protective functions. Any individual, whether an adult or a child, needs protection and mediation with superiors; in return, the subordinate must accede to demands from those who perform these services.*[10]

With this hard logic of being for someone, a key is to create networks of dependents that allow the Big Man/politician to manifest his power. In urban

[7] Al-Hassan Conteh and Marilyn Silberfein, "Boundaries and Conflict in the Mano River Region of West Africa," *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 23 (2006).
[8] Caroline Bledsoe, "'No Success Without Struggle': Social Mobility and Hardship for Foster Children in Sierra Leone," *Man* 25 (1990). See also Caroline Bledsoe, *Women and Marriage in Kpelle Society* (Stanford, Calif., 1980).
[9] Allen M. Howard and David E. Skinner, "Network Building and Political Power in Northwestern Sierra Leone, 1800-65," *Africa* 54 (1984). p. 4. See also Laura Stovel, *Long Road Home: Building Reconciliation and Trust in Post-War Sierra Leone* (2006).
[10] Bledsoe, "'No Success Without Struggle': Social Mobility and Hardship for Foster Children in Sierra Leone." p 75.

settings in Sierra Leone, this has been exemplified by for instance national political party rallies at which supporters have dressed uniformly in order to show full support for their leaders, often with violent clashes as a result.[11] We argue that the civil wars should be seen as a continuation of politics, and thus Big Man politics, and we believe that it is possible to see the same logic of "being for" Big Men in the war scenarios of both Liberia and Sierra Leone[12] – this opens up for a quite different reading of the civil conflicts with Big Men and networks drawing young people into the conflict, rather than forced recruitment and images of "youth" as loose molecules simply volunteering to join militias.[13] Hoffman has recently written about the Civil Defense Forces in southern Sierra Leone and how this militia must be understood in a framework of "relations of patronage" and how "social action needs to be understood not in terms of the individual activities but as the mobilization of social networks".[14] Hoffman shows how networks are being both mobilized and demobilized following the co-action of nodal Big Men.

Military action and politics are thus closely interconnected. As we shall see in this report, political Big Men and Big Men within the economic sphere are, if not the very same person, at least twins. William Reno's book *Corruption and State Politics in Sierra Leone* is a lucid account of the interconnectedness of politics and economy in pre-war Sierra Leone, where "the juncture of economic accumulation and political authority… forms the basis of the Shadow State".[15] It is important to bear in mind that to Reno and most observers who have scrutinized African state building, the current informalization of political life and the twinning of economy and politics are deeply rooted in the colonial histories

[11] Supporters of SLPP in the recent Sierra Leone elections chanted "I will die for Solo B". Solo B (Solomon Berewa) was the presidential candidate of the SLPP. In several clashes during the election period, SLPP supporters clearly showed that they were ready to die for their Big Man (see Mats Utas, "Watermelon Politics in Sierra Leone: Hope amidst Vote Buying and Remobilized Militias," *African Renaissance* 4 (2007).). For historical accounts see Mariane Ferme, *The Underneath of Things: Violence, History, and the Everyday in Sierra Leone* (Berkeley, 2001), John W. Nunley, *Moving with the Face of the Devil: Art and Politics in Urban West Africa* (Urbana, 1987).

[12] See Morten Bøås, "Liberia and Sierra Leone - dead ringers? the logic of neopatrimonial rule," *Third World Quarterly* 22 (2001), William Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States* (1998).

[13] Raised in accounts such as Robert D. Kaplan, "The Coming Anarchy," *Atlantic Monthly* 273 (1994), Robert D. Kaplan, *The Ends of the Earth: From Togo to Turkmenistan, from Iran to Cambodia, a Journey to the Frontiers of Anarchy* (New York, 1997).

[14] Danny Hoffman, "The meaning of a militia: Understanding the Civil Defence Forces of Sierra Leone," *African Affairs* 106 (2007). p. 651. For a broader focus on networks and military mobilization see also Danny Hoffman, "The City as Barracks: Freetown, Monrovia, and the Organization of Violence in Postcolonial African Cities," *Cultural Anthropology* 22 (2007).

[15] William Reno, *Corruption and State Politics in Sierra Leone* (Cambridge [England] New York, 1995). p. 8.

rather than in the local cultures. It is therefore state officials and their economic alter egos that infiltrate and dominate local structures such as ethnic groups, local chiefdoms, occupational and secret societies, and not vice versa.[16] Big Man networks are thus instrumentalized for roughly any socio-economic or socio-political action and the same network can be used for political, economic and military activities. Thus, for instance, a network based in the diamond trade will be utilized for political means that may also include military action, if considered feasible.[17] It is also important to point out that these networks could be potential security risks as well as security stabilizers, depending on the interests and risks. Finally, without concluding that Big Men and networks work exactly the same way across the African continent, it is clear from our research on the AU level in Addis Abeba and at ECOWAS in Abuja that the importance of networks and Big Men ought not to be underestimated in these places either.

2.3 The structure of the report

On the following pages we give brief overviews of the current situations in the three MRB states. In Liberia and Sierra Leone a main focus is on their civil wars, and in the Guinea section we place more effort on the social unrest. This is done to give a proper base for our discussion of the profound informality in the states that actually drives the formality that the Western world meets. After that, we analyze the official picture, with specific studies on the AU, ECOWAS, MRU and MRB states. In this part of the study we show the deficit that Western-driven initiatives has in the region, but also indicate some ways to move forward. Yet again, we ought not to restrain from pointing out the informality of the formal. Thereafter, we give an overview of people's perceptions of the security structures in the MRB states. This bridges the official, policy-level, reality of the states with the reality of the individuals. A main chapter of the report is devoted to the informal context of society. In this chapter we intend to locate the real actors and discuss their political and economic roles in the social settings. This part of our study shows how the informal "shadow structure" drives the formal structure, and provides the context in which we can, and must, find new avenues of approach if we want our initiatives in the region to succeed and truly make a difference. From there we proceed to larger international actors and argue that they too, to both be influential and survive, are incorporated in the informal system. Finally, we draw conclusions and offer recommendations.

[16] Ibid. p. 3.
[17] As pointed out by Danny Hoffman, it may not only be lucrative diamond networks but could as well be networks trading in palm oil or other less globalized commodities (Interview with Hoffman, New York, 24 October 2007).

2.4 Liberia's civil wars (1989-1996, 1999-2003)

A sketch of the background of Liberia's civil wars takes its departure in 1820, when freed American slaves founded the country and subsequently gained "independence" from the American Colonization Society in 1847. After an initial forceful colonizing of the interior, many years of relative tranquillity followed the arrival of the Americo-Liberians. Liberia was turned into a one-party state with the True Whig Party (TWP) completely dominating the national political arena. For most of the 19th and 20th centuries the country remained a US ally. What coloured these decades was a growing polarization in which the Americo-Liberians (people with settler origin) took control over Liberia and established governance over large areas in the interior inhabited by indigenous groups with different cultural and linguistic origins. A concentration of political, financial and military capital in the hands of the Americo-Liberians was the result. In parallel pace with the investments of foreign companies in the country – following President Tubman's *open-door policy* that allowed for great investments in exploitation of the country's natural resources – good roads and basic infrastructure were introduced to parts of the interior.

Gus Liebenow covers this part of Liberian history in a comprehensive way when he describes how Liberians came to see other parts of the country through migration work, and also realized that certain areas were favoured by the government and that standards of living could differ immensely between

different regions.[18] These insights subsequently led to the first steps towards the development of organized political opposition.[19] According to many observers, the rice riots in 1979, following price increases established by the government, were the most crucial event prior to the 1980 military coup.[20] During the rice riots the TWP government could not control events and the Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA) and Progressive Alliance for Liberia (PAL) supported demonstrations that resulted in riots in which the police intervened, but the military refused to stop the escalating demonstrations.[21] The military coup that followed in 1980, in which Sergeant Samuel K. Doe along with a group of other junior commanders in the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) overthrew the government and killed President Tolbert, marked the birth of the so-called Second Republic and the first indigenous leader to assume presidential power in Liberia. The years that followed saw a sharp decline in economic growth, mismanagement of public services, rigged elections, partiality in the appointment of civil servants based on ethnic lines and a devastating increase of ethnic polarization in terms of the security sector's composition and a targeting of opposition along ethnic lines. In short, the 1980s, which were characterized by a military government that lacked the capacity to govern Liberia, laid the foundation for the civil war that started in December 1989.

Charles Taylor, backed by Libya, Côte d'Ivoire and Burkina Faso, led the invasion with the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL). The ECOWAS reacted by setting up the ECOWAS Monitoring Observer Group peacekeeping mission (ECOMOG), which had its base in Sierra Leone and managed to prevent Taylor from realizing victory. Splinter groups soon developed and one of these, the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL), managed to kill President Doe in 1990.[22] Taylor promised to widen the conflict and in 1991 the

[18] J. Gus Liebenow, *Liberia: The Evolution of Privilege* (Ithaca, 1969).

[19] The Progressive Alliance of Liberians (PAL) and the Movement for Justice in Africa (MOJA) were the first two civilian groups to take up opposition against the TWP during the 1970s (J. Gus Liebenow, *Liberia: The Quest for Democracy* (Bloomington, 1987). pp 174, 176.

[20] See e.g. Thomas Jaye, *Issues of Sovereignty, Strategy and Security in the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS): Intervention in the Liberian Civil War*, African Studies; 70 (Lewiston, N.Y., 2003).

[21] Guinea provided troops to quell the riots. This was only a few months after the signing of a bilateral defence agreement between the two countries. Guinea and Sierra Leone had a similar defence agreement, which was already used in Sierra Leone in 1971 (see Adekeye Adebajo, *Building Peace in West Africa: Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea-Bissau*, International Peace Academy occasional paper series (Boulder, Colo., 2002). p. 32 and Amos Sawyer, "Violent conflicts and governance challenges in West Africa: the case of the Mano River basin area," *Journal of Modern African Studies* 42 (2004). p. 441, 444.

[22] See Mats Utas, "War, violence and videotapes: media and localized ideoscapes of the Liberian Civil War," in *Violence, Political Culture & Development in Africa*, ed. Preben Kaarsholm (Oxford, 2006).

Taylor-backed Sierra Leonean Revolutionary United Front (RUF) invaded Sierra Leone. The response from Sierra Leone and Guinea was to organize Liberian refugees (particularly Krahn, former soldiers from President Doe's army) and Mandingoes into the United Liberation Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO). Fighting increased until a ceasefire was negotiated in 1996. In 1997, elections were held in Liberia and Taylor was elected President.

In late 1999 an alliance called Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) was formed by anti-Taylor groups. The alliance was led by Sekou Conneh and was backed by Guinea, from where it invaded Liberia. Many of the fighters were of Sierra Leonean and Guinean origin. Fighting at a slightly slower pace went on during the ensuing years, but in early 2003 it intensified again. In June, peace talks supported by ECOWAS were initiated. In August, as LURD advanced towards Monrovia and US pressure increased, Taylor was forced into exile in Nigeria. Subsequently, Nigerian troops were deployed in Monrovia and on 18 August 2003 the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed by the warring parties – this laid the foundation for the National Transitional Government (NTGL), of which Gyude Bryant was elected chairman. In September, the UN Secretary General authorized a UN Mission in Liberia (UNMIL), which replaced the ECOWAS force. The government has consequently wrestled with issues such as disarmament and reintegration of ex-combatants in partnership with UNMIL. In January 2006 the new government, led by President Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf, was inaugurated. Johnson-Sirleaf, who is the first female elected African head of state, soon embarked on an ambitious reform agenda. In February 2006, a Liberian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (LTRC) was established to examine crimes committed during the period 1979-2003. Taylor was extradited from Nigeria in March 2006 and was later transported to The Hague, where his trial is currently underway in the Special Court for Sierra Leone. There is currently little to indicate that he will be held accountable for war crimes in Liberia.[23] President Sirleaf-Johnson, although embarking on an ambitions route, has yet to prove her government's ability to meet people's expectations.

[23] For a more comprehensive background on the conflict in Liberia see Stephen Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War* (New York, 1999), Mary H. Moran, *Liberia: The Violence of Democracy*, The Ethnography of Political Violence (Philadelphia, 2006), Amos Sawyer, *Beyond Plunder: Toward Democratic Governance in Liberia* (Boulder, 2005), Mats Utas, *Sweet Battlefields: Youth and the Liberian Civil War (PhD thesis)*, ed. Hugh Beach, vol. 1 (Uppsala, 2003).

2.5 Sierra Leone's Civil War

Founded in 1787, also as a settlement for freed slaves, Sierra Leone later became a British Crown Colony and gained independence in 1961. Since then, six general elections – and five military coups – have taken place. Here, too, the descendents of former slaves (Creoles or Krios) formed the elite. After independence, however, the animosity between the indigenous population and the Krios was soon overlaid by political rivalries between various ethnic groups.

The violent seizure of power by the All People's Congress (APC), led by Siaka Stevens in 1968, marked the start of a series of military coups. Stevens' self-proclaimed successor, Major-General Joseph Saidu Momoh, governed the country – which was plagued by economic crises and political unrest – until he was ousted in 1992, one year after the start of the war against a rebel insurgency group under former army corporal Foday Sankoh, known as the Revolutionary United Front (RUF), which was supported and armed by Charles Taylor. Momoh was overthrown in a military coup staged by Valentine Strasser, an army captain. His National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) attempted to crush the rebels by re-equipping the army and forcing it to engage with rebel troops in the provinces. However, many of the poorly trained government troops deserted and defected to the RUF rebels. Their atrocities against the civilian population and involvement in the illicit diamond trade prompted Strasser to hire Executive Outcomes (EO), a private military company, to supplement his own troops. The involvement of EO was militarily successful in that it drove back the RUF, but it also revealed the incompetence of the government's own troops in dealing with the situation. In 1996, Strasser was ousted in a military coup led by his former defence minister, Brigadier General Julius Maada Bio. Bio swiftly handed over power to newly elected President Ahmad Tejan Kabbah. Kabbah's government signed a peace accord with Sankoh's rebels later that year, but this did not end the civil war. Meanwhile,

local self-help measures were proving effective in safeguarding security, albeit confined to a local level, alongside traditional institutions such as secret societies.

In 1997, a coalition of army officers led by Major-General Johnny Paul Koroma forced Kabbah to leave office and formed the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC). Kabbah was reinstated in March 1998 after the junta was ousted by the ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG), but fighting continued in many parts of the country. Even a UN intervention in 1999 failed to bring about peace initially[24]. In May 2000, the rebel forces of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) appeared to be on the verge of capturing Freetown, whereupon the British government decided in favour of military intervention.[25] British troops were initially deployed to evacuate foreign nationals and restore order; later, they also provided support for the United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone (UNAMSIL) contingents, so that in 2001 the UN troops were able to deploy successfully in rebel-held territory. In 2002, the new British-trained Sierra Leone Army (SLA/RSLAF) also began deploying, the Joint Declaration of End of War was signed between the RUF, the Sierra Leone Army and the quasi-official locally based Civil Defense Forces (CDF). That same year, Kabbah and his party won landslide victories in the parliamentary and presidential elections, consolidating his position in power. The country's progress towards peace was considered so significant that the UNAMSIL troops withdrew in December 2005, leaving behind an almost totally civililian UN mission.[26]

This brief historical review of the civil wars in the two countries illustrates the following:

- In both countries, many different security/violent actors have vied for control and influence during the course of several decades.
- The national army and police were never able to establish or maintain a state monopoly on the use of force for any significant period of time.

[24] On 3 May 2000, some 500 UN peacekeepers from Kenya, Zambia and India were taken hostage by loyalists of Sankoh, who at the time held a position in the transitional government. The hostage-taking was a clear sign that the peace accord had effectively collapsed.

[25] For a more complex reading of these events, see Mats Utas and Magnus Jörgel, "The West Side Boys: Military navigation in the Sierra Leone Civil War," (forth.).

[26] For more detailed information on the Sierra Leone civil war see Ibrahim Abdullah, ed., *Between Democracy and Terror: the Sierra Leone Civil War* (Dakar, 2004), Lansana Gberie, *A Dirty War in West Africa: The RUF and the Destruction of Sierra Leone* (Bloomington, Ind., 2005), David Keen, *Conflict & Collusion in Sierra Leone* (Oxford, 2005), Paul Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth and Resources in Sierra Leone*, ed. African issues (Oxford, 1996).

- In the hinterland, local civil defence forces, rebel groups and secret societies have dominated the security sector. For citizens, these various actors could act as protectors but could also pose a threat.
- Actors from neighbouring countries have played a major role during periods of conflict escalation.
- Though the intentions and achievements of the intervention troops (especially ECOMOG) remain questionable, they were nonetheless ultimately successful in imposing a much-needed peace, largely through the use of force.
- The citizens do not harbour any significant feelings of being protected by the national armies, police forces or judicial system.

2.6 Guinea – on the verge?

The third MRB state has to date not experienced civil war, though it has been seriously affected by the wars in its neighbouring countries, foremost in the form of hundreds of thousands of refugees and related unrest in the southern forest region. For a decade now, international observers have predicted civil unrest, if not outright civil war. However, skilful navigation and a centralized grip by President Lansana Conté prevented any kind of organized opposition until the recent labour union-orchestrated demonstrations.

Guinea's wealth in natural resources, mainly bauxite and diamonds, has thus far failed to benefit its general population in any significant way, and the country remains one of the poorest countries in West Africa with an annual per capita income of a mere 370 USD and an average life expectancy of 54 years of age[27]. These circumstances have deteriorated further in 2006-2007, as high inflation and a depreciation of the Guinean franc have combined to boost the prices of essential goods. Socio-economic tensions within Guinea have been compounded by political instability in neighbouring Côte d'Ivoire and Guinea-Bissau, adding to the deterioration of the sub-region where Liberia and Sierra Leone are still recovering from their recent years of armed conflict. *Guinée Forestière*, which borders the three conflict-ridden countries of Sierra Leone, Liberia and Côte d'Ivoire, has been the most directly affected by these conflicts through the arrival of refugees and armed attacks across the borders.

[27] Figures from 2005 and 2004, respectively, see World Bank, *World Development Report 2007/Development and the Next Generation* (Washington, 2006). p. 288.

The country's present leader, President Lansana Conté, is known to be suffering from prolonged illness, which is considered by both Guinean citizens and international observers to affect his ability to govern the nation. His decreasing popularity was recently made visible in a general strike in which union leaders at one point demanded his resignation and more than fifty demonstrators were killed by security forces (see case study below). As three general strikes within the last year illustrate, Guineans are becoming increasingly frustrated with their ruler and their general living conditions. The International Crisis Group (ICG) has recently argued that the political tensions and long-term frustration with the oppressive regime of President Conté that characterize Guinea are likely to lead to a political transition.[28]. While they cite cause for optimism based on recent improvements in the Guinean legislature, they voice their concern that the transition may happen through a military-led *coup d'état*.[29]

The violent response of the national security forces in the two most recent strikes makes it clear that Guinean citizens have long suffered the everyday violence of an authoritative state. This impression is confirmed by Human Rights Watch (HRW), who details the use of torture and other forms of brutality by Guinean security forces in prisons as well as in public manifestations and everyday law enforcement[30]. The frequent cross-border attacks by Liberian and Sierra Leonean armed groups, particularly during the period 1999-2002, which were allegedly supported by a group of dissidents from the Guinean army known as the

[28]International Crisis Group, "Guinea in Transition, Africa Briefing No. 37," (Brussels, 2006). p 9.
[29] Ibid. p. 1.
[30] Human Rights Watch, Youth, Poverty and Blood: the Lethal Legacy of West Africa's Regional Warriors, vol. 17(5) (2005). See also Aminata.com 2 February 2007 for a shocking account of the abuse of protesters in the January 2007 general strike.

Movement of the Democratic Forces of Guinea (RFDG)[31], brought armed conflict upon Guinean civilians in *Guinée Forestière* as armed soldiers looted, raped and killed in the region's towns, villages and refugee camps. These attacks allegedly led to the establishment of the youth militias known as the *Jeunes Volontaires* in 2001 and 2002. These militias responded to a call from the President to protect the country from foreign incursions. Observers agree that by 2004 the militias had generally dispersed, while the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance (OCHA) reports that a number of former *Jeunes Volontaires* are still being targeted by reintegration programs in *Guinée Forestière*. Concern remains, however, that former members of these youth militias remain exposed not only to re-recruitment in other fighting forces in the region but also to other criminal activities such as drug trafficking.[32]

The continued presence of former combatants along the border areas of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone has raised concern that new signs of conflict in any country may attract these idle fighters[33] and escalate violence. Several sources[34] emphasize the grave negative impacts of the conflicts in Guinea's neighbouring countries, Liberia, Sierra Leone and Côte d'Ivoire, particularly on the populations in Guinea's border areas with these countries in *Guinée Forestière*. This region has been overwhelmed by refugees from its neighbours, many of whom remain in Guinea to this day.[35] In addition, Guineans living in Côte d'Ivoire have been forced back to Guinea as refugees, adding more than 100,000 to the refugee population, the majority of whom lack legal status, property or other means to

[31] ECOWAS, "Guinea," in *Small arms study*, ed. ECOWAS (Abuja, 2005). Guinean dissidents known as the RFDG fought alongside Sierra Leonean (from the Revolutionary United Front, RUF) and Liberian fighters during the 2000–01 cross-border attacks. The total attacking force was estimated to be 1,800 strong. Army officers involved in a failed 1996 coup against Conté reportedly led the RFDG. The group's spokesman, Mohamed Lamine Fofana, claimed that the group's leaders were dissident Guinean military officers who had fled the country after the failed 1996 mutiny. The International Crisis Group reports, however, asserted that Taylor instigated the 2000–01 attacks.

[32] Coalition to stop the use of child soldiers, *Child soldiers and disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration in West Africa: A survey of programmatic work on child soldiers in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone* (2006). p. 16.

[33] IRINnews, *Liberia:Idle fighters cause concern.* Accessed 25 July 2007 at http://irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=64334 (2007). See also Human Rights Watch, *Youth, Poverty and Blood: The Lethal Legacy of West Africa's Regional Warriors*.

[34] Coalition to stop the use of child soldiers, *Child Soldiers* (2004), Coalition to stop the use of child soldiers, *Child soldiers and disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration in West Africa : A survey of programmatic work on child soldiers in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone*, International Crisis Group, "Guinea in Transition, Africa Briefing No. 37.", UNHCR, "Guinea," in *UNHCR Global Appeal* (2007).

[35] In January 2007, UNHCR estimated that 59,590 refugees, mainly from Liberia, remain in Guinea (UNHCR, "Guinea." p 161).

resettle in Guinea.[36] Apart from receiving refugees, Guinea provided support to the Liberian armed group LURD, which is known to have recruited Guineans to its ranks during the Liberian Civil War.[37] A core of LURD consisted of Liberians in Guinean exile, giving the group a direct link to the Guinean border areas. The Sierra Leonean RUF is also said to have recruited in Guinea.[38]

[36] Coalition to stop the use of child soldiers, *Child soldiers and disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation and reintegration in West Africa: A survey of programmatic work on child soldiers in Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone*.

[37] Ibid.

[38] There are certainly fewer academic books in English available on contemporary Guinea than on the other MRB countries. Recent sources of broader interest could be: Alpha Ousmane Barry, *Les racines du mal guinéen*, Collection Tropiques (Paris, 2004), Christian Kordt Højbjerg, *Resisting state iconoclasm among the Loma of Guinea*, Carolina Academic Press Ritual Studies Monographs (Durham, N.C., 2007), Elizabeth Schmidt, *Mobilizing the Masses: Gender, Ethnicity, and Class in the Nationalist Movement in Guinea, 1939-1958*, Social History of Africa, (Portsmouth, NH, 2004).

3 The Formal Informality

> *No, we don't have any formal strategic documents that spell out our strategic outlook. I have to make that up as I go along. We don't even have any clear objectives. We don't have time to do any real analysis; we would like to, but the day to day workload is far too great.*[39]

This chapter provides some background and history to the formal structures and governing documents of the African Union (AU), Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), Mano River Union (MRU) and the countries within the MRU. The specific case used for this is the broad field of peace support and peacebuilding. The question is: What are the formal documents, or blueprints, that the AU, ECOWAS and MRU use or will use as strategic tools, in terms of implementation of peace support operations (PSO) or any equivalent operations? The chapter will also try to offer some answers to the split notion of, on the one side, an impressive amount of strategy papers, policy papers and declarations, and on the other side the apparent lack of strategic guidance and operational capacity when it comes to PSO and other related conflict solution aspects. The chapter discusses the specifics in Sierra Leone, Liberia and Guinea, in terms of what actually exists as regards blueprints, trying to see both benefits and drawbacks, as well as to highlight some of the better examples of comprehensive approaches in the region.

The AU as an organization is fairly young; the transformation from the Organization of African Unity (OAU) to the AU was actually initiated at the extraordinary summit in Sirte, 1-2 March 2001. At this meeting, all heads of state declared the ratification of the Constitutive Act of the African Union complete. The Act came into effect on 26 May 2001. In July 2002, the organs of the AU and the procedures were agreed upon. The design was loosely based on the European Union (EU), yet it was firmly stated that the AU must be an African experience. In terms of organizational status, ECOWAS is a much older player; the treaty establishing the organization was signed in Lagos on 28 May 1975. A much debated and hampering foundation of ECOWAS is the division into Francophone and Anglophone groups of member states, which has led to in-house fighting over leadership and basic principles. The MRU was established in 1973, has lived a very quiet life and has in practical terms not been able to influence the conflicts in the region in any positive way.[40] The ECOWAS, the OAU and the

[39] Interview with Bereng B. Mtimkulu, Head of the Peace Support Operations Division, Department of Peace and Security, AU, in Addis Abeba, 1 October 2007.
[40] Osita Agbu, *West Africa's Trouble Spots and the Imperative for Peace-Building* (Dakar, 2006). p. 1.

MRU were based chiefly on economic integration and social development for the founding states and their citizens.[41] This has proven to be quite a hindrance, and African states have actually had to circumvent this by creating the new AU primarily as an organization for peace and security.

3.1 The African Union

The answer to the sometimes dejected employees at the AU having notions of working in an organization without a steering wheel might be found in many factors; the organization's constant under-staffing and under-funding makes it impossible to implement the grand policies agreed upon in meetings or even to mould them into the most basic workable form. The excessive travelling of the senior leadership in the organization provides employees with much too few opportunities for discussion of the implementation process, and the sometimes "fuzzy" writings in the adapted policy papers might be a way to plan a new workshop or high-level meeting. Finally, one must take into account the reality factor; the AU came into effect, or was forced to the forefront, during a very conflict-ridden period in Sub-Saharan Africa, many of its member states have deep-ranging financial difficulties and, finally, the AU is a brand new creation and it would thus be unfair to compare it with other more longstanding super-national organizations.

However, on a conceptual level there is a broad understanding, and agreement, that the redirection from a focus on regime stability and state control to a more pre-emptive, peacebuilding, focus will enhance human security within and between AU member states. Doing so will ultimately mean a shift in how both strategies and policy are established and implemented, from a theoretical to a practical outlook.[42] There is also a new understanding of the conflicts in Africa that steers strategies and policy making in new directions, away from easy explanations such as poverty, resources or ethnicity and looking into much more complex answers and thus arenas such as political elites, individual leaders and military movements not only described as "bandits".[43] The aspects of informal structures and networks are discussed in later parts of this report.

The issue of relinquishing part of one's sovereignty, hard earned many times through armed struggles for independence, has been difficult for many African leaders. This and the question of individual rights and security are debated

[41] Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia had parallel security acts signed bilaterally.
[42] Agbu, *West Africa's Trouble Spots and the Imperative for Peace-Building*. p. 5
[43] Ibid. pp 7-8. See also Utas and Jörgel, "The West Side Boys: Military navigation in the Sierra Leone Civil War."

vividly in contemporary Africa.[44] The AU has made some basic efforts to provide itself and its member states with the implementation tools necessary in this new security arena. With the construction of the Peace and Security Council (PSC), it has a body whose duty is not only to write policy on strategies, but also to see that they are implemented, to the stage at which there are actually boots on the ground. The PSC has made some progress; the AU missions in both Darfur and Somalia are examples of PSO decided, planned and executed by the PSC.[45]

What then are the formal body and construction of the AU in terms of ability to plan, implement and lead PSO? The framework for the AU has been greatly improved since the time of the OAU, with a much stronger AU constitutive act in place instead of the weak charter of the OAU. This means that the legal basis for the organization is stronger. Article 4 in the act is an indication of this, stating that the AU has the right to intervene in member states under certain circumstances, such as a decision by the Assembly in respect to war crimes, genocide and crimes against humanity, but also that member states can request an AU intervention to restore peace and security. Article 4 also establishes a common defence policy for the African continent.[46] Interestingly, and quite contrary to the notion of reluctance by African leaders to give up their sovereignty, the 2007 AU summit was launched with the theme "An AU government: towards the United States of Africa." There is an obvious strive on the AU's part to promote the project of a much more coherent and forceful organization for planning and implementation.[47]

The AU has the primary role of both keeping the peace and establishing and arranging peace and a security structure on the African continent. The PSC is the key function in this structure. The broader umbrella of supporting institutions for keeping or upholding peace and security is comprised of the Panel of the Wise, the Continental Early Warning System (CEWS), the African Standby Force (ASF) and the Military Staff Committee (MSC).[48] The PSC is the highest

[44] But compare citizens' "over-emotional" agendas in relation to local currencies in Sweden and Denmark .

[45] Although it could be argued that such missions are premature and may endanger the future for the AU in providing peacekeeping and security forces in Africa.

[46] The AU's security and PSO capacity is based on its Constitutive Act, effective 2001, and is also based on the guideline document "Africa Our Common Destiny" from May 2004, the "Strategic Plan of the Commission of the African Union" 2004 and the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union (2002), all at www.africa-union.org (accessed on 13 November 2007).

[47] Kathryn Sturman, *New Growth on Deep Roots. Prospects for an African Union Government* (2007).

[48] Tim Murithi, *Institutionalising Pan-Africanism. Transforming African Union Values and Principles Into Policy and Practice* (2007).

authority within this peace and security structure. The chairmanship rotates 12 times a year and the council in effect travels throughout the year. According to an active AU partner, the council meets regularly, but not always in Addis Abeba. They often gather on short notice and with limited time to prepare and network between member states, which is reflected in the results.[49]

> *The PSC, like the rest of AU, travels a lot. It is almost impossible to get hold of the members in the PSC, let alone to have them coordinating meetings. If the members would team up against Nigeria or South Africa, they could easily make a stand against them. Important documents are not circulated before meetings. There is a great lack of capacity to do the networking and preparations that are needed.*[50]

The overall impression when visiting the AU in Addis Abeba is one of immense will, but an even larger lack of resources.

The Panel of the Wise is a rather interesting construction in which former African leaders can influence their peers in an equal, informal way. The panel consists of some ten elders, rotating and elected, but all with former experience from statesmanship and with a reputation within Africa as being able to give sensible advice in a non-threatening way. Members are sent on the initiative of the AU, but can also act on the request individual member countries. The effect is very hard to assess; the whole concept is not one of secrecy *per se*, but at least of acting without a formal agenda. Considering the culture of taking elders' advice seriously in Africa, it is very possible that this is a passable and wise working method. A concept linked to the Panel of the Wise is the PSC's ability to send peace envoys, or special envoys. This has been done on several occasions, and the envoys are drawn from the same pool of elders as those who sit on the Panel of the Wise.[51] It should be noted that former heads of state are most often still politically active in the sense that they remain regional Big Men and important in informal networks. In many cases this is a requirement for success in mediations, but it should be clearly stated that such involvement caters to partiality and at times even prevents solutions. A similar institution is the African Peer Review Mechanism (APRM). This mechanism takes issues of good governance and related factors under scrutiny. The assessment is made by the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD) under the auspice of the

[49] The PSC receives its mandate from the Protocol Relating to the Establishment of the Peace and Security Council of the African Union (www.africa-union.org) 2007-11-12.
[50] Interview with Julie Chappell, UK Africa Conflict Prevention Pool, Addis Abeba, 2 October 2007.
[51] Murithi, *Institutionalising Pan-Africanism. Transforming African Union Values and Principles Into Policy and Practice*. p 4.

AU, and serves as a test of member states – both in being evaluated and actually reviewing fellow member states.

The concept of a Continental Early Warning System (CEWS) was launched in 1992 and has its institutional basis in the 2003 PSC Protocol. However, all regional bodies are expected to have an Early Warning System (EWS) of their own. At least two – ECOWAS and the east African Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) – have functioning embryos today. The EWS operates with an Internet-based system, from different providers.[52] The system acts on aggregated data collected in different regions, from which a number of indicators are measured and collected.[53] The major problem today is the lack of resources for collecting data and the total lack of analysis capacity. The regional systems are not compatible with either each other or the CEWS and, perhaps most importantly, there is little real interest from those operating the regional systems in connecting to one CEWS themselves, or even in helping other regions implement their own EWS.

> *We have an EWS that works. It is used by us. If the AU wants to connect with us, they must ask. We own our own system. The AU has to go through us to access the data so the AU must tell us what indicators they want. There is the issue of state security so it is not always the case that member states want to share sensitive raw data, and this has to be processed by national early warning teams.* [54]

This indicates that the system, although an integral part of a peace and security system in Africa formally agreed upon in the AU, has a long way to go before there will be any real CEWS, with analyzed data, for the decision-makers to base their plans and PSO on.

Within the context of peace and security for the African continent, the AU needs concrete goals if it is to be able to move beyond the often superfluous achievements of countless workshops and policy documentation. In 2004, all heads of state within the AU agreed to create five regional standby brigades, the African Standby Force (ASF) – each brigade consisting of approximately 5,000 soldiers. The policy framework that forms the basis for the development points out that the brigades should consist of a military component and a civilian component. It also states the importance of coherent and effective command and

[52] In the cases of ECOWAS and IGAD, both use the same American software provider.
[53] Jackie Cilliers, *Towards a Continental Early Warning System for Africa* (2005).
[54] Interview with Raymond M. Kitevu, The Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism, of the Inter Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD), Addis Abeba, 1 October 2007. Although Kitevu appears very possessive in this excerpt, he also mentioned a joint ECOWAS/IGAD workshop at WANEP in Accra in early autumn 2007.

control, common communication and information systems, and finally presents a timeframe for all five ASF brigades to be operational in 2010. The document assumes that the ASF will work on a doctrine based on the UN multinational peacekeeping handbook, with changes provided for the African context. A key issue in the implementation of the ASF is the regional headquarters, which, together with a central command in Addis Abeba, is responsible for the planning, implementation, training and execution of the ASF and PSO. In 2004 a decision was made to establish a 15-person planning element in Addis Abeba, responsible for the implementation and coordination of the ASF project and later for the operational control over PSO. Unfortunately, the request for 15 experienced officers seconded to the AU has not been answered in full.

The ASF, in terms of being a project for change and focus, has had a very important role in the restructuring and construction of new security bodies. On a continental level, the AU has had to plan for a common agenda for both establishing and coordinating a force for PSO, thereby having to work out quite a few common policies on the issue of security in Africa. In practice, however, there is only one regional body, ECOWAS, that has any possibility to achieve the goal for 2010, i.e. an operational standby force. The ECOWAS has proven, through the ECOMOG operations in Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea Bissau in the 1990s, that they have both the capacity and the will to act on security threats in the region of West Africa. The other regional bodies, with the exception of North Africa, have implemented the idea of a regional standby force to varying degrees, but it is only the southern African region, SADEC, that can be seen as having any prospect of being able to conduct PSO before 2012, and then only based on South Africa's capacity. North Africa has not begun discussions of a standby force, and East and Central Africa are limited by the overall lack of capacity and regional conflicts. Of course it is no one else but the AU itself that should change its current timetable, but from an outside perspective anything in terms of continental operational capacity is highly unlikely before 2012.

At this stage the AU is still a skeleton organization, with an immensely broad perspective on PSO. The organization is based on very ambitious guidelines and goals, in terms of both what it wants regarding African development at large and what it strives for in more practical terms - ASF, CEWS. However, one must acknowledge the very real problem for the AU: its overall lack of capacity due to very limited finances. It is almost impossible to act on the strategies that actually exist due to chores of day-to-day activities, making cooperation within the organization and with external partners difficult. It certainly hampers decision-making. This said, it is as important to acknowledge the PSO in Burundi, Darfur

and Somalia. With all kinds of difficulties, especially in terms of finance, equipment and strategic transport, there are almost 8,000 AU soldiers on the ground, under AU command, in Africa today. With the resources at hand, this is an impressive result.

3.2 ECOWAS

West Africa, with its regional organization ECOWAS, is in many aspects the forerunner in terms of peace and security structures in Africa, at least when it comes to the implementation and conducting of PSO. The AU mimics ECOWAS in many aspects. One example is the practical use of previous heads of state/elders (in ECOWAS, the Council of the Wise) and the establishing of a separate body for peace and security matters, the Political Affairs, Peace and Security Commission (PAPS) directly under the President of ECOWAS and under the auspice of the Community Parliament and the Council of Ministers. The ECOWAS started out as a cooperative, economic and integration project in West Africa in 1975. The treaty was revised in 1993 to better answer the demands of its member states. In terms of peace and security, the treaty outlines basic principles of peacekeeping at the regional level, peaceful settlement of conflicts and promotion of democratic principles and ruling. The basis for ECOWAS is still economic, monetary and transport issues and cooperation. The adaptation from an economic, social, cooperative organization to one that deals with hard security is yet to be complemented. The adoption of the Protocol on Non-Aggression in 1978 was the first formal step towards the Mechanism for Conflict Prevention, Management Resolution and peace and Security, which was adopted in 1999.[55] The ECOWAS Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) was created in 1990, but has its basis in the 1981 Protocol on Mutual Defense Assistance. An early problem was that francophone West Africa was reluctant to use the means outlined in the 1981 Protocol.[56] Despite this fact, the Anglophone countries (chiefly Nigeria and Ghana) created ECOMOG to intervene in Liberia in August 1990. ECOMOG has since been used in Sierra Leone in 1997, Guinea Bissau in 1999, and again in Liberia in 2001 and 2003.

[55] Emmanuel Kwesi Aning, "Investing in peace and security in Africa: the case of ECOWAS," *Conflict, Security and Development* 4 (2004). p. 535.

[56] Throughout ECOWAS' history there has been tension between the Anglophone (mainly Nigeria) and Francophone countries. The conflict in Liberia and the creation of ECOMOG drove this conflict to the fore (see e.g. Adebajo, *Building Peace in West Africa: Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Guinea-Bissau*, Alhaji M. S. Bah, "West Africa: From a security complex to a security community," *African Security Review* 14 [2005], Abubakar Momoh, "The security imperative of the crises in West Africa," in *Franco-South African Dialogue: Sustainable Security in Africa*, ed. Diane Philander [2000]).

ECOWAS has established an improved model for decision-making within the concept of PSO. The 1999 mechanism gives the heads of state, *the Authority*, direct power to mandate the Mediation and Security Council (MSC) to take action within the mandate of the mechanism. The MSC is the body within ECOWAS with the most power under the new mechanism, and in turn has established a Committee for Mediation and Security (CMS) to make final decisions on implementation and deployment.[57] Work within the new mechanism is done at the level of heads of state, ministers and ambassadors, which means that a decision in the committee is based on what the political leadership wants and can do. A number of other structures have been established by ECOWAS since the deployment of ECOMOG in the 1990s and early 2000s: an Early Warning System (EWS), a centre for observation and monitoring (in close cooperation with EWS) and, perhaps most importantly, a Deputy Executive Secretary for Political Affairs, Defense and Security. The secretary is assigned with using the information from the different bodies in ECOWAS to make appropriate decisions regarding conflicts and start drawing on responses.[58]

There are unfortunately two major concerns regarding the structure in ECOWAS concerning peace and security. The first is the overall lack of capacity, in terms of man power, and financial resources to equip the functions with appropriate tools. These facts beg the question of the actual operability of the EWS. The second issue concerns the overall leadership of the peace and security mechanism within ECOWAS. Since the establishment of a Community Parliament in 1993, there has been an ongoing struggle between the Parliament, individual Commissioners and the different committees, in conjunction with a struggle between individual countries over the positioning of different commissioners and appointments of key positions within ECOWAS. Parliament, the council of elders and the individual commissioners have all been seen sending fact-finding missions and other mechanisms to conflict zones in the ECOWAS area, and not always in a cooperative spirit, creating some uncertainty as to who is actually in charge.[59]

[57] Aning, "Investing in peace and security in Africa: the case of ECOWAS" pp. 535- 536.
[58] Ibid. pp. 536- 537.
[59] Ibid. pp. 537- 542. This is not a problem for ECOWAS alone; most international organs try to tackle this. See, for instance, the fierce “INGO scramble for Africa” in most countries on the continent.

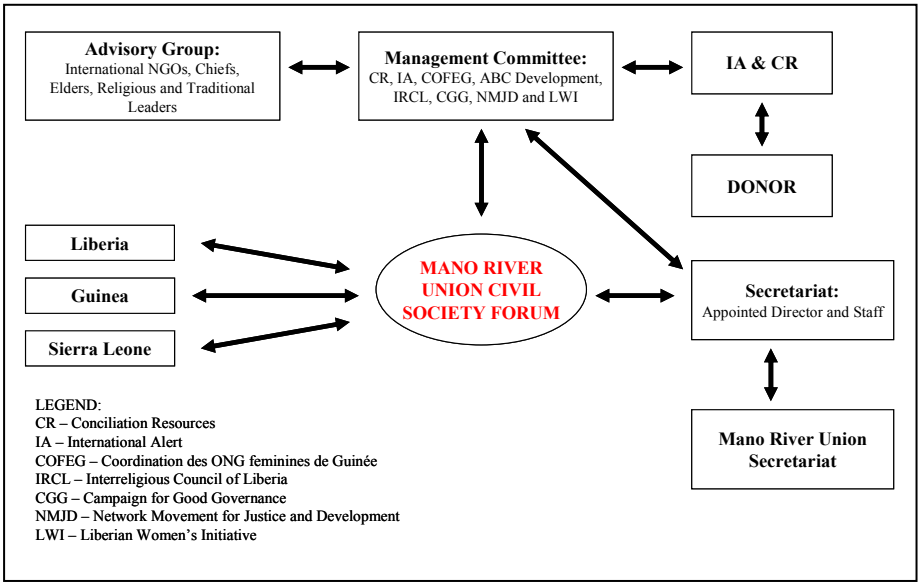
3.3 Mano River Union

I think they [MRU] have a house in Freetown.[60]

The Mano River Union (MRU) was established in 1973, as a sub-regional economic organization. Its basis was to constitute a customs and economic union between Liberia and Sierra Leone. The history of economic and trade cooperation dates back to 1967, when trade unions and other economic issues were discussed on a limited basis.[61] In 1980 a 19th Protocol was added to the original declaration, thereby adding Guinea to the Union.[62] The original declaration states that the ultimate goal is the elimination of all trade barriers and the fair distribution of socio- economic benefits between the signing countries.[63] Decisions are taken at meetings on a ministerial level, on the basis of consensus, with the support of a small Secretariat.[64] However, the Union is very much a forum for debate and is to a lesser degree an operational institution. The problem with taking all decisions on the basis of consensus is that it makes for a very difficult and time-consuming process.[65] According to most observers, the Union has had little effect in the Mano River Basin region, in terms of economic cooperation and facilitation and, even more so, in terms of any security arrangements.[66]

In later years, there have been some attempts to widen the scope into the area of security. One example of this is the Mano River Union Civil Society Forum. Launched in 1994 as an initiative by British-based NGO International Alert, this forum aims to work as a facilitator for the advancement of peace and mediation between warring parties.[67] The forum is considered a permanent body, but has thus far been limited by lack of funding. The initiative is interesting and could be used as one of the "nodes" for multi-functional, comprehensive approaches to peace and security measures. Another attempt to play a role within the context of the security sector was made in 2001 when the ministers for security, foreign affairs, internal security, etc. held a joint security committee meeting, discussing the security situation in the Mano River Basin and possible approaches for bettering the situation and moving forward.[68]

[60] Osman Gbla, Dean of the Social Sciences, Fourah Bay College, Sierra Leone, email conversation.
[61] Peter Robson, "The Mano River Union," *The Journal of Modern African Studies* 20 (1982). p. 613.
[62] Ibid. p. 614.
[63] Ibid. pp. 617- 618.
[64] Ibid. pp. 619-620.
[65] Ibid. p. 622.
[66] Ibid. pp. 626- 627, and www.theperspective.org/mru.html (accessed on 14 November 2007).
[67] www.manoriverunion.org/mru_forum.html (Accessed on 19 November 2007). Text and picture.
[68] www.sierra-leone.org/mru082301.htlm (Accessed on 14 November 2007).



The MRU functions under the umbrella of ECOWAS. All legislative matters proposed by the MRU are to be coordinated with ECOWAS. This is of course complicated, as ECOWAS may "dictate" what can be allowed and what cannot.[69] 2004 saw the launching of the Mano River Peace Forum, the most ambitious project within the security context that the MRU has established thus far. The forum is managed by a permanent body, International Alert and Conciliation Resources included, and is intended to be a central actor of the larger NGO network.[70] The secretariat is situated at MRU headquarters, and oversees the day-to-day implementation of the decisions made by the forum. It is quite clear that the Mano River Peace Forum and the Mano River Union Civil Society Forum are donor-driven initiatives aimed at creating activities within the MRU. It is quite questionable whether they have managed to do so, especially if we consider that such a central character as Osman Gbla, Dean at FBC and head of the *Centre for Development and Security Analysis* (CEDSA), has only scant knowledge about their physical whereabouts.[71]

[69] Robson, "The Mano River Union." pp. 626- 628.
[70] Inauguration Paper, 7 February 2004, http://www.international-alert.org/pdfs/report_on_mru_forum_inauguration.pdf (accessed on 5 December 2007).
[71] On the other hand, staff of the Peacekeeping and Regional Security Group at ECOWAS in Abuja, stated, on an informal note, that they had used the MRU women's organization to unofficially enter Guinea during the general strikes in early 2007.

3.4 Sierra Leone

After the formal declaration in January 2002 that the war in Sierra Leone had ended, two major post-conflict protocols have been launched: the SSR program and the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP). Other strategies include the Peace Consolidation Strategy and Sierra Leone Vision 2025. Both SSR and PRSP have had wide-ranging aims and ambitions. The 2005 PRSP has strong support from the IMF and other international donors.[72] The challenge is, of course, to put the strategies into operational use. The World Bank concludes in its own report that "[t]he slippages observed in various areas are evidences of the very serious capacity limitations of the economy. This phenomenon is compounded by current aid modalities that are not flexible enough to respond appropriately to the current post conflict state of the economy."[73] This indicates not only the overall lack of capacity but also the lack of flexibility and locality needed for strategies and policies to work. One problem with the PRSP is that it relies on international aid and donor money.[74] Although the PRSP is used as a positive driving force for change, and indicates some avenues for operational use, the difference between political lip service and practical use is still huge.[75]

The specifics for Sierra Leone are closely linked to the bilateral agreements between Great Britain and Sierra Leone. A far-reaching Memorandum of Understanding was agreed upon in 2002, covering a period of ten years. This gives Sierra Leone's government some stability in terms of financial support, and more importantly provides a long-term increase in government capacity.[76] Already in 2001 there was evidence of this long-term bilateral cooperation,[77] manifested in the International Military Assistance Training Team (IMATT), for example. Since 2002 IMATT has both operational and advisory roles within the Sierra

[72] See for example World Bank, "Annual Progress Report, Sierra Leone, Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper," (Washington, 2006).
[73] Ibid., p 68.
[74] International Crisis Group, "Liberia and Sierra Leone: Rebuilding Failed States," (2004). p 14. Yet the very reason for most states to write a PRSP report in the first place is to be able to access World Bank loans and international aid money.
[75] See the International Development Association and the International Monetary Fund, Republic of Sierra Leone; PRSP Joint Staff Advisory Note, 13 April 2005, http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPRS1/Resources/Sierra-Leon_PRSP-JSAN(April13_2005).pdf (accessed on 20 November 2007).
[76] Overseas Development Institute, "DFID Budget Support to Sierra Leone, 2004-2007: Achievements & Lessons for the Future," (2007).
[77] International Crisis Group, "Sierra Leone - Time for a New Military and Political Strategy, Africa Report No. 28," (Brussels, 2001). p. 25.

Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF). IMATT is also responsible for the specific training needed for AU/UN missions.[78]

Although there is little discussion over how PSO and other international mechanisms and international aid assisted or were instrumental in bringing peace in 2002, there is on the other hand quite some agreement on the fact that very little has been done in battling the root causes of the conflict.[79] Corruption and mismanagement of state resources is still a great problem in the country. None of the programs launched since the peace in 2002 have actually meant very much in this regard. There have been attempts, such as an anti-corruption scheme and a commission for anti-corruption. In a positive light, one could argue that these things must be allowed to take their time, yet without a true understanding of, and thus proper responses to, root causes of the civil war there will be very little - and very slow - progress.

3.5 Liberia

The formal peace agreement, the foundation for any post-conflict work in Liberia, was signed on 18 August 2003. The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) laid down the directive that in turn led to the elections in which Ellen Johnson-Sirleaf was elected President. Other important blueprints in effect today are foremost the interim Poverty Reduction Strategy (iPRS) and the Security Sector Reform (SSR) – work that is still underway. The CPA has proven to be rather detailed and sets a high standard for the Liberian government, thereby proving difficult to adhere to. This has brought forward two programs, particularly the Governance and Economic Management Assistance Plan (GEMAP) and the overall SSR program.[80] The GEMAP program is part of the larger iPRS, but places stronger emphasis on good governance, transparency and the implementation of anti-theft and anti-fraud mechanisms.[81] The GEMAP is instrumental in furthering discussions with donors and other international financial institutions.[82] The SSR program was largely brought about, and is run, by the US, who has actually pledged a complete overhaul of the AFL. The US is also involved in the process by which a new state strategy for security will be launched.

[78] Brian Thomson, *Sierra Leone: Reform or Relapse? Conflict and Governance Reform* (London, 2007), pp. 12-13.
[79] Ibid. p. 1, and International Crisis Group, "Sierra Leone - Time for a New Military and Political Strategy, Africa Report No. 28." p. 28.
[80] International Crisis Group, "Liberia: Staying Focused, Africa Briefing No. 36," (Brussels, 2006).
[81] Ibid.
[82] Ibid. p. 5.

The iPRS, being the overarching instrument for reconstruction in Liberia, is placed under pressure through its taking on a multitude of aspects, trying to be conflict sensitive and spanning Liberian society – inviting youths, women and other civil society groups to discussions and the implementation process. The complex issue of poverty reduction and state reformation does call for complex models, the biggest problem in concurrent Liberia being the lack of capacity: from the inability to pay soldiers and policemen decent salaries to the overall deficit of capacity at state level. The iPRS is constructed around four focus areas: (1) enhancing national security, (2) revitalizing the economy, (3) strengthening governance and (4) developing an infrastructure.

Together with the retraining and development of the Liberia National Police (LNP), the development of a new Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) is probably the most important step within the iPRS. There is a need to reintegrate some of the armed antagonists from the civil war into one army. What has been agreed on and decided is a new AFL of only 2,000 soldiers. The process of retraining and recruiting is ongoing, but since the army is still influential there are strong powers urging the reenrolment of many more soldiers. As part of a DDR and reintegration exercise, it is also hard to see that an army of this minimal size could have any benefits and is quite to the contrary a potential conflict area for renewed violence. For civilians in Liberia, the retraining of the LNP is perhaps even more important. The individual police officer often has more direct influence over your life than the soldier does.

The focus on youth, former “rebels” and other ex-combatants is very clear in the iPRS. The problem is that there is no real understanding of the enormous task it is to reform the security system as a whole. The span from police officers’ pay to the appointment of judges is perhaps too large for one program. On the other hand, it might be that the overall aims in the iPRS are just what is needed; if supported with enough resources and a long-term perspective, it might prove to be a strategy that works. The strengthening of government capacity and the introduction of a concept of rule of law in Liberia is naturally imperative for the success of the implementation of the new AFL and the new LNP; this will, however, be more difficult than simply retraining soldiers and police officers. It takes far-ranging action to move from hidden agendas and networks to transparency and open accountability within political circles, and this will be an extremely sensitive and difficult task as it is those who are in the system who will have to change it. In addition to SSR, a Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) has been established – very much based on the Sierra Leonean example. A body monitoring Human Rights has been established and zero tolerance of corruption has been adopted. All this is important, but will come to nothing if not supported by a general political true will and determina-

tion. This is where President Johnson-Sirleaf's real commitment and strength will show. Is it possible to become President without being consumed by the networks you aim to destroy? Is it possible to become President without having to make compromises that contradict your work of anti-corruption? President Johnson-Sirleaf has the support of the international community and seems to have the experience needed to focus on the right things; the question is whether she has enough power and national political support from the Liberian elite to do her work.

In terms of implementation, some new improved ways to move forward are being tried. There will be coordination between 13 UN agencies and some 300 NGOs working in Liberia – how this will be accomplished is still to be determined but the will itself is a huge step forward. It is often the different NGOs and other actors that are reluctant to cooperate with others. Achieving real coordination would create a benchmark in the post-war efforts to restructure a nation. ECOWAS, with its focus on economic and social integration and advancement, ranks Liberia last of all member states when it comes to implementation of common standards and regulations. ECOWAS, although instrumental in ending the armed conflict, has not played the role of "leading organization" in the transformation process in Liberia; UNMIL has played a far more important role as guarantor for peace and security. UNMIL leads both SSR and the coordination of NGOs, through the iPRS and the Humanitarian Coordination Centre (HCS). Liberia also has a very strong bilateral connection with the US – whose tasks include retraining the Liberian Armed Forces and providing advisors to the Liberian Ministry of Defense.

3.6 Guinea

Considering Sierra Leone and Liberia within the context of post-conflict transformation, the example of Guinea is quite different. Although it was involved in the conflicts in Sierra Leone and Liberia, not only in terms of being an active player but also in terms of passively receiving hundreds of thousands of refugees from the conflicts from the 1990s through 2002, Guinea has not encountered an internal implosion.[83] President Conté, despite being old, ill and experiencing an attempt on his life in 2005, holds Guinea in very tight rein. The rift between the President and the people is widening and is already of immense proportions, bringing general strike and outbreaks of civil disturbance.[84] The Guinea initiative to advance within the broader spectrum of peace and stability is the National

[83]International Crisis Group, "Guinea: Crisis on Hold, Africa Briefing No 49," (Brussels, 2007).
[84]International Crisis Group, "Guinea in Transition, Africa Briefing No. 37."

Consultation, based upon the results of the conference Civil Society and the Democratization Process: Issues and Perspectives, held in Conakry in March 2006.[85] The National Consultation organized three commissions: political, economic and socio-cultural. The National Consultation has acted as a facilitator and platform for further initiatives in Guinea.[86] The National Consultation has not reached any tangible results to date, but has however shown that civil society in Guinea is preparing for times after President Conté. The great problem in Guinea is the unwillingness of the President to invite Guinean civil society to discussions on constitutional aspects of governance, which has led to several general strikes and civil unrest (see case study on the general strikes below).

Guinea produced a comprehensive PRSP in 2002[87] and has submitted progress reports in 2004[88] and 2006[89]. One problem with Guinea in terms of official blueprints or strategies is that much of the security sector there is based on patronage directly from the President,[90] thereby leaving official documents and plans out of the picture. The basic problem for Guinea now is the issue of the constitution. The renewed effort of a comprehensive and encompassing national dialogue is still in its infancy. From an academic viewpoint it is, in the Guinea case, interesting to speculate on what the outcome of genuine state reform would be at this stage – instead of in the fully collapsed cases of Sierra Leone and Liberia. What could the international community do if they were to act before a total collapse? Guinea is doubtless a state in transition, from a Conté to a post-Conté realm. Dominated by the President and a centrally managed administration, the Guinea population demands progress – if at all possible without being thrown into a civil war. Discourses of change have thus far surfaced in different forums like the national consultations and the general strikes, yet the violent clamping down on strikers shows agents for change that they may need to use violence to proceed.

[85] Ibid. p. 11.
[86] Ibid. pp. 4-7.
[87] See http://poverty2.forumone.com/files/12082_Guinea_PRSP.pdf (accessed on 30 November 2007).
[88] See http://poverty2.forumone.com/files/cr04375.pdf (accessed on 30 November 2007).
[89] See http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTPRS1/Resources/Guinea_APR2(Jan2006).pdf (accessed on 30 November 2007).
[90] International Crisis Group, "Guinea: Change or Chaos, Africa Report No. 121," (Brussels, 2007). p. 2.

4 Perceptions of Security[91]

This section compares the "fuzzy" realities in Liberia and Sierra Leone, and will combine the regional perspective and the perspective from the formal structures with that of the individual citizen. The data provide unique insights into the countries' security arenas as regards the constellation of security actors and their interactions, as well as their significance in today's security issues. The findings are based on a multi-method approach combining unique empirical data from:

- A survey poll of 700 respondents in three urban areas in both countries
- Eight in-depth focus-group discussions, each comprising six to eight participants, covering issues such as the security actors involved and the relationships between these actors
- Around 60 semi-standardized interviews with elites as well as local and international experts

A key goal of this section of the report is to identify those actors whom ordinary people perceive as providers of, and threats to, their security.

4.1 Liberia's "fuzzy" reality

As far as security provision in Liberia is concerned, it comes as no surprise that UNMIL[92] stands at the top of the list as *the* most important security provider (Table 1). Table 2 provides a more detailed picture of a number of relevant security actors, with each listed actor rated according to its significance – both positive and negative – for the provision of security in the country.

[91] This perception study was carried out by Judy Smith-Höhn, who provided a background paper on Liberia and Sierra Leone for this study. The material was gathered as part of a research project on "Legitimate Oligopolies of Violence in Post-Conflict Societies", which was carried out by the GIGA Institute of African Affairs in Hamburg, Germany and funded primarily by the German Foundation for Peace Research. Please do not cite or quote without permission from the author. See also Matthias Basedau, Andreas Mehler, and Judy Smith-Höhn, "Public Perceptions of Security in Post-conflict Urban Liberia and Sierra Leone. Part I: Liberia - Caught between International, State and Non-State Actors," *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development* 3 (2007). Andreas Mehler and Judy Smith-Höhn, "The Interaction of International, State and Non-State Security Actors in Liberia und Sierra Leone: Roles and Perceptions," in *State Failure Revisited II: Actors of Violence and Alternative Forms of Governance*, ed. Tobias Debiel and Daniel Lambach (Duisburg, 2007). Judy Smith-Höhn, "Public Perceptions of Security in Post-conflict Urban Liberia and Sierra Leone. Part II: The Aftermath of Withdrawal in Sierra Leone," *Journal of Peacebuilding and Development* 3 (2007).

[92] United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) is the currently 15,000-man strong peacekeeping force in Liberia (see above).

Table 1: Which group is the most important for your personal safety?

Actors	Percentage
UNMIL	75.9
Liberia National Police	17.9
Armed Forces of Liberia	2
Ex-Combatants	0.1
ECOWAS	0.1
Poro/Sande	0.1
Vigilante Teams	0.1
Family	0.1
No answer/Don't know	3.4

N: 698

Table 2: Perceptions of Security Actors in Urban Liberia (in %)

Types of Actors		Very/somewhat important to personal security	Does not affect my personal security	Somewhat/a great threat to personal security
International	UNMIL	94.9	2	1.4
State	Liberia National Police	91.9	4.6	2.9
	Armed Forces of Liberia	64.8	23.8	9.3
International / commercial nonstate	Private Security Companies	38.3	52.2	3.8

Domestic nonstate	Community Watch Teams	56.6	17.9	15.5
	Poro/Secret Societies	15.7	46.4	26.1
	Political Party Militias	7.2	36.3	42.8
	Street Boys	0.4	6.3	78.6
	Ex-Combatants	3.3	6.9	86.8

N = 698 (of total sample of 700); Percentages of 'Don't know' and 'No answer' responses not shown in table.

In Table 2, it was again UNMIL that received the best results. However, before interpreting these results as an affirmation of UNMIL's positive role in providing security, one should reconsider their rating of 75% in Table 1. At the time of the survey UNMIL was the only viable, and armed, security actor around. A rating of only 75% no longer seems consentient; some results from the focus-group discussions underline this point. It was revealed here that UNMIL was not always considered to contribute to security, particularly on the community level, where it showed little presence. In the Liberian capital Monrovia, for example, UNMIL troops essentially patrol the main thoroughfares and show little if any presence in outlying areas of the city. So although there is no doubt that the peacekeepers are the main guarantors of security, there is certainly still room for improvement. The results for UNMIL may be even more dramatic in rural areas, where there is hardly any UN presence.

Another finding, certainly one of the more remarkable ones, was the relatively positive role attributed to the state security actors – the Liberia National Police (LNP) and the Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL) – given their current reorganization and history of violence against citizens in the past. This is particularly true of the results obtained for the AFL – since this actor did not even exist at the time of survey. This rating should be understood less as a reflection of these actors' actual performance, but more as an indication of the high expectations citizens have for them. There appears to be a preference for state security actors to provide for security.

Private security companies (PSCs) were generally awarded a relatively positive rating. More importantly, a majority of Liberians are unaffected by PSCs, which points to the fact that they provide security mainly for wealthier segments of society.

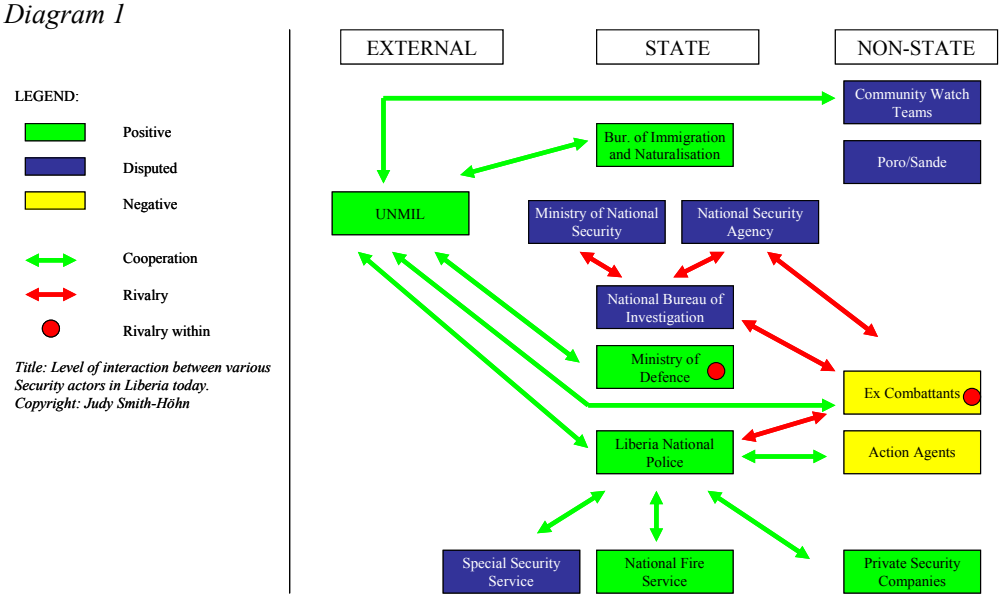
Results from the focus groups revealed the importance of community-based informal actors in the security arena. The map below depicts a mapping exercise that was conducted in all the focus groups. Discussants were asked to identify all relevant security actors, determine their relative significance and illustrate the interaction among these various actors within the security arena.

The map below reveals that, to ordinary Liberians, a variety of actors – beyond the state and external ones – play a role in providing or threatening security in Liberia today (Diagram 1). Two informal actors are particularly noteworthy in this regard: the Community Watch Teams (CWTs) and the Poro/Sande. The secret societies – the Poro and Sande – tend to play a negligible role in the urban areas, and are to some extent viewed as a threat (as shown in Table 2); but above all, they are decoupled from all the other actors. It should be noted here, however, that rural dwellers *assign them a central role in active conflict resolution*, with Poro hierarchies remaining significant actors in providing institutional responses to armed violence in some communities.[93] Still, the absence of points of contact with other security actors indicates that their involvement in the development of strategies for security sector reform would very likely be problematic. This does not apply, however, to the CWTs.

As in the case of Sierra Leone, with the rise in crime and the lack of adequate state-led responses to the problem, CWTs have become more prevalent in Liberia. The fact that such community-based neighbourhood watch teams are (re)emerging points to similarities with Sierra Leone's experiences after the civil war. However, unlike the Sierra Leonean case, in which there was an attempt by the government to formalize police-community cooperation through the Police Partnership Boards, those in charge in Liberia have hitherto limited their strategies to publicly calling for increased community action.

[93] Sawyer, *Beyond Plunder: Toward Democratic Governance in Liberia*, Sawyer, "Violent Conflicts and governance challenges in West Africa: the case of the Mano River basin area."

Diagram 1



Finally, generally speaking, there were two levels at which particular actors were expected to provide security, namely the national and local levels. At the national level it was UNMIL, the LNP and other state actors that were generally expected to provide security; at the local level, many agreed that the individual should provide his/her own security: "You yourself provide security…if there is small trouble"[94].

4.2 Sierra Leone's "fuzzy" reality

The data gathered in Sierra Leone revealed the existence and relevance of several actors – particularly of a non-state, informal nature – in providing or threatening security, with the constellation of security actors being somewhat different than that of Liberia's security arena. Table 3 shows that, here, the external actors – UNAMSIL, ECOMOG, IMATT[95] – do not play as significant a role in the provision of security as do their Liberian counterparts.

[94] Quoted from the focus-group discussion conducted by Judy Smith-Höhn in Monrovia on 19 December 2005.

[95] The United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone, the Economic Community of West African States Monitoring Group and the (British-led) International Military Advisory and Training Team, respectively.

Table 3: Which group is the most important for your personal safety?

Actors	Percentage
Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces	37.2
Police	35.8
UNAMSIL	11.7
ECOMOG	3.2
Government	2.2
Former Warring Faction 1: CDF	1.7
Husband/family/individual	1.1
God	1.1
Rebel/Ex-Combatant	1
President	0.9
Youth Groups	0.6
Foreign Troops (general)	0.5
Traditional Authorities (Paramount Chief/village authorities)	0.4
Private Security	0.3
SLP Operational Support Division	0.3
IMATT	0.2
Mende	0.2
Former Warring Faction 2: RUF	0.2
Other	1.4
None	0.8

Valid N: 651 (24= No answer, 27= Don’t know, total N 702)

Table 4: Perceptions of Security Actors in Urban Sierra Leone (in %)

Types of Actors		Very/somewhat important to personal security	Does not affect my personal security	Somewhat/a great threat to personal security
State	Sierra Leone Police	87.8	3.4	8
	Rep. of SL Armed Forces	81.4	5	10
International/commercial non-state	Private Security Companies	54.6	38.6	1.6
Domestic non-state	Secret Societies	26.6	50.9	19.7
	Youth Wings of Pol. Parties	30.6	33.5	30.3
	Ghetto Boys	4.4	16.2	76.8
	Bike Riders	39.1	30.1	26.6
	West Side Boys	2.9	17	74.6
	Civil Defense Forces	20.5	20.5	54.1
	Revolutionary United Front	2.3	16.1	78

N = 702 (of total sample of 700); Percentages of 'Don't know' and 'No answer' responses not shown in table.

Tables 3 and 4 also reveal the state actors – namely the Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces (RSLAF) and the Sierra Leone Police (SLP) – to be *the* most important security providers. As in Liberia, the Sierra Leone government and its security forces scored high in the respondents' *expectations* for the provision of national security. Unlike in Liberia, however, the armed forces of Sierra Leone were not dissolved but have undergone extensive retraining over the past five years. Surprisingly, focus-group discussions revealed that it was the fact that the RSLAF stayed out of sight and were confined to their barracks that accounted for the discussants' favourable assessments of this actor. This also explains to some extent why more than two-thirds of survey poll respondents considered the

RSLAF very important for their personal security despite the violent, even criminal, history of the military in the country.

The focus groups revealed a more negative picture of the police forces. This deviates from the positive ratings given to the SLP in the survey poll, where as many as 87.8% of respondents considered them to be very or somewhat important for their personal security. This disparity was clarified through interviews conducted with local and international experts on security-related issues and revealed that, despite their high expectations concerning the role of national security forces such as the police force, Sierra Leoneans are very aware of the shortcomings of the police forces in particular. As do their Liberian counterparts, the SLP receive external support and training, in this case from the Commonwealth Police and the civilian police section of UNAMSIL. However, their ability to perform their duties is hamperedby, among other things, a lack of equipment and insufficient remuneration for their services and, hence, partly explains their poor performance.

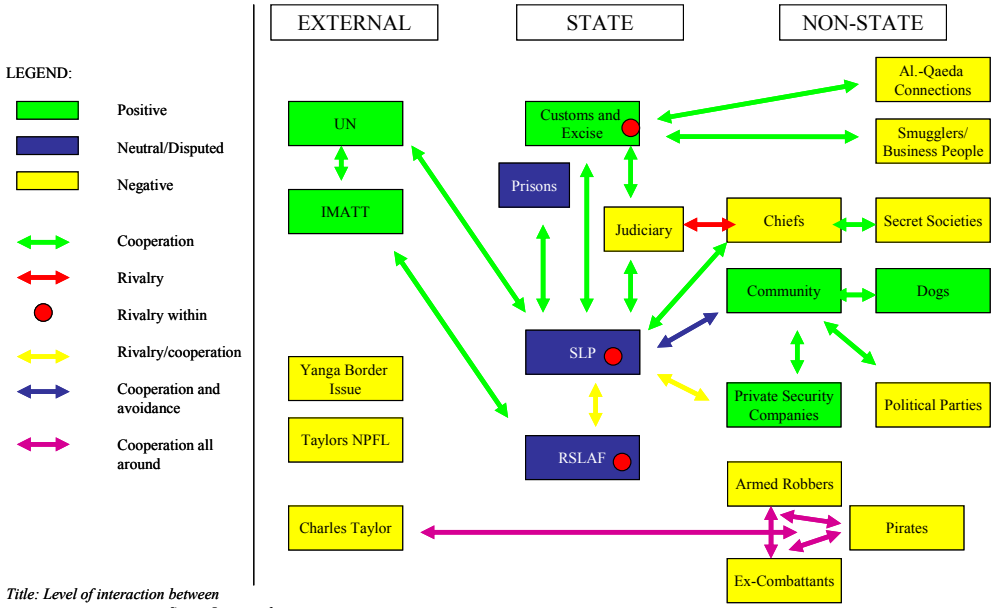
Another interesting result is the generally positive role of private security companies (PSCs). While a not insignificant total of 38.6% of respondents said that PSCs had no impact on their security, quite a number considered them to be 'somewhat' or 'very' important for their personal security (54.6%). In contrast to Liberia, secret societies play a more significant role in terms of providing security in Sierra Leone. Whereas in Liberia secret societies were almost irrelevant in the urban areas, almost one-third of Sierra Leoneans considered them to play a positive role in security provision.[96] That most respondents (around 50%) considered them to be insignificant for their personal security is certainly partly attributable to the fact that the survey was conducted in three urban areas of the country. Focus-group discussions and interviews confirmed the increased importance of such traditional actors in rural Sierra Leone.

In Sierra Leone, our focus-group discussions also revealed that the constellation of security actors differs somewhat from the situation in Liberia. The most notable difference, as mentioned above, is the tendency to attach greater importance to traditional actors – such as secret societies – in Sierra Leone than in neighbouring Liberia, as Diagram 2 illustrates[97]:

[96] Sierra Leone, chiefly Freetown, has an entirely different history of urban secret societies, see e.g. Nunley, *Moving with the Face of the Devil: Art and Politics in Urban West Africa*, Akintola J. G. Wyse, *The Krio of Sierra Leone: An Interpretive History* (Freetown, [Sierra Leone], 1989).

[97] The diagram is based on a mapping exercise undertaken during one of the focus-group discussions in Sierra Leone in April/May 2006.

Diagram 2



Title: Level of interaction between various security actors in Sierra Leone today
Copyright: Judy Smith-Höhn

Comparing the maps for the two countries, it is clear that, in Sierra Leone, the traditional structures are also more integrated into the overall relationship system. While the Poro in Liberia comprise a security-relevant but nonetheless decoupled actor, the secret societies in Sierra Leone (Poro, Sande, Ojeh, etc.) have points of contact with the other actors. They are also represented by other actors in the security apparatus, e.g. through the function of the Paramount Chief – who is usually a member of a secret society himself. In addition, membership in these societies is widespread – not least in the police and private security companies and even among NGO employees.

As for other traditionally based actors, the Civil Defense Forces (CDF) no longer play as positive a role in the security arena as they did in the early stages of the civil war. Returning to Table 2, more than half of all respondents considered them to be a threat or a great threat to their security. The focus-group discussions confirmed their negative role, which is certainly partly attributable to their changing role during the civil war. At that time, local self-help measures proved effective in safeguarding security, albeit confined to the local level. Unlike the community-driven efforts in Liberia, such measures were carried out in a more organized fashion, with civilians coordinating themselves into civil defence groups, usually led by traditional hunters. Thus, the CDF, commonly referred to under their Mende name *Kamajors*, were formed amidst fears of threats from

both the rebels and government troops. These "traditional" institutions – as part of the Poro system of secret societies – were key players during the civil war. Later, however, certain elements within the CDF resorted to extortion and acts of brutality.

The role of the chiefs, on the other hand, has always been an ambiguous one and depended on the respective chief's personal ambitions to protect his people or his own life. Whilst some chiefs in rural areas deserted their people, others played a key role in recruiting and funding *Kamajors*. A number of informal actors were also revealed as posing a potential security risk. The Ghetto Boys, for instance, many of whom are ex-combatants, are considered a major threat to security. The West Side Boys (WSB) – a rogue army faction that emerged at the end of 1990s but which has officially disbanded – are considered to pose a similar threat to security. The focus-group discussions confirmed these views, and discussants agreed that the WSB still maintained a modicum of organizational capacity, with several claiming that they were capable of recruiting and reorganizing at any time. Regardless of whether or not this is true, the fact that many former combatants – whether Ghetto Boys, WSB or RUF rebels – are unemployed and struggling to make ends meet is cause for concern, for it is from this group that those wishing to destabilize the security sector for their own personal gain, for example, would recruit. It was also from this group that the political parties recruited "security" for their election campaigns.[98]

Bike Riders, many of whom are also ex-combatants, can serve as an example of the potential to work with such actors. All in all, they received the most 'balanced' results of all actors, i.e. an almost equal number of respondents considered them either important, insignificant or a threat to their security. In contrast to the Ghetto Boys, this group appears to have a more positive impact on security (39.1%). A third found that they had no impact on their security, whilst 26.6% considered them a threat. These results can be explained if one considers the responses in each of the cities where the survey was conducted. Following conflicts between Bike Riders and other transport stakeholders in Makeni and Koidu Town, civil society groups together with the local police intervened to successfully curb this threat. This has led to a rapid decrease in bike-related unrest and explains the favourable results this group obtained in these cities, particularly in Makeni, where 79% of respondents considered them as being important or somewhat important for their security. In comparison, 73.3% of Koidu respondents considered them positive, whereas only 24% of the respon-

[98] See Utas, "Watermelon Politics in Sierra Leone: Hope amidst Vote Buying and Remobilized Militias."

dents in Freetown answered accordingly. In the latter case, most respondents found the Bike Riders to have no impact on their security (37.1%).

Table 3: Perception of Bike Riders according to City

City	Very important to personal security	Somewhat important to personal security	Does not affect my personal security	Somewhat a threat to personal security	A great threat to personal security
Freetown	9.4	14.6	37.1	19.8	13.4
Makeni	33	46	15	3	3
Koidu Town	41.6	32.7	9.9	11.9	3

N Freetown = 500, N Makeni = 100, N Koidu = 100

Finally, if one compares the current security situation with the period before the end of the war, UNAMSIL's withdrawal in December 2005 marks a shift in the constellation of security actors. The focus groups produced some striking results and led to the identification of additional actors that were relevant in the security sector; most prominent among these were the community watch teams. Sierra Leone's current security arena comprises far more actors than were present during UNAMSIL's deployment. Similarly, more actors were involved during the period before 2001, prior to the end of the civil war. This implies that with the presence of UN troops the need for security was covered. Moreover, the gradual withdrawal of UNAMSIL troops produced a security vacuum that was filled not by state actors but rather by private, non-state actors. Some have only been established recently (such as the Police Partnership Boards or the Community Night Watch), while others have re-emerged (such as the secret societies).

4.2.1 Case study – Community Watch Teams in Liberia

Several community policing groups have been established in Liberia (especially Monrovia) during recent years. A characteristic seems to be that the LNP encourages community policing initiatives, whilst the government takes a more sceptical role – for instance, prominent members of communities have avoided committee meetings on how to develop community policing groups.[99] The Global Facilitating Network for SSR, which held an international workshop on

[99] The Analyst, *Community policing forums*, Monrovia, 4 December 2006 (found on 23 August 2007) http://www.analystliberia.com/community_policing_dec04.html .

post-conflict policing in July 2007, emphasized that attempts by the Liberian police to engage communities in the Community Policing Programme have only been half-hearted attempts to utilize energy and knowledge within the communities. The incapacity of state actors to provide security throughout the country has instead led to the growth of various solutions springing directly from the communities. These include community watch teams (CWT), and provide security in most of the rural areas of Liberia.[100] Obviously, one downside of civilian patrols is the risk of mob violence; as the patrols are not formally part of the Security Sector, there is no formal connection to jurisdiction or trial in court for captured alleged offenders. This results in the public often taking care of prosecution and punishment themselves – a practice that severely limits the human rights of the alleged perpetrator. CWTs are well-functioning in the rural areas, where they are part of a larger social system in which elders and village chiefs can advise and decide on how to deal with offenders. Mob violence is more common in urban areas. Generally, CWTs could probably play an important role in protecting and warning their communities and in helping civilians hide in the event of attackers approaching local communities.[101]

[100] SSR Network 9 July 2007 (found on 22 September 2007) http://www.ssrnetwork.net/documents/Events/PreviousEvents/Policing%20international%20workshop%20%209%20July%202007.pdf .

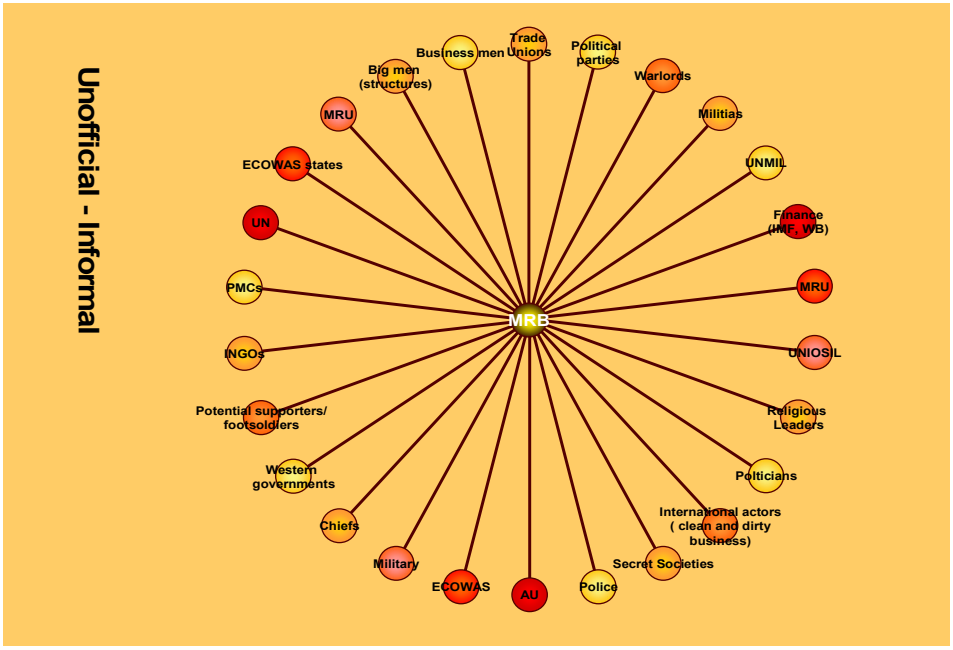
[101] Interview by Mikael Wiking with Michael Sulusi-Sjö, Political Advisor, EU Liberia, 4 October 2007.

5 The informal reality of the MRB security structures

This chapter deals with the informal part of society in the MRB region. It looks into the reality of Big Men and the network that constitutes the informal "system." Around the world, real politics is partly carried out in the hidden, the unofficial or the informal.[102] In Africa this is clearly more the case than anywhere else. Our research clearly shows how, from the UN system, via the AU, ECOWAS and down to the MRB states, informal political contacts and networks are a prime character of how security issues are structured. We have therefore devoted a large part of this report to mapping informal networks both in and around the MRB security structures. If we try to generalize structural issues of the three MRB countries, one could say that Sierra Leone offers the clearest continuity with pre-European, pre-nation state, polities, in which chiefs and other local political formations have continued to prosper. To the other extreme we find Guinea, where the socialist ideology of post-colonial Guinea under the leadership of Sékou Touré did its utmost to destroy local structures of governance in favour of a new centralized system. In the middle we find Liberia, which partly banned local political structures (such as chiefs and secret societies), but at the same time had a political elite who informally continued to use these structures in a variety of ways.

Even if the countries are different in official setup we must acknowledge the many similarities, and we argue that this is because a "Big Man" culture has remained intact in all three countries despite their very different ways of getting to grips with local political systems. A person-oriented approach to political structure will show that the Big Man and his/her networks transfer from chiefdoms to government-orchestrated local councils, prefects or rural development communities.

[102] For examples from the Western world see e.g. Michael Herzfeld, *Cultural Intimacy: Social Poetics in the Nation-State* (New York, 1997), Andrew Shryock, *Off Stage/On Display: Intimacy and Ethnography in the Age of Public Culture* (Stanford, Calif., 2004).



Drawing a picture of Big Men actors and networks, even with only the most basic complexity, would be quite confusing. If one were to add the hierarchical perspective, making the picture three dimensional, it would indeed be an interesting but extremely demanding exercise. In the illustration above we have instead rather modestly drawn up a number of actor types, rather than individuals, that exist as nodal points in a complexity of networks that exists in the MRB area. As discussed above, many of the actors play multiple roles and thus further blur our attempts to visualize these networks. It is quite feasible, for instance, that you have a politician who is a businessman, a member of a secret society, and works for an NGO. Networks would also consist of similar constellations. The soldier who doubles as a warlord (i.e., the Sierra Leonean "sobel") is in the same network as the peacekeeper who ships drugs from Nigeria for an international drug cartel, whose local head rents out real estate for the UN and is given contracts in the construction sector by INGOs. The UN worker uses his white vehicle to transport embargoed, so-called blood diamonds across the border to a neighbouring country. He connects with a businessman who is a main provider of technology for mobile phones working for a company that has been given a huge contract by the World Bank to improve the infrastructure. The peacekeeper is also a close friend of the local military commander, who used to be a commander in the peacekeeping forces in another neighbouring country. He

in his turn received his military training in a main ECOWAS country together with a military commander from the country who is now the country's representative at the AU in Addis Abeba, who could in his turn be central in deciding whether or not the AU should send a standby force to an MRB country. This is a picture of six people connecting in one network. However, they are at the same time members of 20-30 other networks that in part overlap with others.

The networks are endless and provided loyalty is maintained by the multipurpose use, and the possible flows of goods and favours are extremely varied. It is crucial to remember that in the examples above we have only followed one string, and it is important to imagine that there can be hundreds of these from every node, every Big Man. It is also central that on every social level there are similar networks and thus Big Men at a variety of levels (even at the street corner level), who in their turn have their own Big Men. The multidimensional picture thus has tens of thousands of individuals interconnected in numerous ways, leading to a nation structured not on a Westphalian basis but on networks and daily procedures of networking.

5.1 Chiefs and local commissionaires

In this section we provide an overview of the powers and relationships that formal leaders on a sub-state level have. As mentioned earlier, a main difference between the three MRB countries is the way traditional chiefs have been treated. In Sierra Leone they were incorporated into the state structure, in Liberia a new cadre of chiefs was "created" by the government, and in Guinea they were banned altogether and replaced by local commissionaires.

In Sierra Leone traditional authorities, especially Paramount Chiefs and other local chiefs, play a crucial role in the governance of the state with security and development implications. The political significance of the Paramount Chiefs is particularly visible in the 12 parliamentary seats accorded them. Although they are expected to be politically neutral, over the years Paramount Chiefs have aligned themselves with political regimes in the country and their neutrality has largely been compromised. In the recently concluded elections, some Paramount Chiefs (especially in the east of the country) were accused of preventing certain parties from campaigning in their chiefdoms. During the war, youths that formed the Civil Defense Forces (CDF) sometimes clashed with these traditional authorities, especially when the youths reflected on their dictatorial tendencies,

including the imposition of excessive fines on young people.[103] More recently, governments attempt to directly interfere inchiefdom succession procedures, as was manifested in the Biriwa Chiefdom succession dispute in northern Sierra Leone. Osman Gbla[104] reports how government tried to impose a Paramount Chief on the people of Biriwa Chiefdom, an action that was not kindly received by the people. They not only refused to cooperate with the imposed chief but also threatened to disrupt law and order. Reno has clearly shown how intricately the powers of the chiefs are linked with that of central politics, and it is equally clear from his work that it is a mutual dependence whereby chiefs equally influence politicians on the national level. This is even more true in the diamond-rich areas of the Kono, Kenema and Bo districts.[105]

Another feature that ought not to be omitted is the fact that at a local level many individuals still view customary authority as a defence against state bureaucracy,[106] and that in many parts of the country it is only chiefs who administer justice. In a post-war drive of decentralization and also in an effort to balance the powers of rural chiefs the Sierra Leone government, supported (if not forced) by the World Bank and British DFID, has re-established the institution of local councils. Twelve districts and five urban councils in the provinces have been established, mainly to administrate post-war reconstruction and development. These councils have the right to delegate tasks to the chiefdoms, in essence returning to how it was before 1972 when the councils were suspended.[107] Fanthorpe points out that even if the basic idea is to create a new and incorrupt platform for local development there is little to indicate that this will be the case; he rather states: “there is a very real danger that in its present form, decentralization will simply create new platforms for the old politics, and that the rural poor will be locked, as before, into a desperate scramble for elite patronage”.[108]

[103] Paul Richards has argued that structural problems or outright grievances between Chiefs/elders and youths was the reason many young people joined the rebel forces, the military or the CDF; see e.g. Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth and Resources in Sierra Leone*, Paul Richards, "To fight or to farm? agrarian dimensions of the Mano River conflicts (Liberia and Sierra Leone)," *African Affairs* 104 (2005). See also Richard Fanthorpe, "Neither Citizen Nor Subject? 'Lumpen' Agency and the Legacy of Native Administration in Sierra Leone," *African Affairs* (2001), Richard Fanthorpe, "On the limits of liberal peace: Chiefs and democratic decentralization in post-war Sierra Leone," *African Affairs* 105 (2006).

[104] Communication with Osman Gbla (Spring 2006).

[105] For examples on the Kono district see Reno, *Corruption and State Politics in Sierra Leone*, Chapter 3.

[106] Fanthorpe, "On the limits of liberal peace: Chiefs and democratic decentralization in post-war Sierra Leone." P. 27.

[107] Ibid. P. 35.

[108] Ibid. P. 47.

In Liberia, Sawyer highlights, "[p]aramount chieftaincies and districts were created entirely by the national government to enhance its control over interior populations. Sandwiched between clan and country jurisdictions are paramount chieftaincies and districts, which are administrative units used by national government for the implementation of its policies."[109] Sawyer, a political scientist and one-time interim President of Liberia, sees chieftaincies only as institutions of sustained abuse and manipulation that were dealt the *coup de grâce* during the war. These institutions remain in place to this day, but with quite limited powers.

In an interview with one of the Liaison Officers from the Swedish Contingent, Mattias Larsson, who worked in Liberia until late 2006, it becomes clear that chiefs' roles in post-war Liberia are difficult to grasp.[110] During assessment trips around the country, the liaison team met with several chiefs. Generally, Larsson feels that the question of strong local chiefs is being posed prematurely; the social structures that largely were disrupted during the civil war in most areas do not yet allow for strong chiefs. This assumption is strengthened by the fact that it has not yet been possible to conduct municipal and chieftaincy elections .The research institute IDEA looked at local governance in Liberia and reached the conclusion that local chiefs, if elected and broadly transparent, can support the post-conflict local communities immensely. Having a strong local chief, with public support, may help to address peacebuilding among ethnic groups with splits between them and prepare a ground for truth telling and reconciliation as returnees come back to their homes, where ex-combatants are present.[111] One interesting example is the recent steps forward in relations between the Mandingo and the Gio and Mano groups. A Mandingo interest group recently stated that reconciliation has gained momentum following a peace crusade in Nimba in which local chiefs are mentioned among those who have played key roles in the achievements.[112] Moran also discusses the power of local chiefs and concludes that at least in the southeastern parts of Liberia there are democratic mechanisms built into the system between patrons and clients. These mechanisms can be important in reconciliation and peacemaking processes.[113]

[109] Sawyer, *Beyond Plunder: Toward Democratic Governance in Liberia*. p. 163.
[110] Interview conducted by Michael Wiking.
[111] International IDEA, *"Democracy and Peace-Building at the Local Level: Lessons Learned" (found on 20 September 2007),* <http://www.idea.int/conflict/upload/DLL_Lessons_Learned.pdf> (2005). P. 34ff.
[112] Analyst August 8, 2007 (accessed on August 20, 2007), http://www.liberianobserver.com/news/fullstory.php/aid/7977/Nimba_Reconciliation_on_Course.html .
[113] Moran, *Liberia: The Violence of Democracy*. p. 49f.

In Guinea, the system again looks entirely different. Sékou Touré brought Guinea to independence in 1958 and chose a puritan socialist track. In his goal of making Guinea "undivided and indivisible",[114] "to suppress caste and ethnic divisions"[115], the state had to be thoroughly centralized. In his effort to do so, he banned everything that was local or ethnic such as institutions of chiefs, clans and secret societies,[116] and replaced them with communes and development communities.[117] Guinea is divided into regions, prefectures and subprefectures, with the last level corresponding with the rural development community (CRD). Prefects and subprefects are chosen by President Conté himself, whilst the CRD heads are elected (since 2005). In the southern Forest region, for instance, all prefects have come from the Guinean military.[118] In essence, a centralized selection of local authorities and a simultaneous forceful downplaying of other local leadership, although lessened under Conté, have stalled local agendas. However, this has also led to local dissent, as has been observed in the gradual militarization and criminalization of the Forest region, for instance.

The Guinea case is instructive as it points out that although traditional leaders have not been setting local or national agendas, as is the case to some extent in Sierra Leone, there is little to indicate that Guinea is less involved in nepotism and less economically corrupt. We argue that such malevolent "traditions" have little to do with a "traditional" order of things, but that they are closely related to the way the African (modern) states developed from colonialism and onward. It is important to highlight how, in all three countries, leaders from within the state structures are Big Men in society and thereby connect to a myriad other actors in cliental fashion. The close connection between President Conté and the business-man Mamadou Sylla (narrated below) is instructive and clearly proves this point. However, it is important to point out that these kinds of politician/business networks are not only operational at the top strata of state but are rather reproduced down to the most local level. For example, a civil servant working within a CRD in rural Guinea will have the same kind of networks and network obligation with businessmen, but on a local level. Likewise, a chief in a Sierra Leonean diamond district has the dual benefit of earning a great deal of extra money by granting a Lebanese diamond miner rights to land in his chiefdom; with these resources he will strengthen his standing as a Big Man, in part by investing in

[114] Wole Soyinka, "Centralism and alienation," *International Social Science Journal* 63 (2001). p. 14.
[115] Manthia Diawara, *In search of Africa* (Cambridge, Mass., 1998). p. 87.
[116] Ibid. p. 179.
[117] Diawara points out that by doing so he in no way got rid of them but rather drove them underground (Ibid.).
[118] Interview with Mike McGovern, 23 October 2007.

direct developments of the chiefdom, and in part by informally sponsoring people of the chiefdom in a variety of ways. His power as a Big Man/Chief is built on resources he can muster, both financial and "wealth in people".[119]

5.2 Secret societies

Secret societies have become the very image of informal and clandestine West Africa. The social omnipotence of Poro society in large parts of the MRB region naturally caters to potent symbolism; how it was picked up and perceived by missionaries and early colonial civil servants has furthermore cemented Western views of West African "otherness."[120] Mariane Ferme underlines the importance of the Poro in the region and clarifies that the secrecy and secret knowledge have been a crucial vehicle for power accumulation by local Big Men and politicians.[121] The work of anthropologist Christian Kordt Højbjerg[122] illustrates that religious secret societies are an important social force in the border region between Liberia and Guinea. His work on the religious Poro of the Loma ethnic group shows how the leaders of these networks intervene and mediate in local conflict resolution and constitute a respected authority. Højbjerg argues that the tendency in journalistic reports from the Liberian civil war to explain some of the most brutal acts of violence with their association to secret societies is too simple, and misses the point that, while ritual practices may have served as one among other models for shaping violent acts, the perpetrators imitated a great number of sources of authority, such as American war movies. What is important in the present context is to appreciate that combatants in the previous conflicts in the region are seen to have been very strategic in their choice of violent practice[123] – which implies that causes for and sources of the violence are not to

[119] William Reno's work is very instructive in this regard (Reno, *Corruption and State Politics in Sierra Leone*.)

[120] See e.g. George Way Harley, *Masks as Agents of Social Control in North-east Liberia*, vol. xxxii - no. 2 (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1950), George Way Harley, *Native African Medicine: With Special Reference to Its Practice in the Mano Tribe of Liberia* (Cambridge, 1941). But also more recently Ellis, *The mask of Anarchy: the destruction of Liberia and the religious dimension of an African civil war*.

[121] Ferme, *The Underneath of Things: Violence, History, and the Everyday in Sierra Leone*. p. 161.

[122] Christian Kordt Hoejbjerg, "Masked violence: Ritual action and the perception of violence in an Upper Guinea ethnic conflict," in *Religion and African Civil Wars*, ed. Niels Kastfelt (London, 2005), Højbjerg, *Resisting state iconoclasm among the Loma of Guinea*.

[123] See also Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth and Resources in Sierra Leone*, Paul Richards, "Videos and Violence on the Periphery: Rambo and the War in the Forests of the Sierra Leone-Liberia Border," *IDS Bulletin* 25 (1994), Rosalind Shaw, "Robert Kaplan and 'juju journalism' in Sierra Leone's rebel war," in *Magic and Modernity: Interfaces of Revelation and Concealment*, ed. Birgit Meyer and Peter Pels (Stanford, 2003), Mats Utas, "Liberian Doomsday Carnival - Western media on war in Africa," *Antropologiska Studier* (2000).

be sought within the structures of one particular source of authority but rather in the motivations of the fighters themselves.

It has been noted by many scholars that the importance of secret societies like the Poro does not lie in the secrecy *per se*, but in the structuring of society. The main functions of the Poro and other powerful secret societies are political stratification and networking.

> *The contents of the secrets are not as significant as are the **doing** of secrecy and the recognition that a do-not-talk-it proscription is a feature of all legitimate social interactions.*[124]

Leaders of secret societies often have important secular roles in society, or are in the socio-political vicinity of secular Big Men, such as Chiefs and traders; locally, secret societies could be seen as the shadow structure of the chieftaincy but with political and security connections that go far beyond the geographical chiefdom. Herein lies the potential for peacemaking. Beryl Bellman's study on the Poro among the Liberian Kpelle ethnic group is clearly the most outstanding work on the Poro secret society.[125] An excerpt from Bellman's study hints at the connectedness of the Poro society in Liberian state politics:

> *Whenever the Ministry of Local Government wants to communicate information to a local Poro association, this Zo [chief of the Poro] is contacted. Such messages might involve the collection of specific taxes, announce that a high-level government official is going to pass through the area and that the dancing devil of the society should perform, or give permission for performing the initiation rituals of the society.*[126]

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[124] Beryl Bellman, *The Language of Secrecy: Symbols and Metaphors in Poro Ritual* (New Brunswick, N.J., 1984). P. 17.

[125] Ibid. In relation to the main female secret institution Sande/Bundu, there is no single study that stands out, but the following sources give a good picture: Caroline Bledsoe, "Stratification in Sande Politics," *Ethnologische Zeitschrift Zuerich* (1980), Warren d'Azevedo, "Gola Poro and Sande: Primal Tasks in Social Custodianship," *Ethnologische Zeitschrift Zuerich* (1980), Svend Holsoe, "Notes on the Vai Sande Society in Liberia," *Ethnologische Zeitschrift Zuerich* (1980), William Murphy, "Secret Knowledge as Property and Power in Kpelle Society: Elders Versus Youth," *Africa* 50 (1980).

[126] Bellman, *The Language of Secrecy: Symbols and Metaphors in Poro Ritual*. p. 25. Højbjerg argues that the Loma mask performances in Guinea are often seen at public secular ceremonies such as Independence Day parades, presidential visits, inaugurations of administrative centres, etc., thereby serving to affirm the authority of the civil servants or politicians who participate. At the same time, however, the individuals and the masks present at such events are not the same as those presiding over religious ceremonies or intervening in local disputes in which a religious violation is considered part of the dispute (see e.g. Højbjerg, "Masked Violence: Ritual Action and the Perception of Violence in an Upper Guinea Ethnic Conflict", Højbjerg, *Resisting State Iconoclasm Among the Loma of Guinea*.)

The reader should bear in mind that this was 35 years ago. Much has changed and the Poro are nowhere near as central in contemporary society as they used to be. However, they should still be valued as a tool for socio-political organization – and ought to be considered for the resolution of both small and larger conflicts in the area. To this day, the Poro have the capacity to either stabilize or destabilize social environments of large parts of the MRB area, and secrecy is always a feature of social interaction in the Poro society. In Liberia the Poro society, being the informal venue for political organization in most of rural Liberia, also absorbed Americo-Liberians during most of the 20th century, as Americo-Liberian leaders found it a suitable vehicle to forge alliances and create influence in the interior of the country.[127]. During the Poro initiation, accounts are given for what can happen to people who reveal secrets; they may be exaggerated, but serve to scare others into "not talking it".[128] Bellman points out how the secret society leaders have traditionally played a key role in intra-community negotiations as well as local peacemaking. One example comes from Lofa, where the Zo (the Poro head) of one community meets with his counterpart concerning a dispute over land tenure. In this case, the ritual brought about an understanding between the Zoes and peace followed the tense situation. Bellman further underlines that the Poro societies' role is often to represent whole communities, as the formal rituals they perform symbolize the social, economic and political relationships between communities.[129]

It is clear that Zoes from the Poro and other secret societies in contemporary Liberia play an important role in peacemaking between and within local communities. Important to note is that it seems that local peace committees established after the 2003 peace also play an important role in peacebuilding. One example is the small town of Borgezza in Lofa County, where Mandingos and Lormas lived divided by ethnic lines and a great deal of violence continued. A local peace council was created after close consultations with traditional leaders. Leaders of the Poro society have most probably played an important role in the peacebuilding, as some of the issues at hand concerned the fact that the Mandingos did not participate in the beliefs in certain features of Poro society such as the 'Bush devil'. Compromises were made and the situation in the

[127] Bellman, *The Language of Secrecy: Symbols and Metaphors in Poro Ritual*. pp. 13-14. Moran has pointed out that southern Liberia is less hierarchical and has no equivalence to the Poro. See Mary Moran, "Imagining democracy on the Guinea Coast" (paper presented at the American Anthropological Association, New Orleans, November 2002), Mary Moran, "Towards an indigenous democracy for Liberia: concepts voice and autonomy in local political practice" (paper presented at the Liberian Studies Association Meetings, April 2002), Moran, *Liberia: The Violence of Democracy*. Equally so, the Poro are not present in all parts of Sierra Leone or Guinea.
[128] Bellman, *The Language of Secrecy: Symbols and Metaphors in Poro Ritual*. pp 54-55.
[129] Ibid. pp. 27-28.

community stabilized immensely after a time.[130] This is a good example of more secular peace councils seeming to interact with the traditional secret society leaders.

At least one head of state in the MRB countries, Wilton Sankawulo, interim President in Liberia 1995-96, tried to make use of Poro society in his national peacemaking efforts. Due to the informal affairs of the Poro it is difficult to value the outcome of these efforts. Also, although the continued war is a clear indication that it was not an unmitigated success, one should acknowledge that the scholarly suggestions of Amos Sawyer to include the Poro in both state building and peacemaking make it clear that a person with firsthand knowledge of leading Liberia sees the value of it. Sawyer points out that "[t]he authoritative use of Poro conflict resolution mechanisms was vital to the reduction of violence and the settlement of interethnic disputes where state-based conflict resolution mechanisms were either ineffective…or a source of conflict themselves."[131] The Poro, Sawyer stresses, were a source of stability and a pan-ethnic institution based on solidarity with "a deeper order of legitimacy than any other group of secular rulers."[132] Sawyer suggests that the Poro could be re-animated as a positive governing structure. Even if secret societies like the Poro have lost some of the social grip they once had, they still possess profound power. If they are still an important vehicle for power accumulation for politicians and other Big Men in many places, as suggested by Ferme above, and if they still protect trading networks and have the power to ban local trade,[133] they are a force very much at the centre of the MRB region network-centred society and a social force with the potential to make peace, and most likely also war. It could thus be suggested that in a conflict situation one ought to try to utilize these deep-ranging institutions as networks of peacemakers.[134]

Moving away from the Poro complex, one also ought to acknowledge the presence of a variety of hunting societies. "Hunters" in the region are often Poro members but are organized outside the Poro. Hunting societies generally have a limited membership and are different from traditional, largely dormant, war

[130] Jon Temin and Momo M. Kamara, "Bridging the Divide in a Liberian Community," *ReliefWeb 13 March 2007 http://www.reliefweb.int/rw/rwb.nsf/db900sid/RMOI-6Z9KX7?OpenDocument (accessed on 20 September 2007)* (2007).
[131] Sawyer, *Beyond Plunder: Toward Democratic Governance in Liberia*. pp. 30-31.
[132] Ibid. p. 60. See also Utas, *Sweet Battlefields: Youth and the Liberian Civil War (PhD thesis)*. pp. 92-95.
[133] See the comprehensive work of Christopher Fyfe, *A History of Sierra Leone* ([London], 1962).
[134] Utas has also suggested the importance of secret societies in local reintegration efforts and as forces in psychosocial healing of war traumas; see Mats Utas, "Traditional Healing of Young Sexual Abuse Survivors in the Aftermath of the Sierra Leone Civil War," (Freetown, 2004).

societies (also partially outside the Poro).[135] In the Sierra Leone war, hunting societies became a prominent feature.[136] Starting in the Northeast of the country, the Tamaboro hunting militia, which aided the army in protecting the Koinadugu district from RUF soldiers entering from the south, soon became a feature of the south. Danny Hoffman has proposed that the *Kamajors* of the southern districts of Sierra Leone who made up the majority of the Civil Defense Forces (CDF) should be viewed as "the militarization of a web of social relations".[137] Local Big Men, such as Chiefs, etc. involved their networks in protection matters. The CDF became a main force that the Tejan Kabbah government relied heavy on – to the extent that it alienated its own army.[138] Much has been written about the Kamajor militia as a body in Sierra Leone politics.[139]

5.3 Businessmen

"Privatization in Sierra Leone", writes William Reno regarding the state of affairs during the late 1970 and early 1980s under the rule of Siaka Stevens:

> *...joined Steven's legal sovereign authority to personal profit akin to what others already saw as "pirate capitalism" in Nigeria or "state banditry" in Zaire. That is, the Shadow state absorbed all attainable resources, now with the help of newly energized non-official collaborators as well as with whatever could be milked from creditors. As this happened, the "state of Sierra Leone" was reduced thoroughly to Stevens' network and its dependents.*[140]

[135] Utas, *Sweet Battlefields: Youth and the Liberian Civil War (PhD thesis)*. pp. 86-92.
[136] Hunters have also been converted into central actors during the conflict in Côte d'Ivoire (see ongoing research by Till Förster and Kerstin Bauer (Basel University).
[137] Hoffman, "The meaning of a militia: Understanding the Civil Defence Forces of Sierra Leone." p. 640.
[138] The outcome was a coup and a new military government that invited the RUF to share power.
[139] See e.g. David J. Francis, *Civil Militia: Africa's Intractable Security Menace?* (Aldershot, Hants, England; Burlington, VT, 2005), Danny Hoffman, "The Brookfields Hotel (Freetown, Sierra Leone)," *Public Culture* 17 (2005), Hoffman, "The City as barracks: Freetown, Monrovia, and the Organization of Violence in Postcolonial African Cities", Danny Hoffman, "Disagreement: Dissent Politics and the War in Sierra Leone," *Africa Today* 52 (2006), Danny Hoffman, "Like beasts in the bush: synonyms of childhood and youth in Sierra Leone," *Post Colonial Studies* 6 (2003), Hoffman, "The meaning of a militia: Understanding the Civil Defence Forces of Sierra Leone", Danny Hoffman, "Violent Events as Narrative Blocs: the Disarmament at Bo, Sierra Leone," *Anthropological Quarterly* 78 (2005), Melissa Leach, "New shapes to shift: war, parks and the hunting person in modern West Africa," *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute* 6 (2000), Patrick Muana, "The Kamajoi Militia: Violence, Internal Displacement and the Politics of Counter-Insurgency," *Africa Development* XXII (1997).
[140] Reno, *Corruption and state politics in Sierra Leone*. p. 142.

Stevens' close network consisted of businessmen, mainly Lebanese, who benefited enormously from his efforts to control Sierra Leone society through the informal economy. Lebanese businessman and diamond exporter Jamil Said headed the Government Diamond Office (GDO) together with Stevens. The same Said and another Lebanese businessman, Tony Yazbeck, held management positions at the National Diamond Mining Corporation (NDMC).[141] The privatized International Trading Company came under Jamil Said's management, the National Trading Company under Yazbeck's. The exclusive right to import oil was given to another joint venture of Stevens and Said. Stevens and a number of Lebanese businessmen controlled the import and distribution of the nation's staple food, rice. Said became the managing director of Sierra Leone Airways.[142] Stevens and his close business associates monopolized not only business but also political affairs in this fashion. Reno states that "Lebanese dealers protected the Shadow State's resource base from domestic competition and kept wealth out of the hands of political entrepreneurs who could use it to give voice to popular anger".[143] Although extreme, this example shows how closely related political and economic Big Men are and how their network can dominate a whole country.

In a fascinatingly detailed study of Liberia, Gus Liebenow also points out how very interlinked the economic domain is with the political.[144] During previous decades, under Americo-Liberian rule, there was hardly anyone who held a high political office who did not own at least one large enterprise. Establishing a political base with a good network was always necessary before venturing into financial affairs; if the political base was lacking, the person was not going to succeed as a businessman no matter how hard he tried. Generally, businessmen could subsequently utilize their political office to exploit the productivity of the national economy.[145] It should be pointed out that there are differences between contemporary MRB countries and that of Liberia and Sierra Leone during the Cold War. At that time, the quest for loyalty by the two superpowers granted many African leaders support for whatever kind of rule they wished for. The issues are different today, but it would be erroneous to state that the MRB states have changed much due to a liberal democratic world order. Although it lingers behind glossy policy papers and buzzwords like "transparency" and "account-ability", the informal game remains very much the same. In Guinea, protected by

[141] Ibid. p. 114.
[142] Ibid. pp. 136, 142, 144.
[143] Ibid. p. 132. There is an economically powerful Lebanese Diaspora in all three MRB countries. Their economic might is most visible in Sierra Leone. For work on the Lebanese in Sierra Leone, see e.g. H. L. van der Laan, *The Lebanese Traders in Sierra Leone*, Change and continuity in Africa (The Hague, 1975).
[144] Liebenow, *Liberia: The Evolution of Privilege*.
[145] Ibid. p. 93-94.

the US State Department, things are even more "transparent" (in the inverted sense) as the case of Mamadou Sylla, below, points out. This is a good example of how overt business and political networks are connecting in the MRB states. It further shows that loyalty to the informal networks is viewed as superior to national law and the setup of national justice.

5.3.1 Case study – Mamadou Sylla

Born in Boké, in 1960 Mamadou Sylla was one of several people given large amounts of rice by the government to retail. Becoming wealthy, he moved to Conakry and became a senior judge. In 1998, Sylla bought an arms importer and was awarded the contract to supply the Guinean Army. He became a significant supporter of President Lansana Conté, extending facilities to the Army and spending large sums supporting Conté's 2001 referendum to remove presidential term limits. Sylla was subsequently awarded a large number of government contracts, becoming recognized as Guinea's richest man. In 2003 he was appointed Minister of Justice. In 2004 he became a Senegalese citizen in order to further his business dealings there. The following year, at the request of the Guinean government, he became the founder and the leader of the Congress of Guinean Employers.

In 2005, Sylla's firm Futurelec Holding was accused of owing the government over $8,000,000, but he counter-claimed that the state was in fact indebted to him. An independent investigation concluded that while the government owed him $22 million, he actually owed it $55 million, and had a $ 2.7 million over-draft at the Central Bank of the Republic of Guinea – even though individuals were not permitted to hold accounts there. In 2006 he was jailed, accused of embezzlement of public funds by issuing bad checks. In December, he was pardoned through the personal intervention of Conté: On 16 December 2006, President Conté travelled to Conakry's central prison with his motorcade and personally secured the release of Sylla and close ally Fode Soumah, reportedly telling his entourage, "I am justice".

As business and politics are so closely connected in the same networks, businessmen could also be used as peace brokers. In contemporary Liberia, there are potential economic actors for both positive and negative change. One national businessman who could potentially be an important actor for peacebuilding and stabilizing the country is the former presidential candidate George Weah. With many enterprises, his own TV channel and an outstanding career in international football behind him, Weah constitutes a role model for many young men in Liberia. During the election campaign, it became very clear that Weah enjoyed the support of many of the young ex-combatants and youths in general. Despite

comments about his poor academic experience and incapacity to govern the country, many supporters did not lose their faith in or commitment to Weah.[146] He still has a great deal of support in the country and probably has the ability to influence young, uneducated men who still largely look up to him. He has been quiet in the political sphere lately, although he is still affiliated with the Congress for Democratic Change (CDC) party. However, he would not be able to control the CDC political elite in a situation of destabilization, but would rather have an influence on those young, unemployed men who may be key groups for mobilization in a destabilizing situation.

An international economic actor, potentially able to instigate stabilization and assist peacebuilding, is the multinational company Arcelor Mittal. The company, which has signed a new, revised contract with the government, has begun its investment with over one billion USD during 2007. As the exploitation of iron ore in Liberia will generate several thousands of direct jobs as well as many indirect opportunities, this investment is crucial for the country. Part of Nimba County and the town of Buchanan will see much of these investments. Arcelor Mittal Liberia Limited is a potential instrument for stabilization and peacebuilding, as the company will employ numerous Liberians and play a key role in local investments in parts of the country. If its local management staff can be reached by international peacebuilding initiatives, it would hopefully be possible for them to convince and support their employees in not participating in conflict. At least at a local level this would mean a difference, since the employees of the company will probably be supporting large families and their incomes will benefit the local societies as a whole. Since the deal with Arcelor Mittal has been widely discussed in the media and in the streets, people know about the company and its importance and the promising employment opportunities for Liberians. Therefore, the company probably already carries some weight and feelings of goodwill among Liberians. The challenge lies in how Arcelor Mittal would be motivated and organized to actually be a vehicle for stabilization as mentioned above.

Large corporations do not necessarily function as stabilizing factors. The gigantic Firestone rubber plantation, the world's largest prior to the civil war, was undoubtedly the largest employer in the country prior to the war. However, due to worker dissatisfaction Firestone became a conflict area in itself. Furthermore, due to the huge economic interest of the owners, they brokered a series of dubious security and protection deals with different militias as well as informal deals with peacekeepers. It should also be recognized that certain economic actors see instability and lack of government as a positive state of affairs. A

[146] International Crisis Group, *Liberia's Elections: Necessary but Not Sufficient, Africa Report No. 98* (Brussels, 2005). p. 8.

whole set of international actors benefited from low prices on natural resources and labour as well as the prospect of not having to go through proper government channels.[147] It is also important to point out that it is not only external economic actors that benefit from internal wars; local networks also reap benefits in times of conflict. In southern Sierra Leone, Lebanese business networks used the war to wage their own war on more prosperous and dominant traders. Likewise, war networks connected to the army saw an upsurge in all kinds of business. Here there are four issues to highlight: (1) As business is closely linked to political networks, changes in political setup (like a war) will inevitably give room for new economic actors. For them, war is a time to locate new economic space; (2) This reallocation of space does not only happen in large-scale business, but likewise in local trade in local products;[148] (3) As networks are multifunctional (i.e. not one for business, one for politics, etc.), changes will occur at all points on the line with repercussions that are very difficult to foresee; (4) This last fact entails that people will fight particularly hard to maintain the network as they have little idea of what a shift would imply for them.

5.4 Politics and Politicians

> *In 1847 the African American settlers [in Liberia] declared their independence from the American Colonization Society, affirming their commitment to an American-style constitution and its attendant democratic institutions. For one hundred and thirty-three years following, elections were held at regular intervals for both national offices like the presidency and local positions such as town chief. Although members of the settler group maintained monopoly on state institutions and the indigenous people were not fully enfranchised until the 1960s, there is substantial evidence that some principles of transparency and accountability were employed even during the period of single-party rule (1877-1980) by the True Whig Party.*[149]

[147] See e.g. Stephen Ellis, "Liberia's Warlord Insurgency," in *African Guerrillas*, ed. Christopher Clapham (Oxford, 1998), Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy: the destruction of Liberia and the religious dimension of an African civil war*, William Reno, "The Business of War in Liberia," *Current History* May 1996 (1996), William Reno, *Humanitarian emergencies and warlord economies in Liberia and Sierra Leone* (1997), William Reno, "Liberia and Sierra Leone: The Competition for Patronage in Resource-Rich Economies," in *War, Hunger, and Displacement: The Origins of Humanitarian Emergencies*, ed. E. Wayne Nafziger, Franco Stewart and Raino Väyrynen, Queen Elizabeth House Series in Development and UN/Wider Studies in Development Economy (Oxford, 2000), Mats Utas, "Diamanter är för evigt - men Sierra Leonsk ungdom är utbytbar," *http://www.nai.uu.se/events/evenemang/blood_diamond/utas_kommentar.pdf* (2007).

[148] As Danny Hoffman was kind to point out (interview with Hoffman in New York, 24 October 2007).

[149] Moran, *Liberia: The Violence of Democracy*. p. 4.

Liberia has a democratic tradition that exceeds many European states. It also has a long tradition of party politics and organization – chiefly in the character of the True Whig Party (TWP). Despite an early democratic mould and some principles of "transparency and accountability", the TWP developed into a machinery for patronage and the axis around which the politics/economy of the independent nation were built. The TWP and later party formations in Liberia and the other MRB states have only to a limited extent (Guinea under Sékou Touré) followed a left-right political logic, around classic Western ideologies, and quite rarely formed popularity around political commitments to voters. Instead, they have relied on Big Man politics and an intricate use of networks, something that was obvious in the recent election in Sierra Leone.

5.4.1 Case Study – Election "business" in Sierra Leone

On Monday, 17 September 2007, the opposition party APC won the Sierra Leone election. The smooth way it was conducted and the democratic consciousness of the Sierra Leone population will send positive signals to other African countries. Yet the non-democratic tendencies of politicians leave much to be desired.

"I cannot lie to you, Mats, I have sold my vote," says *Justice*, when we, on the election day of the first round, stroll between polling stations in downtown Freetown. *Justice* is the nickname I gave him after our first discussions more than three years ago. He then seemed obsessed with justice, or rather Sierra Leonean state injustice. *Justice* fought in the Sierra Leonean Civil War for the SLA but later went AWOL and defected to Gambia. He says he joined the army and fought the war to get rid of the rotten "system". Later, he left the army for similar reasons: "backstabbing" and "sell game" – the army selling out to economic interests or the enemy. In Gambia he tried to settle down but became involved in money forgery. He ended up killing a person and again ran, this time back to post-war Sierra Leone. So the justice of *Justice* is rather confused and idealized, yet well-intended – he has a good heart. We argue that this is also the state of affairs for *Mama Salone* (Mother Sierra Leone). Prior to the first round of elections in August, *Justice* was approached by a local politician from the ruling SLPP party. He was offered 60,000 Leone (20 USD) and a bag of rice to vote for the party. As he was broke, *Justice* accepted and on election day placed his vote for the Pa (father of the party).

Already in April, we witnessed hordes of people lining up outside the SLPP party leader's mansion to receive money in exchange for promising their votes. A young women working for an INGO tells me how she gathered a group of ten women under a made-up banner for a social organization and went to the mansion of the SLPP party leader. After standing in line for hours, they were

received by the leader and were each given 100,000 Leones (35 USD) for voting for him. Although most visible at the SLPP party leader's mansion (simply because the most money has been given away there), it is clear that all political parties and party functionaries at all levels have handed out money in exchange for promised votes. The buying of votes rests on patron-client politics, still of utmost importance throughout the country. This kind of money is symbolically linked with cola nuts – a gift that entails a moral obligation. One young man we talked to proposed that when the SLPP party leader gave money to people he made them drink water from a bowl that contained cola nuts in an effort to stress the tie between patron and client. SLPP clearly invested enormous amounts of money in tying up voters, and was clearly taken by surprise by the voters' apparent immorality in voting against the party they had received cola nuts from. Despite its generous handouts, SLPP lost the 2007 elections hands down. The rather new practice of taking money from one party yet voting for another is what Sierra Leoneans call "watermelon politics" and we view this apparent immoral behaviour as central to Sierra Leone's democratic progression. However, we will save this discussion for later.

The three main parties (SLPP, APC, PMDC) held their final political rallies on three consecutive days the week before the first round, and all turned out to be powerful manifestations of the nation's keen interest in democracy. People from all walks of life were out in the streets wearing clothes in the colour of their political party. The parties had printed t-shirts with "no violence" slogans (as had the mobile phone companies). The police were present before and after the rallies, armed with handwritten placards and megaphones bellowing "no violence" messages (though the police were refreshingly absent during the rallies). The rallies did not turn violent but remained massive, colourful parades. Likewise, on election day voters reached the polling stations as early as five in the morning in their eagerness to vote. During the day we asked approximately 200 people if they had voted and all but one showed the ink on their finger – the proof of having voted. This huge turnout was even more surprising considering that a majority of the people we talked to were poor and socially marginalized. Being from Sweden, where we vote in silence in a taken-for-granted way, distanced from such democratic esteem, we must admit that it left us envious: This is democracy in the making with a population that truly desires it.

But soon after election day, politics started rearing its ugly head. Prior to the election, the three main political parties had made informal arrangements with former leaders of the warring factions of the civil war to "secure" party headquarters and leadership. The SLPP made the former NPRC/AFRC/West Side Boys (constellations formed out of the army, whereby the two first had been in government positions – one of the chief securities had even been President of

Sierra Leone for a short while) their informal security, APC counted on the former RUF rebels, and the PMDC found loyal security personnel among the Civil Defence Forces (chiefly *Kamajors*). Although some skirmishes took place prior to the first round it was only after election day, when results started to come in, that things heated up. Especially after garnering poor results, the SLPP party office turned into a rumour mill where SLPP security told me that the APC had posted a death list containing the names of some of the heads of security. In order to both protect themselves and fight for the, party they quickly organized into informal military squads, at first arming themselves with knives, etc., but later firearms were distributed. APC security similarly formalized its military structures and mobilized. In essence, what happened under the umbrella of democratic elections was that the main political parties *remobilized* former combatants of the civil war who had been gradually being reintegrated since the end of the war.

A friend of ours, a former West Side Boy commander, who had as late as in May sworn that he would not participate in the "election business" was now deep into "bouncing" for the SLPP party. From once having ousted the SLPP party from power (in 1997) with the AFRC junta, he was now sternly supporting that very party. From having spoken against the political establishment in general, he was now all for it. He and his comrades talked about "making the ground fearful" (rebel terminology for "securing") around the party headquarters and showed in graphic detail how and where to efficiently kill someone with a knife. One direct consequence of this remobilization was that the use of heavier drugs again became commonplace in order to keep going physically for weeks with little sleep and to face threats of violence and personal fear. Some had kept their war habits of smoking heroine and/or crack cocaine, but quite a few had cleaned up. We knew how our friend had struggled to escape his drug abuse, and now he was directly induced to restart his habit – a sad, rather ironic outcome of democratic elections.

But what were their reasons for supporting the party? It appears that though the chief commanders received some direct kickbacks, most others gained little more than free food, drinks and the feeling of being needed for something and by someone (in opposition to their daily experienced social invisibility). Promises were often appealing, for instance junior commanders were promised control over diamond areas in the interior. For them, like many others, participating in the "election business" contained an economic logic of furthering their individual careers, rather than believing in a particular political project. A high-risk game with an uncertain outcome, but as my friend told me: "You know my brother. He has two small trucks. He is doing good business. I am older than he is and what do I have? If we win the election I must get something out of it." One could easily argue that for these young men the election was a window of opportunity,

but for the wrong reason. Simultaneously, one must condemn the politicians and their lack of democratic maturity. On 1 September, a week before the second election, Freetown experienced the worst clashes between the informal security forces of the SLPP and the APC. People were injured and shops were looted, but thankfully the riots were contained by the police. The SLPP lost the second round, but it is difficult to speculate on what the SLPP security thugs will do when they realize that their path in the political opportunity structure has all but vanished. For them, violence is a viable path if it is only supported by higher leaders. However, it is more likely that they will return to the urban shadows and the marginality they opted to leave.

Green is the colour of the SLPP party and the rind of the watermelon. Red is the colour of the APC and the flesh of the watermelon. The Sierra Leone artist Daddy SAJ released a song in early 2007 entitled *Watermelon politics* as a comment on Sierra Leone politics. We believe that this formed part of a general eye-opener for Sierra Leonean voters. The idea is that you can take money from the green party and wear their green t-shirt while your inside is actually red – like the watermelon. We believe Daddy SAJ wants us to imagine it the other way around as well, because he sums up that the watermelon, just like Sierra Leone politics, contains "so-so water". Here is an example of a public figure relaying a message to the people that taking money from one party and voting for another is not in any way immoral. It is rather the people offering the money who are at fault – so "doing watermelon" became legitimate. On the day of the SLPP rally, we heard a great many APC supporters stating that they would participate in the rally to get a t-shirt (however green) and a drink – "I do watermelon", said the Sierra Leoneans with a big smile. The innocent form of participating in the opposition rally for short-term gain or singing the song "Watermelon" appears to be a small step towards democratic consolidation, but *en masse* taking money from a political party and still voting for the party one believes in turned into a long-term way of consolidating democracy in Sierra Leone. By disconnecting money and vote, Sierra Leonean voters taught politicians that they cannot sit idle and save up money during their mandate period simply to go out and shop for votes when an election is approaching. Hopefully, the new government will learn this lesson and start to deliver more than empty promises to the Sierra Leonean voters. If not – and if the democratic process remains unhampered – they will be discarded in the next election, which promises a democratically strengthened Sierra Leonean population.

Despite some positive tendencies during the recent elections in Sierra Leone, the case is instructive in several ways: (1) It is clear how money and politics are closely linked in the way handouts are used to create political loyalty. However, it clearly goes beyond the handout only, as (2) Politicians are Big Men with

powers only as great as the network is. Party politics is a means of patronage, whereby politicians obtain "wealth in people" in exchange for assuming responsibility for their followers (and watermelon politics is a direct critique of the Big Man not living up to his role as a Big Man – rather than a critique of the system as such). However, it is equally clear that the party is secondary – the SLPP candidate distributes wealth from his house, not from the party headquarters. The party is rather a vehicle for individual political paths. (3) The in many ways tragic remobilization of ex-combatants unravels the close connection between militias (or rebel movements) and political parties (or the political network). In post-war Sierra Leone, it has become increasingly clear that the SLPP provided resources to the RUF at the onset of the war in order to destabilize the country. Furthermore, it is also quite clear that the NPRC military government was partly financed by people in the SLPP sphere (especially John Benjamin, who later became the Minister of Finance in the Kabbah government), and were politically guided by the same group of people in the guise of official advisors (one was Kabbah himself) – as the SLPP came to power the RUF shifted their support to the APC.[150] Finally, a fourth issue is worth pointing out: (4) the massive amount of money transferred to voters during the election shows the direct links politicians have with the business realm of the country. Without this, patronage money for buying votes would only have been a drizzle.

The picture narrated above is that of a firmly urban setting. If the case study had been set in a rural area it would have looked quite different. The room for "watermelon" has been much smaller there because social networks, and with them social control, are much tighter. In many rural settings in Sierra Leone, there are often two competing networks that primarily compete for control over the local chiefdom, and as Hoffman has pointed out, "[t]hese political contests tend to preoccupy people outside the capital more than the national campaigns."[151] In fact, from a rural point of view national politics are often used for local power. For instance, the head of a state corporation and an SLPP functionary, but also an actor in a rural chief feud, used the informal security of the SLPP discussed in the case study as his own thugs, returning to the rural town with a minibus full of these "security" thugs to forcefully settle the case. Hoffman also points out that the hearings of the Special Court for Sierra Leone in Freetown are used in the same way to fight or settle local cases.[152] There is certainly an interesting interplay between local and national politics. It is impor-

[150] There is still no official version of the political games during the war. A reason for this is of course that it took place within the informal networks.
[151] Hoffman, "The meaning of a militia: Understanding the Civil Defence Forces of Sierra Leone." p. 648.
[152] Ibid.

tant to highlight that in all three countries Big Men at the national level make use of local actors, but that local Big Men similarly use actors at the national level for their own purposes. [153]

Though "watermelon" is a quite recent phenomenon in Sierra Leone politics, it should be stressed that at the politician level it is far from new. Recycling ministers who turn up in another party is certainly the original "watermelon"[154] and shows how the idea of network and Big Man supersedes the logic of formal party loyalty. Furthermore, it shows how networks are intrinsically interlinked and combinations are multitude and ever-changing. The war has shown that militias such as the RUF and the West Side Boys were able to do exactly the same thing. With this logic, it ought to also be clear that national politicians will have access, through networks, to Big Men and/or militia commanders.[155]

5.4.2 Case study – Big Men in the Liberian war and peace

Political leaders assume a variety of shapes, and it should come as no surprise that politicians, ministers and high-profile civil servants shift shape into rebel leaders. During the first civil war in Liberia, all but one of the five main rebel leaders had previously held government positions. And vice versa: rebel leaders turn into politicians. Some examples from Liberia will highlight this interplay. Given the high number of participating political parties in the 2005 elections, there are a number of politicians who today find themselves relatively distanced from government power. Some have violent histories as protagonist warlords or high-ranking commanders during the civil war. A sketch of the more influential politicians and civil servants today would predominantly include those who participated in fighting during the conflict. They have experience of resorting to violence and of the power that comes with violence. Prior to the 2005 elections, HRW identified candidates for the presidency and other prominent functions who had a history as faction leaders or security sector actors, or of severe violations of human rights.

Former LURD leader Sekou Damante Conneh, who ran for President in 2005, is still considered to be an influential politician. A sign of this informal power came in early 2007 when former NTGL President Gyude Bryant was called to the

[153] Again, William Reno's book shows this in a brilliant way (Reno, *Corruption and State Politics in Sierra Leone*).
[154] As pointed out by Sierra Leonean scholar Zubairu Wai in a recent research forum at the Nordic Africa Institute (*Sierra Leone's 2007 Elections and the Search for Sustainable Peace and Development*, organized by the Program for the Post-Conflict Transition, State and Civil Society in Africa, Uppsala August 30, 2007).
[155] Utas and Jörgel, "The West Side Boys: Military navigation in the Sierra Leone Civil War" .

Ministry of Justice to respond to charges of fraud during his term as President.[156] Conneh then appeared together with Bryant, according to newspapers. His appearance was interpreted as a clear signal that the former NTGL President maintained a good relationship with the former warlord.[157]

A cluster of actors who share the background of having served together under Taylor are noteworthy politicians in contemporary Liberia. A key actor here is Senator Adolphus Dolo (whose *nome de guerre* was 'General Peanut Butter'). The ability of ex-militia leaders and Taylor supporters to destabilize the country is a reason to take them to criminal court rather than solely a TRC, according to Mulbah K. Morlu, representative of the Forum for the Establishment of a War Crimes Court in Liberia. The strategy of former militia leaders seeking refuge in the corridors of power while they still have the capacity to destabilize the country should be considered a worrisome risk.[158] Saa Richard Gbollie, a former commander with the NPFL who gained a legislative seat in Margibi County in 2005, is today Chairman of the National Security Committee. Gbollie has stated in newspapers that he has been informing President Johnson-Sirleaf about the need for more budget support for the national security sector.[159]

Until February 2007, Edward Snowe was the elected Speaker in Liberia's House of Representatives. Snowe, Taylor's former son-in-law , was previously Managing Director of the Liberian Petroleum and Refining Corporation (LPRC) and has been accused of appropriating thousands of dollars to himself and Taylor.[160] Snowe, who had a travel ban imposed by the UN, was accused of travelling without notifying the House, independently establishing diplomatic ties with Taiwan on behalf of Liberia, etc.[161] The ousting of Snowe from the House was a protracted process. An interesting incident that the Liberian Observer reported on concerned death threats to two lawmakers involved in the process. They stated that they were backing Snowe, and tried to influence the

[156] He was recently (on 8 December 2007) arrested for embezzlement of 1 million USD during his time as interim President (see BBC News http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/africa/7133175.stm).
[157] New Democrat, 5 February 2007 (Accessed on 29 August 2007), http://www.newdemocratnews.com/editorial_details.php?recordID=1115 , Analyst, 23 January 2007 (accessed on 29 August 2007) http://www.analystliberia.com/lipa_seminar_jan23_07.html#bryant .
[158] International Crisis Group, "Liberia: Staying Focused, Africa Briefing No. 36."
[159] Liberia Observer 8 June 2007 (Accessed on 30 August 2007), http://www.liberianobserver.com/news/fullstory.php/aid/7227/Security_Sector_May_Get__Huge_Budgetary_Increment_.html .
[160] Human Rights Watch, "Liberia at a Crossroads: Human Rights Challenges for the New Government," *http://hrw.org/backgrounder/africa/liberia0905/3.htm* (2005).
[161] Liberian Observer 190107 (found on 30 August 2007) on http://www.liberianobserver.com/news/fullstory.php/aid/5553/House_Sacks_Speaker_--_The_Reasons_Why.html .

legislators to stop the ousting process.[162] Further, a sign of strong support and the ability to quickly engage young people was seen in the massive demonstrations outside Snowe's residence, claiming that he had been illegally accused and should not step down as Speaker of the House.[163] Commenting on Snowe's capacity today, the General Secretary of the Free Pentecostal Mission of Liberia (FPML) asserts that Snowe is probably still capable of influencing many youths:

You can never underestimate Mr. Snowe's ability. Snowe headed the Youth Wing of the National Patriotic Party and was himself influential among the youths that constituted majority of the fighting force. Moreover, Liberia is a 'crazy society', which means, fewer of the youths are rational people. While it is true that some of the youths are doing something better with their lives, the majority refuse to make use of the opportunity. So, it is possible that they could be used. The disarmament process was inconclusive and armed robbery is still on the increase in Liberia, especially Monrovia.[164]

Lastly, the most recent security threat of the attempted coup plot should be given some attention. Former AFL Chief Charles Julu and former Speaker of Parliament George Koukou were arrested in July for subversive activities. The arrests were followed by the discovery of what was thought to be massive stocks of ammunition in Gbarnga, and the find was first associated with the above-mentioned coup plotters. Soon afterward, however, it was revealed that most of the bullets were used and came from a local scrap dealer.[165] The whole issue seems to have dropped in relevance now, as the trial proceeds. The interesting aspect of this is, however, the massive attention and abundance of rumours it created within a short time – rumours and attention that can be dangerous if they are not dealt with appropriately by the government.[166] In summary, the political actors mentioned above all seem to have the capacity to destabilize the country. One visible signal that Taylor's network still exists is the Association of the Legal Defense of Charles Taylor, which maintains a homepage that combats the

[162] Liberian Observer 310107 (found on 30 August 2007), http://www.liberianobserver.com/news/fullstory.php/aid/5694/In_Wake_of_Their_Support_of_Snowe's_Removal,_Lofa,_Bomi_Lawmakers_Get_Death_Threats.html .

[163] Liberian Observer 090207 (found on 30 August 2007) "Snowe's house barricaded" http://www.liberianobserver.com/news/fullstory.php/aid/5803/Speaker_Under_Siege_.html .

[164] Interview with Alvin Gizzie on 13 August 2007. Conducted by Mikael Wiking.

[165] Analyst 140807 "The Coup Plot" (found on 23 August 2007), http://www.analystliberia.com/gbarnga_arms_discovery_overstated_aug13_07.html .

[166] The letter between American-based Tom Woewiyu and one of the alleged coup plotters, Koukou, is interesting reading and was given great attention in Liberian news media and politics during the summer of 2007. Woewiyu claims that through the letter he shows how the alleged coup plotters tried to convince him to participate in the coup. It can be read at http://www.liberiaitech.com/theperspective/2007/0723200702.html .

perceived lies about the former President.[167] It is quite feasible, however, that Taylor's real powers have diminished due to, first, his years under house arrest in Nigeria, and later his imprisonment by the Special Court of Sierra Leone at ICC in The Hague. However, the logic of the network easily caters to the appearance of new central Big Men rather than its total dismissal.

5.5 Military

The military has certainly played central roles in all MRB countries. In all three countries, military commanders have become civil leaders. Samuel Doe (1980) and Lansana Conté (1984) staged successful coups in Liberia and Guinea, respectively, and in Sierra Leone Joseph Momoh, selected by his predecessor, assumed power in 1985. In the 1990s Sierra Leone experienced two more military governments under Valentine Strasser and Johnny Paul Koroma. This brief overview shows the powers of the military in all clarity. In this section we first intend to contextualize the military historically in the region to show the powers of the military and the political instrumentality of the army. To this end we have chosen Liberia as an example. Afterward, we show how intricate the socio-economic wiring of the army in Sierra Leone has been. Finally, we present a case study of the army in contemporary Guinea.

The formation of the Liberian nation in 1847 had a limited effect on the hinterland. The control and political influence practiced by the Liberian state was in reality quite insignificant. However, the uncomfortable prospect of losing part of its predominantly imagined "domains", when European states commenced the Scramble for Land (1880-90) through the formal regulation of territorial interest at the Berlin Conference (1884-85), required the Liberian government to establish firm military outposts at strategic positions throughout the interior.[168] With the aim of controlling and pacifying the Liberian hinterland, the Liberian Frontier Force (LFF) was instituted in 1908. From the outset, it was comprised mainly of Mende and Loma soldiers, originating from both Sierra Leone and its immediate borderlands. It also came to include other subdued Liberian

[167] See http://www.fortaylor.net/AboutUs.htm for information on this.

[168] Monday B. Akpan, "Black Imperialism: Americo-Liberian Rule over the African Peoples of Liberia, 1841-1964," *La revue canadienne des Études africaines/ The Canadian Journal of African Studies* vii (1973), Martin Ford, "'Pacification' under pressure: the political economy of Liberian intervention in Nimba 1912-1918," *Liberian Studies Journal* xiv (1989).Liberia claimed territory far up into what is today the heartland of Guinea, following Benjamin Anderson's Journey to Musardu in the late 1860s and in current Mali, Medina and Djenne (Benjamin J. K. Anderson, *Narrative of a Journey to Musardu: The Capital of the Western Mandingoes* (New York, 1870).

peoples.[169] In this "pacification" exercise of the early 19th century, the LFF was often engaged in several battles with indigenous groups simultaneously over vast territories. Victory over a particular group of people rarely led to total conquest, however, and although conflicts were often of low intensity they could nevertheless flare up and spread countrywide as rebellions.[170] Thus, the overall setting was a typical frontier zone that could be perceived as a perpetual war zone — a colonial 'space of death' (De Boeck 1998; 2000; Taussig 1992).[171]

Available historical sources give an unequivocal picture of the LFF as an army of poorly trained, poorly disciplined and poorly equipped soldiers. The government of the day seldom paid salaries, forcing soldiers to 'live off the land', stating that "soldiers indulged in wanton pillage, rape, and harassment of the Africans in their districts, and commandeered food, laborers, and carriers without payment".[172] In the annual report by the British Consul General in 1912, the LFF is given the epithet 'that rabble of bloodthirsty cut-throats called the LFF' (cited in Massing 1988:70). Even Liberian President Arthur Barclay (1904-1912) revealed his concerns, stating that the militia was "tending to become a greater danger to the citizen, and his property, which it ought to protect, than to the public enemy".[173] In the wake of LFF 'pacification' a system of indirect rule followed, along with the birth of a rural tax system (the hut tax).[174] Using violent means, civil servants — commissioners, superintendents, customs officials — of the Liberian state worked in close cooperation with the LFF, but frequently with conflicting incentives.[175] They blatantly extorted their counties, levying illegal

[169] Ford, "'Pacification' under pressure: the political economy of Liberian intervention in Nimba 1912-1918", Henry Wilson, "Nation Building, ethnicity and the New Imperialism: Dilemmas of development in Liberia," in *West African Culture Dynamics: Archaeological and Historical Perspectives*, ed. B.K. Swarz and R.E. Dumett (Haag, 1980). In 1912 the US Minister to Liberia also sent Afro-American army officers (Buffalo Soldiers) to assist the LFF. With the primary aim of training the army, it was also believed that they would "serve as an 'inspiration' to the people" (Timothy A. Rainey, "Buffalo Soldiers in Africa: the U.S. Army and the Liberian Frontier Force, 1912-1927 –- An Overview," *Liberian Studies Journal* xxi (1996).

[170] Ford, "'Pacification' under pressure: the political economy of Liberian intervention in Nimba 1912-1918".

[171] Filip De Boeck, "Beyond the Grave: History, Memory and Death in Postcolonial Congo/Zaire," in *Memory and the Postcolony: African Anthropology and the Critique of Power*, ed. Richard Werbner (London, 1998), Michael Taussig, "Culture of Terror - Space of Death: Roger Casementís Putumayo Report and the Explanation of Torture," in *Colonialism and Culture*, ed. Nicholas B. Dirks (Ann Arbor, 1992).

[172] Akpan, "Black Imperialism: Americo-Liberian Rule over the African Peoples of Liberia, 1841-1964." p. 230.

[173] Liebenow, *Liberia: The Evolution of Privilege.* pp. 53-54.

[174] Akpan, " Black Imperialism: Americo-Liberian Rule over the African Peoples of Liberia, 1841-1964", Liebenow, *Liberia: The Evolution of Privilege*.

[175] Andreas Massing, "Towards an ethno-history of Liberia: the early colonization of the Dan," *Liberia-Forum* 4 (1988).

fees and fines, at times sharing this with government functionaries in Monrovia.[176]

For more than a century, the tiny minority of Americo-Liberians controlled state affairs and commerce through an intimate network of privilege and dominance. Although the government in Monrovia gradually increased its presence in the interior, much remained the same. The indirectness of rule, although not official policy, has remained a system of divesting the countryside of goods and labour up to the present. The LFF was eventually reshaped into the AFL and continued to harass local communities in brutal fashion; manhandling and rape were routine. The AFL was, to use the words of political journalist Bill Berkeley:

> *... a malignant organism in the body politic, inherently opportunistic, unlikely to be a source of progressive change. In retrospect it's clear that the institution of the army was a microcosm for what ailed Liberia. A gang culture flourished. Violence was rampant. Ties of blood and ethnicity were paramount. The construction of ethnic patronage systems by rival soldiers would become one of the most important causes of Liberia's subsequent collapse.*[177]

The structurally sanctioned violence of the AFL became evident in the events that followed the 1980 coup, when Master Sergeant Samuel Doe rose to presidential power. The coup, which put an end to the longstanding dominance of the Americo-Liberian elite, unleashed a hatred for the Americo-Liberians that had long boiled inside the indigenous peoples.[178] However, the public execution of the members of the Tubman government, which became known as 'the Liberian Beach Party', was not only 'people's justice' but also had its roots in the military culture. The AFL, under Doe's rule, resumed their violent patrols and after a failed coup attempt following rigged elections in 1985, AFL soldiers paraded the corpse of the plot leader, Thomas Quiwonkpa (one of the senior members of the 1980 coup who had fallen out with Doe) through downtown Monrovia. Apparently, soldiers in the parade publicly hacked off body parts to be kept as souvenirs or even to be consumed to attain some of the great powers possessed by 'the warrior' Quiwonkpa.[179]

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[176] Monday B. Akpan, *African resistance in Liberia: the Vai and the Gola-Bandi*, vol. no. 2, Papers/Liberia Working Group (Bremen, 1988).

[177] Bill Berkeley, *The Graves Are Not Yet Full: Race, Tribe and Power in the Heart of Africa* (New York, 2001). p. 31.

[178] Morten Bøås, "Liberia - the Hellbound Heart? Regime Breakdown and the Deconstruction of Society," *Alternatives* (1997).

[179] Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy: the destruction of Liberia and the religious dimension of an African civil war*. Quiwonkpa is a *nome de guerre* taken from the legendary Gio warrior Wonkpa, briefly mentioned above.

In the aftermath of the 1985 coup attempt, AFL troops set out to pacify the Gio strong men of Monrovia, primarily in Nimba County where Quiwonkpa and many of the other coup plotters had originated. The wanton violence wrought on innocent civilians in Nimba County (1985-89) remains to this day a vivid historical record to most people from the area.[180] It also paved the way for the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) insurrection of Christmas Eve 1989. Within the few years since 1980, the Krahn/Gio ethnic axis in the coup had turned into an ethnic cleavage that spilled over from Doe/Quiwonkpa personal competition for power in the military barracks into the country itself.[181]

The military in Sierra Leone is one of many examples of the intertwined activities between political, military and financial networks. The mix can be described through some historical examples, but needs to be complemented with a general observation of Sierra Leonean society. The political elite in Sierra Leone has always considered the military to be an instrument for their own protection more than an instrument for the protection of the nation and the people. The close relationship between Col. David Lansana (acting Force Commander) and Sir Albert Margai (Prime Minister and leader of the Sierra Leone People's Party, SLPP), manifested in Lansana's participation at the SLPP annual conference in 1964, was one of the first and most visible attempts of the political elite not to primarily bring the military under closer control but foremost to bring the senior military leadership into a patron-type cooperation.[182]

Between 1964 and 1967, almost all British officers in the Royal Sierra Leone Military Forces were replaced by officers from Sierra Leone, with many of the senior officers forming part of the SLPP elite network, mostly through being members of various extended political families.[183] The nature of the cooperation was multiple and often *ad hoc*, with those of common ethnic origin (Mende) calling each other "fellow tribesmen", intermarriage and schooling (Bo Secondary School),[184] but things such as living areas and financial affairs (car loans,

[180] It is estimated that as many as 3,000 civilians were killed in Nimba County by government forces; see Kenneth L. Cain, "The Rape of Dinah: Human Rights, Civil War in Liberia, and Evil Triumphant," *Human Rights Quarterly* 21 (1999). p. 270.
[181] Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy: the destruction of Liberia and the religious dimension of an African civil war*.
[182] Thomas S. Cox, *Civil-Military Relations in Sierra Leone: A Case Study of African Soldiers in Politics* (Cambridge, Mass., 1976). pp. 57-59.
[183] Ibid. pp. 62-65.
[184] For studies on Bo School and its importance in political networks see Richard Corby, "Bo School and its Graduates in Colonial Sierra Leone," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 15 (1981), Richard Corby, "Educating Africans for Inferiority under British Rule: Bo School in Sierra Leone," *Comparative Education Review* 34 (1990).

house loans, building plots) also forged strong networks.[185] The strong ties between politicians and the military were finalized in a way with the creation of a locally based military academy, to which politicians (SLPP) could see that their loyal supporters were admitted.[186]

It was not only the SLPP elite who forged ties to the military. After the transfer of power to the All Peoples Congress (APC) in 1968, the elimination of officers with ties to the SLPP started and in 1969 only a minority of Mende officers remained in the armed forces.[187] The novelty of the APC political elite was that the politicians tried to buy the loyalty of military senior officers through the state budget. The APC also constructed paramilitary teams, used to reinforce the military domestically during 1969-1970. With both the Force Commander and general staff officers being Temne, and at least to some degree loyal to the APC, the idea of a new armed force was complete. This is, however, not the same as the relationship between the SLPP and the officer corps in the mid-1960s; the new officer corps saw themselves as equals to the political elite in a very different way. The possibilities of gaining different concessions from politicians and being involved in political discussions were far greater than in the mid-1960s.[188]

The patron-client relationship during the period 1964-1967 and the APC "reethnification" of the Sierra Leone armed forces show the network between politicians and officers, and the way networks materialize. By promoting those who are loyal and developing mutual support, the network is forged and maintained. The defence of the political elite, not the nation, becomes the common goal. What does the Sierra Leonean armed forces of today look like? Ethnic affiliation, secret societies and political party membership are still very important in how officers position themselves; Chiefs still have much to say when admission to officer's school is discussed, and the recruitment office is largely run more on merits of network than merits of ability. The appointment of the late Hinga Norman as Deputy Minister of Defence under the SLPP is just one example of how party membership, secret societies and war-time cooperation instead of actual credentials follow the logic of social networking. The recent employment of Palor Conteh as Minister of Defence in the APC government also clearly shows this logic. Conteh was retired from the army at a very young age

[185] Cox, *Civil-Military Relations in Sierra Leone: A Case Study of African Soldiers in Politics*. pp. 64-70.
[186] Ibid. pp. 73, 75-76.
[187] Ibid. pp. 205-209.
[188] Ibid. pp. 211-214.

by the pro-SLPP NPRC regime, and is now allowed re-entry due to the shift in political networks.

5.5.1 Case study – The military in contemporary Guinea

As a series of recent protests have shown, the Guinean army is highly destabilized due to lack of salary as well as divisions within the army – possibly along ethnic lines. Thus far, the state and its leader have been able to command the loyalty of the armed forces but a military takeover is becoming more likely as Conté's authority fades. In the case of a *coup d'état*, the central question will be whether the army will split into ethnic factions or present a new common leader. The recent drastic political changes surrounding the appointment of Gen. Bailo Diallo make it difficult to predict the reaction of the rank and file in a power struggle between Diallo and General Arafane Camara. In such a struggle, the risk of a division within the armed forces along ethnic lines is present but is not the only possible outcome. Since such a division might cause repercussions far and wide in Guinean society, a struggle between as few candidates as possible would be preferable and least likely to cause far-reaching confrontations. It should be added that a political transition without the interference of the armed forces would be preferable to any choice of a new military leader[189].

Diplomats and local political analysts point to a major three-way ethnic split within Guinea's population of nine million, which holds the potential for an ethnicized political conflict should law and order break down. The Malinké of northern Guinea are deemed to have held sway under Guinea's first President, Ahmed Sékou Touré, who led the country to independence from France in 1958. The LURD rebel movement in Liberia is also dominated by people from this ethnic group. President Conté, as well as most of his inner circle, belongs to the Soussou people of western Guinea. The third major ethnic group, the Peuls of central and northern Guinea, is seen as being allied with many of the smaller ethnic groups in the Forest Region. Diplomats warn that in the event of a power vacuum at the top, Guinea's security forces, as well as the country's political parties, could also split along ethnic lines.[190]

During the Conté era, the military hierarchy has been dominated by the President's Soussou ethnic group. Conté is rumoured to have direct control over the security forces and to play on ethnic rivalries between his three main corps of

[189] See Gareth Evans and Mike McGovern, "No Coups are Good Coups" allafrica.com, 22 March 2006. http://allafrica.com/stories/200603220472.html (accessed on 8 December 2007).
[190] IRINnews, "Guinea: Living on the edge," *IRIN In-depth http://www.irinnews.org/IndepthMain.aspx?IndepthId=17&ReportId=62546* (2005). p. 6.

elite troops: the presidential guard, known as the "Red Berets"; the autonomous battalion of airborne troops, known as the "Bata"; and the US-trained rangers. This game of divide and conquer will lead to complications in the event of a military takeover, an exiled diplomat commented to Human Rights Watch: "You could say that if the army took over, it would quickly play on ethnic criteria and that would lead immediately to internal problems", the diplomat said. "If power finally ends up in the hands of one particular faction or another, reprisals will be taken against those who have benefited from wielding excess power in the past."[191]

In the MRB countries the military, just like most other institutions that comprise the state sector, rarely pay salaries that soldiers can survive on. Although those holding senior positions and high-ranking officers are paid considerably better than privates, one must remember that with official standings and a social position as Big Man the requests from one's followers increase dramatically. Resources never suffice in this system. Therefore, the military uses alternative income-generating strategies such as using military transport in the interior as private transport. Commanders controlling military trucks use them as a means to establish and maintain positions as Big Men (not always demanding pay – but at times using them as directed favours). Likewise, police officers establish checkpoints at various points to control the flow of goods and skim off profits. In cities, police officers state that they "eat" from street corners by stopping vehicles and raising informal fines – especially from taxi drivers. The state certainly informally "allows" such procedures as a supplementary means of paying salaries, but it is also an important means for Big Men to let their clients/followers benefit, without direct pay, and in this way keep them in the network.

In this vein, military-based networks gained enormously from the civil war. When transport was scarce and hazardous, for instance, military protection of businessmen and goods became profitable. In many cases, military networks virtually took over the trade of certain products. Furthermore, they profited from being employed as "security" on plantations or in mining areas. In Sierra Leone, for instance, they often took over diamond areas with military might and totally controlled the trade to and from them. This logic was also exploited by rebel groups and even peacekeeping forces (predominantly ECOMOG, but in some instances also UNAMSIL and UNMIL).

[191] Ibid. p. 12.

5.6 Trade unions

Trade unions have long played an insignificant role in the MRB region. Although taxi drivers, market women, etc. are often organized in unions, they have rarely played any role on the national scene. It therefore came as a surprise when the labour unions in Guinea turned into a major political power almost overnight. In the other MRB countries there is little to indicate any such attempts at present, but just like in Guinea it could "jump out of the history books". However, it appears that the most volatile group performing actions of solidarity is made up of students. The education standard is critically low in both Liberia and Sierra Leone, and Freetown, for instance, saw a serious student strike in February 2005.[192] In Guinea the trade unions, which were crushed and outlawed after a 1961 teachers' strike, were legalized again in the 1990s but had done little of significance since, until the general strike of 27 February-3 March 2006. This marks the renaissance of a key sector of civil society, which through strikes in the post-World War II period (especially 1947-1948 and 1953) played a major role in extracting concessions from the French that led to independence.[193] Though socialist leader Sékou Touré's repression of the unions was one of the first steps toward authoritarianism, his own career began as a trade union leader, and all Guinean schoolchildren are taught the potentially transformative power of such organized, peaceful protest. Suddenly, this approach has jumped out of the history books and back into the streets of Conakry, as one commentator puts it.[194]

The unions found a way to unite all sectors of society, something the opposition parties had never done. FRAD, the coalition of opposition parties, recognized this and immediately joined with civil society organizations, women's groups, youth groups, religious figures and union members to hold the National Consultation of 17-20 March 2006.[195] The unions themselves had pledged to the government to stay out of politics, and were therefore not represented formally at the National Consultation. Many members did attend, however, in the role of private citizens or as part of other groups. The general strikes and National Consultation have placed the trade unions and professional and civil society organizations in a pivotal position. The last such groundswell was during the

[192] See e.g. Nathaniel King and Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, *Conflict as Integration: Youth Aspiration to Personhood in the Teleology of Sierra Leone's 'senseless war'*, Current African Issues, 36 (Uppsala, 2007). At the same time, the masses of young, marginalized people constitute the group that most directly threatens long-term stability.
[193] Schmidt, *Mobilizing the Masses: Gender, Ethnicity, and Class in the Nationalist Movement in Guinea, 1939-1958*.
[194] International Crisis Group, "Guinea in Transition, Africa Briefing No. 37." p. 3.
[195] Ibid. pp. 3-4.

women's revolt of 1977, which significantly eased the most oppressive period (1968-1977) of the Sékou Touré years. Whether this coalition of actors will remain unified by their common vision remains to be seen.[196]

While it is at present difficult to single out individuals among the trade union leaders, the general secretary of the *Confédération Nationale des Travailleurs de Guinée* (CNTG), Rabiatou Serah Diallo, and her counterpart at the *Union Syndicale des Travailleurs de Guinée* (USTG), Ibrahima Fofana, seem to have been the main driving forces behind the two most recent general strikes. The available reports place great faith in these individuals and their organizations as change agents in Guinean society, and it is difficult to assess their motivation and links outside the ranks of the trade unions.

5.6.1 Case study – The January 2007 strike in Guinea

On 16 December 2006, Guinea's President Lansana Conté travelled to Conakry's central prison with his motorcade and personally secured the release of two close allies charged with embezzlement from Guinea's Central Bank, reportedly telling his entourage, "I am justice". The first, Mamadou Sylla, had been arrested at his home earlier that month in connection with his allegedly unlawful removal of millions of dollars from the Central Bank. The second, Fodé Soumah, former Central Bank Deputy Governor, had also been arrested for alleged complicity in the affair.[197] In response, the country's two trade union confederations, the *Confédération Nationale des Travailleurs de Guinée* (CNTG) and the *Union Syndicale des Travailleurs de Guinée* (USTG), denounced "the interference in the judiciary by the head of state, head of the executive, to secure the illegal release of citizens in conflict with the law", "the proven incapacity of the government to stop the depreciation of the Guinean franc, which fuels inflation and the drastic fall in the people's purchasing power ", and " the proven incapacity of the head of state to properly discharge the mission conferred on him by the Guinean people in accordance with the fundamental law". The trade union leaders concluded that there were no longer credible interlocutors in either the government or among employers for the implementation of the tripartite agreements signed after the two previous general strikes (February-March and June 2006). The general strike was supported by other civil society organizations, notably those united under the banner of the National Council of Guinea Civil Society Organizations (CNOSCG).

[196] Ibid. p. 9.

[197] This is a good example of how overt business and political networks are connecting in the MRB states. It further shows that loyalty to the informal networks is viewed as superior to national law and the setup of national justice.

The general secretary of the CNTG, Rabiatou Serah Diallo, and her counterpart at the USTG, Ibrahima Fofana, together with the leaders of two other trade union organizations, led a revolt that quickly became national and popular. The Labor Exchange, where the CNTG offices are located, served as strike headquarters. The strike that began on 10 January had a large following from the start. Civil servants, employees in the private formal sector and traders in the informal sector all stayed at home. The banks remained closed and the key bauxite sector, the Guinean economy's most important resource, also joined the movement one week later. On 14 January, at the President's request, the trade unions submitted written proposals for resolving the crisis. Among emergency measures to support purchasing power and the full implementation of previously signed tripartite agreements, the trade unions demanded from President Conté "the establishment of a broad-based administration, led by a Prime Minister as head of government", which, according to the document, would allow the head of state to "retire and look after his health better".

The President of the National Assembly, Aboubacar Somparé, was the first to respond on behalf of the head of state. He ignored the central political demand of the unions and promised to satisfy some of their economic and social demands. A peaceful march in the administrative centre of Conakry (Kaloum commune) on 17 January, led by two of the movement's key figures, Ibrahima Fofana (USTG) and Rabiatou Serah Diallo (CNTG), was violently dispersed. In the evening, President Conté, installed in one of the military camps in the town centre, is reported to have threatened the protestors: "I will kill you, however many of you there are. I am a soldier, it won't be the first time I've killed". On 18 January, the strike nearly became a nationwide uprising and the demonstrators' message became more radical: they demanded that the President leave office. In addition to the suburbs of Conakry, nearly all the towns in the country's interior showed their support for the challenge to the Conté regime. Major towns such as Télimélé, Koundara, Dalaba, Pita, Labé, Mamou, Dabola, Siguiri, Kankan, Kissidougou and N'Zérékoré were the scenes of large-scale demonstrations. Clashes took place with security forces between 18 and 23 January in most places, and approximately ten demonstrators were shot dead, even before 22 January when the union confederations and the CNOSCG convened a major peaceful demonstration. Thousands of demonstrators came from the outer suburbs and converged on the city centre.

Clashes with the security forces, police and gendarmerie began as soon as crowds began to gather in the suburbs. However, it was only when the demonstrators tried to cross the 8 November Bridge on the way to the city centre, where the red berets of the presidential guard, gendarmes and police officers were stationed, that the repression became more lethal. The objective of the security

forces was to prevent demonstrators from entering the city centre. They achieved their objective, by firing live rounds at unarmed youths. On the same day the red berets, under the leadership of the President's son, Ousmane Conté, ransacked union offices at the Labour Exchange (*Bourse du Travail*). They beat the assembled union leaders and detained them for six hours at the headquarters of the police force's Mobile Security and Intervention Brigade (CMIS).

The ensuing negotiations involved the trade union confederations CNTG, USTG, ONSLG and UDTG, the National Employers' Association and government representatives. The Presidents of the National Assembly (Aboubacar Somparé), the Supreme Court (Lamine Sidimé) and the Economic and Social Council (Michel Kamano), all associates of the regime, mediated and Christian and Moslem religious authorities acted as facilitators. The first point of the agreement that was reached provided for the appointment of a Prime Minister and the formation of a new government under the following terms:

The President of the Republic agrees to appoint a Prime Minister as head of government in accordance with the powers given to him by article 39 of the Fundamental Law. The draft decree setting out the powers of the Prime Minister and his letter of appointment have received the approval of the Head of State. The Prime Minister, who shall be appointed in the next few days, should be a senior and competent civilian of integrity who has in no way been implicated in malpractice.

Apart from this political point, the agreement reaffirmed respect for the separation of powers and the importance of continuing with judicial proceedings against two of the President's friends, Mamadou Sylla and Fodé Soumah, as well as a series of economic and social measures, notably: a reduction in the price of fuel; an immediate end to the export of food, fishing and forestry products; a reduction in the price of rice and the establishment of a commission with responsibility for monitoring the price of rice; revision of the statutes of the Central Bank of the Republic of Guinea (BCRG) and reaffirmation of its independence from the presidency of the Republic; and certain mining, fishing and forestry agreements. The agreement also provided for the establishment of a commission of investigation to find and punish the perpetrators of the atrocities committed during the strike and demonstrations.

For 13 days, the country waited for the announcement of who would be the new broad-consensus head of government to embody the break with the Conté system. Names were submitted to the presidency but the trade union and political party leaders were never formally consulted. Tired of waiting, union leaders threatened to resume the strike on 12 February if the President had not appointed the Prime Minister by that date. Finally, on 9 February, Eugène Camara, a

member of several government teams over the past ten years and recently promoted to the post of Minister in Charge of Presidential Affairs, was appointed Prime Minister. While the unions and the general public were expecting the appointment of a neutral and relatively consensual figure, the President chose one of his faithful collaborators, someone who certainly had more integrity than others but who was completely identified with the regime and responsible for the financial management that bankrupted the country.

The reaction was immediate and violent. On the night of 9 February, angry demonstrations began in the suburbs of Conakry and the uprising spread to other parts of the country the next day. The President's cortege was stoned by school students. The presidential guard responded by firing live rounds, killing three. The demonstrations against Lansana Conté, now accompanied by looting and destruction, spread throughout the country. The towns of Kankan, Faranah, Kindia, N'Zérékoré, Pita, Guéckédou, Dabola, Labé and Siguiri were all ablaze. Prefectures and many other public buildings were set on fire, and houses belonging to members of the government or close colleagues of the President were vandalized and looted along with shops and other public and private property. Two days after the appointment of Eugène Camara, the death toll had risen to about 20. Between the beginning of the first strike on 10 January and its resumption on 12 February, more than a hundred people lost their lives. The message became clearer and unambiguous: the protesters demanded the departure of Conté and his new Prime Minister. Trade union leaders were no longer able to control the groups of unleashed furious youths. The organized strike of January had given way to the February uprising, carried along by crowds who had nothing to lose and were no longer afraid of dying. Now that the looting had started and anarchy had spread to most towns, it would be difficult to put an end to it.

In Conakry, several accounts mentioned the participation of Liberian and Sierra Leonean mercenaries in the bloody repression meted out by the Conté regime since the beginning of the crisis. These mercenaries had reportedly been put at the government's disposal by Aisha Keita Conneh, a former companion of LURD leader Sekou Damaté Conneh.[198] Aisha Keita is very close to Lansana Conté and played a key role in the logistical organization of the Guinean army's support of the LURD rebellion, including the supply and transfer of forces from Sierra Leone (mainly former CDF) to the Forest Region. Strengthened by her ascendancy over a number of LURD combatants whose subsistence she ensured,

[198] According to Danny Hoffman, who interviewed some of the troops in August 2007, the 150-man strong Sierra Leonean group that Aisha Keita had at her disposal was intended for emergency backup and the protection of her property, and was never used to curb the riots (Interview with Hoffman in New York, 24 October 2007).

she proclaimed herself leader of the movement in 2004 in place of her ex-husband, who was losing influence. She has lived in the Guinean capital for many years in a house protected by soldiers and still retains her links to President Conté's entourage.

At the same time, the turbulent political changes in Guinea since the first strike in early 2006 have provided an opportunity to assess the political landscape in the country and an environment of constant and unpredictable changes in political alliances and power structures. Three general strikes (February-March 2006, June 2006 and January 2007) have gradually become increasingly violent, and it is clear that while the trade unions have been a central driving force in the protests and have led the negotiations with the regime with popular approval, they have had limited control over the protestors once the situation has escalated. It seems likely that an abrupt political transition – i.e., a military takeover or the death or sudden departure of President Conté – will lead to scenarios similar to those of January-February 2007. As long as the trade union leaders remain representatives of civil society – rather than aspiring political leaders themselves, they may be able to lead negotiations on the appointment of a new political leadership with popular backing. It is notable that the trade union leaders have not been associated with any ethnic alliances, making it more likely that they will be able to prevent a further ethnification of the political landscape.

Unions do not exist in a social void, and it would of course be wrong to say that their acts stem from sheer solidarity with the masses (it would be equally wrong to say that there is no component of solidarity – just as naïve as saying that acts of Big Men are solely a matter of self-enrichment and power greed). For example, a student union leader at a college in an MRB state is given a minibus by the President of the country in order to facilitate transportation to college. In part, this is a gesture of solidarity with the students at the college, yet at the same time it is an act of patronage as it is not conditioned only to benefit the students. The union leader is given the opportunity to use the bus to make money. However, the students know that the bus comes from the benevolent President, thus strengthening his patronage. At the same time, the student leader is strengthening his powers as Big Man through using the bus to provide students with transportation. If he were to take the bus and use it somewhere else or fail to service it properly so it ceased working, he would lose both status as Big Man and his following, and likewise his Big Man - in this case the President - would lose faith in him. It is furthermore clear that being elected head of the student union is a way to enter national politics through a network. Union work has the potential of taking one far. As stated above, Sékou Touré started his political career in the union. More recent President Laurent Gbagbo formed his political career with union work in Côte d'Ivoire.

5.7 Warlords

According to William Reno, warlord politics are a violent continuation of failing state politics as an effect of globalization.[199] They are a violent continuation and extension of a network society in which "warlordism can be described as a form of militarized, regionally fragmented authority," or "a form of person-centered politics" based on Big Man theory.[200] Warlords seldom manage to formalize control over a territory but should be seen as temporary, military Big Men who maintain control by commanding military/economic/political networks while forcing other political and economic Big Men to "buy" protection for money or political power.[201] "Warlord rulers and their allies also disrupt authority in other states. They ignore the significance of frontiers if they obstruct efforts to control markets, clandestine or visible."[202] The West African warlord has transgressed borders by destabilizing neighbouring countries, and the regional commanders often command troops in more than one country. Sam "Maskita" Bockarie, for instance, headed the RUF when leader Foday Sankoh was under house arrest in Nigeria. Later he trained Taylor's Special Forces in Liberia and finally became a commander in western Côte d'Ivoire.[203] Taylor has a degree in economics from Boston College in the US. He worked as a senior official in the Samuel Doe administration and in 1983 allegedly stole 900,000 USD and escaped to the US. He was imprisoned there, yet somehow managed to escape, just to turn up in West Africa again. After several years of networking, mainly in the West African sub-region, he manipulated his way to the top of a group of people training in Libya – a group that would come to be known as the NPFL.[204] Charles Taylor's rebel incursion was originally sponsored by Libya, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and France. The NPFL split soon after the incursion due to leadership problems (a group with roots in the Liberian military did not see Taylor as the proper leader of the movement). Yet Taylor, with his sharp business mind in combination with an acknowledged brutality, created a business-run military machine on top of Liberian networks and with clear international links.

[199] Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States*.
[200] Biró, " The (Un)bearable Lightness of Violence: Warlordism as an Alternative Form of Governance in the 'Westphalian Periphery'?" p. 2. See also Böås, "Liberia and Sierra Leone - dead ringers? The logic of neopatrimonial rule."
[201] This game has continued well into peace negotiations, power-sharing deals, and even democratic elections, as Charles Taylor and other warlords/commanders have shown in Liberia.
[202] Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States*. p. 2.
[203] Morten Böås, "Marginalized Youth," in *African Guerrillas: Raging Against the Machine*, ed. Morten Böås and Kevin Dunn (Boulder, 2007).
[204] See Ellis for a detailed history of Taylor: Stephen Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy: the destruction of Liberia and the religious dimension of an African civil war*, 2. rev. ed. (London, 2007). pp. 67-74.

Liberian militias multiplied – often officially with an ethnic patronage base (though the fighters themselves hardly had any ethnic solidarity but rather moved between the groups).[205] Leaders of the new armed groups originated from the same group of people (in networks connected to Taylor's). They had university degrees, at times from abroad and in one case a PhD, and most had held relatively high positions in the state administration, giving them ties to international networks. Already prior to the war, Liberia had become a place of smuggling, drug trade and money laundering with both politicians and civil servants involved in illegal activities.[206] Warlords and Big businessmen saw that war offered even more opportunities for this kind of uncontrolled activity in new areas such as mining and logging, alongside the dismantling and sale of infrastructure. These activities attracted new actors such as gunrunners, exchanging arms and ammunition for goods, further criminalizing social networks.

5.7.1 Case study – LURD

Conté's government has faced external threats, particularly from Liberia when it was ruled by Charles Taylor. In September 2000 a force of Guinean, Liberian and Sierra Leonean combatants attempted to invade Guinea from Liberia. It seized several towns in southeastern Guinea and found some support from ethnic allies (ethnic Mandingo peoples) on Guinean soil. For more than a year, the Guinean security forces fought back and eventually repelled the invaders. According to residents of Nzérékoré, the capital of the Forest Region, professional "rangers" trained by the US army eventually secured the nearby border and restored order to the town.[207] Guinea in turn needled Taylor by backing the Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) rebel movement. LURD launched guerrilla attacks into northwestern Liberia from the Forest Region of Guinea in 1999, and eventually forced Taylor to relinquish power by seizing half the Liberian capital, Monrovia, in 2003.[208]

As LURD's activities intensified in Liberia beginning in 2002, it recruited refugees in from camps in Guinea and along the Guinean border. The Guinean military was largely complicit in this recruitment, although in some instances members of the Guinean security forces prevented it. LURD was reported to have placed family members in Kouankan, Guinea's largest refugee camp, where it maintained an openly armed presence, and continued to return there for rest

[205] Utas, *Sweet Battlefields: Youth and the Liberian Civil War (PhD thesis)*.
[206] Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy: the destruction of Liberia and the religious dimension of an African civil war*. p. 155-156.
[207] IRINnews, "Guinea: Living on the edge." p. 4.
[208] Ibid., Utas, *Sweet Battlefields: Youth and the Liberian Civil War (PhD thesis)*. p. 255.

and recreation, stocks and new recruits. At the end of March 2004, LURD was reported to be present in the Kouankan camp and in the towns of Nzerekore and Macenta, still recruiting for their ranks. According to the Coalition to Stop the Use of Child Soldiers, the United Nations Panel of Experts on Liberia frequently reported on the support the Guinean authorities and military gave LURD. [209] The Panel accused LURD of recruiting in Guinea and other countries, and expressed concern over the link between arms trafficking and the diamond trade. Guinea repeatedly denied that it was a supply route for arms, which would place them in violation of the United Nations arms embargo against Liberia. In May 2003, the Liberian authorities and fleeing civilians reported that Guinean troops were fighting alongside LURD in Liberia, an accusation denied by the Guinean authorities.

Despite having reportedly trafficked weapons imported from the United Arab Emirates and Iran to LURD, Guinea received considerable military aid from the US and in May 2003, one month before LURD's attack on the Liberian capital of Monrovia and despite Guinea's well-documented support of LURD, the United Nations Security Council under American pressure refused to extend the arms embargo to Guinea. It was only in August 2003, after LURD had reached Monrovia with weapons supplied by Guinea, that Washington officially asked Guinea to cease its support of LURD. Guinea reportedly supported the Côte d'Ivoire government in its activities in opposition to Liberia. At the same time, Guineans were said to have joined armed opposition groups in Côte d'Ivoire.[210]

5.8 Border areas and power vacuum

Paul Richards has pointed out that large parts of Sierra Leone's border areas were more connected to Liberia than to Sierra Leone proper already prior to the war. Lack of infrastructure and formal governing interest made for a social setup in which people felt marginalized by their own state.[211] A feature of the MRB

[209] Coalition to stop the use of child soldiers, *Child Soldiers*.
[210] Ibid.
[211] Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth and Resources in Sierra Leone*. See also Roitman on systems of illegal border trades and MacGaffay in the informalization of economies in Africa, Janet MacGaffey, *The Real Economy of Zaire: The Contribution of Smuggling and Other Unofficial Activities to National Wealth* (Philadelphia, 1991), Janet MacGaffey, Rémy Bazenguissa-Ganga, and International African Institute, *Congo-Paris: Transnational Traders on the Margins of the Law*, African issues (London; Bloomington, 2000), Janet Roitman, "Productivity in the Margins: the Reconstitution of State Power in the Chad Basin," in *Anthropology in the Margins of the State*, ed. Veena Das and Deborah Poole (Santa Fe, 2004), Janet L. Roitman, *Fiscal Disobedience: An Anthropology of Economic Regulation in Central Africa* (Princeton, NJ, 2005).

region has long been the virtual power vacuum, or absence of state power in border areas – at times entire districts – in which informal trade and security networks often run the whole show. Guinea's Forest Region in the south of the country is today such an area, and is rumoured to have become a reservoir of inter-communal tensions and a potential source of instability in the region. HRW argues that "crime and banditry have flourished in this already impoverished region, fanned by a flow of guns from the conflicts in neighbouring states".[212] According to OCHA, the presence of around 4,000 former Guinean *Jeunes Volontaires*, recruited to combat incursions from Liberia in 2000 and 2001, along with an unquantified number of Liberian fighters who rejected the disarmament and demobilization process in their own country, has further destabilized the Forest Region. Although UN peacekeepers disarmed more than 100,000 former combatants in Liberia during 2004, there have been continuing rumours of infiltrators from that country entering the Forest Region. There has also been a busy trade in light arms heading into Guinea. This has led to numerous arrests and a strengthening of security controls along the borders to Liberia, Côte d'Ivoire and Sierra Leone. The Guinean authorities have systematically denied all reports that former combatants have been recruited in Liberia to join training camps inside Guinea's Forest Region for the launch of a fresh conflict. However, Interior Minister Kiridi Bangoura admitted to IRIN: "It is impossible to verify systematically that no one infiltrates the country".[213]

Despite disarmament and the dissolution of armed groups in Liberia,[214] weapons are still discovered in rural areas. This is part of a larger, regional problem, officials say. An estimated eight million light arms are circulating in West Africa, according to Jeanine Jackson, US Ambassador to Burkina Faso. Several reports argue that the Guinea Forest Region is a crossroads for the trafficking of small arms. International actors have asserted that such weapons are sometimes made locally by well-organized criminal rings. It is also reported that weapons are stocked in Guinea and eventually smuggled into Côte d'Ivoire.[215] The trafficking is alleged to be intimately linked to drug trafficking. Trafficking networks are reported to be loosely linked to the armed groups operating on the road between Kankan and Kissidougou, where attacks have occurred. Some argue that the bandits might be *Jeunes Volontaires* but this allegation has not

[212] IRINnews, "Guinea: Living on the edge." p. 4.
[213] Ibid. p. 4.
[214] It should be questioned how efficient the disarmament process actually was in both Liberia and Sierra Leone.
[215] Guillaume Landry and Sophie Joy Mosko, *Call for action. Working with child soldiers in West Africa* (2006). p. 16.

been documented. Gunfire is often heard during the night in N'Zérékoré, although no arrests have been made.[216]

A final aspect to consider has been implicit in much of what has already been said, namely the interconnectedness of the MRB countries in terms of combatant mobility, arms trade, political and ethnic ties, etc. Of particular importance in the context of previous and potential conflict scenarios are the highly mobile fighters, who are said to take part in conflicts across the region and to not only change their battlefield but also change sides during the same conflict. One example of such interconnectedness is found in the 2000-2001 cross-boarder attacks by the joint RUF and Liberian security forces on the primary towns of the Guinea Forest Region: Gueckedou, Macenta and Nongowa.[217] Some sources report continued rumours of the re-recruitment of Liberian and Sierra Leonean ex-combatants for missions in Guinea. According to HRW, among those approached to fight in Guinea, about half had been approached by commanders claiming to represent a fledgling Guinean insurgency and the other half by those claiming to be supporters of Guinean President Lansana Conté, who sought to organize militias to assist in national defence[218]. The same report refers to statements from Guinean embassy officials in Liberia, saying that they were receiving consistent reports of the recruitment of former Liberian combatants to fight in Guinea. The Guinean ambassador was quoted as responding: "Let me be clear: if we are attacked from Liberia, we will follow the attackers in hot pursuit all the way to Ganta or anywhere else they may be based. The Guinean army is ready",[219] confirming the regional mobility of violence. A similar retaliatory mission was carried out in 2001, when the Guinean government responded to attacks on the Guinean towns of Gueckedou, Macenta, Foracariah and Pamelap with helicopter gunship attacks on RUF-controlled areas in northern Sierra Leone.

Ex-combatants interviewed by HRW gave detailed descriptions of encounters with recruiters who had spoken with them in Monrovia and in villages in Lofa and Nimba counties, which share borders with Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire. Those recruiting to Guinea appear to have been supporters of former President Charles Taylor of Liberia, including some of his former generals. The majority of recruiters working on behalf of President Conté were said to come from the ranks of LURD. However, a 2003 split in the LURD leadership seems to have

[216] Ibid.
[217] See e.g. Human Rights Watch, *Youth, Poverty and Blood: The Lethal Legacy of West Africa's Regional Warriors*. p. 31.
[218] Ibid. p. 4.
[219] Ibid. p. 36.

motivated several former high-level LURD commanders to begin recruiting for those opposed to President Conté. Those being used in the recruitment were typically former mid-level and unit commanders. Some had been asked to mobilize their entire units. Combatants were typically offered $100-$500, and in a few cases $1000, depending on their rank and position, and most were given a small, token amount of money during their encounter with the recruiter[220].

Some youngsters reported being approached for re-recruitment by several people claiming to represent both sides of a future conflict in Guinea[221], implying that the former affiliation of ex-combatants is less important than their willingness and ability to take part in new militias in Guinea. UN Disarmament Policy Advisor Charles Achodo has commented that Liberian ex-combatants who have not been reintegrated after the war are scattered around Liberian towns bordering Côte d'Ivoire, Guinea and Sierra Leone[222], providing a considerable group of experienced fighters to the highest bidder. All this implies that a potential conflict scenario in Guinea must be approached as a regional one, and that the number of combatants on any side, as well as the motives of the individual fighters, may be highly changeable and unpredictable. Numerous authors have pointed out that it is absolutely crucial to stability in the region to understand processes of youth marginalization of poor MRB citizens and their peers in larger West Africa. [223] Furthermore, one must find a means to cater to a young generation. To borrow from Peter Kagwanja, "[w]hen the continent ignores youth, its warlords celebrate".[224]

[220] Ibid. pp. 36-37.
[221] Ibid. p. 38.
[222] IRINnews, *Liberia: Idle fighters cause concern.* Accessed 25 July 2007 at *http://irinnews.org/Report.aspx?ReportId=64334*."
[223] I. Abdullah et al., "Lumpen Youth Culture and Political Violence: Sierra Leoneans Debate the RUF and the Civil War," *Africa Development* xxii (1997), Ibrahim Abdullah, "'I am a rebel': youth, culture & violence in Sierra Leone," in *Makers & Breakers: Children & Youth in Postcolonial Africa*, ed. Alcinda Honwana and Filip De Boeck (Oxford, 2005), Morten Bööås, "Africa's Young Guerrillas: Rebels without cause?" *Current History* (2004), Bööås, "Marginalized youth.", Human Rights Watch, *Youth, Poverty and Blood: The Lethal Legacy of West Africa's Regional Warriors*, Ismail Rashid, "Student Radicals, Lumpen Youth, and the Origins of Revolutionary Groups in Sierra Leone, 1977-1996," in *Between Democracy and Terror: The Sierra Leone Civil War*, ed. Ibrahim Abdullah (Dakar, 2004), Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth and Resources in Sierra Leone*, Mats Utas, "Abject Heroes: Marginalised Youth, Modernity and Violent Pathways of the Liberian Civil War," in *Years of Conflict: Adolescence, Political Violence and Displacement*, ed. Jason Hart (Oxford, 2008), Utas, *Sweet Battlefields: Youth and the Liberian Civil War (PhD thesis)*.
[224] Peter Kagwanja, "Africa: when the continent ignores the youth, its warlords celebrate," *The Nation (Nairobi)* (2007).

This chapter in our study has shown the intricate networks that build up around Big Men and their activities, a web that not only constitutes a large part of everyday life in the region but actually *is* the daily life. This chapter also indicates the extent to which the informal reality actually drives and shapes the formal realm. The next chapter gives some examples of the extension of these networks outside the region.

6 External actors as Big Men

> *Within a year of targeting those who had fought against him, Taylor had created the conditions for the formation of an armed resistance group, LURD, that operated from bases in the south-eastern forest region of Guinea. Guinea used LURD to stifle an emergent collaboration of RUF/NPFL with renegade Guinean soldiers and other anti-Conté forces in the forest region of Guinea. A few years later, as fighters from Liberian security forces collaborated with Ivorian rebels, the Gbargbo government supported the newly organised Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL). The advances of LURD and later MODEL significantly disrupted Taylor's timber and diamond trade, and threatened his government's hold on much of the country. While ECOWAS' peacemaking strategy sought to establish peace under the sovereign authority of the Liberian government, it became increasingly clear that the government had lost what modicum of support it had among sectors of the Liberian people and the international community.*[225]

Amos Sawyer's quote points out some of the complexity of "internal" war zones extended beyond geographical borders and wars fought beyond the military realms, beyond armies, guns and ammunition, where economic capacities within semi-illicit economies are crucial to the continuation of warlordism. Throughout the report we have indicated the importance of external actors in a variety of ways, and it is important to highlight their connectedness to country and region-based networks. The international interest in diamonds and the clandestine networks that control the international diamond business have been a major source of international interest in the region. The illicit trade in "blood diamonds" certainly perpetuated the war in Sierra Leone by giving the RUF and others access to economic means or arms. Gold and other minerals, timber, rubber, oil and fishing rights all lure international and regional actors into the MRB countries. Weak states and, more so, socially imploding wars create conditions for tremendous benefits to shady investors, as prices on goods and labour diminish. Major criminals such as Dutch national Gus Van Kouvenhoven, residing in Liberia, use their broker position (European with African contacts) to export timber and diamonds, import guns and even train militia to be deployed in other countries. At the same time, they may rent out property to the UN[226] and carry out large donor-funded contracts for INGOs. These actors connect local

[225] Sawyer, "Violent conflicts and governance challenges in West Africa: the case of the Mano River basin area." p. 450.

[226] Van Kouwenhoven leased the Hotel Africa complex outside Monrovia from the Liberian government and then rented it to the UN.

trade/security networks, the criminal networks of the West, legal business networks in Asia and the UN/INGO networks of the region to each other in a series of intricate flows, as diamonds are exchanged for guns.

In these networks we inevitably locate non-national nodes, Big Men. Van Kouvenhoven was a central Big Man in the nefarious networks around Charles Taylor. However, we could equally see him as a benevolent Big Man, paying school fees for children, etc. In the same fashion, one must view the intricate linking of ECOMOG soldiers to both Sierra Leonean and Liberian networks as they fulfilled both economic and social roles. By linking to the informal networks, they used their official peacekeeping positions to double as traders in looted goods, diamonds, logs and illicit drugs. By becoming part of the networks they secured their positions, both physically and socially, and thanks to external resources often had the capacity to become Big Men in the system. Yet other Big Men never needed to be present on the ground. Presidents, ministers of defence, etc. of the ECOWAS countries made their Big Man status clear by sending their followers (soldiers). For instance, Nigeria's large presence in both Liberia and Sierra Leone established both individual leaders and the nation as a Big Man; in this sense, Nigeria is a communal Big Man. Adekeye Adebajo's idea of a *Pax Nigeriana* in the ECOWAS region suggests, for instance, Nigeria as the hegemonic Big Man of the entire region.[227]

Businessmen from Belgium, Lebanon, Ukraine, Malaysia and China all make use of the informal networks of the MRB countries in order to access the goods they demand. During a war, these networks consist to a larger degree of security constellations. Peacekeepers, especially if they are badly equipped (and semi-sovereign), connect to the network tissue of countries in the MRB region. PMCs do the same (EO or DynCorp). Western governments, such as former colonial "landlord" Britain in Sierra Leone and former "business hegemon" US in Liberia, inevitably connect to the informal networks and thus in one capacity or another become Big Men. However, Western governments, UN and INGOs are doing their utmost not to connect to MRB networks, intending instead to create alternative forms of governance – clean "second governments"[228]. By doing so, however, they not only act in a state of self-denial (denying their role as Big Man) but more importantly disconnect from the system by creating a parallel to the informal system – or a shadow of the shadow. It is our firm belief that, just as

[227] See Adekeye Adebajo, "In search of warlords: hegemonic peacekeeping in Liberia and Somalia," *International Peacekeeping* 10 (2003).

[228] As Utas has called it elsewhere, Signe Arnfred et al., "Re-thinking Africa: A Contribution to the Swedish Government White Paper on Africa", http://www.sweden.gov.se/content/1/c6/08/51/14/7251cd8b.pdf," ed. Signe Arnfred and Mats Utas (2007).

during colonial days, this extra-system makes real development efforts difficult and that the UN and Western states, in denying their Big Man status, make it very difficult to structurally improve and stabilize the MRB region.

7 Conclusions

This study was founded in a series of questions of explorative nature, revolving around the regional and local West African aspects that influence the approach to multifunctional implementation planning, and the key factors that promote or hamper West African implementation planning processes and the status of accepted implementation plans. As we have seen, the core response to these questions deals with the formal informalities of the MRB region. This study has tried to show how the informal character of structures in West Africa actually sets the agendas and decides the importance of the formal structures. The system of networks is one of excessive complexity and holds numerous Big Men, as nodes, around which a number of ordinary citizens are nurtured. The network system consists of both vertical and horizontal network connections and is often very fluid. It is not enough to regard these systems as chains of networks, or larger networks consisting of smaller ones; one must rather see this complex in a multidimensional way: all Big Men have in their own turn Big Men; all networks are connected both sideways and upwards/downwards; the network supersedes all kind of groupings and borders. The complex system doesn't differentiate between formal (official) and the informal (shadow) networks but rather encompasses and thrives on the very fuzziness. Because of the system's very informality, it is hard for outsiders to see the vital role the networks play in the implementation of social development and recovery strategies (such as the SSR and the PRSP). However, if all attempts of implementation and coordinated efforts do not embrace the notion of this informality as a core driving force of social and political action in all networks, we will never reach any significant result within a peace and security context. Furthermore, it is important **not** to see Big Men and networks from a rational choice point of view only, but to see the Big Man as an individual **not** always searching for maximum personal gain, as to be able to persist as a Big Man you must use the network from a standpoint of extended solidarity within a moral framework.

The official documentation, strategies and other blueprints from the AU, ECOWAS and the MRU are comprehensive and multifarious. Unfortunately, they are seldom followed by any significant planned capacity for implementation. Many of the most recent strategies produced, such as the PRSPs, do embrace multifunctional approaches and multidimensional intentions. They produce comprehensive visions but hardly any pragmatic guidelines, or maps, of how to reach results – leaving visions as only visions. This, we argue, is due to two factors: the overall lack of implementation capacity and our (Western/donor world) inability to embrace the informal reality of the informal network structures.

Although partly different from a modern historical (colonial and post-colonial) point of view, the three MRB countries show clear socio-political correspondence. Most important in this study are the informal Big Man culture and the reliance on the social networks. We have been able to show examples from all three countries to highlight different aspects of the Big Man and network theory. The interaction between politicians, businessmen, the military, civil servants and civil society are equally complex in all three countries. For this study, in the security and peace-work context, two specific areas in particular could be mentioned: that of taut connections between politicians and the military/police, and that of elaborate links between secret societies and politicians. Both examples show the intricate web we have tried to unwind.

However complex our Western models are, however much we talk about local ownership, about coordination, multifunctional, comprehensive approaches, we need to understand and incorporate local/regional/international networks and nodes of Big Men into our models. Our study shows, and emphasizes, the fact that it is the informal that pursues and carries the formal forward. It also argues that without a thorough understanding of the concept of Big Men and networks we will never be able to make any real contribution to how political and social matters unfold in the MRB area. If we do not support this knowledge with comprehensive capacity-enhancing assets, and if we do not continue doing this for a substantial length of time, there will be no real change in the security situation in the region.

8 Abbreviations

AFL	Armed Forces of Liberia
AFRC	Armed Forces Revolutionary Council
APC	All People's Congress
APRM	African Peer Review Mechanism
ASF	African Standby Forces
AU	African Union
BCRG	Central Bank of the Republic of Guinea
CDC	Congress for Democratic Change
CDF	Civil Defense Forces
CEWS	Continental Early Warning System
CMIS	Mobile Security and Intervention Brigade
CMS	Committee for Mediation and Security
CNTG	Confédération Nationale des Travailleurs de Guinée
CNOSCG	National Council for Civil Society Organizations
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
CRD	Rural Development Community
CRC	Central Revolutionary Council
CWT	Community Watch Team
DDR	Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration
DFID	Department for International Development
ECOMIL	ECOWAS Mission in Liberia
ECOMOG	ECOWAS Monitoring Group
ECOWAS	Economic Community of West African States
EO	Executive Outcomes
EU	European Union
EWS	Early Warning System

FRAD	Front Républicain pour L'Alternance Démocratique
GDO	Government Diamond Office
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICG	International Crisis Group
ICGL	International Contact Group of Liberia
IDEA	International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
IMATT	International Military Advisory and Training Team
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
INPFL	Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia
iPRS	interim Poverty Reduction Strategy
LFF	Liberian Frontier Forces
LINK	Liberia NGO's Network
LNP	Liberia National Police
LPRC	Liberia Petroleum Refining Company
LURD	Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy
MOJA	Movement for Justice in Africa
MRB	Mano River Basin
MRR	Mano River Region
MRU	Mano River Union
MSC	Military Staff Committee
MSG	Management Steering Group in Liberia
NEPAD	New Partnership for Africa's Development
NDMC	National Diamond Mining Corporation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NPFL	National Patriotic Front of Liberia
NPRC	National Provisional Ruling Council

NTGL	National Transitional Government of Liberia
OAU	Organization of African Unity
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Assistance
PAL	Progressive Alliance of Liberia
PMDC	People's Movement for Democratic Change
PRSP	Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
PSC	Private Security Company
PSO	Peace Support Operations
RFGD	Movement of the Democratic Forces of Guinea
RSLAF	Republic of Sierra Leone Armed Forces
RUF	Revolutionary United Front
SADEC	Southern African Development and Economic Community
SCSL	Special Court for Sierra Leone
SLA	Sierra Leone Army
SLP	Sierra Leone Police
SLPP	Sierra Leone People's Party
SRSG	Special Representative of the Secretary General
SSR	Security Sector Reform
SSS	Special Security Service
TRC	Truth and Reconciliation Commission
TWP	True Whig Party
UN	United Nations
ULIMO	United Liberation Movement of Liberia for Democracy
UNAMSIL	United Nations Mission in Sierra Leone
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner on Refugees
UNMIL	United Nations Mission in Liberia
USTG	Union Syndicale des Travailleurs de Guinée
WANEP	West African Network for Peacebuilding

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