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Liberia and Sierra Leone—dead ringers? The logic of neopatrimonial rule

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ABSTRACT *There are many different causes behind the two civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Some are clearly unique to each country, whereas some of the most significant causes of war are shared in both cases. This article argues that the most basic reasons for these two wars are to be found in the extreme version of neopatrimonial politics that was developed in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Neopatrimonialism is not unique to these two countries, nor to Africa. However, the historical experience of the two countries suggests that Liberia and Sierra Leone developed an extreme version of neopatrimonial politics built on the need to secure the self through self-categorisation into self and other. The article therefore suggests that the historical legacy of these interlinkages is so substantial that the fates of Liberia and Sierra Leone are locked together like a pair of dead ringers. Neither country is likely to achieve sustainable peace if warlike conditions still exist in the other country.*

The situation in and between the three West African states, Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone constitutes one of the most dramatic scenarios on the African continent today.[1] Through the media we are fed horror states of red-eyed, drugged monsters in the form of young men who seemingly kill without purpose or remorse. Their only objective seems to be their own survival and the 'pleasure' to be found in rape and looting. The reasons for this are seemingly greed and hate in their most basic forms. Accordingly, the response from the international community at large has so far been either to ignore what is going on in this remote region of the world or to try to come up with sanctions and military solutions that are supposedly designed to protect/promote democracy and a market economy in these countries.

The approach offered in this article is different. My assumption is that, in order to come to a deeper understanding of the situation in this part of West Africa, we must start by acknowledging that the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone, like civil wars elsewhere, are a consequence of political collapse and state recession.[2] The present situation is caused by the years of carelessness, ruthlessness and mindlessness that have swept these two countries for ages. My suggestion is therefore that a more sober understanding of the dynamics of these two civil wars

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are better achieved through the lenses of:

- a dysfunctional neopatrimonial state: patron–client relationships and the expansion and withdrawal of this type of postcolonial state;
- the historical relationship between this kind of state and political violence; and
- the semi-permanent state of social exclusion to which the withdrawal of the state has led.

In order to outline the arguments that support such an approach to these wars, this article will start by offering a brief introduction to the theoretical foundation for the main arguments. Thereafter, we will address the issue of the state in Liberia and Sierra Leone in a historical perspective. This section of the article will seek to highlight both the sameness and the difference between the two states. In the remaining parts of the article, the ebb and flow of the two wars and their interdependence is interpreted through the lenses of a historical approach to the state and its expansion and withdrawal.

The logic of neopatrimonial rule

Life and politics in Africa equal an existence on the margin, which entails that politics in most sub-Saharan African states do not conform to an institutionalised Western political system. Rather, like international politics, politics in Africa are a game played out on a marginal site, beyond institutionalised regulations in a Western bureaucratic sense.[3] Accordingly:

> Politics are more personalised and less restrained, resulting in higher stakes but also in greater risks for those who actively engage in the political game and greater uncertainty for the general public.[4]

The lack of institutionalised constraints, and the fact that the essence of politics is distribution of scarce resources, entail that politics in Africa are more basic in character than elsewhere. The lack of institutional constraints has made politics in Africa open to personal and factional struggle aimed at controlling the state apparatus. The consequence has been a lack of political stability, which has sometimes reduced the political game to a fight between personal contenders for power.

One way of interpreting these African personal leaders or warlords (would-be leaders) is to see them as an African variant of the Machiavellian prince, faced as they are with the question of how to preserve what fortune has suddenly tossed in their laps. In the words of an African Machiavelli who 500 years ago advised the king of Kano about how to survive in the labyrinths of palace politics:

> Vigorous is the cock as he struts around his domain. The eagle can only win his realm by firm resolve, and the cock's voice is strong as he masters the hens. Kingdoms are held by the sword, not by delays. Can fear be thrust back except by causing fear? Ride then, the horses of resolution upon the saddles of prudence.[5]

Thus, in this interpretation, the African prince is an astute observer and manipu-

lator of lieutenants, henchmen and clients; he either rules jointly with other oligarchs or he rules alone but cultivates the loyalty, co-operation and support of other 'big men'. The basic motivation for seeking political power is neither ideology nor national welfare but the desire to acquire and to ensure the well-being of one's own group.

> Truly it is a natural and ordinary thing to desire to acquire, and always, when men do it who can, they will be praised or not blamed; but when they cannot, and want to do it anyway, here lie the error and the blame.[6]

The desire to acquire, which within this context means imperial ambition, is a natural impulse in its own right: it is not just a rational response to the anarchy of the Hobbesian state of nature; hence, Machiavelli maintains, there is no valid moral objection to it, because he rejects the validity of distinctions of good and evil in international politics. For instance, the realist argument in Chapter 3 of *The Prince* is filled with references to necessities, to universal causes and to the unalterable order of things. All these are said to compel the prudent prince to take the actions Machiavelli describes—and thereby justify him in doing so. The pre-emptive actions Machiavelli recommends against potential or future enemies are portrayed as the actions of a doctor applying medicine in the early stages of a disease, and because the physician Machiavelli can certify that threats are inevitable (eg scientifically predictable), pre-emptive attack is a justified response and, indeed, the only rational approach. The goal of his science, parallel to that of medicine, is to guarantee the survival of the state, insofar as it can be guaranteed. This can be accomplished, according to Machiavelli, only by the accumulation of power and the practice of pre-emptive imperialism, neutralising threats when they are small and remote.[7] Machiavelli concedes that states that defy his realist logic may survive, but he goes on to argue that such survival is based on good fortune only. The prince, in order to be a true prince, cannot base the survival of his regime and national security on luck and good fortune; on the contrary, he must give unrestricted play to a political science—political realism—dedicated exclusively and unremittingly to national security, because in a marginal site like international politics no competing goal of state policy, moral or otherwise, can exist without threatening the very foundation of state survival.[8]

Even though the international political context of Machiavelli's prince is entirely different from the situation facing an African 'prince' in the contemporary world, it is my argument that the Machiavellian insight into the forces at play in a marginal site without much in the way of institutional constraints (in a Western sense) may facilitate our understanding of personal leadership in Africa and how it is played out in the African state.

The existence of systems of personal rule is to a considerable degree dependent on the abilities, efforts and fortunes of the leader(s). Because of the uninstitutionalised (in a Western sense) character of the system, it is they who determine whether the political game shall remain a contest with co-operation and restraint among the participants or deteriorate into a damnation game. These rulers often bear the national synonym of sovereign statehood in the manner of '*l'Etat, c'est moi*'.[9] Because the leader is so often portrayed as embodying the idea of the state, so to speak, personal rule becomes inherently authoritarian; that is, an arbitrary

personal government that uses the law and other coercive instruments of the state to further its own purposes, to monopolise power and to deny or restrict the political rights and opportunities of other groups.

However, in order to survive, personal rulers must base their rule on stratagem as well as force to disarm opposition or to secure co-operation from strategic groups or actors. Despite the authoritarian features of personal rule, it is, as are all forms of government, in need of arrangements by which uncertainty and instability can be reduced. Power in itself cannot guarantee stability and the regime's survival. The game of personal politics is not solely about power and fortune in fistfights between opponents; rather, it involves alliances and co-operation. The arrangements by which regimes of personal rule are able to secure stability is, in the literature on the nature of the African state, often referred to as clientelism; that is, a system of patron–client ties that bind leaders and followers in relationships of assistance and support that are built on recognised and accepted inequality between 'big men' and 'smaller men'. Thus, clientelism is an exchange relationship between unequals. These clientelistic relationships have to a large extent survived the colonial period and independence. Today, these relationships are no longer traditional but neotraditional, in the sense that they easily adapt to formal political structures, whether parties or institutions. If one important dimension of these exchange relationships in Africa is the patron–client relationship between unequals—between, for instance, a Liberian warlord and his henchmen—another important dimension is the exchange relationships between equals, between 'big men' in various positions who exchange resources with one another.

> [Clientelism] plays a leading role in the formation of the ruling class. As long as people have something to exchange, they do not need to bribe; they give a favour knowing that it will be paid back one day. This can be observed even at the middle level of society.[10]

Thus, all these sentiments and practices have one point in common which makes each part of a whole: they all presuppose the absence of a clear distinction between public and private domains. The lack of separation between private and public domains makes it almost inevitable that conflicts and differences emerge between the long-term interests of the state and the utility functions of individual actors, because these stem from the patrimonial sentiments and practices that blur the distinction between private and public. The postcolonial state in Africa cannot be characterised as a pure patrimonial state, because the postcolonial state is simultaneously governed by a patrimonial logic and a bureaucratic logic. Thus, in neopatrimonial societies like the African postcolonial state, bureaucratic and patrimonial norms co-exist. But since, in patrimonial societies, there is no clear distinction between public and private domains, it is nearly impossible to speak of corruption and misuse of public funds, because this supposes a reference to a public norm. Nevertheless, although the state is a facade compared with what it pretends to be, in neopatrimonial societies it is able to extract and distribute resources, but this extraction and distribution is privatised. And this privatisation of the public has two consequences.[11]

1. Political power, instead of having the impersonal and abstract character of legal–rational domination, specific to the modern state, is personal power.
2. Politics becomes a kind of business, because it is political resources which give access to economic resources. Politics is reduced to economics.

So far an implicit element in the discussion has been the importance of the subjectification of power along identity lines in order to understand how these political games of personal rule are played out. Thus, the task is to make the deconstruction of these identities into images of self and other that are played out by personal rulers and warlords (would-be rulers) to enforce and strengthen clientelistic relationships between themselves and their followers. The personalisation of power combined with the 'businessification' of politics offers an opportunity for personal rulers and warlords to create power images of the other and to ask for the securing of the self.

The relationship between self and other is a key feature when identity is formatted; and identity and the formation of such is again closely connected to security, because without an *other*, security as a concept is meaningless.[12] The point is that, by itself, the self has no social status. Any idea of an identity has to be expressed in relations with others. Thus, the other becomes an epistemological necessity. What is at issue is the establishment of the boundary between 'us' and 'them'. Just as objects and experiences are categorised, people also categorise themselves, and the outcome of this process of self-categorisation is an accentuation of similarities between the self and other in-groups, and of differences between the self and out-groups.

Following this train of thought to its next logical station, we can use the idea of the other to argue that the in-group defines itself by being the unit which distinguishes the self from the other. The other does not have to be morally evil or ugly, or appear in the form of an economic competitor; one can even have advantageous business dealings with him. Nevertheless, he is the stranger—the other. There is therefore a close continuum between the other and the enemy. The identification of the self and the other is not given *a priori*, but is socially constructed. The boundaries between self and other are constantly reiterated and rewritten in processes of self-categorisation, where the self tends to emerge out of this reflexitivity as what the other is not.[13]

In sum, the point of departure for this brief theoretical exercise was an analogy between two marginal sites—one of international politics and one of African politics. They are both characterised by fewer institutional constraints against coercion and the use of force than is an institutionalised Western society; at both sites, pre-emptive strikes are in fashion. By taking such a train of thought to the next station, a somewhat similar analogy was made between the Machiavellian prince and an African prince—a personal ruler or a warlord—because, like the Machiavellian prince, the main objective of the African prince seems to be not ideology, but personal power and the maintenance of that power. However, even though personal rule equals the monopolising of power, alliances established either through clientelism or exchange with equals is necessary in order to secure the regime and its survival. Such clientelism was seen to be facilitated by the lack of a clear-cut and legitimate delineation between the private and the public

domain. However, resources and the distribution of resources cannot by themselves guarantee clientelistic loyalty but, when they are combined with lines of identities as the subjectification of power, such loyalty can be more thoroughly secured through socially constructed images of self and other (the enemy).[14]

Liberia and Sierra Leone: dead ringers?

Liberia consists of 16 major indigenous groups of people, each possessing its own traditions, customs, religious philosophy and dialects, and laws.[15] In addition to these groups, there are the repatriated African slaves whose ancestors came to Liberia from Congo, the USA and the West Indies during the 19th century. The forerunners of this groups, known as the early pioneers, landed at Providence Island, near Monrovia, on 7 January 1822, as part of a scheme of the American Colonization Society. The number of repatriates was never large. There were about 12 000 colonists between 1822 and 1861, when the American Civil War effectively stopped colonisation.[16]

Even though colonisation was not pursued vigorously,[17] the American Colonization Society created small settlements of repatriates all along the coast. In 1947 these settlements joined together to declare themselves a republic, and a constitution patterned on that of the USA was adopted. According to the constitution, all men are born equally free and independent, and have certain natural, inherent and unalienable rights. But 'all men' did not mean all men who inhabited the area that the constitution laid claim to. On the contrary, the constitution made a strong delineation between an in-group constituted by the repatriates and an out-group constituted by the indigenous groups. The members of the so-called 'native tribes' were not eligible for election or voting. A boundary between 'us' and 'them' was therefore established and the foundation laid for alienation between the different ethnic groups of Liberia. The intention behind this strategy of alienation was obvious. The repatriates, as an emerging economic elite, wanted to secure their domination over political and economic life in the newly constituted nation-state.

In 1870 the True Whig Party (TWP) was established and, for the next 110 years, Liberia was *de facto* a one-party state. Under the rule of the TWP it was always a small elite of repatriates, never more than 3%–5%, who dominated every aspect of political and economic life for their own benefit. In considering the political–economic system that the elite established, one has to bear in mind that most of the original repatriates had little education and no governing experience. It is therefore quite understandable that on return to Africa they turned to the model of society they were familiar with—the plantation.[18] More or less trapped within this model, they turned to a political strategy of division between the self (perceived as the civilized, educated masters) and the other (perceived as the savage, a native underclass that must be kept in place by hard work and discipline). The indigenous population, not particularly happy with this new organisation of society, revolted on several occasions, and just as regularly such revolts were put down with ferocity. The seeds of hatred were firmly planted into Liberian society from the outset.

Governed by institutional rule under a constitution, the Liberian state cannot be

characterised as a patrimonial society *per se*. Rather, it was governed both by patrimonial and bureaucratic logics. It is possible to speak of a distinction between private and public, but such delineation is severely blurred. The Liberian state was a facade of what it pretended to be: it was able to extract resources (in fact, very able) and distribute them. But this extraction and distribution was privatised. Political power and access to political power in the settler state were equal to economic resources, and vice versa.

Politics within the settler oligarchy were extremely corrupt, and incumbent presidents used every resource available to stay in power.[19] The motive behind the fraud and bending of rules was to secure one's position—because Liberia's financial affairs were conducted in a similar way: there was a budget, but it was never adhered to because there was no system of accountability for public funds.[20]

By the early 1920s the Americo-Liberian elite had secured a firm grip on political and economic power in Liberia and, with the arrival of Firestone in 1926, the real eating started.

> The multinationals bought off important people in Liberia's ruling elite, who in return for personal gain protected the companies' favourable terms. The revenues which should have flowed to the government treasury flowed instead to influential individuals, like President Tubman, Emmett Harmon or Richard Henries.[21]

The elite not only ensured that government control was kept to a minimum but also determined the pattern of distribution of what little stayed in Liberia. This pattern of distribution was motivated by the need of those in power to secure their positions through alliances with lieutenants, clients and henchmen bound to the elite through clientelistic arrangements. A complex system of pyramided patron–client relationships throughout Liberian society, with the Americo-Liberians at the top, was created to facilitate settler rule.

The self was secured in its powerful position through the tying of the other into clientelistic relationships. The self was the aristocrat and the other was the native, who was to contribute to the productive labour. In order to construct a clear-cut distinction between the self (the aristocracy) and the other (the native), it was of great importance to enforce a moral code with a stigma on productive labour, because this was the primary element that set the elite apart from the lower classes, and for whom it was possible to avoid labour. The whole lifestyle created by the repatriates was directed towards construction of the self (the elite) as opposed to the other (the indigenous Liberians). Their consumption patterns were not primarily directed towards subsistence and comfort; their basic incentive for accumulation was what Thorstein Veblen would call honorific purposes. The value of an object is measured not by its usefulness but by the extent to which it enhances the status of the owner. The repatriates ideal for living was the lifestyle they were most familiar with; therefore, the elites' towns, houses and patterns of life were reproductions of those things considered to be elegant in the Old South.[22] Their habits of dress can also be interpreted by this formula of cultural background and the functional need of the self to be distinct from the other. Charles Johnston describes the dress habit of the Liberian elite: their view was that attire was an item of conspicuous consumption, and in the early days of the

twentieth century an Americo-Liberian could not have been seen at a Sunday social function without frock coat and top hat.[23] This ideal of an Old Southern lifestyle, with an emphasis on the leisurely non-productive life of the landowner, did not come cheap, which may partly explain the extremities of misuse of public funds in Liberia.

With the presidency of Tubman in 1944 some changes in the stratification of self and other in Liberia were implemented. Officially he advocated a policy of unification, designed to bring the indigenous people of the Liberian hinterland into the political system. However, it was also under Tubman that the cult of the presidency reached its peak. In the tradition of '*l'Etat, c'est moi*', he subverted every institution of society into an image of Tubman as the national symbol of sovereign statehood. Building his reign on personal power vested into exchange systems with other Liberian 'big men' and clientelistic relations with the non-equals, pre-emptive strikes against real and perceived enemies were an integrated part of his survival technique. Real and perceived enemies were victimised and destroyed.[24] Tubman, as a genuine prince, employed the politics of the body as a political ritual in order to express his power and to humiliate enemies and disgrace them:[25]

> He enjoyed the satisfaction of seeing one of his bitterest foes, S. David Coleman, shot to death while fleeing from his persecutors and had his body and that of his engineer son, John Coleman, displayed naked at the Barclay Training Centre. It drew one of the largest crowds ever seen in Monrovia, on whom the dreadful lesson was not lost.[26]

Tubman died in office on 23 July 1971, to be succeeded by his vice president, William Tolbert. However, the heritage from Tubman's personal rule has been extremely enduring in Liberia. To some extent one can argue that the rulers and would-be rulers (warlords) after Tubman had tried to recreate the glamour of the Tubman era and, unsuccessful in this, they have ended up with an inverse, perverted version of its protocol and formality.

Tolbert tried to introduce some degree of reform. Among other things, he introduced an anti-corruption commission. However, because he and his family were among the prime offenders, it was clear that this move was a mere facade. As the years went by and the Tolbert regime's corruption and misuse of public funds increased, while at the same time not expressing the same ability and willingness to use coercion and patronage as had the Tubman regime, it became clear that Tolbert's position was insecure. In April 1979 riots broke out. Trying to secure his position, Tolbert assumed emergency power, put down the riots with great force, and arrested most of the leaders of the opposition that had emerged under his rule. However, only two days before the trial was to begin, a group of 17 enlisted men overthrew the government and killed Tolbert. The seeds of hatred planted so many years ago were ripe for harvesting. The damnation game was about to begin.

Sierra Leone—the rise of a neopatrimonial state

For three years, between 1771 and 1774, Henry Smeathman, an English botanist

sent out to West Africa to collect specimens, travelled the creeks, rivers and hills, the islands and beaches of Sierra Leone. His base was the Banana Islands, governed by the Caulkers, an Afro-European family descended from an English trader and the daughter of an African chief and, while living with them, Smeathman started thinking about the possibility of forming a similar settlement. When he returned to England Smeathman presented a plan for such a settlement, built on a plantation culture based on free labour, in which black and white citizens would live in an equal society based on the principles of democratic liberalism. His main audience were the so-called Black Poor—a group of free but marginalised Africans living in London—and a group of English philanthropists who sought a solution for this group.[27]

The convincing picture painted by the botanist led the philanthropists to select Sierra Leone as the site for their haven for the Black Poor. Plans to establish a colony for freed slaves and to resettle the Black Poor in Sierra Leone went ahead throughout 1786, but the plan appealed to more than just the Black Poor. When ships left Britain for Sierra Leone in early 1787, whites as well as blacks were among the 411 colonisers. The expedition arrived in Sierra Leone in May 1787, but just a month later their first settlement lay in ashes, burned to the ground by a Temne chief in retaliation for the earlier burning of one of his towns by a British warship.

In London, however, the philanthropists formed a new association—the Sierra Leone Company. The aim was to establish a more formally organised colony. The opportunity arrived in the form of a group of blacks living on Nova Scotia and in 1791 the Sierra Leone Company secured support from the British government in order to transport these people to Sierra Leone. In January 1792 1200 free blacks left Nova Scotia for Sierra Leone. When they arrived three months later they established a settlement and gave it the name of Freetown. Unlike the first group of settlers, the Nova Scotians aspired to political influence as well as real access to land. The Sierra Leone Company, which wanted a tightly controlled colony under the 'beneficial' rule of the company-appointed governor, did not grant the black settlers that kind of influence. In the years that followed life in the colony was characterised by rebellion, war and financial disasters, and finally in 1808 the British government took over responsibility for the settlement. From then it followed the usual pattern of a Crown colony government, with 'unofficial' representation of the inhabitants in the advisory legislative council, British judicial practices and British status for the inhabitants.[28] During the period from 1808 to 1864 the original group of black settlers fused with a far greater number of Africans rescued from slave ships to form a 70 000 strong group known as the Creoles. The contact between the black settler group and the Europeans who came to administer, to trade, to convert and to teach produced an Afro-European society by the second half of the 19th century. The cultural product of this interaction is known as Creole society.

Trapped within a community of common destiny, the black settlers developed a social identity of their own as Creoles. They developed their own language—krio[29]—they built up Freetown and established themselves in some of the most important positions in society.

Although Freetown was dominated by the Creoles the hinterland was more

diversely populated with competing societies and political entities. Large parts of southern Sierra Leone are populated by societies whose cultures and languages are part of the Mende group, and in the northern part of the country the Temne is the dominant group. Thus the dominant ethnic groups in political and economic terms in Sierra Leone have been the Creoles, Mende and Temne, with much political competition between them dating back to before British colonial rule.

Until the British government declared a Protectorate over the bulk of the territory and its inhabitants in 1896, the position of the Creoles was unchallenged. Politically, the administrative structure of the Protectorate was constituted by 12 Districts, each administered by a District Commissioner, with, under each of these, a number of chiefdoms, in most cases roughly corresponding to what one believed to be the boundaries of the pre-colonial units. Among these indigenous groups, the Mende and Temne were the most important. Mende civil society had a strong unifying agency in their principal male secret society—the Poro[30]—and Temne civil society constructed common ground on the belief that they had common ancestors who came from the Fouta Jallon. However, the political and social focus for most people was the much smaller chiefdom. The chiefdom in Sierra Leone during colonialism had two political functions, which were both mutually supportive and conflicting.

1. It was the foundation of civil society as the main unit of social solidarity, with the Paramount Chief as the political head and the 'father of his people', but with numerous civil society checks to ensure that he acted in the interests of his people.[31]
2. It was the lowest unit of the British administration.

The second function threatened its first function as the sociopolitical body of the group, and in particular it placed the chief under crossfire. He had to maintain a balance between traditional rule and colonial rule because he was suddenly exposed to the simultaneous logic of patrimonial and bureaucratic rule. But the new situation was also to the advantage of many a local chief who mastered the strategic game of making the norms of the two governing systems co-exist. Some of the actions undertaken by the District Commissioners served to strengthen clever chiefs. They could point to new roads and other signs of change as improvements brought by their standing. More importantly, however, the establishment of the Protectorate undermined the monopoly the Creoles had established on trade with the hinterland. As a political and economic elite they diminished in importance. Simultaneously, as the British traders started to interact directly with the hinterland, the importance of the chiefs increased. The outcome was that the Creoles as a political group lost both autonomy and influence, and several of their privileges and positions. Later in the twentieth century Lebanese traders further diminished their position, but they managed to uphold a relatively dominant position within professions such as medicine and law, and within politics and administration.

The point is that, even though popular resistance to colonial rule emerged after the Second World War, the colonial experience can best be characterised as one of competition between two different elite groups—Creoles and local chiefs—

over natural resources and trading rights. Born from the womb of globalisation and nursed to life by a transnationalised civil society, Sierra Leone was not a united nation that emerged to life when independence was granted in 1961; on the other hand, the foundation for the neopatrimonial state was definitively in place. In that sense the new economic logic of the chiefs and the Creoles reinforced already established practice. For the rural and largely conservative electorate organised around the chiefdoms, state sponsorship was just an enlarged village economy, in which patron–client relationships were essential to survival in an uncertain agricultural environment.[32] Similarly, for the Creoles, patrimonial exchange organised in patron–client networks had been the name of the game for securing the self since the establishment of Creole identity.

Thanks to the creation of a counter-elite organised around chiefs and their chiefdoms, when the idea of internal self-rule was first expressed with strength in the 1940s, Sierra Leone had a small-educated 'creolised' elite which could challenge the Freetown-based Creole political class. Political organisation was confined to a small but expanding trade union movement and to elitist bodies representing the urban educated Creole community and the educated elite (often the sons of chiefs or their close clients) of the hinterland. In 1951 the Legislative Council consisted for the first time in Sierra Leone of an elected African majority, and in April that year the Sierra Leone People's Party (SLPP) was established. The SLPP claimed to be national party, transcending regional and linguistic divisions, and it included some Creoles among its rank and file and leading hierarchy, but it was to a large extent a challenge to Creole domination and pretensions. In order to mobilise the electorate, the SLPP counted on the chiefs, and on 27 April 1961 it led the country to independence under Sir Milton Margai. Margai was not a harbinger of change. His rule was authoritarian and he relied to a large extent on chiefs, elderly friends and British officials. When Margai died in 1964, his younger half-brother Albert Margai replaced him. Under his rule the SLPP was defeated in the 1967 general elections by the All People's Congress (APC) led by a trade unionist Siaka Stevens.[33]

From the 1930s the economic emphasis in Sierra Leone had shifted from forest products (palm oil, coffee, cocoa) to minerals. By the 1960s the country's exports were dominated by diamonds, iron ore, bauxite and rutile. Much of this new mineral wealth was found in areas which previously had been political and economically marginalised. In the main mining areas—Marampa and Yengema—a new type of provincial politics emerged from mining trade unionism. One of the trade union leaders was Siaka Stevens, who had spent some time at the trade union college—Ruskin College—in Oxford. Breaking with the SLPP Stevens established a new party drawing upon his union background and socialist rhetoric. Founded in 1960, the APC was in the early days a catch-all movement appealing to a wide range of dissidents and in particular young people who felt they had been marginalised in the competition between the Creole elite and the chiefdom elite. People in the northern part of the country in particular felt that either Freetown or the Mende elite from the southern part dominated political and economic life. The general feeling among both rank and file and the APC leadership was that they had always received the short end of the stick with respect to the distribution and exchange of political and economic benefits. Under the lead-

ership of Siaka Stevens the APC progressively consolidated its rule. In 1973, through the combined strategy of violence and voting irregularities, the APC assured its candidates' success and gained control of every single seat in parliament. *De facto*, the country had become a one-party state. In 1978 APC organised a referendum that showed that 97% of the voters were in favour of a one-party system. *De jure*, Sierra Leone had become a one-party state.

More than anything else Stevens was the perfect embodiment of the neopatrimonial ruler. He envisioned himself as the head of the extended Sierra Leonean family and claimed roots in all major ethnic groups. He cultivated the picture of himself as 'Pa Siakie', the father of the nation. As the neopatrimonial logic of Stevens rule spread to more and more areas of the country's political economy, the boundaries between state and private interests deteriorated quickly. Despite continued political commitments to Africanisation, by the mid-1980s the economy was more or less controlled by a small group of resident Lebanese traders and collaborating politicians.

From the early 1980s, however, the Sierra Leonean mineral economy started to decline. Consequently, Stevens' rule became increasingly dependent on aid to balance budgets and finance neopatrimonial exchange. But important donors like the IMF and the World Bank were not satisfied with Stevens' approach to structural adjustment, and refused to release their planned structural adjustment credit earmarked for rehabilitation of the public sector. The donors tried to secure a more transparent and accountable use of state resources, but all they achieved was a reduction in the number of people on the civil service payroll. This hurt mainly the less well off individuals in the neopatrimonial state system, not the system and its 'big men', because the Bank's and the IMF's attempts were not directed towards the system and its allocation principles. The donors reduced the numbers of actors in the theatre state, but the hidden state was left untouched and in fact blossomed because, after expat-owned mining decreased in importance, mining of alluvial diamonds by informal pre-industrial methods emerged as the main source of wealth. And such economic activity stimulates the neopatrimonial logic because it depends on quiet deals, *ad hoc* licence arrangements and political protection from the 'big men'. A clandestine diamond trade was created where diamonds were pocketed and smuggled across the border. This trade created a kind of 'magic money' that helped the political elite to keep the shadow state floating.[34]

Despite growing unpopularity, an ageing Stevens was therefore able to stage a successful transfer of power to his handpicked successor Joseph Momoh who assumed the presidency in January 1986.[35] In his inaugural speech Momoh claimed that his regime represented a 'New Order'. He advocated a political philosophy of 'Constructive Nationalism' which proposed always to put the interests of the nation above the interests of particular individuals, groups and factions, but without neglecting the legitimate and defensible needs and interests of those individuals and groups. Corruption would be curbed and the economy revived. However, the new regime failed to come to an understanding with major donors such as the IMF and the World Bank over economic adjustment because Momoh's regime was caught between a rock and a hard place: between the need for international credit to fund neopatrimonial demands from the army, police

and other state organisations, on the one hand, and the need of the shadow state leaders to have a pool of jobs and other opportunities and resources available to reward loyal clients, on the other. The neopatrimonial state that Momoh inherited from Stevens was in severe crisis, and Momoh was unable to resolve the contradictions between an official aid-supported state and the shadow state built on the clandestine diamond trade. Consequently, economic hardship increased even more. It was within the context of a neopatrimonial state in severe economic crisis with little remaining legitimacy that the Revolutionary United Front (RUF) entered eastern Sierra Leone at Bomaru in Kailahun District from Charles Taylor-controlled Liberian territory on 23 March 1991.[36] The RUF undoubtedly pushed the neopatrimonial state over the edge, but its tactics and the civil war that followed also pushed the whole social fabric of Sierra Leone into the abyss as well.

Liberia and Sierra Leone—the damnation game

The roots of the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone therefore go far back in these two countries' respective history. However, the immediate precursor dates from 1985, after Samuel Doe—an ethnic Krahn, who came to power in the 1980 coup—won the Liberian presidential election by massive fraud and subsequently suppressed an attempted coup by Thomas Qwiwonkpa, an ethnic Gio.[37] Doe's soldiers, the Krahn-dominated Armed Forces of Liberia (AFL), engaged in reprisals against real and suspected opponents—and their home communities as well—targeting mostly Gios and Manos. The violence and the subsequent repression prepared the stage for the civil wars.

On Christmas Eve 1989 a small rebel army sneaked over the border of Liberia from Côte d'Ivoire. The rebels called themselves the National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) and were led by Charles Taylor.[38] Although his rebel forces constituted only about 100 lightly armed men when he crossed the border into Liberia, that number increased rapidly. By June 1990 Taylor's army numbered more than 5000, and it doubled during the next three months. President Doe fought back with all the force and strength he could muster. He knew that Taylor's rebel soldiers and the support from them came mainly from Gios and Manos, so Doe urged his army to attack villages where Taylor's soldiers could be hiding, while Taylor countered by unleashing his men on Krahns and Mandingos, who were known to support Doe. The damnation game was on. Doe's men were killing Gios and Manos. Taylor's men were killing Krahns and Mandingos. As Doe's soldiers continued their attacks on tribes that Doe considered to be his enemies, Taylor stepped up his military operations. By late summer 1990 Taylor's forces had captured the Robertsfield International Airport. Soon after, the Firestone Rubber plant, the largest employer in Liberia, had fallen to Taylor's men, and by September he had moved his forces to the outskirts of Monrovia, the capital.

In August 1990 the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) met to discuss the Liberian case. Without any prospects for intervention by the UN or the USA, Nigeria assumed leadership on this issue in ECOWAS and it was decided to establish a peacekeeping force with the admirable objective of

separating the warring factions and stopping the bloodshed.[39] The real agenda was, however, somewhat less altruistic. The Nigerian president, Ibrahim Babangida, was alarmed by the spectre of a civilian uprising overthrowing a military government. As he warned ECOWAS leaders gathered for the summit, 'today it is Liberia, tomorrow it could be any one of you'.[40]

During the summer of 1990 dissension emerged in Taylor's ranks. A Gio soldier named Prince Yeduo Johnson split from the NPFL, claiming that Taylor would not make a good leader for Liberia.[41] Johnson and his followers swept into Monrovia and occupied a part of the city centre. As Taylor and Johnson increased their attacks in and around Monrovia, Doe became increasingly isolated in the presidential palace.[42]

Into this maze of violence and personal political ambitions the ECOWAS Ceasefire Monitoring Group (ECOMOG) was sent with the official objective of imposing a ceasefire and helping to form an interim government that could hold elections within 12 months. At first all the main combatants—Doe, Johnson and Taylor—refused to meet ECOMOG. With the fighting continuing and subsequently no peace to keep, ECOMOG was itself dragged into the battle of Monrovia. Then Doe, who seemed about to lose, changed his mind and expressed a willingness to negotiate. However, leaving his palace-fortress in order to visit ECOMOG representatives, he was instead encountered by Johnson's soldiers. They fought, and in an hour-long gun battle, Doe was wounded in the legs. Unable to escape, Doe was captured by Johnson, who took him to his headquarters, and the infamous tape of Doe's last hours was made.[43] After Doe died from his wounds, Johnson declared himself the new president of Liberia. The end of Doe did not, however, entail the end of the damnation game, because Taylor insisted that he, not Johnson, was the president. After all, he said, he controlled 95% of the country. All Johnson had claimed was Monrovia. So the battle went on between Taylor and Johnson, with ECOMOG trying to push both of them out of Monrovia. But as ECOMOG gradually became more and more successful in its attacks, Taylor and Johnson finally agreed to meet it for peace talks. Late in the autumn of 1990 ECOWAS and the forces of Taylor and Johnson agreed to a ceasefire. But the damnation game was still not over because the question of who should govern had not been solved. Taylor, now with the support of Johnson, declared himself president of his own statehood construction, 'Greater Liberia', with its capital at Gbarnga, and a territory which extended into eastern Sierra Leone. His bodyguards drove him around Liberia in a Mercedes, presidential flags decorating the bumpers. He issued government statements and established an efficient administration paid for by selling timber, diamonds, iron ore and rubber taken from the various parts of the country that he controlled.[44] The problem was only that new factions led by warlords from other ethnic communities emerged and that a Greater Liberia under Charles Taylor's rule was something ECOWAS could never allow to happen because it would break African sovereignty rule number one: maintenance of existing borders. Taylor did not only challenge and overthrow the ruling elite in his own country;[45] his cross-border activities also challenged regime and state survival in other neighbouring ECOWAS countries. Subsequently, there was no way whatsoever that ECOWAS could accept Taylor as president. Instead, through the ECOMOG force, ECOWAS established a temporary president, Amos Sawyer,[46] who was to govern the country

until new elections could be conducted. Taylor and the NPFL, not satisfied with this solution, launched a large-scale attack on Monrovia.[47] ECOMOG then accepted the assistance of some of the other, newly emerging factions in fighting Taylor's men, and in doing so dropped very much of what was left of its appearance of neutrality. The two main reasons for this was that: (1) ECOMOG saw the factions as an effective proxy force to realise their goal of defeating Taylor; and (2) by assisting these factions ECOMOG soldiers and officers gained an advantageous position in the emerging underground economy of the civil war.[48] The two factions that teamed up with the ECOMOG forces against the NPFL were remaining elements of the AFL and the United Liberian Movement for Democracy in Liberia (ULIMO).[49] ULIMO was mainly made up of soldiers from the AFL.

In 1993 another group, the Liberian Peace Council (LPC) also challenged Taylor. The LPC also consisted mainly of former AFL soldiers. In addition, something called the Lofa Defence Force (LDF) emerged to fight ULIMO in Lofa County, and what was left of the AFL did not control any territory *per se*, but was still armed and deployed around Monrovia. Finally, to add to the factionalisation of the war, ULIMO split along ethnic lines, into ULIMO-J and ULIMO-K. ULIMO-J was headed by General Roosevelt Johnson and dominated by the Krahns, whereas ULIMO-K was headed by Alhaji Kromah and dominated by the Muslim Mandingos. The damnation game therefore went on with ethnic groups, warlords and ECOMOG against each other.

The various groups soon lost sight of why they were fighting and of any end to the war, but they all also became embroiled in the warlord political economy logic of the war. The various factions and subfactions fought for control of areas of the country which they could exploit. They used forced labour to extract resources such as diamonds, gold, rubber, hardwood, palm oil, marijuana and looted goods of all sorts. This created a lucrative trade for middlemen who could buy looted goods and natural resources from warlords and supply weapons and ammunition in return. In fact, the logic of the informal economy is central to our understanding of civil war contexts because, by linking local markets and transboundary networks of production and exchange, the informal economy provides needed outlets for the channelling of critical resources to the warring factions.[50] Thus, as ECOMOG forces seized control of Liberia's main ports, the middlemen of the informal civil war political economy were soon only able to work by paying of ECOMOG officers. Several ECOMOG officers therefore made fortunes from racketeering and from the warlord economy in general.[51] ECOMOG became in fact just another faction in the conflict to such an extend that the common Liberian spelling of the ECOMOG abbreviation became Every Moveable Object Gone. The result was to be a period of nearly eight years of loss of human life and dignity.

Peace attempts were made, and about a dozen attempts failed to bring peace. One, signed in the Nigerian capital Abuja in September 1995, held out some promise because for the first time all the key faction leaders signed the agreement and became members of the interim government. A timescale for disarmament was agreed upon and elections were planned for the following August. But, just as ECOMOG was about to embark on the process of disarming the roughly 60 000 guerrillas on 15 January 1996, the damnation game started again. The 'peacekeepers' became involved in heavy fighting with the forces of warlord Johnson's

ULIMO-J militia, while trying to end clashes between the Johnson faction and the ULIMO-K faction. One reason why this part of the peacekeeping mission escalated into heavy fighting with one of the factions was because Johnson claimed that he finally had solid proof that the mainly Nigerian peacekeepers were trafficking weapons to his main rival Alhaji Kromah of ULIMO-K.[52] However, as in violations of previous peace/ceasefire agreements, the key factor was once more rivalry over control of diamond mining and logging of timber. Strategic alliances were made and broken all the time during the seven-year civil war and ECOMOG was very much an actor within this picture. Subsequently, after the clashes in 1996, Johnson said his men would not disarm to ECOMOG because ECOMOG had become a faction in the conflict itself. Taylor, still the most powerful of the Liberian warlords, first offered ECOMOG the support of his soldiers in ending the fighting, but his offer was politely rejected. Taylor then threatened to halt the deployment of peacekeeping soldiers in areas under his control unless the interim government got more control over the actions of the peacekeepers. Following these events, a new factional split emerged: ULIMO-J sacked Johnson, saying he had lost control of his men and had been unable to halt attacks on ECOMOG around Tubmanburg. Accordingly, the ruling council of the state suspended him from the cabinet.[53] This enraged Johnson's Krahn loyalists in the city of Kakata, where heavy fighting broke out between ULIMO-J militiamen supporting Johnson and forces from Taylor's NPFL. After two days of fighting Taylor took control of Kakata, claiming that he did so in order to open an important road to Monrovia and to protect the civilian population.[54] With hindsight, it is clear that his statement about opening the road to Monrovia was prophetic because a couple of months later all hell broke loose in the capital when the city exploded in fighting between Johnson and Taylor's forces.[55]

In short, this peace-agreement looked like just another blind alley for Liberia. However, this time another element was added to the Liberian picture with the execution of Ken Saro Wiwa on 10 November 1995. Following Nigeria's suspension from the Commonwealth and a general international outcry, Nigeria became a pariah nation in the international system, and Abacha's regime was generally condemned for abusing human rights and paying lip-service to demands for democracy. One way for Nigeria to break international isolation was to emerge stronger than ever on the regional scene as the powerbroker and peacemaker in neighbouring countries such as Liberia. Sani Abacha cleverly understood that, if he could emerge as the man who brought peace, stability and democracy to Liberia, it would send a strong message to extra-regional actors like Paris, London and Washington: I am the one you have to talk to if you are going to have any say at all in West African affairs. Moreover, bringing peace and democracy to Liberia would shift attention away from the human rights abuses under his own military dictatorship in Nigeria. Abacha therefore reacted with force and strength when his peace-framework for Liberia threatened to shatter thanks to renewed fighting in Monrovia in April and May 1996 between Taylor's and Johnson's forces. After the fighting in Monrovia died out—more or less by itself by the end of May 1996, since there was not much left to loot there anyway—an amended version of the former peace agreement was hammered out. Abacha summoned the main faction leaders in Abuja during the summer and told

them quite clearly that he would not shy away from tough action in order to make his new plan a success. This time anyone who obstructed the peace process would face much more than verbal wrath from West African leaders and international condemnation. Travel restrictions, freezing of assets, exclusion from the forthcoming elections, expulsion of families from West African countries, restrictions on imports and the establishment of war-crime tribunals were all lined up for troublemakers, in addition to the threat of being exposed to the iron fist of Abacha.

This time the scheme worked. Under the supervision of the iron fist of Abacha, Liberia moved towards peace and elections. The factions did disarm, not completely of course, but weapons were handed in, and under Abacha's hand-picked ECOMOG commander, General Victor Malu, Liberia moved towards the election campaign which culminated in the nearest thing to a free election the country has ever seen with elections in July 1997, when Charles Taylor became president.

Liberia experienced relative peace and stability until 2000. Then, Charles Taylor's regime suffered a major international crisis when it was branded by the UN as the main external supporter of the RUF. The consequence was economic and political sanctions imposed on Liberia. Equally serious, not only for Taylor's regime but also for the whole region, was the situation in Lofa County (the border county between Liberia, Sierra Leone and Guinea). Encouraged by the labelling of Taylor's Liberia as a 'rogue state' by the USA and the UK, Taylor's former enemies in ULIMO-K, supported by the Guinean government, significantly increased their military operations in Lofa County and seemed on the verge of posing a real military threat to Taylor's forces. At the time of writing it is impossible to way what implications the inflow of rebels from Guinea (and Sierra Leone) into Lofa County will have for Taylor's ability to hold on to the presidency. However, as is evident from the volatile situation in the whole region, the prospect of lasting regional peace still remains uncertain, whereas an escalation of the war at the regional level is perhaps just as possible, if not more so. The question therefore remains as to what kind of war game goes on in Liberia. Is it a game engaged in by elites, played out among warlords unwilling to let go of the power enjoyed during the civil war, who find it in their personal interests to keep this Liberian damnation game burning? Or are these events just an image in line with Robert Kaplan's propositions of a masquerading society gone completely insane?

Sierra Leone

As in Liberia, the war started within the context of a neopatrimonial state in severe economic crisis with little legitimacy left. The RUF began its war when it entered eastern Sierra Leone at Bomaru in Kailahun District from Liberian territory controlled by Charles Taylor on 23 March 1991. In the first years of its existence RUF's political objective was to overthrow Momoh's one-party rule and restore multiparty democracy in Sierra Leone.[56] It was formed among political exiles (mainly students and intellectuals) and economic refugees (mainly rural peasants and unemployed youth from the mining fields).[57] Some of these have

gained warfare experience under Charles Taylor, and had learnt from his youth-orientated guerrilla tactics. Others just decided to go home with RUF rather than risk their luck as refugees in Liberia. Encouraged and supplied by Charles Taylor, and supported by Burkinabe and Liberian mercenaries, the RUF leadership launched its war in March 1991. It was in Taylor's interest to support RUF because: (1) the Sierra Leonean government backed the ULIMO faction and allowed this organisation to operate out of bases in Sierra Leone;[58] (2) the Momoh government was involved in ECOMOG; and (3) destabilisation of the border area made it possible for him to incorporate parts of the clandestine diamond trade from Sierra Leone into the business operations of his trading empire, Greater Liberia.

Headed by Foday Sankoh, an ageing former Sierra Leone army photographer,[59] the RUF, like its counterpart in Liberia, was initially just a small force of about 100 fighters. But through various forms of youth conscriptions, both voluntary, by tapping into sentiments of social exclusion, and forced—young recruits were made to participate in atrocities against local leaders—the RUF was able to build a viable fighting force. By summer 1991 it controlled around a fifth of southern and eastern Sierra Leone.

With the escalation of the war, the government lost most of its remaining control over the diamond trade. Subsequently, the Freetown government lost its financial capacity to pay not only most public sector employees, but also the soldiers who fought the RUF in the border areas. Soon Momoh and his 'big men' lost the little legitimacy and credibility they had left. This was the social reality on the eve of 29 April when a group of middle and junior ranking officers led by 27-year-old Captain Valentine Strasser, all experienced from the rural battlefront, seized power. In a radio speech after the takeover Strasser justified the coup and the establishment of the National Provisional Ruling Council (NPRC) by referring to the corruption of Momoh and his ministers, their incapacity to revive the economy and their indifference to the conditions of the poor and the soldiers who fought the rebels. Some attempts at peace negotiations between the RUF and the NPRC were made but, apart from half-hearted offers of amnesty and ceasefire, nothing happened. RUF decided to continue the struggle, and a re-equipped army went on the offensive. The army recaptured Pendembu, Kailahun, Koindu and a string of other small towns during 1993. Not only the army, but also many observers thought that the war was over and that RUF was rolling around mortally wounded in the forests, but soon ambushes and fighting emerged again, this time not only in the border regions, but also over the whole country.

> Frankly, we were beaten and on the run, but our pride would not let us face the disgrace of crossing back into Liberia as refugees. We dispersed into smaller units. We destroyed all our vehicles and heavy weapons. We now relied on light weapons, and our feet and brains and knowledge of the countryside. We moved deeper into the comforting bosom of our mother earth—the forest. The forest welcomed us and gave us succour.[60]

Just before Christmas 1994, the RUF launched a major offensive targeting strategic points all across the country. In January 1995 it reached Waterloo, just a few miles outside Freetown, and the talk of the town was that Sankoh had

established bases in the forest ridges of the Peninsula Mountains close by in order to terrorise the city. The 'bush devil' was banging on the city gates, and there was no place left to hide for the Freetown establishment. In a desperate attempt to reverse the tide of the war, Strasser announced a return to democracy. He made unconditional offers to the RUF to talk about a ceasefire and RUF participation in the promised forthcoming elections, but he also employed Executive Outcomes, a South African security firm with strong links to various parts of the international mining industry to back the army.[61] Backed by Executive Outcomes, the army managed to turn the tide of the war.

In early 1996 the situation seemed to be improving. The military government had in fact stepped down, and elections were held. Achmed Tejan Kabbah of the Sierra Leone Peoples' Party (SLPP) won the presidency in relatively free and fair elections. Some questions concerning the legitimacy of these elections can, however, be raised because only 750 000 people took part in them. This was because substantial sections of the country were either under RUF control or beyond anybody's control. After the transition from military to civil rule in March 1996 negotiations started between the newly elected government and RUF. In November the same year a peace agreement was signed which formally ended the war.

However, the process of reconstruction and reconciliation that had started turned out to be too fragile. The peace process soon encountered a blind alley because the two main warring parties did not trust each other, and the international community, which could have helped the warring parties to reach out to each other, had more or less left the scene. As expressed by an editorial in *West Africa*, 'they pushed for elections, hoping that once a civilian government was in place the war would disappear'.[62] Wishful thinking rarely makes a self-fulfilling prophecy, and the situation rapidly deteriorated. The Sierra Leone army felt threatened by the support Kabbah's government gave to the Kamajois (the civil defence units),[63] and corruption and general mismanagement was soon as bad as under previous governments. After a longer period of increased tension, a group of younger officers led by Johnny Paul Koroma committed a coup on 25 May 1997. Soon after the officers who committed the coup established the Armed Forces Revolutionary Council (AFRC) together with their former enemies, the RUF rebels.

Abacha, who had won praise both from overseas and in Africa for his role in the Liberian settlement, quickly seized the opportunity to emerge once more as the defender of human rights and democracy in the region and ordered the Nigerian ECOMOG troops in Sierra Leone to drive the AFRC out of Freetown so that Kabbah could be restored to power. However, the first part of the Nigerian ECOMOG campaign soon reached a deadlock. ECOMOG controlled Lungi Airport outside Freetown; AFRC controlled Freetown and some of the major cities, whereas large parts of the hinterland, as earlier, seemed to be beyond anybody's clear control.

A peace accord was signed in Conakry, Guinea on 23 October 1997, but it soon fell apart because the AFRC and its leader Johnny Paul Koroma gambled on a two-fold strategy of personalisation and regionalisation of the conflict. Koroma increasingly personalised what he called Sierra Leone's dispute with Sani

Abacha. In this way he hoped to take advantage of the split he knew existed between the West African countries that were officially behind ECOMOG. For a time it looked as if this strategy was working. Charles Taylor, who now had finally become president of Liberia, came out strongly against ECOMOG's use of Robertsfield Airport as the staging post for bombing raids on Freetown, and neither Ghana nor Côte d'Ivoire seemed to believe that bombing raids would oust the AFRC. The AFRC and Koroma in particular also tried to further regionalise the conflict by making threatening noises towards Lansanna Conté's government in Guinea for sheltering Kabbah—whom he rather ironically accused of running a destabilising campaign against Sierra Leone—while he simultaneously sought to develop an alliance with the son of the late Guinean strongman Sekou Touré. The latter was looking for a base to launch an uprising against Conté's government. This latter part of Koroma's strategy explains the close co-operation that emerged between Abuja and Conakry on the Sierra Leone issue.

However, these months of diplomatic efforts were swept aside in less than a week of fighting when ECOMOG stormed Freetown and 'liberated' the capital from the combined forces of rebellious soldiers and the RUF. By March 1998 Freetown was 'liberated' and Kabbah's SLPP government was reinstated, but the question remains: whose security did this ECOMOG operation really promote? As in the case of Liberia, the answer seems to be that ECOMOG is a vehicle for the security of the political elite and their regimes in the region, not for the common people. Similarly to what happened in Liberia, ECOMOG gained control of the capital, whereas in the hinterland the bush war was worse than ever. The RUF and their allies, soldiers still loyal to the AFRC returned to the bush, wreaking havoc in the countryside through operations like 'Operation pay yourself', 'Operation no living-thing' and 'Rebel roulette'.[64] The so-called Kamajois (CDF) improved the people's security in the Mende-dominated areas in parts of southeastern Sierra Leone, but the CDF has also been accused of violations of human rights and involvement in the scramble for control of the diamond areas in the country.

As in earlier periods, most observers thought that the RUF operations described above were the final spasms of the organisation. According to common wisdom it would only be a matter of a few months before ECOMOG had finished off the job. But RUF was not mortally wounded in the forests. Rather, like the situation in 1993, RUF had withdrawn into the hinterland in order to reorganise and rearm. Suddenly, just before Christmas 1998 the movement re-emerged, seemingly stronger than ever and, in a daring but equally violent offensive, broke through ECOMOG's defences around Freetown and managed to take control of substantial parts of the city for over a week in January 1999.[65] The unthinkable had happened, RUF had proven itself to be able to launch a large-scale attack on Freetown. The question was, what now?

In early February 1999 the battle or Freetown appeared to be over. ECOMOG had managed to drive RUF out of most of Freetown. But with no political solution in sight, the way ahead was strewn with uncertainties. The Kabbah government was bent on a military solution and RUF refused to enter into negotiations before their leader Foday Sankoh was released from death row.[66] However, RUF's attack on Freetown changed the perceptions of some of the key players in the conflict.

Under General Abdulsalami Abubakar, who came to power after Abacha,

Nigeria embarked on a process of democratisation and, as Nigerian society became more transparent, the country's military involvement in Sierra Leone became more and more unpopular. Nigerian soldiers were returning home in body bags and the operation had cost a lot of money that Nigeria really could not afford to spend abroad. The message from the emerging democratic leadership in Nigeria was therefore that the country was no longer able to bear the political and economic costs that its military involvement in Sierra Leone entailed. It was these kinds of sentiments that led to the peace agreement between the RUF and the Kabbah government, signed in Lomé in July 1999. This agreement is the closest thing to a working peace agreement that Sierra Leone has seen since the war started, but it too soon experienced huge problems. In May 2000 500 UN troops were temporarily captured by the RUF, Foday Sankoh was arrested in Freetown after shooting outside his house and it seemed like the whole situation was about to escalate into total war again. However, a ceasefire agreement brokered by ECOWAS in the autumn of 2000 has so far saved the country from renewed war on a large scale. The RUF still controls parts of the diamond areas but, thanks to the large presence of UN and British troops, the RUF has not been able to launch a major offensive. The UN and the government have not been able directly to challenge the RUF militarily, but the UN forces have gradually been able to contain it and, with this containment, new lines of communication have been opened, leading to an improved relationship between the UN, the government and the RUF. The RUF has handed over some weapons to the UN and allowed UN peacekeepers to enter into some of the areas under its control, and a process of demobilisation of both RUF and CDF forces has started. Thus, at the time of writing, the situation in Sierra Leone looks quite promising with respect to the possibility of achieving a sustainable peace between the warring parties. However, the situation is still highly volatile and in flux, and it seems likely that the final outcome of the resurrected peace process will depend upon what happens in the border areas between Liberia, Guinea and Sierra Leone. This is so because, as history has taught us, instability and war in one of these countries will cause the other two to implode into war again.

Conclusion

There are many different causes behind these two civil wars. Some are clearly unique to each country, whereas some of the most significant are shared in both cases. I therefore suggest that the interlinkages between these two wars are so substantial that the fates of Liberia and Sierra Leone are locked together like a pair of dead ringers. Neither country is likely to achieve sustainable peace if warlike conditions still exist in the other.

As this article has argued, most of the basic reasons for these two wars are to be found in the extreme version of neopatrimonial politics that developed in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Neopatrimonialism is not unique to these two countries, nor to Africa. However, their historical experience does suggest that settler states established under high levels of insecurity (as perceived by the settler group) are highly likely to develop an extreme version of neopatrimonial politics built on the need to secure the self through self-categorisation into self

and other.

The damnation game that these two civil wars represent therefore has its own nature, firmly based on the logic of neopatrimonial rule and the seeds of hatred implanted into their societies when the initial self-categorisation of master and servant was made. That act planted the seeds of hatred that the damnation game is harvesting today. However, we should not look at this initial act of self-categorisation and the events that followed as a string of evil deeds. On the contrary, I argue rather that what we are faced with is two interrelated strings of events, in which each action, taken in isolation, is perfectly understandable. They were conducted not out of malice but were motivated by a desire to secure the self. It is the sum of the events that together set the scene for this regional damnation game. As the damnation game came to involve increasingly large parts of the population and economies, the emergence of a specific type of political economy followed in its wake. The type of extremely violent, warlord political economy we have seen in Liberia and Sierra Leone makes it much harder to achieve a sustainable peace than is the case with more ideologically orientated wars. War is not only the loss of life, property and wealth. Several actors on all sides in these wars have made huge profits for themselves, and peace is not always their main interest. The desire to accumulate is clearly a force here, but we should also acknowledge that it is much too easy to claim that greed is the main motivating force behind a movement like the RUF.

Instead, what we have to come to terms with is that the armed groups on the various sides in the wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone have to be understood in accordance with the respective social, economic and historical context of each country. We must try to understand how experiences related to corruption, violence (political and economic) and deep poverty formed the social experiences of generations of young people over time. The whole point is that the RUF and the other armed groups (be it Kamajois or NPFL) have more in common than what separates them. They share a common memory of brutalisation, abuse and marginalisation. Each and every one of the armed groups of these two countries has emerged within the context of a deeply dysfunctional and corrupt neo-patrimonial state. This means that there exists a shared background between the RUF, NPRC, Kamajois, Westside Boys and the other armed movements. It is often a matter of pure chance which decides which group the various fighters belong to. Equally important is the fact that recruitment to the various armed groups is often built on a master–apprentice principle. War has become a trade, and young men join the RUF and other armed movements by connecting themselves to 'respected' and highly feared warlords. One striking element in West Africa is the ambivalence of the sociocultural discourse on war and the fighters: fear, contempt and admiration go hand in hand in the way people speak about those who are truly masters of the art of killing.

> Gen Bomblast, Brigadier 555, Gen Guilt, Col Superman, Gen Junior Lion. All are products of Occra Hills. The soldiers who come from Occra Hills wear a toga of arrogance, one that borders on bravado which itself is the product of mind-boggling temerity to slit stomachs, extract and munch human hearts … At the base, guns are free for all. Hard drugs are aphrodisiacs and tranquillisers. Food is in short supply but this is compensated for by a marijuana farm just nearby. Kids have a pastime

> picking marijuana leaves and making soup of them. Occra Hills amazes, it assaults decent existence but it plays up as some medieval communalist setting. It invites nausea; it is the hangover of years of carelessness, ruthlessness and mindlessness that have swept the country since independence … The Westside Boys would take time to teach the British military instructors military strategy the jungle style. Take an ambush for example … Our boys talk about V-shape ambushes or One-Mile-Graveyard ambushes or Shortsleeve amputation or Self-Beat beating or Jaja etc … It takes an Occra Hills graduate a few seconds to chop off a hand in an operation. Just put the hand on a block and sever the wrist in split seconds. The Brits would first think about anaesthetics (whatever that means) if it were necessary for a wrist to be chopped off. Many people have wondered why the Brits got near the Brutes. In our kind of war, Gen Bomblast can floor Gen Powell.[67]

The tragedy of the situation in these two countries is that the historical heritages of the two countries have led to a whole generation of young men and women developing a lifestyle of war and looting built on a common cosmology of joint experiences of social exclusion. There is therefore much more to these wars than greed and hatred. In fact, these wars should be read as part of a larger drama of social exclusion. The men (and women) who fight in Liberia and Sierra Leone are not simply drugged monsters. They are human beings and our approach to them should accordingly be one of humanity, and not solely military. These wars and the atrocities committed are the consequence of years of ruthlessness and mismanagement by the two countries' political and economic elites, which eventually caused them to experience a combined political, economic, social and moral breakdown. It is this legacy that the international community must seek to address if it is to play a fruitful role in the long run in Liberia and Sierra Leone. If not, sustainable peace cannot be achieved and all previous efforts made by the international community in this region will be in vain.

Notes

A previous version of this paper was presented at the 42nd Annual Convention of the International Studies Association, Chicago, 21–24 February 2001. Comments from Daniel Bach, Kevin Dunn, Sandra Maclean and Andrew Grant are highly appreciated.

1 Guinea is increasingly drawn (imploding) into the war in Liberia and Sierra Leone. Although the violence has only recently moved to Guinean soil, the country has been affected by, and involved in, the conflict from the very start. However, because of space limitations, Guinea is not an object of study here, but is referred to in the analysis together with other important West African players like Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire and Nigeria, to mention a few of the most important.

2 Officially, the civil war in Liberia ended when Charles Taylor was elected to the presidency in relatively free and fair elections (by international standards) in 1997. However, the war continued at a low level, with attacks from dissident groups based in Guinea on Northern Liberia (in particular Lofa County) by fighters loyal to ULIMO-K strongman Alhaji Kromah. Partly as a response to Guinean support for ULIMO-K, a militant Guinean group called *Rassemblement des Forces Democratiques de Guinée* has been allowed to establish training grounds in Liberia.

3 Here I am playing with the general assumption in international relations theory that international politics is less regularised and institutionalised than domestic policies. Or, as Morgenthau dramatically envisions it, 'the statesman must cross the Rubicon not knowing how deep and turbulent the river is, or what he will find on the other side. He must commit himself to a particular course of action in ignorance of its consequences, and he must be capable of acting in spite of ignorance.' Hans J Morgenthau, *Politics in the Twentieth Century*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1962, p 344.

4 Robert H Jackson & Carl G Rosberg, *Personal Rule in Black Africa: Prince, Autocrat, Prophet, Tyrant*, Berkeley, CA: California University Press, 1982, p 1.

[5] See Muhammad-al Maghili, *The Obligations of Princes*, trans T H Baldwin, Beirut, 1932. Quoted in A H M Kirk-Greene, 'His eternity, his eccentricity or his exemplarity', *African Affairs*, 90 (358), 1991, pp 163–187.

[6] Niccolo Machiavelli, *The Prince*, London: Penguin, 1961.

[7] It should be noted that it is not so much because threats are constant and overwhelming as because they are inevitable in the long run that Machiavelli argues for universal imperialism. His argument is to attack precisely when the threat does not immediately imperil us, because this is what the logic of science that aspires to guarantee security requires. Yet again, the analogy with medicine is obvious; no doctor deliberately waits for a condition to become life threatening before treating it.

[8] In making his science so normative Machiavelli resembles some of the American realists of the mid-twentieth century (Kennan, Kissinger and Morgenthau) for whom realism was not simply an outlook on international politics but a goal to which public policy should aspire.

[9] For instance, Tanzania was Nyerere and Nyerere was the living symbol of independent Tanzania and African socialism. Or, as one of Nkrumah's biographers expressed himself on radio: 'To millions of people living both inside and outside the continent of Africa, Kwame Nkrumah is Africa and Africa is Kwama Nkrumah. When the question is asked, "What is going to happen in Africa," it is to one man that everyone looks for the answer: Kwame Nkrumah.' Adamafio, quoted in Kirk-Greene, 'His eternity'.

[10] Jean-Francois Médard, 'The underdeveloped state in tropical Africa: political clientelism or neo-patrimonialism,' in Christopher Clapham (ed), *Private Patronage and Public Power: Political Clientelism in the Modern State*, London: Frances Pinter, 1982, pp 162–192.

[11] *Ibid.*

[12] This understanding of security suggests that in security we find nothing but insecurity. See James Der Derian, *Antidiplomacy: Spies, Terror, Speed and War*, Oxford: Blackwell, 1992.

[13] See Lisa Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory and National Cosmology Among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania*, Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995, who shows how in Hutu images the Tutsi were constituted as the categorical opposite and enemy.

[14] See Gérard Prunier, *The Rwanda Crisis 1959–1994: History of a Genocide*, London: Hurst & Company, who, with respect to the genocide in Rwanda, argues that, even though material interests played their role, the willingness of ordinary people to enter the deadly fray cannot be accounted for only by material interests. 'Ideas and myths can kill, and their manipulation by elite leaders for their own material benefits does not change the fact that in order to operate they first have to be implanted in the souls of men' (p 40).

[15] These are the Bassa, Belle, Dey, Gbandi, Gio, Gola, Grebo, Kissi, Kpelle, Krahn, Kru, Lorma, Mandingo, Mano, Mende and Vai.

[16] Of these, 4500 were freeborn (all the first five presidents had been born in freedom) and about 7000 were born in slavery. In addition, about 5700 Africans were freed from the transport ships and resettled in Liberia; in one 18-month period in 1860 more than 4000 of these Congos were settled along the coast. See Paul Gifford, *Christianity and Politics in Doe's Liberia*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.

[17] The idea was controversial. Many saw the scheme as simply a way for the USA to free itself of the problem of freed slaves, and those advocating abolition saw a colonisation as a prop for the institution of slavery. See Milton C Sernett (ed), *Afro-American Religious History: A Documentary Witness*, Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1985.

[18] The pawning of children and government forced labour were common and so open that in 1929 the League of Nations sent a commission to investigate reports of slave trading on the part of Liberian officials. In their report, published in 1931, the commission recommended that Liberia should be stripped of its independence and placed under League of Nations mandate. League of Nations, *Report of the International Commission into the Existence of Slavery and Forced Labour in the Republic of Liberia*, Washington, DC: US Government, 1931.

[19] For instance, in the 1927 presidential election which returned President King to power, King was credited with 243 000 votes, and his opponent with 9000, when the total electorate comprised no more than 15 000. This election is recorded in the Guinness Book of Records as the most bent election of all time. See *Guinness Book of Records*, London: Guinness Publishing Company, 1990.

[20] See George W Brown, *The Economic History of Liberia*, Washington, DC: Associated Publishers, 1941; and Fred van der Kraaji, *The Open Door Policy of Liberia: An Economic History of Modern Liberia*, Bremen: Übersee-Museum Verlag, 1983.

[21] Gifford, *Christianity and Politics in Doe's Liberia*, p 13.

[22] See Hyce Melsom-Richards, *Elitism as an Obstacle to Progress*, Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam Press, 1973.

[23] See Charles Johnston, *Liberia*, New York: Dodd Mead, 1906.

[24] Officially, Tubman had abolished the death sentence but, as the Machiavellian 'prince' he was above

his own laws. They were for the people, not for him. Many opponents were banished to the Belle Yala correction centre, where quite a few were corrected out of existence; others were killed trying to escape the country. See Gus Liebenow, *Liberia: The Quest for Democracy*, Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1987.

[25] See the first chapter of *Discipline and Punish*, where Foucault writes on the body of the condemned, describing the public execution of Damiens in 1757. This is the politics of the body—a political ritual of manifestations of power, humiliation and disgrace for the enemy. See also Morten Bøås, 'Liberia—the hellbound heart? Regime breakdown and the deconstruction of society', *Alternatives*, 22, pp 353–380.

[26] Tuan Wreh, *The Love of Liberty … The Rule of President William V S Tubman in Liberia 1944–1971*, London: C Hurst, 1976, p 5.

[27] Africans who had been granted freedom from slavery if they fought for England during the Revolutionary War in America mainly constituted the so-called Black Poor. They got their freedom in London, but also hopeless poverty.

[28] See John R Cartwright, *Political Leadership in Sierra Leone*, London: Croom Helm, 1978.

[29] Krio is today the *lingua franca* in Sierra Leone, but it is originally the mother tongue of the Creoles. It is based on a Pidgin English core with essentially an African syntax and words borrowed from English, Portuguese, French, Spanish and several African languages.

[30] One of the main functions of the Poro was to ensure uniformity of social customs throughout 'Mendeland'. For further details see Kenneth Little, *The Mende of Sierra Leone*, London: Routledge, 1967.

[31] For instance, the Poro could depose a Mende chief, and his councillors could under certain circumstances kill a Temne chief. See Vernon R Dorjahn, 'The organization and function of the Ragbenle society of the Temne', *Africa*, 29, pp 156–170, 1959; and Little, *The Mende of Sierra Leone.*

[32] See Paul Richards, *Coping with Hunger: Hazard and Experiment in a West African Farming System*, London: Allen & Unwin, 1986.

[33] This was in fact an historic event because it was the first time an opposition party in an independent state in sub-Saharan Africa had come to power through the ballot box, but the military intervened minutes after Siaka Stevens was sworn in. However, they returned him to power one year later in a peaceful transition to civil government.

[34] See Paul Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest: War, Youth and Resources in Sierra Leone*, Oxford: James Curry, 1996.

[35] Joseph Momoh was Major General and former head of the Sierra Leone Army, a nominated Member of Parliament and a cabinet member. He stood as sole candidate for electoral confirmation in the autumn of 1985.

[36] Charles Taylor was head of the National Patriotic Front of Liberia, one of the most powerful factions in the Liberian civil war. In Liberia's 19 July special elections in 1997 Taylor received 75% of the votes in the presidential elections and his party, the National Patriotic Party (NPP), won 21 out of 26 seats in the Senate and 49 out of the 64 seats in the House of Representatives.

[37] For further details see Stephen Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy: The Destruction of Liberia and the Religious Dimension of an African Civil War*, London: Hurst & Company, 1999.

[38] Taylor, the son of a Liberian mother and an American father, was raised in Liberia, but was educated in the USA, and worked there as well. He returned to Liberia just after Doe's coup in 1980 and was given a post in Doe's cabinet. Quite soon, Taylor ran into trouble with Doe and in 1983 he was accused of stealing nearly $1 million from the national treasury. He fled Liberia and went first to the USA and then to Libya, where he received military training. Subsequently, Taylor returned to West Africa, where he gradually acquired support for his anti-Doe army.

[39] The actual planning for ECOMOG took place in the shadows and corners of ECOWAS, a factor that may at least partly explain some of the later difficulties it experienced. Nigeria's president Ibrahim Babangida used the Standing Mediation Committee (SMC) to launch ECOMOG. The problem was that the SMC did not really have the political legitimacy for such an operation. It had existed for less than three months, and its mandate referred to disputes between two member countries, not to civil wars. See Robert Mortimer, 'ECOMOG, Liberia and regional security in West Africa', in Edmond J Keller & Donald Rothchild (eds), *Africa in the New International Order: Rethinking State Sovereignty and Regional Security*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1996, pp 149–164, for further details.

[40] Quoted in Ademola Adeleke, 'The politics and diplomacy of peace-keeping in West Africa: the ECOWAS operation in Liberia', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 26 (2). For a detailed critique of the ECOMOG operations both in Liberia and Sierra Leone, see Morten Bøås, 'Nigeria and West Africa: from a regional security complex to a regional security community?', in Einar Braathen, Morten Bøås & Gjermund Saether (eds), *Ethnicity Kills? The Politics of War, Peace and Ethnicity in Sub-Saharan Africa*, London: Macmillan, 2000, pp 141–162.

[41] Johnson and his followers called themselves the Independent National Patriotic Front of Liberia (INPFL).

[42] With respect to the split between Taylor and Prince Johnson, it is hard to see any political difference between them. The most obvious reason for the split was a personal quest for power. Yet they agreed on one thing—that Doe had to go. 'The only good Doe is a dead Doe', Taylor announced to his troops, and Johnson promised, 'Doe may think he is still president of Liberia, but he is in another world. He is as good as dead.' See Gail B Stewart, *Liberia*, New York: Crestwood House, 1992, p 34.

[43] The so-called Doe tape is in reality just a snuff movie recorded by Prince Johnson and his men. The film shows how they torture and mutilate Doe, while they try to convince him that he should tell them where he has hidden the Liberian state's last remaining financial resources. As such, there is little unusual about the film. What is somewhat odd is that the source of the film, which was circulated in West Africa, was in fact Prince Johnson and his men.

[44] For further details of the political economy of Greater Liberia and its international connections, see William Reno, 'African weak states and commercial alliances', *African Affairs*, 96 (383), pp 165–185; and Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1998.

[45] The point is not to make Taylor into a progressive revolutionary. He certainly does not fit into that category of endangered species, but rather to drive home that his rebellion and war effectively shook the established political-economy elite not only of Liberia, but also of Guinea and Sierra Leone perhaps more than they previously had been.

[46] Amos Sawyer was previously a professor of political science at the University of Liberia. As an opponent of Doe's regime he had lived for several years in exile in the USA.

[47] The so-called 'Operation Octopus' was launched on 15 October 1992. More than 6500 people died during this battle; the bulk may be attributed to ECOMOG shelling and the use of napalm and cluster bombs. See Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy*.

[48] See Herbert Howe, *Ambiguous Order—Military Forces in African States*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2001, who also argues that support of the factions added to the conflicts' uncontrollability, reduced the command effectiveness of ECOMOG and thereby prolonged the war.

[49] In this period Nigeria formed alliances with the Krahn warlords George Boley, Roosevelt Johnson and what was left of the collective leadership of the AFL, while Guinea sought to secure its interests through an alliance with the Mandingo segment of ULIMO (which later became ULIMO-K).

[50] See Musifiky Mwanasali, 'The view from below', in Mats Berdal & David M Malone (eds), *Greed and Grievance: Economic Agendas in Civil Wars*, Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner (for the International Peace Academy), 2000, pp 137–153.

[51] See Stephen Ellis, 'Liberia's warlord insurgency', in Christopher Clapham (ed), *African Guerrillas*, Oxford: James Curry, 1998, pp 155–171, for further details.

[52] Several observers have described how senior officers of ECOMOG supplied various factions with weapons and ammunition in exchange for looted goods or exportable natural resources. See Ellis, *The Mark of Anarchy*; and Reno, *Warlord Politics*.

[53] This council was made up of all the major faction leaders who signed the peace agreement in August 1995.

[54] For further details see Press Release, Associated Press, 9 March 1996.

[55] This third battle for Monrovia, which took place in April 1996, is known to NPFL fighters as 'Operation Pay Yourself' or 'Operation Clean Sweep', eg the last great attempt to loot as a form of compensation for the fighters who had fought for years without receiving many benefits from their leaders. Not only NPFL fighters, but also ULIMO-K and ULIMO-J fighters took part in the looting of the city. ECOMOG soldiers also took part in the events because, apart from actually arming fighters on both sides, they allowed the looting to take place, except when they were paid by rich Lebanese and Indian traders to protect their premises. See Ellis, *The Mask of Anarchy*.

[56] The credibility of this political programme was compromised by mercenary terror and looting. In its main political manifesto (released in 1995)—RUF, *Footpaths to Democracy: towards a new Sierra Leone*, The Zogoda: RUF, 1995, p 8—RUF claims it regrets the assistance by the veterans of the Liberian civil war because it became 'a nightmarish experience for our civil population'.

[57] The social background behind the RUF is to be found in youth experiences in the 1970s. In this period some sort of social amalgamation took place between radical student activists and *rarray man dem* (young unemployed men involved in petty crime) in the *potes* (a physical era—eg street corner, etc) where these young men met in order to discuss politics, music and girls and to drink beer, smoke pot and listen to music. Parts of this colourful background of the RUF are discussed in Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest*; Ibrahim Abdullah, 'Bush path to destruction: the origin and character of the Revolutionary United Front (RUF/SL)', *Journal of Modern African Studies*, 36 (2), 1998, pp 203–235; Ibrahim Abdullah & Patrick Muana, 'The Revolutionary United Front of Sierra Leone', in Clapham, *African Guerrillas*, pp 172–193; and Abdel-Fatau Musah, 'A country under siege: state decay and corporate military intervention in Sierra Leone', in Abdel-Fatau Musah & J Kayode Fayemi (eds), *Mercenaries: An African Security Dilemma*, London: Pluto Press, 2000, pp 76–116.

[58] See Chris C Coulter, *Organizing People and Places: Humanitarian Discourses and Sierra Leonean*

Refugees, Uppsala: Department of Cultural Anthropology & Ethnology, Uppsala University, 2001. This was before the split of ULIMO into ULIMO-J and ULIMO-K, which took place in March 1994.

[59] Sankoh himself is in his early 60s, and clearly bears a personal grudge against the Sierra Leonean government, as he was imprisoned for alleged involvement in an attempted *coup d'état* against Stevens in 1969. For further details see Richards, *Fighting for the Rain Forest.*

[60] Statement by Foday Sankoh in *Footpaths to Democracy: Towards a New Sierra Leone*, The Zogoda: RUF, p 11.

[61] See Reno, 'African weak states and commercial alliances' and *World Politics* for further details about Executive Outcomes and its commercial interests in the mining sector.

[62] *West Africa*, January 1999, p 4.

[63] For details about the Kamajoi militias—or Civil Defence Units (CDU)—as they also are referred to, see Patrick Muana, *Kamajois*, Vols I–III. Leone-net: Owner-leonenet@mitvma.mit.edu.

[64] This paper is not the place to go into the logic of these practices in detail but, like previous RUF operations, they are to some extent a perversion of common political practices in Sierra Leone, and to that extent part of RUF's motive for fighting. For instance, 'Operation pay yourself' is the answer from the socially excluded elements in RUF to the corruption they are so used to in Sierra Leone. 'Operation no living-thing' is their desperate message to the government in Freetown, to ECOMOG and the international community at large that they are still a force to be reckoned with, whereas 'Rebel-roulette'—people captured by RUF have to draw paper pieces from a hat or bowl in order to decide what limb that will be removed from their body (ear, nose, finger, hand, leg etc)—is perhaps just cruelty beyond imagination, but this practice does have counterparts in other cultural practices and mythology in Sierra Leone. Most of the violence is completely random, but the earlier RUF pattern does exist: at least to a certain extent, violence is more often than not targeted at the upper socioeconomic strata in the villages attacked.

[65] The manner in which the RUF conducted its attack on Freetown should once and for all dismantle the myth that this is not a coherent organisation. From a strictly military point of view the strategy was brilliant. By hit and run attacks on the string of smaller towns that surround Freetown, RUF created an exodus of refugees into the city. RUF fighters blended with these refugees and, when the attack on Freetown started, ECOMOG was totally surprised when they were under attack from two sides simultaneously.

[66] Foday Sankoh, who had been in Nigerian custody since 1997, was handed over to Kabbah's government during the summer of 1998, and sentenced to death for treason in November 1998. He was later released, but re-arrested in April 2000. At the time of writing he was still under arrest, at a secret location.

[67] Kingsley Lington in *Concord Times* (Freetown), 30 August 2000, pp 1–2. The background for this article was that in August 2000 the so-called Westside Boys captured 11 British soldiers from the Royal Irish Regiment. The idea that British elite troops should be captured by what was commonly seen as an undisciplined and untrained militia (in a Western sense), mainly comprised of boys/young men between 12 and 25 years, had clearly not been considered very likely by Robin Cook and the British Foreign Ministry. The British soldiers were liberated after a week. In the rescue mission one British soldier, 20 fighters from the Westside Boys and an unknown number of women and children who lived in the camp where the soldiers were held were killed.